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Replies to supplementary questions raised by Legislative Council Members in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2022-23

Director of Bureau : Secretary for Education

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CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

SV-EDB001

(Question Serial No. SV022)

Head: (156) Government Secretariat: Education Bureau

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not specified

Programme: (3) Primary Education, (4) Secondary Education

Controlling Officer: Permanent Secretary for Education (Ms Michelle LI)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Education

Question:

Given that students have had to learn from home for a prolonged period of time amid the COVID-19 epidemic, will the Administration provide information on the following: (a) the number of students in need of mental health support; (b) the number of students joining the relevant guidance and discipline programmes offered by the Administration; (c) how the Administration will follow up on the needs of those students after class resumption; and (d) how the effectiveness of these guidance and discipline programmes be evaluated.

Asked by: Hon CHEUNG Kwok-kwan (LegCo internal reference no.: 9)

Reply:

(a) - (d)

The Education Bureau (EDB) has been encouraging schools to adopt the Whole School Approach and incorporate guidance and discipline programmes into the curriculum and activities to take care of and nurture students in need (including those in need of mental health support) via a school-based approach. The EDB does not specifically compile statistics on the number of student beneficiaries under the guidance and discipline programmes. Besides, the EDB provides support to schools in implementing guidance and discipline initiatives through the formulation of guidelines; provision of resources; provision of training and development as well as the related information and resources for teaching staff; and organisation of activities, etc. The EDB is committed to providing support for students with mental health needs during the epidemic, and has been maintaining communication with schools to remind them of the need to understand students' learning performance and emotion and communicate with parents on a regular basis, so as to review and adjust the support strategies and initiatives at different stages. Overall speaking, schools can take care of the developmental needs and mental health of students through EDB's various programmes mentioned above and school-based support measures. The EDB does not collect information from schools on the number of students in need of mental health support due to prolonged period of home learning amid the epidemic.

Since the outbreak of the epidemic, the EDB has issued online resources from time to time, including launching the one-stop student mental health information website "Mental Health

@ School” (mentalhealth.edb.gov.hk) in August 2021, and fully utilised the “Smart Parent Net” website (www.parent.edu.hk), to disseminate a wide range of mental health information to schools and parents, with a view to taking care of students’ and parents’ mental health by different means. In addition, in April 2021, the EDB released the first set of PowerPoint slides and resources for school-based educational psychologists (EPs) to conduct school-based workshops for teachers on early identification of students with mental health needs. In November 2021, the EDB also organised two large-scale seminars, which were attended by a total of about 1 750 principals, guidance teachers and school social workers of primary and secondary schools.

Upon gradual resumption of face-to-face classes after the special vacation and Easter holiday, students need to make adjustment or may require additional support. In response to this, the EDB rolled out a new round of events for promoting students’ mental health in April 2022, including conducting two territory-wide seminars for schools and providing a new set of reference materials for school-based EPs, with more in-depth contents including case studies, to facilitate their organisation of relevant school-based workshops, and will launch the “Start the Day Full of Energy” slogan design competition for students in May.

The EDB will continue to review the effectiveness of the programmes by various means such as questionnaire surveys, school visits and meetings with service providers, etc. and enhance the programmes so as to provide more appropriate support services to cater for the developmental needs of students.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

SV-EDB002

(Question Serial No. SV023)

Head: (156) Government Secretariat: Education Bureau

Subhead (No. & title): (000) Operational expenses

Programme: (6) Other Educational Services and Subsidies

Controlling Officer: Permanent Secretary for Education (Ms Michelle LI)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Education

Question:

How will the Administration assess the effectiveness of its various measures to strengthen national education? Will it further enhance the wide variety of programmes on national education and education on our country's development?

Asked by: Hon TAN Yueheng

Reply:

With a "multi-pronged and co-ordinated" approach, the Education Bureau (EDB) adopts a wide array of measures, which includes providing curriculum guides, developing learning and teaching resources, offering training for teachers, and organising life-wide learning activities for students (e.g. Mainland exchange programmes for teachers and students), etc. to support schools in promoting national education. These efforts enable schools to plan and implement national education in a holistic and systematic manner within and beyond the classroom. On an ongoing basis, the EDB solicits stakeholders' views on and review the effectiveness of the efforts on the above fronts through various channels, including evaluation questionnaires on teachers' professional training and activities, school visits, sharing sessions, and focus group discussions. Overall speaking, teachers' training programmes were able to achieve the relevant policy objectives and participants' comments about these programmes were positive. In addition, the diversified life-wide learning activities organised for primary and secondary students by the EDB were generally well-received by the education sector. Schools' response has been overwhelming. The number of schools and students participating in these activities has been on the rise and students who took part in them were all actively involved. There has also been a growing interest in learning about our country's development. Schools and parents in general welcome the Mainland exchange programmes for students and positive feedback has been received.

