

LCQ19: Vocational and professional education and training

Following is a question by the Hon Lee Chun-keung and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (January 10):

Question:

The Chief Executive indicated in the 2023 Policy Address that the Government will facilitate the establishment of universities of applied sciences (UASs), and strive to raise the status of vocational and professional education and training (VPET) to attain qualifications at university degree level. UASs will offer programmes with more internship and practical learning opportunities. In addition, the Government also plans to support potential post-secondary institutions to form an Alliance of Universities in Applied Sciences within 2024 to promote VPET. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the latest progress of preparatory work for the establishment of UASs;
- (2) of the estimated number of places and the content of programmes to be offered by UASs;
- (3) of the specific plans to attract interested persons to enrol in UASs; and
- (4) as it is learnt that many schools have ceased operation in recent years, whether the authorities will consider converting the sites concerned into vocational schools; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government has been promoting vocational and professional education and training (VPET) at different levels as a pathway parallel to conventional academic education through the strategy of fostering industry-institution collaboration and diversified development under a multi-pronged approach, with a view to nurturing more quality talent with applied skills. To raise the status of VPET at degree level, the Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address announced that the Government would press ahead with the establishment of universities of applied sciences (UAS), providing an alternative pathway to success for young people who aspire to pursue a career in professional skills sectors.

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Lee Chun-keung is as follows:

(1) The Education Bureau (EDB) has appointed the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) as the consultant to, with reference to international experiences, draw up the criteria for qualifying as UAS in Hong Kong, so as to encourage self-financing post-secondary institutions which have obtained university titles under the established mechanism and possess the capabilities and experience (such as having launched applied degree programmes) to plan ahead and develop along the relevant direction. The EDB and HKCAAVQ are taking forward the matter proactively.

(2) and (3) UAS will provide applied degree programmes with an applied focus blending theory and practice, and closely collaborate with professional skills sectors and incorporate substantial internship and work-based learning opportunities in their programmes, which will help students develop applied skills and create impetus for Hong Kong's development. The EDB will provide financial and related support, including according priority to eligible programmes of UAS for inclusion under the Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors (SSSDP), and to eligible applications from UAS when considering applications for support measures such as the Quality Enhancement Support Scheme and Enhancement and Start-up Grant Scheme, so as to encourage institutions to plan ahead and develop along the direction of UAS, including launching more applied degree programmes that meet the manpower needs of Hong Kong in collaboration with the industries. The EDB will also provide additional subsidies through the SSSDP to students enrolling in applied degree programmes under the SSSDP. The amount of additional annual subsidies will be \$5,000 (for non-laboratory-based programmes) and \$8,000 (for laboratory-based programmes) respectively, with a view to enhancing the enrolment incentive.

The EDB has also set aside a start-up fund to support prospective post-secondary institutions to form an alliance of UAS for joint promotion, including collaboration with UAS on the Mainland and overseas, initiating collaboration and research about applied education at the post-secondary level, and organising joint promotion activities, in order to enhance the status of VPET in society and among parents and students.

(4) The EDB has all along been identifying suitable sites in a proactive manner to support the development of post-secondary institutions, including institutions that adopt the strategic position of providing applied education. As announced in the Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address, the EDB will launch a new round of the Land Grant Scheme in 2024 and eligible self-financing post-secondary institutions will be invited to submit development proposals. To dovetail with the Land Grant Scheme, we also plan to launch a new round of the Start-up Loan Scheme at the same time for interested self-financing post-secondary institutions to make applications, with a view to supporting the institutions to develop and improve campuses in support of more teaching activities. We will announce the details in due course.

Under the established Central Clearing House mechanism for vacant school premises sites, the EDB will review the vacant or to-be-vacant school premises' suitability for school use. Upon confirming that such school

premises are not required to be retained for school use, the EDB will, in accordance with the mechanism, release the sites for the Planning Department's consideration of suitable alternative long-term uses. The Planning Department regularly updates the list of vacant school premises sites reviewed on its website. Non-governmental organisations or social enterprises may apply to the Lands Department or the departments managing the sites for use of the sites for community, institutional or non-profit making purposes on a short-term tenancy.

In the past, there have been cases that certain vacant school premises sites were converted to other uses such as tertiary education and vocational training after being reviewed under the aforementioned mechanism. Examples include the former school premises of North Point Methodist Primary School and Pui Shing Catholic Secondary School, which were allocated to the Education University of Hong Kong and the Vocational Training Council for operating an educational centre and a vocational training centre respectively.