

LCQ22: Preventing youths from being addicted to video game playing

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Pui-leung and a written reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council today (June 14):

Question:

A survey has pointed out that more than 30 per cent of the youths spend at least three hours per day on playing video games (commonly known as "video gaming"). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of requests for assistance received by the authorities in connection with youths' video gaming addiction in each of the past five years, together with a breakdown by age group (i.e. aged under 12, between 12 and 17, and between 18 and 25) and the number of hours spent on video gaming daily (i.e. less than three hours, three to five hours, and more than five hours) of the youths concerned;

(2) whether it has compiled statistics on the number of youth suicide cases in connection with issues arising from video gaming in each of the past five years; whether the authorities have currently put in place specific measures to support parents whose children are addicted to video gaming; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) as it has been reported that the World Health Organization classified "gaming disorder" as a mental disease in 2019, whether the authorities will draw reference from the practices in other regions to roll out measures to prevent youths from being addicted to video gaming, such as requiring real-name registration for video game accounts, and capping the duration for gaming; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) given that there are views that the existing "Healthy School Policy" implemented by the authorities focuses on the anti-drug element, whether the authorities will include the prevention of video gaming addiction in the policy, and roll out relevant preventive education, guidance and support services; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Hospital Authority (HA), relevant bureaux and departments, the consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Pui-leung is as follows:

(1) The Education Bureau (EDB), the Department of Health (DH), the HA and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) do not maintain statistics on requests for assistance in connection with youth's video gaming addiction.

(2) The EDB, the DH, the Hong Kong Police Force and the HA have not compiled statistics on suicide cases in connection with video gaming.

Concerning support for parents, the EDB, together with the Hong Kong Education City and the Committee on Home-School Co-operation, have jointly organised a series of parent seminars each year, inviting experts and social workers to brief parents on parenting for the e-Generation, information literacy, youth online culture, online risks and tips for handling internet addiction of children, and ways for protecting children from cyber-bullying. In addition, videos and articles on how to help children use electronic products properly and how to handle internet addiction of children are available on the one-stop parent education website "Smart Parent Net" (www.parent.edu.hk/en/home) launched by the EDB for parents' reference.

(3) Upon consultation with relevant bureaux, relevant bureaux advised that they have at present no plan on regulating video games with the aim of preventing video gaming addiction.

Although problems arising from video gaming addiction is a concern for the community, its causes and impacts (including those on local adolescents and adults) require further research. At present, the medical sector has not yet reached a broad consensus on the methods on effective diagnosis, treatment or prevention of "gaming disorder". In comparison, at this stage, the impacts of addiction to smoking or alcohol on public health and the healthcare system are, from a public health perspective, problems that require a higher priority in handling and could be effectively prevented. The Government will continue to monitor the impacts caused by video gaming addiction at the public health level.

As for cases of severe mental disorders caused by video gaming addiction, patients can receive the HA's existing services in psychiatric treatment and support. The HA does not maintain statistics on the number of psychiatric patients in connection with video gaming addiction.

In response to the problem of addiction of minors to online games, the DH set up the Advisory Group on Health Effects of Use of Internet and Electronic Screen Products (Advisory Group) in 2013, comprising representatives from the EDB, the SWD, the DH, the social welfare sector, and the relevant Colleges of the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine, etc. The Advisory Group published the Report of Advisory Group on Health Effects of Use of Internet and Electronic Screen Products (the Report) in 2014, with recommendations for children, adolescents, parents and teachers on the healthy use of the internet and electronic screen products. The Report has been uploaded onto the website of the DH.

The DH has also produced a set of four modules of recommendations for parents, teachers, and primary and secondary school students respectively and set up a designated website as a convenient platform for members of the public to obtain relevant health information. Contents of the website include excessive use of the internet and healthy use of electronic screen products. The Adolescent Health Programme provided by the DH's Student Health Service promotes the psychosocial health of adolescents in secondary schools through

outreaching activities, which include topics and seminars targeting students and parents on the healthy use of the internet and electronic screen products.

