

LCQ8: Work on talent admission

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Tan Yueheng and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (December 4):

Question:

It has been reported that Hong Kong ranked ninth among the 67 economies around the globe in the World Talent Ranking 2024 published by the International Institute for Management Development, and as at end-August this year, over 150 000 people of talent arrived in Hong Kong through various talent admission schemes. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as there are views that currently, the Top Talent Pass Scheme only imposes one eligibility criterion for Category A applications (i.e. an annual income reaching HK\$2.5 million or above in the year immediately preceding the date of application), but top talents should not be merely regarded as high-income earners because the key purpose of admitting "pinnacle" talents is to enable talents to contribute their skills and expertise shortly after their arrival in Hong Kong and, in the long term, fulfil the development needs of Hong Kong, whether the Government will consider raising the threshold for Category A applications and adding more screening conditions to enhance the selection of such category of talents;

(2) as the aforesaid Category A applicants primarily come to look for middle and upper-rank posts in Hong Kong, but there are views pointing out that the overall demand for local middle and upper-rank posts is large while the supply is small, which has limited the employment of top talents, whether the Government will formulate more targeted utilisation strategies on the utilisation of talents for Category A applicants, so as to make even better use of the talent pool and fully revitalise talent resources;

(3) whether it has studied if various talent admission schemes are not attractive enough to highly skilled talents who meet the direction of Hong Kong's future development; if it has studied and the outcome is in the affirmative, of the core reasons for that; and

(4) as there are views that the majority of talents admitted through various talent admission schemes are engaged in such industries as finance, innovation and technology, trade and professional services, and that local talents in such industries are themselves sufficient and highly competitive, of the measures adopted by the Government to ensure that such local talents can secure equal employment opportunities?

Reply:

President,

To relieve the prevailing tight local labour market situation, the Government launched the new Top Talent Pass Scheme (TTPS) in end-2022, under which eligible outside talents are not required to have secured offers of employment in Hong Kong before applying for two-year visas through the TTPS to explore opportunities in Hong Kong.

The eligibility and assessment criteria of the TTPS are concise and clear, targeting high-income individuals and top-notch university graduates. There are three categories of applications. Applicants under Category A are required to have an annual income reaching HK\$2.5 million or above in the year immediately preceding the date of application, while applicants under Categories B and C have to be bachelor's degree graduates from the 198 universities specified under the scheme. Since the launch of the TTPS in end-2022 up to end-October this year, nearly 85 000 applications are approved under the TTPS, with applications under Category A accounting for only about one-quarter of the total.

Most talents approved under Category A were entrepreneurs or management of companies before arriving in Hong Kong. They attained good achievements in their respective professional fields and are highly competitive in the market. According to the findings of the follow-up surveys conducted by the Labour and Welfare Bureau earlier on the talents admitted under the TTPS, nearly 60 per cent of the respondents under Category A who have arrived in Hong Kong six months or more were in employment, higher than that of respondents under Categories B and C. Among them, about one-quarter of the employed respondents under Category A are entrepreneurs who have set up companies after arrival to Hong Kong and created job opportunities for the locals. Most of the employed talents under Category A are engaged in industries where Hong Kong has a competitive edge, including commerce and trade, innovation and technology, as well as information and communications technology. This can help fill local job vacancies and strengthen the local talent pool.

A person admitted under the TTPS, upon the expiry of his/her first visa, will have to be employed, or have established or joined in business in Hong Kong so that an extension of stay can be granted. Whether talents can stay in Hong Kong in the long run depends on their own conditions and competitiveness, as well as their ability to secure development opportunities in the local market. In view of the effectiveness and operational experience of the TTPS, the Government has no intention to change the eligibility criteria nor impose additional restrictions for applicants under Category A of the TTPS.

Apart from the TTPS, the Government has also implemented other talent admission schemes to attract diversified talents to come for employment and settle in Hong Kong. Among them, the General Employment Policy (GEP) and the Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals (ASMP) are employment-tied. Applications for talent admission under these schemes have to be sponsored by their employers. This by design has ensured that the admitted talents could meet the demand of the local employment market. As for

the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme (QMAS), its objective is to attract highly skilled talents to settle in Hong Kong, thereby enhancing Hong Kong's economic competitiveness. In addition, the Government has also drawn up the Talent List of Hong Kong, which is subject to updates from time to time to attract high quality talents in a more effective and focused manner to support Hong Kong's development into a high value-added and diversified economy. The Talent List currently comprises 51 professions under nine industry segments, reflecting the types of talents that Hong Kong needs most and are eligible for the immigration facilitation under the GEP, ASMP and QMAS. The Government will continue to review the effectiveness of the various talent admission schemes and make improvements or adjustments as necessary.

The 2023 Manpower Projection indicates that the supply of local manpower would fall short to fill vacancies across sectors in the next five years, resulting in a widening manpower shortage. On the principle of safeguarding the employment priority of local workers, the Government will step up efforts to nurture local talents and unleash local workforce. However, there would still be a need to continue to import outside talents and labour at an appropriate scale to meet imminent needs. In fact, even though many outside talents have arrived in Hong Kong through various talent admission schemes and joined the local labour market, the local unemployment rate has remained at a low level close to full employment.