

**For information**

**Legislative Council Panel on Development**

**Progress Report on Proposed Registration Scheme  
for Tree Management Personnel**

**PURPOSE**

This paper briefs Members on the progress of implementation on the proposed registration scheme for tree management personnel, which aims to enhance the quality of tree management and maintenance work in Hong Kong.

**BACKGROUND**

2. Trees are integral parts of our outdoor environment. They uplift our quality of life by providing amenity areas, moderating temperature, improving air quality and enhancing the visual appeal and biodiversity of our densely built-up city. Currently, about 1.7 million trees<sup>1</sup> in Hong Kong are under the regular care of the Government and amongst them, about one million are in areas of high pedestrian and vehicular traffic flow. In view of the large quantity and the wide distribution of trees in the territory, the Government adopts an “integrated approach” for tree management, under which departments are responsible for managing the trees in the facilities and land within their purview as part and parcel of their daily work. On the other hand, trees located on private land are under the care of respective private lot and property owners. Sufficient manpower and adequate capability of arboriculture practitioners is of utmost importance to keep our urban forest healthy and minimise tree failure risks, thereby protecting public safety.

3. The arboriculture and horticulture industry is young and evolving in Hong Kong. In 2015, the Greening, Landscape and Tree Management Section (“GLTMS”) of the Development Bureau (“DEVB”) commissioned a study on the “Human Resources and Competences Survey and Analysis of the Arboriculture, Horticulture and Landscape Management and Maintenance Industry” (the

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<sup>1</sup> Owing to their large quantity, trees in remote areas of country parks and trees on unallocated and unleased government land cannot be counted. Respective departments are responsible for the non-routine maintenance of these trees.

“Study”) to assess the training and supply of manpower against market demand. In the Study, it was estimated that there were around 2 300 arboriculture practitioners as at 2015 and manpower shortage in the industry was expected for the years ahead. While we are undertaking initiatives under the newly established Urban Forestry Support Fund (UFSF) to attract new entrants to the industry with a view to building up an adequate and quality workforce, there is a strong aspiration of the industry and the public to uplift the standard of the in-service arboriculture practitioners.

## **THE NEED FOR A REGISTRATION SCHEME**

4. Trees, like other living organisms have a natural cycle. They grow, age, become weak and die. The health and stability of trees are affected by many internal physiological and external environmental factors. As different factors interact with each other, the outcome is highly unpredictable. In the past few years, around 200 to 300<sup>2</sup> tree failures were reported to the GLTMS each year, of which less than 10% involving casualty<sup>3</sup>. The tree failure incidents mostly occurred during the rainy and typhoon seasons.

5. Notwithstanding this, proper tree care is certainly an effective means to minimise tree failure risks and is conducive to safeguarding public safety. For this reason, we consider it necessary to enhance the standard of arboriculture practitioners by introducing a registration scheme for tree management personnel who are responsible for tree inspection and various tree works, namely arborists, tree risk assessors, tree work supervisors, tree climbers and chainsaw operators.

6. To minimise any possible impact on the in-service practitioners and the industry, we intend to start off with a voluntary registration scheme for tree management personnel and will encourage all qualified in-service practitioners to register.

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<sup>2</sup> The numbers do not include the number of tree failures that occurred during the hoisting of Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 8 or above.

<sup>3</sup> There was one fatal tree failure incident in 2018.

## CONSULTATION

### Industry

7. To gauge the views of the arboriculture and horticulture industry on the introduction of the registration scheme for tree management personnel, the GLTMS held two industry forums in April 2019, conducted a survey among practitioners from 10 July to 15 August 2019, and attended five focus group discussion sessions with professional bodies, training institutions, trade unions and private companies in July and August 2019. The respondents were in general positive towards the introduction of a registration scheme. We received 222 survey forms from the practitioners and noted that (a) half of the respondents supported a voluntary scheme as a start and a mandatory scheme in the long term; (b) the industry generally considered that personnel involved in tree management (e.g. arborists) and tree works (e.g. tree climbers and chainsaw operators) should be registered; and (c) most of the respondents considered the Government the most appropriate party to implement the registration scheme.

