

## LCQ13: Manpower situation of accounting profession

Following is a question by the Hon Kenneth Leung and a written reply by the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr James Lau, in the Legislative Council today (May 29):

Question:

Quite a number of the persons-in-charge of accounting firms have relayed to me that in recent years, they have continuously encountered difficulties in recruiting accounting professionals. In respect of the manpower situation of the accounting profession, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows the respective numbers of (i) graduates of post-secondary programmes in accounting and finance-related disciplines offered by the various tertiary institutions, and (ii) persons who obtained professional qualifications in accountancy through other routes, in each of the past five years in Hong Kong;

(2) whether it knows the number of private organisations providing accounting, auditing, book-keeping or tax consulting services in Hong Kong, and the number of accounting professionals they hired, in each of the past five years;

(3) whether it conducted, in the past five years, any comprehensive study on the future development as well as the manpower demand and supply situation of the accounting profession; if so, of the outcome; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) whether it has plans, in the coming year, to gain an understanding from the various stakeholders of the accounting profession (including the persons-in-charge of accounting firms, the Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants and other professional bodies in the sector) about the current manpower demand and supply situation of the profession, so as to plan for the medium and long term human resources of the accounting profession, as well as promote the profession's healthy development in the long run; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

(1) According to the information provided by the Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants (HKICPA), the number of persons who obtained professional qualifications in accountancy in Hong Kong through bachelors' degrees in accounting and finance-related disciplines offered by tertiary institutions, as well as other routes, in the past five years are set out in

Table 1 of the Annex.

(2) According to the "Quarterly Survey of Employment and Vacancies" of the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD), the number of establishments engaged in accounting, auditing, bookkeeping or tax consultancy services of the private sector in Hong Kong and their total number of persons engaged in the past five years are set out in Table 2 of the Annex.

(3) and (4) The Government conducts manpower projection from time to time to project the broad trends of Hong Kong's manpower supply and requirements of our economy at the macro level for the medium term. Amongst others, manpower requirements are projected for various economic sectors which include "accounting, auditing and bookkeeping services". In addition, the Vocational Training Council conducts manpower surveys for the accountancy sector regularly. These exercises provide valuable information for the tertiary institutions in planning programmes on accountancy.

In addition to making reference to various sources of information, the Government has all along maintained close liaison with the accounting sector to discuss various initiatives relevant to the development of the accounting profession. As for the manpower development of the accounting sector, the HKICPA has set up an Advisory Panel to study the manpower situation of the accounting sector since 2015. Annual surveys have been conducted with the HKICPA members and students covering different aspects to understand the dynamics of the accounting profession such as the employment prospects, trend in employment change, work-life balance, earning power, training and development, etc. The HKICPA has also conducted in-depth employer interviews with accounting firms in 2018 on issues relating to their recruitment plans, difficulties in recruitment and retaining staff, and attractiveness of the accounting profession, etc.

High-quality professional accounting services are an integral part of Hong Kong's status as an international financial centre. The Government will continue to maintain close liaison with the HKICPA and other relevant stakeholders, with a view to facilitating the healthy development of the accounting sector in the long run.