

LCQ10: Facilitating entry of personnel from higher education institutions in Mainland cities of Greater Bay Area into Hong Kong

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 (May 22):

Question:

The Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) puts forward developing an education and talents hub, and supporting higher education institutions from Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao in jointly operating education institutions as well as the development of GBA into an international demonstration zone for education. On the other hand, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and Hong Kong Baptist University have established campuses in Shenzhen, Guangzhou and Zhuhai respectively. It is learnt that given the diversified collaboration between the Hong Kong and Mainland campuses of these universities, there is a need for teaching and research staff as well as students of the Mainland campuses to visit the Hong Kong campuses frequently. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as it is learnt that while the aforesaid students of the Mainland campuses may take programmes co-organised by the Mainland and Hong Kong campuses, which generally require them to attend classes in Hong Kong for two or more days a week, those students can hardly attend all classes in Hong Kong as they are ineligible for applying student visas, coupled with the fact that students not taking co-organised programmes may also need to come to Hong Kong to participate in academic activities such as talks or seminars, whether the authorities will issue the students in need with special student visas; and

(2) given that while professors as well as research and development personnel of the Mainland campuses can apply for "exit endorsement for talents" and stay in Hong Kong for a maximum duration of 30 days for each visit, foreign teaching and research staff are ineligible for applying the exit endorsement, whether the authorities can discuss with the relevant Mainland authorities the expansion of application of the exit endorsement to cover foreign teaching and research staff or issue them with special work visas, so as to facilitate their teaching, research and academic exchange work in Hong Kong?

Reply:

President,

Hong Kong's post-secondary education sector has been fully leveraging the institutional advantages of enjoying strong support of the Motherland and being closely connected to the world under "one country, two systems", and actively serving the country's needs by contributing Hong Kong's strengths. To fully seize the opportunities brought about by the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), the Government supports Hong Kong's higher education institutions capitalising on the characteristics and strengths of Hong Kong through the establishment of multilateral and cross-disciplinary partnerships in the Mainland cities of the GBA, so as to create favourable conditions for research development, knowledge transfer and industrialisation, thereby promoting research activities of a high academic standard in the GBA. Meanwhile, the Government will continue to actively participate in and promote higher education co-operation in the GBA. We will assist Hong Kong's higher education institutions in exploring more flexible and innovative operation models to promote closer collaboration with their campuses in the Mainland cities of the GBA and facilitate the flow of faculty members and students, with a view to nurturing outstanding talent for the country's development through close collaboration between the Hong Kong and Mainland campuses in teaching and research. Apart from Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University United International College, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen, and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (Guangzhou), which have established their presence in the GBA, the establishment of City University of Hong Kong (Dongguan) was also approved in April this year for an official opening in September this year.

After our consultation with the Security Bureau and the Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau, our consolidated reply to the question raised by Professor the Hon William Wong is as follows:

(1) With the full resumption of normal travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland, Hong Kong's higher education institutions have actively strengthened the exchanges and interactions among the faculty members and students of the Hong Kong and Mainland campuses, and launched various joint programmes to enrich the learning experience of students from both campuses.

Under the prevailing requirements, a person who takes up studies in a full-time locally-accredited post-secondary programme (including eligible short-term courses) or part-time locally-accredited taught postgraduate local programme may apply to the Immigration Department (ImmD) for a visa/entry permit to enter the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) for study, while locally-accredited post-secondary programmes refer to programmes leading to degrees awarded by local degree-awarding institutions. Moreover, a student who is admitted on exchange in full-time locally-accredited local programmes at sub-degree level for not more than six months or exchange in full-time locally-accredited local or non-local programmes at undergraduate or above level for not more than one year may also make an application. If any joint programmes offered by an institution meet the above requirements, students concerned may submit an application under the mechanism.

The HKSAR Government will continue to liaise closely with the relevant higher education institutions and assist them in maintaining communication

with the relevant departments and the Mainland authorities on the immigration arrangements for the relevant students.

(2) The HKSAR Government has been actively attracting and retaining talent, and will continue to assist Hong Kong's higher education institutions in discussing with the relevant Mainland authorities the arrangements for facilitating the travel of relevant expatriates between the Hong Kong and Mainland campuses under the education collaboration framework, with a view to further promoting the interactions and exchanges of talent in the GBA, and building a high-level talent cluster in the GBA.

In order to promote the development of relevant sectors and raise Hong Kong's international profile, the HKSAR Government launched the Pilot Scheme on Immigration Facilitation for Visitors Participating in Short-term Activities in Designated Sectors in June 2022 (the Pilot Scheme), providing immigration facilitation for visitors participating in short-term activities in designated sectors in Hong Kong. Organisations authorised by the relevant bureaux or departments of the HKSAR Government can issue invitation letters to relevant non-local talents in their sectors. Invited persons may come to Hong Kong to participate in specified short-term activities as visitors and receive remuneration without the need to apply for employment visas from the ImmD. The duration of participation in specified short-term activities is up to 14 consecutive calendar days (counting from the day when the eligible visitors start to participate in such activities). The authorised organisations in the Higher Education sector under the Pilot Scheme include the University Grants Committee-funded universities named in the question, and the short-term activities covered include attending conferences, seminars, academic workshops, guest lectures, educational activities, as well as conducting surveys and research. If invited by authorised organisations to participate in designated short-term activities under the Pilot Scheme, foreign teaching and research staff working on the Mainland can also enjoy the facilitation of not having to apply for employment visas. Relevant institutions can continue to make good use of the Pilot Scheme to provide facilitation for foreign teaching and research staff to engage in specified short-term activities in Hong Kong. For details, please refer to the ImmD's website: www.immd.gov.hk/eng/services/visas/stv.html.

The HKSAR Government will continue to facilitate the pooling of various types of talent, including teaching and research personnel, for exchanges in Hong Kong, especially the two-way flow of talent between Hong Kong and the Mainland, and review the relevant policies in a timely manner.