

LCQ3: Study tour activities to the Mainland

Following is a question by the Hon Yiu Si-wing and a reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (January 27):

Question:

The Chief Executive pointed out in the 2020 Policy Address that enhancing students' understanding of the history of the nation, Chinese culture and national developments, as well as deepening education on the nation's Constitution and the Basic Law, are the basic work for fostering students' sense of the nation and awareness of national security. Quite a number of schools have organised study tour activities to the Mainland with the goals of deepening students' understanding of the nation and strengthening their sense of national identity. However, there are views that the itineraries concerned often merely involve gaining a shallow understanding from a fleeting glance, and may not necessarily meet the goals of organising study tour activities. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the Education Bureau (EDB) has formulated guidelines, for study tour activities to the Mainland, setting out the learning themes about the history, culture and developments of the nation that should be included in the study tour activities, as well as the mechanism for evaluating the effectiveness of the activities;

(2) given that quite a number of schools have requested travel agents to submit suggested itineraries, but the relevant suggestions may not necessarily meet the goal of organising study tour activities, whether the EDB will formulate guidelines and a scoring mechanism to assist schools in discussing itineraries with travel agents and selecting suitable travel agents; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) in order to achieve the aforesaid education objective mentioned in the Policy Address, whether the Government will allocate additional resources to schools, so that they can organise more study tour activities to the Mainland; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Education Bureau (EDB) attaches importance to the promotion of national education. Schools are facilitated to adopt a "multi-pronged and co-ordinated" approach to deepen students' understanding of our country's developments in various aspects, strengthen education on the Constitution, the Basic Law and national security, as well as enhance students' sense of

national identity through learning within and beyond the classroom, including curricula of various subjects and life-wide learning activities (including Mainland exchange activities and formation of sister schools with Mainland schools). Unlike the general escorted tours, Mainland exchange activities are not intended for travelling and sightseeing. Instead, they are one type of life-wide learning activities, the content of which should dovetail with school curriculum and the latest developments of our country so that students can learn outside the classroom and deepen what they have learnt in the classroom. These activities could cover areas such as culture, history, economy, geography, physical education, music, art and education. Furthermore, in light of the development strategies of our country (such as the Belt and Road Initiative and development in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area) and the ongoing renewal of school curriculum, including education on the Constitution, the Basic Law and national security, these exchange activities should offer opportunities for students to gain first-hand experience of the developments of our country in various aspects, enable them to have a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between our country and Hong Kong and foster their sense of national identity.

All along, schools have been using different ways to arrange students to join Mainland exchange activities according to their school-based needs. These include using relevant subsidies to organise Mainland exchange activities or participating in the exchange activities commissioned by the EDB, such as the Mainland Exchange Programme for Junior Secondary and Upper Primary Students and the Mainland Exchange Programme for Secondary School Students, on a voluntary basis. In addition, through exchanges with sister schools, schools can enable teachers and students to have a better understanding of the education in the Mainland, facilitate cultural exchange and broaden student' horizons.

The reply to the question raised by the Hon Yiu Si-wing is as follows:

(1) and (2) Mainland exchange activities organised by secondary and primary schools are one kind of study tours outside Hong Kong. The main purpose of the EDB in including the "Guidelines on Study Tours Outside Hong Kong" (Guidelines) as an appendix to the "Guidelines on Outdoor Activities" is to remind schools to ensure the safety of participants joining the study tours. The Guidelines cover points to note such as manpower arrangement, appointment of escorts, scheduling of activities and safety matters for schools' reference in organising such activities. It is also clearly stated that if agents are commissioned to arrange the itineraries, the agents concerned must be licensed ones and the accompanying staff must be holders of a valid Tour Escort Pass issued by the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong. The Guidelines also remind schools to make reference to the curriculum guides on various Key Learning Areas (KLAs) and design suitable study tour programmes, including learning objectives and relevant activities, according to their school-based curriculum and the needs of their students.

The EDB attaches great importance to the quality of Mainland exchange activities for students. In this regard, the EDB has developed the "Points to Note for Schools in Planning Mainland Activities for Their Students". When planning and organising Mainland exchange activities, schools are required to

make reference to relevant curriculum guides on KLAs and their students' needs to set clear learning targets and objectives, as well as provide appropriate learning materials and learning experiences to enable students to apply different learning strategies and understand our country from different perspectives. The EDB also recommends that accompanying teachers of the schools (including the principals) should serve as learning facilitators to help students construct knowledge and enhance learning effectiveness. Before the study tour, teachers should give guidance to students on designing the content for project learning or other learning activities, collecting information and formulating learning objectives. During the study tour, they should guide students to explore and understand the learning objectives, facilitate them to reflect, explore and discuss from multiple perspectives, and nurture their collaboration skills, communication skills and study skills, etc. After the study tour, extended learning activities should be arranged for sharing students' learning experiences and reviewing the effectiveness of student learning. Usually, schools would also collect the opinions of the participating students and/or parents to evaluate the effectiveness.

