

LCQ2: Training provided by uniformed groups for their members

Following is a question by the Hon Holden Chow and a reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, in the Legislative Council today (January 15):

Question:

Some academics have pointed out that quite a number of people have recently been misled by wrong messages into identifying with and even advocating Hong Kong independence. They suggest that the Government should step up publicity and education efforts within the Government and among education institutions at various levels and the various youth uniformed groups, so that more people will understand the constitutional status of the Hong Kong SAR under the "one country, two systems" as well as the national conditions. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council if it knows:

(1) the number of complaints received by the various youth uniformed groups since June last year alleging that their members had participated in unlawful public activities, or openly made remarks which were secessionist or discredited the "one country, two systems"; whether such groups have taken disciplinary actions against those members found to have misconducted themselves; if so, of the details; if not, how the Government prevents illegal acts and messages advocating Hong Kong independence from propagating within such groups; and

(2) whether the various youth uniformed groups provided training in each of the past five years for their members on understanding the country's Constitution, the Basis Law and the national conditions; if so, set out the details of the relevant programmes in a table; if not, whether the Government will require such groups to offer such programmes?

Reply:

President,

Uniformed groups (UGs) are major partners of the Government in promoting youth development. At present, the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) provides recurrent subvention to 11 UGs in the community to support their provision of informal education and training to young people for helping them foster positive values, strengthen leadership skills and attain whole-person development. The total number of members in the 11 UGs has now exceeded 110 000.

My reply to various parts of Hon Holden Chow's question is as follows:

(1) The HAB has signed with each of the subvented UGs in 2014 a Memorandum of Administrative Arrangements (MAA) requiring the annual submission of year plan, budget, financial report and annual report in relation to youth activities for the HAB's scrutiny and monitoring. UGs are not required to annually submit detailed information on all relevant youth activities to the HAB. Operating effectively, we would review the reports submitted by UGs to ensure prudent use of public resources.

In addition to recurrent subvention from the HAB, UGs are also encouraged to proactively seek donations from other bodies or the general public for expanding their services and enabling further benefits to more young people. According to records, the HAB's recurrent subvention accounted for about four per cent to 62 per cent of the operating income of the respective UGs in the 2016-19 financial years.

UGs implement diverse youth development activities and trainings, having regard to their own background, vision and characteristics. The MAA provides that a UG shall be autonomous in the management and control of its operations and activities. All along, UGs are not required to submit information about complaints to the HAB. Therefore, the HAB has neither maintained information about complaints nor participated in their internal discussions or decisions.

In fact, we have been encouraging UGs to take part in activities that help youth cultivate their "sense of national identity" and "international perspective". The work on youth development and the provision of various programmes and activities by UGs will be detailed in the following part of my reply.

(2) The current-term Government strives to address young people's concerns about education, career pursuit and home ownership, and encourage their participation in politics as well as public policy discussion and debate. Our vision is to instil among them a positive outlook on life, a commitment to society, a sense of national identity, a love for Hong Kong and an international perspective. In collaboration with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), we support diverse development of young people, provide them with opportunities to participate in community affairs and to serve the community, and encourage them to broaden their horizons and enhance their understanding of national and world affairs.

Through various funding schemes, including the Funding Scheme for Youth Exchange in the Mainland and the Funding Scheme for International Youth Exchange under the Youth Development Commission (YDC), we support local NGOs to provide young people with opportunities to take part in exchanges on the Mainland and overseas for enabling their understanding of the prevailing economic, social and cultural landscape at the national and international levels, and for promoting their acceptance of different cultures through exchanges with young people from the Mainland and overseas. For details of the above two funding schemes, including the list of funded organisations (comprising UGs) and projects, members may refer to the website (Note) of the YDC.

In the past five years, through the funding schemes under the YDC, a total of about 55 exchange programmes on the Mainland or overseas have been provided to the youth members of UGs for enhancing their understanding of "one country, two systems", the Basic Law and national affairs, and for broadening their international perspective as well. Exchange locations included Beijing, Guangdong Province, Sichuan Province, the United Kingdom and New Zealand, etc. In addition, according to our regular communication with UGs, we understand that they have provided various training programmes on promoting the understanding of the Constitution, the Basic Law and national affairs for members' participation.

Looking ahead, we will work closely with UGs to support their ongoing youth work for collaborative efforts to help young people build a positive outlook on life and develop into a new generation with a commitment to society, a sense of national identity, a love for Hong Kong and an international perspective.

Note: For the Funding Scheme for Youth Exchange in the Mainland

(www.ydc.gov.hk/en/programmes/ep/ep_fundingscheme.html)

For the Funding Scheme for International Youth Exchange

(www.ydc.gov.hk/en/programmes/ep/ep_fundingschemeinternational.html)