

22 questions to be asked at the Council meeting of 30 October 2024

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Question 1
(For oral reply)

(Translation)

Promoting digital corporate identity

Hon SHANG Hailong to ask:

The Financial Secretary has indicated in the 2024-2025 Budget that the Government will set up a “Digital Corporate Identity” (“CorpID”) Platform to enable authentication of identity of enterprises using electronic government services or conducting online business transactions in a secure, convenient and efficient manner. The Government’s goal is to roll out the Platform progressively from end-2026 onwards. However, there are views pointing out that notwithstanding the pressing demand of enterprises for CorpID, the Government’s progress in the relevant work appears to be slightly slow. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) given that the Digital Policy Office has been established since July this year, whether the Office can give priority to the work on setting up the CorpID Platform, so that the target launch date of the Platform will be advanced to 2025;
- (2) as there are views that the current utilization rate of personal digital certificate is on the low side, and small and medium enterprises (“SMEs”) may also be less inclined to adopt CorpID in the future, of the Government’s plan in place to publicize CorpID’s functions, and whether it will consider providing incentives to promote more extensive use of CorpID by SMEs, thereby facilitating smart city development; and
- (3) whether it will consider introducing new eligibility criteria for future funding schemes of enterprises, such as accepting applications only from SMEs using CorpID, so as to enhance their participation in CorpID?

Question 2
(For oral reply)

(Translation)

Development of private museums

Hon MA Fung-kwok to ask:

In the National 14th Five-Year Plan, the country has expressed unequivocal support for developing Hong Kong into an East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange. It is learnt that while private museums are recognized as facilitating the preservation of arts and culture and are booming in many places across the globe, the development of private museums in Hong Kong has all along been constrained by the lack of suitable venues, high maintenance costs, as well as the lack of government support, accreditation, promotion and publicity, etc., some private museums have even ceased operations as a result. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it knows the number of private museums and their operating conditions in the past three years, including the ratio of fee-charging to free admission, attendances, the ratio of those on the promotion list of the Government or the relevant organizations, as well as the number of private museums facing operating difficulties; whether any applications to operate a private museum have been rejected;
- (2) among the existing private museums, of the number of those which have received support (including one-off or regular funding) from the Government or the relevant organizations; whether any requests for support by a museum have been rejected by the Government, and of the purpose for which support was requested; and
- (3) whether it has plans to introduce an accreditation scheme for private museums or extend the scope of application of the Museums Regulation to cover private museums and to centralize the promotion of local museums, so as to enrich the contents of Hong Kong's tourism in arts and culture, and facilitate the development of Hong Kong into an East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange?

Question 3
(For oral reply)

(Translation)

Developing Hong Kong into an East-meets-West centre
for international cultural exchange

Hon Nixie LAM to ask:

There are views pointing out that Hong Kong, as one of the world's top three art auction markets, enjoys advantages such as zero tariff, low tax rate, convenient transportation and strong financial integration capabilities. In recent years, more and more family offices have also included artworks as an investment option. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) given that the National 14th Five-Year Plan has expressed unequivocal support for developing Hong Kong into an East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange, thereby reinforcing Hong Kong's leading position in the international arts market, whether the authorities will formulate measures such as tax concessions and rent concessions, so as to attract more international and Mainland auction houses and art galleries to set up physical outposts in Hong Kong; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (2) given that the Policy Declaration on Developing Family Office Businesses in Hong Kong, issued by the Government in March last year, stated that the Airport Authority Hong Kong was actively studying the establishment of storage, display and appreciation facilities for art and treasures at the Hong Kong International Airport, so as to provide transport and storage facilitation for global art investors, of the progress of the relevant project, as well as the timetable for future work; and
- (3) of the measures in place to attract more top art talents as well as Mainland and overseas young collectors to engage in Hong Kong's contemporary art market, build up an international art exchange platform to connect international galleries and local collectors, as well as attract Mainland and overseas emerging young artists to Hong Kong, so as to support rich and diverse cultural creations and promote the diversified development of the local arts ecology?

