

LCQ12: Assistance for sectors of sports, performing arts, culture and publication

Following is a question by the Hon Ma Fung-kuok and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Caspar Tsui, in the Legislative Council today (December 16):

Question:

On the assistance for the sectors of sports, performing arts, culture and publication by the Government amid the epidemic, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the latest implementation situation of the following support measures introduced under the Anti-epidemic Fund, including (a) the number of applications received, (b) the number of applications approved, (c) the main reasons for rejecting some applications, (d) the total amount of subsidy disbursed, and (e) the current balance of the commitment (set out in tables of the same format as the table below):

(A) the Arts and Culture Sector Subsidy Scheme under the first round of support measures,

(B) the following measures under the second round of support measures:
(i) the relief subsidy disbursed to providers of interest classes at schools,
(ii) the one-off Grant disbursed to registered sports coaches,
(iii) the Amusement Game Centres Subsidy Scheme,
(iv) the Fitness Centre Subsidy Scheme,
(v) the Places of Amusement Licence Holders Subsidy Scheme,
(vi) the Places of Public Entertainment Licence Holder Subsidy Scheme,
(vii) the Sports and Recreational Sites Subsidy Scheme,
(viii) the relief grants provided to the freelance workers hired by subvented non-governmental welfare organisations to provide training and coaching for service users,
(ix) the relief provided to creative industries, and
(x) the subsidy provided to operators of Revitalising Historic Buildings Through Partnership Scheme, PMQ and Fly the Flyover Operation, and

(C) the following measures under the third round of support measures (including the measures in (i) to (vii) above):
(viii) the Sports Premises Subsidy Scheme,
(ix) the Scheme on Relief Grants for Interest Class Instructors Hired by Subvented Non-governmental Welfare Organisations,
(x) the Arts and Culture Sector Subsidy Scheme – Subsidy to individual arts practitioners and freelancers,
(xi) the Cinemas Subsidy Scheme,
(xii) the subsidy provided to the companies in the performing industry which

organise pop concerts, and

(xiii) the Arts and Culture Sector Subsidy Scheme – Rental Support for Tenants of Arts Spaces and Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre;

The round of support measures: _____

Measure	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)

(2) whether it will consider making use of the balance of the commitment for the various measures to further enhance the support for the sectors; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) given that the Government has, upon considering a suggestion made by me, introduced the "Pyrotechnics and Special Effects Operators Subsidy Scheme", under which a one-off subsidy is granted to eligible special effects operators and assistants, of the commitment of the scheme and the expected number of beneficiaries;

(4) as the statistics released by the Census and Statistics Department in respect of the unemployment population for July to September this year have shown that the unemployment rate for the sectors of arts, entertainment and recreation was 11.4 per cent, whether the figure included the unemployed freelancers of the sectors; if not, whether the Government grasps the unemployment situation of such persons, and of the measures in place to further support the practitioners of the sectors, in particular the freelancers;

(5) whether it has reviewed and updated the strategies on assisting the sectors in recovering in the light of the development of the epidemic; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(6) whether it will consider drawing reference from the practice of the Government on, after the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome epidemic in 2003, organising a series of cultural and sports activities to help revive the vigour of society; if so, of the details, and whether it will consider according priority to cooperating with local arts and sports organisations in organising the relevant activities?

Reply:

President,

(1) As at December 4, the implementation details of various schemes and measures under the three rounds of "Anti-epidemic Fund" (AEF) for the sectors of sports, performing arts, culture and publication are set out at Annex. The information provided has consolidated inputs from the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB), Commerce and Economic Development Bureau (CEDB), Development Bureau, Education Bureau, Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) and Social Welfare Department.

(2) Unspent balance under the various assistance schemes of AEF will be returned to AEF for further deployment as decided by the AEF Steering Committee (the Steering Committee). In light of the new wave of epidemic, the Government has to further tighten social distancing measures, including closing the scheduled premises specified in the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F), in order to prevent crowds from gathering and therefore reduce the risks of spreading the virus. The Chief Executive said at a media session on December 8 that the Government will consider assistance measures proactively in support of the industries hard hit by the new wave of epidemic. The Chief Secretary for Administration and Financial Secretary, along with the Bureau Secretaries concerned, will discuss with the relevant sectors the practical measures and financial amount concerned.

