

**For information**

**Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs  
Support to Elite Athletes in Hong Kong**

**Purpose**

This paper briefs Members on the support measures being provided to elite athletes in Hong Kong and the way forward.

**Background**

2. In the information paper No. CB(2)67/10-11(01) submitted to the Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs on 20 October 2010, we elaborated on the three policy directions for the promotion of sports development, namely, to develop a strong sporting culture in the community, to develop sport at the elite level and to raise Hong Kong's profile as a centre for international sports events.

3. To support Hong Kong athletes so that they can perform at a high level in international competitions is an important element of our policy for promoting the sustainable development of elite sport. In recent years, Hong Kong athletes have achieved outstanding results in major international events, including the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games and Asian Para Games.

**Nurturing elite athletes**

4. It takes time to train up outstanding athletes. There are many factors behind every good result achieved in international competitions: the continuous hard work of the athletes, the assistance and support provided by other parties concerned, and the availability of a well integrated support system. The Government works with stakeholders such as the Hong Kong Sports Institute (HKSI), the Sports Federation and Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, China (SF&OC) and "National Sports Associations" (NSAs) to develop elite sport in Hong Kong. The mechanism for elite sports development is outlined in the ensuing paragraphs.

**Identification of potential athletes**

5. Young potential athletes are identified mainly through the following channels -

- (a) With funding from the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), NSAs organise training programmes to attract athletes with potential. The "Young Athlete Training Scheme" is a systematic and progressive training programme for young people, and those who perform well may be selected to join district teams, regional squads or Hong Kong junior squads take part in international competitions. In 2010-11, NSAs have organised 27 training programmes with over 860 activities under the scheme. We expect

the number of participants to be about 32 000. Over 250 young athletes were selected from the scheme to join district teams last year.

- (b) To help NSAs identify and nurture more young potential athletes at an early stage to ensure the succession of athletes, LCSD has launched a pilot scheme to support NSA's feeder programmes. Since 2009-10, LCSD has provided about \$15 million to 22 NSAs to organise 400 related activities, which attracted the participation by more than 9 500 young athletes. A preliminary review has found that NSAs welcome the pilot scheme as it helps to enlarge their squads and provides more training and competition opportunities to help young athletes enhance their skills and performance, which are important to the development of their sporting career.
- (c) In 2010, the HKSI launched the "Talent Development Programme", which aims to conduct scientific and sport-specific tests on athletes who have received formal training, or reached a certain level of performance in their respective sports and are recommended by NSA coaches. HKSI also works in partnership with NSAs by inviting them to refer athletes for screening. Screened athletes are further referred for training according to their development levels. The current target is to identify young potential elite athletes through the testing of 400 athletes in 2010-11.

### **Training of elite athletes**

6. Under the current framework, the HKSI is primarily responsible for the support of elite sport and elite athletes. With its professional expertise and excellent environment and facilities, the HKSI provides advanced sports training and systematic support to local elite athletes. The Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) allocates annual recurrent funding of about \$160 million to the HKSI for training and supporting elite athletes and promoting the development of elite sport. As at the end of December 2010, the HKSI was supporting 14 elite sports<sup>1</sup>, as well as about 1 000 elite athletes and athletes with potential (including disabled athletes).

7. The Government provides direct financial assistance to elite athletes through the HKSI to help them concentrate on their training. In 2009-10 we allocated about \$96 million in direct financial assistance and training support to HKSI athletes. At present, top level full-time elite athletes receive monthly financial assistance of around \$30 000. In addition to providing coaching and training support, the HKSI also provides appropriate support to athletes in the areas of sports science, sports medicine, and strength and conditioning. There are also hostel and restaurant facilities in the HKSI to provide free accommodation and catering to elite athletes.

8. Work on the \$1.8 billion redevelopment of the HKSI started in March 2009, and is expected to finish by the end of 2013. New facilities include a nine-storey multi-purpose building, a multi-purpose sports hall, a boathouse, and a 52-metre indoor swimming pool. A "barrier-free" design has been adopted, and more space is

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<sup>1</sup> The 14 elite sports include athletics, badminton, billiard sports, cycling, fencing, karatedo, rowing, squash, swimming, table tennis, tenpin bowling, triathlon, windsurfing and wushu.

allocated to support services such as sports science and sports medicine to provide disabled and non-disabled elite athletes with an advanced and high-quality training environment and facilities.

### **Development of elite sport**

9. To help prepare athletes for the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games and 2012 London Olympic Games, the Sports Commission has approved several initiatives to promote the development of elite sport in Hong Kong. These include an annual allocation of \$5.6 million to the HKSI from 2009-13 to strengthen the training programmes for four “priority target sports”, namely badminton, cycling, table tennis and windsurfing; and an annual allocation of \$1.5 million in 2009-10 and 2010-11 for the development of judo, which is classified as an “up-and-coming” sport.

10. Sports that are not classified as elite sports are mainly supported by LCSD through the Sports Subvention Scheme. The amount of subvention granted has increased in recent years, and in 2010-11 LCSD gave \$213 million in subvention to a total of 58 NSAs and 22 other sports organisations for local competitions, training programmes, participation in international sports competitions and staff training.

11. We will continue to improve local sports facilities to provide better support for local athletes, including elite disabled athletes and athletes who might not have easy access to the facilities at the HKSI, such as athletes in team sports.

