

LCQ4: Encouraging the youth to develop careers on the Mainland

Following is a question by the Hon Martin Liao and a reply by the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Erick Tsang Kwok-wai, in the Legislative Council today (January 6):

Question:

As Hong Kong's economy has been hard hit by the epidemic, the youth unemployment rate remains high. In this connection, the Government has launched the "Greater Bay Area Youth Employment Scheme" and the "Funding Scheme for Youth Entrepreneurship in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area" to encourage the youth to develop their careers in the Mainland cities of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (Greater Bay Area). However, the concern of society is that whether the youth of Hong Kong have been misled by the hatred-inciting and anti-establishment riots that lasted for as long as one year, resulting in their dampened desire to go to the Mainland for development. The findings of a survey targeting at the youth aged between 15 and 39 have shown that, while the percentage of respondents who have heard of the development plan for the Greater Bay Area has increased significantly from 55 per cent two years ago to over 85 per cent, those identifying with it only account for 22 per cent, representing a slight drop as compared with that two years ago, and the percentage of respondents who are unwilling to go to the Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area for development has risen substantially from 31 per cent two years ago to more than 50 per cent. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows the details, including the numbers of persons and percentages, of Hong Kong youth who are currently studying or have taken up employment in the Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area, together with a breakdown by the age group to which they belong; if such figures are unavailable, whether it will compile the statistics on a regular basis;

(2) of the eligibility criteria for and other details of the Greater Bay Area Youth Employment Scheme, and the respective estimated numbers of youth who can benefit from the two aforesaid schemes; the measures in place to assist other youth who cannot benefit from such schemes in developing their careers in the Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area; and

(3) whether it will examine the reasons why an increase in the number of youth who have heard of the development plan for the Greater Bay Area does not lead to a rise in the number of those who identify with it; what targeted measures the newly established Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Development Office will take, when it conducts strategic publicity and promotion activities, to facilitate the youth to gain an in-depth understanding of and identify with the development of the Greater Bay Area?

Reply:

President,

The objectives of the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (Greater Bay Area) are to further deepen cooperation amongst Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, promote coordinated regional economic development, leverage their complementary advantages, and develop an international first-class bay area for living, working and travelling. The Greater Bay Area has a population exceeding 72 million with a gross domestic product of approximately US\$1.7 trillion. As one of the most open and economically vibrant regions in China, the Greater Bay Area has many opportunities to offer and has huge development potential.

The development of the Greater Bay Area not only will give new impetus to the economic development of Hong Kong, but will also be where major opportunities for Hong Kong's economic recovery after the pandemic lie. It will provide young people with more and greater room for development.

Since the promulgation of the Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area in February 2019, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (HKSAR Government) has kept in close contact with relevant central ministries, the governments of Guangdong Province and the Mainland municipalities of the Greater Bay Area, as well as the Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region to proactively take forward the development of the Greater Bay Area on the basis of "one country, two systems". Many policy initiatives facilitating Hong Kong residents – especially young people – who wish to study, work and start new businesses in the Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area have since been introduced by the Central Government, including measures supporting youth innovation and entrepreneurship, and the opening up of positions in the civil service and at public institutions for application by Hong Kong and Macao residents. These measures will provide young people from Hong Kong with more quality job opportunities, a career ladder and a broader scope of development. The HKSAR Government encourages young people to focus on the Greater Bay Area and to grasp the opportunities it provides.

Upon consulting the Home Affairs Bureau, the Labour and Welfare Bureau and the Education Bureau, our consolidated reply to the Hon Martin Liao's question is as follows:

(1) The HKSAR Government does not maintain statistics or breakdowns on the number of young people from Hong Kong studying or working in the Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area. Yet, information provided by the Ministry of Education shows that there were in total some 7 700 Hong Kong students studying at higher education institutions and research institutes in the Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area in the 2017/18 academic year. Although at present the HKSAR Government does not maintain such statistics, we will, having regard to our work and research needs relating to the development of the Greater Bay Area, consider seeking relevant statistics and

information on specific subjects or projects where appropriate, including conducting surveys or obtaining information from relevant departments on the Mainland.

