

LCQ7:Selection and training of elite athletes

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Following is a question by the Hon Ronny Tong Ka-wah and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (November 24):

Question:

I have recently received complaints one after another from parents of athletes that because a training system for local athletes is lacking in Hong Kong, athletes with potential can only try to achieve outstanding results in various international competitions in the capacity of amateur participants using their own financial resources and efforts, in order to obtain qualification granted by the Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, China to represent Hong Kong. In addition, these parents have also indicated that although their children have met the requirements for participating in a number of international competitions, they, being locally trained athletes, are unable to represent Hong Kong to take part in international competitions because the system for selecting athletes for the Hong Kong delegation lacks transparency and criteria or due to personal connections. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) what mechanism and criteria are in place at present for the authorities to monitor the procedures adopted by various national sports associations (NSAs) for selecting representatives of Hong Kong for international competitions, and what appeal or review mechanism is in place to deal with complaints lodged by athletes; whether it knows the number of athletes selected by various NSAs and their affiliates to participate in international competitions and the sports items participated in each of the past five years, and of the details of the complaints or appeals the authorities received from athletes;

(b) given that some athletes have indicated that the Government's present policy for sports development relies on NSAs and their affiliates to identify and train local elite athletes, and the Government merely provides financial support, whether the Government will review the effectiveness of such policy; if it will, when and how it will conduct the review; if not, of the reasons for that; and

(c) whether the authorities will consider formulating a set of comprehensive and long-term sports development policy, under which the Government will play the role

of training and selecting local athletes, so as to safeguard the status of local athletes, as well as provide financial, livelihood and health protection for elite athletes who want to devote to development in sports; if they will, of the implementation timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government has three clear strategic directions for developing sport, namely: to help elite athletes achieve excellence; to promote sport in the community; and to support the hosting of major sports events by National Sports Associations (NSAs). In promoting sports development in Hong Kong, especially in identifying and training elite athletes, the Government works with stakeholders from various sectors, including the Sports Federation and Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, China (SF&OC), the Hong Kong Sports Institute (HKSI) and NSAs. Under the existing system, the Government and sports organisations work in close partnership to provide resources to support elite athletes and those athletes with potential, helping them to receive professional training. Funding is also provided for their preparation and participation in international sports events -

In addition to developing local sport, promoting Olympism and providing training programmes to administrative executives, coaches and technicians in the sports sector, the SF&OC is also responsible for selecting Hong Kong athletes to compete in international multi-sports competitions. According to the Olympic Charter, a National Olympic Committee (NOC) should not be subject to political, religious, economic or other pressures when developing sport. The Government has never interfered in the athlete selection process.

The HKSI provides support to elite athletes on various fronts, including direct financial support, educational and career counselling and re-employment training, so that they can receive full-time training as athletes and pursue a career in sport.

Every NSA under the SF&OC is affiliated to its respective International Federation and Asian Federation. NSAs officially represent Hong Kong to participate in international sports competitions, and are responsible for managing local activities relating to their respective sports, such as organising competitions and athlete training courses and selecting athletes to participate in local and international

competitions. NSAs are non-profit making bodies. Many of them are registered limited companies and the remaining associations are registered as societies under the Societies Ordinance. NSAs conduct their internal affairs with full autonomy in accordance with their Memorandum and Articles of Association.

The Government supports the work of the SF&OC, the HKSI and NSAs through a variety of policy initiatives, allocation of resources and the provision of venues and facilities. Whilst the Government respects the autonomy and independence of the SF&OC and NSAs, we nonetheless closely monitor the use of public money by these organisations to ensure that it is deployed effectively in promoting sports development. The Government monitors the operation of the HKSI and the effectiveness of its elite athlete training programme through an annual subvention and the appointment of representatives to the HKSI Board.

The reply to the three parts of the question is as follows-

(a) As mentioned above, the selection of athletes for international competitions is the prerogative of the SF&OC and relevant NSAs in accordance with the Olympic Charter and the selection criteria laid down for respective competitions. Any complaints or appeals are handled by SF&OC or relevant NSAs according to their respective procedures. Figures in respect of athletes selected by NSAs for international sports events in the past five years are only available through direct enquiry to the SF&OC and the NSAs. However, as they are currently engaged with the Guangzhou Asian Games, we will inform them of the Honourable Member's concern at a suitable time. In the past five years, the Home Affairs Bureau and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) have received 11 complaints about the selection of athletes for international events, involving seven NSAs. As they fell within the ambit of the NSAs, we accordingly referred these complaints to the NSAs concerned.

(b) The HKSI plays an important role in identifying and training Hong Kong elite athletes. The Government provides annual recurrent funding (of about \$160 million) to the HKSI to train elite athletes, a sum which includes direct financial support to qualified athletes.

Through its Talent Development Programme, the HKSI conducts sport-specific testing of students with the aim of identifying potential junior elite athletes. NSAs implement feeder programmes to identify youngsters with the potential for further

training. Since 2009, we have allocated about \$ 15 million to 22 NSAs to conduct feeder programmes. Around 200 courses or training programmes have been organised, with over 6,100 young athletes taking part. These initiatives will help to nurture new elite athletes for Hong Kong.

Moreover, in collaboration with NSAs, LCSD administers a Sports Subvention Scheme, which provides a series of structured, comprehensive and inter-connected sports training programmes to youngsters for identifying and training young athletes. Over 90% of schools take part in the School Sports Programme (SSP), which began under this Scheme in 2001. The number of participating schools has increased from about 600 in 2001/02 to 1,065 in 2009/10. In addition, under the subvented Young Athletes Training Scheme, athletes with potential are identified through progressive and systematic training and regional leagues, and are recommended to join the Hong Kong youth squads for further training. They may then have the opportunity to represent Hong Kong in international competitions.

(c) As mentioned above, the Government has put in place a set of strategic initiatives for subsidising and training elite athletes. On October 20, 2010, we submitted a paper to the Home Affairs Panel of the Legislative Council, setting out in detail our policy in relation to Hong Kong sport. As regards the protection of athletes, the HKSI arranges insurance cover for athletes who receive training there, which includes life, accident, travel, medical (hospitalisation and out-patient service) and dental care insurance. There are also resident doctors and an in-house medical team to provide medical support to athletes.

Further, to address the needs of retired elite athletes and help them re-integrate into society, the HKSI also offers tailor-made coach training through the Elite Coaching Apprenticeship Programme to help elite athletes become coaches after retirement. In addition, in 2008 the SF&OC launched the Hong Kong Athletes Career and Education Programme, which provides educational and career development support to athletes. To help current elite athletes to enter further education, eight tertiary institutions funded through the University Grants Committee have agreed to accept athletes nominated by SF&OC or HKSI for admission. They will also continue to increase support for elite athletes to allow them to concentrate on preparing for sports competitions whilst pursuing higher education.

Ends/Wednesday, November 24, 2010

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