

**For discussion on
5 April 2024**

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Building Hong Kong as an International Post-secondary Education Hub

Purpose

This paper sets out the Government's work and latest progress of developing Hong Kong as an international post-secondary education hub.

Overview

2. Education is the key to nurturing talent. Hong Kong has sound education infrastructure, world-renowned universities and outstanding research talents. The quality of our teaching and learning is ranked among the top in various international comparative studies. Hong Kong has been actively contributing its strength to the needs of the country, endeavoring to complement the national education goals, the Belt and Road Initiative, opportunities arising from the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) as well as the necessary manpower support for Hong Kong's development of the "eight centres" as outlined in the 14th Five-Year Plan. The Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address has set out clearly the strategic directions and objectives for enhancing the quality of education in Hong Kong, with a view to developing Hong Kong into an international post-secondary education hub and a cradle of future talents, nurturing a diversified pool of talents, and enhancing Hong Kong's momentum of development while promoting people-to-people exchanges and contributing to national development. The Government is developing Hong Kong as an international post-secondary education hub through the following four key strategies and a number of important initiatives

A. Support Expansion and Quality Enhancement of Local Post-secondary Institutions

3. The Government attaches great importance to supporting the expansion and quality enhancement of local post-secondary institutions, with a view to attracting more overseas and Mainland students to study in Hong Kong, promoting internationalisation and multi-cultural experience. While expanding the development scale of Hong Kong's higher education, students will also be provided with a broader international perspective and more diversified choices and pathways for development. As far as the entire community is concerned, the

admission of non-local students can attract more talents to Hong Kong and enhance the quality of our population, thereby facilitating economic development, and in the long run, enhance Hong Kong's overall competitiveness. We have therefore announced a series of measures in the 2023 Policy Address to develop Hong Kong into an international post-secondary education hub.

Increase non-local student quota of publicly-funded post-secondary institutions

4. Starting from the 2024/25 academic year, the non-local student quota of publicly-funded post-secondary institutions will be doubled from 20% to 40%. Taking undergraduate programmes as an example, the non-local student enrolment ceiling will be increased from currently 15 000 to around 30 000. The institutions may, having regard to their own conditions, progressively attract more students from abroad, Belt and Road countries in particular, as well as from the Mainland, to further their studies in Hong Kong, thereby developing Hong Kong' post-secondary education, with high quality teaching and supporting facilities. Apart from integration at the student level, the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded universities also have to make reference to and share local and international best practices in providing comprehensive support on campus to facilitate the integration of non-local students into the community.

5. In terms of support, the UGC-funded universities will continue to take forward a number of hostel projects in order to increase hostel places by about 13 500 in total by 2027 to cater for the needs of students, including those arising from the additional intake. In addition, support measures should include the provision of good campus facilities and convenient catering services to support students with different dietary habits, religious beliefs, languages, customs and cultures, as well as social support (e.g. buddy schemes and extra-curricular activities) and personal support (e.g. physical and mental health programmes, counselling services and career counselling) to enable students to have a fulfilling and enjoyable experience during their study in Hong Kong. We hope that the above measures, coupled with the relaxation of immigration policy to allow eligible non-local graduates/students to stay in/return to Hong Kong to work or take up part-time jobs, will enhance their incentive to stay in Hong Kong for development after graduation.

Expand scholarship schemes

6. As regards scholarship schemes, the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council approved in February 2024 the Government's injection of an additional \$1 billion into the Government Scholarship Fund to increase the quota of the Belt and Road Scholarship to 150, providing full subsidies for students from the Belt and Road regions to pursue undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Hong Kong. At present, about 2 500 outstanding students from Belt and Road countries are benefiting from government and other scholarship schemes. At the same time, the Government will gradually increase the quota of the Hong Kong

PhD Fellowship Scheme to 400 places per academic year with a view to attracting more outstanding talents to study and conduct research in Hong Kong. We will also continue to implement the Hong Kong Scholarship for Excellence Scheme, which subsidises 100 outstanding local students each year to pursue studies in world-renowned universities outside Hong Kong, with a view to broadening local students' global perspectives.

