

## LCQ4: Implementation of increased admission quota of non-local students

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Chow Man-kong and a reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (November 20):

Question:

Regarding the implementation of the increased admission quota of non-local students, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has provided specific guidelines to various funded universities, self-financing post-secondary institutions, and the Vocational Training Council and its member institutions (various institutions) explaining the meaning of the cap on non-local student admissions or the method of calculating it; if so, of the details;

(2) of the numbers of local students and non-local students in various institutions (including students of self-financing post-secondary institutions who come from the Mainland, Macao and Taiwan region) in the 2024/2025 school year, and the percentage of non-local students in local student places (including the percentage of relevant students of self-financing post-secondary institutions in the total number of students of the relevant programmes in the preceding school year), together with a breakdown by sub-degree, undergraduate degree, and postgraduate degree programmes (including Post-graduate Diploma in Education programmes); whether it will request various institutions to step up the publicity of the "Study in Hong Kong" brand, and urge them to actively meet the enrolment cap or target on non-local students; and

(3) of the total tuition income generated by the enrolment of non-local students for various institutions in the past three school years, and whether it has assessed the peripheral economic benefits brought about by such students; whether it will consider further increasing the admission quotas of various institutions (especially self-financing post-secondary institutions) to attract more outstanding students from outside Hong Kong to come here, thus providing a wider source of students to build Hong Kong into an "international hub for high-calibre talent"?

Reply:

President,

(1) The Chief Executive announced in the 2023 Policy Address to build Hong Kong into an international post-secondary education hub, and announced that the enrolment ceilings for the non-local students of Government-funded post-secondary institutions would be doubled to 40 per cent from the 2024/25

academic year onwards. To this end, the University Grants Committee (UGC) Secretariat has promulgated clear guidelines on the definition and calculation of enrolment ceilings for the admission of non-local students for the institutions. The UGC has issued letter to universities, setting out in detail the principles and methods of calculating the enrolment ceilings and the exact figures of the enrolment ceilings for non-local students for taught programmes for each university, to facilitate the university's planning on student admission. It is also clearly indicated that, the relevant ceilings are calculated having regard to the total number of local student places for all years of study at each study level. Redeployment of the ceilings among different study levels is not permitted. It is worth noting that all non-local students pursuing UGC-funded taught programmes do not receive public funding, and that the number of such non-local students is accounted for separately from local student places so as to ensure that study opportunities for local students will not be affected.

As regards the self-financing post-secondary sector, save for students from the Mainland, Macao and Taiwan (MMT), there is no quota restriction on the admission of non-local students to full-time locally-accredited self-financing local sub-degree, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Currently, for MMT students enrolling in full-time locally-accredited self-financing local sub-degree and undergraduate (including top-up degree) programmes, the calculation of quota should be not exceeding 10 per cent to 20 per cent of the total student enrolment in such programmes in the preceding academic year. There is no quota restriction for postgraduate programmes. So far, there are a total of six local self-financing institutions which have been approved by the Ministry of Education (MoE) to admit Mainland students to their undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The Education Bureau (EDB) has all along been maintaining communication with self-financing post-secondary institutions on the admission of non-local students, facilitating their understanding and implementation of the relevant admission arrangements.

(2) Currently, the EDB is consolidating the relevant provisional figures for the 2024/25 academic year. Respective UGC-funded universities will submit, at the end of this year, the actual enrolment of non-local students in the 2024/25 academic year. Based on the UGC Secretariat's preliminary understanding from the universities, the non-local student enrolment in UGC-funded undergraduate programmes in the current academic year has increased to more than 17 000, which is equivalent to about 23 per cent of the local student places. The Government is pleased to see that the funded universities have utilised the relaxed enrolment ceilings and successfully recruited more non-local students to pursue their studies in Hong Kong.

In the 2023/24 academic year, about 64 200 non-local students enrolled in full-time locally-accredited publicly-funded and self-financing post-secondary programmes. Among them, about 23 100 non-local students enrolled in the eight UGC-funded universities. These include about 14 800 students on undergraduate programmes coming from over 100 countries or regions, taking up over 200 different programmes, which is equivalent to 19.9 per cent of the local student places at that study level. Among these students, around 73 per

cent are MMT students. A breakdown of the non-local students enrolling in UGC-funded programmes in the 2023/24 academic year is at Annex 1.

Moreover, in the 2023/24 academic year, the numbers of local and non-local students of full-time locally-accredited local sub-degree and undergraduate programmes of the Vocational Training Council (VTC) and self-financing post-secondary institutions as well as the relevant percentages are at Annex 2. The numbers of local and non-local students of research and taught postgraduate programmes are at Annex 3.

As a matter of fact, the Chief Executive announced in the 2024 Policy Address that the "Study in Hong Kong" brand will be promoted on a global scale, including to strive to host international education annual conferences and exhibitions, encouraging local post-secondary institutions to enhance collaboration and exchange with their counterparts around the world, and attracting more overseas students by offering scholarships and other incentives, especially those from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and other Belt and Road countries, to study in our city. The initiative has received a positive response from the universities. The 40 per cent enrollment ceiling is an upper limit, not an indicator. In the course of expanding the scale of post-secondary education, we need to allow certain space and flexibility for the universities to set specific goals and pace in view of their capacity, and to proceed step by step while ensuring the teaching quality and adequacy of supporting facilities. This will enable the higher education sector to expand capacity and enhance quality in parallel, thereby building Hong Kong as an international post-secondary education hub.

(3) Under the principle of institutional autonomy, universities may set the tuition fee levels for non-local students as they see fit, having regard to their own circumstances; and ensure that, the relevant tuition fees should be at a level which is at least sufficient to recover all additional direct costs. The EDB does not maintain the data on the income from the tuition fees for non-local students.

As a matter of fact, increasing the enrolment ceiling for non-local students aims to consolidate the competitive edge of the high degree of internationalisation and diversity in the post-secondary education, so as to attract top talent from around the world, enhance institutions' capacity in scientific research and teaching, and expand the talent pool for Hong Kong to foster the economic development of Hong Kong. Increasing the income from tuition fees is not the policy objective.

To encourage non-local students to stay in Hong Kong for development and broaden Hong Kong's talent pool, the Government has implemented the Immigration Arrangement for Non-local Graduates to allow non-local students to stay for 24 months after graduation to apply for work in Hong Kong. Over the past five years, an average of about 12 340 applications were approved. Moreover, it was further announced in the 2024 Policy Address that starting from this month, the Government would temporarily exempt full-time non-local undergraduate students from the restrictions on taking up part-time jobs with a view to enhancing their personal exposure to and knowledge of working in

Hong Kong and incentivising them to stay in Hong Kong for development after graduation.

President, the Government has all along been adopting a pragmatic approach in reviewing the non-local student enrolment ceiling in a timely manner, and considering the extent and timing of relaxation in the light of the policy objectives and actual circumstances such as the impact on teaching quality. As regards self-financing programmes, the EDB has all along been supporting the healthy development and continuous quality enhancement of the self-financing sector by providing support and strengthening regulation. We will continue to keep in view the track record of operation, the performance in student admission, and the utilisation of the prevailing quota, and maintain close liaison with MoE to explore feasible enhancements with a view to aligning the relevant admission quotas for non-local students of self-financing post-secondary institutions with those of the Government-funded sector in the long run. We will closely monitor the number of non-local students and collaborate with institutions to attract more students from around the world to study in Hong Kong, so as to strive towards the goal of building Hong Kong into an international hub for high-calibre talent.