

LCQ4: Quarantine arrangements for imported cats and dogs

Following is a question by Professor the Hon Priscilla Leung and a reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (June 11):

Question:

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department has updated the quarantine arrangements for cats and dogs this month. Cats and dogs imported from the Mainland that meet the relevant quarantine requirements (including obtaining satisfactory results from testing conducted by recognised laboratories on the Mainland and having an animal health certificate issued by Mainland official veterinarians) will have their quarantine period significantly reduced from the current 120 days to 30 days upon arrival in Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that imported cats and dogs are currently required to be quarantined at designated quarantine facilities, whether the authorities will consider introducing a flexible mode of quarantine, e.g. home quarantine for the entire period, or a mixed mode involving "quarantine at a facility for the first 15 days and home quarantine for the remaining 15 days", with a view to relieving the financial burden on animal owners and enhancing the efficiency on the use of facilities;

(2) as there are views that the numbers of imported cats and dogs may increase significantly after the quarantine period is reduced, whether the Government has assessed if the numbers of quarantine facilities in Hong Kong and recognised laboratories on the Mainland are sufficient to cope with the demand, and how the authorities will ensure the quality of the relevant testing; and

(3) as there are views pointing out that there is a significant price difference between pet cats and dogs on the Mainland and in Hong Kong, and that updating the quarantine arrangements may increase the numbers of pet-keeping households in Hong Kong in the long run, whether the Government has assessed if there are sufficient veterinary equipment, clinics and hospitals in Hong Kong?

Reply:

President,

Rabies is a contagious disease that causes fatality to mammals (including humans) and no specific treatment is available at present. To prevent the introduction of animal diseases such as rabies into Hong Kong, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) regulates the import of live animals through a permit system, and controls the import of

cats and dogs under the Public Health (Animals and Birds) Regulations (Cap. 139A) and the Rabies Regulation (Cap. 421A) to protect public and animal health. Under effective control measures, Hong Kong has long been widely recognised as a rabies-free place by other places. Animals of Hong Kong generally face less stringent quarantine requirements when entering other places.

On the quarantine arrangements of imported cats and dogs, the AFCD classifies places into different groups according to different risk of rabies, with reference to information about the surveillance of animal diseases from the World Organisation for Animal Health. Group I and Group II places are respectively rabies-free places and places where rabies cases are few and under effective control. Since these places are considered of lower risk of rabies, the imported cats and dogs are exempted from quarantine upon fulfilling specified requirements. Places that do not meet the requirements of Group I or Group II, or where their situations cannot be determined, will be included in Group III. Cats and dogs imported from these places are required to undergo a quarantine of not less than 120 days before December 2024.

Since December 2024, the AFCD has divided Group III into Group A and B according to the results of risk assessment. Quarantine period for cats and dogs of Group IIIA is significantly shortened from 120 days to 30 days upon their arrival in Hong Kong, provided that they meet the relevant quarantine requirements including that the animals must be vaccinated against rabies, conducted a valid rabies neutralising antibody titre test, had an animal health certificate issued or endorsed by a government veterinary officer of the place of export. The Macao Special Administrative Region, Lithuania and the Mainland have been included in Group IIIA successively. As regards Group IIIB places, since the risk of rabies is higher or uncertain, and the incubation period of rabies can be up to several months, the quarantine period for cats and dogs imported from those places is maintained at not less than 120 days.

The reply to the question from Professor the Hon Priscilla Leung is as follows:

(1) As mentioned just now, as long as cats and dogs imported from the newly added Group IIIA places (including the Mainland) meet the relevant quarantine requirements and hold an animal health certificate issued by an official veterinarian from the Mainland, the quarantine period upon arrival in Hong Kong will be significantly reduced from 120 days to 30 days. Because of this change, the cost of quarantine facilities that the owners of these cats and dogs have to pay has been greatly reduced to one-quarter of the previous cost, at the same time, the turnover rate of quarantine facilities will increase to four times than that of the past. The waiting time for quarantine facilities will be reduced correspondingly, and the usage effectiveness will be increased significantly.

As regards the quarantine arrangements, the current international practice is to isolate cats and dogs in officially supervised quarantine

facilities to ensure that the animals will not have direct or indirect contact with other animals during the quarantine period, so as to avoid the transmission of animal disease into the community. As the mortality rate of rabies is close to 100 per cent, and animals have the opportunity to come into contact with other people or animals when they are quarantined in private premises, this will bring to them higher risk. Hence from a risk management perspective, home quarantine arrangement is not appropriate. The Department will continue to make reference to the latest animal disease situation announced by the World Organisation for Animal Health, and timely optimise the quarantine requirements for imported cats and dogs, taking into account factors such as international practices, operational experience and risk assessment.

