

Very Hot Weather Warning issued

Attention TV/radio announcers:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible:

The Hong Kong Observatory has issued the Very Hot Weather Warning.

To prevent heat stroke, avoid prolonged activities outdoors.

If engaged in outdoor work or activities, wear a wide-brimmed hat and light-coloured, loose-fitting clothes. Stay in shaded areas as much as possible.

Drink plenty of water, and avoid beverages containing caffeine or alcohol.

If you feel sick, consult a doctor right away.

SED speaks on HKDSE examination (with photo)

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, at a media session after her visit to Jockey Club Ti-I College to give encouragement to this year's candidates of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination today (July 17):

Reporter: Are there any factors that led to the increase of the number of top scorers in the examination this year? How effective is the Citizenship and Social Development subject given that it only requires students to pass the subject? Will you worry that students are studying half of the subject? Does it make it easier for students to achieve top scores?

Secretary for Education: For the C&S (Citizenship and Social Development) subject, we have standards-referenced reporting for assessment. The result doesn't mean that it is easier (for students to achieve good scores) than before. It's not comparable because this is a newly adapted curriculum. We appreciate very much the efforts of teachers and students and that they achieved good scores.

For the factors that led to the good performance this year, we have just finished the optimisation of four core subjects and we have created more space for our students to have the opportunities to choose one or two more elective subjects. They can explore their interests and abilities, and fully

develop their potentials. I think this is why they got better results than last year.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)



[Transcript of remarks by SJ and SCED after LegCo Ante Chamber exchange session \(with photos/video\)](#)

The Secretary for Justice, Mr Paul Lam, SC, together with the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Algernon Yau; and the Commissioner for Belt and Road, Mr Nicholas Ho, met the media after attending the Ante Chamber exchange session at the Legislative Council this morning (July 17). Following is the transcript of remarks:

Reporter: Can you recap in English what you have discussed in the Ante Chamber? How will the Government do to increase its attractiveness and also its plan to get into RCEP?

Secretary for Justice: I try to summarise very quickly the gist of the discussion in the Ante Chamber. The focus today concerns the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), or to be more specific, how Hong Kong can participate in the BRI in a more proactive manner. We have invited colleagues from different bureaux, including the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, the Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau, the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau and other colleagues. Among other things, I think the Central People's Government takes the views that Hong Kong, in future, should focus firstly on enhancing Hong Kong's role as a platform for providing professional services, for example, to serve as an international legal service centre. Secondly, to promote financial services and to enhance Hong Kong's status as an international financial centre, in particular, in the area of green finance; and thirdly, to strengthen Hong Kong's status as an international cultural exchange centre, for example, to promote or expand the

Belt and Road scholarship, which will benefit students or young people from countries belonging to the Belt and Road and to organise more cultural activities which could improve the mutual understanding between different cultures and between different people. As to more specific measures, perhaps I can invite Mr Yau to provide more details.

Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development: The Belt and Road Office is organising activities in co-ordination with the Central Government such as visits to the Belt and Road countries, taking enterprises and the professional services abroad and meeting different sectors to promote Hong Kong and our advantages. Under "one country, two systems", we have a very good setup in our legal system – we use the common law, the rule of law, free flow of capital. People from the Belt and Road countries would be very interested. Our professional services, such as legal, accountancy, architecture, innovation and technology, are all providing our advantages for people to look at. These visits would be able to expand our influence in those Belt and Road countries.

Regarding your question on RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership), we are working very hard with the RCEP members in getting their support, and hopefully they will go through their normal process and give the accession as quickly as possible.

In the future, the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau will work hard on improving the CEPA (Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement) arrangements with the Mainland, and seeking to the RCEP accession. The Belt and Road Office will again take the delegation overseas and lead them to engage with the Belt and Road countries' counterparts to promote the benefits and advantages of Hong Kong.

At the end of this month, the Chief Executive is leading a delegation to go to Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia. The whole purpose is to foster closer connection with the new economies to promote Hong Kong and to provide more opportunities for enterprises and the professional services to go overseas. Thank you.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)



LCQ11: Reimbursement of Maternity Leave Pay Scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Chau Siu-chung and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (July 17):

Question:

The Government launched the Reimbursement of Maternity Leave Pay Scheme (the Scheme) on April 1, 2021, through which employers can apply for reimbursement of the statutory maternity leave pay paid to employees in respect of the 11th to 14th weeks. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the numbers of applications under the Scheme in each of the past three years and this year to date, and set out in Table 1 a breakdown by the monthly salaries of the employees involved and the respective percentages of the applications concerned;

