

LCQ5: Top Talent Pass Scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Adrian Ho and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (January 24):

Question:

The Top Talent Pass Scheme (TTPS) has been implemented for one year. According to government statistics, as at the end of November last year, a total of 47 681 applications were approved under the Scheme, of which 30 810 applicants have already come to Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of applications rejected under Categories A, B and C of the TTPS as at the end of December last year, as well as the percentages of such numbers in the total number of applications;

(2) as there are views pointing out that some TTPS applicants have not actively complied with the time frame for coming to Hong Kong and securing an offer of employment after their applications have been approved, of the current number of applicants who have successfully secured an offer of employment in Hong Kong among those who have come to Hong Kong under the Scheme, as well as the distribution of the trades in which they are engaged and the time they have taken to secure an offer of employment; and

(3) as there are views that the TTPS is relatively lenient in terms of the work experience requirement for Category C applicants as well as the vetting and approval criteria for the Scheme as a whole, making the Scheme susceptible to being exploited by some people as a "big trick" to immigrate to Hong Kong, for example, there are rumours that individual applicants have only come to Hong Kong for giving birth, travel convenience, enhancing their own curriculum vitae, etc, resulting in the Scheme being "tainted" and not truly fulfilling its purpose of contributing to Hong Kong's economy, of the counter-measures put in place by the Government to perform proper gatekeeping for the Scheme, so as to curb and eliminate all kinds of improper use and abuse of the Scheme?

Reply:

President,

To alleviate the acute manpower shortage, the Government newly launched the Top Talent Pass Scheme (TTPS) in end-2022 to trawl for outside quality talent to enrich the local talent pool. The TTPS is applicable to persons of three categories:

1. Category A: persons with annual income reaching HK\$2.5 million or above in the year immediately preceding the date of application;

2. Category B: full-time bachelor's degree graduates of the universities/institutions prescribed in the aggregate list of eligible universities (Note) (eligible universities/institutions) with at least three years of work experience over the past five years immediately preceding the date of application; or
3. Category C: full-time bachelor's degree graduates of eligible universities/institutions in the past five years immediately preceding the date of application with less than three years of work experience.

Note: The aggregate list of eligible universities under the TTPS comprises the top 100 universities/institutions in four designated world university rankings in the past five years (namely the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings, the U.S. News and World Report's Best Global Universities Rankings and the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Academic Ranking of World Universities); the top five universities/institutions providing specialised hotel programmes on the QS World University Rankings in the discipline of "hospitality and leisure management" in the past five years; and the top 10 Mainland universities under the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Best Chinese Universities Ranking in the past five years. The aggregate list currently consists of 185 top universities/institutions around the world.

An eligible outside talent is not required to have secured an offer of employment in Hong Kong before application for a two-year visa through the TTPS to explore opportunities in Hong Kong.

The TTPS has received enthusiastic responses since its launch. As at end-December last year, we received around 65 000 applications and approved nearly 51 000. Of these, around 36 000 talents arrived in Hong Kong. Along with the approved applications of other talent admission schemes, around 90 000 talents arrived in Hong Kong last year, far exceeding the Government's annual target of admitting at least 35 000 talents.

Our reply, in consultation with the Immigration Department (ImmD), to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) As at end-December last year, there were around 65 000 applications under the TTPS, of which around 3 000 were refused, accounting for 5 per cent of the total number of applications. A detailed breakdown is at Annex. The main reasons for refusal were that the applicants did not meet the eligibility criteria of the TTPS, including failing to meet the eligible annual income threshold under Category A, or not being graduated from institutions in the aggregate list of eligible universities.

(2) and (3) The eligibility criteria of the TTPS are clear and transparent. The ImmD has all along been assessing each application in a rigorous manner on the basis of the eligibility criteria. Apart from examining whether an applicant meets the specific eligibility criteria under the TTPS and normal immigration requirements, the ImmD will consider the individual circumstances of each application before deciding whether to approve it.

Since March last year, the TTPS applicants with work experience are

required to declare in their applications the sectors of their occupations. As at late December last year, more than 20 per cent of the approved applicants came from the financial services sector. Those from the commerce and trade sector and the innovation and technology sector each accounted for about 15 per cent while over 10 per cent of the approved applicants came from the information and communication technology sector. In addition, among all the approved TTPS applicants, more than 70 per cent of them are aged 40 or below, and individuals with high income or graduating from top universities with at least three years of work experience, i.e. applications under Categories A and B of the scheme, also account for almost 80 per cent. These quality talent are young, with high income or good academic qualifications, and possess extensive work experience and global vision. Their arrival in Hong Kong could help fill the manpower gaps in the local market and promote the development of major sectors.

We welcome talent from all over the world to come to Hong Kong for development by choosing appropriate talent admission schemes based on their backgrounds and needs. These schemes complement one another to proactively trawl for diverse global talent with different academic and professional backgrounds to come and settle in Hong Kong. Hong Kong Talent Engage (HKTE) was established in October last year. One of its key functions is to maintain close contact with incoming talent and keep track of their development and needs in Hong Kong, so as to provide them with comprehensive one-stop support services and assist them to settle down quickly in Hong Kong and contribute to the local economic development.

Although it is not a requirement for approved applicants to have secured offers of local employment, they, upon applying for extension of stay before the expiry of their visas granted, will have to be employed, or have established or joined in business in Hong Kong. The ImmD will follow the established mechanism in vetting relevant applications and play a stringent gatekeeping role to ensure that only applications of eligible persons will be approved. The ImmD also conducts surprise inspections from time to time, including verifying on site the employing company's mode of operation, financial status, employees' information, so as to determine whether the information reported by an applicant or his employing company is true. If one is suspected to have submitted an application based on a false employment relationship, or the authenticity of documents submitted by the applicant is in doubt, the ImmD will promptly follow up and conduct investigations. The Department will take decisive law enforcement actions if there is sufficient evidence. Should any person be found to have illegally obtained his/her employment visa or residency, the visa or residence status granted will be invalidated according to the laws of Hong Kong. The persons concerned will also be subject to criminal liabilities and removal back to their places of origin.