

LCQ21: Promoting mind sports

Following is a question by the Hon James To and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, in the Legislative Council today (February 27):

Question:

Mind sports, such as bridge, go, chess, draughts, Chinese chess and "Scrabble" (an English words creating game), refer to sports in which the contests between participants are mainly on intellectual ability. In recent years, mind sports have been in the ascendant around the world and some of those sports have been included as medal sports in the Asian Games. It is reported that Hong Kong players have attained great achievements in mind sports competitions in recent years. For instance, a Hong Kong player was crowned as the Blitz game World Champion at the World Amateur Chess Championship 2017; two Hong Kong players were among the world's top 10 finishers in the World Youth Championship of Scrabble last year, one of whom was even awarded the third place in the Under 16 Group. Regarding the promotion of mind sports, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that more and more young people have participated in various kinds of mind sports in recent years, and some of them who participated in international mind sports competitions on a self-financing basis achieved good results, whether the Government will:

(a) promote the popularisation of mind sports in primary and secondary schools, so as to boost students' intellectual ability and logical thinking,

(b) provide free of charge (i) training venues and (ii) venues for holding territory-wide and international competitions, and

(c) by making reference to the way it supports the Hong Kong Inter-City Bridge Championships which is held annually, offer subsidies to (i) organisers of international mind sports competitions in Hong Kong and (ii) local players participating in such competitions;

if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(2) whether it has studied if the act of awarding cash awards or prizes to winners of international mind sports competitions held in Hong Kong is in breach of the law; if it has studied and the outcome is in the affirmative, of the details, and whether it will amend the legislation to relieve the criminal liabilities of such an act?

Reply:

President,

There are many types of activities and competitions that are based on intellectual ability. Some of them have a long history, such as bridge, chess, go and Chinese chess, for which relevant organisations have been set up in Hong Kong many years ago to promote the respective activities and secured membership in local or international sports organisations, for instance, the Sports Federation and Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, China (SF&OC), the International Olympic Committee (IOC) or the relevant International Federation (IF).

The Government has been committed to promoting the development of different types of sports through the Sports Subvention Scheme (the Scheme) of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), which provides subvention to eligible "national sports associations" (NSAs) and sports organisations to organise various sports activities. Since 2011-12, subvented NSAs or organisations under the Scheme must fulfil six criteria, including that the organisation must be a member of the SF&OC and concurrently be affiliated to the relevant IF (Note 1). However, 26 organisations had long been subvented under the relevant subsidy scheme of the two former municipal councils in the past, and were therefore transitioned into the current Scheme.

At present, there are four organisations in Hong Kong promoting activities based on intellectual ability that are subvented under the Scheme. Details are as follows:

- (i) Bridge: the Hong Kong Contract Bridge Association is a member of the SF&OC and is affiliated to the relevant IOC-recognised IF, therefore fulfilling the criteria to apply for subvention under the Scheme;
- (ii) Chess: the Hong Kong Chess Federation is not a member of the SF&OC but had long been subvented under the relevant subsidy scheme of the two former municipal councils in the past, and was hence transitioned into the current Scheme and would continue to be subvented;
- (iii) and (iv) Go and Chinese chess: the Hong Kong Go Association and the Hong Kong Chinese Chess Association are members of the SF&OC, but there are no IOC-recognised IFs on go and Chinese chess. Given that the two associations had long been subvented under the relevant subsidy scheme of the two former municipal councils in the past, they were transitioned into the current Scheme and would continue to be subvented.

At present, there are 84 NSAs and organisations subvented under the Scheme. The total subvented amount in 2018-2019 is around \$320 million. New applications by organisations for the Scheme must fulfil the six criteria as stated above in Note 1.

My reply to the enquiries on activities based on intellectual ability is as follows:

- (1) The Hong Kong Contract Bridge Association, the Hong Kong Chess

Federation, the Hong Kong Go Association and the Hong Kong Chinese Chess Association may apply for subvention under the Scheme to organise various activities, including promotional activities in schools, training and local events. They may also reserve venues for activities subvented under the Scheme and enjoy rental subsidy in accordance with the LCSD's booking procedures for recreational and sports facilities, and apply for funding support from the Arts and Sport Development Fund (Sports Portion) to organise international events in Hong Kong.

(2) Generally speaking, awarding cash awards or prizes to winners in an international event organised by the abovementioned four NSAs or federation would not constitute an illegal act. However, whether or not the relevant act is in breach of the laws of Hong Kong depends on the specific circumstances of each case.

Note 1: Since 2011-12, the LCSD has required that sports organisations applying for the Scheme must fulfil all of the following criteria –

- (1) it is a member of the SF&OC;
- (2) it is affiliated to the IF of the respective sports;
- (3) it is registered under the Companies Ordinance and has Articles of Association;
- (4) it is a non-profit-making sports organisation;
- (5) it has been in operation and has organised sports programmes for at least three years; and
- (6) the kind of sports it promotes is one of the sports/potential sports of the following major games: Asian Games, Asian Winter Games, Asian Youth Games, Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games, Asian Beach Games, Asian Para Games, Asian Youth Para Games, Olympic Games, Olympic Winter Games, Youth Olympic Games, Winter Youth Olympic Games, World Games, Paralympic Games and Paralympic Winter Games.