(2) To facilitate animal owners to bring their pet cats and dogs to Hong Kong, the Government has not only optimised the quarantine requirements for cats and dogs, but also increased the number of quarantine facilities. The new quarantine facilities at the Kowloon Animal Management Centre under the AFCD have been put into service in May this year. The quarantine facilities provided for cats and dogs have increased from 21 and 20 to 34 and 30 respectively. Further, taking into account that the shortened quarantine period has increased the turnover speed to four times than that of the past, the handling capacity of the AFCD's quarantine facilities could be increased by as much as six to seven times than that of the past. In addition, the AFCD encourages private animal welfare organisations to provide quarantine facilities for cats and dogs, and is reviewing the application of the Hong Kong Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA). It is expected that the quarantine facility will be put into service in the middle of this year. The Department will also provide information and assistance to other private animal welfare organisations interested in operating quarantine facilities for cats and dogs. On the basis of the above improvement measures, it is expected that the quarantine facilities will be able to meet the demand.

As regards the number and testing quality of recognised Mainland laboratories, after discussions with the Mainland authorities and taking into account the regional distribution and level of recognition of the laboratories in the Mainland, the AFCD has recognised four Mainland laboratories in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Changchun for conducting rabies antibody titre tests for cats and dogs. All four laboratories are recognised by the Mainland authorities and the European Union, hence the quality of testing is assured. The AFCD will closely monitor the situation and will discuss with the Mainland authorities to adjust the list of approved laboratories when necessary.

(3) The Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong (VSB) is a statutory body established under the Veterinary Surgeons Registration Ordinance (Cap. 529), and is responsible for the regulation, registration and disciplinary control of veterinary surgeons, to ensure a high standard of veterinary services in Hong Kong. The VSB learns about the overall veterinary services through data gathered in the regulation of the veterinary profession.

The number of registered veterinary surgeons (RVS) has been consistently on the rise since 2015, from 823 in 2015 to 1 364 in April this year, representing an increase of 65 per cent. Moreover, RVS comprises many specialties, such as small animal internal medicine and surgery, dermatology, cardiology, neurology and veterinary pathology. Apart from private veterinary clinics, the City University of Hong Kong and some animal welfare organisations, such as the SPCA, also provide veterinary services, therefore animal owners should be able to find appropriate veterinary services for their pets.

Thank you, President.

LCQ19: Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Dennis Lam and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (June 11):

Question:

At present, the Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates (IANG) adopt a "2+3+3" year mode of stay. It is learnt that earlier this year, some of those who were admitted to Hong Kong for employment through IANG (e.g. those whose employment contracts were about to expire) were unable to obtain three-year visa renewals smoothly when extending their stay. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of first applications for IANG and applications for extension of stay under IANG received, approved and rejected by the Immigration Department (ImmD), as well as the number of persons who were admitted to Hong Kong as dependants under IANG in the past three years;

(2) of the following information on the full-time employment of the persons who have been granted IANG visas and their dependants mentioned in (1): (i) the major industries and job types in which they are engaged, and (ii) the highest, lowest and median amounts of monthly salaries;

(3) whether it has assessed the long-term effectiveness of IANG in attracting and retaining talent; if it has assessed, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) whether ImmD has made any adjustment to the vetting and approval of applications for extension of stay by IANG visa holders at present; if so, of the details; if not, why some IANG visa holders have relayed that their applications for extension of stay have only been granted for a few months;

and

(5) whether it has considered providing transitional support (e.g. arranging short-term accommodation and setting up a dedicated recruitment website, etc) for persons who have just been granted IANG visas in the future, so as to assist them in adapting the live in Hong Kong; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Applicants who are/were non-local students and have obtained an undergraduate or higher qualification in a full-time and locally-accredited programme in Hong Kong may apply to stay/return and work in Hong Kong under the Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates (IANG). The Government has extended the IANG on a pilot basis to cover graduates with a bachelor's degree or higher qualification from Hong Kong universities' campuses in Mainland cities of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA).

