

PUCI persons in custody attain good examination results

Twenty-five young persons in custody at Pik Uk Correctional Institution of the Correctional Services Department (CSD) were presented with certificates at a ceremony today (December 18) in recognition of their efforts and academic achievements. The Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals (TWGHs), Dr Ken Tsoi, was invited to officiate at the ceremony.

In the past year, 104 persons in custody sat for various academic and vocational examinations including the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination, examinations of the Open University of Hong Kong, the Aptis English Assessment Test of the British Council and examinations organised by City and Guilds International Limited, the Vocational Training Council, the Construction Industry Council and other examination bodies. The examinations covered the subjects of Computer Literacy, Hairstyling, Elementary Cantonese Cooking and Kitchen Operations, Basic Laundry Skills and the Intermediate Trade Test in Joiner. They achieved 225 passes including 25 merits. Seven persons in custody sat for 41 papers of the HKDSE Examination this year, obtaining level 2 or above in 34 papers, representing 82.9 per cent of all papers taken. One candidate obtained 23 marks overall in six papers taken. The 25 persons in custody who were presented with certificates today had passed 75 papers, 11 of which resulted in merits.

Dr Tsoi said that the CSD is committed to providing safe custody and appropriate rehabilitation programmes to help persons in custody integrate into society. As such, the TWGHs in collaboration with the CSD has set up a subsidy scheme, namely the TWGHs Positive Life Education Fund, with a total donation of \$1.2 million comprising \$200,000 in 2018-19 and \$200,000 in each of the next five years to the Prisoners' Welfare Fund to provide financial assistance for needy persons in custody pursuing studies. A cheque presentation ceremony was held to present the donation of \$200,000 for 2019-20 during the ceremony.

In addition, Dr Tsoi encouraged the young persons in custody to uphold the spirit of "Be determined to revive, unleash your full potential", and start a new life through focusing on gaining knowledge and preparation for re-entering society with the support of their families and the staff of the CSD.

During the ceremony, persons in custody spoke on their determination to turn over a new leaf with the support of their families and staff members of the CSD by making use of the knowledge and skills learnt in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education course provided by the institution to produce a 3D mapping video with sketches and computer images. The mother of a person in custody also expressed her joy at seeing

the positive changes in her son. The band Splash, composed of persons in custody, performed to convey gratitude to all those helping them in rehabilitation.

LCQ11: Control of wild and stray animal nuisances

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hak-kan and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (December 18):

Question:

The Director of Audit published, in October this year, the results of a value for money audit on the "control of wild and stray animal nuisances". Regarding the work of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) in this respect, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that in the last financial year, (i) AFCD staff did not conduct on-site visits in respect of 65 per cent of the complaint cases which would need their on-site visits, and (ii) in respect of the 1 917 complaint cases analysed by the Audit Commission, there were delays in the interim and substantive replies given by AFCD for 3 per cent and 21 per cent of the cases respectively, whether AFCD has reviewed the causes for such situations and what improvement measures have been put in place;

(2) given that in the last financial year, among the 10 partner organisations which collected cats and dogs from AFCD for rehoming by members of the public, only two submitted rehoming records as required, (i) how AFCD calculates the numbers of animals rehomed under such circumstances, and (ii) whether AFCD has counted those animals that it transferred to its partner organisations but not yet rehomed towards the numbers of animals rehomed; whether AFCD has required its partner organisations to submit rehoming records of other animals (e.g. turtles and rabbits); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) given that the numbers of dogs and cats rehomed in the past five years dropped by 26 per cent and 43 per cent respectively, and that two stray dogs which had passed the health and temperament assessments (rehoming assessments) were euthanised in the last financial year as no rehoming could be found for them, whether AFCD will upload the information of those dogs, cats and other animals which have passed the rehoming assessments onto its website in order to increase their chances of being rehomed;

(4) given that according to AFCD's guidelines, stray cats and dogs will be

euthanised if they are not reclaimed within the detention period of four days after being caught and if they have failed the rehoming assessments, while in the last financial year, the actual detention periods for cats and dogs ranged respectively from 0 to 51 days and from 0 to 93 days, and 47 cats and dogs were euthanised in less than four days of detention, whether AFCD has reviewed the causes for such situations, and what improvement measures have been put in place;

