

LCQ18: Extension of retirement age

Following is a question by the Hon Lee Chun-keung and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (May 28):

Question:

To address the challenges arising from an ageing population and a shrinking workforce, the Government has raised the retirement age for civil servants in the civilian and disciplined services grades who were newly recruited on or after June 1, 2015, to 65 and 60 respectively. On the other hand, according to information from the Census and Statistics Department, the proportion of elderly persons aged 65 and over will increase from 20.5 per cent in 2021 to 36 per cent in 2046, meaning that by then, one in every three Hong Kong people will be aged 65 or over. Regarding the extension of retirement age, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that the Mainland has, since January 1 this year, been gradually extending the statutory retirement age for male employees from 60 to 63 and for female employees from the original 50 and 55 to 55 and 58 respectively, whether the Government will follow such practice and further extend the retirement age for civil servants; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether It has conducted a survey to identify which occupations in Hong Kong currently have a mandatory retirement age, and what the relevant requirements are; whether it has compiled statistics on the average retirement age of employees in these occupations over the past five years, as well as the number of serving employees and how many of them are expected to retire within the next five years;

(3) whether it has plans to encourage government-funded and private organisations to extend retirement age, so as to address the challenges posed by an ageing population and sustain Hong Kong's competitiveness; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) what measures the Government currently has in place to promote the employment of mature persons, so as to encourage them to delay retirement and remain active in the workforce?

Reply:

President,

To address the challenges brought by changes in the population structure, the Government needs comprehensive planning across various policy areas. Various policy bureaux will monitor changes in the local demography and manpower situation in different industries, review and enhance relevant policies and initiatives under their respective charge in a timely manner, and collaborate with stakeholders in various sectors and industries, in order

to meet Hong Kong's economic and social development needs.

On the Member's question, in consultation with the Civil Service Bureau (CSB), the Security Bureau (SB), the Transport and Logistics Bureau (TLB), the Education Bureau (EDB) and the Health Bureau (HHB), I reply on behalf of the Government as follows:

(1) According to the CSB, the Government has raised the retirement age of new recruits of the civil service to 65 for civilian grades and 60 for disciplined services grades respectively since June 2015. Under the existing measures for extending the service of civil servants (including the Post-retirement Service Contract Scheme, final extension of service and the mechanism for further employment beyond retirement age), if the Government requires the experience or service of specific officers for various reasons, these officers can extend their service up to five years. In other words, civilian staff can stay in the service up to the age of 70 while disciplined services staff up to the age of 65. These arrangements have already provided departments with sufficient flexibility to meet their manpower and operational needs and retain experienced civil servants beyond their retirement age.

(2) Apart from the retirement age of civil servants, some industries at present also regulate the retirement age of their relevant practitioners.

Under the Security and Guarding Services Ordinance (Cap. 460), there are four categories (A, B, C and D) of Security Personnel Permits (SPP). Category B SPP covers a wide range of security services. Its holders may perform guarding work in respect of any persons, premises or properties. Category C SPP is required for performing guarding work which requires the carrying of arms and ammunition. Taking into consideration the requirements of these two types of guarding work in respect of the practitioners' physical ability and alertness as well as their social importance, the upper age limits for Categories B and C SPP are set at 70 and 60 respectively. Statistics of the holders of these two categories of SPP provided by the SB are at Annex 1.

Those who have exceeded the upper age limits of Categories B and C SPP may apply for Category A SPP. There is no upper age limit for Category A SPP, holders of which may perform guarding work for "single private residential buildings".

To ensure the navigational safety of non-local vessels within the waters of Hong Kong, the Pilotage Ordinance (Cap. 84) stipulates that all vessels of 3 000 gross tonnage or over and some other specified vessels, while navigating in the waters of Hong Kong, shall be under the pilotage of a licensed pilot. It also stipulates that a licensed pilot who is about to attain the age of 65 years or who has attained the age of 65 years but has not attained the age of 68 years and who possesses satisfactory physical and mental fitness and eyesight as assessed by a medical examination may apply for permission to work as a pilot beyond the age of 65 for any period not exceeding one year until the age of 68. According to the TLB, in the past five years, 26 pilots retired at an average retirement age of 66. In the coming five years, 30 pilots are expected to retire.

