

LCQ5: Appointment of RTHK staff members

Following is a question by the Hon Charles Mok and a reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, in the Legislative Council today (October 28):

Question:

It has been reported that recently, an Assistant Programme Officer appointed on civil service probationary terms by Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) has been informed, before expiry of her three-year probationary period, that the RTHK management has decided to extend her probationary period by 120 days and to reopen the investigation into the complaints from the public against her. Some members of the public consider that the aforesaid decision is unusual and may be related to that staff member's performance in news covering at a government press conference held last year, and that RTHK has, after being pressurised by senior government management, punished by means of personnel arrangements the reporter who seeks the truth. They are of the view that such a move has undermined RTHK's editorial independence and public interest, and has weakened Hong Kong's image as a free and open society. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) among the RTHK staff members appointed under the regular civil service appointment procedure and tasked with programme production, of the respective numbers of those who, on completion of three years' service, (i) were converted to appointment on permanent terms, and (ii) continued to be employed on probationary terms (and the reasons for such an arrangement), in the past three years;

(2) whether the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau has instructed or advised RTHK to extend the probationary period of the aforesaid staff member, and to reopen the investigation into the complaints against that staff member; and

(3) of the completion date of the initial investigation conducted by RTHK into the complaints against that staff member; the justifications for RTHK to reopen the investigation, and the number of commendations received so far from members of the public regarding the work performance of that staff member?

Reply:

President,

As regards the Member's question, I consider that the nature of this question touches upon the appointment of an individual civil servant, which should not be discussed publicly at a Legislative Council meeting. The

Government all along does not comment on the appointment of individual civil servants publicly, including performance of individual staff, or details concerning individual cases of appointment or non-appointment, as such practice will not be appropriate to the staff and the department. Meanwhile, I need to state firmly that we do not agree with the allegations against the Government quoted in the preamble of the question. In fact, the appointment matters of civil servants have all along been handled in accordance with the established mechanism and procedures of the government departments. Therefore, as for the Member's question, we can only provide a general response without violating the aforementioned principle.

Being a government department, the operation and human resources management of the Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) must abide by all relevant rules and regulations applicable to government departments and government employees, including the Civil Service Code as well as relevant rules and regulations on personnel management, such as those relating to appointment, termination of service, conduct and discipline, training and development and conditions of service, etc. The personnel management and enforcement of rules on the aforementioned aspects are handled in accordance with the mechanism. RTHK is no exception. Whether the newly recruited employees of RTHK are offered further appointment after the completion of their probationary or agreement period, is solely handled and decided by RTHK as the appointment authority in accordance with the aforementioned requirements. May I invite Members to respect the aforementioned principle which must be complied with, when raising follow-up questions in a short while. I will address Members' questions based on this principle.

As regards the number of staff appointed by RTHK, from 2017 till now, 202 staff of the Programme Officer grade of RTHK were offered further appointment on New Permanent Terms after being employed on New Probationary Terms or New Agreement Terms for a period of three years. During the same period, one staff was not offered further appointment after being employed on New Agreement Terms for a period of three years, and another two staff were not offered further appointment on New Permanent Terms after being employed on New Agreement Terms for a period of three years.