

立法會
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LegCo Panel on Education

**Subcommittee on increase in
post-secondary education opportunities**

**Minutes of meeting
held on Tuesday, 15 May 2001 at 2:30 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

Members Present : Dr Hon YEUNG Sum (Chairman)
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Prof Hon NG Ching-fai
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon SZETO Wah
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP

Member Absent : Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung

Public Officers Attending : Mr Raymond YOUNG, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (2)

Ms Michelle LI
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and
Manpower (1)

Clerk in Attendance : Miss Flora TAI
Chief Assistant Secretary (2)2

Staff in Attendance : Mr Stanley MA
Senior Assistant Secretary (2)6

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I. Election of Chairman

Dr YEUNG Sum was elected Chairman of the meeting.

II. Meeting with the Administration

[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1525/00-01(01)]

At the Chairman's invitation, Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (2) (DS(EM)(2)) gave a PowerPoint presentation on the Administration's proposals to implement the progressive increase in post-secondary education opportunities. Details of the proposals were set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2) 1525/00-01(01)). He said that the paper also included the Administration's responses to the questions raised by Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong at a previous meeting of the LegCo Panel on Education.

Questions raised by members

Increasing post-secondary education opportunities

2. Referring to paragraph 9 of Annex I of LC Paper No. CB(2) 1525/00-01(01), Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong asked the Administration to elaborate the "four directions" of its plan to increase post-secondary education opportunities. He expressed doubt about the feasibility of the suggestions that such opportunities could be increased by encouraging local institutions to set up campuses outside Hong Kong and by encouraging overseas institutions to set up a branch in Hong Kong. On the first suggestion, he was of the view that a local student who decided to pursue studies overseas would probably enrol at an overseas institution rather than one set up there by a Hong Kong institution. On the second suggestion, he believed that the level of fees charged by branches of overseas institutions set up in Hong Kong would be very high. He also asked why assistance would be provided only to students enrolled in specified sub-degree programmes to study abroad and not to other local students such as those with good academic results.

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3. DS(EM)(2) replied that amongst the "four directions" as set out in the paper, the Administration would mainly rely on the first one to achieve the policy objective of providing tertiary education for 60% of senior secondary school leavers in the coming ten years. In other words, the quantity of post-secondary education would be enhanced mainly by the provision of more such courses in Hong Kong by local institutions. He said that the other three directions were just set out for members' consideration and discussion. He pointed out that it was necessary to explore all possible options of enhancing the quantity of post-secondary education in order to meet the aforesaid policy objective.

4. On the "second direction" as mentioned in the paper, DS(EM)(2) said that some local institutions had already set up overseas offices and were running programmes outside Hong Kong. He added that institutions would only be encouraged to consider setting up overseas branches in accordance with their own development goals.

5. On the "third direction", DS(EM)(2) said that overseas universities setting up branches in Hong Kong would fail to attract students if they charged students a very high level of fees. Nevertheless, he agreed with Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong that there might not be many overseas universities interested in setting up branches in Hong Kong. He added that the Administration had contacted some overseas universities but none of them had plans to set up branches in Hong Kong. He said that this option was included in the paper as a long-term measure for consideration only.

6. On the "fourth direction", DS(EM)(2) said that the Administration's target remained that first-year-first-degree (FYFD) places should meet the demand of about 18% of the relevant age group. It was worried that increasing the number of FYFD places would compromise the standards of students. As to why the current proposal recommended that students had to study sub-degree programmes in selected disciplines in order to be eligible for financial assistance for overseas studies, DS(EM)(2) said that given the proposal was a pilot scheme, it was desirable to confine such disciplines to those with manpower shortages and for which a substantial increase in the number of places would be unattainable in the near future. He said that the selection of these disciplines would be further explored.

7. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong criticized the Administration for failing to provide concrete plans for achieving the policy objective of providing tertiary education for 60% of senior secondary school leavers in the coming ten years. He added that it would mean that some 30 000 additional post-secondary places would be needed each year in order to meet the target. Referring to the "first direction" of the Administration's plan, Mr CHEUNG said that since the post-

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secondary programmes offered by local providers would be self-financing, it would mean that in the future some 30% of the 17-20 age cohort would be engaged in self-financing post-secondary programmes. The students would have to complete the courses by loans and programmes offered by private institutions would be expensive. He considered that the "second" and the "third" directions as mentioned in the paper were impractical and lacked concrete details.

8. DS(EM)(2) responded that the Administration's plan was to enhance the quantity of post-secondary education mainly by the provision of more such courses in Hong Kong by local institutions. He pointed out that over the past two years, a number of providers had launched about 3 000 new sub-degree programmes. A few thousands more of self-financing sub-degree places were expected to be created in the coming two to three years. He said that the Administration was confident that the number of sub-degree places would substantially increase in the next five to six years if funds were secured from the Legislative Council (LegCo) to offer assistance to both students and providers. DS(EM)(2) added that the 60% target was only a planning target. The pace of development would depend on actual demand and supply of post-secondary places.

9. On the "fourth direction", Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong asked whether the proposed financial assistance scheme for overseas studies would be applicable to students who were qualified for admission to the eight University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions. He also asked about the estimated budget for the proposed financial assistance scheme for overseas studies. DS(EM)(2) replied that actually the proposed financial assistance scheme had yet to be finalised. He said that based on the manpower projections conducted by the Administration for the next five years, manpower shortages were anticipated with workers with sub-degree qualifications or at associate professional level. Therefore, the financial assistance scheme was proposed to target at sub-degree students in the short term.

10. In response to the Chairman, DS(EM)(2) said he hoped that the funding request for the provision of financial assistance for students engaged in self-financing post-secondary programmes could be approved by the end of the following month so that the coming batch of Form 5 school leavers could apply for the assistance. Mr SZETO Wah suggested that the funding request in respect of student financial assistance should be separately discussed. He was worried that when LegCo approved any such funding request, it would be misinterpreted that the current proposals to support the progressive increase in post-secondary education opportunities were also supported by LegCo. The Chairman agreed with Mr SZETO. He said that members should not be considered as supporting the four directions as mentioned in paragraph 9 of the Administration's paper even

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if they supported the financial proposals in respect of the student financial assistance.

The process of setting the 60% target

11. Mr SZETO Wah asked the Administration to explain how the 60% target had been set and the decision process involved. He also asked whether the Administration's proposals under discussion would be issued for public consultation. DS(EM)(2) replied that the Administration had made reference to the age participation rate in respect of tertiary education in overseas places and noted that such percentages of the United States (US), Taiwan and Singapore were 80%, over 70% and 60% respectively. The Administration considered that the 60% target was a prudent figure.

12. Mr SZETO Wah further asked whether the 60% target had first been discussed by ExCo, the Education Commission (EC) or the Education and Manpower Bureau before it was announced by the Chief Executive. DS(EM)(2) replied that the target had not been discussed by EC beforehand. However, there were recognized needs to enhance learning opportunities in a knowledge-based economy like Hong Kong. He said that the 60% target announced by the Chief Executive in his last Policy Address had been prudently set having regard to overseas experience and the positioning strategy of Hong Kong. He pointed out that the policy objective had already been widely discussed by the community and many people had expressed support for it. He added that the policy objective would be reviewed five years later.

Financial implications

13. Professor NG Ching-fai declared interests as the Dean of Science of the Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU). He expressed concern as to whether student quality would be compromised while increasing quantity. He reminded the Administration that existing self-financing providers of tertiary education would need to expand their campus supporting facilities in order to offer more full-time post-secondary courses. To facilitate discussion of the Administration's proposals, he asked the Administration to provide the following information -

Adm

- (a) estimated amount of Government expenditure required to launch the grant and low-interest loan schemes for students engaged in sub-degree programmes to cover their tuition fees; and
- (b) estimated amount of financial assistance that would be offered to education providers for them to launch "associate degree" programmes.