Under the Education Ordinance (Cap. 279), a teacher or principal of an aided school shall normally not continue to be employed if he/she has attained the age of 60 years or more before the commencement of the school year. Nevertheless, the Permanent Secretary for Education may issue to the Incorporated Management Committee or School Management Committee of the aided school concerned permission to continue to employ the teacher or principal aged 60 or above for a period of not more than one school year. The maximum aggregate period for which permission may be issued shall be five consecutive school years. The Education Ordinance has already provided flexibility for Incorporated Management Committee or School Management Committee of aided schools to apply for extension of services for teachers and principals. Relevant statistics provided by the EDB on teachers of public sector secondary and primary schools are at Annex 2.

(3) Subvented organisations formulate their own human resources policies and management measures, including terms of employment and retirement policies of their staff members, taking into consideration such factors as resources, overall manpower situation, as well as actual and operational needs. In response to the manpower development needs of their respective sectors or subvented organisations, bureaux/departments may, having regard to the circumstances, encourage subvented organisations under their charge to suitably adjust the retirement policies.

For instance, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) provides subventions and subsidies to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for operating welfare services, and enters into agreements with the NGOs concerned. Subject to their compliance with the service agreement and relevant statutory requirements, NGOs may employ suitable personnel to provide relevant services based on their actual operational needs and human resources policies. The SWD does not stipulate the retirement age, qualifications or conditions for appointment, etc, of the employees of service operators.

Concerning schools, the EDB has long been closely monitoring the manpower situation of teachers in public sector schools with timely and appropriate measures taken to ensure the quality of education and smooth operation of schools. Among them, teachers and principals within the establishment of government schools are civil servants. The retirement age of civil servants who are appointed on or after June 1, 2015 has been raised to 65. Besides, some of the civil servants appointed on or after June 1, 2000 but before June 1, 2015 have opted to retire at the age of 65 in accordance with the relevant procedures. As for teachers in aided schools, the EDB has reviewed the relevant policies and regulations regarding their retirement age, including considering extension of the retirement age for newly-joined teachers in aided schools from 60 to 65. Since the demand for teachers involves many uncertain factors such as changes in the school-aged population and socio-economic development, the EDB needs to consider the long-term teacher manpower needs involved in the relevant policies and latest social conditions, as well as to balance multiple factors. If an incumbent teacher or principal in an aided school is about to retire but the school cannot locate a replacement after making every reasonable effort, it may apply to the EDB for extension of service of the staff concerned beyond retirement age

according to the existing mechanism.

Regarding healthcare, according to the HHB, the Hospital Authority (HA) may formulate appropriate human resources policies taking into account its actual operational needs. In view of the ageing population and shrinking workforce, and with reference to the Government's retirement policy, the HA has raised the retirement age to 65 for new recruits commencing employment on or after June 1, 2015 so as to address the manpower needs in the longer term. For employees who joined the HA before June 1, 2015, the HA has implemented the Policy of Extending Employment Beyond Retirement (EER) to retain suitable retirees/retiring staff to continue to work in the HA after retirement, in order to facilitate succession arrangements and alleviate manpower shortage. Under the EER policy, the HA will engage the retiring staff early and ascertain their intent for further employment through an appropriate screening mechanism. The policy provides flexibility for retirees to choose the start time and duration of further employment up to the age of 65. Retirees may also consider other employment options such as part-time employment or locum employment according to their own retirement plans.

In accordance with the agreement with the HHB and relevant legislation, the Prince Philip Dental Hospital (PPDH) is responsible for the provision of facilities for the training of dentists and other persons in professions supplementary to dentistry. The PPDH may devise its human resources policy according to its operational needs.

