

LCQ19: Development of horticulture industry

Following is a question by the Hon Leung Che-cheung and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, in the Legislative Council today (July 11):

Question:

An organisation in the horticulture industry has relayed that the development of the industry has all along been neglected over the years. The horticulture industry is not regarded as a separate trade in the construction industry, and there is currently no registration system for practitioners in the industry, rendering such practitioners being regarded as general workers only. Moreover, as it is difficult to attract new blood to join the industry due to its remuneration being on the low side, coupled with an ageing workforce, the industry has been beset by a shortage of manpower. The organisation has also pointed out that horticulture contractors often face financial difficulties arising from default on payments by the principal contractors of public works projects (PWPs). On the other hand, the proportion of greening projects in the all PWPs has been rather low in recent years. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether the authorities have compiled statistics on the added value of horticulture-related industries, and its percentage in Gross Domestic Product, in each of the past three years;
- (2) of the amount of resources allocated by the authorities in the past three years to assist in and promote the development of the horticulture industry;
- (3) whether the authorities have projected and planned for the manpower requirements of the horticulture industry; if so, of the details, including a tabulated breakdown by trade of the number and age distribution of the practitioners in the past three years, as well as the manpower requirements in the coming three years; if not, whether the authorities will consider conducting relevant projections and planning;
- (4) whether the authorities have plans to implement the initiative of "designated workers for designated skills" to stipulate that only registered workers in the trades of the horticulture industry may undertake the relevant work, so as to assist the industry in moving towards professionalisation; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (5) whether the authorities know if the Construction Workers Registration Board received in the past three years written applications for designating the trades of the horticulture industry as registered trades; if the Board did, of the relevant vetting and approval outcome;

(6) of the proportion of contracts of greening projects among the PWP contracts awarded in each of past three years;

(7) whether the authorities will, in the long run, increase the proportion of greening projects in all PWPs, so as to promote greening; and

(8) whether the authorities will consider separately awarding contracts of greening projects, so as to avoid horticulture contractors being defaulted on payments by principal contractors?

Reply:

President,

The reply to the question raised by the Hon Leung Che-cheung is as follows:

(1) According to the Census and Statistics Department, landscape care and greenery services contributed to 0.02 per cent of Hong Kong's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in recent years. The value added and GDP contribution of landscape care and greenery services from 2014 to 2016 is set out below. The figure for 2017 is not yet available.

Year	Value added (\$ million)	Contribution to GDP
2014	444.3	0.02 per cent
2015	480.0	0.02 per cent
2016	496.0	0.02 per cent

(2) In the past three years, the Development Bureau (DEVB) organised 120 horticulture related seminars and workshops for horticultural practitioners and students to enhance their professional knowledge and work practices. These seminars and workshops, which included tree risk assessment, pre-wet season tree management, tree inspection after inclement weather, tree identification, proper tree care, urban forestry and management of Brown Root Rot disease, etc., would help support the development of the industry. To further broaden practitioners' professional knowledge, the DEVB also arranged expert members of the Urban Forestry Advisory Panel to deliver talks in urban forestry seminars, and, in collaboration with the Hong Kong Institute of Horticultural Science and the Chinese University of Hong Kong, invited Mainland and overseas experts to attend seminars to share their experience. Organising horticulture related seminars and workshops is an integral part of the work of the Greening, Landscape and Tree Management Section of DEVB. There is no separate breakdown on the resources devoted to such work.

In October 2016, the Qualifications Framework Secretariat of the Education Bureau set up the Arboriculture and Horticulture Industry Training Advisory Committee (A&H ITAC). In the past two years, the Promotion and Consultation Subcommittee of A&H ITAC has introduced the "Award Scheme for

Learning Experiences", in which scholarships were awarded to three practitioners in the industry for participating in industry-related learning activities and promoting the Qualifications Framework (QF). In addition, the Subcommittee has also launched the "Pilot Project on QF Promotion in School Sector" to provide experiential activities in arboriculture and horticulture to about 100 secondary school students and to introduce the prospects of the industry in order to attract newcomers to the industry.

With DEVB's assistance, the Horticultural and Arboricultural Trade Confederation (HATC) has been established to facilitate communication in the industry, support the formulation of the Specification of Competency Standards (SCS) and relevant professional code of conduct so as to uphold quality standards, and encourage continuous professional development.

Besides, the Government also provides resources in support of local landscape architecture, horticulture and landscape management, including liaison with relevant organisations to implement education and human resources plan, and reserving over \$10 million to subsidise relevant Bachelor Degree programmes via the "Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors".