(4) The objective of the Healthy School Policy (HSP) is to help students reach a state of physical, mental and social well-being. The main focus is to help students develop a healthy lifestyle, positive attitude and values, acquire practical life skills and skills to resist temptation, etc. Schools may formulate a school-based HSP in the light of their own situation and students' needs to foster a healthy school environment conducive to the healthy development of students.

The EDB provides the Information Literacy for Hong Kong Students learning framework and information kits on e-learning for schools, as well as professional development programmes for teachers to cultivate students' ability and attitude to use information and communication technology effectively and ethically. The EDB also co-operates with other Government departments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to enhance students' information literacy through student activities and competitions, and has commissioned an NGO to set up a telephone hotline to provide individual support for parents, teachers and students in need. The 2021 Policy Address proposes to enhance the media and information literacy of teachers and students, and optimise the use of the Quality Education Fund to support schools in promoting related education. The EDB also encourages schools to incorporate programmes and organise activities with themes such as "Internet Addiction" and "Prevention of Internet Pitfalls" as appropriate, to promote the use of the internet in a proper and safe manner, as well as enhance students' awareness of cyber crimes. To help students develop habits on using the internet and electronic products properly, teachers should share the negative impacts on addiction to internet and using electronic products with students to encourage reflection and solve problems in a collaborative manner. Furthermore, schools are staffed with professionals, including guidance personnel, school social workers and school-based educational psychologists to provide students in need (including those who are addicted to online games) with necessary support and referral services.

Result of tenders of RMB Sovereign Bonds held on June 14, 2023

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

Result of tenders of RMB Sovereign Bonds held on June 14, 2023:

Tender Result

Tender Date : June 14, 2023
Bonds available for Tender : 2-year RMB Bonds
Issue Number : BCMKFB23013
Issue and Settlement Date : June 16, 2023
Maturity Date : June 16, 2025 (or the closest coupon payment date)
Application Amount : RMB 21,739 million
Issue Amount : RMB 6,000 million
Average accepted Coupon Rate : 2.16 per cent
Highest accepted Coupon Rate (Bonds' Coupon) : 2.20 per cent
Lowest accepted Coupon Rate : 1.60 per cent
Allocation Ratio : Approximately 96.29 per cent

Tender Result

Tender Date : June 14, 2023
Bonds available for Tender : 3-year RMB Bonds
Issue Number : BCMKFB23014
Issue and Settlement Date : June 16, 2023
Maturity Date : June 16, 2026 (or the closest coupon payment date)
Application Amount : RMB 18,062 million
Issue Amount : RMB 4,000 million
Average accepted Coupon Rate : 2.22 per cent
Highest accepted Coupon Rate (Bonds' Coupon) : 2.30 per cent
Lowest accepted Coupon Rate : 1.60 per cent
Allocation Ratio : Approximately 68.43 per cent

Tender Result

Tender Date : June 14, 2023
Bonds available for Tender : 10-year RMB Bonds
Issue Number : BCMKFB23015
Issue and Settlement Date : June 16, 2023
Maturity Date : June 16, 2033 (or the closest coupon payment date)
Application Amount : RMB 10,224 million
Issue Amount : RMB 2,000 million
Average accepted Coupon Rate : 2.65 per cent

Highest accepted Coupon Rate (Bonds' Coupon) : 2.71 per cent
Lowest accepted Coupon Rate : 2.30 per cent
Allocation Ratio : Approximately 37.78 per cent

Services suspension at WSD Tai Kok Tsui Customer Enquiry Centre during electrical installations inspection

The Water Supplies Department (WSD) announced today (June 14) that the services of Tai Kok Tsui Customer Enquiry Centre will be suspended on June 16 for the periodic inspection and testing of electrical installations in the building. The centre will resume operation on June 19.

Members of the public applying for fishing or plumber's license may visit Wan Chai Customer Enquiry Centre for services. Customers who wish to purchase water tickets may visit Shau Kei Wan Marine Office located at 10 Tam Kung Temple Road, Shau Kei Wan. For its service hours, please call the enquiry hotline of the Marine Department at 2542 3711.

The public requiring other services may visit the WSD's Customer Enquiry Centres located at Wan Chai, Sha Tin, Tai Po and Tuen Mun, or through the WSD Customer Services Hotline 2824 5000 or by email (wsdinfo@wsd.gov.hk) for enquiries.

