

LCQ9: Talents in the architectural, surveying, planning and landscape sectors

Following is a question by the Hon Tony Tse and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, in the Legislative Council today (January 26):

Question:

There are comments that with the Government proposing to take forward a number of major development projects such as the Northern Metropolis and the reclamation project of the Lantau Tomorrow Vision, it is expected that Hong Kong's demand for professional architectural, surveying, planning and landscape (ASPL) services will increase significantly in the coming 10 to 20 years. Nevertheless, the number of places offered by local universities to train the relevant professional and skilled talents has not increased for many years, and there is even a downward trend in the number of places for some of the relevant disciplines. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of places for training professional and skilled ASPL talents in each of the past five years and the coming three years, with a breakdown by the tertiary institution providing such training and by discipline;

(2) whether the Government and the relevant authorities (including the University Grants Committee and various tertiary institutions) have assessed Hong Kong's demand for professional and skilled ASPL talents in the coming 10 to 20 years; if so, of the outcome; if not, whether they will conduct an assessment expeditiously, and how the Government ensures that there is an adequate supply of relevant talents to take forward the aforesaid development projects;

(3) whether it will consult the sectors, including the relevant professional associations, developers and contractors, on matters relating to the supply and demand as well as the training of professional and skilled ASPL talents; and

(4) whether it will, by means of allocating additional funding and setting student number targets, etc. to spur the various tertiary institutions to suitably increase the places for training professional and skilled ASPL talents; if so, of the specific plans and implementation timetables; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

To meet the demand for construction professional services arising from the upcoming major infrastructure development, the Government, together with post-secondary education institutions, the Construction Industry Council (CIC) and other training institutions as well as the construction industry, will continue to adopt a multi-pronged approach in ensuring an adequate supply of talents, including enhancement of training; government support through the Construction Innovation and Technology Fund in promoting the use of innovation and technology to enhance the overall productivity of the construction industry.

Regarding the four parts of the question raised by the Hon Tse Wai-chuen, upon consultation with the Education Bureau and the Labour and Welfare Bureau we provide a co-ordinated reply as follows:

(1) For training of professional and skilled talents for the ASPL disciplines in Hong Kong, the actual intake of relevant undergraduate and taught postgraduate (TPg) programmes funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC) in the academic years from 2017/18 to 2021/22 are set out in Annex 1.

As regards other ASPL related non-UGC-funded full-time locally-accredited sub-degree, first-year-first-degree, top-up degree, and TPg programmes, the actual intake in the academic years from 2017/18 to 2020/21 are set out in Annex 2.

(2) The CIC regularly conducts manpower forecast for the construction industry, including projected demand and supply for professionals, skilled talents and workers. The CIC is updating the relevant forecast. Initial feedback from industry stakeholders on the manpower supply and demand situation gauged by the CIC recently reveals a keen demand in certain disciplines of professionals and skilled talents.

CIC would, with due regard to the update on manpower forecast, liaise with relevant government policy bureaux, various post-secondary education institutions and training institutions with an aim to jointly provide sufficient training for the professionals and skilled talents required by the construction industry.

Apart from training, we actively promote the industry to adopt innovative technologies to enhance the overall productivity of the construction industry through the \$1 billion Construction Innovation and Technology Fund (CITF) to meet the future manpower demand. In operation for more than three years, the CITF has gradually achieved notable effect. By the end of 2021, the CITF has approved more than \$570 million, subsidising over 830 enterprises to adopt the Modular Integrated Construction, Building Information Modeling and other advanced construction technologies, and about 11 000 technology related training places for construction professionals, skilled talents and other practitioners.

(3) Government policy bureaux would keep in touch with the relevant industry organisations to understand the manpower demand situation of their respective

sectors. Through the CIC, the Development Bureau would regularly communicate with professional institutions, trade associations, contractors' associations and trade unions related to the construction industry to understand the development needs, the manpower supply and demand and training needs for various professionals and skilled talents. The CIC would also gauge the views of various industry stakeholders in the process of conducting manpower forecast.

(4) Under the current triennial planning mechanism of the UGC-funded universities, Education Bureau would only determine the approved student number targets by university and study level. Apart from the education and healthcare disciplines, it does not specify the student number targets for individual disciplines nor programmes. Universities enjoy substantial autonomy to flexibly deploy their recurrent grants, which are allocated in the form of a block grant, to determine the programmes to be offered and the allocation of student places among different disciplines, including those related to ASPL. The current mechanism ensures that universities may make use of their funding flexibly and respond to the different sectors' demand for talents in a timely manner.

In the course of the triennium planning exercises, the Development Bureau has reflected the industry's higher education demand for professionals and skilled talents in the next few years, including the consideration that the expenditure of capital works programme will maintain at a high level thus creating a continuous demand for talents in the relevant disciplines including ASPL and engineering. UGC-funded universities will review their existing programmes, introduce new ones and retire obsolete ones with reference to the advice on manpower demand for specific sectors provided by relevant bureaux/departments as well as the future trends of the society. This is to ensure that the higher education sector could continuously nurture talents for Hong Kong's development.

As regards the self-financing post-secondary education sector, under the principle of institutional autonomy, self-financing institutions similarly have the flexibility to develop programmes that meet market needs and adjust the intake places of relevant programmes.