

For discussion
on 31 October 2000

Legislative Council Panel on Education Education Reform

PURPOSE

This paper briefs Members on the education reform measures put forward by the Education Commission (EC) and accepted by the Administration. It also sets out the Administration's planned implementation timetable and the detailed arrangements for these measures.

BACKGROUND

2. In his Policy Address in 1997, the Chief Executive asked the EC to conduct a comprehensive review of the education system in Hong Kong. To collect the public's views on reform, the EC has conducted three rounds of consultation and received over 30 000 submissions from different sectors of the community. Taking account of the views received, the EC finalised its recommendations and submitted a report entitled "Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong" (the Report) to the Administration in September 2000. A copy of the Report has been sent to Members for reference. In his Policy Address on 11 October 2000, the Chief Executive announced that the Administration had accepted all the reform proposals put forward by the EC.

3. The review undertaken by the EC covered all stages of education from early childhood education to continuing education, but its main focus was on the academic structure, the curricula, the assessment mechanisms and the interface between different stages of education. The underlying principle of the education reform is to enable our students to have all-round development as well as the attitude and ability for lifelong learning. Supplemented with appropriate support measures, the reforms to be introduced to the school places allocation system, the school curriculum and the assessment mechanism will be able to cater to the diverse learning needs of students, ensure their basic standard and at the same time encourage the pursuit of excellence. Our major reform initiatives are set out in the following paragraphs.

MAJOR INITIATIVES

The Curriculum Reform

4. The ultimate goal of education reform is to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The key to this lies in the reform of the curricula and teaching methods. In this respect, the EC proposed that the curriculum should be reformed to become more flexible, diversified and integrated. Repetitive or unnecessary elements from the curricula should be removed to provide teachers and students with more room to develop an all-round, coherent and diversified learning life. Teachers should be provided with the flexibility to engage students in learning activities beyond the confines of textbook and classroom. (paragraphs 8.2.4--8.2.19 of the Report)

5. The Curriculum Development Council (CDC) is now developing a framework for the curriculum reform aimed at providing students with a comprehensive and balanced learning experience covering intellectual development, life skills, community services, work-related experiences, as well as physical and aesthetic development. The CDC will shortly consult the public and the education sector on the specific arrangements of curriculum reform. The Education Department (ED) will assist schools to implement the reform and arrange for the provision of training for teachers.

Reforming School Places Allocation Mechanism

6. To provide students with sufficient room for an all-round, balanced and coherent learning life, the Primary One Admission (POA) and Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) mechanisms will be reformed as proposed by the EC (paragraphs 8.2.45-8.2.46 and 8.2.53-8.2.66 of the Report). The new interim POA mechanism will be implemented in 2002, which follows the principle of vicinity in allocating school places, and the objective is to reduce the incentive for drilling children in early childhood education. As regards the SSPA, we have announced in July 2000 the abolition of the Academic Aptitude Test with effect from the 2000/01 school year to enable students and teachers to concentrate their efforts on meaningful learning activities. The percentage of discretionary Secondary One places will be increased by phases so that students will have the incentive to work hard and engage in all-round development in order to increase the chance of going to their preferred schools through direct application.

7. As the reform to the school places allocation mechanisms outlined above bring significant changes to the present system, we will phase out the changes over a reasonably long time-frame. For the SSPA mechanism, we will conduct an interim review of the present mechanism in the 2003/04 school year before

deciding on the long-term mechanism.