Table 1

Monthly salary of employees involved	Number of applications (percentage)		
	2021	This year to date
Below \$10,000			
\$10,000 to below \$20,000			
.....			
Above \$150,000			
Total			

(2) of the average processing time for the applications mentioned in (1) in each of the past three years and this year to date; among such cases, of the respective numbers (and percentages) of applications approved, rejected and withdrawn (set out in Table 2); the main reasons for rejection and withdrawal of the applications;

Table 2

Result of application	Number of applications (percentage)		
	2021	This year to date
Approved			
Rejected			
Withdrawn			
Total			

(3) of the amounts reimbursed for the approved applications mentioned in (2) and distribution of the types of industries of the employers involved in each of the past three years and this year to date, as well as the respective percentages of the applications concerned (set out in Tables 3 and 4 respectively);

Table 3

Reimbursement amount	Number of applications approved (percentage)		
	2021	This year to date
Below \$10,000			
\$10,000 to below \$20,000			
.....			
\$80,000			
Total			

Table 4

Type of industry of employers involved	Number of applications approved (percentage)		
	2021	This year to date
Catering			
Construction			
Education services			
Finance			
Health services			
Hotel and accommodation			
Import/export			
Information and communications			
Insurance			
Manufacturing			

Professional service, administrative and other business support service activities			
Real estate			
Retail			
Social work activities			
Storage			
Transport, postal and courier services			
Wholesale			
Work within domestic households			
Other personal services			
Others			
Total			

(4) of the respective total reimbursement amounts involved in the approved applications mentioned in (2) in each of the past three years and this year to date;

(5) as it is learnt that the authorities have appointed a private processing agent to assist in the implementation of the Scheme, of the respective expenditure on appointing the processing agent in the past three years and this year to date, as well as the manpower arranged by the processing agent for the Scheme; whether it has reviewed the effectiveness of the processing agent's assistance in the implementation of the Scheme; and

(6) whether it will consider stepping up publicity and promotion to enhance employers' or human resource practitioners' knowledge of the Scheme, so that more people can benefit from the Scheme?

Reply:

President,

The Labour Department (LD) has implemented the Reimbursement of Maternity Leave Pay Scheme since April 1, 2021. For the maternity leave pay (MLP) of the 11th to 14th weeks' maternity leave that is required to be paid to the employee under the Employment Ordinance (Cap. 57), employers may apply to the Scheme for reimbursement of MLP paid, subject to a cap of \$80,000 per employee.

The reply to the Member's question is set out below:

(1) Up to June 2024, a total of 25 105 applications have been received under the Scheme, with 6 127, 7 963, 7 367 and 3 648 applications received in 2021,

2022, 2023 and 2024 (up to June) respectively. As employers are not required to provide the amount of monthly wages of employees on relevant application forms, the LD does not have breakdowns by monthly wage of employees involved.

(2) In general, employers receive the reimbursement within 15 working days upon submission of an application furnished with all the required information and documents. Breakdown by result of application is tabulated below:

Result of application	Number of applications (%)			
	2021	2022	2023	2024 (Up to June)
Approved	5 405 (98.2%)	7 480 (96.9%)	6 820 (94.7%)	3 507 (94.4%)
Rejected	6 (0.1%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (0.1%)	2 (0.1%)
Application withdrawn	91 (1.7%)	243 (3.1%)	375 (5.2%)	208 (5.6%)
Total	5 502 (100%)	7 723 (100%)	7 198 (100%)	3 717 (100%)

Note: Individual percentages may not add up to the total owing to rounding.

Applications were rejected mainly because the employee concerned had not been employed under a continuous contract for at least 40 weeks immediately before the commencement of maternity leave, i.e. the employee did not meet the eligibility criteria for MLP under the Employment Ordinance. The Scheme does not inquire employers about their reasons for withdrawing applications.

(3) Breakdown of approved applications by reimbursement amount is tabulated below:

Reimbursement amount	Number of applications approved (%)			
	2021	2022	2023	2024 (Up to June)
Below \$10,000	475 (8.8%)	580 (7.8%)	393 (5.8%)	165 (4.7%)
\$10,000 to below \$20,000	2 809 (52.0%)	3 670 (49.1%)	3 134 (46.0%)	1 586 (45.2%)
\$20,000 to below \$30,000	1 084 (20.1%)	1 566 (20.9%)	1 618 (23.7%)	821 (23.4%)
\$30,000 to below \$40,000	482 (8.9%)	742 (9.9%)	746 (10.9%)	418 (11.9%)
\$40,000 to below \$50,000	267 (4.9%)	447 (6.0%)	421 (6.2%)	218 (6.2%)