For private organisations, the Labour Department (LD) implements diversified publicity activities to promote employers' adoption of employee-oriented good human resources management and elderly-friendly employment practices, such as extending the working age of employees, to facilitate elderly employees to continue working if they so wish.

(4) The Government is committed to encouraging and promoting the employment of older persons through provision of employment services, training and promotion.

On employment services, the LD launched the three-year Re-employment Allowance Pilot Scheme (REA Scheme) on July 15 last year to encourage persons aged 40 or above not having been in paid work for three consecutive months or more to re-join the labour market. The REA Scheme covers full-time jobs, part-time jobs and qualified "casual work" to facilitate flexible employment of older and middle-aged persons. During the implementation period of the REA Scheme, each eligible participant who has worked full-time for 12 months continuously can receive a re-employment allowance (REA) of \$20,000. Half-rate REA will be given to those who have worked part-time. REA is not counted as income under the means test for the Old Age Living Allowance. The response to the REA Scheme is very favourable. Up to April 2025, the REA Scheme has recorded over 40 000 participants and 18 000 placements. Of these, about 23 per cent of participants and 24 per cent of those employed were persons aged 60 or above.

In tandem with the REA Scheme, the LD implements the Employment Programme for the Elderly and Middle-aged (EPEM) to encourage employers to

hire persons aged 40 or above and provide them with on-the-job training (OJT). Employers engaging each job seeker aged 60 or above who has left the workforce can receive a maximum OJT allowance of \$5,000 per month for six to 12 months, while those engaging each unemployed job seeker aged 40 to 59 are entitled to a maximum OJT allowance of \$4,000 per month for three to six months. The Government welcomes employers taking on participants of the REA Scheme to join EPEM.

On training, the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) provides around 700 market-oriented training courses straddling across 28 industries and generic skills for eligible persons including older persons. The ERB also provides training courses which gear towards the employment needs of older persons aged 50 or above to encourage the potential workforce to enter the labour market. Apart from general training courses, the ERB has launched the Post-50 Internship Programme for older persons aged 50 or above to facilitate their understanding of the current employment market situation. Under the "Hire and Train" Scheme, the ERB encourages participating employers to provide suitable job vacancies for trainees (including persons who have recently retired), adjust the working hours and leave arrangements to cater for trainees' family and personal situations, and provide on-the-job training and other related support measures so as to encourage the potential workforce to enter the labour market.

In light of the directive of the Working Group on Promoting Silver Economy to unleash "silver productivity", the ERB implements priority training consultation service and will launch more dedicated training courses to address the needs of industries with keen manpower demand. The LD will double the number of job fairs suitable for the elderly and middle-aged this year, and enhance promotion of elderly-friendly employment practices. The Labour and Welfare Bureau will review the REA Scheme and the EPEM to further explore measures to encourage employment of people aged 60 or above.

LCQ21: Arts and cultural activities and mega events

Following is a question by the Hon Stanley Ng and a written reply by the Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Miss Rosanna Law, in the Legislative Council today (May 28):

Question:

There are views that arts and cultural activities serve as an essential vehicle for value transmission. In recent years, the Government has invested a great deal of resources in relevant projects, and the Mega Arts and Cultural Events Fund (Mega ACE Fund) has, since its establishment, supported 21 mega arts and cultural events, with a total approved funding of about \$230

million. The Chief Executive has pointed out in the 2023 Policy Address that the Government endeavours to build mainstream values characterised by patriotism with affection for our country and Hong Kong and in conformity with the principle of the "one country, two systems" (the mainstream values). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) how the various departments under the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau (CSTB) guarantee that the various types of arts and cultural projects being supported are in line with the gatekeeping efforts to uphold the mainstream values;

(2) of the mechanisms or clear guidelines the Government have put in place for vetting and approving arts and cultural activities and mega events to ensure that they will not go against the mainstream values throughout the process from planning to implementation; and

(3) of the number of government-subsidised arts and cultural projects associated with the promotion of the mainstream values, as well as the percentage share and effectiveness of such projects, and set out the relevant information by project in a table?