(5) given that in 2007, nine of the 18 District Councils (DCs) supported in principle the implementation of the "trap-neuter-return" pilot programme for dogs in their districts, whether AFCD will consult the other DCs on the programme after the new DC term commences in January next year so as to extend the scope of implementation of the programme; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(6) as many animal welfare organisations have relayed the difficulties in operating a rehoming centre, including finding suitable premises and shouldering high rents, whether the Government will dedicate certain floors of the new Animal Management and Animal Welfare Building Complex (Complex) proposed to be built in the Kai Tak Development Area for renting to such organisations by drawing lots; if so, of the details; if not, whether it will provide them with rental subsidies;

(7) whether AFCD will provide public veterinary services in the Complex; if so, of the details; if not, whether healthcare vouchers for animals or other subsidies will be provided to animal owners with financial needs; and

(8) whether AFCD, apart from entrusting the work on animal rehoming to its partner organisations, will provide its own (i) animal rehoming centre and (ii) online animal rehoming platform?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Environment Bureau and the Environmental Protection Department, my reply to the question is as follows:

(1) When handling complaints about wild animals, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has been making appropriate attempts to deal with each case on its individual merits in accordance with internal guidelines.

For cases that involve wild animals causing nuisances to the public, AFCD will recommend preventive measures to the persons affected and take appropriate management actions as and when necessary after conducting on-site visits to investigate the cause and situation of the wild animal sighting.

As for cases involving only the sighting of wild animals with no nuisance caused, or repeated complaints, AFCD may not arrange on-site visits but will approach the complainants to look into the situation and offer

appropriate advice or take appropriate actions as and when necessary.

In response to the Audit Commission's recommendations, AFCD will review the relevant guidelines, and take measures to ensure adequate recording of information in the register of wild animal nuisances, as well as deploying additional resources and manpower to facilitate timely handling of cases involving wild animal nuisances.

(2) AFCD is currently collaborating with 18 non-profit making animal welfare organisations (AWOs) to arrange rehoming of suitable animals (including cats, dogs, rabbits and turtles). All animals transferred to these organisations for arranging rehoming are recorded as "animal rehomed". AFCD will maintain close liaison with these partnering AWOs and regularly remind them of the need to submit rehoming records of relevant animals in a timely manner.

(3) and (8) The number of cats and dogs received and caught by AFCD dropped from 7 995 in 2014 to 2 943 in 2018, while the ratio of their adoption increased from 11.1 per cent to 22.6 per cent.

The above 18 partnering organisations of AFCD provide animal rehoming services in various districts across the territory. These services include assessing the suitability of prospective adopters and their living environment for animal adoption, and following up with adopters to see if the adopters take proper care of the animals rehomed. Some partnering organisations have already uploaded the information of animals awaiting adoption onto their websites, answer enquiries and provide matching services online. These organisations are armed with relevant experience and adopter network, and could provide members of the public with more service locations and better meet the current needs of the community. Meanwhile, AFCD is actively liaising with other AWOs with a view to further increasing the number of partnering organisations.

(4) Upon receiving a stray animal, AFCD will try to identify its owner based on the information on the microchip implanted or in the loss report. If an animal without a microchip and not reported lost has been left unclaimed for four days, a veterinary officer will assess its temperament and health condition for arranging rehoming. For animals whose health conditions or temperament are assessed as unsatisfactory but still possible for rehoming after appropriate treatment or temperament improvement, the veterinary officers will provide them with treatment and improve their temperament as far as possible in order to increase their chance of adoption. Since the time required differs among these animals, the duration for keeping them at AFCD's Animal Management Centres varies accordingly.

The 47 cats and dogs mentioned in the Audit Report were euthanised as they were assessed by veterinary officers as having a low chance of survival due to injury or illness or temperamentally unsuitable for rehoming in accordance with AFCD's guidelines. However, the staff concerned forgot to record the reasons for three of these animals in the computer system, resulting in incomplete information. AFCD has already reminded its staff that the reasons for euthanising animals must be properly recorded.

(5) AFCD assisted two AWOs in conducting the Trap-Neuter-Return trial programme for stray dogs at two sites between 2015 and 2018. The results showed that the programme failed to achieve its predetermined performance targets. Nevertheless, we will keep an open mind and offer assistance to AWOs that are interested in conducting such trial programme at other sites. AFCD will consider the proposed sites on a case-by-case basis, taking account of factors such as geographical location, population density, proximity to community facilities and traffic conditions. If a site is found suitable, AFCD will help the AWOs concerned liaise with relevant District Councils and local stakeholders, and seek relevant legislative exemption from the Legislative Council.