After consultation with the Immigration Department and the Labour and Welfare Bureau, our consolidated replies to Dr the Hon Dennis Lam's questions are as follows:

(1) The numbers of applications received, approved and refused under the IANG in the past three years are tabulated below:

Type of Applications		2022	2023	2024
New applications	Number of applications received	10 936	27 295	26 973
	Number of applications approved	10 391	26 089	25 475
	Number of applications refused	21	16	24
Extension of stay applications	Number of applications received	11 032	11 637	6 985
	Number of applications approved	10 619	11 189	6 592
	Number of applications refused	6	20	53
Dependant application	Number of applications approved	1 851	4 702	6 600

Note: Applications approved/refused in a year may not all be received in the same year.

(2) At present, over 90 per cent of those coming to or staying in Hong Kong under the IANG are fresh graduates. They are not required to have secured offers of employment in Hong Kong upon application. However, when applying for an extension of stay, they are required to have taken up employment in

Hong Kong that are at the levels commonly taken up by degree holders and the remuneration packages are on par with the market level. For those who have established or joined in business in Hong Kong, they are required to produce proof of their business upon application for an extension of stay.

The breakdown of the numbers of approved applications for an extension of stay under the IANG by industry/sector is tabulated below:

Industry/sector	2022	2023	2024
Financial services	4 298	4 338	2 834
Academic research and education	1 407	1 873	863
Commerce and trade	1 611	1 312	818
Information technology	495	477	241
Telecommunications	209	351	194
Engineering and construction	211	264	173
Legal services	164	196	111
Medical and healthcare services	124	136	104
Architecture/Surveying	97	112	60
Manufacturing industries	29	70	52
Tourism	25	47	39
Catering services	34	41	24
Arts/Culture	46	49	20
Recreation and sports	26	21	14
Traditional Chinese medicine	8	16	10
Biotechnology	32	40	8
Others	1 803	1 846	1 027
Total	10 619	11 189	6 592

The Immigration Department does not maintain other breakdowns of statistics mentioned in the question.

(3) Since its launch in 2008, the IANG has received positive response and helped Hong Kong attract and retain talent as well as expanding the talent pool. As at the end of April 2025, a total of 177 567 applications have been received. Among them, 172 043 applications have been approved, with over 90 per cent being recent non-local graduates and 2 825 applications coming from the graduates of the GBA campuses of Hong Kong universities. The statistics on entrants admitted to Hong Kong under the IANG who eventually acquired the

right of abode in the past five years are tabulated as follows:

Admission policy/scheme	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
IANG	3 117	3 449	3 495	4 441	4 128

Note: The figures are based on the applicants' status in Hong Kong at the time of application for the right of abode.

With the development of the GBA, it has become a trend for Hong Kong universities to set up campuses in Mainland cities of the GBA through joint ventures, and their graduates will become an important source of talent in the GBA. Starting from the end of 2022, the Government has extended the IANG on a pilot basis to cover graduates with a bachelor's degree or higher qualification from Hong Kong universities' campuses in Mainland cities of the GBA, so as to attract outstanding talent from these institutions to come to Hong Kong for employment and further boost Hong Kong's human resources and competitiveness. The Chief Executive announced in his Policy Address 2024 to extend the pilot arrangement for two years. This measure not only fosters the exchange of talents in the GBA, but also meets the needs of economic development in the GBA. We will continue to monitor the implementation of the IANG, particularly the response to the inclusion of graduates of Hong Kong universities' GBA campuses under the IANG, and review its effectiveness in due course.

(4) Upon applying for an extension of stay by persons admitted under the IANG, non-local graduates/GBA campus graduates are required to have taken up employment in Hong Kong which is at a level commonly taken up by degree holders and the remuneration package is at the market level. For those who have established or joined in a business in Hong Kong, they are required to produce proof of their business. When assessing an application for an extension of stay, various factors related to the applicant's employment or business conditions will be considered, including but not limited to the remuneration package or the operation and development of the business, the economic benefits brought by the employment or business, and the duration of stay in Hong Kong, etc. Successful applicants will normally be granted an extension of stay on time limitation only without other conditions of stay for not more than three years, or until the expiry of their employment contract in Hong Kong, whichever is the shorter. For those who have established or joined in a business in Hong Kong, the length of their extension of stay to be granted will be determined based on the comprehensive consideration of the operating conditions of the relevant business.