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Professor NG further considered that the proposed increase in post-secondary education opportunities should be discussed in the wider context of the Administration's policy on the development of tertiary education in Hong Kong.

Adm

14. DS(EM)(2) replied that detailed information on the financial implications for implementing the proposed increase in post-secondary education opportunities would be provided to LegCo when the relevant funding request was submitted to the Finance Committee.

Adm

15. DS(EM)(2) said that at present, the annual tuition fee for self-financing full-time post-secondary programmes offered by tertiary institutions ranged from \$25,000 to \$50,000. The Administration now proposed to provide financial assistance to students engaged in self-financing post-secondary programmes. The grant and low-interest loan would cover the full amount of the annual tuition fee, subject to a ceiling to be reviewed annually. The initial proposed ceiling was \$60,000. It was estimated that over the next decade, the Government would have to spend \$300 million to \$400 million extra each year to provide grant to these students. DS(EM)(2) agreed to provide information on the financial implications for launching the Means-tested Low interest Loan Scheme and Non-means-tested Loan Scheme later.

Accreditation

16. Professor NG Ching-fai asked the Administration to explain how to ensure the quality of the "associate degree" programmes offered by various institutions such as the Hong Kong Productivity Council (HKPC). Professor NG said that since HKPC was basically not an education institution, he asked whether the institution would offer courses only after accreditation had been conducted. He considered that the Administration should elaborate more clearly the part on "Accreditation" as set out in the paper with regard to both local and non-local education providers.

17. DS(EM)(2) replied that as for courses offered by non-local institutions or other institutions like HKPC, accreditation would be conducted by approved accreditation bodies such as the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA). He explained that a two-tier approach would be adopted for the accreditation process. Institutions would first have to submit proposals on the courses to be offered for endorsement by HKCAA. Funds in part would be allocated to the institutions after endorsement was given. After the courses had come into operation, HKCAA would further conduct the second or third round of accreditation before the courses were finally accredited.

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18. Referring to Annex III on "Proposed regulatory framework for post-secondary education", Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong asked about the conduct of accreditation for the "associate degree" courses offered by institutions such as the Vocational Training Council (VTC), HKPC, Hong Kong Arts Centre (HKAC) and so on. Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower (1) (PAS(EM)(1)) explained that most of the statutory institutions in Hong Kong had acquired self-accrediting status, thus enabling them to conduct accreditation in accordance with existing arrangements. As for the "associate degree" courses offered by non-self-accrediting institutions (such as HKAC and HKPC), accreditation would have to be conducted by HKCAA before the courses would be eligible for Government financial assistance.

Adm 19. However, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong pointed out that the Federation for Continuing Education in Tertiary Institutions (the Federation) and HKCAA were still in the course of drawing up a set of common descriptors for "associate degree" and equivalent qualifications. In the absence of these common descriptors, he queried how HKCAA could conduct accreditation for the "associate degree" courses offered by non-self-accrediting institutions. He took the view that financial assistance should only be offered to the eight UGC-funded institutions and other statutory institutions which had acquired self-accrediting status. The Chairman asked the Administration to take note of Mr CHEUNG's comments.

Quality assurance

20. Ms Cyd HO recalled that the Secretary for Education and Manpower had previously said that the target of providing FYFD places for about 18% of the relevant age group could not be further increased having regard to the standard of students. On this basis, she queried whether the 60% target was a practical one and expressed doubt about the standards of the students who would fill up the remaining 42% increase in post-secondary places. She also expressed concern about the quality of the "associate degree" programmes to be offered given the limited capacity (such as in terms of library and other study facilities) of existing providers of tertiary education.

