

## LCQ8: Work on talent admission

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Tan Yueheng and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (December 4):

Question:

It has been reported that Hong Kong ranked ninth among the 67 economies around the globe in the World Talent Ranking 2024 published by the International Institute for Management Development, and as at end-August this year, over 150 000 people of talent arrived in Hong Kong through various talent admission schemes. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as there are views that currently, the Top Talent Pass Scheme only imposes one eligibility criterion for Category A applications (i.e. an annual income reaching HK\$2.5 million or above in the year immediately preceding the date of application), but top talents should not be merely regarded as high-income earners because the key purpose of admitting "pinnacle" talents is to enable talents to contribute their skills and expertise shortly after their arrival in Hong Kong and, in the long term, fulfil the development needs of Hong Kong, whether the Government will consider raising the threshold for Category A applications and adding more screening conditions to enhance the selection of such category of talents;

(2) as the aforesaid Category A applicants primarily come to look for middle and upper-rank posts in Hong Kong, but there are views pointing out that the overall demand for local middle and upper-rank posts is large while the supply is small, which has limited the employment of top talents, whether the Government will formulate more targeted utilisation strategies on the utilisation of talents for Category A applicants, so as to make even better use of the talent pool and fully revitalise talent resources;

(3) whether it has studied if various talent admission schemes are not attractive enough to highly skilled talents who meet the direction of Hong Kong's future development; if it has studied and the outcome is in the affirmative, of the core reasons for that; and

(4) as there are views that the majority of talents admitted through various talent admission schemes are engaged in such industries as finance, innovation and technology, trade and professional services, and that local talents in such industries are themselves sufficient and highly competitive, of the measures adopted by the Government to ensure that such local talents can secure equal employment opportunities?

Reply:

President,

To relieve the prevailing tight local labour market situation, the Government launched the new Top Talent Pass Scheme (TTPS) in end-2022, under which eligible outside talents are not required to have secured offers of employment in Hong Kong before applying for two-year visas through the TTPS to explore opportunities in Hong Kong.

The eligibility and assessment criteria of the TTPS are concise and clear, targeting high-income individuals and top-notch university graduates. There are three categories of applications. Applicants under Category A are required to have an annual income reaching HK\$2.5 million or above in the year immediately preceding the date of application, while applicants under Categories B and C have to be bachelor's degree graduates from the 198 universities specified under the scheme. Since the launch of the TTPS in end-2022 up to end-October this year, nearly 85 000 applications are approved under the TTPS, with applications under Category A accounting for only about one-quarter of the total.

Most talents approved under Category A were entrepreneurs or management of companies before arriving in Hong Kong. They attained good achievements in their respective professional fields and are highly competitive in the market. According to the findings of the follow-up surveys conducted by the Labour and Welfare Bureau earlier on the talents admitted under the TTPS, nearly 60 per cent of the respondents under Category A who have arrived in Hong Kong six months or more were in employment, higher than that of respondents under Categories B and C. Among them, about one-quarter of the employed respondents under Category A are entrepreneurs who have set up companies after arrival to Hong Kong and created job opportunities for the locals. Most of the employed talents under Category A are engaged in industries where Hong Kong has a competitive edge, including commerce and trade, innovation and technology, as well as information and communications technology. This can help fill local job vacancies and strengthen the local talent pool.

A person admitted under the TTPS, upon the expiry of his/her first visa, will have to be employed, or have established or joined in business in Hong Kong so that an extension of stay can be granted. Whether talents can stay in Hong Kong in the long run depends on their own conditions and competitiveness, as well as their ability to secure development opportunities in the local market. In view of the effectiveness and operational experience of the TTPS, the Government has no intention to change the eligibility criteria nor impose additional restrictions for applicants under Category A of the TTPS.

Apart from the TTPS, the Government has also implemented other talent admission schemes to attract diversified talents to come for employment and settle in Hong Kong. Among them, the General Employment Policy (GEP) and the Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals (ASMP) are employment-tied. Applications for talent admission under these schemes have to be sponsored by their employers. This by design has ensured that the admitted talents could meet the demand of the local employment market. As for

the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme (QMAS), its objective is to attract highly skilled talents to settle in Hong Kong, thereby enhancing Hong Kong's economic competitiveness. In addition, the Government also has also drawn up the Talent List of Hong Kong, which is subject to updates from time to time to attract high quality talents in a more effective and focused manner to support Hong Kong's development into a high value-added and diversified economy. The Talent List currently comprises 51 professions under nine industry segments, reflecting the types of talents that Hong Kong needs most and are eligible for the immigration facilitation under the GEP, ASMP and QMAS. The Government will continue to review the effectiveness of the various talent admission schemes and make improvements or adjustments as necessary.