Question 4
(For oral reply)

(Translation)

Healthcare services provided by unregistered persons

Prof Hon CHAN Wing-kwong to ask:

It has been reported that there are currently many premises in the community claiming to be pain treatment centres, etc., boasting that they can provide clients with services such as “bone manipulating” and pain treatment, but some members of the public are injured after receiving services provided by persons who are suspected to be non-healthcare professionals at these premises. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it knows the number of the aforesaid premises and, among them, the number of those which have applied for licences for private healthcare facilities (“PHFs”);
- (2) of the number of complaints made against the aforesaid premises and the follow-up situations in the past three years; among them, the number of cases involving unlicensed medical practice, and the respective numbers of persons prosecuted and convicted; and
- (3) as it is learnt that some premises which have not applied for PHFs licences are presenting an image of licensed healthcare facilities through means such as promotion and furnishings in order to mislead consumers, of the measures the authorities have put in place to caution members of the public against seeking inappropriate treatments for certain medical conditions, so as to safeguard their health?

Question 5
(For oral reply)

(Translation)

Enhancing Express Rail Link services

Hon YIU Pak-leung to ask:

Some members of the tourism industry are of the view that further increasing the number of destinations in the Mainland served by the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (“XRL”) connecting to the Hong Kong West Kowloon Station (“WKS”), as well as building up the XRL’s long-haul sleeper service network in an orderly manner, are conducive to promoting the development of the tourism industry and facilitating Hong Kong’s integration into the country’s overall development. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective monthly patronage of the XRL service plying between WKS and Guangzhoudong Station and Guangzhounan Station, as well as those plying between WKS and each of the intermediate stations along the routes between WKS and these two stations, since the resumption of XRL service last year; as it has been reported that at present, it takes at least about 90 minutes to travel from WKS to Guangzhoudong Station, which fails to demonstrate the advantages of XRL, whether the authorities have studied with the Mainland authorities the feasibility of raising the speed of the relevant route; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (2) as it is learnt that Xintang Station, commissioned last year with its location at the core of the new development area in the eastern part of Guangzhou, is not only a necessary stop but also an important hub for travelling to the eastern part of Guangzhou, yet the relevant XRL routes only pass the station currently without stopping on it, whether the authorities will expedite negotiation with the Mainland authorities to make Xintang Station an intermediate station of XRL, so as to achieve better linkage between the XRL Hong Kong Section and the Mainland’s railway network; and
- (3) as some members of the industry have relayed that XRL sleeper trains plying between Hong Kong and Beijing/Shanghai are well-received by travellers, whether the authorities have studied the provision of long-haul sleeper train service to more destinations, such as Xi’an and Chengdu in western China, so as to open up the long-haul rail passenger market in the western part of the country, thereby facilitating “two-way travel” by travellers?

Question 6
(For oral reply)

(Translation)

The BUD Fund

Dr Hon Kennedy WONG to ask:

In recent years, the Government has launched many enhancement measures to the “Dedicated Fund on Branding, Upgrading and Domestic Sales” (“the BUD Fund”). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) given that the Government launched the “E-commerce Easy” under the BUD Fund on 15 July this year, with a view to assisting enterprises in opening up the Mainland market through developing electronic commerce (“e-commerce”) business, of the respective numbers of relevant applications received and approved by the Government so far, as well as the average and maximum amounts of funding involved;
- (2) given that at present, enterprises applying for the BUD Fund are required to provide proof of substantive operations and commercial transactions in Hong Kong, but it is learnt that many enterprises with trademarks and other intellectual property rights registered in Hong Kong have substantive operations on the Mainland and overseas, thus rendering them unable to successfully apply for the Fund, and there are views that the original intention of the Fund is to assist enterprises in enhancing their competitiveness, whether the Government will, in the light of the relevant situation, review the eligibility criteria for applying for the Fund; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (3) given that there are views pointing out that the application of artificial intelligence (“AI”) in cross-border e-commerce is particularly innovative, such as the use of AI key opinion leaders for marketing of goods, whether the authorities will consider expanding the funding coverage of E-commerce Easy to include the application of AI, thereby enabling enterprises to make better use of the funding to establish marketing systems; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Question 7
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Pilot Rehabilitation Programme for Employees Injured at Work

Dr Hon David LAM to ask:

