

LCQ5: Top Talent Pass Scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Adrian Ho and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (January 24):

Question:

The Top Talent Pass Scheme (TTPS) has been implemented for one year. According to government statistics, as at the end of November last year, a total of 47 681 applications were approved under the Scheme, of which 30 810 applicants have already come to Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of applications rejected under Categories A, B and C of the TTPS as at the end of December last year, as well as the percentages of such numbers in the total number of applications;

(2) as there are views pointing out that some TTPS applicants have not actively complied with the time frame for coming to Hong Kong and securing an offer of employment after their applications have been approved, of the current number of applicants who have successfully secured an offer of employment in Hong Kong among those who have come to Hong Kong under the Scheme, as well as the distribution of the trades in which they are engaged and the time they have taken to secure an offer of employment; and

(3) as there are views that the TTPS is relatively lenient in terms of the work experience requirement for Category C applicants as well as the vetting and approval criteria for the Scheme as a whole, making the Scheme susceptible to being exploited by some people as a "big trick" to immigrate to Hong Kong, for example, there are rumours that individual applicants have only come to Hong Kong for giving birth, travel convenience, enhancing their own curriculum vitae, etc, resulting in the Scheme being "tainted" and not truly fulfilling its purpose of contributing to Hong Kong's economy, of the counter-measures put in place by the Government to perform proper gatekeeping for the Scheme, so as to curb and eliminate all kinds of improper use and abuse of the Scheme?

Reply:

President,

To alleviate the acute manpower shortage, the Government newly launched the Top Talent Pass Scheme (TTPS) in end-2022 to trawl for outside quality talent to enrich the local talent pool. The TTPS is applicable to persons of three categories:

1. Category A: persons with annual income reaching HK\$2.5 million or above in the year immediately preceding the date of application;

2. Category B: full-time bachelor's degree graduates of the universities/institutions prescribed in the aggregate list of eligible universities (Note) (eligible universities/institutions) with at least three years of work experience over the past five years immediately preceding the date of application; or
3. Category C: full-time bachelor's degree graduates of eligible universities/institutions in the past five years immediately preceding the date of application with less than three years of work experience.

Note: The aggregate list of eligible universities under the TTPS comprises the top 100 universities/institutions in four designated world university rankings in the past five years (namely the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings, the U.S. News and World Report's Best Global Universities Rankings and the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Academic Ranking of World Universities); the top five universities/institutions providing specialised hotel programmes on the QS World University Rankings in the discipline of "hospitality and leisure management" in the past five years; and the top 10 Mainland universities under the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Best Chinese Universities Ranking in the past five years. The aggregate list currently consists of 185 top universities/institutions around the world.

An eligible outside talent is not required to have secured an offer of employment in Hong Kong before application for a two-year visa through the TTPS to explore opportunities in Hong Kong.

The TTPS has received enthusiastic responses since its launch. As at end-December last year, we received around 65 000 applications and approved nearly 51 000. Of these, around 36 000 talents arrived in Hong Kong. Along with the approved applications of other talent admission schemes, around 90 000 talents arrived in Hong Kong last year, far exceeding the Government's annual target of admitting at least 35 000 talents.

Our reply, in consultation with the Immigration Department (ImmD), to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) As at end-December last year, there were around 65 000 applications under the TTPS, of which around 3 000 were refused, accounting for 5 per cent of the total number of applications. A detailed breakdown is at Annex. The main reasons for refusal were that the applicants did not meet the eligibility criteria of the TTPS, including failing to meet the eligible annual income threshold under Category A, or not being graduated from institutions in the aggregate list of eligible universities.

(2) and (3) The eligibility criteria of the TTPS are clear and transparent. The ImmD has all along been assessing each application in a rigorous manner on the basis of the eligibility criteria. Apart from examining whether an applicant meets the specific eligibility criteria under the TTPS and normal immigration requirements, the ImmD will consider the individual circumstances of each application before deciding whether to approve it.

Since March last year, the TTPS applicants with work experience are

required to declare in their applications the sectors of their occupations. As at late December last year, more than 20 per cent of the approved applicants came from the financial services sector. Those from the commerce and trade sector and the innovation and technology sector each accounted for about 15 per cent while over 10 per cent of the approved applicants came from the information and communication technology sector. In addition, among all the approved TTPS applicants, more than 70 per cent of them are aged 40 or below, and individuals with high income or graduating from top universities with at least three years of work experience, i.e. applications under Categories A and B of the scheme, also account for almost 80 per cent. These quality talent are young, with high income or good academic qualifications, and possess extensive work experience and global vision. Their arrival in Hong Kong could help fill the manpower gaps in the local market and promote the development of major sectors.

We welcome talent from all over the world to come to Hong Kong for development by choosing appropriate talent admission schemes based on their backgrounds and needs. These schemes complement one another to proactively trawl for diverse global talent with different academic and professional backgrounds to come and settle in Hong Kong. Hong Kong Talent Engage (HKTE) was established in October last year. One of its key functions is to maintain close contact with incoming talent and keep track of their development and needs in Hong Kong, so as to provide them with comprehensive one-stop support services and assist them to settle down quickly in Hong Kong and contribute to the local economic development.