(6) Since the reference plot ratio for the site of the proposed Animal Management and Animal Welfare Building Complex (the Complex) in the Kai Tak Development Area has already been fully utilised, there is no extra space available for other uses (including uses by AWOs).

According to AFCD's understanding, many AWOs rely mainly on foster homes to take care of animals awaiting for adoption. This could provide more opportunities for the animals to interact with people and increase their chance of rehoming. Those AWOs in need of premises for running rehoming centres may consider the suitability of vacant government sites (including vacant school premises) under the management of the Lands Department that are available for leasing by non-governmental organisations for community purposes by short-term tenancies. AWOs may also apply for subsidies under a funding scheme administered by the Development Bureau to carry out one-off, basic and necessary restoration works so as to put the vacant government sites fit-for-use as rehoming centres.

(7) The number of local registered veterinary surgeons has been increasing in recent years with the current total at 1 049. There are around 140 veterinary clinics providing general and specialist consultation services in the territory. In addition, the Veterinary Medical Centre of the City University of Hong Kong provides veterinary services. According to the findings of a consultancy study on the development of the veterinary profession in Hong Kong released by the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong in 2017, our vet-to-pet (dogs and cats) ratio would drop in 2019 to 1:523, much lower than that in Singapore (1:2 543), the United Kingdom (1:2 374) and the United States (1:3 072). The vet-to-pet ratio is a common indicator for assessing the overall situation of veterinary services: the lower the ratio, the greater the number of veterinary surgeons. Hence, there are currently sufficient veterinary surgeons and clinics to provide various services in Hong Kong. In addition, AFCD has been subventing AWOs in support of their work on safeguarding animal welfare, including the provision of veterinary services. In view of the above, the Government has no plan to provide public veterinary services in the above new Complex or provide members of the public with subsidies for veterinary services at this stage.

LCQ5: Rising tide of unemployment

Following is a question by the Hon Vincent Cheng and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (December 18):

Question:

The social unrest has persisted for half a year and has hit many industries. This situation, coupled with the protracted trade conflicts between China and the United States (US) as well as the enactment of the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act by the US authorities, has not only dampened investment incentives but will also further weaken Hong Kong's economic performance. Some members of the public are worried that amid the gloomy economic outlook, tides of pay cuts and business closing down will appear one after another, and a large unemployed population is poised to grow. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) Of the respective numbers of employees' applications to the Protection of Wages on Insolvency Fund received and approved by the authorities, and the respective numbers of cases concerning wage defaults, dismissal and closing down of companies received by the relevant government departments, in each of the past 12 months, as well as the top five industries with the largest number of such cases;

(2) Of the unemployed population in each of the past six months; the top five industries with the highest unemployment rate at present; the projected unemployment rates for the whole of this year and the first half of next year; and

(3) Of the implementation progress of the four rounds of relief measures introduced by the Government in recent months and their effectiveness in safeguarding jobs; whether it will introduce a new round of relief measures; given that the Government introduced, in 2003 after an epidemic had been brought under control, a package of measures which created approximately 30 000 jobs, whether the Government will introduce a similar package of measures for job creation?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau, the Office of the Government Economist and the Census and Statistics Department, the consolidated reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) In the past 12 months, the Protection of Wages on Insolvency Fund received a total of 2 992 applications. The number of applications received

per month ranged from 142 to 539. The top five industries with the largest number of applications received were construction industry (1 158 applications), food and beverage service activities (716 applications), retail trade (233 applications), import and export trade (220 applications) and other personal service activities (80 applications). During the same period, a total of 2 531 applications were approved. The number of applications approved per month ranged from 73 to 406. The top five industries with the largest number of applications approved (including applications received in the corresponding period or before) were construction industry (1 092 applications), food and beverage service activities (398 applications), retail trade (316 applications), import and export trade (125 applications) and manufacture of computer, electronic and optical products (122 applications). Details of the monthly figures of applications for the Fund received and approved in the aforesaid period are at Annex 1.

