

LCQ5: Cross-boundary cultural exchange activities

Following is a question by the Hon Ma Fung-kwok and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Caspar Tsui, in the Legislative Council today (April 21):

Question:

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) has been provided with a funding of \$140 million in the five years starting from the 2018-2019 financial year to support local arts groups and artists to conduct cultural exchanges in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (Greater Bay Area). Moreover, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Office of the Leading Group for the Development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area under the State Council, together with the People's Government of Guangdong Province, jointly published on December 24, 2020 the Culture and Tourism Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, setting out guiding directions for the overall cultural and tourism development of the Greater Bay Area. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the expenditure incurred by LCSD in the past three financial years for supporting local arts groups and artists for conducting cultural exchange activities in the Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area, as well as the current balance of the funding;

(2) of the respective numbers of local arts groups and artists funded by public money in the past three financial years for conducting cultural exchange activities in the Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area; the details of such cultural exchange activities; whether it has assessed the effectiveness of the Government's efforts in promoting such type of cultural exchange activities; if so, of the details;

(3) whether it will discuss with the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC) the relaxation of the criteria for grants under HKADC's Arts Development Fund (Cultural Exchange Project) (e.g. expanding the scope of the expenditure items which are eligible for grants, increasing the ratio of the amount of the grant to the budgeted total expenditure of an activity) to encourage local arts groups and artists to conduct outbound cultural exchange activities (particularly to the Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) of the measures in place to tackle the impediments posed by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic so as to assist local arts groups and artists in promoting the fruits of their efforts in culture and arts in the Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area; the preparation made by the Government to facilitate a swift commencement of cultural exchange activities

in the Greater Bay Area upon the resumption of normal traveller clearance between the Mainland and Hong Kong;

(5) of the measures in place to complement the Culture and Tourism Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, with a view to providing further support for local arts groups and artists to take part in the promotion of cultural development in the Greater Bay Area; and

(6) whether the approach of setting up a Cultural Exchange Division in the Hong Kong Office in Beijing will be extended to the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Guangdong, with a view to strengthening the liaison work between the SAR Government and the relevant departments and bodies in the Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area, thereby facilitating cultural exchange activities; if so, of the details, if not, the reasons for that?

Reply :

President,

(1) The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) was allocated a five-year funding of \$140 million from 2018-19 onwards to support Hong Kong arts groups and artists for cultural exchanges in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA). The direct production cost in staging cultural exchange activities in the GBA and related activities in Hong Kong amounts to \$20 million, \$22.09 million and \$3.73 million in 2018-19, 2019-20 and 2020-21 respectively, covering commissioning fee, artist fee, production, transportation, publicity as well as other related expenses. The estimated expenditure for the remaining two years would be around \$24.6 million per annum.

(2) In the past three financial years, LCSD has made use of the additional funding to embark on cultural exchange activities in the GBA actively to showcase the arts and culture of Hong Kong. It has also successfully cooperated with venue operators in the GBA to build up a collaboration network and regular liaison mechanism. A total of 36 productions of various arts forms were staged in seven GBA cities. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the touring programmes scheduled for 2020-21 were either postponed to 2021-22 or conducted online.

The Arts Development Fund (Cultural Exchange Project) was set up by the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) to promote cultural exchanges between Hong Kong and other places. In 2018-19 and 2019-20, four arts groups were funded to stage 24 performances in the Mainland cities in the GBA. To fulfill the conditions of grants and reimburse expenses, the grantees were required to, on completion of their activities, submit detailed evaluation reports on the effectiveness of their activities.

In addition, HAB has provided subsidy to Hong Kong arts groups/artists through the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Guangdong (GDET0) for cultural exchange activities in the Mainland cities in the GBA. In the past three financial years, five arts groups were supported to stage 11

performances. GDET0 would review the effectiveness of the performances after their completion. According to the review reports, the performances were well received by the audience in the Mainland cities in the GBA and facilitated the audience's understanding of the characteristics of the arts and culture in Hong Kong; and the professional standards of Hong Kong arts groups were appreciated.