Although it is not a requirement for approved applicants to have secured offers of local employment, they, upon applying for extension of stay before the expiry of their visas granted, will have to be employed, or have established or joined in business in Hong Kong. The ImmD will follow the established mechanism in vetting relevant applications and play a stringent gatekeeping role to ensure that only applications of eligible persons will be approved. The ImmD also conducts surprise inspections from time to time, including verifying on site the employing company's mode of operation, financial status, employees' information, so as to determine whether the information reported by an applicant or his employing company is true. If one is suspected to have submitted an application based on a false employment relationship, or the authenticity of documents submitted by the applicant is in doubt, the ImmD will promptly follow up and conduct investigations. The Department will take decisive law enforcement actions if there is sufficient evidence. Should any person be found to have illegally obtained his/her employment visa or residency, the visa or residence status granted will be invalidated according to the laws of Hong Kong. The persons concerned will also be subject to criminal liabilities and removal back to their places of origin.

LCQ16: Promoting overnight attractions to tourists

Following is a question by the Hon Yang Wing-kit and a written reply by the Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (January 24):

Question:

There are views that the Government should promote to tourists local overnight attractions (particularly those on major festivals such as the New Year's Eve, the Lunar New Year and Christmas) so as to encourage tourists to stay in Hong Kong and have fun. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will publicise and promote to tourists local overnight activities (including watching midnight movies, enjoying acupuncture and massage, singing in karaokes, eating at late-night on-street cooked food stalls and late-night diners, shopping at morning bazaars and supermarkets operating 24 hours a day, spending leisure time at Lan Kwai Fong, watching sunrise and having morning tea and dim sums); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it will discuss with the operators of entertainment and catering establishments such as cinemas, bars and chain restaurants measures to be implemented on major festivals such as introducing overnight movie screenings, extending the operating hours of restaurants and distributing bar vouchers to tourists, so as to offer more late night attractions; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether it will enhance the support for and the promotion of local morning bazaars and allow hawkers to hawk legally when holding festive or time-limited temporary bazaars; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) as it is learnt that theme parks in Japan and South Korea introduce overnight packages and organise overnight parties from time to time, whether the Government will, by drawing reference from such practices, discuss with local theme parks the introduction of overnight packages and organisation of overnight parties on major festivals, with a view to enriching overnight entertainment activities; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) whether it will study the organisation of large-scale overnight music events on major festivals, such as overnight music festivals, disc jockey music parties as well as concerts with firework displays, with a view to attracting tourists to come to Hong Kong to participate in these events; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In respect of the question raised by the Hon Yang Wing-kit, having consulted the Environment and Ecology Bureau, the reply is as follows:

(1) and (2) The Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) consolidated a series of Nightlife Hotspot on its DiscoverHongKong.com website, introducing nighttime activities in Hong Kong, including visiting photogenic bars, late-night shopping, stargazing in rural areas, to visitors.

Beside, riding on the Government's launch of Night Vibes Hong Kong in September 2023, the HKTB has introduced a number of promotions to create a vibrant nighttime atmosphere in town in the past few months. These include intensifying local ambience with city-wide decorations during the Mid-Autumn Festival and Halloween; organising a number of flagship events in the evenings such as the Hong Kong Wine & Dine Festival, Hong Kong WinterFest and Hong Kong New Year Countdown Celebrations, as well as launching the International Chinese New Year Night Parade on the first night of the Chinese New Year. The HKTB also offers to visitors Hong Kong Night Treats visitor dining vouchers and visitor-exclusive special offers on open-top sightseeing buses evening tours; and launching new Temple Street promotion to enhance the nighttime ambience and encourage locals and visitors to experience the city's vibrant nighttime appeal. Details of mega events and promotions are as follows:

Mega event/ promotion	Details
Promotion support for Tai Hang Fire Dragon Dance (September 28-30, 2023)	The event was held over three nights during the Mid-Autumn Festival, with a glowing fire dragon carried by performers dancing through the streets of Tai Hang.
Promotion of "Hallo" Hong Kong Halloween campaign (October 2023)	From mid to late October 2023, Halloween-themed decorations were added to Visitor Centres, MTR stations, sightseeing vehicles and various tourism hotspots throughout the city, inviting visitors and the public to enjoy the rich Halloween ambience while showcasing Hong Kong's unique festive charms to the world.