In the aforesaid period, the number of labour disputes and claims over dispute on wages, termination of contract and cessation of business/winding up/bankruptcy of employers handled by the Labour Department (LD) each month is provided at Annex 2. From January to November 2019, in respect of labour disputes and claims handled by LD, the top five industries with the most cases handled were construction industry (2 865 cases), accommodation and food service activities industry (2 372 cases), other service activities industry (1 229 cases), import/export, wholesale and retail trades industry (1 190 cases) and work activities within domestic households (1 050 cases). LD did not keep such breakdown before January 2019.

(2) The number of unemployed persons compiled from the General Household Survey by the Census and Statistics Department for the three-month periods in the previous six months (i.e. from April to June 2019 onwards) is given below:

	April-June 2019	May-July 2019	June-August 2019	July-September 2019	August-October 2019	September-November 2019*
Unemployed persons	114 300	118 500	120 600	120 300	125 400	125 400

Note: *Provisional figure

In the survey period from September to November 2019, the five major industries with the highest unemployment rate were the decoration, repair and maintenance for buildings sector (7.0 per cent), the food and beverage service activities sector (6.2 per cent), the retail sector (4.8 per cent), the foundation and superstructure sector (4.4 per cent) and the warehousing and support activities for transportation sector (3.7 per cent).

The labour market eased further as economic conditions continued to worsen. The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate increased successively from 2.8 per cent in the second quarter of 2019 to 3.2 per cent in the period from September to November. The number of unemployed persons increased by around 11 200 to 125 400 over the same period. Hard hit by the local social

incidents, the unemployment rate of retail, accommodation and food services sectors as a whole rose visibly from 3.9 per cent in the second quarter to a three-year high of 5.2 per cent in the period from September to November. The number of unemployed persons in these three sectors increased by 6 000 to 31 600, accounting for around 25 per cent of overall unemployment.

If the overall economy, in particular the consumption market, continues to weaken considerably, the local labour market will likely be under severe pressure in the short term. It is possible that the unemployment rate may increase at a faster pace, with the employment situation in the consumption- and tourism-related sectors being particularly serious. The Government will stay vigilant.

(3) To counter the challenging external and local economic environment, the Government has announced four rounds of helping measures since August 2019 to support enterprises, safeguard jobs and relieve people's financial burden, costing over \$25 billion. These measures are summarised at Annex 3.

For some helping measures announced between August and October 2019 requiring additional resources in the current financial year, the Government had consulted the relevant Panels of the Legislative Council (LegCo), and the funding proposals have subsequently been approved by the LegCo Finance Committee on December 6, 2019. As regards the enhanced tax concession, the bill for effecting the tax concession was passed by LegCo on November 6, 2019, and gazetted on November 15, 2019. The Inland Revenue Department will reflect the tax reductions in the tax demand notes.

Relevant bureaux and departments will follow up on the implementation of the above measures at full speed so that enterprises and the public can benefit early. The Government is committed to working out more comprehensive and targeted measures to address the evolving challenges. It is hoped that by supporting enterprises it will help safeguard employment. During economic downturn, helping people secure their job opportunities through the continuing operation of businesses is the top priority of the Government. Through these purposeful measures, we may achieve better effectiveness than creating a large number of unwarranted employment.

The Government will remain vigilant in assessing the economic impacts of the internal and external environment, and utilise our financial reserves to implement timely and suitable countercyclical measures, so as to stimulate the economy and relieve people's hardship, and go through the wave of economic downturn with the community together where necessary.

Remaining flower show fast food stalls

Leased out

Among the 55 commercial stalls of the Hong Kong Flower Show 2020, 53 were let at the auction held on December 4. The remaining two fast food stalls were leased out today (December 18).

Organised by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, the 10-day flower show will be held from March 6 to 15, 2020, at Victoria Park. The 55 commercial stalls in the showground comprise six fast food stalls, one fast food stall – floral cafe, two beverage stalls, three agricultural produce stalls, two handicraft stalls, one traditional snack food stall, one photographic equipment stall, one book stall and 38 flower and gardening stalls.

For enquiries, please call 2601 8260 or visit www.hkflowershow.hk/en/hkfs/2020/commercial.html.

