

LCQ16: HKSAR Government Scholarship Fund

Following is a question by the Hon Lai Tung-kwok and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (May 28):

Question:

The Government established the HKSAR Government Scholarship Fund (GSF) in 2008 to provide scholarships to students every year on an ongoing basis with investment returns. Since the 2016-2017 academic year, the Education Bureau (EDB) has established the Belt and Road (B&R) Scholarship under the Targeted Scholarship Scheme of GSF to encourage students from countries/regions along B&R to pursue post-secondary education in Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that in its press release issued on the 24th of last month, the EDB changed the name that has been used for many years for the Targeted Scholarship Scheme, one of the five types of scholarships and awards under GSF, to the Belt and Road Scholarship, whether the Targeted Scholarship Scheme has been officially renamed as the Belt and Road Scholarship or replaced by it; if so, of the details and reasons for that;

(2) of the respective principal, surplus, investment income and expenditure of GSF in each of the past five academic years;

(3) of the following information in respect of the scholarships under the Targeted Scholarship Scheme other than the B&R Scholarship for each of the past five academic years: (i) the maximum number of places, (ii) the number of awardees (set out by participating institutions and awardees' places of origin), and (iii) the total amount of scholarships awarded;

(4) given that there are three categories of B&R Scholarship, namely B&R Scholarship (Designated Countries), B&R Scholarship (Other Countries) and B&R Scholarship (Research Postgraduate), of the following information on the three scholarships for each of the past five academic years: (i) the maximum number of places, (ii) the number of awardees (set out by participating institutions and awardees' places of origin), and (iii) the total amount of scholarships awarded;

(5) as it is learnt that the EDB indicated a few years ago that it did not maintain statistics on the respective numbers of B&R Scholarship awardees who had, upon completion of their studies, stayed in Hong Kong for advancing their studies, taking up employment or starting businesses, whether the authorities have maintained the relevant statistics thereafter to monitor the effectiveness of such scholarship; if not, how the authorities review the effectiveness of the scholarship; and

(6) whether the authorities have plans to introduce other measures or scholarships to attract more overseas students to come to Hong Kong to study; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

To promote the development of Hong Kong into an international post-secondary education hub and to actively nurture local talents and attract talents from outside Hong Kong, the Government has introduced a basket of measures, including the establishment of the HKSAR Government Scholarship Fund (the Fund) in 2008 to, through scholarships, encourage more outstanding local students to pursue their studies in Hong Kong and to attract more outstanding non-local students to study in Hong Kong. The Legislative Council approved five subsequent injections into the Fund to provide more types of scholarships and scholarship places. My reply to the question raised by the Hon Lai Tung-kwok is as follows:

(1) and (3) To strengthen collaboration in education with Belt and Road (B&R) countries, since the 2016/17 academic year, the Government has offered B&R Scholarship under the Targeted Scholarship Scheme (in addition to the Targeted Scholarship) to students from designated countries, i.e. Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, along the B&R regions. To attract more outstanding non-local students to study in Hong Kong, since the 2019/20 academic year, the annual quota of the B&R Scholarship has been substantially increased from 30 to 80, and has been expanded into three categories, i.e. B&R Scholarship (Designated Countries); B&R Scholarship (Other Countries); and B&R Scholarship (Research Postgraduate), to cover all regions, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries and Korea, along the B&R.

Since the 2019/20 academic year, the Targeted Scholarship has ceased to be offered and has been covered by the B&R Scholarship. Therefore, in the past five academic years, other than the B&R Scholarship awardees, there were no new Targeted Scholarship awardees.

(2) The principal, balance, investment income and expenditure of the Fund from the 2019/20 academic year to the 2023/24 academic year are set out below:

Academic year	Principal (\$ million)	Opening balance (\$ million)	Income (\$ million)	Expenditure (\$ million)	Closing balance (\$ million)
2019/20	3,070	3,248	239	108	3,379
2020/21	3,070	3,379	397	105	3,671
2021/22	3,070	3,671	-327	121	3,223
2022/23	3,070	3,223	167	140	3,250

2023/24	4,070	3,250	1,358*	147	4,461
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*including a new injection of \$1 billion.

(4) For the B&R Scholarship, the number of awardees and the total amount of scholarships awarded in the past five academic years (from 2020/21 to 2024/25) are set out in the table below:

	Academic year				
	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Number of awardees	88	99	100	100	150
Total amount of scholarships awarded (\$ million)	23.8	29.6	34.5	39.2	53.3#

#The figure for the 2024/25 academic year has yet to be audited and confirmed.

The distribution of scholarship places and the distribution by participating institution and place of origin of awardees under the three categories of the B&R Scholarship, namely the B&R Scholarship (Designated Countries), the B&R Scholarship (Other Countries) and the B&R Scholarship (Research Postgraduate), are set out at Annex 1.

(5) When applying, the awardees generally indicated an intention to work, start a business or pursue further studies in Hong Kong upon completion of their studies. However, the Education Bureau (EDB) does not maintain statistics on B&R Scholarship awardees staying in Hong Kong for development after graduation.