The Pilot Rehabilitation Programme for Employees Injured at Work (“the Pilot Programme”) was launched in September 2022, and its industry coverage has also been expanded from the construction industry to the catering and hotel industry and the transportation and logistics industry from May this year onwards. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the total number of reported work injury cases in the construction industry in Hong Kong since September 2022 and, among them, the number of cases which are eligible for the Pilot Programme;
- (2) of the average waiting time of injured employees from the time of injury to commencement of rehabilitation treatment under the Pilot Programme;
- (3) as it is learnt that some injured employees who are eligible for the Pilot Programme have refused to participate in the Programme, whether the Government has gained an understanding of the reasons for their refusal;
- (4) of the types of work injury involved in the cases participating in the Pilot Programme, with a breakdown by the extent of injury;
- (5) among the injured employees who have participated in the Pilot Programme and recovered (i.e. reached maximum medical improvement), of the number of those who have returned to work and, among them, the percentage of those who are able to return to their original positions (especially employees in the construction industry who are able to re-enter the industry);
- (6) among the injured employees who have participated in the Pilot Programme and recovered but are unable to return to work, of the number of those who have completed the procedures of medical assessment of injury (i.e. assessment of permanent incapacity); and
- (7) as it is learnt that some non-profit-making organizations or training organizations in the community provide retraining and return-to-work support services specifically for persons recovered from work injury, how many employees who have recovered under the Pilot Programme but are unable to return to work have been referred to such organizations for follow-up?

Question 8
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Members of the public engaging in outdoor activities
under inclement weather

Hon Steven HO to ask:

It has been reported that whenever a typhoon hits Hong Kong, some members of the public will recklessly disregard warnings and purposely go to the seaside to “chase wind”, and some people will even engage in outdoor activities such as hiking and surfing under extreme weather. There are views pointing out that such behaviour not only endangers their own lives and safety, but also wastes the Government’s rescue resources and leads to casualties among rescuers. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the following information on cases received by the Government in each of the past five years where members of the public encountered danger and sought assistance while engaging in outdoor activities when weather warnings were in force: the number of such cases, the types of outdoor activities involved, the number of search and rescue (“S&R”) personnel, the casualties among the S&R personnel, and the public expenditure involved;
- (2) given that the existing legislation empowers the authorities to close beaches or country parks when necessary, and it is an offence to enter such closed beaches or country parks without permission, of the number of prosecutions instituted by the authorities in the past three years in respect of the aforesaid offence;
- (3) of the work undertaken by the Government in the past three years to prohibit members of the public from entering dangerous areas such as waterfronts, riversides and hills when weather warnings were in force (including putting up notices and disseminating warning messages through the media), as well as the expenditure involved (with a breakdown by work initiative); and
- (4) whether it has considered imposing charges on those members of the public who encounter danger and seek assistance as a result of riskily engaging in outdoor activities under inclement weather (e.g. requiring them to bear a certain proportion of the S&R expenditure), so as to achieve a deterrent effect; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Question 9
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Promoting digital nomadism

Dr Hon Johnny NG to ask:

It has been reported that digital nomadism (i.e. working remotely online while living abroad) has become a lifestyle with growing popularity in recent years. Some studies have estimated that the population of digital nomads worldwide would increase to 1 billion by 2035. There are views that hiring digital nomads is conducive to business operation by reducing employers' costs and expenses, while the presence of digital nomads in the host communities will also contribute to local economic growth. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether the Government will or has estimate(d) and assess(ed) the economic benefits that can be brought to Hong Kong by implementing digital nomad policies to attract talents to work and live in Hong Kong;
- (2) as there are views pointing out that digital nomads can help expand the talent pool to a worldwide scale, and it is learnt that at present, about 60 countries and places across the globe have already introduced digital nomad visas (e.g. the digital nomad visa launched by Thailand this year has a validity of five years, permitting a stay of up to 180 days per visit, while the digital nomad visa introduced by Japan this year allows holders to bring along with them their family members), whether the Government will, by drawing reference from the relevant practices, issue digital nomad visas to overseas and Mainland talents, or even roll out related preferential policies (including temporary resident visas, accommodation allowance, family-friendly measures and tax incentives, etc.) in order to attract specific types of digital nomads (e.g. talents related to Web 3.0, quantum computation and artificial intelligence), thereby attracting more talents to come to Hong Kong; if so, of the details of the plan and the timetable; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (3) whether the Government will, in the long run, consider launching an e-Residency programme to offer digital citizenship to foreigners, so as to attract more talents and enterprises from abroad to settle in Hong Kong?

