

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1107/00-01
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

LegCo Panel on Education

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 15 January 2001 at 4:30 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

- Members Present** : Dr Hon YEUNG Sum (Chairman)
Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, JP
Prof Hon NG Ching-fai
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon SZETO Wah
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
- Member Attending** : Hon CHAN Yuen-han
- Members Absent** : Hon David CHU Yu-lin
Hon SIN Chung-kai
Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP
Hon LAU Kong-wah
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung

**Public Officers
Attending** : Item IV

Mrs Fanny LAW, JP
Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mr Raymond YOUNG, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (2)

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

Mr Peter CHEUNG, JP
Secretary-General, University Grants Committee

Item V

Mrs Fanny LAW, JP
Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mr Patrick LI
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and
Manpower (2)

Mr Matthew CHEUNG, JP
Director of Education

Mr Peter P Y LEUNG
Assistant Director of Education (Special Duties)

Mr Patrick LAU, JP
Deputy Secretary for Planning and Lands (Lands and
Planning)

Mrs June LI
Assistant Director of Planning/Metro

Mrs Connie LAI
Chief Planning Officer of Housing

Item VI

Mr Joseph LAI, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (3)

Mr Patrick LI
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and
Manpower (2)

Mr Matthew CHEUNG, JP
Director of Education

Mr Peter P Y LEUNG
Assistant Director of Education (Special Duties)

Item VII

Mr Joseph LAI, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (3)

Mr Gorden LEUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and
Manpower (6)

Mr Matthew CHEUNG, JP
Director of Education

Mr Andrew C S POON
Assistant Director of Education (Chief Inspector of Schools)

Item VIII

Mr Joseph LAI, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (3)

Mr Gorden LEUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and
Manpower (6)

Dr Tony LEE
Senior Research Officer (English), Education and
Manpower Bureau

Mr Andrew C S POON
Assistant Director of Education (Chief Inspector of Schools)

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

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

Action

I. Confirmation of minutes
[LC Paper No. CB(2)668/00-01]

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2000 were confirmed.

II. Information paper(s) issued since last meeting

2. Members noted that no paper had been issued since the last meeting.

III. Items for discussion at the next meeting
[Appendices I and II to LC Paper No. CB(2)666/00-01]

3. Members noted that there were a lot of controversies over the proposed recurrent funding for the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions in the 2001-02 to 2003-04 triennium. Members agreed to invite the eight UGC-funded institutions and post a notice on the Council's web-site to invite interested organizations to make submissions and give their views at a special meeting scheduled for 3 February 2001.

[*Post-meeting note* : The special meeting scheduled for 3 February 2001 was subsequently cancelled as no deputation would attend the meeting.]

4. The Chairman proposed and members agreed to discuss the final recommendations of the Advisory Committee on School-based Management at the next meeting scheduled for 19 February 2001. Members also agreed that deputations who had participated in the discussion of school-based management at

Action

the meeting on 11 December 2000 should be given the opportunity to make further submissions or give their views at the meeting if they wished to do so.

IV. Recurrent funding for the University Grants Committee-funded institutions in the 2001-02 to 2003-04 triennium

[File Ref : EMB CR2/2041/86 Pt 9]

5. At the invitation of the Chairman, Secretary for Education and Manpower (SEM) briefed members on the background of the Administration's proposal on recurrent funding for the 2001-02 to 2003-04 triennium. She stressed that as previously agreed between UGC and the Administration, there should be a 10% point-to-point reduction in average student unit cost straddling the 1998-99 to 2000-01 and 2001-02 to 2003-04 triennia, with half of the savings being ploughed back to UGC for redistribution to meet new developments such as areas of excellence. The Administration had not requested further reduction in the unit cost beyond the agreed target.

6. SEM further said that as the reduced average student unit cost achieved by the end of 2000/01 had become the new basis for calculating the funding requirement for the entire 2001/02 to 2003/04 triennium, it would result in a reduction in the funding level for the next triennium. In absolute dollar terms, the recurrent funds available to the UGC-funded sector in the next triennium would be about 3.9% less than the current triennium, due mainly to the full triennial effect of the unit cost reduction and deflation during the current triennium. While the Administration agreed in principle that the student mix and the student unit cost by levels should be considered in determining the recurrent funding, it had adhered to the longstanding practice of using the overall student unit cost to determine the recurrent funding for the next triennium. As a result, the recurrent funding was about \$1 billion lower than that calculated under the weighted student unit cost approach. Subject to availability of resources, the Administration would review the situation in determining funding for the 2004-05 to 2006-07 triennium.