(2) The Greater Bay Area Youth Employment Scheme (Youth Employment Scheme) encourages enterprises with business in both Hong Kong and the Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area to employ university graduates from Hong Kong and station them to work in the Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area. A total of 2 000 places will be made available under the Youth Employment Scheme. Hong Kong residents who are legally employable in Hong Kong and hold bachelor's degrees or above awarded by universities in or outside Hong Kong from 2019 to 2021 may participate in the Youth Employment Scheme.

Participating enterprises have to employ the target graduates in Hong Kong according to Hong Kong laws, offer them a monthly salary of not less than HK\$18,000, and station them for a long period in the Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area to work and receive on-the-job training. The HKSAR Government will pay the enterprises a monthly allowance of HK\$10,000 for each qualified graduate employed for up to 18 months.

On supporting young people from Hong Kong to start their businesses in the Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area, the Home Affairs Bureau has introduced, under the Youth Development Fund, the Funding Scheme for Youth Entrepreneurship in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, with a view to encouraging Hong Kong young people to make optimal use of the innovative and entrepreneurial bases in the Greater Bay Area and helping them develop their businesses in both Hong Kong and the Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area. In her 2020 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced further raising the funding of the current-round funding scheme, with a view to supporting more youth start-ups to strengthen their corporate governance, adaptability and digital competence. It is estimated that more than \$100 million will be granted for over 10 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to implement youth entrepreneurship projects, under which subsidies will be provided for more than 200 youth start-ups (involving more than 800 Hong Kong young entrepreneurs), while start-up support and services will be rendered to about 4 000 young people.

The Home Affairs Bureau also subsidises NGOs through the Funding Scheme for Youth Internship in the Mainland to organise Mainland internship activities for young people from Hong Kong, with a view to enabling them to obtain real-life experience in the actual workplace environment on the Mainland, as well as to acquire a deeper understanding of the employment market, work culture and development opportunities therein. In particular, as one of the major cooperation initiatives between Hong Kong and Guangdong, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Hong Kong Youth Internship Scheme launched under the funding scheme has been expanded to cover all Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area since last year. Approximately 950 young people have taken up internship placements in the Greater Bay Area under the internship scheme. Subject to the development of the pandemic, the HKSAR Government will continue to enhance and expand the relevant schemes in the future, with a view to providing Hong Kong young people with more diverse

opportunities to enter the Greater Bay Area.

(3) With the approval of the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council, the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau established the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Development Office (Greater Bay Area Office) and appointed its Commissioner on November 23, 2020. One of the key responsibilities of the Greater Bay Area Office is to help the public better understand the significant opportunities that the development of the Greater Bay Area brings to Hong Kong. Specifically, the Greater Bay Area Office will, through strategic publicity and promotional activities, strengthen the understanding of different sectors of society of the development of the Greater Bay Area, as well as the various opportunities brought to the general public and enterprises or professionals. Young people are a key target of the HKSAR Government's publicity efforts. As such, the Greater Bay Area Office has been promoting the development of the Greater Bay Area through various platforms proactively. For example, the Greater Bay Area Office launched two new television and radio Announcements in Public Interest (APIs) on January 4, 2021 to publicise how the policy measures announced after the two plenary meetings of the Leading Group for the Development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area held in 2019 can facilitate the general public, young people and professionals from Hong Kong to develop and live in the Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area. Moreover, after the television series "11 Charms of the Greater Bay Area" was aired in late September 2020, the Greater Bay Area Office collaborated with Television Broadcasts Limited again to produce a mini-television programme, which consists of 60 two-minute episodes to be broadcast over 12 weeks, covering useful information about studying, working, starting businesses, development opportunities and living in the Greater Bay Area. The aim is to instil amongst viewers, especially young people, a positive impression of the Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area and to create a vision for their own development there in the future.

