

LCQ14: Acoustics of LCSD performance venues

Following is a question by the Hon Emily Lau and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Dr Patrick Ho, in the Legislative Council today (January 11):

Question:

It has been reported that some members of the public have criticized that the acoustics of the concert hall of the Hong Kong Cultural Centre ("HKCC") are not up to international standards, and even worse, audience occupying certain seats of the auditorium cannot clearly hear the tunes of individual musical instruments. The Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra has also queried why the core arts and cultural facilities that the Government proposes to be provided in the West Kowloon Cultural District ("WKCD") have not included a concert hall with acoustics meeting international standards. In this connection, will the Executive Authorities inform this Council:

(a) of the number of such complaints received by the relevant authorities in the past three years;

(b) whether the Leisure and Cultural Services Department engaged experts to assess the acoustics of the concert halls/auditoria in venues under its purview and recommend improvements in the past three years; if so, of the names and professional qualifications of the experts engaged, as well as the recommendations they made and, among such recommendations, of those adopted, and the reasons for the authorities not adopting the others; and

(c) whether they will consider including the provision of a concert hall with acoustics meeting international standards in the WKCD development; if not, of the reasons for that?

Reply:

Madam President,

(a) We have not received any written complaints about the acoustics of the concert

hall or auditorium of the Hong Kong Cultural Centre (HKCC) or any of the district town halls over the past three years. Nevertheless, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) is attentive to comments made by members of the public through the media and other channels on the acoustics of the concert hall of the HKCC.

(b) In building its major performance venues, the LCSD had engaged acoustics consultants to provide technical and expert opinions on the concert halls or auditoria of the centers. Take for example, Marshall Day Associates of New Zealand was engaged as consultant for the Hong Kong Cultural Centre (HKCC) and Vipac Engineers and Scientists Ltd of Australia as consultant for the Yuen Long Theatre and Kwai Tsing Theatre. When maintenance work was carried out for the concert hall of the City Hall in 2004, Shen, Milsom & Wilke Inc of Hong Kong was engaged as the acoustics consultant.

The details of the acoustics improvement works carried out in respect of concert hall of the HKCC are as follows:

Several years after the opening of the HKCC in 1989, a number of acoustics improvement works were carried out to its concert hall, including the seat pads, orchestra shell on the stage, stage traps, and associated lighting and ventilation systems.

In 1997, a temporary forestage was added in the concert hall of the HKCC to cater for the performance of a major orchestra. Mr. David Atherton, the then Music Director of the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, gave valuable advice on improvements to the acoustics of the concert hall. He advised that a forestage would make it possible for an orchestra on stage to perform at a position closer to the audience, thus improving the resonance of low frequency sounds and clarity of string instruments. In this connection, the LCSD engaged once again Marshall Day Associates, the acoustics consultant for the concert hall of the HKCC when it was built, to conduct a comprehensive review. The works included rebuilding a temporary forestage, arranging for relevant professionals to listen to rehearsals of orchestras in the concert hall and then give their views advice, measuring the acoustics with dedicated apparatus, deciding on the most suitable technology to be used to build the forestage and the best position on the stage for performance by orchestras of all sizes and types. Based on the results of the review, improvement works to the concert hall were carried out in 1998. In addition to expanding the stage, seating and stage lighting were improved accordingly and works relating to the

sound systems were also carried out to cater for performances that required sound amplification.

(c) Concert hall is not listed as one of the core arts and cultural facilities in the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) because statistics and surveys on the utilization rate of existing cultural facilities indicate that performing groups and the public have a greater demand for additional theatres than concert halls. However, screened-in proponents are welcome to provide other arts and cultural facilities in the district to add to the variety of facilities. A concert hall is one possible option.

The Government anticipates that with the commissioning of the new cultural facilities in WKCD, more slots will be released for music programmes in those existing performing venues which are equipped with quality acoustics.

Ends/Wednesday, January 11, 2006