<p>Hong Kong Wine & Dine Festival (October 26-29, 2023)</p>	<p>The event was held for four consecutive days at the Central Harbourfront Event Space, with about 300 wine and food stalls. The first three days of the event were open until 11pm, attracting about 140 000 members of the public and tourists.</p>
<p>Hong Kong Night Treats dining vouchers (From November 2023)</p>	<p>Starting from November 2023, the HKTB has been distributing one million visitor dining vouchers worth \$100 each to inbound visitors to encourage them to enjoy Hong Kong's dining experience and bar scene after 6pm at participating bars and Quality Tourism Services Scheme-recognised restaurants. In addition, to encourage local consumption, the HKTB started a similar giveaway of a total of 200 000 Hong Kong Night Treats for Locals dining vouchers to be used after 6pm in two batches starting from December 2023, with a view to enhancing the appeal of local consumption, creating business opportunities for the food and beverage sector continuously and stimulating the economy.</p>
<p>Hong Kong Night Bus Tour visitor-exclusive offer (From November 2023 to January 2024)</p>	<p>From November 2023 to January 2024, the HKTB introduced the Hong Kong Night Bus Tour visitor-exclusive offer. For only \$20, visitors could travel on one of the three designated routes and explore famous attractions and landmarks on Hong Kong Island and Kowloon at night, enjoying the fascinating night view of Hong Kong.</p>
<p>Hong Kong WinterFest (November-December 2023)</p>	<p>A giant Christmas tree was once again set up in the West Kowloon Cultural District, adorning Victoria Harbour. Together with eight Winter Harbourfront Pyrotechnics shows at 8pm, the event attracted a total of 1.2 million visitors.</p>

<p>Whole-new Temple Street promotion (From mid-December 2023)</p>	<p>A new six-month Temple Street promotional campaign has been launched in mid-December 2023, giving a new energy through "A taste of Temple Street" (food stalls) and the Street decor lights. Illuminated arts installations, distinctive signages and light projections adorn the Street to bring together the unique characteristics of Temple Street and inspire a sense of novelty to attract visitors and locals to visit Temple Street for sightseeing and in-depth discovery of its authentic experiences. "A taste of Temple Street" (food stalls) is open daily from 2pm to 11pm, while the Street decor lights light up daily from 5pm to 11pm.</p>
<p>Hong Kong New Year Count-down Celebrations (December 31, 2023)</p>	<p>The Hong Kong New Year Countdown Celebrations was the largest countdown fireworks and music show ever held in Hong Kong, attracting 480 000 visitors on both sides of Victoria Harbour.</p>
<p>International Chinese New Year Night Parade (February 10, 2024)</p>	<p>Nine floats and 29 local, Mainland and overseas performing teams will take to the stage, presenting a series of spectacular performances incorporating Chinese New Year elements from 8pm to 9.45pm.</p>

As to whether merchants will extend the operating hours, it is their commercial decision. It has been a usual practice for some Hong Kong cinemas located in busy districts to schedule midnight/late night screenings until 3am during major festive holidays such as New Year, Chinese New Year and Christmas. For Chinese New Year Eve, some may have screenings overnight until 5am to 6am.

(3) According to the Environment and Ecology Bureau, bazaars can be organised for various purposes and in different forms, such as promoting local economy, festive celebration, and can be held during daytime or nighttime. The Government occasionally organises or supports bazaars to achieve policy or specific objectives, and adopts an open attitude towards festive or time-limited bazaars proposed by organisations. To ensure that bazaar activities do not affect public safety and order, food safety and environmental hygiene etc, the organisers need to obtain relevant licences/permits and should consider local opinions. If the bazaar activities have the required licences/permits, stalls operating in the venue are not required to hold

hawker licences.

On the other hand, illegal hawking on street, even during late-night or early-mornings hours, may cause obstruction to emergency services, environmental and noise nuisance, or hygiene and fire risks. It is also unfair to the businesses of shops nearby. Last year, the Government has received around 8 500 complaints about illegal hawking. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department will continue to regulate and take enforcement actions against unlicensed hawking activities.

(4) For theme parks, we have all along been encouraging the Ocean Park Corporation (the Park) to actively formulate and launch various types of events, including night events with extended opening hours of the Park. Examples of night events organised by the Park last year include Ocean Park Halloween Fest 2023, New Year countdown event, and programmes with education elements such as Grand Aquarium Overnight, Starry Summit Glamping, Eco Night Exploration and stargazing programme. Of them, Grand Aquarium Overnight and Eco Night Exploration were in-park overnight programmes.

For Hong Kong Disneyland Resort (Resort), in addition to the nighttime spectacular "Momentous" newly launched in 2022, the Resort held a New Year's Eve countdown earlier on for the first time in 15 years, which were all popular with guests. The Resort has been promoting packages integrating theme park tickets and overnight hotel stays at the three themed resort hotels, and it will continue to enrich its various offerings with a view to attracting more visitation.

(5) When deciding on the staging of large-scale events, event organisers, be they Government departments or commercial organisations, will consider many factors apart from the operating expenses. For example, the estimated number of participants, their experiences, the impacts to nearby residents and the environment such as whether the events will create noises to nearby residents, and the availability of transportation facilities at the time of the events, and in particular whether the overnight activities will bring nuisances to the neighbourhood. As commercial organisations will in particular consider the cost-effectiveness of the staging of events, the event organisers will be prudent when deciding on the staging of overnight events.

