

LCQ8: Facilitating exchange activities on the Mainland for Hong Kong young people amid the epidemic

Following is a question by the Hon Benson Luk and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Jack Chan, in the Legislative Council today (February 16):

Question:

There are views that allowing young people to go to the Mainland for exchanges and internships is an effective way to keep them well informed of national affairs and national policies. However, in view of the outbreak of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic, a number of schemes for young people to go to the Mainland for exchanges and internships have been suspended since 2020. Among them, the number of participants for the "Funding Scheme for Youth Exchange in the Mainland" dropped significantly from 18 000 in 2019 to 60 in 2020, and the "Funding Scheme for Youth Internship in the Mainland", which had 3 700 participants in 2019, was even suspended in 2020. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will allocate additional resources to the Civil Service College so that it can organise courses on national affairs jointly with youth organisations to enable young people to grasp the pulse of national development; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it has plans, upon the easing of the epidemic situation, to include the various schemes for young people to go to the Mainland for exchanges and internships in the quota on quarantine-free travel, so as to resume young people's exchange and internship activities on the Mainland as soon as possible; and

(3) whether it has plans to facilitate exchanges between young people in Hong Kong and on the Mainland amid the epidemic; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government has been striving to provide Hong Kong young people with exchange and internship opportunities in the Mainland. The Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) currently subsidises non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to organise Mainland exchange projects for young people through the Funding Scheme for Youth Exchange in the Mainland, in order to deepen their understanding of the culture and history of the Mainland, the way of life of Mainland people, the developments of our country, etc., as well as foster

their exchange with Mainland people. Before the pandemic, about 18 000 young people benefitted from the Scheme every year. As regards internship, the HAB subsidises NGOs through the Funding Scheme for Youth Internship in the Mainland to organise Mainland internship activities for local young people, with a view to enabling them to obtain real experience in the actual workplace environment in the Mainland, as well as acquire a deeper understanding of the employment market, work culture and development opportunities therein. In addition to these funding schemes, the HAB also collaborates with top-notch scientific research and cultural institutions in the Mainland as well as major corporations in Hong Kong to implement the Thematic Youth Internship Programmes to the Mainland and the Scheme on Corporate Summer Internship on the Mainland and Overseas respectively, providing unique internship opportunities for local young people with different backgrounds, expertise and interests. Before the pandemic, the three internship schemes altogether offered Mainland internship opportunities to over 4 000 young people every year.

Having consulted the Civil Service Bureau, our consolidated reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Benson Luk is as follows:

1. The Civil Service College is committed to enhancing the understanding of civil servants on our country's development and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's constitutional order. The training provided by the College is targeted at serving civil servants.
2. Young people's health and safety are our primary concern. We are closely keeping in view the developments of the pandemic as well as the cross-boundary quarantine requirements between the Mainland and Hong Kong, and will arrange for the resumption of our exchange and internship activities in the Mainland when it is safe and practicable to do so.
3. The various youth exchange and internship programmes in the Mainland organised by the HAB aim at enabling young people to experience the culture and the living and working environments in the Mainland by visiting there in person, thereby broadening their horizons and helping them develop and learn. Even though the funded exchange projects cannot be held for the time being due to the pandemic, we have permitted the funded organisations to organise local activities that do not involve crowd gatherings before departure, such as online briefing sessions, seminars and training courses, so that participants can learn about the culture, history, social features, people's way of life, latest developments, etc., in the Mainland (particularly the exchange/internship destinations).