

LCQ11: Academic staff members of universities funded by University Grants Committee

Following is a question by Professor the Hon Chow Man-kong and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (June 11):

Question:

Regarding the academic staff members of universities funded by the University Grants Committee, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows the numbers of newly-joined academic staff members (including but not limited to (i) senior academic staff, (ii) junior academic staff, (iii) academic supporting staff, (iv) administrative, technical and other staff, and (v) technical research staff) of the eight universities funded by the University Grants Committee (the eight universities) in each of the past three academic years, as well as their respective percentages in the academic staff members of the respective ranks, together with a breakdown by (A) university, (B) academic programme/department (including but not limited to (I) Medicine, Dentistry and Health, (II) Sciences and (III) Education and Continuing Education), and (C) background of relevant academic staff members (i.e. (a) holders of Hong Kong Permanent Identity Cards, and (b) holders of visas granted by the Immigration Department under the Top Talent Pass Scheme, General Employment Policy and Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates, etc);

(2) whether it knows the numbers of academic staff members of the eight universities who left the service (including but not limited to those mentioned in (i) to (v) in (1)) in each of the past three academic years, as well as their respective percentages in the academic staff members of the respective ranks, together with a breakdown by (A) to (C) mentioned in (1));

(3) regarding the departure situation mentioned in (2), whether it knows the reasons for departure of the academic staff members of the eight universities in each of the past three academic years (e.g. retirement, transfer to another local university, change of profession and other reasons), and whether it has analysed their departure trends, together with a breakdown by university; and

(4) as there are views that as the United States (US) has further tightened its visa policy on non-US academics as well as research and development (R&D) personnel, and the relevant countries in the European Union have also introduced measures one after another to "trawl talent", whether the authorities will introduce stronger and more effective measures to attract such people to engage in R&D work in Hong Kong, so as to develop Hong Kong into an international hub for high-calibre talent; if so, of the details; if

not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Our reply to Professor the Hon Chow Man-kong's question is as follows:

Hong Kong's overall competitiveness in education ranks among the top five in the world, and our post-secondary education is highly internationalised and diversified. To date, five University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded universities have been ranked among the top 100 in the world, six are ranked among the top 50 in Asia, a number of them have been ranked among the top universities in the world's most international universities ranking, and they have excellent research talent, which make them attractive to students and scholars from all over the world. The universities are recruiting globally following their institutional development strategies and their teaching and research needs, so as to continuously enhance their global competitiveness. Under the leadership of the Committee on Education, Technology and Talents led by the Chief Secretary for Administration, the Government will continue to promote Hong Kong as an international hub for high-calibre talent, co-ordinate and drive the integrated development of education, technology and talent, expand connections, formulate policies to attract and cultivate talent, and foster the co-ordinated development of technologies, so as to strengthen Hong Kong's position as an international post-secondary education hub and an international innovation and technology centre.

Over the past years, with the Government's increased investment in higher education and the introduction of various support measures, the staff number in academic departments of the UGC-funded universities has increased by 4.5 per cent from 13 548 in the 2021/22 academic year (AY) to 14 161 in the 2023/24 AY, with an increase of 8.5 per cent in the number of senior and junior academic staff from 4 974 to 5 398. The number of leaving academic staff has also dropped from 399 to 378. Overall, Hong Kong's higher education institutions are proactively pursuing the goal of capacity expansion and quality enhancement, and have achieved certain success in recruiting and retaining talent.

The actual numbers of staff in the academic departments of universities by staff grade, university and departmental cost centre group are at Annex I. The numbers of senior/junior academic staff joining and leaving are at Annex II and Annex III respectively. We do not have a breakdown of the number of intake and departure of academic supporting staff, administrative, technical, and other staff and technical research staff, as well as a breakdown of the background of the staff or the reasons for departure, such as retirement, completion of contract, transfer to other local universities, etc.

In the light of the changes in the global higher education landscape, the Education Bureau (EDB) has promptly called on all universities in Hong Kong to introduce facilitation measures for affected students and scholars with a view to safeguarding their legitimate rights and interests, while

attracting top talent in accordance with their diversified admissions and talent policies. The EDB is pleased to see that local universities are responding proactively and closely monitoring the situation, fully utilising the Government's facilitation initiatives that support the capacity expansion and quality enhancement of post-secondary institutions in Hong Kong.

We will continue to keep a close eye on the development and accordingly consider support measures for them in a holistic approach so as to give full play to Hong Kong's role as an international post-secondary education hub. Apart from the recruitment measures of the institutions, the Government attracts more top talent to pursue their studies in Hong Kong through a range of initiatives, including doubling the cap on non-local students in publicly funded post-secondary institutions to 40 per cent, increasing scholarship quotas, and gradually increasing the number of places under the Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme. We remain committed to pursuing various policies and initiatives, fostering networks and partnerships at the national, regional, and international levels, and will continue to work collaboratively with stakeholders to promote the "Study in Hong Kong" brand. These efforts align with the national strategies to invigorate the country through science and education, cultivate high-calibre talent, and advance innovation and development, thereby contributing to meeting the needs of our nation.