Since its launch in the 2016/17 academic year, the B&R Scholarship has been well received by outstanding students from countries and regions along the B&R and participating local universities. In the five academic years from 2020/21 to 2024/25, we received over 1 000 nominations from 66 B&R countries (including the six designated countries of the B&R Scholarship), covering Central Asia, South and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Europe, Africa, North America and South America. Since the 2024/25 academic year, the Government has increased the scholarship places per annum from 100 to 150. The average utilisation rate of the yearly quota in the past five years was over 97 per cent, and all places were fully utilised in the past three academic years. Thus far, over 680 students from 49 B&R countries have been awarded scholarships totalling about \$210 million. Details are set out at Annex 2.

The Government and institutions have implemented various measures to encourage non-local students, including the B&R Scholarship awardees, to stay in Hong Kong for development after graduation:

(i) Measures to facilitate development in Hong Kong

The Government introduced the Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates in 2008, which was further relaxed in 2022 with an extension of the limit of stay from 12 months to 24 months, so that non-local students could apply to stay in Hong Kong to seek development opportunities upon graduation. Moreover, since November 2023, the Government has temporarily exempted full-time non-local postgraduate students from the restrictions on taking up part-time jobs, and the exemption has been extended to cover non-local undergraduate students since November 2024, with a view to enhancing their experience and understanding of working in Hong Kong, and increasing their incentive to stay in Hong Kong for development after graduation.

(ii) Employment support

Local post-secondary institutions have been encouraging non-local students to stay in Hong Kong for development upon graduation through different channels, which include their faculties and student affairs offices providing information related to further studies and employment as well as diversified support services, such as employment and internship opportunities, recruitment seminars, and career counselling and consultation services.

(iii) Exchange network

The EDB has organised an exchange session on further studies in Hong Kong for new awardees each year starting from the 2024/25 academic year to help them learn about different opportunities in Hong Kong and establish a platform for them to support each other. It is also hoped that through the sharing of experience by awardees who have graduated and stayed in Hong Kong for development, new awardees will be encouraged to consider staying in Hong Kong for development upon graduation. Furthermore, the Government and institutions, from time to time, invite awardees to join exchange activities, such as the B&R Summit, to tell the good stories of Hong Kong.

The B&R Scholarship is remarkably effective in attracting students from the B&R countries to study in Hong Kong. It is also instrumental in enhancing the city's internationalisation and campus diversification, as well as facilitating Hong Kong's development into an international post-secondary education hub. Students staying in Hong Kong for development after graduation can enrich our city's talent pool. In addition, these awardees usually maintain close ties with Hong Kong after graduation, and even become ambassadors to promote Hong Kong and foster connections with the city. Even though they may not stay in Hong Kong for long-term development, they can establish a valuable worldwide network that enhances Hong Kong's global status and influence. These connections can promote collaboration in different areas (including business, technology and academics), thus reinforcing Hong Kong's advantage of being closely connected to the world.

The Government will continue to review the effectiveness of various measures, and introduce as necessary new measures or enhance the existing ones to attract non-local graduates to stay in Hong Kong for development.

(6) As the Government injected \$1 billion into the Fund in the previous

financial year to substantially increase the annual quota of the B&R Scholarship by 50 per cent to 150 starting from the 2024/25 academic year, the Government has for the time being no plans to further adjust the scholarship places or introduce other scholarship schemes. Nevertheless, the Government is also taking the following measures to attract more non-local students to study in Hong Kong:

(i) Enhancing publicity

Hong Kong has sound education infrastructure and its competitiveness is among the global top five. Our post-secondary education sector is highly internationalised and diversified, with five universities ranked among the world's top 100. The Government is establishing the "Study in Hong Kong" brand in collaboration with local post-secondary institutions by, among others, striving to host international education conferences and exhibitions, encouraging local post-secondary institutions to enhance collaboration and exchange with their counterparts around the world in promoting the "Study in Hong Kong" brand on a global scale, and attracting more non-local students, especially those from ASEAN and other B&R countries, to study in Hong Kong through scholarships and other incentives. The University Grants Committee (UGC) has been providing funding for universities to bolster their efforts in enhancing internationalisation and strengthening engagement with the Mainland. The UGC has provided a funding of \$20.47 million in the 2022-25 triennium for the Heads of Universities Committee's Standing Committee on Internationalisation (HUCOMSCI) comprising all eight UGC-funded universities to participate in and organise various overseas activities, and has set aside around \$10 million to support the HUCOMSCI in launching a brand new project to promote Hong Kong's higher education to the B&R countries, which includes the formulation of publicity and promotion strategies as well as the production of publicity materials and videos. The HUCOMSCI has commenced the work, and has commissioned a consultant to formulate the publicity and promotion strategy and conduct a market survey. The Government's overseas Economic and Trade Offices as well as relevant organisations from Hong Kong also participate in the publicity work from time to time.

(ii) Enhancing educational collaboration

To date, the EDB has signed 10 memoranda with countries along the B&R to strengthen educational ties and exchanges with these countries, while actively promoting the B&R Scholarship.

(iii) Complementary policies and support

The Government encourages and supports the post-secondary institutions' efforts to enhance campus facilities and provide social and personal support to facilitate student integration, so as to enable non-local students to have an enriched, fulfilling and enjoyable experience when studying in Hong Kong; to provide information and support related to further studies and employment for non-local students, so as to enhance their incentive to stay in Hong Kong for development after graduation; and to promote Hong Kong to the B&R countries.