

LCQ6: Measures to attract and nurture talents

Following is a question by the Dr Hon Elizabeth Quat and a reply by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, in the Legislative Council today (December 5):

Question:

It has been reported that the ranking of Hong Kong in a world talent report has fallen from the 12th place of last year to the 18th of this year. There are comments that Hong Kong has to catch up expeditiously in respect of attracting and nurturing talents so as to maintain its competitiveness. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that some top overseas academic institutions (e.g. the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Stanford University) require their students taking artificial intelligence programmes to also take humanities subjects such as languages, music or economics with a view to enabling them to develop broad horizons, an open mind and innovative ideas, whether the Government will request the various universities to make reference to overseas practice and nurture more talents with multi-abilities; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) given that 12 member states of the European Union have incorporated programming courses into the curricula in primary and secondary education and the Mainland authorities will introduce artificial intelligence courses in primary and middle school levels, whether the Government will review the education policies and allocate additional resources to cater for innovation and technology development, including incorporating all "Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics" (STEAM) subjects into the regular curricula in primary and secondary education, devising plans to train up sufficient STEAM teachers, and requesting the various universities to recruit more STEAM academics and increase the number of places for the relevant programmes; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) given that quite a number of countries and regions (e.g. Australia and Shenzhen) have put in place measures such as granting incentive payments, concessions and right of abode to attract foreign scientific research professionals, whether the Government will adopt more proactive talent admission policies; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

Acting Madam President,

Talent has been a major pillar underpinning Hong Kong's present-day success and will continue to be the key driver propelling our economic development. The current-term Government attaches great importance to

enhancing and optimising our human capital to cater for the evolving development needs and maintain Hong Kong's overall economic competitiveness. Our reply to Dr Hon Elizabeth Quat's question is in three parts as follows:

(1) The University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded universities enjoy academic freedom and institutional autonomy. All along, the UGC-funded universities would, taking into account a host of factors such as social developments, market demand, relative strengths and observations on manpower trends of different industries, to carry out academic planning and curriculum design.

Since the implementation of the four-year undergraduate curriculum, the universities have devoted much effort in reorganising the curriculum, including the introduction of a newly designed general education curriculum. It allows students to systematically broaden their knowledge, extensively spanning across different areas such as languages, literature, philosophy, economics and technology. Universities are also devoted to strengthening students' creative thinking, leadership and communication skills, as well as improving cultural qualities through general education, thereby implementing the concept of whole-person education. In addition, universities also offer more overseas exchanges, work attachments and internship opportunities to strengthen students' international horizons and experiences.

Moreover, individual faculties allow students to take up minor studies in other faculties according to their own interests and goals, so that students can learn beyond their majors. In response to the needs of society, universities are launching more cross-disciplinary programmes in recent years, such as Bachelor of Arts and Sciences, to nurture all-rounded talents.

(2) To align with the worldwide educational trend and equip students with necessary knowledge and skills in response to economic, scientific and technological developments as well as changes in society, the Government has made significant efforts to promote STEM education in recent years. In late 2016, the Education Bureau released the Report on Promotion of STEM Education – Unleashing Potential in Innovation, containing a number of recommended measures which are being implemented progressively. In light of the latest development in science and technology, we updated the relevant curriculum guides, which were published in 2017. In the 2017/18 school year, we enhanced coding education at the primary level to develop students' computational thinking skills. We are now reviewing the Information and Communication Technology Curriculum for the senior secondary level and considering incorporating contents related to artificial intelligence.

In fact, STEM education is not a separate and new subject. We have been promoting STEM education in primary and secondary schools through relevant Key Learning Areas (KLAs), including the Science, Technology and Mathematics Education. In accordance with their school context and their students' interests and abilities, schools may adopt different emphases and plans when implementing STEM education. Some schools, for example, have implemented STEAM education by incorporating elements of Arts Education.

On professional training for teachers, we have been providing intensive training programmes on STEM education for school leaders and middle managers

in batches since the 2017/18 school year, and organising professional training programmes for teachers on coding education and on themes related to technology application. Besides, we have been providing primary and secondary schools with diversified school-based support services, so as to assist them in curriculum planning across the KLAS of Science, Technology and Mathematics Education and incorporating elements of STEM education into the school-based curriculum.

At the university level, the Innovation and Technology Bureau (ITB) has earlier briefed the UGC-funded universities on the trends and development of manpower requirements in the innovation and technology (I&T) sector. In view of the importance attached by the community to I&T, the UGC-funded universities have responded positively in their Planning Exercise Proposals for the 2019/20 to 2021/22 triennium by, inter alia, proposing more cross-disciplinary programmes, such as those relating to artificial intelligence and financial technology.

In 2003, the Government deregulated the salary scale of UGC-funded universities, with a view to enhancing their international competitiveness in recruiting and retaining talents. In accordance with the principle of institutional autonomy and their respective human resources policy and mechanism, the universities will continue to recruit teaching and research personnel having regard to universities' circumstances and demand for talents.

(3) As Asia's world city, Hong Kong is an international business and financial hub, enjoying unique advantages to tap into the unlimited opportunities in both the Mainland and other Asia-Pacific regions. Also renowned for its open and free trade regime, low tax system, rule of law and high competitiveness, Hong Kong is a livable international city welcomed by global talents. The report mentioned in Dr Hon Quat's question also re-affirmed Hong Kong's strengths in attracting outside talents to sustain a top-tier talent pool.

To further attract quality talent from around the world in a more effective and focused manner to support Hong Kong's development as a high value-added and diversified economy, the Government promulgated in August this year the first Talent List of Hong Kong. The 11 professions under the Talent List cover a variety of cutting-edge and emerging technology and research professionals, and are those whom Hong Kong needs most in the immediate to medium term for our economic development. Immigration facilitation is provided to eligible persons under the Talent List through the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme (QMAS). For applicants who meet the specifications of the respective profession under the Talent List, bonus marks will be given under the General Points Test of the QMAS, subject to documentary proof.

In addition, to attract outside technology talent in support of Innovation Technology (I&T) development, ITB launched the Technology Talent Admission Scheme in June this year to provide a fast-track arrangement for admitting overseas and Mainland technology talent to conduct research and development work in Hong Kong, thereby facilitating the I&T sector to attract

talent.

The Government is also committed to promoting the various talent admission schemes overseas, including commissioning publicity visits and strengthening promotion through the economic and trade offices outside Hong Kong and relevant organisations with a view to attracting talent to come to Hong Kong for development.

The Government will continue to review the effectiveness of different talent attraction measures and admission schemes and keep an eye on other countries or regions' initiatives to attract outside talent, with a view to considering enhancements to the talent admission regime of Hong Kong and further attracting high-quality outside talent to come to Hong Kong for development and enrich Hong Kong's talent pool. Thank you, Acting Madam President.