Looking ahead, the EDB will continue to strengthen the implementation of various measures in relation to national education at the system level. Through the provision of diversified learning activities within and beyond classroom, we aim to, on various fronts, enhance students' understanding of our country and develop in them a sense of identity

towards the nation, the Chinese race and our society; and nurture them into a new generation with a sense of social responsibility and national identity, an affection for Hong Kong as well as an international perspective.

As the school level, the implementation of national education relies on the holistic planning, active promotion, effectiveness evaluation and continuous refinement by school sponsoring bodies and school management. There are both empowerment and accountability in school-based management. Schools may promote national education in school in ways they see fit. In parallel, the school management has the responsibility to understand and monitor its learning and teaching, the quality of the teaching materials used and the appropriateness of student activity arrangements. To better support schools in promoting national education on all fronts, the EDB seeks to understand the planning and implementation of national education in schools, as well as the effectiveness thereof through school visits, curriculum development visits and inspections. Feedback will be given to support schools with regard to each school's own context. The EDB will also organise sharing sessions to facilitate the exchange of good practices among schools with a view to enhancing their capacity in planning, taking national education forward at the school-based level and facilitating the continuous self-improvement of schools.

In general, the education sector acknowledges that teachers, as members of the teaching profession, should demonstrate professional accountability for the quality of teaching and be a role model for their students. Moreover, national education does not only involve school education, it also requires the consensus of all sectors in society, the creation of a patriotic atmosphere and the concerted minds and efforts of different stakeholders to foster a strong sense of national identity among students.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY**SV-EDB003****(Question Serial No. SV024)**Head: (190) University Grants CommitteeSubhead (No. & title): (-) Not specifiedProgramme: University Grants CommitteeControlling Officer: Secretary-General, University Grants Committee (Prof James TANG)Director of Bureau: Secretary for EducationQuestion:

Regarding the work of the Research Grants Council (RGC), please provide the following information:

- (1) whether the RGC will consider increasing the maximum funding for each scientific research project;
- (2) whether the RGC will conduct regular review on the funding direction of scientific research projects;
- (3) whether the RGC will examine how to expedite the approving process; and
- (4) whether the RGC will strengthen the collaboration with Mainland academic institutions to increase the research funding pool for both places.

Asked by: Hon CHIU DuncanReply:

- (1) The RGC administers various competitive research funding schemes with different objectives, eligibility requirements and funding ceiling for each project¹.

¹ The funding ceiling for each project of the RGC's major competitive research funding schemes is as follows:

Competitive Research Funding Scheme	Funding ceiling for each project (HK\$)
General Research Fund	2 million
Early Career Scheme	2 million
Theme-based Research Scheme	75 million
Areas of Excellence Scheme	75 million
Collaborative Research Fund	
• Collaborative Research Project Grant	10 million
• Collaborative Research Equipment Grant	10 million
• Young Collaborative Research Grant	5 million
Research Impact Fund	10 million

Taking the General Research Fund as an example, the RGC has increased the budget for the scheme by about 25% from \$788 million in 2021/22 to \$988 million in 2022/23; and will also consider the possibility of raising the budget ceiling for research project this year. Additionally, to further support cross institutional collaboration and collaborative research, the RGC has set aside an additional annual budget of \$50 million for the three collaborative research funding schemes (i.e. the Theme-based Research Scheme, the Areas of Excellence Scheme and the Collaborative Research Fund) starting from 2021/22, as well as an additional allocation of \$50 million for the Areas of Excellence Scheme starting from 2022/23. With the increase in budget, the funding ceiling for each Areas of Excellence project will be raised from \$60 million to \$75 million starting from 2022/23, on par with that for the Theme-based Research Scheme.

The RGC will review the budgets and the funding ceiling for each project of the funding schemes from time to time to ensure the funding schemes address the needs of the research sector.

- (2) The Theme-based Research Scheme under the RGC provides funding for large-scale collaborative research projects, with a view to focusing academic research efforts of universities on themes of strategic importance to the long-term development of Hong Kong. The Steering Committee on Research Themes and Topics (SCRTT) of the RGC comprising members from the local academia and the industry is responsible for reviewing the research themes and grand challenge topics under the scheme regularly. To enhance Hong Kong's further integration into the nation's overall development, the SCRTT has recently reviewed the research themes and grand challenge topics under the scheme, with a view to encouraging researchers to carry out pioneering and strategic research projects in frontier areas mentioned in the National 14th Five-Year Plan such as artificial intelligence, quantum information, integrated circuits, brain science, genetics and biotechnology, clinical medicine and health as well as deep space, deep earth, deep sea and polar exploration. These changes will be implemented in 2023/24.