The 2023 Manpower Projection indicates that the supply of local manpower would fall short to fill vacancies across sectors in the next five years, resulting in a widening manpower shortage. On the principle of safeguarding the employment priority of local workers, the Government will step up efforts to nurture local talents and unleash local workforce. However, there would still be a need to continue to import outside talents and labour at an appropriate scale to meet imminent needs. In fact, even though many outside talents have arrived in Hong Kong through various talent admission schemes and joined the local labour market, the local unemployment rate has remained at a low level close to full employment.

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## **LCQ19: Government outsourced service contracts**

Following is a question by the Hon Kingsley Wong and a written reply by the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr Christopher Hui, in the Legislative Council today (December 4):

Question:

According to an information note of the Legislative Council Secretariat, many local governments around the world have in recent years implemented "reverse contracting" (i.e. the direct provision of some municipal services by the Government like before), partly due to the fact that outsourcing of services can hardly realise considerable cost savings, and the service quality and efficiency may be unsatisfactory, while the relevant authorities have hoped to improve the remuneration and job stability of outsourced workers. It is learnt that setting up a public municipal services organisation for direct long-term employment of workers outside the civil service establishment is one of the major modes of reverse contracting. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the current total number of outsourced workers responsible for

government services;

(2) of the annual value of outsourced contracts procured by the four major procuring departments of outsourcing services (i.e. the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, Leisure and Cultural Services Department, Housing Department and Government Property Agency) since 2018, together with the respective numbers of outsourced workers involved under the relevant contracts;

(3) of the average increase in expenditure for the same batch of service contracts upon introduction of various rounds of improvement measures on the outsourcing system by the Government since 2018;

(4) given that a survey conducted by the former Efficiency Unit in 2010 revealed that government departments could incur costs as much as 11 per cent of the annualised contract value for the management and monitoring of outsourced service contracts, whether the Government has conducted afresh survey on such costs in recent years; if so, of the change in cost ratio; if not, whether it will do so; and

(5) as there are views that the remuneration of government outsourced workers has improved in recent years, while exorbitant costs have been incurred by government departments for the management and monitoring of outsourced service contracts, whether the Government has studied if (i) the economic benefits brought by outsourcing, instead of direct employment of workers by the Government, has been diminishing, and (ii) greater economic benefits can be brought by the setting up of a public municipal services organisation for reverse contracting; if it has studied, of the details; if not, whether it will do so?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with relevant bureaux and departments (B/Ds), a consolidated reply is as follows:

(1) We do not maintain information on the number of outsourced workers for all types of services in the Government. As at October 31, 2024, around 40 000 non-skilled workers were involved in the service contracts of the four major procuring departments (i.e. the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, Housing Department, Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and Government Property Agency) in total.

(2) As regards the service contracts involving non-skilled workers awarded by the four major procuring departments through tendering from 2018-19 to 2024-25 financial year, the total value of contracts and the numbers of non-skilled workers involved are set out at Annex.

(3) The Government has implemented a series of improvement measures in April 2019 and May 2023 respectively to further safeguard the rights and benefits

of outsourced non-skilled workers in the procurement of services. These measures include enhancing the tender evaluation system, enhancing the remuneration of non-skilled workers and introducing a standardised regulatory framework to enhance the monitoring of non-skilled worker contracts. Generally speaking, these measures would lead to an increase in contract expenditure. However, changes in contract value (including increase or decrease) also depend on other factors, such as departments' possible adjustments to service requirements (e.g. service content, manpower requirement) of the new batch of contracts, the number of tenderers and their tendering strategies and inflation. Hence, changes in value of contracts awarded by government departments do not merely reflect the impact of improvement measures introduced, and it is not possible for us to make an independent assessment of such impact.

(4) The former Efficiency Unit (EU) conducted a survey on government outsourcing in 2012. According to the survey, on average, the contract management cost for all government departments is about 14 per cent of the annualised contract value. The former EU has not conducted any similar survey since then.