Apart from making use of traditional channels such as television programmes as well as television and radio APIs, the HKSAR Government is also making use of internet platforms which are more commonly used amongst the younger generation to disseminate positive information about the development of the Greater Bay Area, and to encourage the public (especially young people), businesses and professionals to make the best of the opportunities it has to offer. These platforms include the dedicated Greater Bay Area website (bayarea.gov.hk) which serves as a "one-stop" portal for relevant information, social media pages on Facebook and Instagram ([hk.bayarea](https://www.facebook.com/hk.bayarea)) and a WeChat official account (HKCMAB). After the pandemic, the Greater Bay Area Office will proactively organise larger-scale local promotional and publicity events, as well as briefings and meetings with different local institutions and bodies, with a view to strengthening the understanding of various sectors of society of the development of the Greater Bay Area development.

We hope that young people will continue to understand our country and the development of the Greater Bay Area, as well as to make the best of the significant opportunities the Greater Bay Area offers them in their personal and career developments.

LCQ1: Anti-epidemic measures targeting at imported frozen goods

Following is a question by the Hon Wong Ting-kwong and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (January 6):

Question:

It has been reported that the coronavirus which is currently rampant across the globe can survive for several days at low temperatures. In recent months, cases have been recorded from time to time on the Mainland in which the packages of imported frozen foods were tested positive for the virus, and some workers were infected with the virus suspectedly due to coming into contact with such kind of goods or the conveyances concerned, who then spread the epidemic to the community. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the additional measures put in place to prevent the coronavirus from being spread to Hong Kong via imported containers and frozen goods (especially those coming from those regions or countries where the epidemic was severe);
- (2) of the additional measures put in place to help prevent workers who need to come into contact with imported frozen goods from being infected; and
- (3) whether it has regularly conducted coronavirus tests on the retail shops for and conveyances of imported frozen goods, as well as the workers handling such goods; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Adhering to the strategy of "preventing the importation of cases and the spreading of virus in the community" with respect to COVID-19, we have implemented, apart from immigration control, virus testing and social distancing, a series of preventive measures including those safeguarding against the risk of virus transmission through imported frozen foods and other goods. The following is my consolidated reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Wong Ting-kwong:

On preventing the importation of the virus through imported frozen foods, noting the earlier cases in the Mainland that the COVID-19 virus was detected on imported frozen foods or their packaging, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) has

immediately stepped up, at the import level, testing of various types of frozen foods and their packaging imported from different countries/regions, which involves taking samples at its Airport Food Inspection Offices and the cold stores of importers. As at the end of 2020, over 1 300 related food samples were collected for testing. The test results were all negative. The CFS will continue the surveillance on imported frozen foods and their packaging to closely monitor the risk of the spread of the COVID-19 virus through imported frozen foods. Moreover, arrangements are being made with the relevant departments to extend the virus surveillance to other frozen goods and their packaging.

In the meantime, the FEHD has arranged voluntary free COVID-19 testing service for various targeted groups since July 2020. The testing service has been extended to practitioners of licensed cold stores since November 2020. As at the end of December 2020, over 2 200 practitioners of licensed cold stores participated in the COVID-19 testing scheme with all tested to be negative. The FEHD will continue to provide voluntary and free testing service for practitioners of licensed cold stores. Persons who have undergone the tests are also entitled to be re-tested.

In addition, the Department of Health continues to provide free COVID-19 testing service for staff members of the Hong Kong International Airport, including those working at air cargo terminals who may be in contact with frozen goods. The daily quota has increased from the original 500 to the current 800 starting from January 4, 2021.

Meanwhile, the Transport and Housing Bureau (THB) has been providing voluntary and free COVID-19 tests for front-line workers of the Kwai Tsing Container Terminals who are required to work or contact crews onboard container ships since September 2020. As at the end of December 2020, over 11 600 specimens have been collected and tested. The THB will continue to liaise with terminal operators closely to ensure the smooth operation of the testing scheme.

In consultation with the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health, the CFS issued the "Health Advice for Frozen Food Handlers on the Prevention of COVID-19" (the Advice) to the food trade (including licensed food premises and licensed cold stores) in early November 2020. The Advice was also disseminated to container terminal operators and the cold chain logistics sector to remind frozen food handlers of the potential risks of infection and the need to take precautionary measures, such as good personal hygiene practices, putting on personal protection equipment, and maintaining environmental hygiene and social distancing. The FEHD noted that the trade had actively followed the Advice to put in place measures against the pandemic.

