

LCQ3: Promotion of national and national security education in higher education institutions

â€‹Following is a question by the Hon Chow Man-kong and a reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (June 14):

Question:

Regarding the promotion of national and national security education in higher education institutions (institutions) (especially the eight universities funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC)), will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the numbers of academic staff members and students of various institutions who have been arrested, are awaiting trial and are convicted after trial for contravening the Hong Kong National Security Law since its implementation, with a breakdown by institution; whether the academic staff members involved in the cases still engage in the teaching and research work of their respective institutions at present;

(2) as it is learnt that various institutions have since the last academic year incorporated national and national security education into students' scope of learning, but since the authorities respect the autonomy of various institutions in curriculum design, the curriculum design standards vary among various institutions, and an institution has even publicly stated that the implementation of Western core value education in institutions is better than the teaching of the Hong Kong National Security Law, whether the authorities have drawn up codes or guidelines to assist various institutions in designing the relevant curriculum, and incorporated the relevant requirements into the statutes of institutions (such as the handbooks for academic staff members and the codes for students); if so, of the details; if not, whether the authorities will draw up clear codes or guidelines in the new academic year for institutions to follow; and

(3) whether it will use the assessment outcomes of the performance of UGC-funded universities in implementing national and national security education as one of the indicators for allocating funds to such universities; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

According to The Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (NSL), any institution, organisation or individual in Hong Kong shall abide by it, and

shall not engage in any act or activity which endangers national security. While post-secondary education institutions enjoy institutional autonomy and academic freedom under the Basic Law, they must also hold themselves accountable to the public, ensure good governance and proper use of public funds, and nurture talents with virtue and ability. Post-secondary education institutions are not above the law, as all staff members and students must abide by the law. The Government has communicated with the post-secondary education institutions through regular channels to remind them of their statutory obligations under the NSL in order to strengthen the prevention and suppression of activities on campus that may violate the NSL or other laws.

The fundamental mission of education is to nurture morality and foster talent. Post-secondary education institutions are duty-bound to nurture our new generations into citizens with a sense of social responsibility and national identity, an affection for Hong Kong as well as an international perspective. The NSL aims at preventing, suppressing and imposing punishment for acts and activities that endanger national security. It is the duty of the education sector to strengthen prevention through education. Among others, post-secondary education institutions shall offer their students national security education or activities in accordance with Article 10 of the NSL, with a view to raising staff members and students' awareness of national security and law-abidingness.

Our reply to Dr Hon Chow Man-kong's question is as follows:

(1) Student and staff affairs are within the autonomy of post-secondary education institutions. They have put in place mechanisms to ensure that students and staff members do not engage in conduct that is unlawful or damages their reputation. The Government does not maintain information on the number of students and staff members arrested or charged for violating the NSL. Nevertheless, according to the information provided by the Security Bureau, as at June 2, 2023, a total of 252 persons were arrested for suspected acts and activities that endanger national security since the implementation of the NSL. Among them, 155 persons and five companies were charged and 79 persons convicted or awaiting sentencing.

Currently, all post-secondary education institutions have put in place student and staff disciplinary policies and mechanisms which are reviewed and updated in accordance with the latest developments in society, including the implementation of the NSL. Students and staff members shall abide by the respective conduct rules set by their institutions and shall not engage in conduct that is unlawful or damages the institutions' reputation. In the event of arrest, charge and conviction for suspected involvement in illegal activities and illegal acts, including offences under the NSL, the institutions will generally refer the matter to the relevant student or staff disciplinary committees for handling in accordance with the established procedures. The committees will decide whether disciplinary action is to be taken, having regard to the nature and severity of the case. Depending on the severity of a case, students may be suspended from their studies or expelled, and the employment of staff members may be terminated. The institutions also require job applicants to declare their conviction records.

(2) and (3) With the implementation of the NSL on June 30, 2020, post-secondary education institutions have taken a series of measures since the 2021/22 academic year to incorporate national and national security education into students' learning in fulfilment of their statutory duty under Article 10 of the NSL, through organising seminars, sharing sessions, workshops, forums and study tours, etc.

In further pursuance of the above-mentioned objectives, the Government has included whole-person development as one of the four strategic directions adopted in the 2022-25 triennium of the University Grants Committee (UGC), illustrating that instilling a strong sense of civic duty into students through values education at university level will help nurture graduates to become the future pillars of society, and that education on the Constitution, the Basic Law and the NSL should form an important part of the university curriculum with a view to nurturing students into law-abiding and responsible citizens. The said strategic direction was adopted as part of the assessment criteria in the Planning Exercise for the 2022-2025 triennium. The UGC reviewed the universities' proposals in accordance with the assessment criteria and submitted its funding allocation recommendation to the Government, which was eventually accepted and implemented.

In addition, the UGC signed University Accountability Agreements (UAAs) with the UGC-funded universities with a view to enhancing their accountability and performance transparency. The UAAs set out the overall development strategies of the UGC and the UGC-funded universities, as well as the basic principles on the use of the UGC's funding. In renewing the UAAs for applicability to the 2022-25 triennium, the UGC added a new provision to emphasise the aforementioned strategic direction of whole-person development. In this regard, the UGC-funded universities responded positively in their Planning Exercise Proposals (PEPs) for the 2022-25 triennium, setting out in detail their overall strategies and plans formulated on values education, and have been implementing the plans outlined in their PEPs since the 2022/23 academic year, including the introduction of relevant courses that carry credits or form part of the graduation requirements.

Post-secondary education institutions enjoy autonomy on curriculum design. In general, they provide diversified learning opportunities both within and outside the curriculum to enhance students' awareness of our country's history, culture, constitutional order and the latest developments in various fields, thereby helping them gain a deeper understanding of our country, develop a stronger sense of national identity, and achieve an enhanced sense of national security, law-abidingness and civic duty. The institutions determine the course duration having regard to the teaching mode, content and requirements, and provide appropriate courses for students. Fit-for-purpose assessments, such as examinations and project studies are also conducted to assess students' understanding of important issues related to the NSL.

The Education Bureau (EDB) requires post-secondary education institutions to regularly review and report on the arrangements for courses and activities related to national and national security education. Information provided by them shows that they have taken into account their

actual circumstances, such as their respective positioning, qualifications of the teaching staff, programme and course structure, in providing the series of courses and other learning activities on national and national security education. In addition to various topics under national security, the scope of coverage also includes Chinese culture, history and philosophy, the close ties between the country and Hong Kong, and the training of students' leadership qualities, etc. Relevant courses and learning activities delivered by faculty members or external experts are also arranged to help students gain sufficient knowledge and a comprehensive understanding of our country's developments. As reported by the institutions, the feedback from the teaching staff and students was positive. The institutions will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of their national and national security education-related courses and learning activities, and make appropriate adjustments as needed to ensure that they can effectively achieve the learning objectives of raising the awareness of students and staff members on national security and developing an enhanced sense of law-abidingness.

The UGC Secretariat will continue to maintain close communication with and provide feedback to the UGC-funded universities, and support them in implementing the strategic direction of whole-person development in the 2022-25 triennium. The EDB will continue to liaise with post-secondary education institutions (including self-financing institutions) on issues relevant to the promotion of national and national security education, and provide them with support.