

# CE unveils measures to support jobs and livelihoods amid pandemic

With the global COVID-19 pandemic impacting Hong Kong's economy and people's livelihoods, the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, in her Policy Address today (November 25) unveiled various measures to support people in need to cope with the current challenges.

"Affected by the global and local epidemic, Hong Kong's labour market has come under immense pressure," Mrs Lam said.

"To help workers find a way out of the predicament, the Government has to make every effort to restore the economy, create more jobs, increase training and retraining opportunities, step up manpower matching and enhance the safety net of the social welfare system."

The Chief Executive announced measures to foster job opportunities in certain sectors, which are particularly suitable for young graduates. These include:

- \* green industry: The Government will invest in a series of environmental projects in the next few years, creating an estimated 4 000 job opportunities in sectors such as scientific research, architecture and engineering, recycling and transport;
- \* construction industry: In addition to the planned large-scale projects, various works departments will press ahead with renovation, repair and maintenance works for various government buildings and facilities, and expedite the refurbishment and minor improvement works of public markets;
- \* innovation and technology (I&T) industry: The Government will provide wage subsidies for Hong Kong technology companies to hire employees to work and gain experience in the Mainland cities of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA);
- \* property management industry: The Government is collaborating with large property management companies and will subsidise them to employ more young people interested in pursuing their career in property management;
- \* creative industries: The Government will make good use of various funds which support the development of films, design, culture and arts as well as Art Tech. It will also consider providing wage subsidies to attract more newcomers who aspire to pursue a career in the creative industries; and
- \* legal profession: As an international legal hub and centre for dispute resolution services, coupled with the recent implementation of liberalisation measures for legal professional services in the GBA, there is a need for Hong Kong to nurture more legal talents.

To further enhance the support to employees affected by the economic

downturn, the Employees Retraining Board will launch a third tranche of the Love Upgrading Special Scheme in January 2021. The quota will be doubled to 20 000 places and last for six months.

The Government, Mrs Lam said, will launch the Greater Bay Area Youth Employment Scheme to encourage enterprises with operation in both Hong Kong and the GBA to recruit and deploy local university graduates to work in the Mainland cities of the GBA. The scheme will provide 2 000 places.

On the \$2 transport fare concession scheme for the elderly and eligible people with disabilities, the Government will include the required funding in the 2021-22 Budget with a view to progressive implementation within that financial year, on the premise of being able to combat and prevent abuse effectively.

To alleviate the public's burden of transport expenses during the epidemic, a special temporary measure to relax the monthly public transport expenses threshold under the Public Transport Fare Subsidy Scheme from \$400 to \$200 will be extended for six months, to June 30, 2021. This is expected to benefit around 3.8 million people each month, Mrs Lam said.

For individuals and families with difficulties coping with daily food expenditure, the Government will regularise the Short-term Food Assistance Service Projects from August 2021, with \$415 million earmarked to meet the recurrent expenditure of the service.

Mrs Lam said additional measures would be implemented to enhance support for persons with disabilities and their carers. These include providing additional residential respite places through the Bought Place Scheme for Private Residential Care Homes for Persons with Disabilities and providing residential respite service in boarding sections of special schools with vacant boarding places, and arranging severely mentally handicapped persons in need of pairing day activity centre services to receive services at their hostels subject to the availability of sufficient space.

Announcing that additional resources of \$300 million would be provided under the Beat Drugs Fund, Mrs Lam said, "The social unrest last year, together with the persisting COVID-19 epidemic since early this year, have brought different levels of impact and influence on the mental well-being of some people."

E-learning has been adopted by schools to continue lessons when face-to-face classes were temporarily suspended due to the COVID-19 epidemic.

The Education Bureau will set aside \$2 billion in the Quality Education Fund to launch a three-year programme to further support schools and teachers in implementing this blended mode of teaching and learning.

Initiatives under the programme include setting up a platform for sharing learning and teaching resources as well as encouraging the sharing of quality teaching materials by teachers and subsidising schools to purchase mobile computer devices for loaning to needy students, and to provide Wi-Fi

routers and mobile data cards for students who have no access to appropriate Internet services because of their living conditions.

"In January this year, I put forward a series of initiatives to further improve people's livelihoods," Mrs Lam said.

"Although the COVID-19 epidemic has brought drastic changes to our economy and public finances, the Government will take forward the initiatives in a prudent manner."