Furthermore, the CFS started to discuss with cold store operators on how to step up the disinfection of the outer package of imported frozen foods and the working environment of cold stores in late November 2020. The major cold store operators have indicated their support. In late December 2020, the CFS issued the "Prevention of COVID-19 – Guidance on Disinfecting the Working

Environment and the Food Package of Cold Stores at Import Level" (the Guidance) to licensed cold stores and suggested to them relevant preventive measures including the type of disinfectants and their usage, precautions for the use of chlorine-based disinfectants and personal protection measures. The Guidance has been distributed to all licensed cold store operators and uploaded to the CFS's dedicated website "Let's Beat COVID-19 Together". The CFS will continue to work with the frozen food trade to enhance anti-epidemic work with regard to imported frozen foods.

At the same time, since the COVID-19 outbreak, three air cargo terminals at the Hong Kong International Airport have adopted a series of measures to safeguard the health and safety of staff members and stepped up the cleaning and disinfection of workplace. The cargo terminal operators will continue to pay heed to the guidelines issued by relevant international organisations and take appropriate steps and measures in handling temperature-controlled cargoes entering Hong Kong.

In fact, the main mode of transmission of COVID-19 is through respiratory droplets. The virus can also be transmitted through contact. Droplets carrying the virus can deposit on objects and surfaces surrounding infected persons. People can be infected if they touch contaminated objects or surfaces (including frozen foods and other frozen goods) and then touch their eyes, nose or mouth. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the virus causing COVID-19 can survive on different objects (including frozen foods and other frozen goods) for a few hours to several days, but cannot multiply. According to the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, in the earlier positive cases of COVID-19 nucleic acid in foods and packages on the Mainland, the load of the nucleic acid was relatively low and the virus present was not necessarily alive.

Practitioners who frequently come into contact with imported frozen foods and other frozen goods should observe personal hygiene and take adequate personal protection measures all the time. The risk of acquiring the virus through contact with frozen goods in daily work is believed to be very low. The WHO also states that it is highly unlikely that people will contract COVID-19 from frozen foods and other frozen goods. Nevertheless, we will continue to closely monitor the risk of the spread of the COVID-19 virus through imported frozen foods and sustain our efforts in enhancing the anti-epidemic work in respect of imported frozen foods and other frozen goods.

Thank you, President.

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to Fusion Bank Limited

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

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) wishes to alert members of the public to a press release issued by Fusion Bank Limited on suspicious mobile applications (Apps), which has been reported to the HKMA. Hyperlink to the press release is available on the [HKMA website](#) for ease of reference by members of the public.

Anyone who has provided his or her personal information to the Apps concerned or has conducted any financial transactions through the Apps should contact the bank concerned using the contact information provided in the press release, and report to the Police or contact the Cyber Security and Technology Crime Bureau of the Hong Kong Police Force at 2860 5012.

LCQ7: Impacts of epidemic on students

Following is a question by the Dr Hon Cheng Chung-tai and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (January 6):

Question:

In light of the severe situation of the coronavirus disease 2019 epidemic and upper respiratory tract infections among students, the Education Bureau (EDB) has directed schools to suspend face-to-face classes on a number of occasions since January last year. Many parents have expressed that since there is a significant reduction in the number of school days in this school year as compared with those in previous years, they are worried that the learning progress as well as the physical and mental health of their children may be affected. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that while the EDB has repeatedly stressed that schools should achieve "suspending classes without stopping learning", online teaching undoubtedly has fewer interactive elements, and the findings of a survey reveal that almost half of the responding students relayed that they have difficulty in staying concentrated during online learning and they were unable to grasp the contents of the lessons and homework, and some students even indicated that they had not acquired any knowledge during class suspension, whether the EDB will consider making an exception by extending this school year and shortening school holidays, as well as making relevant arrangements;

(2) as the findings of the aforesaid survey have revealed that during class suspension, students rarely met their classmates, stayed home for a prolonged period, and lacked discipline in their daily living, which resulted in various emotional problems, whether the EDB will allocate additional resources to schools for employing additional school social workers to help students address such problems; and

(3) as there are comments that small class teaching (SCT) not only may enhance teaching effectiveness but also may reduce the risks of students contracting diseases as the class sizes are reduced, but currently only around 80 per cent of the public sector primary schools are implementing SCT, whether the EDB will allocate additional resources to enable all public sector primary schools to implement SCT?