Promote multi-cultural learning experience

7. Starting from the 2023/24 academic year, the UGC has injected an additional \$100 million into the Funding Scheme for Mainland and Global Engagement and Student Learning Experience. This will encourage universities to offer students with more exchange and learning opportunities outside Hong Kong, and promote a diversified and inclusive international learning environment. Specifically, universities may use the funding under the Scheme to support local students' participation in learning experience outside Hong Kong, such as exchange programmes, study visits, internships, field trips, service learning and international activities, etc., with the GBA being the focus of the Scheme. The funding can also be used for organising activities in promoting a diversified campus culture and facilitating exchanges among students of different backgrounds and cultures, such that students can benefit from an internationalised learning environment and broaden their horizons even during their study on local campus. In response to innovations in teaching and learning modes, the funding scheme also covers virtual and mixed-mode activities. The additional funding can benefit more students of the UGC-funded universities, and is in line with the Government's target as set out in the 2022 Policy Address for about 50% of local undergraduates of the UGC-funded universities to have learning experience outside Hong Kong by the 2025/26 academic year.

Promote post-secondary education development in the Northern Metropolis

8. The Government will strive to develop the Northern Metropolis University Town in the Northern Metropolis where post-secondary institutions are encouraged to strengthen co-operation with renowned Mainland and overseas institutions, and create synergy by sharing resources and enhancing collaboration with the industry sector, with a view to attracting more overseas academic and research talents to Hong Kong.

9. To capitalise on the tremendous development opportunities in the Northern Metropolis, the Education Bureau (EDB) has earmarked sites in various development areas to actively promote the establishment of post-secondary education infrastructure and to nurture talents required for the development of Hong Kong and the GBA. In this connection, the EDB has consulted various post-secondary institutions and will be actively reviewing the distribution of and demand for post-secondary education land use after consolidating the information collected. We will also maintain close liaison with institutions with interest to participate in the development of the Northern Metropolis, and follow up with

relevant bureaux/departments on matters relating to the finalisation of the land use, with a view to facilitating the development of post-secondary education in the Northern Metropolis.

B. Supporting Diversity in Post-secondary Education

Planning of UGC-funded programmes

10. The Government encourages the UGC-funded universities to keep abreast of the times and innovate in curriculum planning, teaching and research, to meet the needs of the times, actively complement the future development objectives of the country and Hong Kong, and nurture talents to create stronger impetus for Hong Kong's development. In the Planning Exercise for the 2022-25 triennium, the Government has clearly set out the strategic directions to encourage universities to plan strategically in light of societal development, and to encourage 35% of the students studying in STEAM (i.e. Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) subjects and 60% of the students studying in subjects relevant to the "eight centres" under the 14th Five-year Plan, so as to nurture professionals of different fields and contribute actively to reinvigorating the country through science and education. We are currently preparing for the Planning Exercise for the 2025-28 triennium, in which we will continue to formulate strategic directions, having regard to the latest developments of our country and society. Guidance on the planning of academic programmes will facilitate our universities to plan for the future over a longer horizon.

Support self-financing post-secondary institutions in enhancing their campuses

11. The Government has all long been supporting the sustainable and healthy development of the self-financing post-secondary education sector in parallel with the publicly-funded sector. To support self-financing post-secondary institutions in developing and enhancing their campuses for supporting more teaching and learning activities, the EDB will launch a new round of the Land Grant Scheme and Start-up Loan Scheme this year. We will announce the details in due course.

Promote vocational and professional education and training

12. The Government has all along been promoting vocational and professional education and training (VPET) and encouraging young people to pursue their studies and careers based on their capabilities and aspirations. To provide young people with more opportunities to showcase their talent, the Government has adopted the strategy of fostering industry-institution collaboration and diversified development to promote VPET on various fronts under a multi-pronged approach as a pathway parallel to conventional academic education, encouraging the articulation between vocational and academic studies, cooperation between industries and education and the integration of science and

education, and providing diversified learning and employment opportunities with a view to nurturing more high-quality talent with applied skills.