7. SEM pointed out that at present, there was a limited scope for UGC and UGC-funded institutions to carry unspent funds from one triennium to another. To encourage long-term planning and prudent financial management, the Administration proposed that UGC-funded institutions should each be allowed to carry over unspent funds up to 20% of their respective recurrent grants in a triennium to the next triennium as reserves. In allowing them to do so, the adverse effect of the budget deficit of \$1 billion would be reduced considerably. In fact, the eight UGC-funded institutions currently held a total reserve of more than \$3.4 billion. SEM added that in line with Government's current policy on revision of

Action

fees, the Chief Executive in Council had approved that the tuition fees for UGC-funded institutions for 2001-02 should be frozen at the current levels.

University programme fees

8. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong asked why university degree programme and sub-degree programme fees would not be reduced by 10%, in correspondence with the 10% average student unit cost reduction achieved by the end of the next triennium. He pointed out that the 5% saving in average student unit cost retained by UGC would be redistributed to meet new developments such as areas of excellence which were not directly related to students' learning in the UGC-funded institutions. He considered that university programme fees should be decreased as a result of the reduction of average student unit cost since Government fees would be reviewed according to cost adjustment.

9. On reduction of university programme fees, SEM responded that the tuition fee levels for UGC-funded institutions were set at levels to recover 18% of the average student unit cost of the whole UGC-funded tertiary sector. Although there were cost differences among disciplines, the Government adopted a uniform tuition fee for all degree and above level programmes. Secretary-General, University Grants Committee (SG/UGC) supplemented that as a result of the proposed freeze in programme fees, the cost recovery rate would be about 17.8% (excluding the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIE)'s sub-degree programmes) and 17.4% (including HKIE's sub-degree programmes) of the average student unit cost based on the level of grants to the UGC-funded sector for 2001-02.

10. On the 5% saving in average student unit cost, SEM pointed out that the 5% saving retained by UGC would be mainly deployed to fund new developments and researches aiming to upgrade the quality of tertiary education. Although not directly related to teaching students, research would keep teaching staff intellectually active which, in turn would enhance teaching. To ensure quality of research projects, UGC-funded institutions were now required to produce quality research proposals to compete with one another for allocations as determined by the Research Assessment Exercise on an annual basis.

11. SG/UGC then briefly explained the two-tier arrangements for allocation of recurrent funding between Government and UGC, and between UGC and UGC-funded institutions. He explained that the reduction of some 3.9% (i.e. about \$1.9 billion) in the funding requirement for the next triennium as compared to the current triennium resulted from the combined effects of the full triennial effect of the 10% point-to-point reduction in average student unit cost (2.5%), deflation during the current triennium (1%) and the reduction in student number targets

Action

between the current and the next triennium (0.39%). He stressed that the 5% savings in average student unit cost would mainly be used to fund research projects conducted by UGC-funded institutions through the Earmarked Research Grant (ERG) and Areas of Excellence Scheme.

Allocation process and its transparency

12. Prof NG Ching-fai enquired about the nature and application of the performance- and mission-related funding of \$700 million. SG/UGC clarified that in the light of productivity enhancement programme, UGC had taken the initiative to introduce various measures towards the goal of quality assurance, including the Teaching and Learning Quality Process Review and the Management Review. The \$700 million was set aside for further distribution to UGC-funded institutions after a broad-based assessment exercise and further dialogue with the institutions.

13. Prof NG Ching-fai further enquired about the basis for determining recurrent grants and earmarked grants for specific purposes such as the Earmarked Research Grant. He also asked how the Administration would improve the transparency of the mechanism for allocating recurrent funding to UGC-funded institutions.

14. SG/UGC responded that Government determined the level of recurrent grants to UGC-funded institutions by deducting from the institutions' total funding requirements an assumed income of the institutions which included tuition fees. In the light of Government grants available, UGC would determine the level of specific recurrent grants for individual institutions and other earmarked purposes in the triennium. In calculating the total recurrent grants, UGC would take into account the student numbers by subject and level, staff numbers, research-active staff numbers by subject, relative unit costs between subjects for both teaching and research, etc. Basically, the recurrent grants comprised teaching, research and professional elements which shared about 75%, 23% and 2% of the total recurrent grant respectively. In addition to this recurrent block vote, UGC-funded institutions received other sources of Government funding including ERG. For the next triennium, UGC had proposed to increase the amount of ERG by 27%. Furthermore, half of the saving in average student unit cost in the current triennium would be ploughed back to the UGC for redistribution to the institutions to meet new developments such as the Areas of Excellence Scheme.

