

LCQ15: Distance Business Programme

Following is a question by the Hon Charles Mok and a written reply by the Secretary for Innovation and Technology, Mr Alfred Sit, in the Legislative Council today (June 3):

Question:

To support enterprises to continue their businesses and provide services during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic, the Government has allocated a funding of \$500 million from the Anti-epidemic Fund for launching a Distance Business Programme (the Programme), under which funding support will be granted through a fast-track approval process for enterprises to adopt information technology (IT) solutions for developing distance business. The Programme covers 12 IT solution categories relating to distance business (e.g. online business, online order taking and delivery, and smart self-service systems) and opens for applications between May 18 and October 31 this year. In addition, the Government has published an IT Service Providers Reference List (the List) for reference by applicant enterprises. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective to-date numbers of applications received, approved and rejected; a breakdown of the number of enterprises whose applications were approved by (i) the number of employees and (ii) the number of years of operation, the respective numbers of applications received and approved under each IT solution category, as well as a breakdown of the rejected cases (if any) by reason for the rejection; whether it has assessed if the funding is sufficient to provide support for all eligible applicants; if it has assessed and the outcome is in the negative, whether it will provide additional funding in a timely manner;

(2) of the respective to-date numbers of applications for inclusion in the List received, approved and rejected; a breakdown of the number of service providers whose applications were approved by (i) the number of employees and (ii) the number of years of operation, as well as a breakdown of the rejected cases (if any) by reason for the rejection;

(3) of the details of the publicity efforts made for the Programme, including the means (e.g. holding briefing sessions or placing advertisements on mainstream or online media), number of times, number of participants and expenditure; and

(4) whether it has received complaints that websites with a domain name comprising 'D-Biz' (the English abbreviation of the Programme) were found to have disguised as the official website or have misled the public; if so, of the details and the follow-up actions?

Reply:

President,

Remote working or service has become a new trend against the backdrop of the epidemic. The Innovation and Technology Commission (ITC) has launched the Distance Business Programme (the Programme) under the Anti-epidemic Fund to provide funding support to enterprises to continue their business and services during the epidemic through adoption of information technology (IT) solutions. The Hong Kong Productivity Council is the Secretariat of the Programme (the Secretariat).

The reply to the various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) and (2) The Programme has invited applications from IT service providers to enrol on the IT Service Providers Reference List (Reference List) from May 4. As at 6pm on June 1, the Secretariat has received 3 525 applications. A total of 2 023 IT service providers have been enrolled on the Reference List. Remaining applications are being processed, and no service provider has been rejected from enrolling on the Reference List so far. The Secretariat does not maintain statistics of the years of operation of the service providers on the Reference List, while the number of service providers by a breakdown of their number of employees is tabulated below:

Number of employees	Number of IT service providers on the Reference List
1-9	1 391
10-19	312
20-29	103
30-39	60
40-49	28
50-99	62
100 or above	67
Total	2 023

The Programme has invited funding applications from enterprises from May 18. As at 6pm on June 1, the Secretariat has received 8 665 applications. The Secretariat is processing the applications received, and has yet to approve or reject any funding applications.

(3) ITC issued a press release on May 1, 2020 to announce the details for IT service providers to apply for enrolling on the Reference List, and subsequently issued another press release on May 16 to announce the details for funding applications by enterprises. It also issued a press release on May 30 to remind service providers who wish to enrol on the Reference List to submit applications before the deadline as soon as possible. The Programme has a dedicated webpage with information including the Reference List, Guidance Notes and application forms. In addition, the Secretariat has organised or participated in over 16 webinars with over 15 000 participants

from April 24 to June 1, and has published/broadcasted advertisements on mainstream or online media for over 170 times during the period to promote the Programme. As at June 1, the Secretariat has spent \$270,000 on promoting the Programme.

(4) ITC and the Secretariat have received enquiries and complaints on suspected bogus websites which resemble the official website of the Programme. The Secretariat has issued clarifications on the official website of the Programme and reminded the public to stay vigilant. It has also issued 17 written warnings to those suspected bogus website entities, and furnished information of those websites to the Police for follow-up.