### **Enhancing support for participation in major international events**

12. The sports portion of the Arts and Sport Development Fund (ASDF) is an important source of funding for the development and promotion of sport. It is mainly used for supporting athletes’ preparation for and participation in major international and national sports events, as well as helping NSAs and other sports associations to organise large-scale international events in Hong Kong. For the Asian Games and the Asian Para Games in Guangzhou, we allocated nearly \$28 million from the ASDF to support Hong Kong athletes’ preparation for and participation in the events. The Legislative Council Finance Committee (FC) has approved an injection of \$3 billion into the ASDF and that the investment return from the fund will be used to support the long-term development of the arts and sport. This will allow us to enhance support for athletes’ preparation for and participation in major international and national games, and to support athletes on other fronts.

### **Incentive Awards for medallists**

13. To encourage elite athletes to perform at the highest level, since 1996 the HKSI has managed the “Athlete Incentive Awards Scheme”, which offers awards to medal winners at major games. In 2009, the Sports Commission agreed to a substantial increase in the level of awards for medallists at the Olympic, Paralympic, Asian and Asian Para Games. A total of \$10.89 million in incentive awards was given to medal winners (altogether 107 disabled and non-disabled Hong Kong athletes) in the 2010 Guangzhou Asian and Asian Para Games.

## **Education and career development of athletes**

14. We attach great importance to providing adequate education and career development support to elite athletes. Our objective is to ensure that they will have an opportunity to prepare for further education or a “second career” after retirement from high-level competition, whilst undergoing training or participating in competitions. In this regard, in 2008 the HKSI launched the Enhanced Athletes Educational and Vocational Development Programme to provide diverse educational and career development support to athletes, including schools referrals, academic guidance, consultation and tutorial services. Training programmes on personal development are also available to help athletes enhance their public speaking skills and media handling techniques. There are also courses on financial management, time management and communications. Elite athletes may also apply for scholarships and subsistence allowance from the Hong Kong Athletes Fund and enrol in certificate, diploma, higher diploma and bachelor’s degree courses run by local or overseas educational institutions. At present, 27 athletes are receiving subsidies under the Fund. Elite athletes who are about to retire may also receive part-time coach training under the Elite Coaching Apprenticeship Programme. Athletes who join the Elite Athletes Coach Education Subsidy Programme may also receive subsidies for enrolling in the Sports General Theory course under the Coach Accreditation Programme and qualify as coaches.

15. With an initial allocation of about \$11 million from the Government, in 2008 the SF&OC launched the Hong Kong Athletes Career & Education Programme to provide education and employment training and counselling services to serving and retired athletes. The programme includes long-term and short-term vocational training, a mentorship programme, a Sports Ambassador Programme, consultation services on career development and employment and internship opportunities. Retired athletes who wish to pursue further education may receive support, such as on-line English courses, scholarships and financial support. Serving athletes may also receive financial support for part-time education, enrol in on-line English courses and receive consultation services on education and career development. As at December 2010, seven retired athletes had received scholarships totalling about \$0.2 million for their studies. Six other retired athletes have applied for scholarships amounting to over HK\$0.3 million and 16 retired athletes have secured full-time or part-time jobs through the Programme.

16. At present, the eight funded institutions<sup>2</sup> under the University Grants Committee accept enrollment applications from athletes recommended by the HKSI or SF&OC. They allow athletes who have been admitted to their institutions to defer commencement of studies; take leave as necessary to carry on with sport training and competitions; and extend their period of study. They also make special arrangements

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<sup>2</sup> They include University of Hong Kong, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University, Lingnan University, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong Polytechnic University and Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

to cater to other needs of athletes. In 2010, 16 athletes were admitted to local tertiary institutions under this arrangement. In addition, the HKSI and Beijing Sport University have jointly offered a “Bachelor of Education in Sports Training” programme for Hong Kong athletes since 1999. It is the only part-time degree course in Hong Kong that focuses on education in sports training. So far, 58 students have completed the course, which is held every two years.

## Way Forward

17. Despite the recent encouraging results attained by Hong Kong athletes, we consider it important to continue to enhance our support for them so that they may progress and not lag behind elite athletes elsewhere. We will explore ways to further promote the development of elite sports in the following areas -

- (a) **Strengthening the identification and training of athletes** – to continue to identify young people with potential, we need to consider how best to capitalise on the existing athlete training system. Experience from the Young Athletes Training Scheme and the pilot feeder programmes organised by NSAs suggests that the sustained development of a sport hinges on the effective identification of young athletes and an early start in their training. In this connection, we propose -
- To review the existing feeder system to identify room for enhancement, e.g., by providing NSAs with more information about young potential athletes, so that the athletes may develop according to their strengths;
  - To explore ways to deploy resources more flexibly to encourage more young people to take part in sports training programmes; and
  - To expand the scope of feeder programmes, e.g., by including more events with good potential or which are popular so that they may better develop.
- (b) **Enhancing support for elite athletes** – to enable elite athletes to concentrate on their training and competition, we will consider further improving the training environment and strengthening support. We have elaborated above the existing mechanism and initiatives, which address athletes’ needs in terms not only of training and preparation for competitions, but also of study, employment, and daily life. In view of the rising standards in sport and the intense competition among athletes internationally, we need to consider how to attract more local athletes to pursue a sporting career on a full-time basis. A key consideration is to help athletes balance their development in sport with educational needs, as well as to help them identify an appropriate path after their retirement from high level competition.
- (c) **Enhancing co-operation with the Mainland and the international community** – to elevate the level of elite sport in Hong Kong, we shall continue to strengthen links with elite sports organisations on the Mainland and in the international community, to facilitate exchanges and provide more opportunities for Hong Kong athletes to receive training and participate in

sports competitions in different parts of the world.

## **Conclusion**

18. We will take note of the views of Members, the sports sector and other stakeholders on the directions mentioned above when developing further initiatives, with the objective of providing favourable conditions for nurturing elite athletes and promoting the development of elite sport.

**Home Affairs Bureau**  
**January 2011**