There are different modes for schools to organise study tours outside Hong Kong, such as commissioning travel agents to do the job, collaborating with other organisations or arranging the tours by the schools themselves. If agents are commissioned to organise study tours, the schools concerned should follow related tendering and procurement procedures in the appointment of agents and conform to the related administrative and financial requirements. For example, for schools with Incorporated Management Committee (IMC), they should obtain prior approval from their IMC when engaging in commercial activities and follow the procurement procedures applied to aided schools. Generally speaking, schools should determine the learning objectives of the exchanges, learning themes and itinerary requirements (such as spots to be visited and learning activities) first before proceeding with the quotation or tendering procedures in choosing the appropriate travel agents to organise study tours that suit the learning objectives.

(3) The Government currently deploys considerable resources to support various Mainland exchange activities. Since the 2017/18 school year, over 100 000 quotas have been provided annually through the Mainland exchange programmes commissioned by the EDB, such as the Mainland Exchange Programme for Junior Secondary and Upper Primary Students and the Mainland Exchange Programme for Secondary School Students, which are sufficient for students to join at least one Mainland exchange activity each in the primary and secondary stages. Students participating in these programmes will receive a subsidy amounting to 70 per cent of the tour fee. For every 10 students nominated for the programmes, schools can apply for full subsidy for one student so that students with financial needs will be subsidised. If schools need to apply for full subsidy for more students, they should give brief explanation in the application forms and the EDB will follow up according to the merits of individual cases.

Besides, the Government also provides sufficient resources for schools to organise Mainland exchange activities on their own. For example, since the

2019/20 school year, the Government has allocated about \$0.9 billion annually to provide public sector schools and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools with a recurrent Life-wide Learning Grant (in the 2020/21 school year, for schools operating 24 classes as an example, the amount for each primary school and secondary school is approximately \$760,000 and \$1,170,000 respectively). Further examples include the recurrent grant for sister schools in Hong Kong (in the 2020/21 school year, the amount for each school is approximately \$156,000), the Junior Secondary and Upper Primary School Students Exchange Programme Subsidy Scheme: "Understanding Our Motherland", as well as the Senior Secondary School Students Exchange Programme Subvention Scheme for organising diversified Mainland exchange activities. In addition, schools can make use of the Expanded Operating Expenses Block Grant to subsidise students to participate in exchange learning activities. The Quality Education Fund (QEF) has also included "Life-wide Learning" as one of the priority themes. Schools may apply for additional resources under the QEF to arrange diversified learning activities, including cross-boundary learning activities and exchange activities, to complement various curriculum areas, which will enrich students' learning experiences, broaden their horizons and enhance their interest and motivation in learning, thereby facilitating their whole-person development. As schools have already obtained sufficient resources, there is no need to allocate more resources at this stage.

Thank you, President.

LCQ22: Coronavirus Disease 2019 vaccination programmes

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Chiang Lai-wan and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (January 27):

Question:

The Government has indicated earlier on that it made advance purchases of three vaccines for protecting against Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) (the vaccines) for administration to all people in Hong Kong for free, and that the vaccination programmes are expected to commence next month at the earliest. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) apart from healthcare workers, the elderly and staff of residential care homes, whether the Government will include the following categories of persons in the priority vaccination groups:

(i) supporting staff in hospitals,

- (ii) sample-taking personnel and laboratory staff involved in the COVID-19 virus testing,
- (iii) staff of the Hong Kong Fire Services Department responsible for transferring persons under quarantine,
- (iv) cleansing workers under the Government's outsourced service contractors,
- (v) officers from the disciplined services at immigration control points,
- (vi) frontline personnel working in the airport,
- (vii) personnel working in quarantine centres,
- (viii) practitioners of the transport and logistics sectors, and
- (ix) persons exempted from compulsory quarantine;

(2) whether it will include Hong Kong students who need to travel to countries/regions with a medium or high epidemic risk in the priority vaccination groups, with a view to reducing their risks of contracting COVID-19 overseas;

