

Submission from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University

On the issue of international school places, the recent commitment stated in the 2012-2013 Budget by the Financial Secretary, the Hon John Tsang, early this month, to provide 5,000 additional international school places in the next few years coupled with measures such as in-situ expansion of individual international schools, is to be commended. All these have demonstrated the commitment of the Hong Kong SAR Government.

Talent is the most important asset of Hong Kong as an international city. The business community has long made their case heard that there are insufficient international school places, especially on the Hong Kong island where long waiting list is a norm. This hurts in terms of attracting talents to Hong Kong.

Expanding education services and developing Hong Kong as a regional education hub has been an aspirational goal of the Hong Kong SAR Government. To prepare for the four-year undergraduate curriculum, the local universities have been recruiting globally in recent years. If the inadequacy of international school places cannot be dealt with appropriately and in a timely manner, the young academics, who need to provide education for their children, will be discouraged to join universities in Hong Kong. In fact we are already witnessing many cases like this. Those overseas talents serving in the local universities may also consider leaving given the ever-escalating fees charged by most international schools due to shortage of school places. Exorbitant school fees in addition to exorbitant rents in the city constitute a double whammy for our universities to both recruit and retain overseas talents.

We are also concerned what message we are sending to the international community in Hong Kong and abroad if the outcry of insufficient international school places are not pro-actively managed. The increase in school places set out in The Budget, mentioned earlier, is unlikely to be achieved in near future. While the short-term arrangements and building works are going on, perhaps tangible measures in managing the communication with all stakeholders who are end users of international school places are critical. We certainly want to be known as "Asia's world city where there are sufficient and a wide choice of quality international school places." To this goal, let us get the facts and figures out to the public and the global community, celebrate the provision one enjoys, so we speak of facts, not anecdotes and stories that would hurt Hong Kong in attracting talents to it.