

## LCQ18: Mechanism for vetting the eligibility of applicants for admission adopted by higher education institutions

Following is a question by the Hon Tang Fei and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (June 26):

Question:

It has been reported that a university has recently found that some students have provided fraudulent documentary proof of academic qualifications when applying for admission. There are views that the incident has brought potential impact on Hong Kong's reputation as an international hub for post-secondary education. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council if it knows:

(1) the specific measures taken by various higher education institutions to ensure the authenticity and validity of documentary proof of academic qualifications submitted by applicants for admission; and

(2) whether various higher education institutions will enhance their mechanisms for vetting the eligibility of applicants for admission to prevent the recurrence of similar incidents, thereby ensuring the quality of their students; if so, of the specific details?

Reply:

President,

Falsifying or furnishing fraudulent academic qualifications is a serious offence liable to a maximum penalty of 14 years' imprisonment. As fraudulent academic qualifications seriously affect student admission by local higher education institutions and Hong Kong's hard-earned international reputation, the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and all sectors of the Hong Kong community deeply resent such act and have zero tolerance towards the matter.

Earlier on, a certain university found a very small number of cases where applicants allegedly submitted fraudulent documents when applying for admission. The university reported the incident to the Police and dealt with the incident seriously, indicating its determination of zero tolerance.

Hong Kong's higher education has unique advantages, including high teaching quality, strong basic research capabilities, extensive international

connections, and close co-operation with the Mainland, representing a strong foundation. We particularly treasure the golden reputation of Hong Kong's higher education. Facing intense competition for admissions, universities have always established stringent admission procedures and mechanisms to ensure fairness and impartiality in selecting the best candidates. As the cradle of future talent, our higher education institutions must be well prepared for Hong Kong to develop itself into an international hub for post-secondary education, be it academic standards or the establishment of systems.

In response to the question raised by the Hon Tang Fei, our key replies are as follows:

(1) All of the eight University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded universities have formed academic boards/senates to take charge of academic matters while academic units and/or graduate schools are responsible for the administration and gatekeeping of student admission. There are rigorous admission standards and procedures as well as clear guidelines in place for stringent vetting of the academic qualifications, public examination results and relevant documents of students admitted. Generally speaking, verification is made through various channels, such as requesting the admitted students to arrange for direct dispatch of relevant proof of study (e.g. transcripts) by the respective awarding institutions to the universities concerned, checking with credible platforms (e.g. the China Higher Education Student Information website), verifying the results with the relevant examination boards directly, or requesting the applicants to arrange for direct dispatch of their results by the relevant examination boards to the universities concerned. Students may also be required to produce originals or certified copies of the certificates or transcripts for further checking when registering with the universities in Hong Kong as and when necessary. Those who are unable to furnish the required documents in the above process may have their admission offers rescinded or registration rejected.

(2) The admission mechanisms of the eight UGC-funded universities uphold the principles of merit-based selection, fairness and impartiality. All universities will continue to provide training, including collaborating with the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) in this regard, inviting the ICAC to take part in reviewing or providing advice on the admission procedures, and formulating internal guidelines on corruption prevention, etc, with a view to raising anti-corruption awareness among relevant staff and ensuring the integrity of the system and fairness of the admission mechanisms. At the same time, the universities will diligently undertake their gatekeeping responsibilities and clearly demonstrate their zero tolerance stance towards using fraudulent academic qualifications to apply for admission. They will take decisive disciplinary actions upon discovery of such violations, including rescission of admission offers or expulsion, and will refer such cases to the relevant law enforcement agencies and visa-issuing authorities for follow-up action as appropriate. In addition, the universities have been paying closer attention to the recent untrue information, abetting and other illegal activities. They actively make clarifications on their websites, social media and in application forms, and

remind applicants that all application materials must be accurate. Unlawful conduct will not be tolerated. In the light of the ever-changing circumstances, the universities will continually improve the arrangements to maintain their academic reputation.