

LCQ19: Facilitating admission of high-calibre overseas students and scholars to Hong Kong

Following is a question by the Hon Tang Fei and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (June 18):

Question:

It has been reported that the United States (US) Government has recently barred Harvard University from enrolling international students. There are views that, due to political factors, it is expected that more top-tier institutions will face restrictions on international student recruitment in the future. This could lead to significant shifts in the global talent mobility within the higher education sector. As such, Hong Kong, as an international education hub, should seize the opportunity to actively attract and retain high-calibre international students and scholars, so as to consolidate its position as a regional hub for knowledge, innovation and technology. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether, in the face of the aforesaid abrupt change in overseas higher education policies, the Government has formulated a systematic plan to assist Hong Kong institutions in attracting high-calibre students affected by the turbulent international situation to pursue studies in Hong Kong, and to ensure that they can stay in Hong Kong for career development after graduation; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) how the University Grants Committee (UGC) will avoid resource misallocation and vicious competition in the course of promoting talent competition among the eight UGC-funded universities, and whether UGC will take the lead in establishing a unified platform to foster collaboration among institutions, so as to enhance their overall international competitiveness; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether, in the face of the China-US confrontation and competition, the Government will introduce specific policy measures to encourage Hong Kong's higher education institutions to capitalise on new opportunities arising from the shifting geopolitical landscape, with a view to further strengthening Hong Kong's position as an international education hub; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Hong Kong's overall competitiveness in education ranks among the top

five in the world, and our post-secondary education is highly internationalised and diversified. To date, five University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded universities have been ranked among the top 100 in the world, six are ranked among the top 50 in Asia, a number of them have been ranked among the top universities in the most international universities ranking, and they have excellent research talent, which make them attractive to students and scholars from all over the world. Under the leadership of the Committee on Education, Technology and Talents led by the Chief Secretary for Administration, the Government will continue to promote Hong Kong as an international hub for high-calibre talent, co-ordinate and drive the integrated development of education, technology and talent, expand connections, formulate policies to attract and cultivate talent, and foster the co-ordinated development of technologies, so as to strengthen Hong Kong's position as an international post-secondary education hub and an international innovation and technology centre.

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

(1) and (3) In the light of the changes in the global higher education landscape, the Education Bureau (EDB) has promptly called on all universities in Hong Kong to introduce facilitation measures for affected students and scholars with a view to safeguarding their legitimate rights and interests, while attracting top talent in accordance with their diversified admissions and talent policies. The EDB is pleased to see that local universities are responding proactively and closely monitoring the situation, fully utilising the Government's facilitation initiatives that support the capacity expansion and quality enhancement of post-secondary institutions in Hong Kong.

We will continue to keep a close eye on the development and accordingly consider support measures for them in a holistic approach so as to give full play to Hong Kong's role as an international post-secondary education hub. Apart from the recruitment measures of the institutions, the Government attracts more top talent to pursue their studies in Hong Kong through a range of initiatives, including doubling the cap on non-local students in publicly funded post-secondary institutions to 40 per cent, increasing scholarship quotas, and gradually increasing the number of places under the Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme. We remain committed to pursuing various policies and initiatives, fostering networks and partnerships at the national, regional, and international levels, and will continue to work collaboratively with stakeholders to promote the "Study in Hong Kong" brand. These efforts align with the national strategies to invigorate the country through science and education, cultivate high-calibre talent, and advance innovation and development, thereby contributing to meeting the needs of our country.

(2) The EDB and the UGC have been actively fostering collaboration among the eight UGC-funded universities, including supporting the jointly-established Heads of Universities Committee's Standing Committee on Internationalisation (HUCOMSCI) to promote the "Study in Hong Kong" brand around the world. We will continue to deepen institutional collaboration through the HUCOMSCI to attract more talent from around the world and accelerate the development of Hong Kong into an international post-secondary education hub.

Each of the eight UGC-funded universities has its own strengths and characteristics, and is making full use of the Government's facilitation policies and measures to bring their strengths into full play in recruiting and attracting more outstanding students and academics. With the Government increasing the non-local student quota for UGC-funded universities from 20 per cent to 40 per cent from the 2024/25 academic year onwards, the proportion of non-local students enrolled in UGC-funded undergraduate programmes has increased from about 19.9 per cent in 2023/24 academic year to 23.2 per cent. Universities will adopt the principle of meritocracy to attract more non-local students to study in Hong Kong. Non-local students will also make choices of further studies that suit their own strengths and interests.

As for academic staff, the UGC-funded universities have also been actively expanding capacity while enhancing quality by increasing the number of academic staff in the UGC-funded universities from 4 974 in the 2021/22 academic year to 5 398. The universities will continue to recruit top scholars from around the world through various measures to create a favourable environment for scientific research and contribute to the development of our country and Hong Kong.