The Efficiency Office (formerly the EU) was merged with the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer to form the Digital Policy Office (DPO) in July 2024. The new office is responsible for formulating policies on digital government, data governance and information technology and consolidating information technology-related resources within the Government so as to accelerate the development of digital government. DPO has no plan at this stage to relaunch relevant surveys.

While the Government no longer conducts similar surveys, all B/Ds should ensure efficient and effective use of resources under their charge and put in place appropriate procedures to monitor expenditure. The cost of supervising such expenditure should also be reasonable.

(5) Outsourcing is one of the ways adopted by the Government to deliver public services. Government departments will, having regard to operational needs, service nature and effectiveness, etc, adopt the most suitable mode of public service delivery (e.g. appointing civil servants or non-civil service contract staff, and outsourcing). Where departments decide to outsource their services, the relevant services should be procured in accordance with the Government's procurement procedures in a clear, open, fair and competitive manner.

Implementation of "reverse contracting" involves relevant administrative structure and expenditure, which may not necessarily be more cost-effective than outsourcing services. Financial analyses should be conducted having regard to circumstances of individual cases. Regardless of the mode of service delivery, as it involves the use of public funds, departments should ensure proper use of public resources. Departments have therefore made holistic considerations, including cost-effectiveness, when deciding to outsource their services.

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## LCQ10: “Document-free” passage

Following is a question by the Hon Lai Tung-kwok and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (December 4):

Question:

The national Exit and Entry Administration announced on the 15th of last month the implementation of "document-free" channels on a trial basis at Shenzhen Bay Port and at Gongbei Port of Zhuhai Municipality for use by individuals travelling frequently to and from Hong Kong and Macao for private purposes. It is learnt that the above arrangement for easy passage is similar to contactless clearance arrangements such as the Flight Token service currently available at the Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA), and the authorities have indicated on multiple previous occasions that since the contactless clearance technology requires direct comparison of faces against all data in the database, its application is more suitable for ports serving specific groups of pre-verified individuals below the population of 100 000. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether the authorities have plans to provide similar arrangements for easy passage at the corresponding port (i.e. Shenzhen Bay Port) and other land boundary control points; if so, of the details;
- (2) whether the authorities have conducted exchanges with the relevant authorities of the Mainland on the technology involved in the document-free channels and sought to understand (i) if the number of persons served by those channels has exceeded 100 000, and (ii) if there is any difference between the technology adopted by the Mainland for the document-free channels and that adopted in Hong Kong for contactless clearance; and
- (3) of the number of passengers who have used the Flight Token service to depart from the HKIA in each of the past two years, and the percentage they accounted for in the total number of departing passengers from the HKIA?

Reply:

President,

Starting from November 20, 2024, the Mainland has upgraded on a trial basis some of its e-channels at Shenzhen Bay Port of Shenzhen Municipality, Guangdong Province and Gongbei Port of Zhuhai Municipality, allowing individuals travelling frequently to and from Hong Kong and Macao for private purposes to use "document-free" channels. According to the notice issued by the Exit and Entry Administration of the People's Republic of China, Mainland residents holding a valid Exit-entry Permit for Travelling to and from Hong

Kong and Macao and multiple exit endorsement for travelling to Hong Kong and Macao for stay, visiting relatives, business visit, talents or other purposes, and Hong Kong and Macao residents (including non-Chinese citizens) holding a valid Mainland Travel Permit for Hong Kong and Macao Permanent Residents who are aged 14 or above and have agreed to the collection of facial features, fingerprints and other information by the border inspection authority may use the "document-free" channels at the border without presenting their physical travel document.

It is understood that upon arriving at the "document-free" channel, the passenger should look at the camera at the front gate, adjust his/her standing position as appropriate, and follow the instructions shown on the screen to verify his/her personal information. When the verification has been completed, the front gate will open and the passenger can enter the channel. Inside the channel, the passenger should follow the instructions to scan his/her biometric information such as fingerprints and facial features. Upon successful verification, the rear gate will open. The passenger may leave the channel and the clearance is completed.

