

LCQ18: Manpower of Lifeguards

Following is a question by the Hon Luk Chung-hung and a written reply by the Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Miss Rosanna Law, in the Legislative Council today (May 14):

Question:

There are views pointing out that the problems of insufficient manpower and recruitment difficulties of lifeguards in Hong Kong have remained unresolved for many years, which may lead to the chaotic situation of unlicensed lifeguards being employed, undermining the dignity of the industry's workforce and jeopardising the lives and safety of swimmers. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the current number of vacancies of civil service lifeguards; whether the Government has assessed the impact of the vacancy situation on the services to the public;

(2) whether it has studied if the Government has difficulties in recruiting lifeguards; if it has studied and the outcome is in the affirmative, of the support measures and proposals to resolve the problem;

(3) as some members of the industry have relayed that at present, civil service lifeguards have limited promotion prospects and their remuneration packages are inadequate, and their posts are only included in the Artisan grade, but they have to obtain a number of certificates and regularly renew their licenses in order to be employed on a continuous basis, which has resulted in a high wastage rate and stifled the development of the industry, whether the Government will further review and adjust the grade structure of civil service lifeguards, thereby retaining talents and attracting new blood to join the industry;

(4) of the respective numbers of (a) surprise and (b) non-surprise (i) inspections of private swimming pools conducted by the relevant government departments in the past three years, and the respective numbers of non-compliance cases found during such inspections in which (ii) there was insufficient manpower on duty at the swimming pools, and (iii) unqualified lifeguards were employed and on duty (set out in the table below); the actions taken by the Government to pursue such non-compliance cases;

Year	(a)			(b)		
	(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(i)	(ii)	(iii)
2022						
2023						
2024						

(5) as it has been reported that the Food and Environmental Hygiene

Department (FEHD) will check the identity documents and Pool Lifeguard Awards (PLA) of the lifeguards on duty during inspections of private swimming pools and verify the validity of PLA with the Hong Kong China Life Saving Society (HKCLSS), of the specific procedures adopted by the FEHD for verifying the validity of the PLAs with the HKCLSS, including whether the FEHD has established a formal and regular liaison mechanism with the HKCLSS; if so, of the details; if not, whether it will consider establishing such mechanism; and

(6) as it has been reported that the HKCLSS intends to introduce an online service for checking the qualifications of lifeguards, whether the Government will collaborate with the HKCLSS to establish a checking system for qualified lifeguards, so as to rigorously combat unlicensed lifeguards and, at the same time, facilitate employers in checking the qualifications of the lifeguards they employ?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with relevant policy bureaux and government departments, the consolidated reply to the questions raised by the Hon Luk Chung-hung is as follows:

(1) The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) is responsible for managing 46 public swimming pools, 42 gazetted beaches (Note 1) and five water sports centres. As at May 1, 2025, a total of 1 308 civil service lifeguards were employed by the LCSD. The number of vacancies was 188 (Note 2) .

During the swimming season every year (i.e. April to October), the LCSD needs to employ about 700 seasonal lifeguards. However, with increasing market demand for lifeguards due to the growing number of local private swimming pools in recent years, it has become more challenging for the LCSD to recruit seasonal lifeguards, which inevitably affects the provision of services at aquatic venues. The LCSD has all along flexibly deployed its serving lifeguards and other resources with a view to maintaining the services provided at aquatic venues as far as possible. The LCSD will arrange sufficient lifeguards to be on duty at aquatic venues that are open and deploy additional manpower when necessary, such as calling off-duty lifeguards to report for duty or arranging lifeguards to work overtime where practicable. Having regard to the usage of swimming pools and habits of swimmers, the LCSD will also temporarily close facilities with low usage rates during sessions with fewer attendees to optimise the use of manpower resources.

(2) The LCSD proactively puts in place various measures to increase and stabilise the manpower supply of lifeguards, including improving the remuneration package of seasonal lifeguards, enhancing the flexibility of recruitment procedures and exploring the recruitment of more eligible persons to join lifesaving services, etc.

