

LCQ21: Top Talent Pass Scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Rock Chen and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (March 13):

Question:

Regarding the Top Talent Pass Scheme (TTPS), will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective longest and shortest lengths of stay in Hong Kong of persons admitted to Hong Kong via the TTPS, as well as the average number of days of their stay so far; whether the Government has any requirement or expectation regarding the length of stay in Hong Kong of such persons; if not, whether it will set a minimum requirement or other conditions on the length of stay in Hong Kong of such persons;

(2) how it ensures that persons admitted to Hong Kong via the TTPS truly work, reside and pay taxes in Hong Kong; whether the Government will step up efforts in monitoring and checking the length of stay, and the status of employment and tax payment of such persons in Hong Kong, so as to prevent abuse of the scheme or wastage of resources by such persons; and

(3) of the total number of persons admitted to Hong Kong via the TTPS investigated by the relevant government departments for allegedly making use of false employment relationships, providing inaccurate documents or failing to pay taxes as required (and the percentage of such number in all persons admitted to Hong Kong via the TTPS) as at the end of December last year, as well as the outcome of the relevant investigations, together with a breakdown by application category of the TTPS (i.e. Category A, B and C)?

Reply:

President,

The Top Talent Pass Scheme (TTPS) seeks to attract top talent with high income, good academic qualifications and extensive work experience to pursue development in Hong Kong. Eligible outside talents are not required to have secured offers of employment in Hong Kong before applications for two-year visas through the TTPS to explore opportunities in Hong Kong. However, they, upon applying for extension of stay before the expiry of their visas granted, will have to be employed, or have established or joined in business in Hong Kong.

The TTPS has received enthusiastic responses since its launch in end-2022. As at end-February this year, we received over 72 000 applications and approved nearly 59 000. Of these, around 44 000 talents arrived in Hong Kong. Along with the approved applications of other talent admission schemes,

around 108 000 talents have arrived in Hong Kong since last year.

Our reply, in consultation with the Immigration Department (ImmD), to the Member's questions is as follows:

(1) and (2) A person admitted to Hong Kong under the TTPS will normally be granted an initial stay of two years without other conditions of stay upon entry. Such relevant arrangement aims to attract talent to explore opportunities in Hong Kong, hence without any requirement imposed on the duration of stay for persons admitted under the TTPS in the first two years.

A person admitted under the TTPS, upon the expiry of his/her first visa, will have to be employed, or have established or joined in business in Hong Kong so that an extension of stay can be granted. When applying for extension of stay, an applicant is required to provide the ImmD with concrete supporting information and documents, including employment contracts, proof and accounts of their business operation and tax demand notes. The ImmD will follow the established mechanism in examining whether an applicant meets the eligibility criteria of extension of stay. If necessary, the ImmD will visit the applicants' reported work and business premises to conduct on-site verification to ensure that only applicants meeting the relevant immigration policies will be admitted into Hong Kong for stay.

The Government has recently conducted first-round follow-up surveys with persons who have arrived in Hong Kong for more than six months with the TTPS visas to understand the situation of their settling in Hong Kong or plans, including employment, accommodation and children's education in Hong Kong. With reference to the data on employment status and income of the TTPS entrants and their spouses, we estimate that the TTPS will contribute directly to Hong Kong's economy by an amount of some \$34 billion per annum, which is equivalent to about 1.2 per cent of the local Gross Domestic Product. In addition to the economic contribution, the TTPS entrants and their spouses are generally younger, with more than half of them aged under 40. They, in addition to bringing their young children to settle in Hong Kong, will add new impetus to the local labour force and bring about positive impact on Hong Kong's demographic structure.

(3) The ImmD has all along been playing a robust gatekeeping role in vetting all visa applications, including those under the TTPS. In case of doubts about the applicants' employment relationships or the authenticity of the documents submitted, the ImmD will promptly follow up and conduct investigations. Should any person be found to have illegally obtained his/her employment visa or residency, the visa or residence status granted will be invalidated according to the laws of Hong Kong. The persons concerned will also be subject to criminal liabilities and removal back to their places of origin.

The eligibility criteria of the TTPS are clear, and the required information and documents are relatively straightforward. The TTPS was launched in end-2022, and the first visas granted to all approved applicants have not yet expired. The ImmD has so far not detected any cases requiring

criminal investigation on the authenticity of documents submitted by applicants.