

LCQ16: Addiction of minors to online games

Following is a question by the Hon Starry Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Caspar Tsui, in the Legislative Council today (October 27):

Question:

The Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong conducted last month an online questionnaire survey on the situation of minors being addicted to online games. The findings revealed that, among the 463 parents of students of primary and secondary schools surveyed, respectively 33.4 per cent and 18.3 per cent indicated that their children spent three to five hours and more than five hours daily on online games. The parents surveyed held the view that their children's study, health and family relationship had been affected by their addiction to online games. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will, by studying and drawing reference from the relevant practices of the governments in places such as the Mainland, Korea and Japan, take measures to curb minors' addiction to online games, including (i) requiring real-name registration for online game accounts, (ii) capping the duration for which minors are allowed to play online games, and (iii) restricting the collection of game payments from minors; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it will study (a) requiring developers and agents of mobile games, mobile application platforms and payment platforms to improve their trade practices and enhance information transparency, and (b) formulating a code of practice to provide (i) a maximum amount of "in-game purchases" to be made by minor gamers, a mechanism for refund, and a probability for winning in-game lucky draws through payment of fees, and (ii) a means for payment platforms to authenticate the age of gamers, so as to prevent minors from making excessive "in-game purchases"; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will allocate additional resources to schools for (i) enhancing students' awareness of self-protection in the world of online games, (ii) nurturing in students a correct attitude towards online games, and (iii) providing parents of students with the required knowledge for early identification of their children's addiction to online games and for seeking assistance from professionals; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Innovation and Technology Bureau, the Food and Health Bureau, the Education Bureau (EDB) and the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, the Home Affairs Bureau would give a consolidated reply to the question on behalf of the Government as follows:

Game companies which provide online games in Hong Kong have to comply with all relevant laws of Hong Kong. For example, contents of online games should comply with the requirements of the Control of Obscene and Indecent Articles Ordinance (Cap. 390); if there is a virtual lucky draw which constitutes an act of gaming in the online game, such a lucky draw should be subject to the regulation of the Gambling Ordinance (Cap. 148); the trade practices adopted by online game companies should comply with the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (Cap. 362). Regarding consumer issues in relation to mobile games, the Consumer Council published a related report in its CHOICE magazine early this year, urging developers and agents of mobile games to enhance information transparency (including the indication of the probability of winning lucky draws in mobile games through "in-game purchases", disclosure of the list of winners, etc.) and allow parents to limit the amount of "in-game purchases". The Consumer Council also reminded gamers to study the agreement and terms with mobile game companies, including relevant refund terms.

In fact, in response to the problem of addiction of minors to online games, relevant government departments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), schools and other bodies have been providing various types of services and programmes. The Government set up the Advisory Group on Health Effects of Use of Internet and Electronic Screen Products (Advisory Group) in 2013, comprising representatives from the EDB, the Social Welfare Department, the Department of Health (DH), the social welfare sector, relevant Colleges of the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine, etc. The Advisory Group published the Report of Advisory Group on Health Effects of Use of Internet and Electronic Screen Products (the Report) in 2014, with recommendations for children, adolescents, parents and teachers on the healthy use of Internet and electronic screen products. The Report has been uploaded onto the website of the DH.

The DH has also produced a set of four modules of recommendations for parents, teachers, primary and secondary school students respectively and set up a designated webpage as a convenient platform for the public to obtain relevant health information. Contents of the webpage include excessive use of Internet and healthy use of electronic screen products, etc. The Adolescent Health Programme provided by the DH's Student Health Service promotes psychosocial health of the adolescents in secondary schools through outreaching activities. It also includes topics and seminars targeting at students and parents on the healthy use of Internet and electronic screen products.

The EDB provides the Information Literacy for Hong Kong Students learning framework and information kits on e-learning for schools, as well as professional development programmes for teachers to cultivate students' ability and attitude to use information and communication technology effectively and ethically. The EDB also co-operates with other Government

departments and NGOs to enhance students' information literacy and awareness of cyber security through student activities and competitions, and has commissioned an NGO to set up a telephone hotline to provide individual support for parents, teachers and students in need. The 2021 Policy Address proposes to enhance the media and information literacy of teachers and students, and optimise the use of the Quality Education Fund to support schools in promoting related education. Furthermore, schools are staffed with professionals, including guidance personnel, school social workers and school-based educational psychologists, etc. to provide students in need (including those who are addicted to online games) with necessary support and referral services.

The Government attaches great importance to cyber security, and has been actively promoting relevant information as an effort to enrich the public's, especially students', knowledge of cyber security. In the past two school years of 2019/20 and 2020/21, the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) and professional bodies jointly organised more than 20 physical or virtual school visits to convey information security messages to more than 5 100 teachers and students. Besides, the OGCIO collaborated with the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) to provide information related to cyber security for the public education exhibition on the National Security Education Day in April 2021. The OGCIO will continue to work with the HKPF and the Hong Kong Computer Emergency Response Team Coordination Centre to organise the annual Build a Secure Cyberspace information security promotional campaign with a view to strengthening the understanding of cyber security by organisations and the public, reminding them to act prudently in the cyber world, so as to maintain cyber security and avoid falling into cyber pitfalls or even breaching the law inadvertently.