The LCSD has recruited 110 full-year lifeguards on a two-year contract since 2023, and further employed 70 additional full-year lifeguards on a two-year contract in 2024 and 2025 respectively. Such relatively long contract period is conducive to stabilising the manpower supply of lifeguards. The LCSD has also taken into account market trends to further enhance the remuneration package of seasonal lifeguards, with monthly salary reaching as high as \$23,000 (excluding end-of-contract gratuity) to reduce the salary gap between lifeguards in the public and private sectors.

Furthermore, as contractors of outsourced services offer more flexibility on remuneration packages and working hours, which makes the recruitment arrangement more flexible and attractive, the LCSD has outsourced lifesaving and first aid services at six public swimming pools on a trial basis since September 2024. The relevant service contractor has been providing stable lifesaving and first aid services. The LCSD will continue to review and evaluate the effectiveness of outsourcing lifesaving and first aid services.

As for expanding the new labour markets, the LCSD will continue to step up its publicity efforts for recruitment exercises, including extensively displaying recruitment posters and disseminating recruitment information/advertisements to reach out to more target groups. The LCSD will also proactively liaise with youth services organisations and schools to promote and encourage young people to pursue a career in lifeguarding, as well as to raise their interests in working as seasonal lifeguards, with a view to increasing the manpower supply of lifeguards. Besides, the LCSD launched the "Combined Seasonal Lifeguard Training Scheme" in 2023 and has so far organised six "Integrated Certificates Courses on Life Saving" to attract more people with no lifesaving qualifications to join the profession. In addition, the LCSD has collaborated with the Employees Retraining Board to organise specific lifesaving training programmes and provide relevant job opportunities with a view to increasing the manpower supply of lifeguards.

(3) Under the prevailing policy of the Civil Service Bureau (CSB), when a specific civil service grade has proven and persistent recruitment and retention difficulties, or fundamental changes in the job nature, job complexity and responsibilities, the Government will consider conducting a grade structure review for the grade concerned. There have been no fundamental changes to the job nature, job complexity and responsibilities of civil service lifeguards. In the past three years, the average vacancy rate of civil service lifeguards was 5.28 per cent, which was lower than the rate of 9.38 per cent for the entire civil service in the same period. The LCSD will continue to monitor the situation with the CSB.

(4), (5) and (6) In the past three years, the number of surprised inspections conducted by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) on licensed swimming pools is provided below:

	Number of inspections	Number of cases of insufficient number of personnel on duty	Number of non-compliance cases involving employment of unqualified lifeguards
2022	8 845	0	0
2023	8 834	0	0
2024	12 828	4	0

As all inspections conducted by the FEHD on licensed swimming pools are surprise inspections, there is no record on non-surprise inspections.

For the four cases in 2024 in which sufficient number of qualified lifeguards was not made available in accordance with the law or licensing conditions, the FEHD had taken prosecution or issued warnings to the licensees depending on the actual situation.

The lifesaving qualifications required by lifeguards are assessed and awarded by the Hong Kong China Life Saving Society (HKCLSS) (Note 3). Starting from May 19, 2025, the FEHD will implement a number of measures to strengthen the monitoring of the qualifications of lifeguards at private swimming pools. These measures include stepping up inspections of swimming pools. Apart from checking the identity documents of lifeguards on duty and their Pool Lifeguard Awards (PLA) during each surprise inspection, the FEHD will also send all information of the PLA to the HKCLSS for verification. The FEHD and the HKCLSS have established a regular verification mechanism to handle the matter.

Note 1: Lifesaving services are not provided by the LCSD at three of the gazetted beaches as beach facilities such as beach buildings and shark prevention nets are not available there.

Note 2: With lifesaving and first aid services being outsourced at six public swimming pools under the LCSD on a trial basis since September 2024, the 98 civil service lifeguard vacancies in the venues concerned will not be filled for the time being.

Note 3: The HKCLSS is the only national sports association recognised by the International Life Saving Federation for assessing lifeguard qualifications and awarding lifeguard certificates in Hong Kong.