Question 10
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Electronic Tax Reserve Certificates Scheme

Hon CHAN Yuet-ming to ask:

The Inland Revenue Department has implemented the Tax Reserve Certificates system for many years to help taxpayers save up and earn interest for tax payment, and introduced the Electronic Tax Reserve Certificates Scheme (“the Scheme”) in 1999. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the effectiveness of the Scheme at present, and set out in a table (i) the total amount of sales, (ii) the number of purchasers, (iii) the amount of sales per capita, (iv) the distribution of sales by age groups, and (v) the amount of redemptions under the Scheme in each of the past five years;
- (2) as there are views that, under the influence of external factors, the time deposit rates of banks in Hong Kong are still at a high level, whether the Government has assessed if such a situation will affect the sale of the Scheme; and
- (3) as the latest per annum interest rate announced in the Tax Reserve Certificates (Rate of Interest) (Consolidation) Notice has been changed from the previous rate of 0.8833% to 0.8%, and the Scheme will earn interest for a period of 36 months only, its return is much lower than that of the time deposit schemes of banks in Hong Kong in recent years as well as that of other medium and low-risk wealth management products, whether the Government will conduct a review of the contents of the Scheme or step up the publicity work, so as to enhance the effectiveness of the Scheme?

Question 11
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Supply of hostel places of post-secondary institutions

Hon Benson LUK to ask:

The Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (“the CPC Central Committee”) adopted the Resolution of the CPC Central Committee on Further Deepening Reform Comprehensively to Advance Chinese Modernization, in which “support for Hong Kong’s position to become an international hub for high-calibre talents” was stated. Moreover, last year’s Policy Address proposed to build Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education by increasing the admission quota of non-local students to Government-funded post-secondary institutions. According to a recent report published by an organization, it was envisaged that by 2028, the shortfall in hostel places for students of local post-secondary institutions would further increase to some 120 000. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it has projected and compiled statistics on the respective (i) numbers, (ii) proportions and (iii) hostel application proportions of local and non-local students in post-secondary institutions in the coming five years; given that the Government has, starting from the current academic year, increased the admission quota of non-local students to Government-funded post-secondary institutions to 40%, of the current nationality distribution of the non-local students;
- (2) whether it knows (i) the respective proportions of local and non-local students in post-secondary institutions who were successfully allocated with hostel places upon application and (ii) their terms of hostel residence in the past 10 years; whether various post-secondary institutions have set a limit on the term of hostel residence; if a limit has been set, of the details (set out in a table), and whether the Government has plans to extend the term of hostel residence for students;
- (3) given that the Government established in 2018 the Hostel Development Fund with some \$10,300 million to provide six University Grants Committee-funded universities with an additional 13 473 hostel places, whether it has compiled statistics on the current number of hostel places provided by universities across the territory; of the Government’s projected growth in the supply of university hostel places in the coming five years, and the shortfall in hostel places when set against students’ demand for accommodation; whether it will consider injecting funds into the Fund again in the future; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

- (4) whether it will study allocating idle lands in the vicinity to the post-secondary institutions concerned for the construction of academic buildings or hostels, or consider relaxing the plot ratio of land adjacent to universities in rural areas to allow for greater flexibility in university expansion; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (5) given that as indicated in the paper submitted by the Government to the Subcommittee on Matters Relating to the Development of the Northern Metropolis of this Council in April this year, 19 post-secondary institutions had participated in the engagement activity of the Northern Metropolis University Town (“NMUT”) and submitted proposals, whether the Government has estimated the number of post-secondary institutions that can be accommodated by NMUT, and whether sites have been reserved for hostel purposes; if so, of the expected number of hostel places to be provided; if not, the reasons for that?

Question 12
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Strive and Rise Programme

Hon Martin LIAO to ask:

Regarding the second round of the Strive and Rise Programme (“the Programme”), will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) given that the Strive and Rise Alumni Club (“Alumni Club”) under the Programme has organized a number of exchange tours to the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (“GBA”) and also offers local job tasting or internship programmes for Alumni Club members aged between 16 and 21, and it is reported that some Mainland multinational enterprises intend to hire mentee graduates of the Programme, whether the authorities will consider extending the job tasting or internship programmes of the Alumni Club to GBA, so that mentees may gain a deeper understanding of the development of GBA at an early stage and widen their horizons; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (2) as it is reported that some mentors in the first round of the Programme were unable to spare time and participate in the activities with their mentees due to their busy schedules, and remained unaware of the emotional issues among the mentees by the end of the first round of the Programme, whether the authorities will make appropriate adjustments to the mentorship mechanism in the second round of the Programme to accommodate mentees with special needs and arrange for the mentors to receive training first, so as to help the mentors identify and address the emotional needs of the mentees; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) as it is learnt that a number of interest classes offered to mentees under the basic training sessions of the Programme are very popular among the mentees, but the costs of the interest classes in sport, musical instruments, art, etc., are too high that it is difficult to meet mentees’ long-term learning needs despite a subsidy totalling \$10,000 is provided to them in two phases under the Programme, whether the authorities will introduce measures and collaborate with schools and various sectors where practicable, so as to support mentees in continuing to develop their interests; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (4) as there are views that the Child Development Fund is similar to the Programme in nature and content, for example, both with the elements such as “personal development plan” and “mentorship”,

whether the Government will consider reviewing their contents and make appropriate integration or project collaboration, so as to optimize resources; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Question 13
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Promoting students' physical and mental health