15. As regards the transparency of the recurrent funding allocation mechanism, SG/UGC said that the basis for calculating recurrent grants were detailed in UGC's report on "Higher Education in Hong Kong" which was available on UGC's website on the Internet. In addition, UGC published an annual report entitled "facts and figures" which provided a digest of all essential information and statistics

Action

regarding the work and operations of the UGC, as well as the activities of the UGC-funded institutions. Except costs of individual programmes and quality of institution's research projects, all essential information related to the determination of recurrent grants were included in these two documents.

Competition for quality academic staff

16. Miss Emily LAU asked whether the Administration had assessed the ability of UGC-funded institutions to recruit quality academic staff after the reduction in their recurrent funding. She also asked whether recurrent funding for individual institutions would be reduced by the amount of endowments they had received. She cited that as a result of tight cost control, tertiary institutions in United Kingdom had been suffering from an inability to recruit renowned professors. She held the view that while institutions should be requested to ensure cost effectiveness in using the resources, they should be provided with sufficient funds to recruit and retain quality academic staff.

17. SEM said that so far only one UGC-funded institution had indicated that some serving professors intended to resign and leave Hong Kong. She considered that apart from a competitive remuneration package, scholars with an international standing would consider the prospect of career advancement and research achievements, as well as the institution's reputation, teaching and research environment, etc., in their choice of employment. She agreed that quality academic staff should be retained and that there were keen competitions for talents in some industries. SEM pointed out that although UGC-funded institutions followed the Master Pay Scale for academic staff, they had discretion to use private endowments to offer better terms and conditions to prestigious scholars. Unlike income generated from its reserve, private endowment was not counted in an institution's recurrent budget.

18. Prof NG Ching-fai pointed out that many academic staff in UGC-funded institutions had expressed concern about the proposed reduction in recurrent funding for the next triennium. They feared that further cuts in future recurrent budgets would follow.

19. SEM responded that in line with the Education Commission's reform proposals in education, tertiary education system would be reviewed in the light of the changing needs of the community and the increasingly knowledge-based global economy. The review would aim to facilitate long-term development of the higher education sector and would encompass university admission system, programme structure, funding system, etc.

Action

20. Due to time constraint, the Chairman suggested and members agreed to continue discussion of the subject at the special meeting on 3 February 2001

V. Reservation of school sites

[LC Paper No. CB(2)666/00-01(01)]

21. The Chairman informed members that the Panel had requested the Administration at the meeting on 18 Dec 2000 to provide detailed information on the availability of reserved school sites for further discussion at today's meeting.

22. SEM said that the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) had co-ordinated with relevant bureaux and departments and provided estimate on the tentative availability of the 234 reserved sites for school development, as well as the factors affecting the availability of these sites as detailed in the paper [Paper No. CB(2)666/00-01(01)]. The Administration had conducted a review of the availability of these sites. The review tentatively suggested that, subject to timely resolution of factors affecting the availability, 51 of them might be made available for development of schools/post-secondary colleges in or before 2005.

23. SEM further said that the Education Department (ED) would continue to collaborate with relevant departments to further explore the possibility of advancing the availability of the reserved and other sites as far as practicable. If this could be achieved, there would be adequate sites to construct more post-secondary colleges, and new schools for in-situ re-development and reprovisioning of existing schools which were technically non-feasible to be included under the School Improvement Programme (SIP) before 2005.

24. Deputy Secretary for Planning and Lands (Lands and Planning) (DS/PL(LP)) supplemented that the Planning and Lands Bureau (PLB) would have to allocate sites to meet the competing needs of the community in education, housing, health and other areas. He estimated that around 100 sites, involving some 60 to 90 hectares of land, were required to cater for the needs for whole-day primary schooling and reprovisioning of existing schools which could not be improved in-situ. He pointed out that there would be sufficient supply of sites for school development in new towns and developments, but not in urban districts. PLB would continue to collaborate with relevant departments to see if more sites could be identified for school development.

Availability of reserved school sites

25. Mr WONG Sing-chi noted with concern that the reserved sites for development of 15 primary and 14 secondary schools in Kwu Tung and Fanling

Action

North would only be available after 2010. He expressed doubt as to whether the available dates of the reserved sites as stated in the paper were up-to-date. He pointed out that according to information provided to the North District Council, phase I of the public estates in these districts would be ready for occupation in 2006. He asked how the Administration would plan for the provision of sufficient primary and secondary school places to cater for the future population growth in Kwu Tung and Fanling North.