Reply:

President,

Since the beginning of 2020, the situation of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic has been fluctuating. Schools are places where many young students study and engage in activities. On campuses activities are frequent. In order to safeguard the safety of students, school staff and the public, and prevent the spread of the virus in schools and communities, the Government has been in close liaison with health experts and the school sector to timely announce measures, including suspension of face-to-face classes, partial face-to-face classes and half-day face-to-face classes in response to the epidemic development, so as to strike a balance between student learning and epidemic prevention. All along, schools have been actively supporting the arrangements, coping with the changes with flexibility and quickly adapting to the new normal, with a view to achieving the objective of "suspending classes without suspending learning", as well as caring for and taking care of students' learning, social and emotional needs. The Education Bureau (EDB) has also developed relevant resources to share with teachers and parents to help them support students in need. The EDB will continue to closely monitor the development of the epidemic, take into account professional advice from health experts as well as maintain dialogues with the school sector. We will review the school arrangements in a timely manner and provide schools and students with appropriate support.

Our reply to the three parts of the question is as follows:

(1) During the suspension of face-to-face classes, schools flexibly adopt different modes of learning and teaching, such as e-learning, according to their circumstances and needs of students at different key stages, to support students to continue learning at home so that they can achieve "suspending classes without suspending learning".

For secondary and primary schools, they assist students to make good use of the time at home to learn by encouraging them to prepare for their studies and to read extensively, and by organising small online study groups for

them, etc. Schools have also developed numerous teaching video clips, conducted real-time online lessons and adopted online platforms/learning management systems for supporting students' learning. Learning and teaching resources have been distributed to students via electronic means such as emails/intranet while students are required to submit assignments electronically. Furthermore, schools have made arrangements for the teaching staff to keep in touch with parents via telephone or other electronic means.

The survey conducted by the EDB in the 2019/20 school year reveals that primary and secondary schools have adopted diversified strategies to support students to learn systematically at home and schools have also adopted different means to track students' learning progress during the class suspension period. Most schools considered that the progress of implementation of home learning plans for students met the pre-set targets. The EDB will maintain close communications with schools to understand their operation and needs, and in response to epidemic changes, work hand in hand with them to make flexible arrangements for the learning stages.

Besides, the EDB seeks to understand how secondary and primary schools support student learning and development in the new normal under the epidemic. As observed in inspections, schools, in general, are still gathering experience and continuously exploring effective measures to cater for student learning and development. We will continue to share schools' successful experience with the education sector in future for refining related school work, such as using e-learning to enhance students' self-directed learning.

As regards kindergartens (KGs), since it is not desirable for young children to use electronic screen for a long period of time, e-learning is not suitable for KG students. We encourage KGs to design activities suitable for home learning, such as encouraging children to read at home; producing and distributing learning materials that align with the learning themes, children's interest and abilities; encouraging parents to support their children in doing simple housekeeping tasks etc, so as to help maintain children's learning motivation and curiosity; as well as collaborate with parents to better cater for children's emotional and moral developmental needs. To further support KG students' learning at home, we launched a new initiative in December last year that a one-off subsidy would be provided to all KGs joining the KG education scheme to support them to implement the "Gift Book Scheme" and "Do It Yourself (DIY) Handicraft and Learning Package Scheme", which aim to cultivate children's reading interest and promote reading culture.