In addition, the RGC will also introduce special funding schemes for thematic researches to address urgent needs of society, such as the two rounds of one-off Collaborative Research Fund COVID-19 and Novel Infectious Diseases (NIDs) Research Exercise launched in the 2020/21 and 2021/22 academic years, involving a total funding amount of \$250 million. A total of 43 research projects were funded under the exercise². Drawing on successful experiences gained from the said exercises, the RGC plans to allocate \$150 million in 2022/23 to establish a new Strategic Topics Grant to fund researches on specific topics which can enhance Hong Kong's capabilities in grasping development opportunities and meeting challenges.

² For the results of the two rounds of one-off Collaborative Research Fund COVID-19 and NIDs Research Exercise, please refer to the RGC webpages:

2020/21: https://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/rgc/funding_opport/crf/funded%20research/20-21.html

2021/22: https://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/rgc/funding_opport/crf/funded%20research/21-22.html

Other competitive research funding schemes under the RGC treat all academic researches equally. Universities' research teams enjoy the freedom to decide on their research directions and address different needs of our society flexibly. The RGC and its committee/panels consider academic quality as the overriding criterion in evaluating proposals, and assess research proposals of all disciplines in a fair and impartial manner.

- (3) The RGC conducted a review of its structure, operation and the portfolio balance of its research funding schemes in two phases in 2017 and 2019 respectively. In the Phase II Review, the RGC closely examined its assessment process. The report of the Phase II Review pointed out that the funding cycles of the research funding schemes under the RGC were widely accepted by the research community and it was considered not necessary to change the funding cycles of various schemes. Taking GRF as an example, the application deadline is in November every year and the funding results are announced by the end of June of the following year. Applicants who fail to receive grants in the current round will have sufficient time to prepare and revise their proposals for submission before the deadline of the next round. Besides, given the large number of funding schemes under the RGC and the numerous applicants for each scheme, to ensure the robust operation of the peer review mechanism, there is little room for reducing the time for processing and assessing applications.
- (4) The RGC has been establishing research collaborations with research bodies in the Mainland and overseas through developing joint research schemes, with a view to effectively fostering academic links and promoting regional and international research collaboration among the local research community. Among all, the RGC and the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC) jointly established the NSFC / RGC Joint Research Scheme³ in 1999/2000, which has been well-received by researchers in Hong Kong. The RGC has increased the budget for the scheme from HK\$35 million in 2021/22 to HK\$47.5 million in 2022/23 so as to provide funding support for more projects. Meanwhile, the RGC and the NSFC have launched a new collaborative research scheme⁴ this year to support larger-scale collaborative research projects across disciplines and/or across universities in the Mainland and Hong Kong, with a budget of about HK\$36 million. In sum, the RGC has allocated HK\$83.5 million in total in 2022/23 to support the schemes with the NSFC, representing the largest joint research schemes under the RGC.

The RGC has been dedicated to promoting collaboration across various universities, institutions and disciplines. Researchers are welcomed to collaborate with local, Mainland and other non-local universities and institutions. Applicants can invite researchers from Mainland universities or institutions to join the research teams as Co-Principal Investigators, Co-Investigators or Collaborators. Universities can also submit applications in partnerships with Mainland universities or institutions.

³ See details at https://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/rgc/funding_opport/nsfc/call_letter.html

⁴ See details at https://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/rgc/funding_opport/nsfc_crs/call_letter.html

The RGC keeps an open mind on any proposals for collaboration with other Mainland / overseas countries / research funding bodies, and will continue to consider the possibility and worthiness of establishing such collaborations on a case-by-case basis.

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CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY**S-EDB004****(Question Serial No. S050)**Head: (156) Government Secretariat: Education BureauSubhead (No. & title): (-) Not specifiedProgramme: (7) Post-secondary, Vocational and Professional EducationControlling Officer: Permanent Secretary for Education (Ms Michelle LI)Director of Bureau: Secretary for EducationQuestion:

- (1) The Government, from 2020/21, through the Quality Enhancement Support Scheme (QESS) of the Self-financing Post-secondary Education Fund, encourages institutions to incorporate elements of quality assured work-based learning and assessment in their vocational and professional education and training programmes. Please provide in the table below the titles, scopes, institutions, industry partners, subsidy amounts and durations of the relevant projects under the QESS.