Dr Hon Hoey Simon LEE to ask:

Last year, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China issued the Special Action Plan for Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving the Mental Health Education for Students in the New Era (2023-2025), pointing out that promoting the physical and mental health and all-round development of students is an important issue. However, there are views pointing out that a number of student suicide cases were reported in Hong Kong at the beginning of the school year in September this year, highlighting the critical situation of students' mental health and the need for the Government to strengthen the cooperation among schools, families and the community in order to establish a more comprehensive support system. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it will review afresh the Three-Tier School-based Emergency Mechanism implemented in December last year in order to strengthen the assistance to schools in early identifying students with higher suicidal risk and providing them with appropriate support expeditiously;
- (2) whether it will formulate quantifiable guidelines (e.g. setting maximum daily homework load) based on the four elements (i.e. Rest, Relaxation, Relationship and Resilience) and the objectives for promoting mental health covered in the Education Bureau's 4Rs Mental Health Charter to enable schools to take practical actions to reduce student stress;
- (3) whether it will further implement small class teaching and improve the teacher-student ratios so as to increase the level of student participation and the opportunities for teacher-student interaction, so that teachers can better understand the individual needs and challenges of each student, thereby enhancing the care and counselling for individual students;
- (4) whether it will improve the resources for Life-wide Learning so that schools can be more flexible in applying them to help students achieve the aims of whole-person development;
- (5) whether it will strengthen the comprehensive implementation of positive education and the establishment of a caring school culture, so as to enhance the sense of well-being in schools; and
- (6) as some studies have pointed out that the emotional stress of teachers and parents positively correlates with the depression level of

students, whether the authorities will introduce various activities and measures (e.g. streamlining the administrative work of schools) at the level of teachers and parents to relieve their emotional stress, so as to prevent their negative emotions from affecting students?

Question 14
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Improving the water quality of the Tsuen Wan waterfront

Hon Joephy CHAN to ask:

In his 2022 Policy Address, the Chief Executive set a target of reducing the pollution load at identified outfalls emanating stench in specific districts (including Tsuen Wan) by half before the end of this year. It has been reported that the Government department concerned has indicated recently that the aforesaid target has been achieved ahead of the schedule, and the pollution load of the Tsuen Wan waterfront has been reduced by about 80%. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) as it has been reported that the Environmental Protection Department (“EPD”) indicated last month that 70 cases of misconnection of drains had been found in Tsuen Wan and, among them, 36 cases had been rehabilitated or were under acceptance inspection, of the specific locations of such cases of drain misconnections and the specific rehabilitation measures taken; as for the remaining cases of drain misconnections pending rehabilitation, of the Government’s rehabilitation works plan and timetable;
- (2) as EPD has indicated that following the rehabilitation of misconnected drains, the next task is to continue to identify other sources of pollutants, of the progress and targets of such task and the plans in place to monitor the water quality situation of the Tsuen Wan waterfront, for example, whether prosecution will be instituted against property owners involved in the misconnections of drains to prevent recurrence of similar problems; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) upon the completion of the drain rehabilitation works mentioned in (1), of the specific measures put in place by the Government to ensure that the drains can be effectively maintained and managed on a long-term basis, and whether such measures cover preventive maintenance and contingency rehabilitation plans; whether the Government will introduce new technologies to enhance the durability and operation efficiency of drains;
- (4) whether the Government has plans to extend across the territory the successful experience and fruitful outcomes of rehabilitating drains at the Tsuen Wan waterfront as well as the techniques applied, so as to improve the overall pollution load and odour intensity of the waterfront of Hong Kong; whether the Government will collaborate

with environmental groups and experts to jointly take forward the work of ameliorating pollution at the waterfront;

- (5) as it has been reported that the Government has installed monitoring systems at the Tsuen Wan Sports Centre to monitor on an ongoing basis the odour changes of the Tsuen Wan waterfront, of the details of the data collected by such monitoring systems (including ways to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data); of the water and air quality data of the Tsuen Wan waterfront collected by the Government over the past two years, and whether such data shows a trend of progressive improvement; and
- (6) whether the Government has short-term and long-term plans to continuously improve the water quality and odour of the Tsuen Wan waterfront; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Question 15
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Dental care professionals