HAB is also responsible for providing recurrent subvention to the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC). HKADC uses the subvention to operate different grant schemes, of which the Cultural Exchange Project Grant is dedicated to providing support to arts groups/artists for cultural exchanges. HKADC also provides designated funding to support Hong Kong arts groups/artists to participate in Mainland arts festivals. In the past three financial years, HKADC provided grants to 12 artists/arts groups which conducted 14 cultural exchange programmes in various art forms in the Mainland cities in the GBA. The grants are provided on reimbursement basis. The arts groups/artists receiving grants are required to submit project reports and financial reports to HKADC for disbursement of grants.

(3) Since April 1, 2020, HKADC has taken over the administration of the Arts Development Fund and merged it with HKADC's Cultural Exchange Project Grant to streamline administrative work with a view to providing one-stop services to arts groups and artists. After consolidating the resources, applications under the Cultural Exchange Project Grant have been processed under two categories, including Cultural Exchange Trial Version and Cultural Exchange General Version. The maximum amount of grant is \$150,000 for Trial Version, \$500,000 for General Version and \$800,000 for individual meritorious projects. HKADC has also removed the relevant limit on maximum grant which is based on the number of cities involved, thereby increasing the overall amount of grants for projects. As applicants come from different art forms and their artistic levels vary, the amount of grant is determined based on the merits of each application (such as content, budget, artistic level, expectations in the development and promotion of arts). It is not desirable to set a uniform grant level that is based on a certain percentage of the estimated total expenditure.

(4) Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all cultural exchange programmes scheduled for 2020-21 in the GBA were postponed to 2021-22 or conducted online. To enable audience in the GBA and the Mainland to continue enjoying local productions during the pandemic, LCSD collaborated with its venue partners to broadcast four free online programmes on Mainland online platforms and attracted over 3.1 million views. To prepare for the swift resumption of the GBA cultural exchange activities upon relaxation of travel restrictions, LCSD has secured dates for touring 14 productions in the GBA. In parallel with live in-venue performances, LCSD also actively works with venue operators in promoting online programmes via their WeChat accounts and other Mainland online platforms to facilitate the understanding of Mainland audience on Hong Kong artists and art groups. This also helps broaden the audience base.

(5) LCSD will continue to strengthen the collaboration with venue operators in the GBA and further support local artists and arts groups to conduct

various activities in the GBA. The relevant activities include curation of productions, participation in arts festivals and thematic events in the GBA, building new branding with venue operators, organisation of various fringe and educational activities, and exploration of more new small- and medium-sized venues. These support measures seek to provide more space and opportunities for Hong Kong arts groups to allow wider penetration of their work in the region. Besides, LCSD will organise cultural exchange workshops on technical and arts administration with its counterparts in the GBA so as to provide better support for touring arts groups.

To further promote cultural exchanges in the GBA, LCSD organises the "Hong Kong Week 2021@Guangzhou" from April to May 2021. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the "Hong Kong Week 2021" will feature both in-venue and online programmes. There will be a total of 15 programmes, including 11 performing arts programmes, one film programme and three exhibitions.

(6) HAB has provided funding to ETOs in the Mainland to recruit additional local staff since 2018-19; and GDET0 has therefore deployed dedicated staff to assist in the organisation of cultural exchange activities between Hong Kong and the Mainland cities in the GBA and to strengthen connectivity among them. Moreover, LCSD has been actively promoting cultural exchange in the GBA. Its Cultural Exchange Liaison Office (CXLO) is responsible for commissioning and staging productions of local arts groups/artists in the GBA cities and has formulated cooperation plans and liaison mechanism with cultural venue partners in the Mainland to present productions suitable for the GBA cities. CXLO maintains close communication with GDET0 to provide publicity and other support to the programmes.