In consultation with the Transport and Logistics Bureau, my reply to the question raised by the Hon Lai Tung-kuok is as follows:

(1) The Immigration Department (ImmD) has provided facilitation arrangements incorporating facial recognition technology at various land boundary control points (including Shenzhen Bay Port), including the self-service departure for visitors to Hong Kong Smart Departure launched in 2017 and Contactless e-Channel service launched in 2021. For Smart Departure, an eligible passenger needs to present his/her electronic travel document in front of the Smart Departure e-channel to read his/her personal data, and then show his/her face for identity verification after entering the channel. After confirmation, the departure clearance will be completed. As for Contactless e-Channel, a Hong Kong resident needs to present his/her identity card or QR code to read his/her personal data in front of the Contactless e-Channel, and then enter the channel for identity verification. During the process, he/she only needs to show his/her face without verifying his/her fingerprints, and there is no need to touch any shared equipment of the e-Channel. In addition, it also solves the issue of citizens being unable to use the e-Channel due to problems with their fingerprints in the past. This innovative clearance mode has provided faster, more convenient and hygienic immigration clearance service for Hong Kong residents. As of November 2024, more than 5 million Hong Kong residents have registered for Contactless e-Channel service, and the cumulative number of passengers who used the service since its launch has reached 130 million, accounting for more than 70 per cent of the number of Hong Kong residents who used the e-Channels for clearance every day, which proves that the service is widely welcomed by the public. Both of the above-mentioned immigration clearance arrangements require passengers to present their identity card or QR code to read their personal data, and then use facial recognition technology to verify their personal identity in order to complete the immigration clearance process.

(2) The ImmD has been maintaining close co-operation and exchanging views

with the Mainland immigration authorities on immigration management and operations. The two above-mentioned immigration clearance arrangements by the ImmD do not require the use of fingerprints for identity verification, which is different from the technology used in the "document-free" channel currently being trialled in the Mainland. The "document-free" channel mainly adopts facial recognition technology to replace the presentation of travel document or QR code to read passengers' personal data on the database, and passengers are required to confirm that the information read is correct before they can enter the channel. During the process of identity verification, passengers are still required to show their face and fingerprints to verify their identity. Therefore, the number of passengers served by the "document-free" channel can exceed 100 000.

As for Smart Departure and Contactless e-Channel, passengers' personal data is read directly from their identity card or QR code presented, and their identity is verified by using facial recognition technology. Therefore, the number of passengers served can also exceed 100 000.

Contactless clearance is a step further than Smart Departure and Contactless e-Channel services. It generally refers to the clearance process which does not require presentation of any travel document/QR code or the use of fingerprints for identity verification. It uses facial recognition to verify the user's identity against the database directly. The Flight Token service launched in 2022 is an example of applying relevant technology by the ImmD and the Airport Authority Hong Kong (AAHK). A passenger only needs to show his/her face for identity verification during the check-in procedure in order to store his/her personal data in the database for comparison purpose. For subsequent departure procedures at the airport (including baggage check-in, security inspection, immigration departure clearance, and boarding gate), he/she only needs to show his/her face for identity verification, and is not required to present any travel document or boarding pass again, which is convenient for passengers. In addition, an eligible Hong Kong resident can use the Flight Token e-Channel when departing from the airport. He/she only needs to scan his/her face at the Flight Token e-Channel camera to complete departure clearance without presenting any travel document/QR code or using his/her fingerprints for identity verification, thereby achieving contactless clearance.

Since this technology requires real-time comparison against all data in the database, to ensure high efficiency and accuracy, at this stage we consider that contactless clearance is technically more suitable for ports serving specific groups of pre-verified individuals below the population of 100 000.

In addition to the Flight Token e-Channel used at the airport, the contactless clearance technology will also be used at the Chung Ying Street checkpoint in Sha Tau Kok. People holding valid Closed Area Permits for entering and leaving Chung Ying Street (i.e. those people living or working at Chung Ying Street, etc.) can, upon registration, use the contactless channels to verify their identity through facial recognition technology in order to enter and leave the checkpoint unimpededly. We will also study with



relevant Mainland authorities the application of contactless clearance technology in the Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Co-operation Zone in the future to allow designated personnel of the two parks to enjoy travel convenience.

(3) According to information provided by the AAHK, in 2023 and the first ten months of 2024, the number of users of the Flight Token service was approximately 6.9 million and 11.7 million respectively, accounting for 45 per cent and 70 per cent of the number of departing passengers at the airport in the same period.