26. DS/PL(LP) responded that the development of the reserved sites listed in the paper were planned in accordance with the forecast population growth in the districts concerned. The Administration would review the schedules of development on an on-going basis and would advance the schedule for individual sites in the light of the actual population growth in the districts concerned. Assistant Director of Planning/Metro supplemented that residential sites in Kwu Tung North were unlikely to be available in 2006. She undertook to ascertain the information and revert to the Panel.

Adm

27. Mr WONG Sing-chi queried how the Administration could secure sufficient sites for reducing primary school and secondary school class sizes, given that it might not even have adequate supply of sites to meet new demand for school places arising from population growth in individual districts. SEM responded that the Administration was committed to providing adequate school places in accordance with the population growth in each district. She added that the shortfall of 100 school sites identified in paragraph 24 had not included the demand for reducing class sizes. The Chairman remarked that a greater number of school sites would be needed in order to implement the initiative of reduction of class size.

Priority in allocation of sites for school development

28. Miss Emily LAU enquired about the priority given by the Administration to school development in its allocation of sites. She doubted whether the Administration had acted in line with the consensus reached at previous discussions of the Public Works Subcommittee that allocation of sites for school development should be given priority consideration since education was paramount to the future development of Hong Kong. She also asked whether the Administration would consider re-zoning sites allocated for other purposes such as residential developments which had not been utilized for a considerable period of time.

29. In response, DS/PL(LP) said that in preparing town plans and designing comprehensive development projects, the Planning Department (PlanD) would reserve school sites on the basis of the needs for community services in

Action

accordance with the specifications laid down in the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines (HKPSG). To provide additional school sites arising from new policy commitments, the Administration would review sites which had been reserved for other purposes but for various reasons had not been developed or redeveloped, and consider re-zoning them for school development. He assured members that the PlanD and the Town Planning Board (TPB) would continue to review and identify sites which could be re-zoned for school development. Meanwhile, the Administration would also consider converting industrial and commercial buildings into temporary college premises, if these buildings were not cost-effectively deployed for their intended purposes. DS/PL(LP) added that re-zoning of sites reserved for residential developments would have to be jointly discussed by the relevant bureaux, departments and TPB thoroughly.

30. Miss Emily LAU said that today's discussion would have conveyed a clear message to relevant bureaux that school development should have high priority in allocation of land resources.

Procurement of sites for school development

31. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong asked how the Administration would co-ordinate the efforts of relevant bureaux and departments to procure more sites for school education. He also asked how the Administration could resolve the 10 major problems affecting the availability dates of sites reserved for school development. He pointed out that as indicated in Annex B to the paper, extensive site formation, infra-structural facilities, and the feasibility study for comprehensive development/redevelopment were the three main considerations for determining the availability dates of the 234 reserved sites. He urged the Administration to co-ordinate the best efforts of related bureaux and departments to bring forward the development of the 33 and 76 sites which under the current schedule could only be available in 2005 and 2010 respectively.

32. DS/PL(LP) said that the explanatory note under Annex B aimed to specify the 10 major factors affecting the availability dates of the 234 reserved sites. There were other considerations such as the work schedule and progress of developments in the vicinity of the sites. He pointed out that wherever practicable, the Administration would seek the necessary funding support from the Finance Committee/Public Works Subcommittee to bring forward the development of reserved sites. He undertook to provide periodic reports on the latest developments of these sites, but pointed out that co-ordination of departmental efforts was essential to effective use of land resources for school development. He considered that a working group under the lead of EMB comprising representatives from relevant bureaux and departments including the Works

Action

Bureau and Housing Bureau should be established to co-ordinate deployment of sites for school development.

33. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong urged the Administration to procure more land resources for school development by way of the five approaches in paragraph 5 of the paper. He stressed that the Administration should ensure effective co-ordination of departmental efforts to review sites for re-zoning purposes, identify vacant land adjacent to or close to schools not suitable for SIP and consider construction of school villages in less build-up areas. He pointed out that many sites reserved for departmental use were left undeveloped for years.

Adm

34. DS/PL(LP) said that the Administration had an internal monitoring mechanism to ensure effective use of land resources. Departments would be required to provide explanations on sites reserved for their use but which had not been developed three years after allocation. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong requested that a list of the reserve sites which had been left undeveloped be provided to the Panel for information.

