

LCQ2: Promoting professional development of manipulative therapy industry

Following is a question by the Hon Lam Chun-sing and a written reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council today (April 24):

Question:

Regarding the promotion of the professional development of the manipulative therapy (MT) industry, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the number of massage establishments with valid licences for operation granted under the Massage Establishments Ordinance (Cap. 266) in each of the past five years, and whether it has compiled statistics on the number of such establishments providing MT; if so, of the figures; if not, whether it has plans to compile such statistics in the future;
- (2) whether it has compiled statistics on the number of new applications for massage establishment licences under Cap. 266 involving the provision of MT in each of the past five years; if so, of the respective numbers of such applications approved and rejected, the main reasons for the rejection of applications, as well as the average vetting and approval time for each application; if not, whether it has plans to compile such statistics in the future;
- (3) as some MT practitioners have relayed that MT is different from general massage services, and the current development of MT establishments providing MT may be affected by the regulation of Cap. 266, whether the Government will consider reviewing and enhancing the relevant regulatory regime; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (4) of the following information on MT-related courses in the Qualifications Register in each of the past five years: (i) the number of courses, (ii) the number of places, (iii) the number of enrolments, (iv) the number of trainees who completed the courses, and (v) the number and percentage of trainees who were engaged in related jobs after completing the courses, with a breakdown by type of operators (i.e. operators appointed by the Employees Retraining Board and other operators) and Qualifications Framework (QF) Level;
- (5) whether it will consider setting up a Manipulative Therapy Industry Training Advisory Committee under QF to better support the training and development of talent for the MT industry; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (6) as some MT practitioners have relayed that the professional knowledge and

skill levels of practitioners in the industry vary, whether the authorities will consider establishing a qualification accreditation system for the MT industry requiring practitioners to pass recognised professional examinations or assessments; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that and the measures in place to ensure the quality of practitioners?

Reply:

President,

At present, different types and modalities of "massage" services are available in the market (such as Thai-based massage, hot stone massage, and aromatherapy massage), with some of these services identifying themselves as "tui-na" though they are similar in nature to general "massage" services. Generally speaking, these services do not involve healthcare services, and persons providing these services are in general not regarded as healthcare professionals.

According to the Chinese Medicine Ordinance (Cap. 549), any persons providing "tui-na", on the basis of Chinese medicine principles, might be considered as "practising Chinese medicine" (Note). According to section 108 of the Ordinance, any person who not being a registered or listed Chinese medicine practitioner practises Chinese medicine commits an offence, and may be liable to a fine at level 6 and to imprisonment for three years.

Regarding the questions raised by the Hon Lam Chun-sing concerning the regulatory regime for massage establishments and "tui-na" industry training, in consultation with the Security Bureau, the Labour and Welfare Bureau, and the Education Bureau, the relevant consolidated information is provided as follows:

The Massage Establishments Ordinance (Cap. 266) aims to regulate massage establishments through a licensing regime in order to prevent and combat vice or illegal prostitution activities committed by criminals in these establishments. The Massage Establishments Ordinance was amended in 2001 to narrow its scope of regulation. At present, the requirement for a Massage Establishments Licence does not apply to a number of specified services, for instance those provided on the premises of registered healthcare professionals (e.g. doctors, physiotherapists, Chinese medicine practitioners and chiropractors), hair salons, beauty parlours, nursing homes, etc. The numbers of licensed massage establishments under the Massage Establishments Ordinance in the past five years are as follows:

Year	Number of licensed massage establishments
2019	112
2020	113
2021	111
2022	108

2023	104
2024 (as at March)	103

When handling a new application for a Massage Establishments Licence, the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) will normally issue a letter of "Approval-in-Principle" to the applicant within 35 working days, allowing the applicant to commence works on the premises concerned. After relevant government departments have issued a certificate to confirm that the requirements for the works have been complied with, the HKPF will issue a Massage Establishments Licence to the applicant.

The HKPF does not maintain figures of licensed massage establishments by the type and modalities of services provided.

From the perspectives of healthcare policy and public health risks, "tui-na" performed on the basis of Chinese medicine principles is currently subject to the regulation of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance. At the present stage, the Health Bureau does not plan to formulate a regulatory regime specifically for "tui-na" or "massage" which does not involve healthcare services.

The Qualifications Framework (QF) defines clear and objective standards applicable to qualifications in the academic, vocational, professional, and continuing education sectors. The primary objective of establishing QF is to promote lifelong learning with a view to continuously enhancing the quality, professionalism, and competitiveness of Hong Kong's workforce. Currently, the Government has set up Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs) for 23 industries, covering over half of the workforce in Hong Kong. Members of ITACs include representatives of major employers, employees, professional bodies and regulatory bodies of the relevant industries. The ITACs serve to provide a platform for stakeholders to jointly promote QF and exchange views on the training needs and manpower development of the industries. The establishment and operation of ITACs hinge on the consensus and collaboration of all stakeholders. The Government will continue to proactively promote QF to different industries and stakeholders and, based on the actual circumstances of the industries, including the views of industry stakeholders and regulatory bodies as well as the manpower situation, provide appropriate support in areas such as leveraging QF to enhance the manpower quality of the industries and promoting a wider adoption of QF.

The Qualifications Register (QR) is established under QF. QR is a web-based database containing information on qualifications and their respective learning programmes that have been quality-assured and recognised under QF, including the names and titles of learning programmes, qualifications, operators and granting bodies, as well as QF credits, QF Levels, and modes of delivery, to facilitate learners' access to the relevant information.

In the past five years (i.e. 2019-20 to 2023-24), as at February 2024, the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) has been providing the Foundation

Certificate in Pain Release Massage (Part-time) programme pitched at QF Level 2. The numbers of training places, intakes and graduates by year are tabulated as follows:

Year	Training places	Number of Intakes (by course commencement date)	Number of Graduates (by course completion date)
2019-20	396	244	253
2020-21	317	122	99
2021-22	617	432	395
2022-23	635	553	486
2023-24 (as at February 2024)	594	505	469

The training bodies of the ERB do not provide employment follow-up services for students who have completed part-time courses, hence there is no record of the number and percentage of graduates who engaged in related work after completing the courses.

Information about the massage programmes under the QR, of which the granting bodies are organisations other than the ERB, in the past five years is as follows:

Calendar Year	QF Level	Number of Programmes
2023	Level 2	1
	Level 3	3
	Level 4	1
	Level 5	1
2022	Level 2	1
	Level 3	3
	Level 4	1
2021	Level 2	1
	Level 3	3
	Level 4	1
2020	Level 2	1
	Level 3	3
	Level 4	1

2019	Level 2	2
	Level 3	4
	Level 4	1

Note: According to section 2 of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance, "practising Chinese medicine" means any of the following act or activities— (a) the diagnosis, treatment, prevention or alleviation of any disease or any symptom of a disease; (b) the prescription of Chinese herbal medicines or proprietary Chinese medicines; (c) the regulation of the functional states of the human body, on the basis of traditional Chinese medicine in general practice, acupuncture or bone-setting, and "Chinese medicine practice" or "practice of Chinese medicine" shall be construed accordingly.