The above shows that schools have effectively sustained students' learning motivation and progress through a variety of methods, and this fully illustrates that learning is not confined to the classroom. Learning is not only a teaching and studying process to catch up with the subject knowledge, but also a way to cultivate students' self-directed learning skills and attitudes, so that during the epidemic, they can stay positive and optimistic and care for people around them. We notice that different organisations have conducted various surveys on the learning arrangements during the school

suspension period. Since the objectives, targets, methods and timing of the surveys are different, when interpreting the survey results, we should understand the relevant background and factors in detail to analyse whether the results are representative and could reflect the actual situation, rather than taking them out of context.

We are of the view that there is no need to extend the school year or shorten the school holidays at the current stage.

(2) Under the epidemic, students lack regular social activities, and their emotions are easily affected. In response, schools have strengthened professional support, maintained communication with parents and students, and cared for and taken care of students' learning, social and emotional needs.

Since the 2018/19 school year, the EDB has started to enhance student guidance service in primary schools. The EDB has provided a new funding mode, implementing the policy of "one school social worker for each school" in all public sector and Direct Subsidy Scheme primary schools. Schools may, having regard to their own circumstances, employ at least one school-based registered graduate social worker with professional qualifications to further enhance the overall quality of guidance services. In the 2020/21 school year, over 80 per cent of public sector primary schools were served by at least one school-based registered graduate social worker, with around 480 registered graduate social workers being employed by the schools. As for secondary schools, the Social Welfare Department has implemented the measure of "two school social workers for each school" in more than 460 secondary schools in Hong Kong since the 2019/20 school year, with the addition of about 370 school social workers. The number of school social workers for each secondary school is increased from 1.2 to 2 and there is an increase of about 46 posts of Social Work Officer concomitantly to enhance supervisory support for handling complicated cases.

Professionals of different disciplines in a school (including guidance personnel, school social workers and school-based educational psychologists) will provide students with appropriate support. Through the whole-school discipline and guidance approach, related professionals collaborate with teachers to provide remedial, preventive and developmental counselling programs for students as necessary. During the period of suspension of face-to-face classes, the EDB has recommended and encouraged schools to keep in contact with and express concern to students through telephone or electronic communication as well as to understand whether students are affected through close observation of students' performance and enhanced communication with parents. If students have encountered emotional difficulties, teachers can refer them to professionals to help solve the academic, social and/or emotional developmental problems, including pressure faced under the epidemic.

The EDB has also reminded teachers/guidance personnel/school social workers to continue to pay attention to those in need (i.e. cases of prolonged absence from school, families lacking support and suspected child maltreatment or child being reported maltreated, etc.) and follow the

prevailing procedures in handling at-risk cases in light of the principle of child protection.

To help teachers and parents understand how to handle negative emotions of students and assist them to maintain mental well-being, the EDB has produced a series of short psychoeducational videos for teachers and parents, namely "Suspending Classes without Suspending Love in the Epidemic". The EDB has also issued an information note on "Providing Emotional Support for Students in the New School Year" and information on mental health, facilitating teachers to help students maintain regular living habits and engage in school life again under the epidemic. Besides, the EDB has also organised workshops with a view to enhancing the capabilities of teachers and school personnel in supporting students to mitigate their negative emotions and stress.

(3) As an established measure to optimise learning and teaching, the current policy of implementing small class teaching (SCT) progressively in public sector primary schools will not be changed due to the epidemic. At present, around 80 per cent of public sector primary schools have implemented SCT. As the overall demand for Primary One school places has gradually declined to a steady level from its peak, both the EDB and the school sector believe that this has created a favourable condition for more schools to implement SCT for better learning and teaching. After careful examination and communication with the school sector last year, the EDB has decided to arrange for suitable primary schools to implement SCT in phases starting from the 2021/22 school year. In the first phase, an additional 11 public sector primary schools will start implementing SCT concurrently. The EDB will continue to regularly review the situation of supply and demand of school places in each district and closely liaise with relevant schools and school sponsoring bodies for the orderly implementation of SCT. In tandem, the EDB will organise relevant professional development and support programmes for teachers on an ongoing basis to maximise the effectiveness of SCT and hence the number of students that can benefit from SCT.