Project title	Scope	Institution	Industry partner (if applicable)	Subsidy amount	Duration

- (2) The figures provided by the Education Bureau show that due to a falling birth rate, student intakes of self-financing programmes have fallen short of expectation and many programmes under the Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors (SSSDP) have registered an enrolment rate of below 50%. Will the Government consider relaxing the 10% cap on self-financing institutions in respect of admitting overseas (including the Mainland) students to their undergraduate and sub-degree programmes so as to address the problem of under-enrolment while taking the opportunity to develop Hong Kong's education services and support the development of specific industries?

Asked by: Hon WONG Yuen-shan

Reply:

- (1) To support and facilitate the incorporation of elements of work-based learning and assessment in post-secondary programmes and further promote Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET) through close partnership between self-financing post-secondary institutions and industries, the Education Bureau (EDB) has been encouraging institutions to submit proposals under the Quality Enhancement Support Scheme (QESS) of the Self-financing Post-secondary Education Fund that incorporate quality assured work-based learning and assessment in their VPET programmes through close partnership with industries from the 2020/21. There was no relevant applications under the QESS in the 2020/21. The applications for the 2021/22 are being processed, and the results will be announced in the third quarter of 2022.

- (2) In accordance with the prevailing policy, except students from the Mainland, Macao and Taiwan (MMT), there are no restrictions on the admission of non-local students to full-time locally-accredited self-financing local sub-degree and undergraduate programmes. As for MMT students, currently, six local self-financing post-secondary institutions, namely Chu Hai College of Higher Education, The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Shue Yan University, Hong Kong Metropolitan University, Tung Wah College and Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong under the Vocational Training Council, have been approved by the Ministry of Education to admit Mainland students to their full-time locally-accredited self-financing degree programmes. Under the mechanism, the number of MMT students admitted to full-time locally-accredited self-financing local sub-degree and undergraduate (including top-up degree) programmes by these self-financing post-secondary institutions in each academic year should not exceed 10% of the total student enrolment in such programmes in the preceding academic year. As regards sub-degree programmes, there are currently no restrictions on self-financing post-secondary institutions in respect of admitting Mainland students to their full-time locally-accredited self-financing local sub-degree programmes, while the above-mentioned 10% quota is still applicable. The EDB will continue to liaise with the Ministry of Education on matters relating to the admission of Mainland students by self-financing post-secondary institutions in Hong Kong.

Regarding the Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors (SSSDP), it aims to increase the supply of subsidised places, thus offering more opportunities for local secondary school leavers to pursue higher education as well as nurturing talent in support of specific industries. The SSSDP is not applicable to non-local students.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

(Question Serial No. S047)

Head: (190) University Grants Committee

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not specified

Programme: University Grants Committee

Controlling Officer: Secretary-General, University Grants Committee (Prof James TANG)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Education

Question:

Further to my following up question raised at the 18th session of the special meeting of the Finance Committee this morning (14 April 2022), I would like to request for a written reply from the University Grants Committee (UGC) to my supplementary questions below so that this committee could have a better understanding of the relevant situation.

The community of Hong Kong and various members of the Election Committee in particular are very concerned about the nurturing of talent, talent mobility in Hong Kong as well as the proper and effective use of public funding on university education. It is the duty of a member of the Legislative Council to monitor in an effective manner.

According to the reply with serial number EDB066, a Member has asked about the way to ensure that the UGC will adhere to the principle of integrating into the national development and the Government's strategies for the development of innovation and technology in the allocation and use of funding and the guidelines of the Government. The reply says that the "universities should think boldly and strategically in mapping out the strategies in a longer planning cycle, taking into account the opportunities presented by the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) Development."

However, quite a number of my counterparts engaging in higher education have recently reflected to me that the UGC has conducted consultation on research postgraduate programmes (RPgs) places and the mechanism for allocating additional places. A working group has also been formed for the relevant work. It is very strange that, of the 8 members, only 2 are Chinese members (and only 1 is Hong Kong academic representative). While the chairman of the UGC is but an observer, other members, including the convenor, are mostly from such places as the United Kingdom, the United States of America, New Zealand and Singapore. Given the acute shortage of talent in Hong Kong and the talent needed in future must be connected and integrated to the national development, I hope that the UGC would give a specific reply to my supplementary questions as follows:

- (1) What are the consideration and specific reasons for appointing the above overseas members of the working group? Why does the UGC habitually appoint western academics as members of the relevant boards and committees? What are the consideration and statutory grounds for such a small proportion of Hong Kong and Chinese academics?
- (2) What is the above overseas working group members' understanding of the current development of higher education in Hong Kong and China, as well as the future development of the economy and industries? How can they make sound judgement as to the future talent demand of Hong Kong and China?
- (3) On the allocation of RPg places, it is understood that the relevant review will involve as many as 7 000 or so RPg students. If the above overseas members do not have basic understanding of such talent in the fields of innovation and technology, engineering and biotechnology, that is highly demanded in Hong Kong, as well as the long-term development direction of Hong Kong under the National 14th Five-Year Plan, how can the allocation of places, which involves public funding, complement Hong Kong's development and ensure the proper use of public funding?