Press ahead with the establishment of universities of applied sciences

13. The Chief Executive announced in his 2023 Policy Address that the Government will facilitate the establishment of universities of applied sciences (UAS), and strive to raise the status of VPET to attain qualifications at university degree level, providing an alternative path to success for young people who aspire to pursue a career in technical professions. We promulgated the criteria for qualifying as UAS on 2 February 2024, and announced on 21 March 2024 that the Hong Kong Metropolitan University had fulfilled the relevant criteria and successfully qualified as the first UAS in Hong Kong. To further enhance the status of VPET in society and among parents and students, we have allocated \$100 million as a start-up fund to support potential self-financing post-secondary institutions to form an alliance of UAS for joint promotion. We will also provide financial and related support to encourage institutions to offer more applied degree programmes related to technical professions and provide more incentives for enrolment, thereby supporting appropriate self-financing institutions to develop into UAS.

C. Promote Collaborative Development of Higher Education in Hong Kong and on the Mainland

Encourage further co-operation and exchanges between institutions of the two places

14. The Government endeavours to drive, facilitate and encourage higher education co-operation between Hong Kong and the Mainland, with a view to complementing each other's advantages, especially in maintaining close collaboration in the areas of scientific research co-operation, student exchange and talent nurturing. As of November 2023, there were 2 467 active academic research collaboration projects between higher education institutions of Hong Kong and the Mainland. Six Hong Kong's higher education institutions have thus far set up industry-education-research bases or institutes in Shenzhen to further strengthen co-operation with the Mainland institutions on scientific research. Quality research talents are an important force to support Hong Kong's position as an international innovation and technology centre.

Encourage Hong Kong's higher education institutions to set up campuses on the Mainland and provide joint programmes

15. The Government will continue to actively participate in and promote higher education cooperation in the GBA. We will assist Hong Kong's higher education institutions in exploring more flexible and innovative operation models to promote closer collaboration with their GBA campuses, with a view to nurturing

outstanding talents needed by the country's development and synergising the complementary academic structures and facilities of the Hong Kong and Mainland campuses. Apart from Hong Kong Baptist University, The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) and The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST), which have established their campuses in the GBA, City University of Hong Kong is pressing ahead with the preparations for the establishment of its Dongguan campus.

16. The Government supports the collaboration between Hong Kong's higher education institutions and renowned universities outside Hong Kong, with a view to enhancing our local academic and research standards. In line with the principle of institutional autonomy, the UGC-funded universities have been collaborating with international and Mainland institutions in various forms, including joint programmes, academic and research exchanges as well as student exchange programmes. Various universities with Mainland campuses have also been actively introducing collaborative double major programmes spanning their Hong Kong and GBA campuses (including the 2+2 degree programme co-offered by CUHK and CUHK(Shenzhen) and the arrangement for mutually recognised and transferrable credits between HKUST and HKUST(Guangzhou)), enriching students' learning and internship experience in the two places and facilitating the nurturing and gathering of internationalised and innovative talents in the GBA

Active promotion of development of university alliances

17. The Government supports the establishment of alliances between higher education institutions of Hong Kong and the Mainland. Hong Kong's higher education institutions have established five alliances with institutions of the Mainland and Macao, namely the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao University Alliance, the Beijing-Hong Kong University Alliance, the Shanghai-Hong Kong University Alliance, the Jiangsu-Hong Kong-Macao University Alliance and the Alliance of Higher Institutions in Shandong, Hong Kong and Macao, bringing together over 80 elite institutions. Through a comprehensive co-operation mechanism, the alliances gather high-quality teaching and research resources and deepen the mutual benefits of member institutions in areas such as scientific innovation and talent exchange, thereby enhancing the level and standard of regional co-operation and facilitating the GBA's development in different aspects.