Hon LAM Chun-sing to ask:

Regarding dental care professionals (“DenCPs”), will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the following information on the Department of Health (“DH”)’s recruitment exercise for dental hygienists, dental therapists, dental technicians and dental surgery assistants in each of the past five years: the (i) target number of recruits, (ii) number of applicants, (iii) number of persons invited to attend interviews/trade tests, (iv) number of persons who passed the interviews/trade tests, (v) number of appointment letters issued and (vi) number of persons who reported for duty;
- (2) as the Working Group on Oral Health and Dental Care under the Health Bureau has pointed out in the Interim Report submitted to the Panel on Health Services of this Council in March this year that merely relying on the dentist workforce to meet the needs for enhancing dental care services is insufficient, and suggested that DenCPs play a more significant role in dental care services, whether the authorities have plans to expand the staff establishments of dental hygienists and dental therapists so as to enhance public services; if so, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) as DH currently provides annual tuition fee sponsorship of \$70,000 to students pursuing studies as dental hygienists and dental therapists on the condition that they work in dental clinics under DH or specified non-governmental organizations for one year after graduation, how the authorities plan to attract those graduates to stay and serve in the public healthcare system upon the expiry of the one-year period;
- (4) as there are views pointing out that the introduction of a statutory registration system for DenCPs (including dental hygienists and dental therapists) with their scope of practice defined under the Dentists Registration (Amendment) Bill 2024 (“the Bill”) has fundamentally altered the work nature, duties and work complexity of the dental hygienist and dental therapist grades in the Government, whether the authorities will commence a grade structure review for the aforesaid grades to comprehensively examine their entry requirements, qualification requirements for various ranks and

remuneration packages; if so, of the timetable and roadmap; if not, the reasons for that;

- (5) as the authorities indicated during the Second Reading debate on the Bill that they expected the Dental Council of Hong Kong (“DCHK”) to set up a registration system for DenCPs within three years upon the passage of the Bill, of the timetable and roadmap for the relevant work (including compiling a DenCPs register and drawing up a code of practice); whether they have plans to include dental technicians and dental surgery assistants in the registration system in phases, so as to enhance the protection for users of dental services; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (6) whether the authorities will consider discussing with DCHK to further relax the scope of practice of dental hygienists to allow them to administer anaesthetic injections for periodontal disease and root canal treatments, as well as other non-invasive treatments, and to include relevant contents such as the procedure for administering anaesthetic injections in the training curriculum of dental hygienists; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (7) whether the authorities have plans to further expand the participation of DenCPs in the primary healthcare system, including allowing them in the provision of oral healthcare at District Health Centre Expresses and District Health Centres, as well as dental health education and disease prevention services; if so, of the details; if not, whether the authorities will formulate the relevant plans expeditiously; and
- (8) whether it has considered including DenCPs as healthcare service providers under the Elderly Healthcare Voucher Scheme to encourage the elderly to receive dental care services on a regular basis; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Question 16
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Recovery for reuse and upcycling of wood waste

Hon SHIU Ka-fai to ask:

Some members of the local timber industry have relayed that Hong Kong generates a large amount of wood waste from areas such as home decoration (including replacement of furniture and floor boards) and construction works every year. However, due to the lack of effective arrangements for recovery for reuse and upcycling, most of these wood materials are disposed of at landfills. They are of the view that this not only depletes the space resources of the landfills, but also runs contrary to environmental protection principles as the waste is not converted into resources. They aspire that the Government will provide adequate support to enable the recovery for reuse and upcycling of used wood materials. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the amount of wood waste (excluding yard waste) generated in Hong Kong in each of the past five years, and set out in tables a breakdown of the amount and percentage by source (e.g. used furniture, floor boards and construction materials) and way of handling (e.g. disposed of at landfills and recovered for reuse);
- (2) of the respective ways by which wood waste (excluding yard waste) is recovered for reuse and upcycled in Hong Kong currently, and the use of the products so produced; whether it has assessed the effectiveness of the relevant work; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) whether it has studied the practices adopted in other places for the recovery for reuse and upcycling of wood waste and the effectiveness of the relevant work; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (4) considering the factors required for the recovery for reuse and upcycling of wood waste, such as land and manpower, whether the authorities have plans to study the handling of wood waste jointly with Mainland cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area or other neighbouring cities; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (5) whether it will plan to work with chambers of commerce and relevant stakeholders of the local timber industry through negotiation and cooperation to improve the ways in which wood waste is recovered for reuse and upcycled and the effectiveness of the relevant work; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Question 17
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Protecting the rights and interests of consumers

