

LCQ12: Mainlanders studying in Hong Kong

Following is a question by the Hon Cheung Kwok-kwan and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (December 4):

Question:

Recently, a wave of demonstrations and violence has swept through a number of universities in Hong Kong, with the more serious cases being that the campuses of The Chinese University of Hong Kong and The Hong Kong Polytechnic University were once occupied by rioters for several days, and turned into arsenals and battlefields. It is learnt that owing to worries about personal safety, quite a number of university students from the Mainland have been evacuated from the campuses with the assistance of the universities concerned and the Police and have returned to the Mainland. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows the respective numbers of Mainlanders studying in the various (i) universities, (ii) other tertiary institutions, (iii) secondary schools and (iv) primary schools in Hong Kong in the current academic/school year (set out in a table);

(2) whether it knows the number of cases, since June this year, in which the Mainlanders studying in Hong Kong dropped out and returned to the Mainland; whether it has estimated the final number of such cases in the current academic/school year;

(3) of the number of requests for assistance received since June this year by the Government from the Mainlanders studying in Hong Kong;

(4) of the immediate measures put in place by the Police and the Education Bureau to safeguard the personal safety of the Mainlanders studying in Hong Kong, as well as the support provided by the authorities concerned to them when they are unable to return to the campuses to attend classes or to stay at the dormitories; and

(5) of the impacts of this wave of dropouts among the Mainlanders on the education system of Hong Kong; the measures in place to alleviate such impacts, including persuading them to stay and study in Hong Kong, as well as restoring the confidence of those who have returned to the Mainland in the law and order of Hong Kong with a view to attracting them to return to Hong Kong to continue their studies?

Reply:

President,

Recently, some universities have been damaged or even occupied by masked protesters. Some even made and used weapons on campus, leaving university campuses in a devastated state and causing multiple injuries. A number of universities were thus forced to end the regular classes of this semester early. Violence is never a solution to problems; it only intensifies conflicts, deviates from the approach of resolving problems through rational analysis, and even causes casualties, infrastructural damage, and property loss. All people should express their views in a lawful, peaceful, and rational manner and seek consensus through dialogue.

As the university campuses have been subjected to various degrees of extensive damage, the universities concerned need time to assess the damage before restoration works begin. The violent incidents have caused the universities trauma and loss in various aspects. Apart from hardware facilities such as school buildings, the universities have lost valuable time for teaching and research, and even talent, which may even affect their international reputation. We hope that the education sector can, as soon as possible, restore calmness and gradually rebuild order and make arrangements for teaching and research work. The Education Bureau (EDB) will provide appropriate assistance and support, having regard to the needs and actual circumstances of various universities.

Our reply to the Hon Cheung's question is as follows:

(1) The respective numbers of Mainland students studying in primary schools, secondary schools, and post-secondary institutions in Hong Kong are tabulated as follows:

Category of Schools/Institutions	Number of Mainland Students
Primary	950
Secondary	1 349
Post-secondary	38 087

Notes:

(1) The figures of primary and secondary schools include non-local Chinese students i.e. students with Chinese nationality (including those from Mainland China, Macao, and Taiwan) studying in Direct Subsidy Scheme schools, international schools and private independent schools. These figures refer to the position as at mid-September 2018. The information obtained from the Student Enrolment Survey for the 2019/20 school year is being collated and is not available for the time being.

(2) The figures of post-secondary institutions, which include Mainland students and exchange students on full-time programmes, are provisional figures for the 2019/20 academic year.

(2) The EDB does not maintain statistics on the number of Mainland students studying in Hong Kong who have dropped out and returned to the Mainland. It

should be noted that the decision to terminate one's studies is a matter of personal choice. The common reasons for such termination include taking up employment, family reasons, health reasons, changing schools/institutions, financial difficulties, and academic performance. The EDB will not speculate on the number of such cases.

(3) During the period from June 1 to November 22, 2019, the EDB did not receive any requests for assistance from Mainland students, whereas the Police states that they do not have the relevant statistical data.

(4) At the beginning of the current academic year, the EDB contacted the top echelons of the local universities and asked them to keep a close eye on the potential problem of non-local students or students with different political stances being bullied on campus, take timely measures to prevent bullying, and promote respect for different views.