LCQ12: Nuisances caused by wild pigs

Following is a question by the Hon Steven Ho and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (January 6):

Question:

The Government has since 2017 suspended arranging hunting teams to carry out wild pig hunting operations, pending a decision on the strategies and measures for the management of wild pigs to be made upon completion of a review. In October of the same year, the Government launched the Capture and

Contraception/Relocation Programme (CCRP) on a pilot basis to address the persistent nuisances caused by wild pigs in the urban areas. However, some members of the public have complained to me that incidents of wild pigs attacking and injuring members of the public, spreading African swine fever as well as damaging crops and other properties after intruding into residential areas, farms and urban areas have still occurred incessantly in recent years. Those members of the public consider that such a situation has demonstrated the ineffectiveness of CCRP and hence the necessity for the Government to adopt new approaches to effectively tackle the problems of proliferation of wild pigs. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of operations conducted under CCRP last year; the respective numbers of wild pigs (i) captured, (ii) administered with contraceptive vaccine or surgically sterilised, and (iii) relocated to remote countryside in such operations;

(2) of the number of complaints about nuisances caused by wild pigs received in each of the past five years, and the total value of property losses reported by members of the public; whether it has set up a dedicated telephone hotline to receive this kind of complaints and take timely follow-up actions;

(3) as the Government indicated in 2019 that the evaluation of (i) the effectiveness of the contraceptive vaccine in use and (ii) the feasibility of conducting sterilisation surgery for wild pigs in the field, under CCRP would be completed by the end of that year, of the evaluation results, and when such results will be published; whether the review on the strategies and measures for the management of wild pigs has been completed; if so, of the outcome; whether it will arrange the hunting teams to conduct wild pigs hunting operations again, or adopt other approaches, to tackle the problems of proliferation of wild pigs;

(4) whether it will consider adopting other options to tackle the problem of overbreeding of wild pigs, and conducting a systematic assessment of such fertility trend; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(5) given that the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department commissioned in 2018 a local university to examine and improve the design of the refuse collection facilities being used in the residential areas and on streets to prevent wild animals such as wild pigs from wantonly destroying such facilities in order to forage food from them, and that trials have been conducted on three improved designs at more than 40 locations, of the trial results and the follow-up work; when it will completely switch to using the newly designed facilities; and

(6) of the number of prosecutions instituted in the past five years by the Government by invoking the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Cap. 170) against persons who fed wild pigs illegally, and the major penalties imposed on the convicted persons; whether it has reviewed the procedures and methodologies of the relevant law enforcement actions (including the installation of closed circuit television systems and law enforcement by law

enforcement officers in plain clothes and through surprise operations); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government has been closely monitoring the nuisance caused by wild animals to the public. For the management of wild pigs, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) launched the pilot Capture and Contraception/Relocation Programme (CCRP) in late 2017 to address the nuisance problem caused by wild pigs in urban areas. The AFCD will relocate wild pigs causing nuisance away from residential areas to remote countryside in order to provide immediate relief to the nuisance problem. They will also perform contraception or sterilisation on wild pigs causing nuisance or those rescued where conditions permit to prevent the increase in the number of wild pigs habitually looking for food in residential areas. The AFCD has regularised the relevant work since 2019.

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Steven Ho is as follows:

(1) Since the commencement of the CCRP in late 2017 and up to November 2020, the AFCD has arranged 128 operations and caught 666 wild pigs in total. Among them, 296 received contraceptive treatments or sterilisation; 499 were relocated to remote countryside farther away from residential areas.

(2) When members of the public encounter wild pig nuisance, they could notify the AFCD to take follow-up actions by calling the round-the-clock Government Hotline 1823. The number of complaints on wild pigs received by the AFCD over the past five years is tabulated as follows:

Year	Number of complaints
2016	583
2017	738
2018	929
2019	1 184
2020 (Up to November)	920

The AFCD does not have information relating to the loss of valuables caused by wild pig nuisance.

