

LCQ16: Attracting talents to come to Hong Kong

Following is a question by the Hon Starry Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (September 8):

According to Hong Kong Labour Force Projections for 2017 to 2066, the labour force in Hong Kong will reach a plateau at 3.68 million in 2022 and then decrease to 3.51 million in 2031. On the other hand, in order to meet the needs of the economy and cater for sustainable development, the Government has implemented in recent years a number of schemes for importing labour and talents: the General Employment Policy, the Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals, 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. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of applications received and approved under the aforesaid schemes in each of the past five years; whether it has evaluated the effectiveness of the various schemes on promoting local economic and social development; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices (Overseas and Mainland) and other Offices of the Government on the Mainland will step up efforts in promoting the aforesaid schemes to the local residents, so as to attract more talents to come to Hong Kong; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will comprehensively review the relevant arrangements of the aforesaid schemes and make improvements, e.g. streamlining the procedures for applying for and renewal of visas, shortening the time taken for vetting and approval of applications, and relaxing the limit of stay, so as to attract more talents to come to Hong Kong; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Human capital is an important driving force for enhancing Hong Kong's competitiveness and promoting economic development. Against the backdrop of an ageing population and a declining labour force, Hong Kong needs sufficient quality talents for meeting the needs of a knowledge-based economy and diversified development of industries, as well as seizing the tremendous opportunities brought about by the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the National 14th Five-Year Plan and the Belt and

Road Initiative, etc.

To support our long-term economic development, the Government will continue to nurture local talents and adopt an open and proactive talent attraction policy, while upholding priority employment of the local workforce.

Having consulted the Human Resources Planning and Poverty Co-ordination Unit under the Chief Secretary for Administration's Private Office, the Labour and Welfare Bureau, the Immigration Department (ImmD) and other relevant bureaux and departments, my consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Starry Lee is as follows:

(1) The Government has been striving to attract talents, professionals and entrepreneurs from around the world to develop their careers in Hong Kong through various talent admission schemes in order to enhance Hong Kong's international competitiveness and reinforce our role as Asia's World City. The Government also reviews the arrangements and effectiveness of these schemes from time to time, with a view to enlarging Hong Kong's talent pool continuously. To attract talents to Hong Kong, we welcome them to bring along their family members in accordance with the dependant visa policy.

The relevant statistics on applications for admission to Hong Kong under various talent admission schemes/policies in the past five years (Note 1) are tabulated as follows:

Immigration scheme/policy		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 (January to July)
General Employment Policy (GEP) (Note 2)	Number of applications	42 680	44 963	45 288	17 688	7 539
	Number of applications approved	39 952	41 592	41 289	14 617	6 471
	Number of applications refused	1 114	921	1 147	910	436

Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals (ASMP) (Note 3)	Number of applications	13 998	15 623	16 413	9 026	6 395
	Number of applications approved	12 381	13 768	14 053	6 995	5 354
	Number of applications refused	373	249	365	415	247
Quality Migrant Admission Scheme (QMAS) (Note 4)	Number of applications	1 932	3 314	5 896	3 966	2 489
	Number of applications approved	411	555	874	1 709	906
	Number of applications refused	585	985	1861	2 482	3 190
Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates (IANG) (Note 5)	Number of applications	9 420	10 254	10 992	7 644	3 941
	Number of applications approved	9 331	10 150	10 799	7 154	3 541
	Number of applications refused	0	0	1	13	16
Admission Scheme for the Second Generation of Chinese Hong Kong Permanent Residents (ASSG) (Note 6)	Number of applications	133	125	94	68	46
	Number of applications approved	80	71	55	37	25
	Number of applications refused	0	0	0	1	2

Technology Talent Admission Scheme (TechTAS) (Note 7)	Number of applications	Not applicable	29	84	131	38
	Number of applications approved		24	75	116	36
	Number of applications refused		0	0	0	0

Note 1: The cases approved or refused in a year may not be the applications submitted in the same year.

Note 2: The GEP is applicable to persons (other than Chinese residents of the Mainland) who wish to enter Hong Kong for employment as professionals.

Note 3: The ASMTF is applicable to Chinese residents of the Mainland who wish to enter Hong Kong for employment.

Note 4: The QMAS seeks to attract highly skilled or talented persons to settle in Hong Kong. The annual quota of the QMAS was 1 000 from 2017 to 2019, and has been increased to 2 000 since 2020. The figures on applications approved denote the number of quotas allotted.

Note 5: The IANG aims to attract qualified non-local graduates to stay/return and work in Hong Kong.

Note 6: The ASSG aims to attract the second generation of emigrated Chinese Hong Kong permanent residents from overseas to return to work in Hong Kong.

