

UGC welcomes Budget proposal for new Fellowships Scheme and subsidy for internships for STEM students

The following is issued on behalf of the University Grants Committee:

The Chairman of the University Grants Committee (UGC), Mr Carlson Tong, today (February 26) welcomes the Financial Secretary's proposal in the 2020-21 Budget to set aside about \$571 million for the UGC to launch a Targeted Taught Postgraduate Programmes Fellowships Scheme and \$40 million to subsidise short-term internships for students taking STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) programmes in local universities.

The Fellowships Scheme provides fellowships on a pilot basis for five cohorts (starting from the 2020/21 academic year) to meritorious local students to pursue designated taught postgraduate programmes conducive to the development of Hong Kong offered by the eight UGC-funded universities.

Mr Tong said, "The UGC believes that cutting-edge cross-disciplinary training at postgraduate level will speedily strengthen the talent pool for priority areas in Hong Kong's strategic development. The Fellowships Scheme will attract more meritorious local students to pursue further studies in critical areas conducive to the development of Hong Kong. It also exemplifies the full support from the Government for promoting higher education in Hong Kong."

The Fellowships Scheme will be open to students who pursue designated taught postgraduate programmes, subject to a cap of HK\$120,000 per fellowship to subsidise their tuition fee. The Fellowships Scheme will provide a maximum of 500 fellowships for the first cohort of students (i.e. those to be admitted in the 2020/21 academic year) and 1 000 thereafter. The UGC has set up a task force to assess the proposed taught postgraduate programmes from individual universities and the respective number of fellowships to be allocated to each programme. The first cohort covers 43 targeted programmes from seven priority areas, namely STEM; promoting good health; developing a sustainable environment; enhancing Hong Kong's strategic position as a regional and international business centre; advancing emerging research; and promoting the creative, cultural and heritage sectors. The UGC has announced the list of eligible programmes and the respective number of fellowship places to be allocated to each programme earlier this month.

The initiative was first mentioned in the Chief Executive's 2019 Policy Address. This complements the Government's continued support for the higher education sector in recent years, including the 20-billion injection into the Research Endowment Fund that has been provided to further the research excellence of Hong Kong.

Turning to the proposed \$40 million subsidy for short-term internships

for undergraduate and postgraduate students in STEM programmes offered by local universities, Mr Tong said, "This initiative will add to the Government's ongoing efforts in cultivating talents for this strategic area. It will promote collaboration and interaction between the universities and the industries, and benefit our students by offering them valuable hands-on experience essential to a rewarding career in STEM."

Mr Tong also expressed appreciation for the initiatives the Government launched over the past two-and-a-half years to take university undergraduate and postgraduate education to new heights.

Education Commission Chairman welcomes 2020-21 Budget

The following is issued on behalf of the Education Commission:

The Chairman of the Education Commission, Mr Tim Lui, today (February 26) welcomed the measures proposed by the Financial Secretary in the 2020-21 Budget.

Mr Lui said, "As the Chairman of the Education Commission, I am pleased to note the Government's continuous devotion of substantial resources to education and implementation of various measures to provide quality education and nurture talent. Education accounts for the biggest recurrent spending of the Government with an estimated expenditure of \$99.6 billion for 2020-21. This represents about one-fifth of the total estimated recurrent government expenditure.

"I am very glad to note that about \$150 million has been reserved for paying the examination fee for candidates sitting for the 2021 Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination with a view to alleviating parents' financial burden. In addition, \$40 million is earmarked for subsidising short-term internships for undergraduates and postgraduates taking STEM programmes in local universities."

Mr Lui added, "In the past two years, the Government has introduced various new measures on education to further cater for the different needs of students. In addition, among the eight in-depth reviews proposed by the current-term Government, seven have been completed and some recommendations have already been implemented. On post-secondary education, the Government has also devoted additional resources which include the injection of additional resources into the Research Endowment Fund to strengthen research capacity and cultivate a research culture, and the provision of subsidies to strengthen the promotion of vocational and professional education and training. All these measures are being implemented and are beginning to take

root. I believe their effects will manifest themselves over time.

"On measures responding to the novel coronavirus epidemic, I welcome the earlier announcement by the Education Bureau (EDB) of deploying existing resources to provide additional funding to schools to support their anti-epidemic work and pay for the related expenses. To alleviate parents' burden on children's learning, a funding of about \$900 million will be allocated from the Anti-epidemic Fund to be set up to increase the Student Grant of each recipient from \$2,500 to \$3,500 in the 2019/20 school year, benefiting parents of about 900 000 students."

