

**Progress Report on the motion on
“Raising the limit of university places for
publicly-funded degree programmes”
moved by the Hon Fred Li Wah-ming at the
Legislative Council meeting on 9 April 2008**

Background

The Hon Fred Li Wah-ming moved the motion on “Raising the limit of university places for publicly-funded degree programmes” at the Council meeting of 9 April 2008. The following motion, as amended by Hon Miriam Lau Kin-ye, Hon Cheung Man-kwong, Hon Jasper Tsang Yok-sing, Dr Hon Yeung Sum and Dr Hon Joseph Lee Kok-long, was endorsed –

“That, talents are the foundation of society, and to keep in tune with the social development, Hong Kong must strive to enhance the integrated competitiveness of its population, but the percentage of the people in Hong Kong who attend universities at the appropriate age has all along been lower than those of other big international cities and the neighbouring regions, and there is presently a keen demand for degree holders in the market, this Council urges the Government to gradually raise the annual limit of 14 500 places for publicly-funded first-year first-degree programmes, encourage the provision of more private university places, increase the proportion of local people of the appropriate age group holding first degree or higher academic qualifications, and provide more opportunities for sub-degree holders with outstanding academic results to pursue higher studies, and that the Government should also endeavour to upgrade the quality of university education, correspondingly increase the support facilities such as university hostel places, and provide opportunities for more non-local students to attend universities in Hong Kong, so as to match the development of a knowledge-based economy in Hong Kong and its development as an education hub in the region, thereby training more talents in various sectors such as finance, trade, logistics, tourism and culture for Hong Kong; this Council also urges the Government to increase the direct subsidy for sub-degree places, provide more effectively subsidy, such as interest-free loans, to students taking degree and sub-degree programmes with a view to

alleviating their financial burden, and increase the funding for the places for first-year first-degree programmes in nursing to meet the nursing manpower demand of the community, public and private hospitals and residential care homes for the elderly in the futures.”

2. This progress report sets out the follow-up action taken by the Administration for Members’ information.

Increasing publicly-funded first-year first-degree places

3. In determining the approved student number targets for publicly-funded first-year first-degree (FYFD) places in the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded sector, the Administration will take into account various educational, social and economic considerations. These include, among others, the projected student population of the 17-20 age cohort, the quality of student intakes, the development of the publicly-funded and self-financing post-secondary sectors, the Government’s fiscal position, as well as the manpower requirements and economic development trends of Hong Kong. Increasing the number of publicly-funded FYFD places involves a huge amount of public resources including additional teaching facilities and student hostels. In addition, we should also consider that all UGC-funded institutions are currently preparing for the implementation of the 4-year normative undergraduate programme with effect from 2012 onwards, including curriculum development and construction of academic facilities and student hostels.

4. While the number of FYFD places has basically remained unchanged since the 1994/95 academic year, developments on other fronts have led to increases in tertiary education opportunities for the relevant age cohort, including the provision of publicly-funded senior year places and the rapid development of self-financing post-secondary education sector in Hong Kong. The Administration will examine all relevant factors carefully, and review the student number targets at various levels from time to time.

Provision of more private university places

5. We agree that promoting the development of the self-financing sector will help to provide a diversified higher education system, thereby enhancing the opportunities of students to receiving tertiary education. In this regard, the Government will take up a facilitator role to support the development of private universities through various support measures,

such as considering granting sites at reduced or nominal premium for campus development by self-financing, non-profit-making private universities and considering granting one-off allowances to such institutions to support their long-term development. Separately, to encourage institutions to provide more locally-accredited self-financing degree or top-up degree programmes, we have obtained funding approval from the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council (LegCo) to extend the Financial Assistance Scheme for Post-secondary Students (FASP) to provide assistance to sub-degree graduates pursuing such programmes. The extended FASP will be implemented with effect from the 2008/09 academic year.

Articulation opportunities of sub-degree graduates

6. To provide more articulation opportunities for sub-degree graduates, the Administration has advanced the timetable to provide a total of 1 927 publicly-funded Year 2 undergraduate places in the 2008/09 academic year (i.e. to provide an additional 960 places on top of the 967 places being provided in the 2007/08 academic year). In addition, as set out in para. 5 above, we will extend FASP to support sub-degree graduates pursuing locally-accredited self-financing degree or top-up degree studies in Hong Kong to enhance their articulation opportunities.

Enhance quality of teaching and learning and support facilities

7. The programmes offered by the eight UGC-funded institutions with self-accrediting status are subject to the internal quality assurance process of the institutions concerned to ensure that the entry qualifications as well as the quality and standards of teaching and learning of the programmes meet the relevant requirements. Furthermore, the UGC has all along played a very important role in quality assurance. The various reviews conducted have served to ensure UGC-funded institutions provide quality higher education programmes and public funds are used effectively. In order to further improve the quality of programmes offered by the institutions, the UGC established the Quality Assurance Council (QAC) in 2007 to ensure the quality of educational experience in all first-degree level programmes and above offered by UGC-funded institutions. QAC has started to conduct quality audits of the quality assurance mechanism and quality of the programmes of individual UGC-funded institutions.

8. As regards support facilities, the institutions have submitted to the UGC and the Administration for consideration, 12 capital works

proposals related to additional facilities required for the 4-year normative undergraduate programme. Having considered the proposals in accordance with the established mechanism and procedures, the Administration has earmarked funding for them and the Finance Committee of LegCo has already approved funding for one of the projects. The institutions are now working on the detailed design of the remaining 11 projects, and will submit them to the Finance Committee for funding approval in due course.

9. As regards student hostels, in order to relieve the shortfall in hostels, we are liaising with the institutions and relevant bureaux and departments on the construction of “joint hostels” for shared use by the UGC-funded institutions. We will seek the funding approval of the Finance Committee of LegCo in due course.

Developing Hong Kong as a Regional Education Hub

10. To develop Hong Kong as a regional education hub, we have announced a series of measures, including increasing the non-local student quotas for local institutions, establishing a \$1 billion HKSAR Government Scholarship Fund to award government scholarships to outstanding local and non-local students, relaxing employment restrictions to allow non-local students to take up study-related internships, part-time on-campus jobs and summer jobs, and relaxing immigration control to facilitate non-local students to stay and work in Hong Kong upon graduation. We believe that these measures will increase Hong Kong’s attractiveness as a regional education hub and will enhance Hong Kong’s competitiveness in the long run.

Student Financial Assistance

11. We will improve the FASP to provide post-secondary students with means-tested loans to cover their living expenses. Furthermore, as explained in para. 5 above, the Finance Committee of LegCo has approved extending FASP to provide financial assistance to sub-degree graduates pursuing self-financing full-time locally-accredited degree or top-up degree studies in Hong Kong.

Increasing funding for FYFD programmes in nursing

12. The UGC-funded institutions will balance various factors, such as the Administration’s advice on manpower requirement for specific sectors and professions (including nurses), community needs, institutional

capacity, role of individual institutions and their future development, number of academic staff available, admissions quality and demand from other academic departments, etc, and propose student intakes to various academic programmes in their Academic Development Proposals (ADPs). The UGC is currently examining the institutions' ADPs for the 2009/10 – 2011/12 triennium and will submit the recommendations on approved student number targets and recurrent grants for the triennium to the Administration for consideration. We intend to submit our recommendations regarding the recurrent grants for the UGC-funded sector for the 2009/10 to 2011/12 triennium to the Finance Committee of LegCo for consideration in early 2009.

Education Bureau
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