21. DS(EM)(2) responded that there were already 30% of senior secondary school leavers engaged in post-secondary education. The current proposals were to increase this figure to 60% within ten years. He pointed out that at present only about one-third of Form 5 school leavers had access to senior secondary school education. However, it was noted that many Form 5 school leavers had actually scored reasonable results in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination but still could not be admitted to Form 6 or any sub-degree courses offered by existing tertiary institutions. The Administration was of the view that more

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opportunities should be provided for these students to further their studies after Form 5 graduation.

22. DS(EM)(2) further reiterated that the 60% target was only a planning target and assured members that the Administration would review the target in the light of experiences gained from actual implementation.

23. Ms Cyd HO considered that without a solid foundation, students could not benefit much from any post-secondary education opportunities given to them. She was of the view that the Government should first devote more resources to improving primary and secondary education such as the teacher to student ratio and facilities of school premises.

24. DS(EM)(2) responded that the Administration also considered that basic education was one of the most important aspects of its education policy. Therefore, a series of measures had been introduced by devoting additional resources to basic education. He pointed out that the focal point of the education reform was also concerned with improving basic education including secondary, primary, kindergarten and pre-school education. However, DS(EM)(2) explained that as it would take time to implement the new measures and for them to achieve any effect, the Administration did not think that the proposed changes to post-secondary education should be introduced only after the education reform had made remarkable achievements.

Progression pathways of "associate degree" programmes

25. With reference to one of the flow charts presented by DS(EM)(2) at the beginning of the meeting, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong queried why the Administration mentioned that students who had completed Project Springboard could proceed to study the sub-degree programmes offered by tertiary institutions. He said that as far as he knew, only the Lingnan University had offered a few such places for these students. He also pointed out that it was not true, as opposed to what the Administration mentioned on the chart, that students finished with the proposed "associate degree" programmes would be articulated to the second year of bachelor's degree programmes at the local universities. He said that not one single university in Hong Kong had made such commitment so far. He said that while the Administration was going to submit a proposal to LegCo to seek funding approval for implementing the proposed "associate degree" courses, legislation had yet to be put in place to provide a legal basis for the courses. In addition, the programmes to be introduced had not even been accredited, and the study to draw up a set of common descriptors for "associate degree" and equivalent qualifications was still pending. He also pointed out that no university in Hong Kong so far had indicated acceptance of the proposed "associate degree"

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equivalent with completion of the first year of a bachelor's degree programme of a local university. He added that there was the rigid limit of the annual intake of FYFD students which was fixed at 14 500. Therefore, he could not see how the local universities could spare any places and offer them to graduates of "associate degree" programmes.

26. In response to the Chairman, Professor NG Ching-fai said that the School of Continuing Education of HKBU had been offering two-year "associate degree" programmes. Students completing the courses would be admitted into the third year of bachelor's degree programmes at some of the universities in the US. He said that these universities had been satisfied with the standards of these students and a few more universities in the US had recently approached HKBU to establish articulation. Professor NG pointed out that "associate degree" programmes were popular in the US and he had visited some of the institutions there offering such programmes. In particular, he noted that their campus facilities were very good and, with the full support of the local government, the tuition fee charged for these programmes was low in the US.

27. In response to members' views, PAS(EM)(1) invited members to note paragraph 4.2 of the executive summary of the draft consultancy study report on "Associate degree in Hong Kong" compiled by the Federation. She said that it was already mentioned therein that the objectives of "associate degree" programmes included preparing students to work at associate professional level, to further their studies in universities or to pursue professional development. She added that based on the US experience, about 30% of graduates of "associate degree" programmes would pursue further studies in universities whereas 70% would work and some of them would engage in part-time studies.

28. PAS(EM)(1) explained that local graduates of "associate degree" programmes could proceed to study degree programmes especially those offered by overseas institutions. They could also choose to seek employment and engage in continuing education. She believed that the US experience would be applicable to Hong Kong.