He added, "I deeply believe that the EDB will maintain close communication with stakeholders and continue to enhance the quality of education in Hong Kong and nurture talent."

Hospital Authority welcomes budget allocation in 2020-21

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The Hospital Authority (HA) Chairman, Mr Henry Fan welcomed the 2020-21 Budget announced by the Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan today (February 26) at the Legislative Council, which would increase the annual subvention for HA from \$72.5 billion (including \$71.4 billion recurrent) in 2019-20 to \$76.6 billion (including \$75 billion recurrent) in 2020-21. Compared with the 2017-18 actual provisions, the cumulative growth has been 36 per cent (35 per cent for the recurrent provision). The estimates for 2020-21 have yet to include the \$4.7 billion just approved by the Legislative Council Finance Committee for tackling the epidemic.

"Despite the economic downturn, we are delighted to witness Government's commitment to sustain the development of public healthcare with the increased financial provision to the HA," said Mr Fan.

Mr Fan expressed gratitude to the Government's financial support, which allows the HA to enhance staff promotion opportunities and boost the morale of frontline staff to retain them to serve in public hospitals.

"We will enhance the promotion opportunities for Associate Consultants to promote to Consultants and additional posts of Nurse Consultants to enhance the career progression prospects for frontline healthcare workers. The HA will also enhance the training and promotion opportunities for supporting staff to attract more people to work in public hospitals."

"With the Government's strong support, service commissioning in phases

in Hong Kong Children's Hospital, Tin Shui Wai Hospital and North Lantau Hospital is in progress. To modernise public hospitals, the HA will enhance Positron Emission Tomography-Computed Tomography service, apart from enhancing various information technology systems to streamline workflow and enhance efficiency," Mr Fan added.

The HA Chief Executive, Dr Tony Ko also expressed appreciation to the Government for the resources support in improving working environment and patient services of the HA. "We are particularly grateful for the Government's support for us to launch new services, including the addition of 400 beds to meet the growing service demand and improve healthcare service quality."

"We will continue to enhance patients' access to general outpatient and specialist outpatient services, alongside the enhancement in Accident and Emergency, Operating Theatre, diagnostic radiology, endoscopic and pharmacy services to meet the increasing service demand," said Dr Ko.

"The coverage of HA Drug Formulary will be widened for treating hepatitis, oncology and cardiovascular diseases. Public hospitals will further enhance support to cancer patients by strengthening inpatient and consultation services, radiotherapy and chemotherapy services, and expanding the cancer case manager programme. Mental health services for children and adolescents as well as psychogeriatric outreach services will be strengthened."

Dr Ko thanked the Government again for the additional funding allocation of \$4.7 billion to the HA earlier for tackling the COVID-19 epidemic. The HA will ensure the prudent deployment of the funding to better equip public hospitals in managing the epidemic in various aspects, including frontline healthcare manpower; temporary accommodation arrangements and allowances; additional personal protective equipment; enhancing laboratory support; and strengthening a range of hospital support services including cleansing, transportation and supplies.

LCQ20: Planning and development of Kowloon City district

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hoi-yan and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, in the Legislative Council today (February 26):

Question:

On matters relating to the planning and development of the Kowloon City

district, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of private buildings in the district, with a breakdown by the age group to which the buildings belong (i.e. 20 years or below, 21 to 40 years, and 41 years or above);

(2) of the number of buildings in the district that have participated in the various Government-led building rehabilitation schemes, as well as the measures in place to encourage owners of the remaining buildings to participate in the relevant schemes and to provide them with the assistance needed;

(3) of the number of government buildings in the district, and set out, by name of building, the years of commissioning of such buildings, the public services provided, as well as the utilisation rate of each service, in each of the past five years; whether it has plans to redevelop such buildings; if so, of the details;

(4) of the number of applications received in each of the past three years by the Government from developers for redeveloping or converting the residential buildings in the district, as well as the number of residential flats to be built in respect of each application; and

(5) of the latest progress of the plan to redevelop the old Kowloon City district?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the five-part question is as follows:

(1) According to the records of the Buildings Department (BD), as at end 2019, the numbers of private buildings (including buildings for various types of use) in Kowloon City District aged 20 years or below, 21 to 40 years and 41 years or above are tabulated below:

Building Age	Number of Buildings
20 years or below	586
21 to 40 years	887
41 years or above	2 050