Nevertheless, there are also some entertainment venues in Hong Kong, such as bars, which are open overnight. Interested local residents or visitors may go to these venues for enjoyment. For visitors who are going to join large-scale events in Hong Kong, they may, depending on their need, arrange hotel reservations in advance to rest after the events and continue their itineraries and other activities in Hong Kong.

LCQ20: Combating online and phone fraud

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Kin-por and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (January 24):

Question:

It is learnt that in order to combat the increasingly rampant online and phone fraud, the United Kingdom and Singapore have enacted new legislation and introduced many new measures in recent years. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will, by drawing reference from the practice of the United Kingdom, consider enacting legislation to require large online companies to take measures to prevent members of the public from being exposed to fraudulent advertisements (including advertisements for investment schemes with fake celebrity endorsements);

(2) whether it will consider making reference to Singapore's practice of taking the initiative to combat fraud by enacting legislation empowering the Government to order the cessation of the dissemination of the relevant online content where it suspects or has reason to believe that the online activity in question is preparatory to the commission of a scam;

(3) whether it will draw on Singapore's experience and consider rolling out a mobile application which utilises artificial intelligence to automatically filter scam SMSs and phone calls for users who have installed the application by running the suspected fraudulent SMSs and phone calls against a scam database of the Police; and

(4) apart from the aforesaid measures, whether the Government is considering or will introduce other practicable measures to combat online and phone fraud; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Fraud cases have become increasingly serious in recent years. The Government is very concerned about the situation. Relevant departments have been adopting a multi-pronged approach to combat various types of frauds and enhance public awareness through enhanced law enforcement, publicity and education, multi-agency co-operation, intelligence analysis and cross-boundary co-operation on an ongoing basis.

In consultation with the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau and the Hong Kong Police Force,

the reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) and (2) The Police and the Communications Authority (CA) have been working closely with stakeholders to combat fraud, including stopping the circulation of fraudulent content on the Internet.

On co-operation with the telecommunications industry, with reference to the practice in other jurisdictions and considering the implementation feasibility in Hong Kong, the CA, in accordance with the Telecommunications Ordinance (Cap. 106) (TO), introduced in 2022 a condition in the licence of telecommunications service providers to stipulate clearly that telecommunications service providers must, upon the request of law enforcement agency, take prompt and necessary actions to block or suspend telephone services and websites which are suspected to be involved in fraudulent activities, so as to assist the Police in combating fraudulent cases. As the licence holders, the telecommunications service providers must comply with the relevant licensing conditions. In case of breach, the CA may, depending on the circumstances, impose penalties according to the TO. Telecommunications service providers have, based on the information provided by the Police, successfully intercepted more than 6 800 website links involved in fraud cases and blocked or suspended more than 2 400 telephone numbers suspected to be involved in fraud cases.

In the course of carrying out their duties, the Police will, for the prevention and detection of crime, request information or seek co-operation from relevant persons or organisations (including information and communications technology companies). Among others, the Police may request Internet platforms to remove posts or other information (such as videos, texts and images). Examples include removal of content suspected to involve fraud, fraudulent accounts opened under pretences to defraud others, etc. The Police and the relevant stakeholders have been co-operating smoothly in this regard and the Police's requests have been actively followed up.

We call upon members of the public who receive suspected fraudulent messages via online platforms to block or report the messages through the function provided by the platforms. They may also report the suspicious links to the Police so as to facilitate the telecommunications service providers to, according to the investigation results by the Police, prevent users from accessing the related websites.

The above measures of multi-agency co-operation and interception of fraudulent cases at source are in line with the practices in different jurisdictions around the world (including the United Kingdom and Singapore). We will continue to proactively enhance our anti-fraud measures, and at the same time keep in view and make reference to the means and measures adopted by overseas jurisdictions in tackling fraudulent cases.

(3) In September 2022, the Police launched a one-stop scam and pitfall search engine, Scameter, and a mobile application version, Scameter+, in February the following year to help members of the public distinguish suspicious online platform accounts, payment accounts, telephone numbers, email addresses and websites, etc, and to provide anti-fraud tips. As at December

31, 2023, the Scameter has recorded over 2.13 million searches, with about 360 000 fraud and cyber security risk alerts issued. We note that similar applications are also available in other countries (e.g. Singapore) to help protect the public from being defrauded.

The Police are actively enhancing the functions of the Scameter+, and are planning to add an automated element in February this year to issue alerts immediately when users browse suspicious websites and receive suspicious calls, so as to remind members of the public to be more vigilant. At the same time, a public reporting mechanism will also be introduced, so that members of the public who come across suspicious calls or websites can report such calls through the app, thereby enriching the content of the database. The functions are similar to those of Singapore's anti-fraud mobile filtering application. We will continue to study the feasibility of different options on how to combat fraud with the use of advanced technology (including artificial intelligence).

(4) Apart from the new measures mentioned above, the Government has also continued to strengthen existing measures to enhance the anti-fraud capability of various sectors of the community.