(3) In 2015, the DEVB commissioned a consultancy study to assess the manpower supply for the arboriculture, horticulture and landscape management and maintenance industry (greening industry). The study also covered the assessment of education and training for the greening industry and explored measures to tackle short-, medium- and long-term manpower demands. The study was completed in 2017. The projected manpower situation in various years, as well as their age distribution in 2015 are set out below:

Greening Industry-related Workers	2015	2016	2017	2018
Arborist/Arborist Assistant	780	980	960	980
Tree Climber Specialist/ Tree Climber Assistant	220	400	380	360
Horticulturist/ Horticulturist Assistant	100	210	230	230
Landscape Architect	50	70	70	100
Landscape Designer/ Assistant Landscape Designer/ Landscape Draftsman	180	230	230	230
Skilled Horticulture/ Arboriculture Worker	3 150	3 760	3 770	3 950
Unskilled Horticulture/ Arboriculture Worker	2 820	3 520	3 520	3 980
Total	7 300	9 170	9 160	9 830

Age Distribution of Greening Industry-related Workers in 2015

Greening Industry-related Workers	Age Group (per cent)			
	<25	25-44	45-64	>65
Arborist/Arborist Assistant	16	69	14	1
Tree Climber Specialist/ Tree Climber Assistant	6	54	40	
Horticulturist/Horticulturist Assistant		59	41	
Landscape Architect		69	31	
Landscape Designer/ Assistant Landscape Designer/Landscape Draftsman	2	81	17	
Skilled Horticulture/ Arboriculture Worker		25	70	5
Unskilled Horticulture/ Arboriculture Worker		18	66	16

The study indicated that there was an estimated workforce of approximately 7 300 in 2015 and projected that there would be an additional manpower requirement of about 2 530 in 2018, including 1 370 skilled workers and 1 160 unskilled workers. Based on the findings, the DEVB will undertake a series of measures, including actively working with educational and training institutions to provide more suitable training programmes on horticulture; and collaborating with educational and training institutions to organise activities to promote the industry to a wider audience.

(4) Currently, there is no registration system for horticulture-related work in Hong Kong. The "designated workers for designated skills" requirement is being implemented through contract terms. For example, the use of chainsaws, tree inspection and aerial tree works all require special training and qualifications.

To assist the industry to move towards professionalisation and enhance the knowledge and standard of horticultural practitioners, A&H ITAC is now assisting the industry in formulating the SCS, setting the competency standards for major tasks in the industry and detailing the skills, knowledge, outcome standards, and professional ethics and attitude expected of practitioners. Based on the SCS, training programmes catering for the needs of the industry will be developed. The SCS can provide the basis for industry regulation. Formulation of the SCS will be completed by 2019.

(5) The Hong Kong Landscape and Arboriculture Professionals General Union requested the Construction Workers Registration Board (CWRB) to include the relevant trades under the Construction Workers Registration Ordinance. The Subcommittee on Registration Matters (Subcommittee) under the CWRB considered the proposal in accordance with its workflow and principles of adding new trades (e.g. industry-recognised skill levels, availability of established skill assessment mechanism) and discussed with relevant industry stakeholders. The Subcommittee noted that the DEVB had commissioned a consultancy study to assess the manpower supply for the greening industry,

which recommended that training should be provided and a qualifications framework for the industry be established. The CWRB considered that enhancement of training and establishment of a qualifications framework would be more effective in addressing the industry's request for recognising the competency level of industry practitioners and enhancing job opportunities.

(6) The percentage of planting works against total project estimates in public works contracts (Note 1) in the past three years is as follows:

Public Works Category	Year of Works Contracts Awarded		
	2015	2016	2017
New works projects	1.03 per cent	0.81 per cent	1.62 per cent
Maintenance works projects (Note 2)	22.2 per cent	7.21 per cent	16.09 per cent

Note 1: Only works contracts with planting elements are included.

Note 2: As the duration of maintenance works contracts usually spans several years, there is periodic fluctuation on the quantity and cost estimates of this type of contracts.

(7) The Government attaches importance to the quality of our outdoor environment. Landscape and planting requirements are incorporated in all new and maintenance works projects. As works projects differ in nature and development parameters, the percentage of planting works against total project estimates also varies accordingly.

Different types of projects are required through circulars and guidelines to incorporate certain greening percentage. For example, new Government building projects with site area of 1 000 square metres or above require 20-30 per cent green coverage. The Government also require at-grade public roads to reserve sufficient space for roadside planting works, and integrate landscape elements in the highway structure design. Further, there are technical guidelines on the use of vegetation in landslip prevention and mitigation works to integrate landscape works with its surrounds.

(8) Having regard to the type, complexity, technical requirements and costs of projects, works departments will formulate appropriate works contracts or split the project into separate works contracts. As various processes in horticultural projects need to be aligned and coordinated with other works components, singling out horticultural work into separate contracts is not an effective arrangement. This notwithstanding, under special circumstances, government departments may award planting contracts individually taking into account the characteristics of the project and practical circumstances.

Subcontracting is a common practice in the construction industry to facilitate project implementation in a cost-effective and efficient manner. To enhance the transparency of subcontracting arrangements and accountability, all public works contractors are required to submit a

"Subcontractor Management Plan" upon contract commencement and provide quarterly updates on details of their subcontracting management during the contract period. Works departments will monitor the contractors' performance. Substandard subcontracting management, if any, will be reflected in the quarterly performance report.