35. Miss CHAN Yuen-han echoed Mr CHEUNG's concern, saying that it was imperative for the Administration to appoint a bureau to oversee the review and to ensure effective re-deployment of sites for school development.

36. SEM said that ED was exploring the feasibility of establishing an inter-departmental mechanism on school development projects. She pointed out that the establishment of a higher level co-ordination team among various bureaux and departments to review and identify existing sites suitable for school development would take time. For the time being, PLB and EMB would review the feasibility of re-zoning sites for school development and identify vacant land for school expansion. She also urged members to assist in soliciting the support of District Councils on school development proposals, particularly those which were considered as immature due to various reasons such as inadequate transport facilities.

Adm

37. At members' request, the Administration should provide in three months' time an update on the reserved school sites, including their tentative availability dates and responsible department(s) to resolve the problems affecting their availability for members' reference. Members agreed that "Reservation of school sites" should tentatively be included as an agenda item for the regular meeting in April 2001 as a follow-up discussion.

VI. Regulation of tutorial schools

[LC Paper No. CB(2)666/00-01(02)]

Action

38. At the invitation of the Chairman, Assistant Director of Education (Special Duties) (ADE(SD)) briefed members on the salient points of the Administration's paper on the subject.

Registration requirements

39. Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung enquired about the registration requirements for tutorial schools and asked whether teachers of tutorial schools were subject to the same qualification and registration requirements applicable to institutions offering a full school curriculum (i.e. kindergartens, primary and secondary schools).

40. ADE(SD) responded that tutorial schools falling within the definition of "school" under the Education Ordinance (EO) would have to register with ED and comply with the relevant requirements of EO as other schools. Premises which were not purpose-built for school operation should meet the fire safety, building safety and sanitation requirements set out under the relevant rules and regulations of the Fire Services Department, Buildings Department and Department of Health. Teachers of tutorial schools would be required to meet the prescribed qualifications and register with ED. They had to be either permitted or registered teachers.

False or misleading advertisement

41. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that he was in support of legislation against false or misleading advertisements of tutorial schools. He expressed concern that some tutorial schools had falsely claimed in their advertisements that they were linked to some popular schools/colleges and that their teachers were members of the authority responsible for setting the public examination papers. He suggested that ED should set up a registration system for teachers of tutorial schools to declare their qualifications and public engagements so that it could identify false and misleading advertisements in a proactive manner.

42. ADE(SD) said that such a system of declaration would mean additional requirements for tutorial schools which did not apply to other schools. Since there were some 900 registered tutorial schools, the administration of such a declaration system might incur substantial manpower resources and recurrent expenditure. He considered that the Education (Amendment) Bill 2000 (the Bill) which was introduced into the LegCo on 10 January 2001 would enhance prosecution against false or misleading advertisement and achieve adequate deterrent effects. He added that ED would work jointly with the Consumer Council to educate parents and students on how to select tutorial schools.

Action

43. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed dissatisfaction with the Administration's response. He said that it was unsatisfactory that ED would only take action against the tutorial school for publishing false or misleading advertisement upon receipt of a complaint after the parents and student had been misled for months. Mr CHEUNG maintained the view that apart from relaxation of the time limit for making prosecution, ED should consider establishment of the proposed registration system in order to deter malpractices of tutorial schools.

44. In response to the Chairman's enquiry about compliance with legislative requirement, ADE(SD) informed members that ED had set up a central compliance team with seven ED officers and a retired police officer in May 2000 to inspect schools for compliance with the EO. Complaints on tutorial schools were also referred to the team for investigation. Subject to reasonable suspicion of non-compliance, ED would refer the case to the Police for further investigation or prosecution action. He clarified that under the existing EO, only false or misleading advertisements in relation to the school's premises were prohibited. In view of this loophole, the Bill had incorporated a provision to prohibit schools from publishing any advertisements containing false or misleading information. The Bill would also empower school inspectors to demand proof of identity and personal particulars from persons found in a school premises where illegal activities were suspected.

Scope of the Education Ordinance

45. With reference to paragraph 8 of the Administration's paper, Ms Audrey EU expressed reservations on the proposal of confining the scope of EO to kindergartens, primary schools and secondary schools and legislating other types of schools such as tutorial schools and institutions offering continuing education as business undertakings. ADE(SD) explained that considering the huge resources required for ensuring compliance with EO, the consultant commissioned to study the registration procedures for kindergartens and tutorial schools had recommended exploring feasibility of the proposal as a long-term measure to re-focus the ED's resources.