On co-operation with the financial sector, the Police have set up an Anti-Deception Alliance with major banks at the end of November 2023. Ten banks have stationed their staff at the Police Headquarters to communicate and co-operate with the Police in a more direct and immediate manner on the interception of fraudulent funds, identification of potential fraud victims, and exchange of intelligence. In Singapore, there are also similar arrangements for bank staff to work in police premises to enhance co-operation with the financial sector.

In addition, following the linkage of the Scameter with the Faster Payment System platform in November last year to alert members of the public when they transfer funds to suspicious accounts, the Police will explore with relevant stakeholders the extension of the alert mechanism to other platforms, such as general online banking services and automatic teller machines, in order to widen the scope of the alert mechanism. In addition, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority has required banks to implement a series of measures to enhance the security of electronic banking by March this year, such as setting up a dynamic fraud monitoring mechanism for assessing more thoroughly customers' transaction patterns and data, hence promptly identifying suspicious account activities for taking appropriate actions (including requesting customers to provide additional confirmation before executing transaction instructions).

To target fraudsters using virtual assets to commit fraud, the Securities and Futures Commission (SFC) and the Police established an inter-organisational working group in September 2023 to strengthen the risk assessment mechanism for suspicious virtual asset trading platforms and enforcement collaboration. In case of serious fraud, the SFC and the Police will make full use of the investigation and statutory powers of both parties, including issuing a cease and desist letter to the relevant website operator to terminate the suspected illegal activities, or requesting the Police to

block the suspicious website, thereby combatting the crime with the strongest efforts.

On telecommunication front, the Task Force set up by the Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA), the Police and major telecommunication service providers in September 2022 has introduced various measures to combat online and telephone frauds. They include requiring fixed and mobile telecommunication service providers to monitor and identify the calling modes suspected to be involved in deception and suspend the services of such calls; reminding users to be aware of offshore calls starting with the caller number prefixed with "+852" by sending voice or text alerts to target at fraudulent calls originating from outside Hong Kong; and continuing to enhance the Real-name Registration Programme for Subscriber Identification Module (SIM) Cards, including requesting telecommunications service providers to conduct sample checks regularly and follow up on the verification of suspicious pre-paid SIM cards, strengthening validation of user information etc.

In addition, with a view to helping members of the public verify the identities of SMS senders and guard against telephone and text scam, the OFCA has introduced in late December 2023 the SMS Sender Registration Scheme (the Scheme). The Scheme has first been implemented in the telecommunications sector. All participating companies or organisations will use Registered SMS Sender IDs with the prefix "#" to send SMS messages to local subscribers of mobile services. The OFCA will monitor the implementation of the Scheme and will take the initiative to invite other sectors and government departments that often use SMS to communicate with users to participate in the Scheme, with a view to further expand the Scheme.

The Police will continue to step up law enforcement, enhance prosecution effectiveness and vigorously combat the use of stooge accounts by fraud syndicates for money laundering by applying to the court for heavier penalties. At the same time, the Police will minimise victims' losses by intercepting fraudulent payments and early warning of fraudulent cases, and continue to enhance the public's awareness of fraud prevention through online and offline publicity work. The Police will also actively seek to maintain close co-operation with stakeholders from various sectors, relevant government departments and other law enforcement agencies, including those in the Mainland and overseas, in combating fraudulent cases.

LCQ2: Promoting Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination programme

Following is a question by the Hon Tang Fei and a reply by the Acting

Secretary for Education, Mr Sze Chun-fai, in the Legislative Council today (January 24):

Question:

The latest Policy Address has proposed to develop Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education. There are views that while building for the future, the Government also needs to review the present, such as how to promote the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE) programme. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the strategies and measures which it has adopted or plans to adopt to promote the HKDSE programme to places outside the territory, so as to enable the HKDSE programme to “go global”;

(2) given that for talents coming to Hong Kong through the various schemes to compete for talents, their children may study in Hong Kong in the capacity as dependants, of the strategies and measures which the Government has adopted or plans to adopt to publicise the HKDSE programme to talents coming to Hong Kong and attract their children to enrol in such programme; and

(3) as it has been reported that the number of medical students admitted to the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Hong Kong through the Joint University Programmes Admissions System only accounts for 45 per cent of the number of places of its medical programmes in the current school year, which has fallen short of the pledged target of 75 per cent for eight consecutive years, and there are views that local tertiary institutions do not see the HKDSE programme as a superior programme, of the strategies and measures which the Government has adopted or plans to adopt to improve the HKDSE programme, so as to enhance the recognition of the HKDSE programme by local and even overseas universities?

Reply:

President,

As announced in the Chief Executive's Policy Address 2023, we will make use of the advantages of the internationalisation and diversification of education in Hong Kong to develop Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education. To this end, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government has endeavoured to plan the development of education in the light of the macro perspective and long-term needs to cultivate and attract multicultural talents for not only creating strong impetus for the growth of Hong Kong, strengthening people-to-people bond, but also proactively integrating into the country's development, seizing the opportunities brought about by the latest development of the country, with a view to implementing the development of the “eight centres” in Hong Kong under the 14th Five-Year Plan and contributing to the development of the country.

