

Speech by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mrs Carrie Lam, at the Groundbreaking Ceremony of International Culinary Institute

Clement (Vocational Training Council (VTC) Chairman, Mr Clement Chen), Andrew (Chairman, Steering Committee of the ICI, Dr Andrew Leung), Carrie (VTC Executive Director, Mrs Carrie Yau), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure in joining you at this ground-breaking ceremony. Today, as Clement says, marks the beginning of the construction of the International Culinary Institute under the Vocational Training Council. The Institute will be the first of its kind in Hong Kong, dedicated to providing training for students and in-service practitioners aspiring to become professional chefs proficient in international cuisines. It also underlines the importance that the Government attaches to vocational training education in Hong Kong.

Since its establishment in 1982, VTC has been a very close working partner of the Hong Kong SAR Government in providing comprehensive vocational education and training in Hong Kong. Each year, the VTC provides about 250,000 full-time and part-time places for people of different education levels in a wide range of programmes which lead to formal qualifications from post-Secondary Three up to degree levels.

To tie in with Hong Kong's manpower needs, the VTC has, throughout the years, launched a number of flagship projects. These initiatives have the Government's full support. I am pleased to note the impeccable track record so far. Within a short span of time, the Chinese Cuisine Training Institute has emerged as a centre of excellence in Chinese culinary art. Not too long ago, we witnessed the success of two teams of Hong Kong chefs in winning two international Western culinary competitions held in Switzerland and Korea. Nearly all 25 chefs of the winning teams are alumni of the VTC. Separately, we also applaud the resounding success of students of Hong Kong Design Institute in winning many local, regional and international competitions.

Today, we are here to kick off another flagship project, the ICI. Building on the remarkable success of the CCTI (Chinese Cuisine Training Institute), the ICI will serve as the cradle for nurturing professional chefs proficient in international cuisines. I am sure that, like the CCTI, the ICI will in no time emerge as a centre of excellence in culinary art, enabling Hong Kong to scale new heights as the Gourmet Paradise, a wine hub, a popular tourist destination and a growing centre for MICE (i.e. Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions). In doing so, the ICI will be instrumental in raising the competitiveness and long-term development of Hong Kong.

I am encouraged by VTC's zealous efforts in establishing an extensive network and collaboration with top-notch culinary art institutes around the world and the local industries. These networks have laid a very solid foundation for the ICI to launch a wide spectrum of high-quality and practical pre-service and in-service programmes in international cuisines, as well as food and wine pairing, sommelier training, etc. We trust that with the state-of-the-art infrastructure, the ICI's vision of becoming a centre of excellence in international culinary art will soon become a reality.

In a way, the ICI embodies the VTC spirit. The distinct design of this building, a "salt crystal", epitomises the role of the VTC and the ICI. Whilst salt is neither glamorous nor expensive, it is indispensable. We can live without diamonds, but we can hardly survive without salt. Similarly, whilst vocational education and training might not seem to be very glamorous in many people's eyes, they play a pivotal role in propelling the development of Hong Kong. Salt also brings out the best of our food. Likewise, vocational education provides a pathway for many youngsters to realise their potential.

The ICI also symbolises the Government's commitment to vocational education. The Steering Committee on Population Policy which I chair launched a four-month consultation exercise since October 2013. And on this occasion I have to thank Clement for just sending in a very useful submission to the (Steering) Committee. One of the key issues identified for public deliberation is how to revive the value of vocational education in Hong Kong. While the public engagement exercise just ended last Sunday, the Chief Executive has already announced in his 2014 Policy Address a series of strategic measures to accentuate the importance of vocational education. Two of these measures build on VTC's ongoing efforts. First, we plan to introduce a Pilot Training and Support Scheme at the VTC to integrate structured apprenticeship training programmes and clear career progression for specific industries facing labour shortage or ageing problems. Second, we will provide recurrent funding to support the VTC in providing industrial attachment opportunities for its students, ensuring a smooth transition from study to employment. In addition, we will invite the VTC to draw up a strategic development plan for its campuses in order to enhance synergy and provide state-of-the-art facilities which are pivotal to enhancing image and quality of vocational education. So a lot more work for you, Clement, as the Chairman, and for Carrie as the chief executive of the VTC!

Meanwhile, we fully recognise that a better appreciation of vocational education by students and parents should start at schools. To this end, the 2014 Policy Address has announced that public sector secondary schools will each be provided with an additional recurrent grant equivalent to the salary of a graduate teacher to introduce life planning education elements. An additional \$200 million has also been earmarked for the Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged to further encourage the business sector and organisations to work with schools to facilitate whole-person development of students, particularly from the grass-roots families.

To step up efforts in promoting vocational education, the Government will establish a Task Force on Vocational Education to map out the strategy and measures to promote vocational education effectively in the community. All in all, we have a very busy agenda in strengthening vocational education in Hong Kong to meet our manpower needs. So I look to VTC for support in taking forward these initiatives.

On this memorable occasion, I must thank and congratulate all those who have worked so hard in contributing to the planning of the ICI. May I also wish the construction of the Institute every success.