On the other hand, it can be seen that the UGC has given a rather general reply by emphasising only that “under the existing mechanism, the universities may take forward the promotion of education and research on such topics as the Constitution, the Basic Law and the National Security Law”, or by merely mentioning that “education on the Constitution, the Basic Law and the National Security Law should also form part and parcel of university education to nurture the students as law-abiding and responsible citizens.”

- (4) Will the Education Bureau or the UGC provide the basic requirements for education on the Constitution, the Basic Law and the National Security Law and request all UGC-funded and self-financing institutions to complete the relevant work? If yes, please provide written supplementary information; if not, please explain the reason for it and provide remedial measures.

Asked by: Hon CHOW Man-kong

Reply:

(1) to (3)

The UGC established the Working Group on the Review of the Allocation Mechanism of Research Postgraduate Places (WGRPg) in November 2021 to review the supply of and demand for UGC-funded research postgraduate (RPg) places, the feasibility to increase the number of places, and the allocation mechanism of the RPg places.

Same as other working groups under the UGC, the Convenor and members of the WGRPg are appointed by the Chairman of the UGC. Since RPg places involve funding allocation to the eight UGC-funded universities, when appointing the Convenor and members of the WGRPg, the UGC strived to avoid potential conflicts of interest between the candidates and

the universities. It is also necessary to ensure that the WGRPg has sufficient professional knowledge, competence and experience pertinent to the development of the higher education sector, so that the local higher education sector can maintain its research at the world-class level and dovetail with the policy of developing Hong Kong into a regional education hub. The WGRPg comprises nine local and overseas members¹, including serving or past vice chancellors of local and overseas renowned universities, who have worked in higher education institutions across the globe, including Asia, Oceania, Europe and the United States, and also eminent community leaders with outstanding achievements in their respective fields. They have profound understanding of and experience in the developments of Hong Kong's higher education and research sector, as well as the UGC's work in the areas of research, quality assurance and planning. They have contributed to the higher education sector in Hong Kong in their personal capacity and played a very positive role in its development. In addition, the WGRPg is under the aegis of the UGC, which is a non-statutory advisory body responsible for offering impartial and expert advice to the Government on the strategic development and resource requirements of higher education in Hong Kong. The ultimate authority to determine the allocation of funding rests with the Government.

In deliberating the new allocation mechanism, the WGRPg has put forward a number of guiding principles, e.g. the mechanism should be more flexible in responding to the constantly evolving external environment, better commensurate with the results of the Research Assessment Exercise, as well as more able to ensure that the universities are aligned with Hong Kong's development strategies and interests, including Hong Kong's strategic positioning in the national development and under the 14th Five-Year Plan, on the premise that the institutional autonomy of the universities is appropriately safeguarded.

(4)

The UGC-funded universities have the duty to nurture our young generations into citizens with a sense of social responsibility and national identity, an affection for Hong Kong as well as an international perspective. They should also offer their students national security education or activities according to Article 10 of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (National Security Law), with a view to raising students' and staff members' awareness of national security and of the obligation to abide by the law.

In order to implement national security education on their campuses, the universities have been organising or planning courses and activities of various modes, such as courses that carry credits or form part of the graduation requirements, thematic seminars, conferences, workshops, Mainland exchange and internship programmes, etc. Some of the universities have invited legal experts and groups that are well-versed in the National Security Law to teach the relevant topics and provide guidance on the teaching materials and information adopted. Furthermore, to assist universities in their planning and implementation of national security education, and with due respect to universities' autonomy in curriculum design, earlier ago the Education Bureau (EDB) had distributed the legal scholar Professor

¹ Please refer to the following UGC webpage for the membership of the WGRPg:
<https://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/about/organisation/membership/wgrpg.html>

Wang Zhenmin's co-authored book on the national security law (《香港特別行政區維護國家安全法讀本》) to the funded universities through the UGC Secretariat for their reference.

We will continue to maintain communication with the UGC-funded universities and pay close attention to the implementation of national security education in universities, with a view to providing appropriate support for them as necessary. As a government department under the EDB, the UGC Secretariat will continue to proactively perform its bridging role by fully supporting and facilitating EDB's close communication with the UGC-funded universities.

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