

# Speech by SED at Times Higher Education Asia Universities Summit Opening Ceremony (English only) (with photo)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, at the Times Higher Education Asia Universities Summit Opening Ceremony today (June 21):

Mr Paul Howarth (Chief Executive Officer, Times Higher Education), Mr Phil Baty (Chief Global Affairs Officer, Times Higher Education), Professor Rocky Tuan (Vice-Chancellor and President, the Chinese University of Hong Kong), distinguished speakers, guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning. It gives me great pleasure to join you today at the opening ceremony of the Times Higher Education (THE) Asia Universities Summit 2023. On behalf of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, I wish to first extend my warmest welcome to the distinguished guests joining us from all four corners of the world. It is exciting for all of us as this Summit is a significant step for our higher education sector to resume connectivity to the world after the pandemic. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) and THE for hosting this Summit, which is one of the most prestigious international events organised by the higher education sector in Hong Kong this year.

THE is not unfamiliar to the Hong Kong society as most of our publicly funded universities have been on the top list of the THE rankings. In 2023, five of them, covering more than 80 per cent of all students pursuing publicly funded programmes, are among the top 100 universities in the world according to the THE rankings. I must also congratulate the host of this Summit, CUHK, for breaking into the top 100 in the 2023 THE Impact Rankings announced early this month. With only 7.4 million residents in an area of 1 104 square kilometres, we are one of the cities in the world with the largest number of universities in the top 100. The outstanding achievement undoubtedly speaks to the significant influence of our higher education in the region and beyond, and helps consolidate our status as an education hub in Asia.

Apart from world rankings, research excellence and the robust research environment of our sector are also well-recognised and confirmed by international peer experts through the University Grants Committee's regular research assessment exercises (RAE). In the last RAE concluded in 2020, about 360 international experts, with 70 per cent of them being distinguished scholars all over the world, were invited to assess about 16 000 research submissions by the eight publicly funded universities, including research outputs, research impact and research environment. The RAE panels considered

81 per cent of the research environment scored the highest two ratings, meaning that their research strategy, infrastructure, people, income, esteem, etc, were all conducive to producing world-leading or internationally excellent research. Furthermore, impact agenda is receiving more attention in the global research community, and the performance of our universities was equally encouraging, with 80 per cent contributing "outstanding" and "considerable" impact to society. Our solid achievement in research has, again, further consolidated our status as a regional hub for research collaboration.

In addition, Hong Kong's universities are highly globalised with a rich diversity of cultures. At present, one in every five students of our publicly funded programmes is from outside Hong Kong, and the proportion is even slightly higher for the universities which have established themselves internationally and are hence more popular among non-local students. The extent of internationalisation is even higher among faculty members. Among around 6 300 academic staff, 64 per cent are from outside Hong Kong. All of them are top-notch experts, bringing in innovative ideas, cutting-edge expertise and diverse perspectives that contribute to the vibrancy and diversity of our academic community. Our sector has also signed over 2 600 exchange agreements with universities worldwide, offering students with opportunities to increase their exposure, thereby cultivating a global sense and international outlook.

Building upon such a robust foundation, and coupled with Hong Kong's uniqueness as an international city that is in harmony with the system of Mainland China, our universities are well-equipped to leverage the opportunities arising from the globalisation and the rapidly growing economies of Asia. With an exciting theme of "Future Asian University 2050", I have great confidence that you will find this Summit rewarding because Hong Kong, as a regional education hub, is best positioned to inspire you, from a multidimensional perspective, the long-term prospect of higher education and the emerging opportunities in the region, particularly those in Mainland China.

The world economy and the landscape of the higher education are constantly evolving and becoming increasingly interconnected, which accelerate the flow of capital, investment and talent between East and West. Looking ahead, to remain competitive and maximise the growth prospects, universities should break down traditional silos and foster cross-boundary collaborations to expand their presence in the fastest-growing economies in Asia, particularly in the major cities on the Mainland.

Over the past decades, our country has been according top priority to the development of teaching, research and technology transfer. In 2021, the 14th Five-Year Plan was approved at the National People's Congress of China, mapping out the development blueprint and action agenda for the country in the five years of 2021 to 2025, covering several key priorities and initiatives for building a more innovative, sustainable and competitive economy. Under the Plan, Hong Kong has been assigned with a key role to reinforce and enhance its competitive advantages for integrating into the

national strategy, with a focus on enhancing academic co-operation and exchanges among higher education institutions in cities of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), a burgeoning region that comprises the two Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macao, and the nine municipalities in Guangdong Province. With a total area of around 56 000 sq km, over 86 million in population, and a GDP close to US\$1,700 billion in 2020, the region's potential growth in the coming decades is certainly promising and full of possibilities.

Thanks to the strong policy and resources support by the Central People's Government, our universities are ambitiously taking the GBA development as the best entry point to integrate into the overall development of our country, bringing continuous impetus to Hong Kong's higher education sector. Relevant initiatives include establishing new campuses and cross-boundary multidisciplinary research centres in the GBA cities, as well as developing joint academic programmes and research projects with Mainland institutions, leveraging different academic strengths in the region. Our strong ties with the Mainland also enable our universities' closer collaboration with business and industry partners, providing not only funding for research and development, but also expertise, technologies and business networks which are key to achieving impactful research. On this, I am glad that CUHK has included a tour to its campus in Shenzhen, one of the major cities in the GBA, as part of the programme of this Summit. I am sure the tour will provide participants with more insights about all these ideas that I just mentioned, and will help them explore possible ways to scale new heights through regional co-operation.

Ladies and gentlemen, the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us a lesson that no single economy or place can solve the global challenges alone. Only through closer cross-boundary partnerships and collaborations can we tap into collective wisdom, skills and resources, thereby leveraging our strengths while overcoming weaknesses. I can assure you that Hong Kong always stands ready to be your strategic partner and serve as a gateway to access the potential collaboration opportunities with the Mainland. By working together and committing to a shared vision of excellence and innovation, we are ready to build a brighter future for our next generations.

My gratitude, once again, to CUHK and THE for organising this event and for offering such a valuable platform for us to reconnect with friends from the world. I wish you all many fruitful exchanges and the Summit a great success. Thank you very much.