\$50,000 to below \$60,000	106 (2.0%)	194 (2.6%)	201 (2.9%)	128 (3.6%)
\$60,000 to below \$70,000	60 (1.1%)	100 (1.3%)	121 (1.8%)	56 (1.6%)
\$70,000 to below \$80,000	39 (0.7%)	55 (0.7%)	57 (0.8%)	21 (0.6%)
\$80,000	83 (1.5%)	126 (1.7%)	129 (1.9%)	94 (2.7%)
Total	5 405 (100%)	7 480 (100%)	6 820 (100%)	3 507 (100%)

Note: Individual percentages may not add up to the total owing to rounding.

The LD does not have breakdowns of approved applications by trade. Yet, according to our records, applications were mainly from employers of the financing, insurance, real estate and business services (21.6 per cent), import/export, wholesale and retail (21.1 per cent) and community, social and personal services (20.0 per cent) sectors.

(4) For the approved applications mentioned under (2), the Scheme has reimbursed \$545 million up to June 2024. The reimbursement amounts in 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 (up to June) were \$118 million, \$173 million, \$166 million and \$88 million respectively.

(5) In the past three years, the total service contract value for engaging a processing agent (PA) by the LD to implement the Scheme was \$90 million. During the contract period, PA is responsible for the operation of the Scheme, which included setting up a service centre for the Scheme; developing, operating and maintaining the Disbursement Information System; processing and approving applications in accordance with the operation guidelines and requirements as prescribed by the LD; conducting quality assurance checks and internal audit checks; handling enquiries and complaints from the applicants; assisting in conducting publicity activities; and organising public engagement activities.

According to the service contract, PA is required to appoint at least three managerial personnel to assist in implementing the Scheme and to employ at least 39 staff members for handling various specified tasks under the Scheme.

The LD regularly conducts quality assurance checks, including performing random checks on PA's vetting records and related information, conducting on-site inspections and convening management meetings, for monitoring the performance and service effectiveness of PA.

(6) The LD has been promoting the Scheme through different channels such as broadcasting radio announcements in the public interest; placing advertisement; disseminating promotional messages through mobile applications, Internet platforms, the Reimbursement Easy Portal and the LD's homepage; as well as displaying posters and distributing leaflets.

Particularly for employers and human resources practitioners, in addition to organising briefings and workshops on details of the Scheme, the LD also places advertisements in publications of different chambers of commerce, employers' associations and organisations of human resources management to publicise the Scheme. The LD will continue to explore suitable promotional channels to further enhance the publicity efforts.

LCQ12: Developing a hub for primary and secondary education

â€‹Following is a question by Professor the Hon William Wong and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (July 17):

Question:

It has been reported that, with the worsening situation of low birth rate in Hong Kong, primary and secondary schools are facing "class reduction and school closure" one after another. On the other hand, the Chief Executive has proposed in the 2023 Policy Address to build Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education. There are views that Hong Kong's primary and secondary basic education also have significant advantages in developing international education (including teachers having all undergone high-quality and systematic training, and the curriculum being taught in both languages of Chinese and English, etc.), and the Government should make good use of such advantages and introduce policies to alleviate the impact of low birth rate, replenish the sources of students and nurture talents for the long-term development of Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective numbers of Mainland and overseas students currently enrolled in international schools at primary and secondary levels;
- (2) whether it will consider constructing new school premises or converting the premises of some primary and secondary schools which have been closed or are likely to be closed, as well as providing additional supporting facilities (e.g. hostels), so as to operate primary and secondary schools dedicated to absorb Mainland and overseas students;
- (3) whether it has plans to promote and admit students to local primary and secondary schools (including international schools and schools dedicated to offering Mainland curriculum) in the Mainland, neighbouring Chinese-populated regions and overseas, so as to increase the sources of students for various types of schools in Hong Kong; and

(4) whether it has plans to, while building Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education, build Hong Kong into an international hub for primary and secondary education; if so, of the details; if not, whether it will consider the plans concerned?

Reply:

President,

The Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address outlined the direction to develop Hong Kong into an international post-secondary education hub and a cradle of future talents. This policy is based on the fact that Hong Kong has world-renowned universities and outstanding research talents, thus focusing only on post-secondary education. Regarding primary and secondary education, parents are provided with diverse and quality choices under the education system of Hong Kong.