(2) As at January 2020, the number of cases in the Kowloon City District that have participated in Government-led assistance and loan schemes relating to building safety and rehabilitation are as follows (Note: Individual buildings can benefit from multiple schemes):

Government-led assistance and loan schemes relating to building safety and rehabilitation	Number of cases
Operation Building Bright 2.0 (OBB 2.0)	147 buildings (Note 1)
Fire Safety Improvement Works Subsidy Scheme (FSWS)	194 buildings
Lift Modernisation Subsidy Scheme (LIMSS)	175 lifts
Building Maintenance Grant Scheme for Elderly Owners (BMGSE0)	2 248 applications
Mandatory Building Inspection Subsidy Scheme	286 buildings
Building Safety Loan Scheme	630 buildings
Operation Building Bright (OBB)	603 buildings (Note 2)

Note 1: The figure includes 79 buildings approved for Category 1 and 68 buildings selected as Category 2 of OBB 2.0 (Note 3).

Note 2: OBB was launched in 2009 and its application already closed in 2010.

Note 3: Category 1 buildings cover those whose owners are prepared to take up the organisation of the prescribed inspection and repair works for at least the common parts of their buildings with a view to complying with the Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme (MBIS) requirements. Category 2 buildings cover those which have outstanding MBIS notice(s) but the owners concerned have difficulties in coordinating the prescribed inspection and repair works for the common parts of the buildings. The BD will select Category 2 buildings proactively on risk basis for exercising BD's statutory power to hire consultants and contractors to carry out the required works in default of the owners concerned, and recover the costs incurred from the owners. Eligible owners may seek to cover all or part of the costs incurred by claiming subsidies available to them under OBB 2.0.

In October 2019, the Government announced funding injections for enhancement of OBB 2.0, FSWS, LIMSS and BMGSE0 to benefit more owners. The details are listed in Annex I.

To encourage more owners to participate in these schemes, the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) will continue to carry out a series of publicity activities through different channels, including:

(a) various media channels, such as advertisements on the television and radio, bus, newspaper, etc., according to different schemes and target beneficiaries;

(b) issuing letters to target building owners to promote the schemes and inviting them to attend district briefings on the schemes;

- (c) organising briefing sessions for District Councils and reaching out to the public through District Councillor's offices;
- (d) partnering with non-governmental-organisations in different districts to introduce details relating to the schemes to owners of target buildings in the district and providing assistance in making applications; and
- (e) providing a "Building Rehabilitation Platform" website and hotline for owners to enquire details of the schemes.

(3) After consulting the relevant policy bureaux/ government departments, the information on Government buildings in Kowloon City District, the years of commissioning of the buildings and the public services provided are set out in Annex II. Amongst them, the Government has concrete plans to redevelop the Kowloon Animal Management Centre and two former schools (ex-premises of Kowloon Docks Memorial Primary School and ex-Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong (Kowloon Tong)). Relevant information is also set out in Annex II.

As the compilation of the utilisation rate of various departmental facilities involves an extensive review of vast amount of information, we are unable to provide the relevant information within limited time.

(4) For development projects (including redevelopment projects) carried out by land owners/ developers, approval of building plans must be obtained from the Building Authority in accordance with the Buildings Ordinance (Cap. 123) (BO). Besides, land owners/ developers have to obtain approval of demolition plan and demolition consent from the Building Authority before the commencement of any demolition works in accordance with the requirements of the BO, if the development project involves the demolition of existing buildings. Currently, summary information on new building plans approved in each month (except amendment plans) including the addresses of the development projects, types of new buildings, total gross floor areas for domestic or/and non-domestic uses, occupation permits already obtained from the BD (including the numbers of domestic units upon completion) and sites with demolition consents issued of all private development projects are set out in the Monthly Digest of the BD and uploaded to the BD website (www.bd.gov.hk/en/whats-new/monthly-digests/index.html) for public inspection. Members of the public may also request to inspect and copy the approved plans of individual private development projects of which occupation permits have been issued.

The release of information aims at providing information contained in approved building plans and it does not contain records as to whether the projects involved are redevelopment projects or any relevant information of the original buildings.

(5) In 2011, the Government revised the Urban Renewal Strategy and subsequently established the District Urban Renewal Forum (DURF) in Kowloon City to strengthen the urban renewal planning at district level. DURF advises the Government on district-based urban renewal initiatives from a holistic

and integrated perspective, including tendering advice on regeneration and redevelopment areas, preservation targets and implementation models.