(3) The field study of contraceptive vaccine and the performance of sterilisation surgery for wild pigs initiated by the AFCD are the first of their kinds in the world. To assess the effectiveness of the contraceptive vaccine, the AFCD has conducted analysis on a number of wild pig serum samples. The results of the analysis indicated that 93 per cent of those wild pigs did not get pregnant again two to 21 months after vaccinations. As the effect of contraception on the control of wild pig nuisance is on a medium to long term basis, it is premature at this stage to draw conclusion on its effectiveness. The AFCD will continue to collect samples to monitor the long-

term effectiveness of the vaccine. The AFCD has also started to conduct sterilisation surgery on wild pigs in the field since 2018. Although the effect of sterilisation surgery is permanent, the process is complicated and requires a long preparation time. Furthermore, it is difficult to perform such surgery in certain environment (e.g. restricted space, difficult terrain or lack of traffic connection) or urgent situations. Thus, it cannot completely replace the contraceptive vaccine treatment.

Having weighed all pros and cons, especially public safety, the AFCD formally terminated the operations of wild pig hunting teams in 2019. The AFCD has set up an advisory group comprising both local and non-local wildlife conservation experts (advisory group) to advise on the management of wild pigs. The AFCD holds regular meetings with the advisory group to review the management strategies on wild pigs.

(4) Studies reveal that wild pigs' reproductive rate is highly dependent on food availability. The AFCD's investigation also reveals that the increase in wild pig nuisance cases in recent years is largely due to intentional feeding and improper disposal of outdoor garbage. In this regard, other than relocation and contraception/sterilisation of wild pigs habitually looking for food in residential areas, the AFCD has been working closely with relevant departments to eliminate the pull factors at black spots by removing food residues, strengthening the promotion of no-feeding of wild pigs, and improving the design of refuse collection facilities, etc.

In order to gather more information for refining the management strategies in the future, the AFCD launched a preliminary study in 2019 to estimate the population size of wild pigs by applying statistic model on time-lapse data collected from infra-red cameras. The results were used to calculate the population size and reproduction trend of wild pigs in the countryside areas in Hong Kong. Initial analysis showed that there were about 1 800 to 3 300 wild pigs in the countryside areas in Hong Kong. The AFCD will collect and analyse further data and expects to complete the analysis in 2021. The department will then work with the advisory group on strategies to further control the number of wild pigs in Hong Kong.

(5) The AFCD has commissioned a consultancy study with the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and the Environmental Protection Department to improve the design of litter containers and refuse collection facilities with a view to reducing scavenging for food from outdoor refuse by wild pigs and monkeys. The contractor has developed three new designs of wild pigs or monkeys-resistant litter containers which were tested at over 70 sites frequently disturbed by wild animals throughout the territories. All field trials were completed in the third quarter of 2020. Evaluation results suggested that the new designs can effectively reduce wildlife nuisance. The FEHD will deploy the newly-designed litter containers in more suitable sites based on actual needs to reduce the nuisance of wild animals.

(6) Kam Shan, Lion Rock and Shing Mun Country Parks, part of Tai Mo Shan Country Park, Tai Po Kau Nature Reserve, a section of Tai Po Road along Caldecott Road and Piper's Hill section of Tai Po Road are specified places under the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Cap. 170) at which the feeding

of any wild animals are prohibited (feeding ban area). Any person feeding wild animals in the feeding ban area is liable to a maximum fine of \$10,000.

The information on prosecutions against illegal feeding of wild animals (including wild pigs) over the past five years is tabulated as follows:

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Number of prosecutions against illegal feeding of wild animals (Note)	66	70	61	25	36
Number of successful prosecutions against illegal feeding of wild animals (Note)	57	60	55	20	35
Highest fine of successful prosecutions (\$)	1,200	1,500	1,500	1,000	2,000

Note: Some of the prosecutions instituted in a certain year might be processed in the next year.

The AFCD arranges regular patrol at the feeding ban area and will take prosecution actions against anyone who has contravened the prohibition of feeding wild animals, subject to the availability of sufficient evidence. The AFCD will, from time to time, review the patrolling and enforcement arrangements at the feeding ban area in accordance with the actual situation and intelligence gathered, including deployment of additional manpower to conduct enforcement and blitz operations at night and on public holidays. Joint operations with other concerned departments will also be conducted to strengthen combat against illegal feeding of wild animals.