(5) Since its establishment on October 30, 2023, the Hong Kong Talent Engage (HKTE) has been providing comprehensive one-stop support to talents coming to or staying in Hong Kong under various talent admission schemes (including the IANG) through both online and offline means. Apart from providing comprehensive information on living and working in Hong Kong as well as handling enquiries from outside talent through its online platform

(www.hkengage.gov.hk), the HKTE organises with working partners a variety of online and offline activities such as job fairs, themed seminars, workshops (including Cantonese learning classes) and social integration activities (including the Talent+ Volunteer Programme) to share information on entrepreneurship, employment as well as other living tips and to facilitate the incoming talent to settle in Hong Kong and integrate into the city as soon as possible. The online platform features about 5 000 real-time quality job opportunities daily for which talent can apply directly through the platform. Moreover, the online platform is connected to about 90 designated working partners of the HKTE to provide recommendations and services in areas such as job seeking, accommodation, education, integrated settlement, banking and insurance, business and corporate as well as networking and community, etc through online matching tools.

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Wednesday, June 11, 2025 is 103.2 (same as yesterday's index).

LCQ5: Southbound Travel for Guangdong Vehicles

Following is a question by the Hon Lai Tung-kwok and a reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Ms Mable Chan, in the Legislative Council today (June 11):

Question:

It is reported that following the completion of the automated car park on the Hong Kong Port Island of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) by the end of this year, the authorities plan to implement the Southbound Travel for Guangdong Vehicles in phases starting as early as the end of this year. The scheme runs with quotas and Guangdong vehicles allocated with quotas under the first phase will only be allowed to park at the automated car park at the HZMB Hong Kong Port. Passengers may proceed directly to the restricted area of Hong Kong International Airport and depart Hong Kong by plane without going through immigration clearance, or enter Hong Kong via the HZMB Hong Kong Port and then transfer to other modes of transport to reach the urban areas. Guangdong vehicles will only be allowed access to the urban areas under the second phase of the Southbound Travel for Guangdong Vehicles. In

this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the reasons for implementing the Southbound Travel for Guangdong Vehicles in two phases; whether it will consider implementing the two phases in one go by merging them, so as to address the calls from various sectors for attracting road trip visitors more expeditiously;

(2) whether it will designate no-entry zones for Guangdong vehicles in specific urban areas with heavier traffic, and whether it will increase the daily quota for the Southbound Travel for Guangdong Vehicles on weekends, Sundays, and Hong Kong public holidays when urban traffic is relatively light and smooth; and

(3) whether it has assessed the economic benefits brought to Hong Kong upon the full implementation of the Southbound Travel for Guangdong Vehicles?

Reply:

President,

Guangdong and Hong Kong have been committed to implementing various cross-boundary transport measures to jointly develop the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), and to make good use of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB). Since the successful implementation of Northbound Travel for Hong Kong Vehicles (the Northbound Travel Scheme) in July 2023, eligible Hong Kong single-plate private cars are allowed to travel under the customs guarantee-free policy to various commercial centres, countryside, tourist hotspots, etc, in the Guangdong Province via the HZMB for business, visiting families or sight-seeing on a short-term basis upon making simple bookings; thus allowing greater convenience for Hong Kong travellers to plan their travel. The number of northbound Hong Kong private cars to the Guangdong Province has been on the rise, with over 100 000 private cars which have participated in the scheme. The usage of the HZMB has also recorded new highs, with its two-way vehicular flow reaching a total of 450 000 vehicles in May 2025 (i.e. a daily average of about 15 000 vehicles), representing an increase of about 170 per cent as compared to that before the implementation of the Northbound Travel Scheme; among which vehicles under the Northbound Travel Scheme account for about 40 per cent of the HZMB's vehicular flow (i.e. a daily average of about 6 000 vehicles). Meanwhile, to meet the keen expectations of the public on two-way travel, and to provide diversified experiences for Mainland travellers to visit Hong Kong, we are actively working with the relevant Mainland authorities on the implementation arrangements for the Southbound Travel for Guangdong Vehicles (the Southbound Travel Scheme).

In response to the three parts of the question raised by the Hon Lai Tung-kwok, my reply is as follows:

(1) The experience of implementing the Northbound Travel Scheme provides pragmatic and substantive reference for the planning of the Southbound Travel Scheme between Guangdong and Hong Kong. The governments of Guangdong and Hong Kong have been monitoring the application and travel experience of the

citizens in a bid to roll out a number of enhanced arrangements, which include gradually increasing the maximum number of applications received per day from 200 at the beginning to the current 500; increasing the number of vehicle inspection centres from one at the beginning to three at present; expanding the travel booking timeslots, while deferring the deadline of booking and cancellation of booking. Guangdong and Hong Kong have also worked together to enhance port clearance at the HZMB ports, so as to address the increasing vehicular flow of the HZMB. Meanwhile, various parts of Guangdong are successively providing ancillary facilities to facilitate the vehicles under the Northbound Travel Scheme and launching promotion.