Reply:

President,

My consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Stanley Ng is as follows:

As announced by the Chief Executive under the chapter of Patriotic Education in the 2023 Policy Address, the Government endeavours to build mainstream values characterised by patriotism with affection for our country and Hong Kong and in conformity with the principle of the "one country, two systems".

Regarding mega arts and cultural events, the CSTB has been promoting Chinese history and culture to the public to foster their appreciation of Chinese culture, to deepen their understanding of our country, as well as to enhance their sense of national identity through multiple channels. In terms of organisational structure, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department established the Chinese Culture Promotion Office in April last year, with a view to taking forward related work in a more focused and strategic manner.

In the Blueprint for Arts and Culture and Creative Industries Development promulgated in November last year, the first strategic direction that we put forward is to promote profound traditional Chinese culture and develop cultural contents with Hong Kong character. Under this strategic direction, the CSTB and its departments stay firmly rooted in mainstream values when handling various works related to arts and culture, including the assessment of all applications of the Mega ACE Fund. We will also monitor the operation of the approved projects to ensure the events take place in the manner that the interests of our country and the general public would be safeguarded.

Regarding the promotion of profound traditional Chinese culture, the Mega ACE Fund has approved around \$74.36 million to support six events in relation to the promotion of Chinese culture since its establishment. Details are as follows:

	Title of Event (by event date)	Approved Funding Amount (\$)	Event Date	Attendance
1	"Madame Song: Pioneering Art and Fashion in China"	8,000,000	July 29, 2023 to April 14, 2024	163 141
2.	INK ASIA 2023	13,672,155.7	October 4-8, 2023	32 889 (the fair) 829 633 (other side programmes)
3.	A Path to Glory – Jin Yong's Centennial Memorial The World of Wuxia	15,000,000	March 15 to October 31, 2024	214 841
4.	Chinese Kungfu x Dance Carnival	14,686,070	July 9-14, 2024	34 300
5.	ART021 Hong Kong Contemporary Art Fair	15,000,000	August 28 to September 8, 2024	111 622
6.	The Forbidden City and The Palace of Versailles: China-France Cultural Encounters in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries	8,000,000**	December 18, 2024 to May 4, 2025	109 661@

@ Actual number of participants to be finalised upon the submission of audited report by the organiser

** Actual grant amount to be finalised upon the submission of audited report by the grantee after the event

The six events attracted a total attendance of around 1.5 million and were well received, allowing a large number of public and tourists to understand and learn the profound traditional Chinese culture through the events.

No. 3 alarm fire in Tin Shui Wai (2)

A fire broke out at a warehouse in Ha Tsuen, Tin Shui Wai at 12.40pm yesterday (May 27) and was upgraded to No. 3 alarm at 1.33pm. The fire was surrounded at 6.12am today (May 28), put under control at 8.28am and largely put out at 10am.

Firemen used eight jets and mobilised seven breathing apparatus teams to fight the blaze. About 50 persons were self-evacuated to places of safety.

Two persons felt unwell and were sent to Tuen Mun Hospital and Tin Shui Wai Hospital for treatment respectively.

EDB announces arrangements for fifth round of Basic Law and National Security Law Test in 2024/25 school year

The Education Bureau (EDB) today (May 28) announced that the fifth round of the Basic Law and National Security Law Test (BLNST) in the 2024/25 school year will be open for application from 9am on May 30 to 5pm on June 12. The test will be held on July 19 (Saturday).

The target participants for the fifth round of the test are persons with a bachelor's degree or those who will attain a bachelor's degree in the 2024/25 or 2025/26 academic year and are planning to join or change to another secondary school, primary school or kindergarten to take up a teaching post. Applications can be made through the EDB's online application system (www.edb.gov.hk/en/blnst). Limited places for the test will be available on a first-come, first-served basis. Those who have already obtained a pass result in the BLNST organised by the EDB, the Civil Service Bureau or recruiting departments/grades for degree holders will not be accepted to sit the test again.