(3) given that the universal vaccination programme in Israel provides round-the-clock vaccination service and deploys vaccination caravans to provide vaccination service in remote areas, which made Israel's vaccination rate reach 15.8 per cent within two weeks, being the highest in the world, whether the Government will introduce similar arrangements so as to increase the vaccination rate;

(4) as the findings of a survey indicate that quite a number of members of the public have adopted a wait-and-see attitude towards vaccination, whether the Government will consider providing incentives to encourage members of the public to receive vaccination;

(5) given that members of the public may, to a certain extent, choose which vaccine to take, whether it has assessed if there will be a mismatch of demand and supply of the vaccines; if it has assessed and the outcome is in the affirmative, of the measures in place to ameliorate this problem and how it will handle the surplus vaccines; and

(6) given that the Government will set up an indemnity fund to provide indemnities to members of the public who encounter severe adverse events after the administration of the vaccines, of the details of the fund?

Reply:

President,

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) and health experts, COVID-19 would not be eradicated without effective treatment and vaccination.

The Government has been adopting a "two-pronged" strategy to procure vaccines for protecting against COVID-19 for the entire Hong Kong population. The Government has on one hand joined the COVAX Facility led by WHO, and at the same time directly entered into advance purchase agreements with individual vaccine developers for obtaining greater supplies of vaccines at an earlier time.

My reply to the various parts of the question raised by Dr the Hon Chiang Lai-wan is as follows:

(1) to (2) The Government's goal is to provide vaccines for the majority of the Hong Kong population within 2021 through vaccination programmes led by the Government. Members of the public can receive the vaccines on a voluntary basis free of charge. Having regard to the views of experts, and depending on the supply of vaccines, suitable groups for application and information on adverse events, etc., we will accord priority for vaccination to groups which have higher risks of coming into contact with the COVID-19 virus (e.g. healthcare workers), groups which have greater mortality rates after contracting the disease (e.g. the elderly, chronic patients), and/or groups which may easily transmit the virus to the vulnerable or weak if infected (e.g. staff of residential care homes). Furthermore, we are reviewing other target groups which may need to receive vaccination early due to their work nature or other needs. Besides the priority groups, we will basically arrange vaccination for citizens according to their age groups, starting with relatively older persons and gradually extending to younger groups. The Government will announce the details of the vaccination programme in due course.

(3) to (5) The Government's goal is to provide vaccines for the majority of the Hong Kong population within 2021 through vaccination programmes led by the Government. Members of the public can receive the vaccines on a voluntary basis free of charge. The Government will be responsible for the distribution of the vaccines. In the process, it will consult the Joint Scientific Committees under the Department of Health as well as expert groups, including reviewing the latest scientific evidence on the epidemiology and clinical features of COVID-19, published clinical data on the COVID-19 vaccines to be procured by the Government and local data, as well as recommendations and practices by overseas health authorities.

In view that the three types of vaccines to be provided by the Government each have different requirements for handling, the vaccination arrangement will be formulated in accordance with the corresponding handling procedures of the relevant vaccine. For example, the vaccine developed by Fosun Pharma in collaboration with BioNTech has more stringent requirements for cold chain management (the vaccines must be stored in -70 degrees Celsius, and can only survive in a two to eight degrees Celsius environment for five days) and also require correct thawing procedures, in order to ensure the quality of the vaccines and that the vaccination procedures adhere to requirements, we will set up Community Vaccination Centres in 18 districts in Hong Kong. Regarding the vaccines provided by Sinovac Biotech (Hong Kong) Limited, and AstraZeneca and the University of Oxford, in view that their

storage temperature is similar to that of regular vaccines, we expect that they will be handled following the arrangements for seasonal influenza vaccines in general, under which vaccination will be provided through private hospitals and clinics.

As the vaccines have not yet arrived in Hong Kong for commencement of vaccination, the attitudes of members of the public towards the vaccines are still unknown. We also do not yet have clinical evidence on the need for repeated vaccination on a regular basis. Hence, it is premature to discuss the handling of surplus vaccines at this stage. When implementing the vaccination programme, the Government will adopt a science-based approach. We will do well the work on information dissemination, promotion and education following the principles of openness, transparency, accuracy and timeliness. We will disseminate the benefits and correct information on vaccination, the views of experts and details of the vaccination programme, etc. to members of the public through various channels such as print, electronic and social media, with a view to enabling the public to adequately grasp the relevant information before vaccination, including the principles, formulation, usefulness and side effects, etc. This is to allay the public's concerns, and on this premise, encourage them to get vaccinated. We will also step up monitoring of false information on vaccines within the community and make clarifications and debunk rumours as necessary. We have uploaded relevant information onto the Government's "COVID-19 Thematic Website", and will later set up a thematic website for the vaccination programme, so that members of the public can have access to correct and the most updated information and messages on vaccines from an official channel.