Take forward the mutual recognition of sub-degree level qualifications proactively

18. The HKSAR Government has been proactively taking forward the mutual recognition of sub-degree level qualifications with relevant Mainland authorities, including higher diploma qualifications, and will continue to follow-up on the matter with them. In addition, since early 2022, the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) has been providing consultancy services to relevant authorities in the Guangdong Province to support the development of the Guangdong Lifelong Education

Qualifications Framework, including assisting in establishing a quality assurance mechanism, accreditation standard and procedures, piloting an accreditation exercise and developing guidelines for setting up a qualification register. The progress has been satisfactory and the HKCAAVQ expects the consultancy service to be completed in Q3 2024, which could lay the foundation for further liaison and cooperation between the qualification frameworks of Hong Kong and Guangdong in the long term.

D. Strengthen Exchanges and Collaboration with Places outside Hong Kong

19. The Government has all along supported the UGC-funded universities in strengthening their international exchanges and ties, and establishing strategic partnerships with academic institutions around the world, with a view to broadening the international perspectives of their academic staff and students, and tapping the opportunities arising from the development of our country. To promote internationalisation, the eight UGC-funded universities have jointly set up the Heads of Universities Committee's Standing Committee on Internationalisation (HUCOMSCI) and established the "Study in Hong Kong" brand to attract more students from outside Hong Kong to pursue further studies in Hong Kong. Since the announcement to develop Hong Kong into an international post-secondary education hub in the 2023 Policy Address last October, the EDB and the UGC Secretariat have further strengthened collaboration with the HUCOMSCI, actively enhancing the publicity and promotion of the "Study in Hong Kong" brand and expanding the international network and recruiting more students from different regions to pursue further studies in Hong Kong. In particular, the Secretary for Education just attended the annual conference and exhibition of the Asia Pacific Association for International Education (APAIE) in Perth, Australia in March this year, and delivered a keynote speech on "Study in Hong Kong" where she promoted the advantages of Hong Kong as an international post-secondary education hub. She also emphasised that the Government will render full support to Hong Kong's universities in strengthening collaboration and ties on student exchanges and academic research with institutions around the world.

20. To support the universities in resuming and enhancing their promotion activities, the UGC has included a provision of \$20.47 million in the 2022-25 triennium for the HUCOMSCI to participate in and organise various overseas activities and visits for recruiting international students. Apart from the annual APAIE conference mentioned above, the HUCOMSCI plans to set up a joint Hong Kong Pavilion in international expositions such as the annual conference and exhibition of the NAFSA: Association of International Educators to be held in the US in May this year and the annual conference of the European Association for International Education to be held in France in September this year, as well as organising the joint student recruitment visit to India later this year. In addition, the UGC has provided a funding of about \$10 million to support the HUCOMSCI in launching a brand new project to promote Hong Kong's higher

education to countries along the Belt and Road, which includes the formulation of publicity and promotion strategies as well as the production of publicity materials and videos, etc. The HUCOMSCI has commenced the work and commissioned consultants to formulate the publicity and promotion strategy and conduct a market survey. The EDB and the UGC Secretariat will continue to work closely with the HUCOMSCI and collaborate on the various outbound visits to promote Hong Kong's unique advantages to the world, with a view to attracting more meritorious overseas students to pursue further studies in Hong Kong.

21. On the other hand, with a view to broadening students' horizons and presenting to them the development opportunities outside Hong Kong, the UGC has been encouraging universities to provide more exchange and learning opportunities outside Hong Kong, so as to enable students to better understand our country's development and the global trends. As of end November 2023, the UGC-funded universities have signed a total of more than 2 600 student exchange agreements with institutions around the world, which represent a further increase when compared with the situation before the pandemic.

E. Conclusion

22. Hong Kong's post-secondary education is highly international and diversified. We will strive to implement the above initiatives and develop Hong Kong into an international post-secondary education hub, nurturing and attracting outstanding talents and enhancing momentum for Hong Kong's development.

Education Bureau
March 2024