

PRESS RELEASE

Date: 9 August 2024

The Council of the Hong Kong Laureate Forum Responds to the PCPD's Investigation Report

The Council of the Hong Kong Laureate Forum (the HKLF) identified a malicious ransomware attack against its information system on 27 September 2023 and subsequently took immediate action in a prompt manner. Apart from reporting to the Hong Kong Police Force, the HKLF also proactively notified the Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data (PCPD) of the incident, provided substantial information and fully cooperated with PCPD's investigations over the previous months.

Since the cyberattack, the HKLF has taken a series of response actions and measures, including:

- With the assistance of its external IT support service provider, containment actions were taken immediately after the incident to protect and restore the HKLF's IT systems;
- A press release was issued to announce the incident to the public proactively;
- The possibly affected data subjects were reached out by individual notices, alerted to stay vigilant and reminded to contact the HKLF staff for any concerns;
- Cybersecurity experts were engaged to inspect the systems and conduct in-depth investigation into the cause of the incident, scale of systems being affected, retrievability of data, and to advise further system protection measures;
- According to the experts' advice, containment and enhancement actions were taken to strengthen its cybersecurity measures to prevent further cyberattack;
- A specialist was entrusted to monitor the dark web on whether any concerned information was published.

The forensic investigation conducted by the PCPD revealed that the incident affected the personal data of 8,122 individuals, which included approximately 7,200 e-newsletter subscribers, and the personal data affected included their names and email addresses. In addition, the other 920-odd individuals affected included applicants for young scientists, Shaw Laureates and their accompanying persons, forum ambassadors / event helper applicants, locally engaged scientists, speakers, reviewers, current and former staff members of the HKLF as well as board members of the HKLF. According to the external dark web monitoring specialist, no said information has been found to be published to date.

The HKLF attaches great importance to the PCPD's findings of the HKLF's shortcomings in personal data protection and its recommendations. The HKLF has implemented various organisational and technical remedial measures after the incident, which included deployment of advanced firmware and anti-virus software, implementation of regular patch management and regular monitoring on data security measures adopted by service vendor(s), enforcement of a strong password policy, networks segmentation, execution of regular vulnerability scan and system security audit. The HKLF has also prepared a set of internal information security policy and measures as well as reinforced trainings for staff in order to enhance their awareness and behaviour on cybersecurity. The HKLF appreciates PCPD for its valuable advice and concrete suggestions during the process, and will spare no efforts continuously in enhancing cybersecurity measures and complying with the personal data privacy requirements.

The HKLF reiterates its strong condemnation of the hacker's illegal access and devastation to its information systems and data thieving. The HKLF expresses deep apologies again to all affected parties.

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