In response to the violent incidents that took place at several universities in November, the universities have either cancelled all face-to-face classes since mid-November or ended the current semester early. Online teaching or other teaching resources have been used instead so that students need not return to the campus to attend classes. We are aware that some non-local students have left Hong Kong after the suspension of classes. As for those who remain in Hong Kong, appropriate support has been provided by the universities to those in need, for example, the setting up of designated units to arrange temporary accommodation for them in hostels outside the campus, the provision of 24-hour counselling support, and emergency loans. Peace has now been restored initially on campus, and individual universities have enhanced on-campus security arrangements, for example, by hiring additional security staff members and implementing access management, having regard to their actual needs. The universities will restore the campus facilities as soon as possible so as to provide a safe learning environment for all students and staff members.

The laws of Hong Kong apply to all places in the territory and nowhere is above the law. University campuses are not a safe haven for criminals, and offenders shall bear their criminal liabilities. The Police have the statutory duty to maintain public safety and public order, and must take appropriate actions to maintain law and order and safeguard public peace when situations severely threatening public order and public safety occur. The universities need to co-operate with the Police in carrying out their duties in accordance with the law and dealing with illegal activities taking place on campus, so as to ensure the safety of the campuses as well as the teachers and students. The EDB will also stay in touch with the universities and provide them with appropriate assistance. In addition, the EDB and institutions have all along been calling upon students to stay away from scenes of confrontation to avoid injury.

The Government will make every effort to ensure the personal safety of members of the public (including non-local students studying in Hong Kong). If necessary, the universities should assist students in seeking assistance from law enforcement agencies.

(5) Attracting outstanding non-local students to study in Hong Kong to further internationalise the local higher education sector and broaden the global outlook of local students is of paramount importance to Hong Kong's future development.

The actual impact of demonstrations and violent incidents on non-local students' desire to pursue their studies or exchange programmes in Hong Kong in the future is yet to be further observed. In fact, the universities in Hong Kong have built a solid academic foundation and enjoyed a good international reputation after years of development. Therefore, in the long run, when calmness is gradually restored on campus, Hong Kong's higher education will still appeal to non-local students. The Government will closely monitor the situation and in due course explore ways to further assist universities in enhancing their internationalisation. Meanwhile, the University Grants Committee (UGC) will continue to implement the Funding Scheme for Enhancement of Internationalisation and Student Learning Experience in the 2019-22 Triennium under which additional resources will be provided to support the universities in providing a better learning experience for non-local students pursuing relevant programmes and fostering student integration. Our universities will continue to facilitate multi-cultural student integration and exchange through various measures and support services, such as orientation and familiarisation programmes, language enhancement programmes, student needs surveys, cultural exchange activities, social activities and gatherings, adjustment support, advice and counselling services, community services, mentoring and peer support schemes as well as academic and career advice.

The Chairmen of the Councils of the eight UGC-funded universities issued a joint statement on October 20, pointing out that universities should cherish a diversity of views and promote rational discussion, rather than being drawn into supporting any particular political position. The statement also stressed that any form of violent conduct, vulgar language or disrespectful behaviour has no place on university campuses, or indeed anywhere. It is a primary duty of all university stakeholders to respect university property. Defacing and damaging property is a criminal act which cannot be tolerated. The EDB considers that universities should act in accordance with the principles set out in the statement. University staff members and students should comply with university regulations and those who violate the regulations should be handled in accordance with the standing mechanisms of universities. If a criminal case occurs in a university, it should be referred to the law enforcement agencies for handling. In handling the incident at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the Police took a peaceful and flexible approach in resolving the standoff to restore the order and peace of the university campus. At the level of society as a whole, the Police will continue to stand fast at their posts, perform their duties faithfully and act according to the law, with a view to restoring Hong Kong's public order and the confidence of all individuals (including foreigners working and studying in Hong Kong) on the law and order of Hong Kong, so that Hong Kong will continue to be one of the safest and most stable cities in the world. We believe that so long as society and the universities return to

harmony, order, rationality and inclusiveness, the confidence of various sectors of the community and students from around the world in our higher education sector can be restored.