

# Dentists Registration (Amendment) Bill 2024 to be introduced into LegCo

The Government announced today (March 27) that the Dentists Registration (Amendment) Bill 2024 (the Bill) will be gazetted tomorrow (March 28), with the First Reading at the Legislative Council scheduled for April 10, to amend the legislative framework that has been in place since 1959.

The Bill proposes to create new pathways for admitting qualified non-locally trained dentists to practise in Hong Kong, introduce an internship for local dental graduates and a period of assessment for non-locally trained dentists to enrich their clinical experience, as well as update the regulatory regime for dental hygienists and dental therapists to tie in with the Government's policy direction of promoting oral health and dental care. The introduction of the Bill aims to increase dental manpower in Hong Kong to support public and subsidised dental services and enhance the overall standards of dental professionals to better protect users of dental services.

## Admission of non-locally trained dentists

Hong Kong is now facing an acute shortage of dentists, with only 0.37 dentist per 1 000 population. This ratio is considerably lower than that in Mainland China and other advanced economies. Such a manpower shortage persists despite the fact that the Government had increased the number of local training places for dentists on four occasions (from 50 per year in the 2008-09 academic year to 90 per year in the 2022-23 academic year). In recent years, the manpower shortage has been particularly severe in the public sector which offers, amongst others, school dental care and other public dental services. As at January 1 this year, the vacancy rate of the Dental Officer grade of the Department of Health (DH) has reached 27 per cent (100 vacancies out of 370 posts).

With reference to the experience of admitting non-locally trained medical practitioners, the Bill will introduce new pathways for admitting qualified non-locally trained dentists, including the limited registration (LR) to be open to all dentists and the special registration (SR) to be provided for specialist dentists. For any non-locally trained dentist who is selected for full-time employment in a specified institution, including the DH, the Hospital Authority, the University of Hong Kong and the Prince Philip Dental Hospital, he or she may submit an LR or SR application to the Dental Council of Hong Kong (DCHK), and, upon approval, directly practise in the aforementioned specified institution.

If a non-locally trained dentist has served in a specified institution(s) for at least five years in aggregate and is certified by the employing specified institution(s) to have served satisfactorily, an LR dentist will be exempted from taking part of the licensing examination while an SR dentist may be exempted from taking part or all of the licensing

examination subject to the DCHK's consideration in accordance with the nature of work undertaken by the dentist. The non-locally trained dentist will be eligible for full registration to practise in any institution in Hong Kong after passing the required part of the licensing examination.

The Bill will also introduce temporary registration (TR) to enable dentists from other jurisdictions to perform clinical teaching or research in Hong Kong for a period not exceeding 14 days. A TR dentist cannot migrate to full registration.

#### Internship and period of assessment

To further enhance the professional standard of dentists, the Bill will require local dental graduates and non-locally trained dentists who opt to take the licensing examination directly to undergo a one-year internship or period of assessment before obtaining full registration by modelling on the prevailing practice for medical practitioners. The requirement will enhance their clinical experience in real-life work settings and enable them to get familiar with the practice in Hong Kong, thereby safeguarding patients' safety to a greater extent.

Under the new requirement, local dental graduates will need to undergo a one-year internship before obtaining full registration. As students of the local Bachelor of Dental Surgery programme about to graduate this summer have started to seek employment, the internship requirement will apply to local dental graduates of the class of 2025 and thereafter at the earliest.

As for non-locally trained dentists who are not admitted to Hong Kong through LR or SR but opt to take the licensing examination directly, they will, upon passing the licensing examination, need to undergo a period of assessment for one year (or a duration specified by the DCHK, subject to the dentist's clinical experience) before obtaining full registration.

The exact timing for implementing the above arrangements for internship and period of assessment will hinge on the actual legislative progress.

#### Registration system for dental care professionals

At present, two categories of ancillary dental workers in Hong Kong directly provide dental care services to patients under the supervision of dentists. They include:

(1) Dental hygienists (Note): To perform preventive dental care (e.g. oral examination, education, teeth cleaning and polishing, fluoride application, as well as scaling); and

(2) Dental therapists: Currently employed by the DH only to provide school dental care service and perform preventive dental care and basic curative dental care (e.g. filling and extraction).

The Bill will update the regulatory regime for ancillary dental workers

by introducing a statutory registration system, while retitling the relevant workers as dental care professionals (DenCPs). Meanwhile, the Bill will suitably adjust the scope of practice of dental hygienists and dental therapists on a risk-based approach by specifying the types of dental work they can perform and the related conditions. This serves to establish the professional status of these workers, while ensuring their service quality under a more formalised regulatory regime to safeguard the rights of patients.

Upon legislative amendment, dental hygienists and dental therapists must be engaged by a registered dentist(s), or a partnership, organisation, establishment or body corporate which has engaged registered dentist(s), for practice. The Government expects the DCHK to put in place the statutory registration system for DenCPs within three years after passage of the Bill to enable dental therapists to work in organisations other than the DH (including those in the public or private sector).

#### Other amendments

The Bill will specify continuing professional development as a mandatory requirement for dentists and DenCPs in a bid to maintain their professional competencies, and also revamp the composition and structure of the DCHK to cater for its additional statutory functions. Furthermore, the Bill will make other technical amendments, such as updating the definition of practising dentistry, to bring the regulatory regime up to date.

Note: The existing Chinese title of dental hygienists (牙科衛生員) is not in line with that of dental therapists (牙科治療師). Their current scope of work is not limited to teeth (牙科) (such as taking x-ray films inter-orally or extra-orally for the investigation of lesions of the mouth, jaw, teeth and associated structures). The Government will rename the title as "牙科治療師" when introducing the statutory registration system.

