

LCQ11: Application fee and visa fee for talent admission schemes

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Lo Wai-kwok and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (June 18):

Question:

The Financial Secretary announced in the 2025-2026 Budget that an application fee of \$600 would be charged for various talent and capital investment admission schemes. The visa fee for approved applications would also increase based on the length of limit of stay of the visa/entry permit, rising from the original flat rate of \$230 to \$600 (not more than 180 days) or \$1,300 (181 days or more). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of persons charged a visa fee of \$230 by the Immigration Department for visa applications under various talent admission schemes over the past three years, with a breakdown by length of stay of the visa/entry permit (i.e. seven days or less, eight days to one month, two months to six months, and over six months);

(2) whether it has estimated the respective numbers of persons who will pay \$600 and \$1,300 visa/entry permit issuance fees each year under the new fee structure, as well as the corresponding total amount of application and visa fees received by the Government accordingly; if it has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) as there are views that the new visa fee (with a limit of stay of not more than 180 days) together with the application fee, has actually increased from \$230 to \$1,200, which will greatly impact those coming to Hong Kong for short-term work (e.g. musicians coming to Hong Kong to compose and perform music for Cantonese opera performances for one to two days), and it is not conducive to the implementation of the policy objectives on culture and tourism, such as the integrated development of culture and tourism in the Greater Bay Area, whether the authorities will consider waiving the relevant visa fees for persons coming to Hong Kong for short-term employment; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The various admission schemes for talents and capital investors (specified admission schemes) have been well received since their introduction or enhancement. In respect of talent admission schemes, the number of applications for first entry has grown from around 58 000 in 2022 to more than 221 000 in 2023 and around 208 000 in 2024, representing an

increase of more than 250 per cent compared with 2022. Processing such applications involve substantial administrative resources. With reference to the fees charged for similar applications in overseas jurisdictions, the Government decided to, with effect from the day of the announcement of the 2025-26 Budget, introduce an application fee of \$600 for each of the applications under the specified admission schemes for entry, change of conditions of stay or extension of limit of stay (including principal and dependant applications); and the visa/entry permit fees for approved applications will be increased, based on the length of the limit of stay, from the original rate of \$230 to \$600 (with a limit of stay of 180 days or below) or \$1,300 (with a limit of stay of 181 days or more) to peg to their costs and reflect the "user pays" principle.

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

(1) and (3) At present, among the seven talent admission schemes, the validity period of the first approved visas/entry permits under the Top Talent Pass Scheme, the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme, the Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates, the Admission Scheme for the Second Generation of Chinese Hong Kong Permanent Residents, and the Technology Talent Admission Scheme is generally 24 months or above. For the employment-tied General Employment Policy (GEP) and the Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals (ASMP), the validity period of the applicants' approved visas/entry permits is generally determined by the validity period of their employment contracts, ranging from one day to 36 months.

In 2022-23, about 160 000 applications of different types under the various talent admission schemes were approved by the ImmD; and about 300 000 applications were approved in both 2023-24 and 2024-25. The ImmD does not maintain the other statistical breakdowns referred to in the question. However, based on the experience from day-to-day processing, more than half of the approved applications under the GEP and the ASMP are related to short-term/one-off project-based employment, e.g. for conference and performance, with a limit of stay of 180 days or below. Taking into account the relevant circumstances, the Government introduced two tiers of visa/entry permit issuance fee, which is set at \$600 for visa granted with a limit of stay of not more than 180 days, and \$1,300 for those with a limit of stay of 181 days or more. We consider that the fee levels are modest, and have balanced various considerations including the "user pays" principle and the impact on the applicants concerned. They are affordable to talent and capital investors targeted by the admission schemes. The numbers of applications and visas/entry permits issued under the specified admission schemes in the past few months are comparable to those in the same period last year, indicating that the new fee structure has not affected Hong Kong's attractiveness to outside talent.

(2) In considering the new fee structure, the Government, based on the relevant statistics from early 2023 to end August 2024, estimated that the annual caseload for the three financial years from 2025-26 to 2028-29 would be about 400 000 applications of different types under the specified admission schemes; approximately 340 000 visas/entry permits would be issued

for a limit of stay of 181 days or more, while around 26 000 will be issued for a limit of stay of not more than 180 days. On this basis, the estimated annual revenue in the next three financial years arising from the new fee structure is around \$700 million, comprising about \$250 million of application fees and about \$450 million of visa/entry permit issuance fees.