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## **LCQ1: Combating fraudulent claims of Traffic Accident Victims Assistance**

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Kin-por and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (December 4):

Question:

It has been reported that the Police recently arrested 275 people suspected of making fraudulent claims of Traffic Accident Victims Assistance (TAVA) disbursed by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) by producing fake medical proof or staging traffic accidents. The relevant cases involved 121 traffic accidents and an amount as high as \$14 million. The SWD has pointed out that obtaining TAVA by deception is a criminal offence, and the persons concerned may be prosecuted under the Theft Ordinance and be liable on conviction to imprisonment of a maximum of 14 years. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of TAVA applications referred to the Hospital Authority or the Department of Health for re-assessment as the medical proof submitted was considered suspicious as well as the number of suspicious cases referred to the Police for thorough investigation over the past three years; whether the Police have taken law enforcement actions and prosecuted the persons suspected of obtaining TAVA by deception under the Theft Ordinance; if so, of the number of persons arrested and the penalties imposed;

(2) apart from verifying medical proof with healthcare institutions, of the Government's further measures in place to prevent TAVA frauds, such as stepping up investigation into applicants making multiple TAVA applications as well as looking into the suspected issuance of fake sick leave certificates by the same healthcare institutions or doctors; and

(3) of the Government's means to make members of the public clearly

understand that TAVA fraud is a criminal offence subject to severe punishment?

Reply:

President,

The Traffic Accident Victims Assistance (TAVA) Scheme (the Scheme) is a welfare measure administered by the Social Welfare Department (SWD). The objective of the Scheme is to provide speedy financial assistance to road traffic accident victims or the surviving dependents of deceased victims on a non-*'means'* tested basis, regardless of the element of fault leading to the occurrence of the accident.

In response to the question raised, my consolidated reply is as follows:

(1) The SWD strictly verifies every TAVA application. According to the existing arrangement, the SWD will seek written confirmation from the Police regarding whether a traffic accident is involved in the relevant application and seek clarification on the relevant medical assessment information with the public/private medical institution which issued the medical certificate. If incomplete information and documents are identified or clarification is needed, e.g. when the medical certificate does not establish that the applicant's injuries were caused by the traffic accident, the SWD will make enquiries with the medical institution concerned or request a re-*'assessment'* to ensure that the injuries sustained by the applicants are related to the traffic accidents concerned. Over the past three years (i.e. from 2022-23 to the end of September in 2024-25), the SWD had verified medical certificates with public/private medical institutions for a total of about 5 600 times. The SWD officers will continue to process the applications in accordance with the established procedures after confirming or clarifying the relevant medical assessment information.

Besides, the SWD officers will strengthen the verification of whether the applicant has made any claims for damages or compensation through other means for the same traffic accident. To avoid double compensation, the SWD will timely inform insurance companies upon SWD's disbursement of TAVA payments to the applicant.

If false medical information, fraudulence or other criminal element are suspected to be involved during the processing of application, the SWD will refer the case to the Police for investigation and will immediately cease processing the relevant application. In recent months, the Police has arrested a number of individuals suspected of submitting fraudulent TAVA claims using false medical certificates and other methods. These arrests were indeed prompted by suspicious applications identified by the SWD officers during the application vetting process, in accordance with the established working procedures. Over the past three years (i.e. from 2022-23 to the end of September in 2024-25), the SWD referred a total of 575 suspicious cases to the Police for investigation. Among these cases, 275 individuals were arrested for allegedly providing false medical certificates to the SWD to

fraudulently obtain TAVA payments.

(2) and (3) To prevent abuse or fraudulent claims of TAVA, the SWD has reviewed its case vetting workflow and increased random checks of medical certificates submitted by applicants pursuant to the risk-based principle. In addition, for cases with repeated applications by the same applicant, the SWD will require these applicants to provide more detailed information about the traffic accidents for conducting investigations. The SWD will also analyse whether the traffic accidents concerned share common features or suspicious elements. For the applications involving Interim Maintenance Grant (IMG), depending on the circumstances of each individual case (e.g. the length of the period for obtaining IMG), the SWD will check the applicant's traffic violation records with the Police to verify their eligibility for the grant.

The SWD will clearly explain to the applicants that obtaining TAVA payments by deception is a serious criminal offence. Apart from losing their eligibility for assistance, applicants may also be prosecuted under the Theft Ordinance (Cap. 210) and be liable on conviction to a maximum penalty of 14 years' imprisonment. All applicants are required to sign the application form to acknowledge that they fully understand their obligation to provide accurate and truthful information, and that they will be criminally liable for obtaining TAVA by deception. In addition to disseminating related promotional information through its website, the SWD also posts press releases and broadcasts short videos on combating abuse or fraud related to TAVA in the reception area of the office of TAVA Section, to remind visitors that defrauding TAVA is a serious criminal offence with severe penalties.

