

LCQ18: Support for Hong Kong's film industry

Following is a question by the Hon Ma Fung-kwok and a written reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, in the Legislative Council today (January 6):

Question:

With the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic persisting, Hong Kong's film industry has been hard hit. The Government announced in July last year that it would allocate around \$260 million under the Film Development Fund (FDF) to implement five measures for supporting the film industry, so as to increase local film productions, nurture talents for the industry, and help the film industry tide over the difficult times. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows the number of local films the filming of which started in 2020; among such films, the number of those which have benefited from the relevant support measures under FDF;

(2) of the number of applications for location filming received by the Film Services Office of Create Hong Kong since 2020; the number of such applications in respect of which the relevant government departments gave no-objection in principle notices, and the support such departments provided to the film crews concerned, as well as the number of such applications in respect of which such departments refused to give no-objection in principle notice and the reasons for that;

(3) of the implementation situation of the aforesaid five measures for supporting the film industry:

(i) the number of films which are in the pipeline under the "Directors' Succession Scheme", and in respect of each film, the expected filming commencement date, employment opportunities to be created and expenditure involved;

(ii) the number of applications received since the implementation of the relaxation measures for the "Film Production Financing Scheme", the expected date on which the result will be announced and expenditure involved;

(iii) the number of submissions received under Phase 1 of the "Scriptwriting Incubation Programme"; the expected dates on which the whole programme will be completed and winning scripts announced, and expenditure involved;

(iv) the number of training courses organised under the measures for sponsoring the trade to offer free short-term advanced training courses and, in respect of each course, the main contents as well as the expected number of beneficiaries and expenditure involved; and

(v) the production progress of the various winning film proposals under the enhanced sixth "First Feature Film Initiative" and the expenditures involved;

(4) whether it has further gained an understanding from members of the film industry about their needs amid the epidemic, so as to introduce more support measures; and

(5) whether it will, by drawing reference from its practice of supporting the arts and culture sector, disburse subsidies to grassroots workers of the film industry through the industry's practitioner organizations; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

(1), (3) to (5) The Government understands that various sectors have been hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. When formulating measures to support the local film industry, we have all along consulted the Film Development Council (FDC) and the trade and invited relevant stakeholders to provide views on implementation details, with a view to ensuring that the measures are practicable and can benefit practitioners of different disciplines in the industry. We announced in July 2020 that around \$260 million under the Film Development Fund (FDF) would be earmarked to implement five major measures to increase the number of local film productions, nurture young directors and scriptwriting talents and enhance professional training, so as to add value to the trade and help the trade practitioners tide over this challenging period. An overview of the latest development of the five major measures is as follows –

(i) Directors' Succession Scheme – There are five director teams participating in the first round of the Scheme. Each film production would be granted a subsidy of around \$9 million. Principal photography of the film projects is expected to commence within 2021 the earliest. With reference to past experience, a small-to-medium budget film production involves around 170 crews. Actual number of crew members involved would be subject to individual film production needs. Therefore, the more films to be produced, the more practitioners from different film disciplines would be benefitted.

(ii) The Film Production Financing Scheme (FPFS) – The six-month relaxation measures to the FPFS has been implemented since July 15, 2020. As at end-December 2020, we have received eight applications, with one application approved, one rejected, one withdrawn and the remaining five under consideration. In addition, we understand that the trade is preparing at least another six film project proposals for submission to the FDC soon.

In response to the positive feedback from the trade, we announced on December 20, 2020 the extension of application deadline under this initiative for six months to July 14, 2021, with a view to increasing the number of local film productions under the pandemic and providing relief to film practitioners during this challenging period. We expect around 10 film productions would benefit from the measures, involving a total Government

financing of \$100 million.

(iii) Scriptwriting Incubation Programme – Application was closed on October 14, 2020. The response was overwhelming, with around 1 550 applications received. The vetting process is underway. The announcement of shortlisted entries to enter the next phase of the competition is scheduled for Q1 of 2021, with the completion of the entire Programme by end-2021. We have earmarked a funding of around \$8 million for implementing the Programme.

(iv) Sponsoring the trade to provide free short-term advanced training courses – The Federation of Hong Kong Filmmakers (FHKF) and the Hong Kong Film Directors' Guild (HKFDG) have received a total of \$20 million subsidies from the FDF to organise free short-term advanced professional training for the trade since the second half of 2020, namely the Skills Programme for Hong Kong Filmmakers and the Hong Kong Film Directors' Guild's In-depth Professional Training respectively, with a view to advancing the professional knowledge and skill level of film practitioners.

Under the Skills Programme for Hong Kong Filmmakers, experienced filmmakers have led a production crew in producing videos on different themes for teaching purpose. With aid of the video illustrations, ten professional seminars on different film-making skills have been/would be organised to allow participants to obtain professional knowledge of different film disciplines. As for the four-month Hong Kong Film Directors' Guild's In-depth Professional Training, four professional training courses of different themes (namely audio post-production, computer graphics, film colourisation and printing, as well as film marketing and distribution) were organised for participants to have full exposure to the film-making and distribution process.

Both programmes have received overwhelming responses from the trade. The FHKF organised the first four online seminars in end-December 2020, and would hold the remaining six seminars in early-January 2021; while the HKFDG has completed all the 19 classes comprising 228 training sessions. Around 2 000 trade practitioners have benefitted from the two training programmes.

(v) First Feature Film Initiative (FFFI) – The five winning projects of the 6th FFFI were announced in mid-July 2020, involving a total funding of \$31 million. The winning teams are now taking forward the preparation work. Principal photography is expected to commence within 2021.

Through liaison with the sector and the subsequent launch of a series of measures and support as mentioned above, we receive positive response from the film sector. The sector considers that the support measures are practical and sustainable, and help increase the number of high-quality local film productions and nurture more film specialists, thereby benefitting both the sector and practitioners of different film professions.

We have also launched three rounds of Cinemas Subsidy Scheme under the Anti-epidemic Fund (AEF) to provide one-off subsidies to cinemas licensed as a place of public entertainment with commercial operation in specified

periods in order to sustain their businesses; and the Pyrotechnics and Special Effects Operators Subsidy Scheme to provide one-off subsidy of \$7,500 to eligible persons holding valid licence of special effect operator or special effect assistant during specified period. In addition, the Government has introduced various support measures under the 2020-21 Budget and the AEF to cover a wide range of sectors (including the film sector), such as the Employment Support Scheme, enhancement measures to the SME Financing Guarantee Scheme, etc., from which relevant film companies and practitioners will also benefit.

The Government will continue to support projects initiated by the trade that are conducive to the long term development of Hong Kong film industry through various funding schemes under the FDF, such as the FPFS, the FFFI and the Scheme for Funding Other Film-related Projects, etc., with a view to enhancing local film productions, nurturing talents of different film professions, expanding markets and building audience. As far as we are aware of, around 30 local film productions have been completed or are in principal photography since early-2020, eight of which are subsidised by different funding schemes under the FDF.

(2) The Film Services Office (FSO) under Create Hong Kong is committed to assisting production crews to conduct location filming in Hong Kong, by liaising and coordinating with relevant government departments on applications to use public places (especially when involving road closure) and other venues (such as government premises), in order to obtain permission from relevant departments for location filming. FSO will issue "no objection letter" to successful applicants. In 2020, FSO had issued a total of 534 "no objection letters" relating to location filming. No application was rejected.