

LCQ10: Enhancing Top Talent Pass Scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Shang Hailong and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (April 2):

Question:

The Chief Executive announced in the 2024 Policy Address that the initial visa validity period for high-income talents under the Top Talent Pass Scheme (i.e. Category A talents under the Scheme) would be extended from two years to three years (the new measure). However, quite a number of Category A talents have relayed to me that they are doubtful about the application process for extending the validity period, and consider that there is room for improvement in the process. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the specific process for Category A talents to apply for extension of the initial visa validity period to three years under the new measure; whether clear announcements have been made on the relevant application process to facilitate submission of applications by Category A talents;

(2) whether it has plans to enhance the process mentioned in (1), e.g. whether consideration will be given to exempt current visa holders who are Category A talents from submitting applications for extension of stay, or implement the initiative of "one-click application" on the Internet to automatically extend the visa validity period to three years; if so, of the specific details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether the Government has considered, in approving Category A talents' applications for extension of stay, granting approval for both the extension of visa validity period normally granted and the extension of an additional one-year under the new measure at the same time (e.g. applicants who meet the requirements will be granted not only extension of visa period for three years under normal circumstances, but also an additional one-year visa period in the light of the new measure, adding up to a total of four years); if so, of the specific details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

To alleviate the acute manpower shortage, the Government launched the new Top Talent Pass Scheme (TTPS) in end-2022, targeting high-income individuals and top-notch university bachelor's degree graduates, to trawl for outside quality talents to enrich the local talent pool. The eligibility and assessment criteria of the TTPS are concise and clear. Eligible talents

are not required to have secured offers of employment in Hong Kong before applying for visas through the TTPS to explore opportunities in Hong Kong. Yet, upon expiry of the first visas, they will have to be employed or have established/joined in business in Hong Kong so that extension of stay can be granted.

An applicant under Category A of the TTPS is required to have an annual income reaching HK\$2.5 million or above in the year immediately preceding the date of application. Since the launch of the TTPS, up to end-February this year, close to 99 000 applicants have been approved, of which over 25 000 are under Category A, accounting for about one-quarter of the total.

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

The 2024 Policy Address announced the reform of various aspects of the talent admission regime, including extending the validity period of the first visas of high-income talents under the TTPS from two years to three years. For Category A applicants with approvals given from the day of announcement (i.e. October 16, 2024), the validity period of their first visas has been extended from two years to three years to facilitate their planning to move to Hong Kong with their families.

The new measure also applies to around 21 000 Category A applicants whose applications were approved before the announcement in the 2024 Policy Address. As announced by the Government through a press release and media briefing on November 1, 2024, these previously approved talents may apply to the ImmD, within three months before the expiry of their limit of stay, for unconditional extension of stay for one year. If they have secured offers of employment, or have established or joined in a business in Hong Kong upon applying for an extension, they may be granted an extension of stay for up to three years after submitting relevant proof. The pattern of their limit of stay is in line with the prevailing arrangement of granting extension of stay of up to three years under most of the talent admission schemes. We have no plan to change it.

The ImmD, before granting an extension of stay, has to ensure the relevant person's compliance with the normal immigration requirements, including holding a valid travel document for return to his/her country of residence or citizenship. Hence, Category A applicants are required to submit applications to the ImmD for extension of stay. Applicants only need to submit their applications through the platform on the ImmD's website, providing basic information and uploading valid travel documents. The procedures are very simple and convenient.