In 2014, DURF submitted the Urban Renewal Plan for Kowloon City (the Renewal Plan) to the Secretary for Development. The Renewal Plan is a document available for reference by members of the public and different organisations (including developers, the URA and property owners). Apart from the Government, these stakeholders or organisations may also participate in the implementation of the Renewal Plan. The document can be perused through the following link: www.durf.org.hk/pdf/Urban%20Renewal%20Plan_en.pdf.

The Government and the URA have been vigorous in implementing appropriate proposals under the Renewal Plan as far as practicable. For instance, the URA has commenced six redevelopment projects in To Kwa Wan under a district-based approach since 2016 in order to improve the local road network and streetscape in a comprehensive manner; strengthen street vibrancy; and retain local characteristics of small on-street shops. In addition, the Kai Tak Road/Sa Po Road project commenced in early 2019 will create a node between the Kai Tak Development Area and Kowloon City District through a proposed sunken plaza connecting the project to the Kai Tak underground shopping street.

In its future urban renewal initiatives, the URA will put an emphasis on studies and prior comprehensive planning before determining the priorities for implementation of urban renewal projects, with a view to improving the living conditions of old districts and enhancing the planning benefits for the community more effectively. The URA will also continue to consider appropriate proposals under the Renewal Plan for implementing urban renewal works in Kowloon City District.

Anti-epidemic Fund Steering Committee convenes first meeting

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, chaired the first meeting of the Anti-epidemic Fund Steering Committee this afternoon (February 26).

The Legislative Council Finance Committee approved the injection of \$30 billion into the Anti-epidemic Fund last Friday (February 21) in order to enhance the capability of the Government and other relevant parties in combating the COVID-19 epidemic, and to provide assistance or relief to enterprises and members of the public hard hit by the current epidemic or affected by anti-epidemic measures.

The Steering Committee deliberated and approved the funding commitment

for 24 measures at the meeting today. Relevant bureaux and departments will implement these measures as soon as possible to provide support to enterprises and members of the public. Bureaux and departments will report to the Steering Committee on the implementation details, progress and expenditure of measures under their purview to facilitate effective monitoring of the Fund's operation by the Steering Committee.

Mr Cheung stressed, "To further strengthen Government's effort to combat the epidemic and provide assistance and relief to relevant enterprises and members of the public as soon as possible, bureaux and departments will take expeditious actions to address the pressing needs of the community promptly."

The 24 approved measures and their funding commitments are as follows:

	Measures	Funding Commitments
1.	Enhancing support to the Hospital Authority in combatting the epidemic	\$4,700 million
2.	Support local mask production	\$1,500 million
3.	Global procurement of personal protective equipment	\$1,000 million
4.	Support property management sector in anti-epidemic efforts	\$1,000 million
5.	Technology applications to enable reusability of masks	\$800 million
6.	Support construction sector in anti-epidemic efforts	\$710 million
7.	Support cleansing and security staff engaged by Government and Hong Kong Housing Authority service contractors in anti-epidemic efforts	\$250 million
8.	Installation of emergency alert system	\$150 million
9.	Home quarantine support	\$50 million
10.	Ex-gratia payment to households of the two public housing estates designated as quarantine centres	\$30 million
11.	Retail Sector Subsidy Scheme	\$5,600 million
12.	Food Licence Holders Subsidy Scheme	\$3,780 million
13.	Subsidy for the transport sector	\$3,230 million
14.	Convention and Exhibition Industry Subsidy Scheme	\$1,020 million
15.	Special allowance for eligible Working Family Allowance and Student Financial Assistance households	\$990 million
16.	Additional student study grant for 2019/20 school year	\$900 million

17.	Rental waivers for tenants at the Science Park, industrial estates and Cyberport	\$380 million
18.	Subsidies for live marine fish wholesale traders and fishing vessels with Mainland deckhands	\$270 million
19.	Support to child care centres	\$220 million
20.	Arts and Culture Sector Subsidy Scheme	\$150 million
21.	Licensed Guesthouses Subsidy Scheme	\$150 million
22.	Travel Agents Subsidy Scheme	\$140 million
23.	Support to training bodies	\$90 million
24.	Licensed Hawkers Subsidy Scheme	\$30 million

The Steering Committee is chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration, and members include nine relevant Directors of Bureaux. The Steering Committee will continue to monitor the implementation of the measures, and the use of Fund, and to examine the progress reports from relevant bureaux and departments on a regular basis.