The Government provides 12 years' free primary and secondary education to eligible children through public sector schools. Non-local students who come to live in Hong Kong with their parents (including those who come to Hong Kong under various talent admission schemes) may also choose to enrol in any local public sector schools, Direct Subsidy Scheme schools or private schools (including international schools) that suit them, provided they meet the relevant eligibility requirements. We are glad to see that Hong Kong's diverse and quality education is also one of the factors attracting talents to Hong Kong.

Faced with a structural decline in school-age population, the Government accords top priority to the interests of students when planning for the future development of education. Aiming for a "soft landing", we review the policies and effectiveness of utilisation of public resources, and adjust the number of schools in a gradual and orderly manner to ensure a healthy and sustainable education ecosystem and optimal use of public resources. As to non-public sector schools, they may also admit overseas students in accordance with prevailing policies, should they provide adequate supporting arrangements.

Our reply to the questions raised by Professor the Hon William Wong is as follows:

(1) The numbers of non-local students in international schools in the 2023/24 school year are tabulated as follows:

Level	Non-local students		
	Mainland students	Other non-local students	Total

Primary	1 209	13 497	14 706
Secondary	1 008	11 676	12 684
Total	2 217	25 173	27 390

Notes:

(i) Figures refer to the position as at mid-September 2023.

(ii) Figures include students in international schools, but not those in special schools.

(iii) Local students refer to those who are Hong Kong permanent residents and do not have any valid passport other than the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Passport. Students not covered by this definition are all regarded as non-local students.

(iv) Mainland students refer to those with Chinese nationality (including those from Mainland China, Macao and Taiwan).

(2) The Education Bureau (EDB) has all along upheld the principle of optimising the use of public resources, and handles vacant school premises (VSP) in accordance with Central Clearing House mechanism. The EDB conducts reviews on whether the vacant or to-be-vacant school premises are suitable to be retained for school use (primary and secondary school), having regard to factors such as the size, location and physical conditions of the premises, as well as the educational needs and relevant policy measures. Upon confirming that such premises are not required to be retained for school use, the EDB should, in accordance with the said mechanism, release the relevant sites for the Planning Department (PlanD)'s consideration of suitable long-term alternative uses. Since the establishment of the prevailing mechanism in 2011, the EDB already released over 250 vacant or to-be-vacant school premises sites. For details, please refer to the list of VSP sites updated by PlanD regularly on their webpage

(www.pland.gov.hk/pland_en/resources/vsp/vsp_list.html).

(3) and (4) As mentioned above, the policy of developing Hong Kong into an international post-secondary education hub focuses on post-secondary education, and the Government has no plan to extend the policy to primary and secondary schools at this stage. Public sector primary and secondary schools would continue to focus on the learning needs of eligible students in Hong Kong. At the same time, the Government is committed to developing a vibrant international school sector to meet the demand for international school places from non-local families living in Hong Kong and families coming to Hong Kong for work or investment. In addition, with the vibrant development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and Hong Kong's commitment in promoting the interflow of talent with the Mainland and creating strong impetus for growth, it is considered that there would be demand for Mainland curriculum from Mainland families in Hong Kong. Hence, we have allocated, via the School Allocation Exercise mechanism, the greenfield site at Tin Shui Wai for the establishment of the very first non-profit-making private school offering the Mainland curriculum in Hong Kong.

Non-public sector schools with adequate supporting arrangements may

admit overseas students in accordance with prevailing policies. Schools admitting underage overseas students who come to Hong Kong to study on their own without parental accompaniment should, in the interest of students' well-being, consider the relevant supporting arrangements and services required, including the provision of adequate support, proper care and sound protection (e.g. arrangements for accommodation, guardianship, counselling, etc.) to cater for the needs of the students in respect of their learning, daily life, personal growth and mental health etc., so as to ensure students' healthy development.

In terms of publicity and promotion, the EDB works closely with the Hong Kong Talent Engage (HKTE) to provide non-local families who are interested in coming to Hong Kong with clear information on future studies in Hong Kong via the dedicated online platform. The HKTE actively collaborates with several working partners to introduce information about education in Hong Kong, which enables incoming talents to have a better understanding of the education system in Hong Kong. In addition to providing school profiles of public sector schools, the EDB has also launched a new thematic website to introduce international schools in Hong Kong.

On the other hand, local school councils also organise joint exhibitions and talks in the Mainland to provide information to and answer enquiries from the Mainland parents and students who are interested in studying in local schools. Some schools have even arranged school visits, class observations and experiential learning sessions for newly-arrived families and/or those intending to apply to come to Hong Kong with a view to allowing them to directly experience the learning environment and conditions in Hong Kong.

To conclude, we would continue to develop a diverse and quality education system and tell the good stories of Hong Kong's education through various channels.