

LCQ2: Development of private museums

Following is a question by the Hon Ma Fung-kwok and a reply by the Acting Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Mr Raistlin Lau, in the Legislative Council today (October 30):

Question:

In the National 14th Five-Year Plan, the country has expressed unequivocal support for developing Hong Kong into an East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange. It is learnt that while private museums are recognised as facilitating the preservation of arts and culture and are booming in many places across the globe, the development of private museums in Hong Kong has all along been constrained by the lack of suitable venues, high maintenance costs, as well as the lack of government support, accreditation, promotion and publicity, etc, some private museums have even ceased operations as a result. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it knows the number of private museums and their operating conditions in the past three years, including the ratio of fee-charging to free admission, attendances, the ratio of those on the promotion list of the Government or the relevant organisations, as well as the number of private museums facing operating difficulties; whether any applications to operate a private museum have been rejected;
- (2) among the existing private museums, of the number of those which have received support (including one-off or regular funding) from the Government or the relevant organisations; whether any requests for support by a museum have been rejected by the Government, and of the purpose for which support was requested; and
- (3) whether it has plans to introduce an accreditation scheme for private museums or extend the scope of application of the Museums Regulation to cover private museums and to centralise the promotion of local museums, so as to enrich the contents of Hong Kong's tourism in arts and culture, and facilitate the development of Hong Kong into an East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange?

Reply:

President,

Museums are an important part of cultural inheritance and dissemination. The Government has been committed to supporting the development of cultural software in Hong Kong through public museums. Currently, 15 museums and two art spaces are managed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) in accordance with the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Chapter 132), each with different focuses and themes, covering the three

major areas of art, history and science, bringing different cultural experiences to citizens and tourists. The LCSD continues to invest a lot of resources in improving the facilities and enriching the content of its museums. The renovation of the Hong Kong Museum of Art in recent years is an important example.

The current-term Government is committed to fostering cultural development with a view to developing Hong Kong into an East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange, and has announced that the number of museums under the LCSD will be further increased to continue to enrich Hong Kong's cultural landscape and bring new impetus to cultural development to meet the general public's demand for museums. From the cultural policy perspective, in addition to operating and developing public museums, the Government also welcomes the establishment of private museums by individuals or organisations to complement with public museums, which is conducive to the diversified development of the cultural ecology of Hong Kong. The LCSD museums have detailed plans from planning, construction to operation to achieve the Government's public policy mission, while private museums have higher development autonomy, fewer restrictions, and can also be operated in a more commercial manner. Therefore, when the Government considers supporting private museums and formulating related policies, it must take into account the overall resource allocation and evaluate relative priorities of projects to avoid unnecessary pressure on public funds. Having regard to the uniqueness on the history, theme, scale, operating mode, and financial situation of individual museums, the Government currently does not have plans to formulate a set of standard mechanisms to support the operation of private museums, however, if resources permit, we will consider providing different forms of support to the operation of individual private museums, based on the Government's policy objectives, expectations of society, and the actual situation of individual museums.

In consultation with relevant bureaux/departments, my reply to the question raised by the Hon Ma Fung-kwok is as follows:

(1) and (2) The Government does not maintain data on the number and operating conditions of private museums. As far as we know, there are dozens of private museums in Hong Kong, covering different themes such as culture, arts, history, folklore and education. Currently, the Hong Kong Maritime Museum (HKMM) is the only private museum subvented by the Government. It rents Central Pier No. 8 at nominal rent and receives Government subvention to support its operation. The HKMM recorded approximately 66 100, 52 800 and 106 200 visitors respectively in the last three financial years (i.e. April 1, 2021 to March 31, 2024), among which free visitors account for about 30 per cent, mainly school tour groups.

In addition to subvention, the Government welcomes organisations interested in operating museums to apply for subsidy for cultural, arts projects or activities, such as the Springboard Grants and the Project Grants under the Arts Capacity Development Funding Scheme managed by the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau (CSTB), the Project Grant and Matching Fund Scheme from Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC) and the Lord Wilson Heritage

Trust, to support the museum's operations or to organise events. For example, the HKADC provided funding to a private museum's training programme in 2023.

Non-government organisations and social enterprises, if interested in operating a private museum on vacant government land, can submit an application for "Use of Vacant Government Land for Community, Institutional or Non-Profit Making Purposes on Short Term Basis". The Government will consider whether to grant the short term tenancy at nominal rent in accordance with policy objectives and established assessment criteria. In 2024, the CSTB provided policy support at nominal rent for two short-term tenancy applications for the use of private museums. These two applications are currently being considered together with other applications by relevant departments.

Private museums may also consider participating in the global network of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) by referring to and adhering to the professional and ethical standards established by the ICOM, thereby improving the quality of their museums to attract more visitors and gain more chances of mutual support and collaboration with other museums. The ICOM, established in 1946, is an international organisation of museums and museum professionals committed to the conservation, continuation and communication to society of the world's natural and cultural heritage. The major museums under the LCSD are members of the ICOM. Non-governmental cultural and museum organisations including the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority, the HKMM, the Art Museum of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the University Museum and Art Gallery of the University of Hong Kong and MILL6 Foundation are also members of the Council.

(3) As mentioned above, the Government encourages the diversified development of Hong Kong's cultural ecology and currently has no plans to launch a private museum certification system or regulate the operation of private museums through legislation. Nonetheless, the LCSD museums have been collaborating with other local museums from time to time, and promoting these museums through different platforms and channels. One of the most obvious examples is the Muse Fest HK organised by the LCSD every year since 2015, inviting different local museums and cultural institutions to become partners, allowing citizens and tourists to visit different museums in the city and experience Hong Kong's rich and unique culture, history and artistic diversity. In addition, the LCSD museums and private museums also from time to time lend collections to each other or collaborate in organising various activities, including exhibitions, lectures and seminars.

In addition, the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) has been promoting unique museums, including public and private museums and related activities to tourists through its website (discoverhongkong.com), social platforms and tourist information centres, etc, such as M+, Hong Kong Palace Museum, Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences and Hong Kong News-Expo. The HKTB also introduces Hong Kong's museums through social media. For example, it has collaborated with the Mainland social media Xiaohongshu to launch the Hong Kong Citywalk Guide, which introduces five unique Citywalk routes for roaming around Hong Kong, including the Museum Walk route.