

LCQ5: Environmental professionals

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Lo Wai-kyok and a written reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (November 22):

Question:

There are views pointing out that in order to implement the policy initiatives set out in the Hong Kong's Climate Action Plan 2050 (the Plan) and strive to achieve the goal of carbon neutrality before 2050, the demand for environmental professionals will become increasingly keen in Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) regarding the implementation of the Plan, whether the authorities have assessed and projected the demand for environmental professionals, and in the light of the relevant outcome, formulated policy initiatives to nurture locally and attract from overseas the relevant talents, so as to expand the talent pool for environmental professionals; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether the authorities will proactively collaborate with the industry to improve the professional qualifications framework and continuing professional development for environmental professionals in Hong Kong, and elevate the status of the relevant professional societies; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) given that the Government has since 2020 launched the Graduates Subsidy Programme under the Green Employment Scheme to provide opportunities for graduates who are interested in environment-related fields to enter the industry and nurture "green professionals" by subsidising enterprises to employ graduates in environment-related fields, whether the authorities will consider improving and regularising the subsidy programme to attract the new generation to join the environment profession; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Labour and Welfare Bureau and the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau, the reply to the question raised by Dr the Hon Lo is set out below.

(1) The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government attaches great importance to combating climate change. The Hong Kong's Climate Action Plan 2050 published in October 2021 set out four major decarbonisation strategies, namely net-zero electricity generation, energy saving and green buildings, green transport and waste reduction, as well as specific targets,

implementation timetables and roadmaps, to lead Hong Kong towards carbon neutrality. Measures to decarbonise and to adapt to climate change will not only bring about sustainable improvement to the environment, but will also drive the development of a green economy, create job opportunities in related industries such as energy supply, recycling, electric vehicles, new energy transport, as well as green and sustainable finance, and increase demand for skilled talents in environmental professions.

To assist various sectors of the community in seizing the opportunities brought by low-carbon transformation, tertiary institutions have introduced undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in environmental studies to nurture talent for green industries. In the area of green finance, the Government launched in December 2022 the Pilot Green and Sustainable Finance Capacity Building Support Scheme for application by market practitioners, related professionals as well as students and graduates of the relevant disciplines. After completing eligible programmes, applicants can apply for a subsidy of up to \$10,000. The Green and Sustainable Finance Cross-Agency Steering Group also launched the Sustainable Finance Internship Initiative in October 2022 to create more internship opportunities for students. In addition, the Government has added "financial professionals in environmental, social and governance (ESG)" to the Talent List of Hong Kong since 2021 to provide immigration facilitation to these talents.

The Government has drawn up the Talent List to attract high-quality talent in an effective and focused manner. The List covers the industry segment of environmental technology services and provides immigration facilitation to non-local talents in the environmental profession who submitted applications under the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme, the General Employment Policy and the Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals.

In respect of technical personnel, to encourage young people to join the Technician Training Scheme offered by the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD), the EMSD participated in the Vocational Training Council (VTC) Earn & Learn Scheme as an employer. Technician trainees who join the scheme would be granted an allowance and government subsidy by instalment during the training period of two to three years. In the new round of recruitment conducted in August this year, the EMSD recruited around 230 trainees. Trainees who completed the scheme with satisfactory performance might be considered with priority for employment as Technician I or Technician II of the EMSD. The Government is also collaborating closely with the trades to strengthen the training of technical and maintenance personnel for electric vehicles (EVs). In August this year, the VTC launched the Certificate in EV Repair and Maintenance programme, which offers opportunities for existing practitioners to study and enhance their technical skills. In addition, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) is exploring collaboration with the VTC to roll out an environmental protection-related apprenticeship scheme and provide on-job training opportunities for students taking Certificate of Vocational Education, Diploma of Vocational Education or Higher Diploma programmes.

(2) & (3) The EPD has all along been supporting the continuous development of environmental professions in Hong Kong, so that the standards and credibility of environment-related services and industries can be enhanced through professionalisation. Apart from promoting exchanges and development of environment-related professions with various professional institutes, we also supported the establishment of the Hong Kong Institute of Qualified Environmental Professionals (HKIQEP) by local environmental professionals in 2015, the development of professional qualification framework and continuous professional development for environmental professionals, as well as gradually enhancing the professional status of environmental professionals. We will continue to support the continuous development of the environmental professions in Hong Kong.

In respect of training, the EPD collaborates with relevant professional institutes to provide internship training for graduates in environment-related disciplines and young environmental professionals, so as to help them acquire relevant professional qualifications and increase their chances of securing employment in the environmental protection sector. For example, the EPD has been working with the Hong Kong Institution of Engineers for more than 25 years in providing university engineering graduates with environmental engineering-related internship training opportunities to assist them in acquiring the qualification of environmental engineer.

There were tremendous pressure and challenges on the local employment market brought about by the epidemic. Through the Anti-epidemic Fund, the then Environment Bureau and the EPD launched three rounds of Graduates Subsidy Programme under the Green Employment Scheme from 2020 to 2022 to subsidise eligible private companies and suitable organisations to employ fresh graduates working in areas related to environmental protection, ecological conservation, green energy and energy conservation, climate change, sustainable development, etc. In the light of the easing of the epidemic situation with society and economy returning to full normalcy, the Graduates Subsidy Programme has ended. To help more graduates of environment-related disciplines to join the environmental profession, the EPD is exploring collaboration with the HKIQEP to recruit graduates to participate in internship training in different organisations with a view to assisting them in acquiring environmental professional qualifications.

In addition, the EPD has been organising summer internship programmes over the years to provide university students with internship and training opportunities, with a view to enhancing their understanding of career development in environmental protection-related fields. The EPD has also launched the Job Shadowing Programme this year, through which secondary four to secondary six students can learn about the work of the EPD by shadowing professional and technical staff, with the aims of cultivating their interest and passion in environmental protection and preparing them for future studies and career development. As at end-October this year, 160 secondary school students have participated in the Job Shadowing Programme.