

LCQ11: Regulation of outbound tour escorts and tourist guides

Following is a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Gregory So, to a question by the Hon Ip Wai-ming in the Legislative Council today (June 8):

Question:

According to the information of the Travel Industry Council (TIC), there are nearly 19 200 accredited outbound tour escorts and nearly 6 200 accredited tourist guides in Hong Kong at present. Regarding the regulation of outbound tour escorts and tourist guides, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) whether it knows, as at the first quarter of this year, if such batch of tour escorts and tourist guides included persons holding both the Tour Escort Pass and the Tourist Guide Pass at the same time; if so, of the number of such persons concerned;

(b) whether it knows the number of tour escorts and tourist guides who were "disqualified" (i.e. their Tour Escort Passes or Tourist Guide Passes were revoked) in the past three years and the reasons for their disqualification, and the number of tour escorts and tourist guides who did not apply for or were not granted renewal of their passes, and the respective reasons concerned;

(c) whether the authorities regularly review if the TIC-approved courses such as the Pre-service Tourist Guide Training Course, the Certificate Course for Outbound Tour Escorts and the Skills Upgrading Scheme Tour Guide Training Course, etc. offered by various training institutions can meet the requirements of TIC on such courses and under the respective accreditation systems for outbound tour escorts and tourist guides; if they do, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(d) whether the authorities will consider putting the existing Outbound Tour Escort Accreditation System and Tourist Guide Accreditation System within the purview of the Commissioner for Tourism (the Commissioner) and designating the Commissioner to be responsible for regulating tour escorts and tourist guides; if they will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong (TIC) is responsible for trade self-regulation under the existing regulatory regime for the tourism sector. The TIC first introduced the Outbound Tour Escort Accreditation System in 1999, to assist travel agents to enhance their service standard, and encourage tour escorts and tourist guides to uplift their professional skills and conduct. In order to obtain the Tour Escort Pass (TEP), applicants must have met the specified qualification requirements, completed the TIC's Certificate Course for Outbound Tour Escorts and passed the relevant examination. The TIC further introduced the Tourist Guide Accreditation System in 2004, which provides that applicants for the Tourist Guide Pass (TGP) must have met the specified qualification requirements, completed the tourist guide training courses recognised by the TIC (such as the Pre-service Tourist Guide Training Course or training courses under the "Skills Upgrading Scheme for the Travel Industry") and passed the relevant examination before they could obtain the TGP.

My reply to the four parts of the question is as follows:

(a) As at the first quarter of this year (i.e. March 31, 2011), there are 20 291 and 6 342 persons holding TEPs and TGPs issued by the TIC. Among them, 3 311 persons hold both TEPs and TGPs.

(b) Over the past three years (i.e. from April 1, 2008 to March 31, 2011), one tour escort's TEP was revoked, six tour escorts' TEPs were suspended, and 15 tourist guides' TGPs were suspended for seriously breaching the TIC's codes of conduct or directives, or committing serious criminal offences, etc. There was no TGP revocation in the past three years. Moreover, 8 235 tour escorts and 2 120 tourist guides did not renew their passes, for reasons not known to the TIC. Furthermore, six tour escorts' and two tourist guides' applications for pass renewal were refused. The reasons for refusal included the applicant submitted renewal applications after the specified period but was unwilling to take the accreditation examination, or the applicant was convicted of criminal offence and subjected to a bind-over order.

(c) The Training Committee under the TIC is responsible for all training matters, including examining the training needs of the sector; designing, reviewing and updating course contents; and determining entry requirements for trainees and qualification requirements for instructors. In addition to members from the tourism

sector, the Training Committee also comprises representatives of training and academic institutions.

The Certificate Course for Outbound Tour Escorts is organised by the TIC. The TIC's Executive Office reports regularly to the Training Committee on the administration of the training courses and results of trainees' opinion surveys. It also liaises with the instructors to review the course contents and teaching methods. The Training Committee discusses the syllabus and entry requirements of training courses from time to time, in response to the needs of the sector and travellers, to ensure the courses could keep pace with trade developments and practitioners' needs. In addition, the TIC set up a Working Group in July 2010 to review the Outbound Tour Escort Accreditation System, including the certificate course for tour escorts and other related matters.

The Pre-service Tourist Guide Training Course for non-trade trainees, is organised by TIC-recognised institutions. The recognised institutions are required to prepare their training manuals in accordance with the course framework specified by the TIC and submit them to the TIC for consideration. The Training Committee has a mechanism to monitor course quality, which includes opinion surveys of trainees and unannounced class inspection and assessment by Committee members.

The TIC implemented the Tourist Guide Accreditation System in 2004. To cater for the demands of the industry, the Government has also organised tourist guide training courses under its "Skills Upgrading Scheme". The Employees Retraining Board has taken over the organisation of such courses under its "Skills Upgrading Scheme Plus" on April 1, 2011. These courses are also recognised by the TIC. The responsible institutions ensure the quality and effectiveness of the courses through class inspection, opinion survey of trainees and feedbacks from consultative networks with the industry. The TIC's Executive Director has been participating actively in the respective consultative networks and discussions on training strategies, contributing to the development of the training courses.

(d) The regulatory framework of the tourism sector in Hong Kong has evolved over the years in tandem with market development, mode of trade operation and needs of the community at different stages. These changes were implemented after consultation and discussion within the community and the trade. We have published, on April 29 this year, a consultation paper to consult the trade (including front line practitioners) and the public on the review of the operation and regulatory framework

of the tourism sector in Hong Kong. The objective is to set the direction for sustainable and healthy development of Hong Kong's tourism sector. The regulation of tourist guides and tour escorts falls within the scope of this review. For example, one area for consideration is whether a licensing system for tourist guides should be introduced. We will draw up substantive reform proposals taking into account the views received in the consultation.

Ends/Wednesday, June 8, 2011

Issued at HKT 15:43