

Speech by DCS at Forum for World Education Hong Kong Regional Conference 2023 (English only) (with photo)

Following is the opening speech by the Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Cheuk Wing-hing, at Forum for World Education Hong Kong Regional Conference 2023 today (May 26):

Ms Shih (Chair of the Forum for World Education Hong Kong Steering Committee Member, Ms Edith Shih), Ms Pan (Board Member of the Forum for World Education, Ms Jun Pan), Professor Davis (President of the Forum for World Education, Professor Cheng Y Davis), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning. I am delighted to join you today at the Forum for World Education's regional conference in Hong Kong. My thanks to the Forum for organising this seminal, two-day gathering, for bringing together educators, business leaders, policymakers and researchers from all over Asia and indeed around the world, here to exchange ideas, insight and intelligence on the latest education developments and the promising directions.

Education is the very foundation of economic, cultural and social progress. It is accorded top priority in the Hong Kong SAR Government's policy commitments. In the next few minutes, allow me to tell you about what we are doing in ensuring that education remains the centerpiece of Government policies.

To start with, education gets the lion's share of our spending, accounting for more than 20 per cent of our recurrent expenditure. In the current (2023-24) financial year, we estimate that our education expenditure will exceed HK\$104 billion (or US\$13 billion).

We promote the parallel development of publicly funded and self-financing, post-secondary education.

Today, more than 50 per cent of our young people have degree-level education opportunities. And some 80 per cent have access to post-secondary education.

We are dedicated to growing Hong Kong as a regional education hub.

That means attracting academic and research talent from around the world.

It helps that Hong Kong is blessed with an East-meets-West cultural sensibility. That engenders a singular learning environment, preparing

overseas students to meet fast-changing global challenges, especially for those interested in tapping the enormous opportunities available in the Greater China region.

Thanks to Hong Kong's English-speaking post-secondary institutions and language environment, international students need minimal time and efforts to immerse in Hong Kong's education system.

The cosmopolitan nature of campus and city life cultivates students to acquire an international outlook.

At the same time, our enviable Chinese language and cultural environment creates unsurpassed opportunities for students aspiring to build their careers in Greater China, particularly in the Greater Bay Area.

Quality is another decisive advantage of our post-secondary education. Hong Kong boasts a multitude of world-class institutions, including 22 degree-awarding bodies.

Five of our universities were ranked among the top 100 in the 2023 QS World University Rankings. Which makes us unique not only in the country, but also in Asia.

Our business administration programmes are also among the best in the world, with three of our executive master of business administration offerings ranked among the world's top 25. Among them, the Kellogg-Hong Kong University of Science and Technology EMBA programme was actually rated the world's best in the Financial Times 2022 EMBA Ranking.

We welcome overseas students to study, conduct academic research and participate in exchange activities in Hong Kong. In the 2021-22 academic year, about 20 400 non-local students from over 100 countries and regions took post-secondary programmes here.

That same year, about 2 200 exchange students took part in publicly funded, post-secondary programmes.

We are working, too, to augment our talent pool, so as to help seize the enormous opportunities, there for us, under the national 14th Five-Year Plan and in the Greater Bay Area.

In the furtherance of this, we are increasing the number of publicly funded research postgraduate students by almost 30 per cent in the coming two academic years.

Together with other measures, that will increase the number of research postgraduate students in our universities by up to 50 per cent.

We have also implemented measures to attract outstanding, non-local students to pursue their studies in Hong Kong. That includes a Belt and Road Scholarship, encouraging brilliant students from Belt and Road economies to

enrol on undergraduate and research postgraduate programmes in Hong Kong.

Let me add that tuition for non-local research postgraduate students is competitively set at just over HK\$42,000 (or about US\$5,300), a level heavily subsidised by the HKSAR Government.

And our longstanding Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme attracts top research postgraduate students from around the world. Each awardee receives a stipend worth more than US\$43,000 a year for up to three years.

Non-local graduates who wish to stay in Hong Kong and develop their careers can, with minimal requirements, take advantage of our Immigration Arrangement for Non-local Graduates.

Recently, for example, non-local graduates are free to stay in Hong Kong for two full years without the need to first secure a job. That allows them to look for the career opportunity that is right for them.

The point, ladies and gentlemen, is clear and compelling: we very much welcome graduates from all over the world to look to Hong Kong for their future.

We are, of course, hardly alone on this front. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the demand for international education, and global talent, will only continue to grow.

That said, our chances are unique. It helps that we have the full support of our nation and the immense opportunities opened up by the national 14th Five-Year Plan.

The Plan looks to Hong Kong to enhance our traditional strengths in finance, trade and transportation, and as an international legal and dispute-resolution services centre in the Asia-Pacific. It also calls on Hong Kong to develop regional or international hub status in four emerging centres, namely: aviation, innovation and technology, intellectual property and as an East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange.

We are also playing a pivotal role in the Belt and Road initiative, as well as in the Greater Bay Area – the vast and fast-emerging cluster city development integrating nine cities in southern China with Hong Kong and Macau, that has a combined GDP of US\$1.89 trillion in 2022, placing it tie-8th with Italy in the global league of GDP, just behind France and in front of Canada and South Korea.

Alongside these wide-ranging business, trade and investment prospects, and long-term promises, our world-class universities and creative industries will help Hong Kong attract international talent. In doing so, we will contribute to the region's, and the world's, knowledge economy. Of that, I am confident.

My thanks again go to the Forum for World Education for organising its

regional conference here in Hong Kong. Please enjoy the Forum's sessions and the wisdom of the prominent speakers in these next two stimulating days, and I wish you all the best of business, and education, in the coming year.

Lastly, let us all wish for the speedy realisation of this Forum's powerful theme: "The Transformative Power of International Education for a Better World."

Thank you.