Starting from the 2023/24 school year, all newly appointed teachers in public sector schools, Direct Subsidy Scheme schools and kindergartens joining the Kindergarten Education Scheme (including newly joined teachers and teachers changing schools) are required to pass the BLNST in order to be considered for an appointment. The requirement applies to all ranks of the

teacher grade including principals.

Details about the test are available on the EDB webpage (www.edb.gov.hk/en/blnst).

LCQ9: Quota-free Scheme for Hong Kong Private Cars Travelling to Guangdong via Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge

Following is a question by the Hon Michael Tien and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Ms Mable Chan, in the Legislative Council today (May 28):

Question:

It is learnt that during the morning session on the first day of the long Easter holidays in April this year (i.e. April 18), the traffic flow to the Mainland through the "Quota-free Scheme for Hong Kong Private Cars Travelling to Guangdong via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB)" ("Northbound Travel for Hong Kong Vehicles" Scheme) caused serious congestion at HZMB Hong Kong and Zhuhai Ports, with some members of the public travelling from Admiralty taking four hours to arrive at Zhuhai. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of bookings for departure on April 18 this year made under the "Northbound Travel for Hong Kong Vehicles" Scheme, and the number of vehicles that actually made such trips, together with a breakdown by time slots; and

(2) whether it has rigorously checked if all vehicles travelling to the Mainland under the "Northbound Travel for Hong Kong Vehicles" Scheme have completed their bookings or made their trips according to the time slots they have booked; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

"Northbound Travel for Hong Kong Vehicles" (the Scheme) allows eligible Hong Kong private cars to travel between Hong Kong and Guangdong via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) without the need to obtain regular quotas. It facilitates Hong Kong residents' self-driving to Guangdong for business, visiting families or sightseeing on a short-term basis, thereby further making good use of the HZMB and promoting the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. Since the implementation of the Scheme in

July 2023, it has been well received by Hong Kong citizens.

Having consulted the Security Bureau, the Transport Department (TD) and relevant Mainland and Macao authorities, our reply to various parts of the Hon Michael Tien's question is as follows:

(1) To ensure smooth traffic of the HZMB and to implement the Scheme in an orderly manner, the governments of Guangdong and Hong Kong agreed that applicants are required to reserve the specified date and time via the booking system for travelling of vehicles via the HZMB to Zhuhai Port.

On April 18, 2025 (i.e. first day of the Easter holiday), the number of travel booking under the Scheme was some 6 900, of which about 5 000 bookings were in the daytime (i.e. 6am to 6pm). Among the some 6 900 bookings, some 6 500 actually travelled on that day; of which over 80 per cent (some 5 700) travelled according to the reserved time slot.

In addition to vehicles under the Scheme, other eligible vehicles are allowed to use the HZMB at the time concerned in the question. Taking private car as an example, eligible vehicles include vehicles travelled under Regular Quota for Guangdong-Hong Kong Private Cars, Regular Quota for Hong Kong-Macao Private Cars and HZMB Macao Port Park-and-Ride Scheme.

(2) As stipulated in the terms and conditions of application for the Scheme, if vehicles are found violating the travel arrangement (including travelling without a reservation or beyond the specified time), relevant authorities of the governments of Guangdong and Hong Kong may refuse to allow the relevant vehicles to travel to Guangdong via the HZMB, and may suspend their eligibility for making another reservation or even revoke the relevant licences issued to them. At present, the TD transmits the travel booking information under the Scheme to the law enforcement departments of the Hong Kong Port on a regular basis with a view to facilitating the daily work at the HZMB Hong Kong Port of the departments. The TD has also been maintaining close liaison with the relevant Mainland authorities and conducting random checks on the vehicle crossing records of the Scheme from time to time to review the compliance situation with the terms and conditions of the Scheme. The governments of Guangdong and Hong Kong will continue to maintain close liaison to adjust and refine various arrangements of the Scheme as required in a timely manner.