Note 7: The TechTAS was launched in June 2018. It provides a fast-track arrangement for admitting overseas and Mainland technology talents to conduct research and development (R&D) work in Hong Kong. Eligible companies may apply for a quota with the Innovation and Technology Commission. The application figures denote applications for employment visa/entry permit for eligible persons from companies with quotas allotted made to the ImmD.

(2) Talent attraction is one of the major initiatives announced in the Chief Executive's 2020 Policy Address. The Government has been stepping up efforts in promoting the various talent admission schemes through the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices (ETOs) and InvestHK's offices overseas and on the Mainland to attract talents around the world to come to Hong Kong for career development. In support of the relevant policy, the ETOs have been actively promoting the schemes through different means and channels, including meetings, online platforms, social media and electronic communications to attract talents from all sectors to Hong Kong. The ETOs have also been promoting the schemes by hosting or participating in different events, such as business seminars for promoting Hong Kong's advantages and encouraging talents to come to Hong Kong and organising seminars at universities to introduce the employment opportunities in Hong Kong to students and graduates.

InvestHK has also been actively working with relevant bureaux, the ImmD, the ETOs, the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation, Hong Kong Cyberport Management Company Limited, foreign chambers of commerce and human

resources specialists to showcase to global talents the opportunities in Hong Kong and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area by organising different kinds of global promotion events (including webinars) and through social media and other digital promotion platforms. To further promote the advantages of Hong Kong and different talent admission schemes, InvestHK has rolled out a range of promotional initiatives, including a thematic website on talent attraction (www.liveworkhongkong.gov.hk), flyers, presentation decks and promotional videos. Arrangements have also been made for overseas and Mainland talents working in Hong Kong to share their stories at different events for reference by those interested in coming to Hong Kong for career development.

In March this year, the ImmD, the ETOs and InvestHK's overseas and Mainland offices jointly launched an Announcement in the Public Interest (API) entitled "Compose Your Own Future" to promote the various talent admission schemes. The ImmD has broadcast the API in different multimedia promotional channels on the Mainland and overseas targeting at non-local talents to attract them to consider Hong Kong for career development. As at July 2021, the API has accumulated nearly 25 million impressions.

The Government will continue the relevant promotion efforts to attract high-quality talents required for Hong Kong's future economic development.

(3) In the past few years, the Government has implemented an array of new measures to attract non-local talents. These measures include the following:

(i) The Government launched the TechTAS in June 2018 to provide a fast-track arrangement for admitting overseas and Mainland technology talents to conduct R&D work in Hong Kong, thereby facilitating talent attraction by the innovation and technology sector. Since January 2020, TechTAS has extended its coverage from the tenants and incubatees of the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation and Hong Kong Cyberport Management Company Limited to all companies conducting R&D activities in specified technology areas in Hong Kong. The specified technology areas have also been increased from seven to 13;

(ii) In August 2018, the Government promulgated the Talent List where applicants who meet the requirements will be awarded bonus points under the General Points Test of the QMAS after assessment, so as to attract quality talents from around the world in a more effective and focused manner to support Hong Kong's development as a high value-added and diversified economy. The Government is now reviewing the Talent List to better reflect the latest trends in the employment market; and

(iii) Since 2020, the Government has increased the annual quota of the QMAS from 1 000 to 2 000 with a view to further enlarging Hong Kong's talent pool.

At present, talents and professionals admitted to Hong Kong will normally be granted a stay of two years upon entry, and the pattern of their subsequent extension of stay will be "3+3" years. For top-tier entrants having been permitted to work or stay in Hong Kong for not less than two

years and having an assessable income for salaries tax of HK\$2 million or above in the previous year of tax assessment, a 6-year extension of stay may be granted upon application for extension. Separately, entrants admitted through the Achievement-based Points Test under the QMAS may normally be granted a stay of eight years upon entry. Regarding the processing time, the ImmD will critically examine whether the applicants meet the eligibility criteria while striving to enhance its services. For the GEP and ASMP, the ImmD pledges to have 90 per cent of the applications finalised within four weeks upon receipt of all necessary documents. In 2020 and from January to July 2021, over 99 per cent of the relevant applications were finalised within the said time frame, well exceeding the target set in the performance pledge.

In addition, the ImmD plans to streamline all visa application processes at the end of this year to further enhance service efficiency. Among others, the ImmD will start issuing e-Visas for applications for entry visas and extension of stay. By then, visa applicants may complete the whole process of submission of applications, payment and collection of visas online or via the ImmD mobile app, without having to visit the ImmD's offices, thereby saving time and effort. The ImmD will implement the arrangement in phases and publicise relevant information in a timely manner.

The Government will review its talent attraction measures and admission schemes from time to time, and will continue to strike a proper balance between maintaining immigration control and facilitating the entry and retention of talents.