

LCQ4: Demand for and supply of technology talents

Following is a question by the Hon Duncan Chiu and a written reply by the Secretary for Innovation and Technology, Mr Alfred Sit, in the Legislative Council today (May 4):

Question:

The Government launched in June 2018 the Technology Talent Admission Scheme (TechTAS). In January 2020, it increased the number of technology areas covered under TechTAS to 13 and extended its coverage to all companies in Hong Kong conducting research and development activities in these 13 technology areas. Regarding the demand for and supply of technology talents, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the following information on TechTAS in each year since it was launched and as at March this year:

(i) the respective numbers of applications received, approved and rejected, as well as the number of applications withdrawn, with a breakdown by the technology areas involved; and (ii) a breakdown of the number of technology talents who were admitted to Hong Kong by the region from which they came, the salary group to which they belonged, the technology areas involved, and the type of companies that they were employed (i.e. tenants of the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation, tenants of the Hong Kong Cyberport Management Company Limited, and others);

(2) whether it has reviewed the implementation of TechTAS on a yearly basis, including (i) whether the eligibility criteria are too stringent or outdated (if they are, whether it has considered abolishing or updating individual eligibility requirements), (ii) whether there are discrepancies between the numbers of applications received as well as the quotas granted and the targets set, and (iii) the impacts of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic on TechTAS; if it has reviewed, of the outcome; of the measures in place to attract and encourage more local innovation and technology (I&T) companies to participate in TechTAS;

(3) whether it will review TechTAS in a timely manner in the light of the latest developments in global technology to ensure that all technology areas in Hong Kong are covered under TechTAS, thereby benefiting more I&T enterprises; and

(4) given the wastage of technology talents amid the epidemic and the intense global competition for technology talents, whether the Government has comprehensively assessed the demand for and supply of talents in different technology areas in Hong Kong at present and in the coming decade; if so, of the outcome, and how it ensures that there are sufficient technology talents

to help achieve the goal of developing Hong Kong into an international I&T hub; if not, whether it will conduct an assessment expeditiously?

Reply:

President,

The Technology Talent Admission Scheme (TechTAS) was launched in June 2018 to handle expeditiously the admission of overseas and Mainland technology talents to undertake research and development work in Hong Kong. The coverage of TechTAS was extended to all companies in Hong Kong conducting research and development activities in 13 technology areas in January 2020. Eligible companies can apply for quota from the Innovation and Technology Commission (ITC). My reply to the various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) Since the launch of TechTAS, a total of 726 quota applications were received by the ITC, of which 620 were approved, 63 were rejected, and 43 were withdrawn by the applicant companies as at end March 2022. The breakdown statistics on quota applications by technology areas are set out at Annex 1. A company allotted with a quota may assist an eligible person employed by it to apply for an employment visa/entry permit from the Immigration Department (ImmD) within the quota validity period (currently 12 months). The actual time of quota usage depends on the progress of the companies in identifying talent, which in turn is subject to various factors such as the global economic conditions and the development of pandemic.

As at end March 2022, the ImmD received a total of 316 applications for visa/entry permit under TechTAS, among which 285 applications were approved. The remaining 31 applications were withdrawn by applicants or could not be further processed. The breakdown statistics by technology areas are at Annex 2. With regard to the applicants approved for admission to Hong Kong under TechTAS, the breakdown statistics by region, type of employing company/institute and monthly remuneration are at Annex 3.

(2) and (3) The number of applications under TechTAS is affected by factors such as the global economic conditions, business development of individual companies, development of the pandemic and relevant entry restrictions etc. Hence, it is difficult to make any estimate of application number.

The addition of six technology areas in 2020 (namely 5G communications, Internet-of-Things, integrated circuit design, microelectronics, digital entertainment and green technology) is conducive to promoting the development of smart city and re-industrialisation. These areas, coupled with the original seven technology areas (namely biotechnology, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, robotics, data analytics, financial technologies, and material science), should be able to cater for the overall innovation and technology (I&T) development in Hong Kong. The ITC will certainly from time to time explore the possibility of further enhancing TechTAS, with a view to keeping it abreast of time to dovetail with the city's latest development.

(4) According to 2021 Manpower Update Report (Innovation and Technology Sector) of the Vocational Training Council, the I&T labour market remained robust due to the new normal brought by the COVID-19 epidemic, the continuous development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, and economic transformation. In addition, as many large scale I&T infrastructure projects are under planning, it is believed that the demand of the city for I&T talents will remain keen.

A vibrant I&T ecosystem is a crucial driving force for attracting talents to come and stay for development in Hong Kong. The Government has been adopting a multi-pronged approach to enlarge the I&T talent pool through nurturing, retaining and attracting talents with a series of initiatives. Apart from TechTAS as mentioned above, other initiatives include:

- the IT Innovation Lab in Secondary Schools Programme and Knowing More About IT Programme were launched in 2020 and 2021 respectively to provide funding support for secondary and primary schools for organising information technology-related extra-curricular activities;
- the STEM Internship Scheme launched in 2020 has been regularised since 2021, providing funding for local universities to arrange short-term internships for their undergraduates and postgraduates enrolled in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)-related programmes;
- continuously subsidising outstanding university students to take part in overseas exchange, local internships, mentorship programmes, etc., through the Innovation and Technology Scholarship with a view to nurturing future leaders in the I&T sector;
- the eligibility for the Research Talent Hub was extended in 2021 to include holders of a bachelor's or master's degree in STEM-related discipline awarded by a well-recognised non-local institution;
- the Reindustrialisation and Technology Training Programme was launched in August 2018 to subsidise staff of local companies on a matching basis to receive training in advanced technologies, especially those related to Industry 4.0;
- the Global STEM Professorship Scheme was introduced in 2021 to support universities in recruiting internationally renowned I&T scholars and their teams to conduct research and teaching activities in Hong Kong; and
- the flagship I&T project, InnoHK research clusters has successfully attracted over 30 world-renowned universities and research institutes to collaborate with local universities in setting up 28 research laboratories in the Hong Kong Science Park, pooling thousands of researchers from all over the world to participate in related scientific research projects.

Besides, the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation and the Cyberport have launched incubation programmes to assist I&T talents in starting their business and provided internship and training opportunities. The InnoCell in the Hong Kong Science Park, completed at the end of 2020,

provides around 500 residential units as living and collaborative space to promote interactions and exchanges among I&T talents.

Looking forward, this year's Budget has earmarked \$10 billion to further promote the development of life and health technology, with the aim of enabling institutions to enhance their capacity and capability in this field, including in the area of pooling technology talents, etc. Furthermore, the InnoLife Healthtech Hub under planning will also pool together top-notch research teams from all over the world for research collaboration. Meanwhile, the Government will double the maximum annual funding support under the Innovation and Technology Fund for the 16 State Key Laboratories in Hong Kong and six Hong Kong Branches of Chinese National Engineering Research Centres up to \$440 million in total, so that they can have more resources to carry out various tasks, which include nurturing local talents and further their co-operation and exchanges with institutions in the Mainland.