Prof Hon Priscilla LEUNG to ask:

It has been reported that a chain fitness and beauty group suddenly announced its “temporary business suspension” last month. As at the middle of last month, the Consumer Council received a total of 3 861 relevant complaints, involving a total amount of nearly \$130 million, with an average amount of about \$33,000 per case, and the largest amount involved in a single complaint was about \$1.81 million. Regarding protecting the rights and interests of consumers, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it will re-activate the legislative exercise to stipulate a statutory cooling-off period for beauty and fitness services consumer contracts; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (2) whether it will consider establishing new industry rules for the beauty and fitness industries, so as to protect the rights and interests of consumers; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (3) whether it will consider setting up an interdepartmental task force to roll out publicity and education programmes (especially targeting underprivileged groups such as poor elders), so as to help members of the public become smart consumers and avoid suffering losses; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Question 18
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Eligibility criteria for Guangdong Scheme and Fujian Scheme

Hon Holden CHOW to ask:

Currently, applicants for the Old Age Allowance (“OAA”) under the Guangdong Scheme and the Fujian Scheme (“the Schemes”) must reach the age of 70 or above and must have resided in Hong Kong continuously for at least one year immediately before the date of application (“the requirement of continuous residence in Hong Kong”). However, some members of the public have relayed that they had moved to Guangdong Province before they turned 70, and are still ineligible to receive OAA even though they now reach the age of 70 because they fail to meet the requirement of residing in Hong Kong continuously for at least one year immediately before the date of application, and are even required to return to Hong Kong and reside for one year in order to meet the eligibility criteria. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective numbers of applications for OAA under the Schemes received, approved and rejected by the Government in each of the past five years; among the approved applications, the number of cases for which the authorities exercised discretionary power and granted OAA (set out in a table);
- (2) of the criteria for exercising discretionary power for the cases mentioned in (1), and whether the criteria include special circumstances of the persons concerned (such as chronic disease patients receiving treatment in Guangdong Province); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (3) whether it will consider making special arrangements for people who are currently aged 70 but have previously moved to Guangdong or Fujian, so that as long as they meet all other requirements except the requirement of continuous residence in Hong Kong, the Government will, by discretion, grant OAA to them?

Question 19
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Domestic violence

Hon Lillian KWOK to ask:

There are views pointing out that domestic violence is of grave concern in the community. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective numbers of requests for assistance and reported cases in relation to domestic violence received by the Government in each month of the past five years, as well as the number of persons convicted;
- (2) as it is learnt that when handling domestic conflict reports, the Hong Kong Police Force (“HKPF”) will refer cases in need to the Social Welfare Department for follow-up actions once consent is sought from the parties concerned, and for persons who refuse to accept the referral service, HKPF will provide them with a “Family Support Service Information Card” so that they can seek assistance on their own, whether the Government has continuously followed up and provided support for those persons who refused the referral service; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) of the waiting time for and the average number of sessions of psychological counselling and emotional support services provided by the Government to victims in domestic violence cases;
- (4) given that the Police currently classify domestic conflict reports into “Domestic Violence (Crime)”, “Domestic Violence (Miscellaneous)” and “Domestic Incidents” based on their degree of seriousness, whether the Government will regularly review and update the relevant classification criteria and guidelines; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (5) of the Government’s education and publicity efforts on the prevention of domestic violence in the past three years (set out by item); whether it has assessed the effectiveness of such work?

Question 20
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Promoting the development of cross-boundary financial services between
Hong Kong and the Mainland

Hon YIM Kong to ask:

