

# LCQ4: Measures to facilitate the flow of people between the Mainland and Hong Kong

Following is a question by Professor the Hon William Wong and a reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (January 24):

Question:

Starting from February 20 last year, six categories of Mainland talents in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area may apply for the exit endorsement for talents travelling to and from Hong Kong and Macao, which allows them to travel to and from Hong Kong multiple times within the validity period of the exit endorsement. Besides, the 2023 Policy Address has announced that foreign staff of companies registered in Hong Kong may apply for multiple-entry visas which are valid for two or more years to travel to the Mainland. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of persons travelling to Hong Kong with the aforesaid exit endorsement for talents since its implementation, together with a breakdown by category of talents and number of days of their stay;

(2) given that academic institutions (such as post-secondary institutions) are not companies registered in Hong Kong, whether the aforesaid multiple-entry visa arrangement covers research and development (R&D) personnel of such institutions (including students, teaching staff and researchers); if so, of the application procedures, and whether an upper limit has been set on the number of applicants; if the arrangement does not cover such personnel, whether the Government can strive for the Mainland's introduction of the relevant arrangement; and

(3) given that the Development Plan for Shenzhen Park of Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Co-operation Zone has proposed to provide travel convenience for R&D personnel, starting with a "highly convenient first-line entry and exit" model for customs clearance, of the progress of negotiations between the Government and the Mainland on the relevant arrangements?

Reply:

President,

Hong Kong actively leverages on our distinctive advantages of being backed by the Motherland and connected to the world under "one country, two systems" to better integrate into our country's development and serve well as the hub connecting the domestic and global markets. The Guangdong-Hong Kong-

Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) is a major national strategy and the best entry point for us to actively integrate into the overall development of the country. A rich and diverse pool of human resources serves as major impetus for development. As such, the interactions and exchanges of talents in the GBA, especially the two way flow and co-operation among innovation and technology (I&T) talents, are crucial to the development of Hong Kong and the construction of GBA as a whole. All these present unlimited promise for Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government has been in close discussion with the Mainland on the facilitation measures to promote the "southbound and northbound" flow of high-end talents in the GBA. In February 2023, the Mainland introduced the "southbound" exit endorsement for talents, facilitating the travel of six categories of GBA Mainland talents (i.e. outstanding, scientific research, education, healthcare, legal and other talents) to Hong Kong. Later on, the 2023 Policy Address announced that foreign staff of Hong Kong-registered companies could make applications in Hong Kong for "northbound" multiple entry visas to the Mainland for two years or more with priority processing. This measure targets at foreign staff holding a Hong Kong Identity Card. It is not limited to any particular industries or talent categories, and is in line with the HKSAR's objective of actively maintaining diversity and internationalisation.

In response to the various parts of the question raised, my reply is as follows:

(1) The "southbound" GBA exit endorsement for talents was introduced by the Mainland in February 2023. Eligible holders are allowed to travel to and from Hong Kong multiple times within the validity period of the exit endorsement. During each visit, they are allowed to stay in Hong Kong for not exceeding 30 days, which is far longer than the normal seven-day period for other types of exit endorsement. As at the end of 2023, nearly 10 000 talents had travelled to Hong Kong with the exit endorsement for talents. They included 347 talents under the "Outstanding" category with exit endorsement valid for five years, 5 872 talents in the fields of Scientific Research, Education or Healthcare with exit endorsement valid for three years, and 3 739 talents under Legal and Other with exit endorsement valid for one year. The Immigration Department does not maintain statistics on the number of days of stay in Hong Kong for holders of exit endorsement for talents.

Regarding the "northbound" travel of Hong Kong talents, the 2023 Policy Address announced the multiple-entry visas policy. Since then, there has been a significant increase in the number of "multiple-entry" visas issued for two or five years in Hong Kong, with about 9 000 applications approved. Before the introduction of the measure, most "multiple-entry" visas approved for the first time in Hong Kong had a validity period of no more than six months.

The two measures have been well received since their introduction, and have greatly facilitated the two way flow of talents in the GBA.

(2) As mentioned above, the measure announced in the 2023 Policy Address has

particularly benefited foreign staff of Hong Kong-registered companies. They may apply for two-year or five-year multiple-entry visas with priority processing. This measure has no cap on the number of applicants.

Considering the needs of academic and scientific research institutions, we have discussed with the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the HKSAR (OCMFA). The OCMFA agreed to extend the priority processing applicable to foreign staff of Hong Kong-registered companies to academic and scientific research institutions in Hong Kong. Applicants are only required to complete the visa application forms online and go directly to the Chinese Visa Application Service Center in Wan Chai for completion of processing. Their visas are to be collected on the next day at the earliest and there is no cap on the number of applications.

Such a tailor-made policy for the HKSAR will help attract high-end corporations and talents around the world to settle in Hong Kong, and gather as well as take root in the GBA.

(3) The Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Co-operation Zone (Co-operation Zone) locates at the convergence point of the Northern Metropolis and the Guangzhou-Shenzhen I&T corridor, which consists of the 87-hectare Hong Kong Park and the 300-hectare Shenzhen Park. The first three buildings of the first phase of the Hong Kong Park will be completed gradually from the end of 2024 as planned.

The Co-operation Zone will operate under the mode of "one zone, two parks", with scientific researchers going to work early and returning home late between the two parks every day in future. As such, it is necessary to provide convenient clearance mode and facilities for designated personnel to cross the border conveniently.

The Security Bureau will collaborate with the Mainland authorities concerned to actively explore an innovative clearance mode which will allow designated scientific researchers between the two places to go through immigration clearance by using a cross-river footbridge connecting the two parks. Upon pre-verification of their eligibility, the personal data of these scientific researchers will be kept in a database for comparison purpose during clearance. For entry or exit via the cross-river footbridge, they are only required to scan their faces in front of the camera at the automatic channels and use face recognition technology to verify their identities against the database. They are not required to present any identification documents or QR codes during the process. The immigration clearance will be completed upon successful verification, thereby achieving contactless clearance.

Looking ahead, the HKSAR Government will continue to maintain close communication with the Mainland authorities on the solid basis of the "southbound" and "northbound" policies, with a view to further promoting the interactions and exchanges of talents in the GBA, and building a high-level talent cluster in the GBA. At the same time, we will make strenuous efforts to tie in with the development of the Co-operation Zone to ensure that

scientific researchers can travel conveniently between the two parks, so as to make greater contribution to the high-quality development of our country.

Thank you, President.