As regards the Southbound Travel Scheme which is the reverse reciprocal arrangement of the Northbound Travel Scheme, eligible Guangdong private cars without regular quotas will also be allowed to travel to Hong Kong via the HZMB for business, visiting families or sight-seeing on a short-term basis under the condition that advance bookings have been made. Drawing on the experience from the Northbound Travel Scheme, we need to ensure that the Southbound Travel Scheme is taken forward in a prudent manner while enhancing speed and efficiency. We have earlier announced the two automated car parks near the HZMB Hong Kong Port as part of the Southbound Travel Scheme, where private cars from Guangdong and Macao can park when they come to Hong Kong via the HZMB. Visitors who park their cars at the "Park and Fly" carpark could transfer flight at Hong Kong International Airport, thereby further facilitates the transport of travellers of the GBA to and from all parts of the world via Hong Kong, as well as consolidate Hong Kong's position as a leading international aviation hub. Visitors who park at the "Park and Visit" carpark could go through immigration clearance at the passenger clearance building of the HZMB, which provides visitors to Hong Kong with an additional option, thereby promotes the flow of people between the two places and drives economic growth. At present, the Government and the Airport Authority Hong Kong are actively undertaking preparatory work for the commencement of operation, including conducting tests and drills, as well as formulating the details in respect of the booking and use of the car parks. Our objective is to streamline the procedures as far as possible to provide maximum convenience for travellers. In addition, we are planning promotional activities and discounts, with a view to attracting self-drive visitors, which will in turn stimulate the retail, food and beverage, hotel and related service sectors in Hong Kong.

(2) Meanwhile, we are also working with Guangdong to make early preparation for Guangdong vehicles to enter Hong Kong urban area. We are taking comprehensive consideration of various aspects, including total volume control, port clearance, risk management and enhancement of supporting facilities. On one hand, we will assess traffic at the port and the capacity of nearby roads, divert traffic away from peak hours, and strengthen port clearance as well as ancillary transport arrangements and contingency plans; on the other hand, we will properly manage the risks, such as requiring southbound vehicles to comply with the rules and regulations of Hong Kong to ensure the safety of their vehicles and take out a Hong Kong third party insurance. We are also formulating publicity information covering application procedures, driving rules and ancillary facilities. Where risks are

controllable, we will streamline the application procedures and provide convenience for applicants. Following the above arrangements, the Southbound Travel Scheme will be implemented in orderly manner, welcomed by users, to the satisfaction of the public, and beneficial to the community at large; thereby obviating the need to impose restricted zones or roads for Guangdong vehicles.

(3) We believe that under the conditions of orderly implementation, total volume control, and appropriate supporting measures, the Southbound Travel Scheme will provide visitors with convenient and flexible new travel option to Hong Kong for travel, business, attending exhibitions or conferences, participating in concerts or other large-scale events, seeking various professional services, leisure and dining, etc, according to their need. It is expected that various industries in Hong Kong will benefit; and the synergy effect achieved with the Northbound Travel Scheme will also add extra impetus to the economies of Guangdong and Hong Kong, and the integration and development of the GBA.

The HKSAR Government is proactively working with respective Mainland authorities to formulate the implementation arrangements and timetable for taking forward the Southbound Travel Scheme in an orderly manner. I myself have also been leading a team to discuss with Guangdong side, with a view to striving for early announcement of the details of the scheme within this year.

Thank you, President.

LCQ11: Academic staff members of universities funded by University Grants Committee

Following is a question by Professor the Hon Chow Man-kong and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (June 11):

Question:

Regarding the academic staff members of universities funded by the University Grants Committee, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows the numbers of newly-joined academic staff members (including but not limited to (i) senior academic staff, (ii) junior academic staff, (iii) academic supporting staff, (iv) administrative, technical and other staff, and (v) technical research staff) of the eight universities funded by the University Grants Committee (the eight universities) in each of

the past three academic years, as well as their respective percentages in the academic staff members of the respective ranks, together with a breakdown by (A) university, (B) academic programme/department (including but not limited to (I) Medicine, Dentistry and Health, (II) Sciences and (III) Education and Continuing Education), and (C) background of relevant academic staff members (i.e. (a) holders of Hong Kong Permanent Identity Cards, and (b) holders of visas granted by the Immigration Department under the Top Talent Pass Scheme, General Employment Policy and Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates, etc);