The wide recognition of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education

(HKDSE) Examination as an academic qualification in Hong Kong and abroad reflects that the Hong Kong's brand of quality education is widely recognised and acknowledged locally and internationally. Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Tang Fei is as follows:

(1) The implementation of the New Senior Secondary curriculum reform and the successful organisation of the first HKDSE Examination in 2012 was a new milestone of the secondary education in Hong Kong. We have been proactively promoting the senior secondary curriculum of Hong Kong and the HKDSE Examination in Hong Kong and abroad. The result is encouraging. The qualification of the HKDSE, apart from being recognised by the tertiary institutions in Hong Kong and the employers for further studies and employment, is also recognised by about 600 tertiary institutions abroad. Besides, nearly 140 Mainland higher education institutions enrolled HKDSE students to their degree programmes through the Scheme for Admission of Hong Kong Students to Mainland Higher Education Institutions.

As a matter of fact, the HKDSE Examination has many advantages. First, it gives full play to Hong Kong's characteristics of being biliterate, trilingual and inclusive. The HKDSE Examination is an examination which can be taken in Chinese or English and its qualification is widely and internationally recognised. For candidates taking examinations in Chinese, they can also choose to answer in writing in traditional or simplified Chinese characters, or use Cantonese or Putonghua to answer in oral examinations. Besides, the curriculum focuses on a broad and balanced knowledge base; values the contemporary issues that may impact on daily lives at personal, community, national or global levels; and cultivates informed and responsible citizens with a sense of national identity and global vision. Third, the curriculum, being flexible and diversified, offers not only traditional academic subjects but also applied learning subjects for selection, which demonstrates the concept of "convergence of vocational and general education" and helps students plan their careers. Specifically, the HKDSE offers a wide choice of subjects, including some 50 Applied Learning subjects and six other language subjects, being capable of catering for the different needs and interests of candidates, including Non-Chinese Speaking (NCS) and non-local candidates. Fourth, the HKDSE Examination is fair, objective and reliable. Its adoption of the standards-referenced reporting system to report candidates' examination results is in line with the international standards and widely recognised locally and abroad. The advantages and characteristics of the HKDSE Examination as mentioned above are rather attractive to students on the Mainland and from other places.

The HKDSE Examination has all along been moving with the times and making refinements in response to the latest developments in the education sector and the community. For example, the Korean Language examination will be offered in 2025, and six Applied Learning subjects, such as "Introduction to Fintech" and "Digital Construction", will also be introduced in 2025. Given the many Hong Kong people heading to the Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area for development, to assist the children of Hong Kong people to study the Hong Kong curriculum on the Mainland and register for the HKDSE Examination and pursue further studies, the Hong Kong Examinations and

Assessment Authority (HKEAA) accepted two schools for Hong Kong children or Hong Kong and Macao children recognised by the relevant education authorities on the Mainland and in Hong Kong to offer the senior secondary curriculum of Hong Kong as the "Participating Schools" of the 2024 HKDSE Examination in September 2023. This will enable the schools concerned to recommend their bona fide Secondary six students to register for the HKDSE Examination as school candidates. On the other hand, to cater for the learning needs of NCS students, the HKDSE Examination also offers the examination of Applied Learning Chinese for them.

To further promote the international recognition of the HKDSE Examination, the HKEAA introduces its latest development through various events such as education fairs, physical and online seminars and meetings in Hong Kong, on the Mainland or overseas, including the promotion to the admission staff of the overseas tertiary institutions through online seminars with a view to enhancing the recognition of the HKDSE Examination. In addition, the HKEAA attended the Mainland Higher Education Expo 2024/25, jointly organised by the Ministry of Education and the Education Bureau in December 2023 to introduce the HKDSE Examination qualification to representatives of over 100 Mainland universities and institutions. On the other hand, the 2023 Policy Address proposed to develop Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education. We will vigorously take forward the relevant work, including the promotion of international recognition of the HKDSE Examination.

(2) The Education Bureau proactively supports the Government in recruiting talents from all over the world. We have introduced a number of measures in collaboration with other government departments and the school sector to assist the incoming talents to understand the diversified education system in Hong Kong and apply for the appropriate schools and programmes for their children. The children of the incoming talents may study in local schools, including public sector schools, Direct Subsidy Scheme schools or private schools, or they can also choose to study in international schools. We also explain to the talents who are planning to come to Hong Kong for development on matters relating to local admission and further studies through webpages, online seminars and question-and-answer videos to help them and their children to understand the operation of different types of schools in Hong Kong, the characteristics of Hong Kong's curricula as well as the advantages of local further studies.

