

# LC: Speech by CS in presenting Government Minute in response to Report No. 78 and Report No. 79 of Public Accounts Committee

Following is the speech (translated from Chinese) by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Chan Kwok-ki, in presenting the Government Minute in response to Report No. 78 and Report No. 79 of the Public Accounts Committee in the Legislative Council today (May 24):

Mr President,

Laid on the table today is the Government Minute (GM) responding to Report No. 78 and Report No. 79 of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) presented to the Legislative Council on February 15, 2023.

I welcome the Reports of PAC and am grateful for the time and efforts devoted by the Chairman of the PAC, the Hon Shiu Ka-fai, and members of the PAC. The Government accepts the PAC's various recommendations and sets out in detail in the GM the specific responses of the relevant bureaux and departments. The PAC has conducted public hearings on the chapters "Licensing services for drivers" in Report No. 78 and "Continuing Education Fund" in Report No. 79. I would like to highlight the key measures taken and progress made by the Government and relevant organisations in response to the recommendations.

## Licensing services for drivers

In response to the comments and recommendations made by the Audit Commission and the PAC on licensing services for drivers, the Transport Department (TD) has taken various measures to ensure an effective driving training and testing system for promotion of road safety.

Regarding the provision of driving tests, the TD has taken measures to increase the driving test output. Upon utilisation of the time saved from the introduction of an electronic driving test form and arrangement of Driving Examiners to take up additional work on Saturdays starting late March 2023, around 1 000 additional driving tests can be provided for early test appointments per month, with a view to improving the overall waiting time for driving tests. In addition, the TD is conducting a new round of Driving Examiner II recruitment exercise. New recruits will assume duty in the second half of 2023. Meanwhile, the TD has been working with the Independent Commission Against Corruption since February 2023 for reviewing the duty reporting arrangement of Driving Examiners to examine the possibility of making adjustments in order to further increase the driving test output. The relevant review is expected to be completed in the third quarter of 2023.

In respect of updating the computerised question banks of driving written tests, the TD has enhanced the system to ensure that the question banks are reviewed regularly and as necessitated by legislative amendments, with a view to ensuring that all the questions and answer options are up to date.

As regards the management of driving training schools, the TD will enhance the monitoring of the operators' gearing-up progress during the relevant tender and selection exercises for schools in future to ensure that the schools have met all requirements before being designated as driving schools. The TD has also consulted the Competition Commission and adopted a new marking scheme for awarding tenders, under which a technical assessment and a rental proposal each carries weighting of half of the overall score. The TD will continue to conduct re-tendering exercises with the Lands Department for the schools located on government short-term tenancy sites on a regular basis, and to examine further enhancement of the assessment criteria in future tender exercises to introduce more competition into the market of driving training schools.

On the licensing and monitoring of private driving instructors (PDIs), the TD will continue to regularly review and closely monitor the situation of "inactive" PDIs in assessing the need for issuing new PDI licences. The TD plans to collect information from candidates regarding the driving instructors who provided training to them, the number of training hours taken, etc when they attend driving road tests starting June 2023, with a view to enhancing the monitoring of the situation of "inactive" PDIs. Moreover, the TD has strengthened the arrangement of roving inspections of PDIs on a regular basis to monitor the teaching quality of PDIs more closely.

#### Continuing Education Fund

In response to the recommendations on the Continuing Education Fund (CEF), the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) and the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency (WFSFAA) have taken various measures to proactively improve different aspects of the CEF's operation.

As regards the monitoring work on inspection, the LWB has completed the review of the service agreement with the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) for 2022-23, and followed up and rectified the arrangements on inspection of registered courses. The HKCAAVQ agrees to refund the fees paid with regard to the unsuccessful audit visits in the past five years as mentioned in the Audit Report. After deduction of the service fees payable for the preparatory work for conducting audit visits, the formalities to refund the remaining fees had been completed in 2022-23. In addition, in 2022-23, the HKCAAVQ could only charge service fees for audit visits successfully conducted. Upon completion of the 2022-23 service agreement, the LWB will engage a service provider for conducting audit visits through open tender. The LWB will make reference to the recommendations of the Audit Report and the PAC Report to set out clearly the contents of the service agreement and the arrangement, adding appropriate provisions to define clearly the roles and responsibilities of the service provider, the service requirements to be fulfilled, etc.

The LWB and the WFSFAA attach great importance to safeguarding national security, and issued a letter in March 2023 reminding all course providers under the CEF to abide by the Hong Kong National Security Law. The LWB and the WFSFAA will issue letters to all course providers under the CEF in June 2023, requiring them to sign an undertaking on safeguarding national security, as well as revise the application forms for new course registration and renewal requiring all course providers to sign a declaration to acknowledge that their operational arrangement of CEF courses must fulfil the requirements of the Hong Kong National Security Law. Additional provisions on the requirements of safeguarding national security will be added in the CEF Terms and Conditions and the Guide in mid-2023.

On strengthening the regulation of promotion of CEF courses, the LWB and the WFSFAA have reminded all course providers in writing not to promote CEF courses in any way deviating from the objectives of the CEF. The LWB and the WFSFAA have also stepped up inspections of promotional materials of CEF courses on the internet to ensure that they are compatible with the objectives of the CEF. The CEF authorities have requested submission of duly prepared promotional materials by course providers at the time of application for course registration for checking their compatibility with the objectives of the CEF. If course providers are found to have allegedly promoted CEF courses as a means to pave the way for emigration, or in any way deviated from the objectives of the CEF, the CEF authorities will request them to withdraw and/or cease using relevant promotional materials, and take other appropriate regulatory actions in case of severe non-compliance, such as issuing warning letters or reprimands to the non-complying course providers or de-registering the courses.

The LWB and the WFSFAA have enhanced the use of information technology to improve the efficiency of the CEF's operation, including commencing the development of a centralised e-service portal in the first quarter of 2023 to provide a one-stop service portal for applicants of all financial assistance schemes, including the CEF, under the purview of the WFSFAA. The portal will facilitate CEF claimants' online submission of applications and supporting documents as well as their viewing of the status of their applications. The LWB will also consult the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer to explore the feasibility of setting up an operating system to co-ordinate operations involving multiple parties.

The LWB and the WFSFAA will continue to monitor the implementation of the various improvement measures, so as to ensure that the CEF can give full play to its functions and safeguarding learners' interests.

Closing

Mr President, I would like to thank the PAC again for its efforts and suggestions. The bureaux and departments concerned will strictly adhere to their responses and implement improvement measures as set out in the GM.

Thank you, Mr President.