

Speaking Note by
Mr. Eddie Ng Hak-kim, SBS, JP,
Secretary for Education
at the Special Meeting of the Legislative Council's Finance
Committee to examine the Estimates of Expenditure 2013-14
on 12 April 2013

Mr. Chairman,

The Government has all along been investing heavily in education for the purpose of nurturing human capital, thereby facilitating social mobility and sustaining the development of Hong Kong. In 2013-14, the total provision for education is \$76.9 billion, of which \$63 billion is for recurrent expenditure which accounts for more than one-fifth of the total recurrent government expenditure. Education is the largest spending area of the Government's total expenditure. We have heard comments that the increase in provision for education is less than those in previous years or the growth is smaller when compared with other policy areas. I must stress that the present-term Government attaches great importance to investment in education. At a time when there is change in the demographic structure of Hong Kong with a declining student population and a growing elderly population, it is even more important for us to nurture our new generation to meet future challenges. Take secondary school education as an example, in spite of the continuous decline in student population, we have been increasing our investment in students. In 2013-14, the unit cost per

secondary student is 8.8% higher than that of last year. The unit cost per primary student has also increased by 3.8%.

New Initiatives in 2013-14

2. In 2013-14, in addition to implementing practicably the new education initiatives launched in recent years, we will take forward the various new education initiatives announced in the Policy Address and the Budget. Now, I would like to give you a brief account of these initiatives.

Upgrading Language Proficiency

3. Hong Kong is an international city. Our people should possess good language proficiency. In 2013-14, we will inject \$5 billion into the Language Fund to promote bi-literacy and tri-lingualism among our people. The proposed injection of \$5 billion into the Language Fund will serve as seed money to generate a more stable return for the fund to facilitate its relatively longer term diversified planning. We will invite the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research to put forward specific proposals.

Nurturing Distinguished Teachers

4. A quality teaching force is the key to raising the quality of education. In 2013-14, we plan to inject an additional \$480 million into the HKSAR Government Scholarship Fund (GSF) to set up scholarships for

outstanding local students to take degree courses or teacher training programmes in prestigious universities outside Hong Kong. Students who receive the awards must undertake to teach in Hong Kong upon graduation for at least two years or a period equivalent to the duration of receiving the scholarships, whichever is longer. It is expected that about 20 scholarships will be awarded each year. Since the number of scholarships is limited, priority will be given to those who study in programmes under specific specialised areas. At present, the specific specialised areas are English Language and Early Childhood Education. The Education Bureau (EDB) will revise the specific specialised areas depending on the needs and circumstances in the future.

Upgrading Qualifications Training

5. We propose to allocate \$10 million per year, starting from 2013-14, to support the Industry Training Advisory Committees set up under the Qualifications Framework to launch new initiatives to enhance the knowledge, skills and exposure of workers in the industries, so as to further increase their competitiveness in the labour market. These include introducing award schemes for outstanding practitioners to engage in learning activities in different places around the world; designing training programmes and package, according to the Specifications of Competency Standards, that meet the needs of the industries, as well as stepping up promotion and publicity of the Qualifications Framework for its wider acceptance among all sectors.

Support for Students with Special Education Needs

6. In recent years, there is an increasing number of students with special education needs (SEN) attending the Vocational Training Council (VTC). To further support students with SEN, from 2013-14 onwards, we propose to allocate \$12 million to the VTC each year to purchase equipment and learning aids for students with SEN, providing them with psychological and student counselling services, and enhancing the support for teaching and learning.

7. We also propose to make injections of \$20 million each into the GSF and Self-financing Post-secondary Education Fund respectively to establish scholarships to give recognition to deserving tertiary students with SEN.

Relief Measures for Tertiary Students

8. To alleviate the financial burden of fresh tertiary graduates, we will continue to relax the repayment period of student loans and give all student loan borrowers who complete their studies in 2013 the option to start repaying their student loans one year after graduation.

Enhancement to Kindergarten Education

9. To follow up with the pledge made in the Chief Executive's Election Manifesto and the Policy Address, we

have set up a dedicated committee in April to study how to practicably implement free kindergarten (KG) education. The committee will listen to stakeholders' opinions on the existing policy on KG education, identify issues for possible improvement, examine the various aspects of free KG education and make practicable recommendations to the EDB on the implementation of free KG education. Currently, we anticipate that the committee will complete its work in two years. This does not mean that KG education will stay put during the period. The committee will explore measures that can be implemented in the short or medium term to help the KG sector face the existing challenges. The Government will actively consider providing support in this regard. Also, I wish to point out that as announced in the Policy Address, we will provide KGs under the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme with an additional one-off grant in the 2013/14 school year. The KGs concerned can make use of this grant to improve their teaching resources, environment and facilities. A total provision of some \$160 million will be involved.

Support for Non-Chinese Speaking (NCS) Students in Learning Chinese

10. We strive to support NCS students to integrate into the local community and master their Chinese. Starting from the 2013-14 financial year, we will allocate an additional provision of \$2 million each year to refine the Summer Bridging Programme for NCS students progressing to Primary 1 to Primary 4 by allowing NCS parents to

accompany their children during the Programme. Through parent-school collaboration, NCS students would be better supported in learning Chinese and enhancing their Chinese proficiency. Also, we will make better use of the routine events organised by ethnic minority communities and step up our collaboration with non-governmental organisations to encourage NCS parents' participation in diversified Chinese activities together with their children with a view to enhancing exposure to, and use of Chinese by both parties. The Standing Committee on Language Education and Research would further discuss the development in this area.

Further Stepping Up Support for Integrated Education

11. To help ordinary schools cater for their students with SEN, the EDB has been providing schools with additional resources, professional support and teacher training. To further step up the support for schools enrolled with a larger number of students with SEN, we will allocate additional resources to improve the funding arrangement of the Learning Support Grant (LSG) with effect from the 2013/14 school year. Specifically, we will raise the ceiling of LSG for public sector primary and secondary schools from \$1 million to \$1.5 million per school per annum. Schools may pool together and flexibly deploy the LSG and other school resources for employing additional teachers, teaching assistants or hiring professional services to render appropriate support for the students with SEN.

12. Mr. Chairman, my colleagues and I will be happy to answer questions from Members.

Education Bureau

12 April 2013