LCQ1: Prices of daily necessities

Following is a question by the Hon Yung Hoi-yan and a reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Algernon Yau, in the Legislative Council today (June 14):

Question:

Recently, the Consumer Council conducted a survey on the prices of goods sold by three major supermarket chains in 2022 and found that there was a price increase in nearly 70 per cent of the goods, with the aggregate average price of a basket of 260 items from the relevant supermarkets rose by 2.1 per cent over 2021, higher than the increase in the Composite Consumer Price Index (i.e. 1.9 per cent) over the same period. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has studied the causes for the price increase in supermarket goods and whether collusive pricing or monopolisation has been involved in such causes; if it has studied and the outcome is in the affirmative, of the Government's measures in place to curb the situation concerned; if it has not studied, the reasons for that;

(2) of the current number of vacant stalls in and the vacancy rate of various public markets and cooked food centres; whether it has plans to enable such stalls to be let out easier by offering a lower rental, so that members of the public can purchase affordable food and daily necessities; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) of the measures in place to stabilise commodity prices, such as the measures in place to encourage more supermarket brands to join the Hong Kong market, so as to drive down the prices of goods through stimulating competition, and the measures in place to spur supermarket operators to bear social responsibility, thereby effectively controlling the prices of necessities and ensuring that members of the public need not bear expensive goods?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Environment and Ecology Bureau, my consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Yung Hoi-yan is as follows:

Hong Kong is a highly open and one of the most competitive economies in the world. The Government does not implement price control on various goods sold in the market.

The Government has all along been promoting fair competition. In this connection, the Competition Ordinance (Cap. 619) (CO) came into full effect in December 2015, with the aim of ensuring that Hong Kong continues to be a competitive, dynamic and free market by curbing harmful anti-competitive conduct, bringing the benefits of a level-playing field to Hong Kong consumers, businesses and the wider economy.

Even though the CO does not regulate the pricing level of goods sold by individual undertakings in the market, the First Conduct Rule of the CO prohibits any behaviours that prevent, restrict or distort competition in Hong Kong, including joint ventures, vertical price restrictions and cartels (such as agreeing with competitors to fix prices and share markets). The Second Conduct Rule of the CO prohibits undertakings with a substantial degree of market power from abusing that power to prevent, restrict or distort competition in Hong Kong, including behaviours such as predatory pricing, margin squeeze, refusals to deal, which have the object or effect of excluding competitors from the market, thereby limiting choices available to consumers.

The two Conduct Rules both regulate behaviours of market participants. According to the CO, regardless of whether cases are originated from

complaints received, referrals by the Government or public bodies, or initiated by the Competition Commission (the Commission) itself, when the Commission has reasonable cause to suspect contravention of any Conduct Rule under the CO, it could commence investigation in accordance with the CO. The Commission has been proactively handling and prioritising cases and complaints that affect people's livelihood, especially those involving the grassroots or the underprivileged groups.

Apart from promoting fair competition, to protect consumers' rights and interests, the Consumer Council (the Council) has been monitoring closely the supply and price of various goods. The Council constantly conducts various surveys, including user experience surveys and price surveys on goods and services to collect market information and publishes regularly the results of price surveys for the public's reference. The results of the Council's annual supermarket price survey 2022 released in April 2023 showed that the aggregate average price of a basket of items from the supermarkets surveyed increased by 2.1 per cent over 2021, reflecting that the cost of daily necessities had increased. The Council has called on supermarket groups to share and shoulder social responsibility by striving to control prices of necessities. At the same time, consumers can make good use of the Online Price Watch (<https://online-price-watch.consumer.org.hk>) of the Council to compare prices across different supermarkets and retailers. The Council will continue to monitor closely price changes of various daily necessities to facilitate the public in making smarter choices.

The Commerce and Economic Development Bureau will continue to maintain close liaison and work closely with the Commission to promote fair competition and the Council to protect consumers' rights and interests.

On the usage of public markets and cooked food centres, as at March 31, 2023, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) manages around 13 600 stalls in public markets and cooked food centres, with a net vacancy of around 700 stalls and a net vacancy rate of around 5.1 per cent. The number of vacant stalls and net stall vacancy rate for each public market and cooked food centre are set out at Annex.