(6) Notwithstanding that the vaccines to soon enter the market have undergone stringent clinical tests to ascertain their safety and that tens of thousands of people have participated in the clinical research, and that the number of people administered with the vaccines in other places continues to increase, it is a matter of fact that the research and development period of COVID-19 vaccines is greatly compressed as compared to other regular vaccines. Hence, the occurrence of rare or unpredictable severe adverse event after widespread vaccination on the population cannot be completely ruled out. Having made reference to overseas practices on the relevant issue, the Government plans to set up an indemnity fund. In the event members of the public encounter a rare or unpredicted severe adverse event associated with the administration of the vaccine, they can still take action against the drug manufacturer. The fund will cover the indemnities ultimately determined by court or arbitration and can provide in advance part of the indemnities in order to make available financial assistance to the member of the public as early as possible. The Government is formulating the relevant mechanism and details and will seek funding approval from the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council as soon as possible.

Raising social security payments and implementing a series of improvement measures to CSSA Scheme from February

The Social Welfare Department (SWD) announced today (January 27) that the standard payment rates under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme and the rates of Old Age Allowance (OAA) (including OAA under the Guangdong (GD) Scheme and the Fujian (FJ) Scheme), Old Age Living Allowance (OALA) (including OALA under the GD Scheme and the FJ Scheme) and Disability Allowance under the Social Security Allowance (SSA) Scheme will be increased from February 1 this year. On the same day, a series of improvement measures to the CSSA Scheme will also be implemented, including enhancements to the Disregarded Earnings (DE) arrangement and extending a range of special grants to eligible non-elderly able-bodied recipients.

An SWD spokesman said, "Based on the established adjustment mechanism, i.e. according to the movement of the Social Security Assistance Index of Prices, the Government earlier proposed to increase the above rates by 2.7 per cent (see Annex I). The proposal has been approved by the Legislative Council Finance Committee and will take effect on February 1. An additional expenditure of \$1.448 billion per year will be incurred for the adjustment, benefiting some 1.38 million recipients of the above Schemes."

The spokesman added, "According to the established mechanism, the maximum rent allowance under the CSSA Scheme will also be adjusted upwards by 1.6 per cent on the same day (see Annex II) based on the movement of the Consumer Price Index (A) rent index for private housing."

In addition, following the Government's completion of a review on the "pro-employment" measures and other measures under the CSSA Scheme in 2019, the Chief Executive's 2019 Policy Address announced a series of improvement measures to the CSSA Scheme. The relevant funding proposal has been approved by the Legislative Council Finance Committee on May 29, 2020.

The spokesman said that the SWD has been implementing a series of improvement measures to the CSSA Scheme by phases, including the enhancement of the Employment Support Services and effecting a one-off increase in the maximum rent allowance as well as extending the coverage of the "Community Living Supplement" to eligible non-elderly able-bodied recipients from 2020. On February 1 this year, the SWD will implement the remaining improvement measures, including raising the maximum level of DE under the CSSA Scheme from \$2,500 per month to \$4,000 per month and increasing the maximum level of earnings to be totally disregarded from a new job from the first month's income to a maximum of the first two months' income every two years (see Annex III); as well as extending a range of special grants to eligible non-elderly able-bodied recipients (see Annex IV).

CSSA and SSA recipients who have enquiries may contact their respective

social security field units or call the SWD hotline at 2343 2255.

Inland Revenue Department to resume basic public services

In view of the latest developments of the epidemic situation and in line with the Government's announcement yesterday (January 26) that government departments will resume more public services in a safe and orderly manner, the Inland Revenue Department announced today (January 27) that the following offices will provide basic public services from January 28:

Offices	Opening hours
Central Enquiry Counter Business Registration Office Stamp Office Collection Enforcement Sections Refund Section	From 9am to noon and from 1.30pm to 4pm, Monday to Friday
Central Telephone Enquiry	From 9am to 12.30pm and from 1.30pm to 4pm, Monday to Friday

The department appeals to members of the public for their understanding that the above services will be provided at a reduced scale and they should be prepared to experience a longer waiting time before they can be served. The department encourages the public to use electronic services to handle tax affairs as much as possible. A list of such services can be found in the department's website at www.ird.gov.hk/eng/ese/index.htm.

