

LCQ1: Attracting innovation and technology talents

Following is a question by the Hon Martin Liao (Hon Chan Kin-por to ask on his behalf) and a reply by the Secretary for Innovation and Technology, Mr Nicholas W Yang, in the Legislative Council today (October 30):

Question:

In recent years, the Government has been committed to developing Hong Kong into an international innovation and technology (I&T) hub, as well as continuously enhancing policies on and measures for attracting talents outside Hong Kong to come here for work, with a view to maintaining Hong Kong's edges amid the keen international competition for talents. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that the Government has, since last year, provided through the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme immigration facilitation to eligible persons under the Talent List of Hong Kong, and launched the Technology Talent Admission Scheme, of the respective numbers of applications from I&T talents for working in Hong Kong received, approved and rejected by the Government so far under these two initiatives; in respect of the approved cases, of the number of talents who are currently in Hong Kong and those who will come to Hong Kong within this year, the nationalities and places of origin of the persons concerned, as well as the time taken to vet and approve such cases; whether it has evaluated the effectiveness of such initiatives, including if the number of talents who have been granted entry approval as well as their expertise and qualifications meet the expectations;

(2) given that authorities of overseas places and nearby municipalities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (Greater Bay Area) adjust from time to time their policies on and strategies for attracting outside talents, whether the Government has grasped and assessed the latest situation, reviewed and enhanced the talent admission arrangements of Hong Kong correspondingly, and introduced new schemes or measures to attract I&T talents, with a view to strengthening Hong Kong's competitiveness in this regard; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) of the Government's short and medium term targets on attracting the various types of I&T talents from outside Hong Kong; given that the I&T development in Hong Kong is one of the integral parts in developing the Greater Bay Area into an international I&T hub, how the Government ensures that Hong Kong and other municipalities in the Greater Bay Area will complement, and will not compete viciously with, one another in attracting I&T talents?

Reply:

President,

Talent is the key to success for innovation and technology (I&T) development. The Government has been attracting, nurturing and retaining I&T talent, with a view to expanding the I&T talent pool of Hong Kong.

Having consulted relevant bureaux and department, the reply to the three parts of the question is as follows:

(1) According to the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB), the Talent List was launched in August 2018, and immigration facilitation has been provided for applicants under the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme (QMAS) involving professions covered by the Talent List. According to the information provided by the Immigration Department (ImmD), as at end September 2019, a total of 30 applications met the eligibility criteria of the professions of "Data scientists and cyber security specialists", "Innovation and technology experts" and "Fintech professionals" under the Talent List, and were awarded 30 bonus points under the General Points Test. Amongst them, 25 have been allotted quotas while the remaining five are being processed. Applicants allotted with quotas were from the Mainland, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom.

Upon receiving the required information and documents, the ImmD will normally be able to complete preliminary processing of the applications within two weeks, before submitting to the Advisory Committee on Admission of Quality Migrants and Professionals (the Advisory Committee) for further assessment. The Advisory Committee will conduct the selection exercise for quota allocation to applicants quarterly, and recommend to the Director of Immigration how best to allocate available quotas. Results of each selection exercise will be published on the ImmD website within 15 working days after quota allocation.

The relevant measure of the Talent List has just been implemented for a year. The Government will monitor the implementation to ensure it can keep up with Hong Kong's latest economic development and need for different talent.

On the other hand, the Innovation and Technology Commission (ITC) launched the Technology Talent Admission Scheme (TechTAS) in June 2018, which provides a fast-track route for admitting overseas and Mainland technology talent to undertake research and development (R&D) work in Hong Kong. TechTAS is a three-year pilot scheme.

As at end September 2019, ITC has received 291 quota applications and all of them have been approved. The ImmD has received 99 relevant working visa or entry permit applications. Amongst them, 86 have been approved, nine have been withdrawn by the applicant and four are under processing. Talent with visas or entry permits approved came from the Mainland, Taiwan, the United States, South Korea, Malaysia, etc.

On average, ITC will approve quotas within three working days upon receipt of all necessary information and documents, while ImmD will need two

weeks to process the relevant visa or entry permit applications.

To further support technology development in Hong Kong, we will extend the applicable technology areas of TechTAS from seven to 13 and the coverage to all companies undertaking R&D activities in these 13 areas in Hong Kong. We will also extend the quota validity period from six to 12 months.

(2) The world is competing intensely for technology talent. Neighbouring regions such as Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (Greater Bay Area) cities, Taiwan, Singapore, Japan, etc, have launched proactive measures to attract talent, such as providing cash subsidy for foreign talent, providing talent apartment, relaxing restrictions on job selection, expediting processing of immigration and residency procedures, extending periods of stay, as well as relaxing the residence requirements of dependants, etc.

In Hong Kong, apart from QMAS and TechTAS mentioned in part (1) of the reply, the Government has in place other immigration schemes to meet the needs of different professionals. Professionals may apply to work in Hong Kong through the General Employment Policy applicable to overseas, Taiwan and Macao residents and the Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals applicable to Mainland residents. Non-local graduates may apply to stay or return to work in Hong Kong through the Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates. Persons who are the second generation of emigrated Chinese Hong Kong permanent residents from overseas may apply to return to Hong Kong for development through the Admission Scheme for the Second Generation of Chinese Hong Kong Permanent Residents.

The Government will continue to review the effectiveness of different talent attraction measures and admission schemes and enhance the talent admission regime as appropriate, with a view to further attracting talent and professionals to come to Hong Kong for development and thereby enriching Hong Kong's talent pool.

(3) Hong Kong is in keen demand for I&T talent. According to LWB's Manpower Projection to 2027 released in May 2019, the overall manpower requirements of Hong Kong is projected to increase at an average annual rate of 0.3 per cent during the period of 2017 to 2027. The manpower requirements of the I&T sector are projected to grow the fastest among all sectors, at an average annual rate of 4.3 per cent. Our goal is to fulfill the long-term needs of the industry on I&T talent.

Technology talent is undoubtedly hard to come by, but sourcing it is by no means a zero-sum game. In terms of I&T development, Hong Kong has complementary strengths with other Greater Bay Area cities and is in need of different types of talent. Hong Kong has tremendous strength in scientific research, world-class universities, the advantage of being internationalised, a robust rule of law and intellectual property rights protection systems, and so forth. We are capable of attracting top global R&D talent. Meanwhile, other cities in the Greater Bay Area have a massive market, as well as the capability of research results commercialisation and advanced manufacturing that would require plenty of technical talent in advanced manufacturing. We

believe every Greater Bay Area city will take appropriate measures to attract the needed talent, in accordance with their different development needs.