

LCQ5: Students with dependent visa being admitted to local schools

Following is a question by the Hon Lam Chun-sing and a reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (March 19):

Question:

According to the definition of local students by the Education Bureau (EDB) for the purpose of admission to post-secondary programmes, students holding dependent visa or entry permit who were below 18 years old when they were first issued with such visa or entry permit by the Immigration Department are also defined as local students. There are views that the definition of local students is too loose, which may affect the fairness of competition for places and the accurate use of resources by the University Grants Committee (UGC). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of persons aged between 12 and 17 who were admitted to Hong Kong as dependants under various talent admission schemes in each of the past three years and so far this year, together with a breakdown by age;

(2) whether it will collect data on whether students admitted to UGC-funded programmes through the Joint University Programmes Admissions System are holders of dependent visas, and consider introducing a tiered system of tuition fees for UGC-funded bachelor's degree programmes, under which local students with dependent visas will be charged higher tuition fees; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) as it has been learnt that the EDB has indicated earlier that it is reviewing the definition of local students for the purpose of admission to post-secondary institutions, of the current progress of the relevant work?

Reply:

President,

Hong Kong possesses a sound education infrastructure, and diversified and quality basic education, and the quality of teaching and learning ranks high in a number of international rankings. Coupled with highly internationalised and diversified post-secondary education, education in Hong Kong is highly attractive. The eight University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded universities provide 15 000 first-year-first-degree (FYFD) places for local students each year, and local senior secondary school graduates may apply for admission to publicly-funded degree programmes through the Joint University Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS) and the non-JUPAS route. As for non-local students, at present, institutions may admit non-local students (up to 40 per cent) by way of over-enrolment. All institutions follow the principles

of fairness and meritocracy in selecting and admitting students in accordance with established mechanisms and procedures.

Under the prevailing arrangements for student admission, students who are dependant visa/entry permit holders who were below 18 years old when first issued with such visa/entry permit by the Immigration Department (ImmD) of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region are classified as local students. There have been recent concerns that if the holders of the aforesaid dependant visas have never come to Hong Kong to study or live, but as local students on the basis of their dependant visas alone are allowed to enrol in the subsidised places of the UGC-funded universities and enjoy university fee subsidies, the fairness of competition for the places and the targeted use of public funds will be affected. In this connection, the Government is conducting a comprehensive review of the relevant arrangements and considering various feasible options in a holistic manner, with a view to optimising the use of public resources and addressing the concerns of the community.

Our reply to the questions raised by the Member is as follows:

(1) The Government has since 2022 implemented a series of proactive initiatives to attract talents, including the Top Talent Pass Scheme, etc. From the end of December 2022 to the end of February this year, more than 450 000 applications were received under the various talent admission schemes, of which more than 290 000 were approved. During the same period, around 196 000 talents arrived in Hong Kong, with some of them bringing along their families to settle in Hong Kong. From 2022 to the end of February this year, around 132 000 unmarried dependant children under the age of 18 were permitted to come to Hong Kong as dependants under the various talent admission schemes. (Detailed annual statistics are at Annex.) The ImmD does not maintain statistics on dependant children broken down by age.

(2) According to the JUPAS Office, the number of dependants admitted to UGC-funded FYFD programmes through the JUPAS route in the three years from the 2022-23 to 2024-25 academic years are 62, 68 and 185 respectively.

At present, the tuition fee level for local students of UGC-funded undergraduate programmes is a flat rate of \$42,100 per annum. All non-local students enrolled in UGC-funded programmes are not publicly-funded and the universities are required to charge tuition fees at least sufficient to recover all additional direct costs. In accordance with the above principle, universities may determine the appropriate level of tuition fees for non-local students, having regard to their own circumstances and programme costs, and taking into account various factors. At present, the Government has no plan to change the relevant principles and arrangements. However, for dependant visa holders with residence requirements, we will consider making reference to the practices of other countries/regions and review the conditions and requirements for subsidising tuition fees for local students on undergraduate programmes, e.g. considering requiring the visa holders to have ordinarily resided in Hong Kong for a certain period of time prior to admission before they become eligible for a tuition fee subsidy for local students, so as to ensure the effective use of public funds.

(3) The review of the definition of "local students" is now well underway. We have met with different stakeholders and listened to their views. At the same time, we have made reference to the policies of the United Kingdom and Singapore, and been in close contact with other policy bureaux and departments. We are consolidating comments from various parties, conducting in-depth examination and carefully assessing the feasibility of different options and their implementation details, having regard to their impact on the attractiveness of various talent admission schemes, tertiary institutions' arrangements for student admission, and entry restrictions for overseas persons. At the same time, in order to minimise the impact of the new measures on the children of talents, we will actively consider putting in place transitional arrangements. The Education Bureau (EDB) will announce the latest arrangements as soon as possible after considering various options.

President, education is the key to a hundred-year plan. Education is the key to nurturing talents, who are the driving force behind Hong Kong's development and the foundation of a strong nation building and national revival. Under the leadership of the Committee on Education, Technology and Talents, the EDB will continue to proactively complement various measures for the admission of talents. Whilst strengthening the educational support for children of incoming talents, the EDB will continuously nurture local talents, enhance the quality of education in Hong Kong, and tie in with the direction of the integrated development of education, technology and talents.

Thank you, President.