(3) With the approval of the Steering Committee, CEDB launched the Pyrotechnics and Special Effects Operators Subsidy Scheme (the Scheme) on October 23. The Scheme provides a one-off subsidy of \$7,500 to each eligible special effects operator (SEO) and special effect assistant (SEA) holding at least one valid licence within 2020 (between January 1 and September 30) issued under the Entertainment Special Effects Ordinance (Cap. 560) and its subsidiary legislation and who have not benefited from the Employment Support Scheme or any other sector-specific subsidy schemes under AEF. Same practitioners holding different types of SEO/SEA licences should only be eligible for a maximum subsidy amount of \$7,500. The estimated expenditure of the Scheme is around \$1.8 million.

The application was closed on November 13 with a total of 144 applications received. After vetting, 132 eligible applications were approved and all subsidy had been disbursed.

(4) Sectoral unemployment rate statistics published by the Census and Statistics Department have covered all unemployed persons mainly engaged in the sector concerned before unemployment irrespective of their employment status before unemployment, including freelancers, self-employed persons, employees, employers and unpaid family workers.

Freelancers in the labour market (including the arts and culture sector and sports sector) may take up jobs in different industries. Taking into account their own circumstances, relevant freelancers may apply for different support schemes under AEF.

(5) As the operation conditions of various sectors are different, the recovery strategies for individual sectors should be considered in the light of the circumstances. For the arts and culture sector, the LCSD has implemented a measure to reduce the percentage levied on gross tickets proceeds by half (that is from 20 per cent to 10 per cent) at four performance venues, that is the Hong Kong Coliseum, the Queen Elizabeth Stadium, the Hong Kong Cultural Centre and the Hong Kong City Hall. In order to benefit more hirers, the two-year discounted period will commence four months after the full seating capacity is resumed. Events held within the

four-month grace period will also benefit from this measure. The Government hopes that this measure would provide incentive for the arts and culture organisations to stage large-scale programmes after the epidemic.

To assist different industries hard hit by the epidemic, the Government introduced the Job Creation Scheme under second round relief measures under AEF. Over 2 500 time-limited posts for six to 12 months are introduced in work areas and departments relating to culture, arts and leisure and recreation. These posts include both full-time and part-time posts. The expenditure involved is over \$350 million.

On sports, HAB supports the creation of 45 positions under the Job Creation Scheme for the Hong Kong Sports Institute (HKSI) and relevant national sports associations for persons with disabilities to strengthen the training of athletes and administrative support. Around \$18.5 million has been allocated.

In addition, for major sports events which have been cancelled or postponed due to the epidemic, the Government has been in contact with relevant national sports associations to understand their situation and provide appropriate support and special direct subsidies to reduce their financial burden. We will calculate the subsidy amount based on the actual expenditure (such as venue charges paid and publicity expenses) incurred reasonably for the event concerned. The amount of subsidy will be capped at \$2 million for each event.

The Government will continue to give our full support for the preparation of Hong Kong athletes for the Tokyo Olympic Games and Paralympic Games. The Government has been assisting HKSI's operations so as to allow athletes to train under appropriate anti-epidemic measures to help safeguard the health of our athletes. In addition, due to the pandemic this year, our athletes lost their opportunities to attain sports results because most international events were cancelled or postponed. Nevertheless, we will maintain the current athlete categories of elite athletes in 2021 so that the financial support to athletes will not be affected.

The Government also supports national sports associations in planning and organising sports events provided that health conditions are safeguarded in the light of the development of the epidemic. This includes the assistance to the Hong Kong Football Association (HKFA) in its completion of the remaining fixtures of the Hong Kong Premier League (HKPL) in the 2019/20 football season in September and October this year by opening up some venues and providing subsidies to HKFA and HKPL clubs, including rental fees and match-related expenses.

As for the creative sectors, the Government has been providing support to projects conducive to the development of relevant sectors through the CreateSmart Initiative (CSI) and Film Development Fund (FDF). The Chief Executive has proposed the injection of another \$1 billion into the CSI in her recent Policy Address to sustain the development of creative industries. To address the specific needs of the local film sector, CEDB announced in

mid-July that around \$260 million would be earmarked under the FDF to implement five major measures to address the needs of different fields of the film industry, with a view to retaining talent and injecting fresh impetus into the sector.

(6) At this stage, the most imminent task of the Government is to concentrate effort and resources to combat and contain the epidemic the soonest. The Government will keep in view the development of the epidemic, prepare and consider appropriate activities and measures that can promptly reinvigorate the economy after the epidemic. In fact, the Government has been adopting the "suppress and lift" strategy whereby anti-epidemic measures would be relaxed when the epidemic is eased with a view to maintaining normal life and economic activities.