### Arboriculture and Horticulture Industry Development Advisory Committee

8. To ensure that the proposed registration scheme and other initiatives under the UFSF to be rolled out meeting the industry's best interest, the Arboriculture and Horticulture Industry Development Advisory Committee ("AHIDAC") has been established on 1 June 2020. The AHIDAC comprises 12 non-official Members from the trade associations, unions, professionals, and higher education and vocational training institutions in the industry, and six official Members from relevant bureaux and tree management departments. At the first meeting of the AHIDAC held on 3 July 2020, we gained strong support from the Members on the framework of the proposed registration scheme as set out in paragraphs 9 to 15 below.

## FRAMEWORK OF THE PROPOSED REGISTRATION SCHEME

9. We intend to introduce a registration scheme for the five types of tree management personnel, namely arborists, tree risk assessors, tree work supervisors, tree climbers and chainsaw operators, with the following framework:

### Registration Requirements

10. To minimise any possible adverse impact on the industry and the employment situation, the registration requirements for the tree management personnel are initially set as the qualifications and work experience currently and generally required for in-service practitioners under government contracts. We will encourage all qualified in-service practitioners under the five types of tree management personnel to register voluntarily. The requirements for particular type of tree management personnel cover respective academic, professional and training qualifications in arboriculture, as well as work experience as appropriate.

### Renewal Requirements

11. Each registration and renewal will be valid for three years. Registered tree management personnel who wish to apply for renewal of registration will have to produce in-service records in the immediate past three years before expiry of the current registration and records of completion of relevant continuing professional development courses during the same period. Continuing professional development is essential to keep the tree management personnel abreast of the latest techniques and development in the industry.

### Registration Documents

12. We will issue a registration letter and an electronic registration card with name, photo, registration number, registered personnel type and expiry date of registration to each registered tree management personnel. We will also publish the names of the registered tree management personnel together with their types of work and expiry dates of registration in the website of the GLTMS for reference by the industry, private property owners, property management personnel and government tree management departments. We believe that the registry would in turn attract more qualified tree management personnel to join the registration scheme.

### Code of Conduct and Performance Monitoring

13. Registered tree management personnel are expected to deliver arboriculture services up to the required standards, thereby ensuring healthy tree growth and protecting public safety. We will develop a set of code of conduct to provide guidance on proper practices of the industry and professionalism of the tree management personnel. Besides, we will also develop a performance

monitoring system to ensure compliance of the code of conduct. Non-performers will be subject to appropriate regulatory measures.

### Registration/Renewal Fee

14. Noting the voluntary nature of the registration scheme, our initial thinking is not to charge registration and renewal fees so as to encourage active participation in the registration. We will examine the registration and renewal fees at a later stage.

### Local Professional Assessments and Trade Tests

15. We understand that the varying practice standards of practitioners in the industry are partly contributed by the varying assessment requirements and criteria of the professional assessments and trade tests set by different local and overseas professional bodies currently available in the industry. To complement the registration scheme standardising the professional standard of the industry, there is a need to develop local professional assessments and trade tests to specify competence standards and performance criteria, to assess competence and skills of in-service practitioners with the same yardsticks, and at the same time to serve as the recognised local professional qualifications. This assessment regime will also facilitate the establishment of a competence hierarchy for the career development of local practitioners from tree workers to qualified arborists. We will conduct a study to develop the local professional assessment and trade test requirements with an aim to incorporating them into the registration scheme in future.

## **WAY FORWARD**

16. We are formulating the implementation details in accordance with the above framework and aim to roll out the registration scheme in the last quarter of 2020. The performance of the registration scheme will be monitored and reported to the AHIDAC. We will review the registration scheme as and when necessary and adjust the implementation arrangements in the best interest of both the industry and the public.

**Development Bureau**  
**July 2020**