

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.