LCQ6: Conducting elections in fair and just manner

Following is a question by the Hon Elizabeth Quat and a reply by the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Patrick Nip, in the Legislative Council today (December 18):

Question:

The District Council (DC) Ordinary Election was held on the 24th of last month. The Electoral Affairs Commission received 7 460 relevant complaints, about 2 000 of which involved voting arrangements. Some members of the public have expressed worries that similar problems may occur in the Legislative Council General Election to be held next year. On ensuring that elections be conducted in a fair and just manner, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as a number of electors claimed that upon their arrival at the ballot paper issuing desk in the polling station for the first time on the polling day of the aforesaid DC election, they were informed that the particulars registered in respect of their names on the Register of Electors had been crossed out (i.e. indicating that they had been issued with a ballot paper earlier), and they were therefore issued only with a "tendered" ballot paper which would not be counted, rendering them unable to exercise their voting rights, whether the Government had taken measures to guard against this situation before the election was held; if so, why such situation still occurred; of the new measures put in place to prevent the recurrence of such

situation in the next election;

(2) as it has been reported that in response to calls on the Internet, some people queued up repeatedly outside polling stations on the polling day of the aforesaid DC election, so as to create long queues to deter electors from casting their votes, resulting in some people who were in a hurry as well as frail elderly persons and persons with disabilities who were unable to wait for a long time giving up voting, whether the law enforcement agencies have looked into this situation; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; of the new measures put in place to prevent the recurrence of such situation in the next election; and

(3) as the current voting procedure comprises entirely manual operations (including verifying the identity of electors, issuing ballot papers and recording that on the Register of Electors, voting by using a stamp, and counting votes), which is error-prone and vulnerable to fraudulent acts, whether the Government will use electronic voting in the next election; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

Mr President,

My reply to the Hon Elizabeth Quat's question is as follows:

The sixth term District Council Ordinary Election (the Election) was held on November 24 this year. With the number of electors and voter turnout reaching a record high, a total of 452 District Council Members were elected. Held in the midst of instability in society, the Election had faced unprecedented challenges. Competition was fierce like never before as none of the some 400 constituencies were uncontested. We saw a lot of irresponsible speech and behaviour that disregarded the fairness of the Election during the process. For instance, public appeals were made to confiscate the identity cards of the elderly, some candidates were threatened during the canvassing activities while others were targeted by petrol bombs. There were also incidents involving damages and arson of candidates' offices. Some even spread rumours that the Election had been cancelled or rescheduled. Notwithstanding this, the polling and counting of the Election was concluded in an open and transparent manner and was overall peaceful and orderly under the scrutiny of candidates and the public.

The EAC will refer complaints on alleged infringement of the law to relevant law enforcement agencies. We understand that relevant law enforcement agencies have been following-up on the reports or complaint cases involving suspected breach of law. Besides, if candidates or electors think that the Election is interfered by corrupt or illegal conduct, or there is a material irregularity in relation to the Election, they may lodge election petitions to question the result of the Election under Section 49 and 50 of the District Council Ordinance, which will be determined by the court. The results of an election can be challenged on the various grounds, including:

- (1) corrupt or illegal conduct was engaged in by or in respect of the elected person at or in connection with the election; or
- (2) corrupt or illegal conduct was generally prevalent at or in connection with the election; or
- (3) material irregularity occurred in relation to the election, or to the polling or counting of votes at the election.

For this Election, the deadline for lodging election petitions is January 29 next year. As of today, one person has lodged an election petition.

(1) For the statutory procedures of issuing ballot papers, only registered electors whose names appear on the 2019 final register (FR) of electors may vote at the 2019 District Council Ordinary Election. After an elector has arrived at a designated polling station, pursuant to the Electoral Affairs Commission (Electoral Procedure) (District Councils) Regulation (the Regulation), the electoral staff would inspect at the ballot paper issuing desk the original of the elector's Hong Kong Permanent Identity Card or other identity documents permitted by the legislation (such as the HKSAR Passport), and give a ballot paper to the elector if the staff is satisfied about the elector's identity. A line must be placed in the register of electors to cross out the name and number of identity documents of the elector concerned in order to denote that the ballot paper has been issued to the elector.

Pursuant to the Regulation, the Presiding Officer (PRO) may, at the time a person applies for a ballot paper, ask the person to confirm his/ her identity and that he/ she has not voted in the Election, and may give a ballot paper to him/ her only upon the PRO's satisfaction of the answer provided. Candidates, their election or polling agents observing in the polling station(s) may request the PRO to ask the above questions.