It is learnt that the continuous deepening of economic and trade cooperation between Hong Kong and the Mainland has led to a significant increase in the demand for cross-boundary financial services. Recently, the Mainland has introduced a series of new policies aimed at further supporting cross-boundary financial services between Hong Kong and the Mainland, such as various specific proposals including the National Financial Regulatory Administration's initiatives to support China-capital banks and insurers to establish regional headquarters in Hong Kong, and to support Hong Kong and Macau banks to further expand the business scope of their branches in the Mainland. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether the Government has recently conducted surveys on the development of cross-boundary financial services between Hong Kong and the Mainland, and assessed the problems and challenges involved; if so, of the details and main conclusions;
- (2) whether consideration will be given to setting up a dedicated working group to efficiently dovetail with the relevant regulatory authorities in the Mainland and jointly promote the implementation of Mainland policies on supporting cross-boundary financial services; if so, of the expected work objectives and timetable;
- (3) as it is learnt that the People's Bank of China ("PBoC") is striving to formulate the institutional arrangements for cross-boundary flow of financial data which is a crucial component to promoting cross-boundary financial services involving complicated issues of data security and legal compliance, whether the Government will proactively initiate discussions with PBoC to establish a coordination mechanism for the safety and regulation of cross-boundary flow of financial data between Hong Kong and the Mainland; and
- (4) in order to attract more China-capital banks and insurers to establish presence and set up regional headquarters in Hong Kong, whether the Government will consider studying and introducing a series of facilitation policies to provide clear guidelines and support to China-capital banks and insurers interested in further developing their business in Hong Kong?

Question 21
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Illegal carriage of passengers for reward by van-type light goods vehicles
and cross-boundary private cars

Hon Andrew LAM to ask:

The Government released in July this year the preliminary findings on the study on combating illegal carriage of passengers for hire or reward and regulation of online hire car hailing platforms. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether the aforesaid study has covered any study on the operation mode of illegal carriage of passengers for reward by van-type light goods vehicles (“vans”) and cross-boundary private cars (“PCs”); if so, of the preliminary findings, and whether any conclusion has been drawn on the factors affecting the regulation of online hailed cars; if not, the reasons for not including such study;
- (2) of the number of prosecutions and convictions involving illegal carriage of passengers for reward by vans in the past three years, and the penalty imposed in each of the convicted cases;
- (3) of the number of prosecutions and convictions involving illegal carriage of passengers for reward by cross-boundary PCs in the past three years, and the penalty imposed in each of the convicted cases; whether any unlawful employment was involved in such cases; if so, of the number; and
- (4) of the number of cross-boundary PCs in Hong Kong that may legally carry passengers for hire or reward; whether there are any measures to combat illegal carriage of passengers for reward by cross-boundary PCs?

Question 22
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Combating sales activities of duty-not-paid cigarettes

Dr Hon NGAN Man-yu to ask:

It has been reported that the sales activities of duty-not-paid cigarettes (“illicit cigarettes”) have become increasingly rampant in recent years. Lawbreakers have employed adolescents with little life experience to distribute illicit cigarette leaflets, commonly known as “dim sum sheets”, in public housing estates, and there are even “cheap whites promotion teams” wearing tops printed with the brand names of “cheap whites” (i.e. illicit cigarettes packaged in the same way as duty-paid cigarettes) to promote illicit cigarettes to smokers in busy areas. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the following information on illicit cigarette cases intercepted at source by the Customs and Excise Department (“C&ED”) in the past three years: the number of such cases, the number of persons involved in such cases, and the market value of the illicit cigarettes involved; what measures the authorities have put in place to step up efforts to intercept at source the smuggling of illicit cigarettes into Hong Kong;
- (2) of the following information on the law enforcement operations conducted by C&ED to combat illicit cigarette activities in the past three years: the number of such operations, the number of cases detected, the number and dutiable value of the illicit cigarettes seized, the number and age distribution of persons arrested (with a breakdown by seller and buyer), and the penalty imposed on the convicted persons;
- (3) regarding the recruitment of young people by lawbreakers to promote illicit cigarettes, whether C&ED and the Tobacco and Alcohol Control Office (“TACO”) of the Department of Health have received the related reports, and of the relevant follow-up situations; what measures C&ED and TACO have put in place to prevent young people from participating in the promotional and trafficking activities of illicit cigarettes;
- (4) as it has been reported that lawbreakers have set up websites to advertise illicit cigarettes on the Internet, and to advertise and sell illicit cigarettes through social media platforms and instant messaging applications (e.g. Facebook, Instagram and Telegram), what measures C&ED and TACO have put in place to intercept such

advertising and sales activities, and whether it has assessed the effectiveness of such measures;

- (5) of the total number of reports on suspected illicit cigarette activities received by C&ED through its 24-hour hotline, dedicated crime-reporting email account or online form in the past three years, and the relevant follow-up situations; and
- (6) whether C&ED and TACO have considered, by drawing reference from the policy on combating abuses of public housing, setting up a financial reward mechanism for reporting to encourage members of the public to report the sale of illicit cigarettes, so as to reduce the promotional and trafficking activities of illicit cigarettes in public housing estates?