The FEHD from time to time arranges open auctions to let out vacant stalls in public markets and cooked food centres. The upset auction prices are based on the reference rentals assessed by the Rating and Valuation Department which takes into account factors including the open auction results of similar stalls in the same market and other FEHD markets, the location and facilities of the market, as well as the position of the stalls in the market, etc. The actual market rental is determined by the outcome of auction. While rental level is one of the core components of operating costs, it is not the determinant of the retail prices of goods. Other factors such as costs of goods and transportation, market positioning, demand and supply, may also be at play. Public markets of the FEHD are one of the major fresh food retail channels. Tenants usually decide and adjust the prices of goods having regard to factors including market rules and operating costs. The Government seeks to promote competition through which the price of goods sold in public markets would stay at a reasonable level. In new and overhauled

public markets under the FEHD's Market Modernisation Programme, the "one-tenant-one-stall" policy (i.e. multiple tenancies are in general disallowed) is implemented, with a view to fostering fair competition among market stalls and preventing monopoly. In building sizable new public markets at suitable locations, the FEHD also fosters positive competition between public markets and other fresh food retail outlets, which is conducive to the maintenance of the prices of goods at a reasonable level.

LCQ7: Civil service establishment

Following is a question by the Hon Stanley Ng and a written reply by the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mrs Ingrid Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (June 14):

Question:

It is learnt that while the Government has been continuously creating civil service directorate posts in recent years, the number of posts on the civil service establishment has slightly decreased for two years in a row. In addition, the Government has indicated that the target of zero growth in the civil service establishment will remain unchanged this year. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the proportion of the number of civil service supernumerary directorate posts in the total directorate civil service establishment at present;
- (2) whether there is any requirement which limits the ratio of the number of civil service supernumerary posts to the number of civil service permanent posts at present; and
- (3) whether it has studied how to eliminate the perception among members of the public and grass-roots civil servants that the target of maintaining zero growth in the civil service establishment and the arrangement of continuously creating additional civil service directorate posts are "fattening the top and thinning the bottom"?

Reply:

President,

Reply to different parts of the question is as follows:

- (1) The civil service establishment includes both permanent and time-limited posts. Time-limited directorate posts are also known as "supernumerary directorate posts", which means they are non-permanent posts. It does not

mean they are counted outside the establishment. As at May 2, 2023, the civil service establishment stood at 1 482 for permanent directorate posts and 81 for time-limited directorate posts respectively. In other words, the proportion of the number of time-limited civil service directorate posts in the total directorate civil service establishment was approximately five per cent.

(2) Whether a permanent post or a time-limited post is to be created depends on the job nature of the post concerned. So, it is not appropriate to set a specific ratio between these two types of posts. For jobs of time-limited nature or jobs that are subject to future review, creation of time-limited posts is more appropriate and can ensure proper use of public money as well.

(3) Among civil service posts, there are time-limited posts deleted every year upon expiry of the duration for which the posts are created or upon completion of the jobs concerned. In addition, some posts would be deleted upon changes in the mode of operation (e.g. upon replacement of manual work by resorting to information technology). On the premise of maintaining zero growth in the civil service establishment, the number of new posts (including permanent and time-limited posts at directorate and non-directorate ranks) created by the Government will not exceed that of the posts expected to be deleted. In creating posts at different ranks, the primary consideration rests with the operational needs. With the on-going development of the society, various issues grow in complexity, and competition in the international arena has also grown in intensity. Under such circumstances, the Government has to enhance the governing capability and create strong impetus for growth, with a view to building a better future for Hong Kong. In this regard, the current-term Government has put forth a host of innovative and strategic initiatives, including the establishment of the Steering Committee on Northern Metropolis, the launch of the "Hong Kong Talent Engage" one-stop platform, etc. To take forward these initiatives, the Government would require additional manpower with leadership, co-ordination, organisation and professional competencies at the directorate and senior levels to steer various bureaux/departments in delivering the relevant policies and measures. Accordingly, while maintaining zero growth in the civil service establishment, it is only reasonable and necessary for the mix of posts at different ranks to be adjusted as appropriate to meet the latest need of the Government in the administration of Hong Kong.