29. PAS(EM)(1) further said that the Federation had been commissioned to conduct a study to draw up a set of common descriptors for "associate degree" and equivalent qualifications, having regard to international practices. The study was now in its final stage. She invited members to note that all members of the Federation had agreed to adopt the same set of common descriptors in terms of programmes structure, entrance requirements, teachers' qualifications and so on. It was planned that HKCAA would also conduct accreditation of different courses on the basis of these common descriptors. PAS(EM)(1) said that there was scope for further development in establishing articulation between local and overseas

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institutions to facilitate graduates of "associate degree" programmes to pursue studies in overseas universities.

30. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that the Administration must make clear to students that the number of FYFD places at the eight UGC-funded institutions was fixed at 14 500. Therefore, these institutions might only be able to admit very few graduates of "associate degree" programmes to the second year of their degree courses. Mr CHEUNG said that many students might not be able to afford of studying overseas. Therefore, students must not be given a misconception that graduates of "associate degree" programmes could have direct admission into local degree programmes.

Public consultation

31. Ms Emily LAU considered that there should be collection of opinions and public consultation prior to the formulation of policies in order to gain public support for policies. However, she noted that the 60% target had been determined without undergoing such a process. She said that she supported improvements be made to the education system with a view to enhancing the competitiveness of Hong Kong and the quality of manpower resources. However, she felt that there were needs for the Administration to provide more detailed information with regard to the actual implementation of the current proposals, such as the financial implications and quality assurance of courses offered by private institutions. She further proposed inviting deputations to give their views on the current proposals. She considered that the Subcommittee needed to conduct a more in-depth study on the proposals and that members should be better informed in order to scrutinise funding request concerning the proposals, which would be submitted to LegCo later. The Chairman and members supported Ms LAU's suggestion of inviting deputations to give views on the Administration's proposals.

Miscellaneous

32. Referring to Schedule 3 of the Annex on "Proposed regulatory framework for the post-secondary education", Ms Audrey EU asked about the proposed nature of the post-secondary courses to be offered under the current proposals. PAS(EM)(1) replied that the Administration had been discussing with various statutory professional bodies such as those of accountants, engineers and lawyers. It was planned that courses mainly on the training of workers at associate professional level would be offered.

33. Mr SZETO Wah asked the Administration to provide the following information for the Subcommittee to consider -

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- (a) the number/nature of existing "associate degree" programmes/places offered by various statutory professional bodies; and
- (b) the number/nature of existing "associate degree" programmes/places offered by the eight UGC-funded institutions.

The Chairman expressed concern as to whether the development of more associate degree programmes by the eight UGC-funded institutions would adversely affect the teaching quality of these institutions. DS(EM)(2) replied that there were established internal accreditation mechanisms for the eight UGC-funded institutions. Moreover, the quality of teaching and programmes offered by the institutions were closely monitored by UGC as well.

- Adm 34. Ms Cyd HO asked the Administration to provide information on the number of graduates of "associate degree" programmes offered by the eight UGC-funded institutions who had been accepted by overseas universities for direct admission to their degree programmes and had successfully completed the programmes. Referring to paragraph 5 of the Administration's paper, Ms HO also asked the Administration to provide information on its plans of providing land to eligible institutions interested in offering "associate degree" programmes. She was concerned about the adequacy of campus space and facilities of existing UGC-funded institutions to support the operation of more "associate degree" programmes. DS(EM)(2) agreed to provide the information by the next meeting.
- Adm

Way forward

- Clerk 35. The Chairman sought members' views on the deputations to be invited to the next meeting to give views on the current proposals. Members agreed to invite representatives of the eight UGC-funded institutions as well as concern organisations to the next meeting. Members also agreed to place a notice on the website of LegCo to invite public views or submissions.

III. Date of next meeting

36. Members agreed that the next meeting would be held on 1 June 2001 at 10:45 am.

37. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 4:30 pm.

Legislative Council Secretariat
11 September 2001