(3) In the past few years, the proportion of students successfully admitted to the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded first-year-first-degree undergraduate programmes through the Joint University Programmes Admissions System with HKDSE Examination results has consistently accounted for about 80 per cent of the total number of local students, whereas the proportion of students admitted with sub-degree qualifications and those of other qualifications have each accounted for about 10 per cent. We believe that HKDSE candidates will continue to be the major source of new students to be admitted to the UGC-funded undergraduate programmes.

The optimising measures for the HKDSE Examination core subjects,

including the gradual implementation of the optimising work for the Category A Elective subjects, ongoing introduction of more Category B (Applied Learning) subjects which are recognised by the tertiary institutions, and the introduction of a new arrangement for Category C (Other Languages) subjects, had been implemented starting from the 2024 HKDSE Examination to broaden the knowledge base of students, enhance the recognition of the curriculum by local and even universities abroad, and provide more diversified and flexible choices for candidates in pursuing further education or employment.

In the 2024 HKDSE Examination, more than 40 per cent of school candidates took three elective subjects in addition to the four core subjects, which is a significant increase as compared with the 2023 HKDSE Examination, where only about 20 per cent of school candidates took three elective subjects, reflecting that the enhancement measures can assist more schools to release lesson time and increase the flexibility of the senior secondary curriculum.

Thank you, President.

LCQ12: North East New Territories Landfill

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Yuet-ming and a written reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (January 24):

Question:

The North East New Territories Landfill (NENT Landfill) is located close to the Heung Yuen Wai Boundary Control Point and straddles the Hong Kong-Shenzhen ecological corridor. Some local and Shenzhen residents in the area are concerned about the impact of the NENT Landfill Extension project on the surrounding environment and nearby developments. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the measures taken by the Government in the past year to alleviate the pollution caused by the operation of NENT Landfill (including but not limited to pollution from livestock waste treatment), and whether it has assessed the effectiveness of such measures;

(2) as the Government will regularly exchange views with the Shenzhen authorities on the operation of NENT Landfill, of the relevant professional connection and information exchange in the past year, as well as the new measures put in place by the Government to step up efforts in disseminating the relevant information to the residents concerned;

(3) as the NENT Landfill Extension project is being taken forward, of the latest progress of the project, and the estimated serviceable life of NENT Landfill after its extension;

(4) as the first waste-to-energy incinerator at Shek Kwu Chau will commence operation in 2025, whether the Government has studied if there is room for reducing the amount of municipal solid waste (MSW) to be transported to NENT Landfill; if it has studied and the outcome is in the affirmative, of the estimated amount, as well as the specific timetable for NENT Landfill to cease receiving MSW; and

(5) given that the Government has set up a dedicated website to publicise the monitoring data on the concentrations of hydrogen sulphide at NENT Landfill, and that although the hydrogen sulphide generated by NENT Landfill meets the relevant standards, it is learnt that bad odours are still being emitted from time to time, whether the Government will consider setting up a dedicated hotline or online channel, so that residents in the vicinity can have an additional channel to reflect the situation concerned?

Reply:

President,

Currently, about 11 100 tonnes of municipal solid waste (MSW) are generated in Hong Kong per day. To reduce the total amount of waste, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) is promoting waste reduction and recycling in full steam in accordance with the Waste Blueprint for Hong Kong 2035 announced in 2021, such as progressively installing smart food waste collection facilities in public housing estates across the territory and implementing MSW charging to encourage waste reduction and recycling, as well as resources circulation. In addition, we are working full steam on developing an advanced and efficient network of modern waste-to-energy (WtE) facilities to move away from the reliance on landfills for waste disposal. These include the Integrated Waste Management Facilities Phase 1 (I-PARK1) currently under construction near Shek Kwu Chau, which is expected to commence operation in 2025 for handling 3 000 tonnes of MSW per day. We are also actively planning for the development of the Integrated Waste Management Facilities Phase 2 (I-PARK2), with an expected MSW handling capacity of about 6 000 tonnes per day. Before the commissioning of these two WtE facilities, we still need the West New Territories (WENT) Landfill and the North East New Territories (NENT) Landfill for handling MSW in Hong Kong. At present, the remaining capacity of these two landfills is less than 20 per cent. Based on the current daily waste intake, it is projected that both landfills will be exhausted in 2026. Therefore, Hong Kong still needs to suitably extend both landfills to cope with the ultimate waste disposal needs of the territory in the short to medium term. The reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Yuet-ming is as follows:

(1) The EPD had progressively introduced a number of improvement measures at the NENT Landfill since mid-2021, with full implementation by mid-2022,

including stepping up the application of Posi-Shell covers to safeguard environmental hygiene and reduce odour emission, advancing the process of covering the landfill operational areas with clean soil cappings to reduce the size of such areas by 40 to 50 per cent as far as practicable, shortening the time for waste reception at the landfill site by one hour by advancing the closing time of waste reception from 7pm to 6pm, installing additional deodourisers, covering the leachate storage lagoons and enhancing the monitoring of odour emission, etc. To ensure effective implementation of the relevant measures and optimise the operation and management of the NENT Landfill, the EPD staff members stationed at the NENT Landfill work in shifts from early morning to late evening each day to monitor the work of the landfill contractor in the completion of applying soil cappings and Posi-Shell covers after the closure of waste reception for the day and in other environmental performance. In addition, starting from mid-2022, if weather conditions allow, the on-site staff members would operate drones to take aerial photographs on a daily basis to monitor the conditions and operational performance of the landfill more effectively. The EPD has also engaged a professional contractor to step up the monitoring of the operation of the landfill contractor through applying artificial intelligence-assisted drones and other technologies.

