

LCQ14: Funding Scheme for Youth Exchange in the Mainland

Following is a question by the Hon Lillian Kwok and a written reply by the Secretary for Home and Youth Affairs, Miss Alice Mak, in the Legislative Council today (November 8):

Question:

The Home and Youth Affairs Bureau and the Youth Development Commission have jointly launched the Funding Scheme for Youth Exchange in the Mainland (the Scheme), sponsoring eligible non-governmental organisations to organise youth exchange tours to the Mainland. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of organisations that received funding support under the Scheme in each of the past five financial years, and set out, by type of such organisations, their names and the amounts of funding granted;

(2) whether it has assessed the effectiveness of the Scheme in each financial year and put in place any improvement measures; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) given that at present an eligible participant for sponsorship under the Scheme must be aged between 12 and 35, whether the Government will consider raising the age ceiling; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) as it is learnt that at present, some Hong Kong young people aged between 12 and 35 are non-holders of a Hong Kong Permanent Identity Card (PIC), whether the Government will consider removing the restriction that participants under the Scheme must hold a PIC; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Under the Funding Scheme for Youth Exchange in the Mainland (FSYEM), the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau (HYAB) and the Youth Development Commission (YDC) provide funding for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to organise youth exchange projects in the Mainland for Hong Kong young people to enhance their awareness and understanding of the country's development and strengthen their sense of national identity through fostering exchange with the Mainland people. Our reply to the Hon Lillian Kwok's questions is as follows:

Information of the funded NGOs and approved funding amount under the FSYEM from 2018-19 to 2019-20 are set out in Annex. The FSYEM was suspended from 2021-22 to 2022-23 due to the pandemic, but it has been resumed earlier this year.

The HYAB has been evaluating the effectiveness of the FSYEM in every financial year. Upon completion of an exchange project, participants are invited to fill in evaluation questionnaires from which we can understand their views on the project for monitoring its effectiveness and quality. This will also form part of the track record when we assess future applications submitted by the same organisation. Based on the feedback collected from participants in the previous round of the FSYEM, over 90 per cent of the respondents considered the FSYEM beneficial in deepening their understanding of the Mainland.

In addition, we appointed an independent third-party organisation earlier on to conduct a research study on the FSYEM and the Funding Scheme for Youth Internship in the Mainland to gauge views from participants of the schemes and other stakeholders by way of focus group discussions with a view to further enhancing the schemes. The study report revealed that the exchange/internship projects under the funding schemes were deemed effective by participants, organisers and employers. Over 90 per cent of the participants agreed that the two schemes achieved the intended outcomes and considered the completed exchange/internship projects fruitful, especially in areas such as understanding the local culture and development opportunities, boosting one's employment advantage and promoting personal development. We will continue to enhance the breadth and depth of the Mainland exchange programmes to further enhance Hong Kong youth's understanding of the country.

The HYAB would review the operation of the FSYEM from time to time and introduce enhancement measures when necessary. For example, we made a number of adjustments to the FSYEM in 2019-20, which included relaxing the eligibility requirements of participants from aged 12 to 29 to 12 to 35 to cover young people of different age groups and development stages; and providing funded support staff in order to strengthen immediate support to the exchange activities in the Mainland, etc.

We are now finalising the details of the FSYEM in 2024-25, among which we would consider a number of enhancement measures, e.g. expanding the eligibility requirements of participants to provide NGOs with more flexibility in recruitment, increasing the number of funded support staff to strengthen the support for younger participants, etc. We will announce the details when the scheme opens for applications.