

# Opening remarks by SLW at HKTDC Education & Careers Expo 2022 (English only)

Following are the opening remarks by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, at the opening ceremony of the Hong Kong Trade Development Council (HKTDC) Education & Careers Expo 2022 this morning (July 21):

Margaret (Executive Director of the HKTDC, Ms Margaret Fong), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning. It's great to see you all here on a very sunny, lovely day.

First of all, I would like to congratulate the HKTDC for staging this, what we believe is the signature event, as Margaret said, for the 31st time, I think it's in a row. It will bring together nearly 800 educational institutions, professional associations, private enterprises and also government departments from 18 countries/regions all under the same roof. I would also like to extend a very warm welcome to exhibitors from Japan, Finland, Ireland and Switzerland for taking part in this Expo for the first time. I am sure this four-day event will provide a useful guide to students and job seekers to explore opportunities and a variety of career pathways as they make plans for their future.

Manpower is clearly vital to our economy. As the Government, we put a lot of emphasis on manpower development, and also nurturing our talent which is key to ensuring that we remain competitive in the years to come, as Hong Kong develops itself and transforms itself into a knowledge-based and high value-added economy. It is increasingly important that our economy is going to be driven by innovation, professionalism and a wide adoption of technology in business sectors. In fact, from that angle, manpower is shifting towards high-skilled and educated workers.

So for Hong Kong, we spare no effort in nurturing our local talents by improving and keep on investing in our education. Let's take a look at this very important yardstick. The proportion of students having a post-secondary education right now is three quarters. If we look at the same figure 10 years ago, it was two-thirds. So clearly, in the span of 10 years, we've made a lot of improvement in terms of having more students having a post-secondary education, which is very, very important for their future. In addition, we also promote vocational and professional education and training (VPET) as multiple and flexible pathways for young people with different aspirations and abilities. We've also been making efforts to strengthen VPET pathways at the degree level. The Government launched in 2020 a pilot project on the development of applied degree programmes to prepare graduates for employment in relevant disciplines with recognised qualifications.

Apart from the formal education, we also invest very heavily in building up our own manpower and skill sets through training, retraining and lifelong learning. The Employees Retraining Board provides over 170 000 training places a year. Some of these courses are placement-tied, some are focusing on specific skill sets and some are trying to improve people's generic skills. Also, we have a Continuing Education Fund (CEF). The purpose of that Fund is to promote learning by subsidising all adults, regardless of their educational level or how much money they earned, so that they can upgrade themselves, upskill themselves and learn new skills to meet with the fast-changing demand in a society that keeps on changing. Despite COVID-19, the beneficiaries, if we look at the number of people who benefitted from the CEF in the past three years, have increased more than double. Right now, we have 50 000 people benefitting from the CEF. To keep the momentum going, we will very soon introduce a new wave of CEF enhancement on August 1, including completely removing the upper age limit. Regardless of age, if you want to improve yourself, you can apply for a subsidy from the CEF and upgrade yourself at any age. Also, we are going to raise the ceiling of the subsidy from August 1. The ceiling of that subsidy will be \$25,000 a year.

We clearly understand that the Government alone cannot succeed in improving our manpower. What we need is a collaborative approach. We need the support of education institutes, business sectors and non-governmental organisations. I am confident, through collaboration among all parties, we could help our young people realise their potential and acquire the necessary skills and knowledge, so that they can build a bright future for themselves.

Ladies and gentlemen, in closing, I wish this year's Expo, as before, a great and resounding success and all of you a rewarding and fruitful experience. Thank you very much.