To enhance the integrity of the Scheme and ensure proper use of public funds, the Government will conduct a review of the eligibility criteria and scope of assistance of the Scheme, with a view to ensuring that traffic accident victims with genuine needs receive timely assistance while at the same time, preventing abuse and severely punishing criminals who commit fraud cases.

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## **LCQ9: Development of hawker economy**

Following is a question by the Hon Kwok Wai-keung and a written reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (December 4):

Question:

There are views that the hawker economy is one of the cultural characteristics of Hong Kong, and hawker areas are signature spots for tourists to take photographs and "check-in" as well as iconic tourist spots in Hong Kong, while at the same time providing the gateway for members of the

public to start their small businesses. However, the hawker management policy of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) is more from the municipal perspective of performing regulatory and enforcement duties. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of complaints in respect of licensed fixed-pitch hawkers and licensed itinerant hawkers received by the Government in 2018, 2022 and last year, with a tabulated breakdown by type of complaints;

(2) as some licensed itinerant hawkers have relayed that upon receipt of complaints about obstruction, the FEHD usually handles such cases by driving the hawkers away, and these hawkers can only switch from hawking on streets with high pedestrian flow to hawking on side streets with low pedestrian flow, which is extremely unfavourable to their business operation, what measures the Government has put in place to ensure that they have a reasonable business environment;

(3) given that according to the information on the FEHD's webpage, one of the objectives of the hawker management policy is to reduce on-street hawking activities of licensed hawkers, whether the Government has considered reviewing the policy objective more from the perspectives of cultural, tourism and economic values as well as adjusting the policy, so as to facilitate the development of the hawker economy; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) of the respective numbers of licensed fixed-pitch hawkers and licensed itinerant hawkers as at September 30 this year, with a tabulated breakdown by age distribution (i.e. aged 18 to 29, 30 to 39, 40 to 49, 50 to 59, 60 to 69, 70 to 79, and 80 and above); and

(5) as there are views pointing out that while Hong Kong's economy is recovering at present, shop rents remain exorbitant and some owners have even increased rents against the market trend, leading to persistently high start-up costs for members of the public, whether the Government has plans to introduce a new licensing scheme for fixed-pitch hawkers or adjust the existing licencing requirements, so as to enable more members of the public to start up their own businesses through operating hawker pitches; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The community has very different views and expectations on hawkers and their on-street hawking activities. The Government has to strike a balance between the varying views and expectations, allowing licensed hawkers to operate according to market demand, while ensuring environmental hygiene, food safety and public safety and minimising nuisance to local residents etc. Having consulted the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau (CSTB), my reply to the Hon Kwok Wai-keung's question is as follows:

(1) The number of complaints in respect of licensed fixed-pitch hawkers and

licensed itinerant hawkers received by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) in 2018, 2022 and 2023 are set out at Annex I. The complaints were mainly related to street obstruction, environmental hygiene nuisance and other licence-related issues. The FEHD does not maintain a breakdown of the complaints by type.

(2) and (5) Hong Kong is densely populated. On-street trading by licensed itinerant hawkers at locations of high pedestrian flow may cause obstruction and environmental nuisance, or even hygiene and fire risks. When taking enforcement actions, FEHD will, according to actual circumstances, balance the operational needs of hawkers and the rights of other street users as well as nearby residents. Fixed hawker pitches or hawker bazaars tend to cause less disturbance and are easier to manage. To provide licensed itinerant hawkers the option to move into and operate in a fixed hawker pitch or hawker bazaars, the FEHD will at times open up vacant fixed hawker pitches for re-allocation. This will also provide opportunity for other eligible members of the public to join the hawking trade. In 2019 and 2022, the FEHD released a total of 540 vacant fixed hawker pitches for re-allocation, and 523 new fixed pitch hawker licences have been issued so far.

(3) From the perspective of cultural and tourism policy, according to the CSTB, tourism is everywhere in Hong Kong, and any place can become a tourist attraction. There is already established mechanism to regulate licensed hawkers, and by balancing the needs of various parties and complying with relevant policy objectives and regulations, it is believed that they can attract tourists' patronage.

(4) As at September 30, 2024, the number of licensed fixed-pitch hawkers and itinerant hawkers as well as their age distribution are set out in Annex II.