Pursuant to section 60 of the Regulation, if the register shows that a person has already been issued with a ballot paper when that person applies for a ballot paper, and if the PRO is not certain whether the same person has been issued with a ballot paper earlier, the PRO must issue to that person a ballot paper endorsed on the front of it with the words "ÉTÈ" and "TENDERED". "TENDERED" ballot papers are not to be counted, but if there is any dispute after the conclusion of the election, that ballot paper can be admitted as evidence in election petitions. As of December 13, the EAC has received 16 complaints in relation to the issuance of "TENDERED" ballot papers.

In accordance with section 15 of the Elections (Corrupt and Illegal Conduct) Ordinance (the ECICO), applying for a ballot paper in the name of another person, or, having voted at the Election, applying at the same Election for a ballot paper in the person's own name is liable on conviction to a fine of \$500,000 and to imprisonment for seven years.

(2) For the queuing arrangements for obtaining a ballot paper on the polling

day, pursuant to the Regulation, when an elector is issued with a ballot paper, he/ she must immediately go into a voting compartment and mark the ballot paper without undue delay, and must leave the polling station as soon as he/ she has put the ballot paper into the ballot box. If an elector intentionally makes repeated requests for a ballot paper in order to obstruct the poll, the PRO may decline his/ her requests. If the PRO considers that the elector has voted at the Election and applies at the same Election for a ballot paper in his/ her own name, the PRO may request a police officer to arrest the person concerned, pursuant to the Regulation. Pursuant to the ECICO, a person engages in corrupt conduct at the Election if the person, by a deception, obstructs or prevents another person from voting at the Election. Pursuant to the ECICO, such person is liable on conviction to a fine of \$500,000 and to imprisonment for seven years.

The cumulative voter turnout rate of this term's District Council election had reached a record high of 71.2 per cent, and close to three million voters had casted their votes. In the first three hours after the commencement of the poll, a total of 720 000 voters had already casted their votes, which was three times the figures of the last election. Queues appeared in many polling stations. We note that crowd control arrangements were implemented at many polling stations to flexibly handle the long queues of electors on the polling day. The very large scale of the Election also meant that we had to set up more than 610 polling stations, as well as recruit over 20 000 electoral staff and deploy more than 10 000 staff from the Hong Kong Police Force, Fire Services Department, Civil Aid Service, etc. to provide support on the polling day. We will review the polling arrangements, recruitment and training of electoral staff, as well as the operational guidelines, etc., with a view to identifying areas with room for improvement. The EAC must, within three months of the conclusion of the Election, submit a report to the Chief Executive to review the electoral arrangements, including its preparatory work, polling and counting arrangements, publicity, etc., and make recommendations. At the same time, the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau will seriously review the experience of the Election with Registration and Electoral Office (REO) to enhance the electoral arrangements of the Legislative Council General Election next year.

(3) On the issue of using technology, we have been proactively studying ways to electronise different stages of the election throughout the years. However, we must strike a balance among the need of using technologies, efficiency, security risks, privacy protection and public trust, etc. before introducing any arrangements. While we had consulted the Legislative Council (LegCo) on some of the proposals in the past, such proposals could not be implemented in the end due to the diverse views received.

The direction of electronisation mainly involves three aspects, namely issuing ballot papers in an electronic manner, electronic voting as well as electronic counting. In relation to the issuance of ballot papers, under the existing arrangements, REO arranges for two electoral staff to issue ballot papers together, in order to minimise human error and ensure that the election is conducted in an honest and fair manner. REO is now studying the

use of an electronic poll register, with a view to increasing the efficiency and accuracy when issuing ballot papers.

As for electronic voting, we have looked into the experiences of overseas countries/regions, and found that a number of issues are encountered in adopting electronic voting, including the system being hacked leading to the election result being affected, disruption of voting due to malfunctioning of electronic voting devices, high cost incurred in procuring electronic voting devices, limited useful life of the devices which will soon become outdated etc. From the perspective of risk management, information security and cost-effectiveness, etc., we consider that such problems must be properly resolved before electronic voting can be introduced. There must also be sufficient discussion in the community in deciding whether trade-offs are to be made.

In relation to electronic counting, we have already consulted the LegCo Panel on Constitutional Affairs earlier. It is our target to conduct a demonstration in some traditional functional constituencies with fewer number of electors in the LegCo election to be held next year.

Thank you, President.