

University Grants Committee welcomes “The Chief Executive’s 2021 Policy Address”

The following is issued on behalf of the University Grants Committee:

The Chairman of the University Grants Committee (UGC), Mr Carlson Tong, welcomed various new initiatives announced in "The Chief Executive's 2021 Policy Address" today (October 6) which are critically important to the future development of higher education and research in Hong Kong. These initiatives include relaxing the over-enrolment ceiling of UGC-funded research postgraduate (RPg) students while inviting the UGC to look into the feasibility of increasing the number of the relevant places, extension of the Research Matching Grant Scheme (RMGS) and the support for universities to take part in developing Hong Kong into an international innovation and technology (I&T) hub.

Mr Tong said, "The new initiatives announced in the Policy Address will drive research excellence in Hong Kong and enable universities to pool top-notch talents, thereby laying a solid foundation for Hong Kong's development under the National 14th Five-Year Plan. At present, the eight UGC-funded universities provide 5 595 publicly-funded RPg places. In June this year, the UGC endorsed the establishment of a working group to conduct a comprehensive review on the allocation mechanism of RPg places with the target of completing the review in 12 months. At the invitation by the Chief Executive, the UGC will look into the supply of and demand for RPg places and consider the feasibility of increasing the number of places."

In the Policy Address, the Chief Executive has also announced the relaxation of the over-enrolment ceiling of UGC-funded RPg students from 70 per cent to 100 per cent progressively. Mr Tong expressed his appreciation for this further relaxation as there has been an increasing demand for RPg places and believed that such an arrangement would not only facilitate universities to flexibly redeploy resources for nurturing more research talents, but also strengthen the research development of universities.

The existing \$3 billion RMGS was introduced in August 2019 for three years. A total of \$1.62 billion cumulative amount of grants has been disbursed to 18 participating universities and institutions so far. The RMGS diversifies research funding sources of the higher education sector and encourages collaboration between the sector and the private sector. Mr Tong welcomed the extension of the RMGS for two further years to mid-2024 which will allow more time for universities in their planning, and continue to enhance the social impact of the research conducted by the higher education sector.

Mr Tong also appreciated the Government's support for the campus

development projects put forward by the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Education University of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and the University of Hong Kong, to participate in developing Hong Kong into an international I&T hub and perform their special roles in I&T development.

Mr Tong said, "Over the past several years, the Government has dedicated a substantial amount of resources to support research development in Hong Kong. As revealed in the results of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2020 released in May, around 70 per cent of the research submissions were judged by the panels of international experts as internationally excellent or above, which was a significant improvement over the last RAE conducted six years ago in 2014. This shows that the researchers in Hong Kong have lived up to public expectations and achieved remarkable progress in their research work. To complement the Government's efforts in strengthening the role of universities in I&T development, the UGC will explore allocating additional funding from the Research Endowment Fund for the Research Grants Council to step up support for research activities in our universities. The UGC will work closely with the Government, the universities and other stakeholders to take these new initiatives forward with full steam, and actively contribute to the nurturing of talents and consolidation of our strength in technological research."

The Policy Address also reiterates the Government's support for post-secondary institutions in fulfilling their legal obligations on the promotion of national security education. The UGC Secretariat will continue to fully support the Education Bureau in its work on this front.