

LCQ8: Smart Government Innovation Lab

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Chun-ying and a written reply by the Secretary for Innovation and Technology, Mr Alfred Sit, in the Legislative Council today (June 17):

Question:

The Government established the Smart Government Innovation Lab (Smart LAB) in April last year to promote the development of Smart Government and facilitate the development of innovation and technology in Hong Kong. Regarding the work of the Smart LAB, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as there are views that none of the 15 solutions with potential and with proof-of-concept arranged by the Smart LAB features innovative elements which are groundbreaking, and all such solutions are to be applied to individual government departments only, whether the Government will try to think out of the box by developing solutions that can support cross-departmental applications, with a view to providing more convenient services to members of the public; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) given that the Government implemented in April last year a new procurement policy which aimed at encouraging government departments to (i) adopt marking schemes and raise the technical weighting in assessment, (ii) make the innovative suggestions submitted by bidders as one of the assessment items, and (iii) refrain from including, in general, bidders' experience as a mandatory requirement for participating in procurement, so as to afford small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups more opportunities to participate in bidding government contracts, of the respective numbers of cases in the 12 months since April last year in which SMEs and start-ups participated in bidding and were awarded government contracts; how such figures compare with those in the preceding 12 months; and

(3) given that the Government is carrying out a pilot project of applying robotics technologies in smart office, and will invite the various government departments to participate in a competition by submitting conceptual proposals which can effectively apply robotics technologies to enhance the quality of public services, of the government departments that will apply the robotics technologies concerned?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau, we set out our reply to the questions as follows:

(1) The Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) established the Smart Government Innovation Lab (Smart LAB) in April 2019 to

encourage and facilitate wider adoption of innovation and technology in government departments, and promote active participation of industry players to assist government departments in adopting various information technology solutions to improve public services. In addition, the Smart LAB has set up a thematic website (www.smartlab.gov.hk) setting out the challenges faced by different public services and inviting industry players to submit technology solutions and product suggestions.

The Smart LAB organised technology fora on various topics in the past year, and invited industry participation and sharing on examples of different technology applications, including smart city infrastructure, intelligent transport system and traffic management, as well as blockchain. Departments will consider adoption having regard to their practical needs and OGCIO will also provide suitable technical support on different technological aspects. In blockchain application, for instance, four departments have arranged pilot implementations in areas such as transfer of trademarks, optimisation of procedures for preparing environmental impact assessment reports, improvement of traceability and management for pharmaceutical products, and enhanced monitoring of filing status of company documents in the light of their business needs. Aside from that, OGCIO also supported departments in conducting big data analytics by adopting a data-driven approach in decision making in order to foster innovative mindset to raise government operational efficiency and improve public services. The Smart LAB will also focus on exploring the application of robotics technologies, and plan to develop robotic process automation modules, such as establishing an automated workflow for form processing, streamlining the processing of general public enquiries, etc., to expedite the adoption of related technologies by various departments.

Given differences in the public services provided by various departments, the Smart LAB will source suitable technology solutions from the industry through exchanges with the industry, and thematic workshops to enable a better understanding by the industry of the operation and service needs of departments, so to formulate corresponding solutions. The Smart LAB will also arrange proof-of-concept (PoC) for suitable solutions to facilitate departments' better understanding on the feasibility of the solutions and whether they are able to address their practical needs, so that implementation plans and procurement requirements can be drawn up more effectively, including inter-department adoption of similar solutions.

(2) All along, the Government procures goods and services required through fair, transparent and competitive procedures in accordance with the Government's procurement policy and principles under the Agreement on Government Procurement of the World Trade Organization. The Government treats all tenderers on an equal footing. As the Stores and Procurement Regulations of the Government does not require tenderers to specify whether they are SMEs and start-ups, the Government does not have information on SMEs' and start-ups' participation in and award of government contracts.

However, the Government understands that SMEs and start-ups may have limited experience and track record in undertaking government contracts. To

encourage more SMEs and start-ups to participate to bid for government contracts, the Government has minimised the entry barriers under the pro-innovation procurement policy by requiring that, as a general rule, procuring departments should not set tenderers' experience as an essential requirement for participating in procurement unless absolutely necessary and with prior approval.

(3) Robotics technologies encompass different technologies and modes, including machine learning, cognitive systems, intelligent agent, robotic process automation etc. Combined with artificial intelligence and big data analytics, related applications can facilitate various departments to automate complicated workflow and information dissemination, thereby enhancing departments' operational efficiency and quality of public services. The Smart LAB will arrange seminars, thematic workshops and technology fora in the second half of this year to raise the awareness of various departments about robotics technologies, and invite industry participation through online briefings and virtual fora etc. To further promote robotics technologies, OGCIO will invite government staff of various departments to participate in a competition to submit conceptual proposals which can effectively apply robotics technologies to enhance public services. Upon short-listing of proposals and completion of PoC, winning teams will be selected. These winning proposals can encourage relevant departments to arrange further implementation and OGCIO will also provide technical support.