

LCQ19: Promoting development of innovation and technology

Following is a question by the Hon Elizabeth Quat and a written reply by the Secretary for Innovation and Technology, Mr Nicholas W Yang, in the Legislative Council today (March 18):

Question:

As a major initiative of the Government, InnoHK aims at developing Hong Kong as the hub for global scientific research collaboration. This involves the establishment of world-class research clusters at the Hong Kong Science Park (HKSP) with research and development (R&D) laboratories set up by world-renowned institutions and commercial entities to conduct collaborative scientific researches. On the other hand, the Government indicated in October last year that it was pressing ahead with the establishment of two world-class research clusters at HKSP, with one being Health@InnoHK focusing on healthcare technologies and the other being AIR@InnoHK on artificial intelligence and robotics technologies, and that it had already received 65 proposals from world-renowned universities and research institutes. On promoting the development of innovation and technology, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective progress in the establishment of the aforesaid clusters; the number of admission applications received, approved and rejected by the authorities to date in respect of each cluster, as well as the average amount of subsidy granted to those institutions/entities whose admission and subsidy applications have been granted;
- (2) among the admission applications (i) received and (ii) approved in respect of each cluster, of the respective numbers of those submitted by world-renowned institutions and commercial entities, and set out the name of the world-renowned institutions and commercial entities whose applications have been approved;
- (3) given that the authorities will adopt the seven criteria set out in the Guidance Notes for Admission to Health@InnoHK & AIR@InnoHK (the Guidance Notes) when vetting and approving applications for admission to the clusters, of the weighting of each criterion in the assessment, and whether the criteria include "peer assessment"; as the Guidance Notes stipulate that the proposed R&D programmes must "have a reasonable likelihood of being adopted or commercialised, if the R&D programme is successful", whether those admission applications with R&D programmes not involving commercialisation will be considered;
- (4) given that non-profit-making R&D laboratories set up by non-profit-making institutions at the aforesaid clusters may only get R&D subsidy for a period of four to five years in respect of each R&D programme, how the Government ensures that such institutions will still be able to continue taking forward

the relevant R&D programmes upon expiry of the subsidy period;

(5) of the strategy formulated by the Government to dovetail InnoHK with Hong Kong's re-industrialisation;

(6) as the Chief Executive indicated in last year's Policy Address Supplement that the Government would examine the establishment of the third InnoHK research cluster, (i) of the progress and timetable of the relevant work, (ii) the area of focus of that cluster, and (iii) whether its mode of operation will be different from that of the aforesaid two clusters; and

(7) as a think tank has suggested the Government to set up mega research institutes similar to the Broad Institute of the United States and the Francis Crick Institute of the United Kingdom to encourage intensive collaboration among researchers from different disciplines and institutes across the world and conduct cutting-edge research programmes, whether the Government will consider the suggestion; if so, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

We have allocated \$10 billion for the establishment of the first two InnoHK research clusters, namely Health@InnoHK focusing on healthcare technologies and AIR@InnoHK focusing on artificial intelligence and robotics technologies, in the Hong Kong Science Park.

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

(1) and (2) The InnoHK initiative has received enthusiastic response, with a total of 65 proposals from world renowned universities and research institutes. After a rigorous assessment process, we are following up with the institutions concerned. As discussion is still in progress, we are unable to announce for now the number and the list of laboratories that will be set up in the two research clusters and the funding amount involved.

(3) The Innovation and Technology Commission (ITC) has considered a basket of factors holistically when assessing the proposals. The major factors considered include the scientific merits of the research programmes, the impact of the research (if successful), the academic standing and research achievements of the collaborating institutions and the key research personnel in the relevant research areas, track record of research achievements, past experience of research collaboration, experience and the capability of technological adoption/ commercialisation, local talent development, benefits and contributions to the local community, etc. We have also consulted the InnoHK Steering Committee on the assessment of the proposals.

The Government hopes that the research programmes under the InnoHK research clusters will bring about benefits and contributions to the society if they are successful. Therefore, whether the funded research programmes will have reasonable opportunities to be applied or commercialised when the

research is successful is one of the assessment criteria.

(4), (6) and (7) Through the establishment of InnoHK research clusters, the Government's vision is to develop Hong Kong as the hub for global research collaboration and to converge top-notch researchers from around the world to conduct world-class and impactful collaborative researches. Non-profit-making research centres can receive Government funding for five years under the InnoHK initiative. During this five-year period, the centres need to submit regular progress reports to ITC. The research centres may continue to receive funding if they have good governance and research progress. As compared to the establishment of a single research institute, this arrangement allows the Government and the relevant research institutes to maintain flexibility. On the one hand, the Government can provide research funding for world top-notch global research collaboration in the medium to long term. On the other hand, subject to the latest trend of research and technological development, the research focus of InnoHK research clusters can be adjusted.

The Government is committed to the InnoHK initiative in the long term. The Chief Executive's 2019 Policy Address Supplement has mentioned examining the setting up of the third InnoHK research cluster so as to further promote global research and development (R&D) collaboration in Hong Kong. We will review factors including the strengths of Hong Kong and the global technological development in considering the research focus of the third InnoHK research cluster. There is no fixed timeline for now.

(5) Encouraging R&D is key to innovation and technology development and an important part in the promotion of re-industrialisation. The Government believes that the InnoHK research clusters will not only help capture and consolidate Hong Kong's R&D strengths, but also promote the development of advanced technology and the relevant industries locally, thereby fostering the development of advanced manufacturing industries that are based on new technologies and smart production in Hong Kong in the long run.