Since tax payments, lodgement of objections and holdover applications, and submission of tax returns and information can be made or performed without social contact, the relevant deadlines will not be extended. If members of the public experience difficulties in handling the relevant matters, they should contact the department by electronic means, by post or by fax (www.ird.gov.hk/eng/cu_enqs.htm).

The department will review the situation and make further announcements as necessary.

LCQ18: Protection of online privacy

Following is a question by the Hon Elizabeth Quat and a written reply by the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Erick Tsang Kwok-wai, in the Legislative Council today (January 27):

Question:

WhatsApp is a mobile application (the App) widely used by Hong Kong people for instant messaging. The App has recently issued a notice to its users requesting them to indicate whether they agree to the updated terms of service and privacy policy of the App (new terms), which include the following provision: the user agrees to share his/her user information with Facebook (FB), which is the owner of the App, and FB's subsidiaries. In the event that the user has not indicated his/her consent by the deadline, he/she will not be able to continue using the App. A large number of users of the App have criticised that the new terms undermine the protection for their privacy, and that the App's de facto forcing its users to accept the new terms is an abuse of its market power. Although the person-in-charge of the App has subsequently indicated that the new terms will only apply to business accounts and deferred the relevant deadline, the concerns of users are still not assuaged. On the other hand, the App's users in the United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union (EU) are not affected by the new terms for the time being. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows if the Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data (PCPD) has, upon review of the new terms, found the new terms to be in breach of the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Cap. 486) and related codes of practice/guidelines;

(2) given that the PCPD has written to FB and put forward some recommendations (including providing users who do not agree to the new terms with viable options that enable them to continue to use its service), whether it knows if the PCPD has received a reply; if the PCPD has, of the details;

(3) whether it has studied if the App's users in the UK and the EU not being affected by the new terms is attributable to the better protection provided by the privacy protection legislation in those places; if it has studied and the outcome is in the affirmative, whether it will, by making reference to such legislation, amend Cap. 486, in order to enhance the privacy protection for members of the public; if it will not, of the reasons for that and the alternatives available; and

(4) whether it knows if the PCPD has examined whether the messaging applications, social platforms and online media websites commonly used in Hong Kong have collected users' personal data excessively; if the PCPD has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In response to the question raised by the Hon Elizabeth Quat, having consulted the Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data (PCPD), the response is as follows:

(1) and (2) Given the wide usage of the messaging application mentioned in the question by the general public in Hong Kong, and the keen concerns about the privacy issues arising from the new terms on the sharing of personal data concerned, the PCPD has earlier sent a letter to that messaging application's United States headquarters, and maintained proactive communications with their representatives, while providing the following four suggestions:

- clearly explain to users the arrangements for the sharing of personal data under the new terms, and the personal data involved and the use of other data;
- delay the deadline of consideration by users, giving ample time for users to consider;
- since not all users using the messaging application have at the same time opened the social network accounts under question, it is therefore worthy to consider not to apply the new terms to those users; and
- consider providing to users who have not chosen to accept the new terms and privacy policy a workable plan to continue to use the messaging application.

Subsequently, the PCPD noted the company announced on January 15, 2021 that it had extended the deadline for users to accept its new terms of service and privacy policy from February 8 to May 15, and stated that it would provide further information and explanation to users within this timeframe.

The PCPD has earlier received the preliminary reply from the company; following on this, the PCPD will find out further details from the company, and request the company to provide more details to the public to alleviate public concerns. The PCPD will continue to pay close attention to the developments, so as to further assess whether the company has contravened the relevant requirements under the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (PDP0).

(3) The PCPD is currently communicating with the representative from the company in a proactive manner. At this stage, the PCPD still does not have sufficient information to comment whether the United Kingdom and the European

Union users are affected by the new terms, and whether this is relevant to those areas' respective privacy laws. That said, in light of the rapid development of the global privacy landscape (such as the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation of the European Union), the PCPD will consider issuing guidelines on the personal data privacy problems of which the public should be aware when using social networks.

(4) Currently, the PCPD disseminates information from time to time, to explain to the public the privacy problems of which to be aware when using social networks, for example, the "Protecting Online Privacy – Be Smart on Social Networks" information leaflet (www.pcpd.org.hk/english/resources_centre/publications/files/SN2015_e.pdf). Moreover, upon receiving complaints and enquiries, the PCPD will review the collection, holding, processing, use or disclosure of personal data by relevant data users on online social networks, messaging applications, Internet media, etc., to ensure data users comply with the requirements of the PDPO and the Data Protection Principles. In future, the PCPD will strengthen the proactive patrolling work in this aspect, so as to further protect the privacy rights of the general public.