To expedite the environmental improvements to the NENT Landfill and minimise the visual and odour impacts on nearby residents arising from the landfill and its extension works, the EPD has already advanced the final restoration and greening works of the NENT Landfill, originally scheduled for 2026 upon completion of its landfilling operation, to end-2021, with a view to minimising odour emission and improving the appearance of the landfill as soon as possible, thereby minimising the "Not In My Backyard" effect and the associated visual impact. In addition, the EPD carried out, as scheduled in end-2023, the restoration and greening works for 80 per cent of the operational areas where landfilling is completed. In 2024, we will continue to advance the restoration and greening of the remaining operational areas where landfilling is completed.

Besides, we draw on the successful experience of landfill sites in the Mainland to enhance the overall extraction volume of landfill gas (LFG) at the NENT Landfill. We will progressively extend the use of impermeable plastic liners for capping the landfill operational areas and install gas extraction facilities underneath the liners or additional extraction pipes at suitable locations, thereby speeding up the connection of gas extraction facilities to the existing LFG collection system for better odour control at the NENT Landfill. The odour issue arising from the landfill will further improve when we introduce in the first half of 2024 a new mechanical technology to cap the landfill operational areas with impermeable plastic liners upon completion of operation each day.

Apart from the aforementioned measures, we are sending pig waste to other sites for treatment using anaerobic digestion technology on a trial basis to minimise the potential odour problem arising from livestock waste treatment at the NENT Landfill, with the target of gradually receiving and treating livestock waste with anaerobic digestion technology after the

commissioning of the Organic Resources Recovery Centre Phase 2 (O-PARK2) in 2024. Moreover, we have sprayed biological agents, as applied in landfill sites in the Mainland, in livestock waste pits during their operation. Waste odour is either absorbed or dissolved by the micro-organisms in the biological agents. We have also installed openable metal covers on livestock waste pits that are in use. The metal covers will be opened only when disposal of livestock waste is required for minimising the possibility of odour emission.

Following the implementation of the various improvement measures, the EPD commissioned an independent professional body to carry out independent monitoring exercises by collecting data at the Liantang/Heung Yuen Wai areas and the nearby local villages, which revealed that the levels of hydrogen sulphide measured in 2023 in areas close to the Hong Kong-Shenzhen boundary and villages in the vicinity of the landfill remained low and complied with the national standard. The number of complaints concerning the NENT Landfill received by the EPD in 2023 decreased by about 78 per cent when compared with the same period in the preceding year.

(2) The EPD has all along been working in close liaison with the relevant Shenzhen authorities and, through organising exchange meetings and mutual visits, maintained close communications and exchanges on the operation and management of the NENT Landfill. With concerted efforts to mitigate public concerns, specific measures for improving the operation of the NENT Landfill and its extension and reducing the impacts on nearby residents have been explored from time to time. Besides, the EPD communicates with the locals on the management and operation of the waste treatment facilities in the districts through District Liaison Groups. Relevant data on the monitoring of hydrogen sulphide is accessible to members of the public in Hong Kong and Shenzhen on the EPD's website at airsensor.pedia.epd.gov.hk.

(3) and (4) As mentioned above, during the transitional period until the completion of sufficient modern WtE incinerators, we still need landfills for handling MSW in Hong Kong. An appropriate extension of the NENT Landfill is necessary for the ultimate waste disposal needs of the territory in the short to medium term. The design capacity of the NENT Landfill extension project is about 19 million cubic metres for reception of both MSW and construction waste.

Currently, the development of I-PARK1 is at full steam and the preparatory work of I-PARK2 is also actively underway. Upon the commissioning of I-PARK2, the NENT Landfill will completely cease MSW reception and will be transformed to receive construction waste only, which does not decay and is odourless, thereby eliminating the odour problem arising from MSW reception. Besides, it is anticipated that a substantial amount of construction waste will potentially be produced during the development of the Northern Metropolis, which will require disposal at the NENT Landfill.

(5) Members of the public may make suggestions or enquires in relation to environmental issues at 1823 or the EPD's customer service hotline at 2838 3111. The relevant EPD staff members would take appropriate follow-up

actions. In addition, the EPD staff members stationed at the NENT Landfill would conduct daily site inspections to monitor the operational and environmental performance of the landfill contractor. The EPD would also maintain communication and keep in touch with the local communities and the rural committees concerned through District Liaison Groups and various channels.