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**Speech by the Hon Mrs Selina Chow Liang Shuk-ye, GBS, JP  
Motion Debate on Report on Higher Education in Hong Kong, 26  
June 2002**

Selina Chow:

Madam President, higher education is an important part of social investment. The question of how a balance can be struck is very important. The Liberal Party considers that the objectives of higher education are to nurture sufficient talents for society on the one hand and achieve outstanding performance in pursuit of excellence at higher levels or in more sophisticated domains on the other. In this connection, the Liberal Party does not oppose the provision of additional resources where necessary. But this does not mean that overlapping or wastage of resources for higher education is allowed.

Since education resources are indeed limited — this is the reality, and in any society, any kind of resources are limited — we should make a greater effort to ensure effective utilization of resources, with a view to adding value. With regard to "selectivity" in the provision of funding mentioned in the report, our view on education has always been that on the premise of popularization of education, it is utterly important to nurture elites. Under the "selectivity" principle proposed in the report, institutions with better performance can be allocated with more funding. The Liberal Party considers that this is precisely a manifestation of the pursuit for excellence and can offer institutions incentives to give play to their strengths and finally become capable of competing at international levels. Besides, since education resources are limited, we do not agree that resources be evenly distributed to every institution. In fact, the "selectivity" concept is more consistent with the principle of putting the limited resources to good use.

Moreover, research work in universities is of great importance not only to the universities. It is also a crucial factor dictating the advancement of society as a whole. Therefore, we hope that local universities can achieve excellence in their research studies or even exceed international standards in certain domains. We should not give up the efforts made by universities with capability and achievements in conducting research. But as I said earlier on, education resources in Hong Kong are limited. Added to this is the fact that local universities often receive less funding for research than internationally renowned institutions. Therefore, the principle of "selectivity" can better cater to the actual circumstances in Hong Kong, enabling institutions to adopt a more focused approach in their research endeavours to achieve goals of greater significance.

I must emphasize that the Liberal Party does not object to the policy of

popularizing tertiary education. Only that we are of the view that we should not give up research and teaching efforts at some higher levels or more specialized domains. Therefore, "selectivity" in the provision of funding is all the more important where resource constraints prevail.

Furthermore, after the publication of the report on Higher Education in Hong Kong, to address the issue of resources, there have been discussions about whether Hong Kong has too many universities and about the need for some measure of integration. In this connection, I would like to share with Members my thoughts. Earlier on, the Vice Chancellor of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (who is the Secretary for Education and Manpower designate), Prof Arthur LI, proposed that universities be merged on geographical proximity, so that they can complement each other and resources can be pooled together. We consider that this proposal merits consideration and has discussion value, because after all, this is related to the question of how education resources can be most effectively utilized.

At present, we have eight universities providing different programmes. Some programmes are overlapping, and from the perspective of resources, wastage is unavoidable. Besides, a number of institutions have competed to launch some new programmes, such as the Chinese medicine programme which is quite well-received recently. While universities enjoy autonomy, no one is in a position to play the role of a co-ordinator to ensure the most effective and appropriate injection of social resources which is consistent with the overall development and interest of Hong Kong. This is indeed an issue that requires thorough consideration, attention, discussions and decisions in the context of reform to tertiary education.

Madam President, earlier in the debate, Miss Emily LAU mentioned the views of the staff of some tertiary institutions. A number of Members also responded with strong views, particularly on the question of delinking from the civil service pay. Obviously, anyone whose vested interest is threatened will naturally feel worried. I do not oppose holding discussions on this. But as to whether a consensus must definitely be reached, as suggested by Miss Emily LAU, I am not optimistic about this. On the view that a consensus must be reached before policies can be implemented, I certainly beg to differ. I think it is always impossible for a consensus to be reached in a society, though adamantly insisted by some people. Therefore, I think our discussions should be premised on the overall interest and long-term development of Hong Kong. I very much agree to holding rational discussions, but I oppose never-ending discussions. Hong Kong has recently been criticized both by the local community and outsiders for always holding discussions without reaching decisions. I think we should reflect on ourselves. It is because not only the Government appears to be holding discussions without reaching decisions. Is this phenomenon also found in society at large? Indeed, nothing can be ideal in this world, and for some issues, it is impossible for them to be agreeable to all. Moreover, the more it

involves one's own interest, the more difficult to seek consent from everyone. Therefore, I think we cannot just talk about lofty ideals that are impossible to realize. This is very undesirable to the development of our society as a whole. So, I hope that Members can focus on the development of tertiary education in their consideration.