46. The Chairman suggested that members could propose setting up a Bills Committee to scrutinize the Bill if they wished to follow up on the issues relating to regulation of tutorial schools.

VII. Book grant for teachers

[LC Paper No. CB(2)666/00-01(03)]

Action

47. At the Chairman's invitation, DS/EM(3) introduced the Administration's paper on the subject.

48. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that teachers should update their professional knowledge and skills through life-long learning. He asked whether the one-off book grant could be made a recurrent grant in the long run. DS/EM(3) responded that book grant for teachers was a new initiative for public sector schools to purchase educational publications aimed at enhancing teachers' professional development through reading and self-learning. Subject to effective use of funds and the support of the community, the Administration would consider providing recurrent grants for such purpose. The Chairman remarked that the Administration should indicate such possibility in the financial proposal to be submitted to the Finance Committee for approval.

49. Mr SZETO Wah asked whether ED had consulted schools on the suggested book list for reference. Assistant Director of Education (Chief Inspector of Schools) responded that primary and secondary schools would have the discretion to procure books based on the needs of their teachers. The suggested book list was for reference only. DS/EM(3) supplemented that schools should purchase educational publications which were beneficial to the professional development of teachers. Mr SZETO was of the view that while schools should have the discretion to procure books, ED should also monitor in order to prevent any abuse of public funds.

VIII. Injection of new funds to the Language Fund

[LC Paper No. CB(2)666/00-01(04)]

50. At the Chairman's request, DS/EM(3) briefed members on the main points of the Administration's paper.

51. Mr CHUENG Man-kwong asked whether priority consideration had been given to English language projects in allocation of the Language Fund. He observed that as at 1 December 2000, the total allocation approved for funding 92 English and 133 Chinese and Putonghua projects were \$242.45 and \$83.39 millions respectively.

52. In response to Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong's query that English language projects seemed to have received more funding vis-à-vis Chinese and Putonghua projects, DS/EM(3) explained that the large difference in total funding between English and Chinese and Putonghua projects could be attributed to some costly English language projects such as the Funding Scheme for Workplace English Training at a \$50 million budget. He assured members that the Administration

Action

had been giving, and would continue to give, equal emphasis on English, Chinese and Putonghua projects in allocation of the Language Fund.

53. Miss Emily LAU expressed concern about the decline in language standard despite the huge investment in the Language Fund. She considered that recruiting quality teachers was the most straightforward and important way to raise students' language standard.

54. DS/EM(3) responded that apart from enriching the language environment for students through immersion programmes, the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research would conduct a 3-year pilot scheme to send pre-service teacher trainees to attend overseas immersion training as part of their training programme. He pointed out that one of the main objectives of injecting \$200 million into the Language Fund was to implement the pilot scheme.

55. Miss Emily LAU expressed doubt about the effects of attending a short immersion training on improving teachers' language abilities. She asked whether the Administration would consider increasing resource allocations, such as by way of the Language Fund, to employ more quality teachers for language teaching in order to achieve the objective of enabling our students and workforce to be bi-literate and tri-lingual.

56. DS/EM(3) responded that feedback from educational institutions and student and teacher participants on the effects of immersion programmes had been encouraging. Meanwhile, the Administration would also consider measures to attract more qualified language teachers. He pointed out that the Language Fund was established to provide non-recurrent funding support to quality language projects. It would not have sufficient funds to support projects requiring recurrent funding support.

57. Mr SZETO Wah and Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong declared interests as a member of the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union (HKPTU). Mr SZETO informed the meeting that HKPTU had received financial support from the Language Fund between 1994 and 1998 in organizing a series of game activities under the Popular Reading Award Scheme (PRAS) to raise students' interest in reading. However, the financial support from the Language Fund was discontinued after 1998. HKPTU was forced to seek funding support from the Quality Education Fund (QEF) but QEF could only provide funding support once. Mr CHEUNG added that PRAS incurred an annual cost of around \$80,000 to \$100,000 and some 100,000 students had participated in the wide variety of activities under PRAS. They queried the criteria for the allocation of the Language Fund. DS/EM(3) took note of the views. He assured members that the

Action

Administration would endeavour to provide financial support to quality and well-received language projects through various sources of funds.

IX. Any other business

58. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:50 pm.

Legislative Council Secretariat

15 March 2001