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## [TCU's fourth quarterly report of 2023 released](#)

The following is issued on behalf of the Transport Advisory Committee:

The Transport Complaints Unit (TCU) of the Transport Advisory Committee received 10 851 complaints and suggestions in the fourth quarter of 2023, with 291 being pure suggestions.

The complaints and suggestions received during the quarter were mostly related to public transport services (87 per cent), enforcement matters (7 per cent) and traffic conditions (5 per cent).

The number of cases on public transport services decreased from 10 439 in the previous quarter to 9 448 this quarter, while that on illegal parking and other enforcement matters increased from 656 to 764. The number of complaints and suggestions on traffic conditions increased from 267 to 529 and that on road maintenance decreased from 59 to 37.

All the complaints and suggestions received by the TCU in the quarter were referred to the relevant government departments and public transport operators for follow-up action.

During the period under review, investigations into 8 314 cases were completed. Of these, 7 492 cases (90 per cent) were found to be substantiated, seven cases (less than 1 per cent) were unsubstantiated, and the remaining 815 cases (10 per cent) could not be pursued due to lack of evidence.

For the substantiated cases, the relevant government departments and public transport operators have either taken steps to rectify the situation or are considering possible solutions to the problems identified. Among these cases, 17 drivers were summonsed by Police.

During the quarter, the relevant government departments and public transport operators took on board 11 suggestions made by the public to enhance public transport services and improve traffic conditions. A summary of the cases is in the Appendix.

Members of the public may make their suggestions or complaints to the TCU by dialling the hotline 2889 9999 (voice mail service is available outside office hours), by fax to 2577 1858, by email to [info@tcu.gov.hk](mailto:info@tcu.gov.hk) or by filling in a form on the TCU website ([www.tcu.gov.hk](http://www.tcu.gov.hk)).

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## **TAC briefed on coping measures of railway system under extreme weather conditions**

The following is issued on behalf of the Transport Advisory Committee:

The Transport Advisory Committee (TAC) was briefed today (March 27) by the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) on the coping measures of the railway system under extreme weather conditions.

Climate change has brought along more frequent extreme weather events, posing challenges to the city and the operation of its infrastructure. It is

necessary for the railway, as a major infrastructure facility, to have a comprehensive climate resilience strategy. The MTRCL has put in place comprehensive preparedness and contingency measures for extreme weather conditions to ensure the safety of passengers, staff and the railway system.

In light of the experience gained from the severe flooding caused by heavy rainstorm in early September 2023 and the strike of Typhoon Koinu in early October 2023, the MTRCL has reviewed its contingency measures and will implement a series of enhancement measures before the rainy season this year, with a view to further strengthening its capability to cope with extreme weather, minimising the inconvenience brought to passengers and, most importantly, ensuring the safety of passengers and the railway.

The TAC Chairman, Professor Stephen Cheung, said, "Members concurred that extreme weather events are indeed a major risk to the city. As a heavily patronised public transport network, the railway must have its resilience to cope with climate change strengthened to ensure the safety of passengers. Members appreciated the effort made by the MTRCL in this regard, especially the exploration of innovation and technology to enhance preparedness of staff and the system to confront emergencies. They also hope that the MTRCL will closely monitor the effectiveness of the measures and continue to review various contingency arrangements."

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## **10th batch of Child Development Fund projects opens for applications**

The Social Welfare Department (SWD) is accepting applications from primary schools and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for operating the 10th batch of Child Development Fund (CDF) projects from today (March 27). The CDF projects aim at providing children from disadvantaged backgrounds with more personal development opportunities, thereby reducing intergenerational poverty.

Upon the completion of the overall review of the CDF Programme by the SWD in late 2023, a series of enhancement measures will be implemented, including positioning the target participants at Primary Three to Primary Six students so that underprivileged children could benefit from the CDF Programme at the early stage of development. Participating children may use the funds of the targeted savings programme at the 13th month of the Programme at the earliest for implementation of personal development plans under the supervision of NGO/school operators and their mentors. In addition, to provide greater flexibility for NGOs/schools in implementing the projects, NGO/school applicants may apply for a three-year project or two consecutive three-year projects under the "one-plus-one-approach". The threshold of the target number of participants for each project has also been relaxed to the

effect that the minimum number of participants is lowered to 25 while the maximum is 100 for all. Around 2 500 and 500 places will be provided for the 10th batch of the NGO-led and school-based projects respectively.

Details of the CDF enhancement measures have been uploaded to the CDF website ([www.cdf.gov.hk](http://www.cdf.gov.hk)). Application forms and guidelines are available on the SWD website ([www.swd.gov.hk/en/whatsnew](http://www.swd.gov.hk/en/whatsnew)). An online briefing session will be held at 2.30pm on April 16 (Tuesday) for primary schools and NGOs interested in operating the projects. All the duly signed designated application forms, together with the required document(s) should be submitted via email ([scdf@swd.gov.hk](mailto:scdf@swd.gov.hk)) or by hand (Room 942, 9/F, Wu Chung House, 213 Queen's Road East, Wan Chai, Hong Kong), on or before 5pm on May 21 (Tuesday). Application by post will not be accepted. After the vetting of applications, awarded NGOs/schools may recruit participating children around late July and commence the programmes and activities from the fourth quarter of this year.

Founded in 2008, the CDF is a tripartite, cross-sector collaboration among the community and family, the business sector and the Government, aiming at supporting longer-term development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Through the three key components, namely the personal development plan, mentorship programme and targeted savings, participating children may develop savings habits, good characters and positive values, etc from an early age. So far, 200 CDF projects in nine batches operated by NGOs as well as 112 school-based projects in nine batches operated by schools have been rolled out, benefiting over 26 000 children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

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