(2) whether it knows the numbers of academic staff members of the eight universities who left the service (including but not limited to those mentioned in (i) to (v) in (1)) in each of the past three academic years, as well as their respective percentages in the academic staff members of the respective ranks, together with a breakdown by (A) to (C) mentioned in (1));

(3) regarding the departure situation mentioned in (2), whether it knows the reasons for departure of the academic staff members of the eight universities in each of the past three academic years (e.g. retirement, transfer to another local university, change of profession and other reasons), and whether it has analysed their departure trends, together with a breakdown by university; and

(4) as there are views that as the United States (US) has further tightened its visa policy on non-US academics as well as research and development (R&D) personnel, and the relevant countries in the European Union have also introduced measures one after another to "trawl talent", whether the authorities will introduce stronger and more effective measures to attract such people to engage in R&D work in Hong Kong, so as to develop Hong Kong into an international hub for high-calibre talent; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Our reply to Professor the Hon Chow Man-kong's question is as follows:

Hong Kong's overall competitiveness in education ranks among the top five in the world, and our post-secondary education is highly internationalised and diversified. To date, five University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded universities have been ranked among the top 100 in the world, six are ranked among the top 50 in Asia, a number of them have been ranked among the top universities in the world's most international universities ranking, and they have excellent research talent, which make them attractive to students and scholars from all over the world. The universities are recruiting globally following their institutional development strategies and their teaching and research needs, so as to continuously enhance their global competitiveness. Under the leadership of the Committee on Education, Technology and Talents led by the Chief Secretary for Administration, the Government will continue to promote Hong Kong as an international hub for high-calibre talent, co-ordinate and drive the integrated development of

education, technology and talent, expand connections, formulate policies to attract and cultivate talent, and foster the co-ordinated development of technologies, so as to strengthen Hong Kong's position as an international post-secondary education hub and an international innovation and technology centre.

Over the past years, with the Government's increased investment in higher education and the introduction of various support measures, the staff number in academic departments of the UGC-funded universities has increased by 4.5 per cent from 13 548 in the 2021/22 academic year (AY) to 14 161 in the 2023/24 AY, with an increase of 8.5 per cent in the number of senior and junior academic staff from 4 974 to 5 398. The number of leaving academic staff has also dropped from 399 to 378. Overall, Hong Kong's higher education institutions are proactively pursuing the goal of capacity expansion and quality enhancement, and have achieved certain success in recruiting and retaining talent.

The actual numbers of staff in the academic departments of universities by staff grade, university and departmental cost centre group are at Annex I. The numbers of senior/junior academic staff joining and leaving are at Annex II and Annex III respectively. We do not have a breakdown of the number of intake and departure of academic supporting staff, administrative, technical, and other staff and technical research staff, as well as a breakdown of the background of the staff or the reasons for departure, such as retirement, completion of contract, transfer to other local universities, etc.

In the light of the changes in the global higher education landscape, the Education Bureau (EDB) has promptly called on all universities in Hong Kong to introduce facilitation measures for affected students and scholars with a view to safeguarding their legitimate rights and interests, while attracting top talent in accordance with their diversified admissions and talent policies. The EDB is pleased to see that local universities are responding proactively and closely monitoring the situation, fully utilising the Government's facilitation initiatives that support the capacity expansion and quality enhancement of post-secondary institutions in Hong Kong.

We will continue to keep a close eye on the development and accordingly consider support measures for them in a holistic approach so as to give full play to Hong Kong's role as an international post-secondary education hub. Apart from the recruitment measures of the institutions, the Government attracts more top talent to pursue their studies in Hong Kong through a range of initiatives, including doubling the cap on non-local students in publicly funded post-secondary institutions to 40 per cent, increasing scholarship quotas, and gradually increasing the number of places under the Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme. We remain committed to pursuing various policies and initiatives, fostering networks and partnerships at the national, regional, and; international levels, and will continue to work collaboratively with stakeholders to promote the "Study in Hong Kong" brand. These efforts align with the national strategies to invigorate the country through science and education, cultivate high-calibre talent, and advance innovation and development, thereby contributing to meeting the needs of our nation.