Strengthening Remedial and Enhancement Measures

8. One of the important objectives of the education reform is that schools should not give up on any student and every effort has to be made to ensure students attain the basic standards. To enable schools and teachers to perform this function, we will introduce a new recurrent grant for all public sector schools¹ from the 2000/01 school year. With this recurrent grant, schools will be able to hire additional staff or procure various services to relieve teachers' workload so that they can focus on their core functions of teaching and learning, with particular emphasis on catering to the diverse learning needs of students, curriculum development and enhancing students' language abilities. The proposed rates of the grant to schools are as follows:

No. of classes	Primary schools	Secondary schools
	(per school per annum)	(per school per annum)
	\$	\$
1 to 18	450,000	250,000
19 or more	550,000	300,000

9. In the spirit of school-based management, schools can make use of the grant flexibly to hire personnel or services to relieve teachers' workload, but they will be required to incorporate the proposed usage of the grant in their annual schools plans to be endorsed by the School Management Committee. As the purpose of the proposed grant is to enhance teachers' capacity to implement the reform measures, we will require schools to fully consult their teachers on how the grant should be used. For the purpose of accountability, schools are required to report to parents annually the progress of implementing their plans, and to send to the ED an annual report covering, among other things, an evaluation of the achievement against the performance targets set. The ED will work in partnership with schools to help them develop/implement the plans.

10. Based on the number of classes operated by existing primary and secondary schools, we estimate that the amount of money to be given to eligible schools is around \$509 million per year. Payment of this grant will be met from an annual allocation of \$800 million earmarked for education reform as announced in the 2000 Budget. We will conduct a review in the 2002/03 school year to evaluate whether the grant has been effectively used to allow teachers to focus

¹ These include government, aided, caput schools, schools under the Bought Place Scheme and the Direct Subsidy Scheme

more on enhancing students' learning effectiveness. We will also review the funding arrangement to enhance cost-effectiveness. Subject to the endorsement of the Education Panel, we will shortly seek the approval of the Finance Committee for the disbursement of the proposed grant.

Enhancing Learning Opportunities

11. At present, only 85% of Secondary 3 leavers obtain a subsidized Secondary 4 or vocational training place. In response to the recommendation of the EC to increase learning opportunities for senior secondary education (paragraph 8.3.5 of the Report), we will, starting from the 2002/03 school year, provide all Secondary 3 students who have the ability and wish to continue their study, with a subsidized Secondary 4 or vocational training place. This initiative will help to better equip secondary school students for further studies or employment. It will incur a total recurrent expenditure of \$744 million in a full year. We will need to provide an estimated 6 000 additional places at senior secondary level by the 2003/04 school year. We envisage that the new schools will offer senior secondary programmes with a diversified curriculum to cater for different abilities and interests.

12. As noted by the EC, the proportion of tertiary education places in many parts of the world far exceeded that in Hong Kong. There is an urgent need for us to catch up (paragraphs 7.16 and 8.4.45 of the Report) if Hong Kong were to maintain its competitive edge in the knowledge-based economy. We have therefore announced a target to promote a gradual increase of tertiary places in the coming ten years, with the aim of providing tertiary education for 60% of secondary school leavers in the 17-22 age group by 2010.

13. As we do not envisage an increase in university places, the increase will mainly occur in the sub-degree sector, which will include Higher Diploma and Associate Degree places. Through the provision of land grant and interest free start-up loans, we will encourage the tertiary institutions, continuing education providers and private enterprises to provide these courses on a self-financing basis. To ensure that no one will be deprived of the opportunity to receive education due to lack of means, various levels of subsidies will also be provided to students in the forms of study grants, low-interest loans and non-means tested loans. We will also collaborate with the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation, the Federation for Continuing Education in Tertiary Institutions and various professional bodies to work out an academic accreditation and quality assurance mechanism.

Enhancing Teachers' Professional Competence

14. As teachers and principals play a central role in education reform, there is a need to enhance their professional competence so as to enable them to meet the challenges arising from the reform (paragraphs 11.2--11.4 of the Report). To achieve this objective, we will collaborate with the teacher training providers to formulate ways to strengthen pre-service and in-service training in line with the principles and direction of the education reform. We will also work closely with the education sector to set up a professional development ladder for teachers and to develop a culture of life-long learning and professional self-improvement in the teaching profession. We will also take necessary actions to prepare for the establishment of a General Teaching Council.

15. As recommended by the EC (paragraph 8.1.4 of the Report), we will require all new kindergarten teachers to possess five passes in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE), including Chinese and English, from the 2001/02 school year. Furthermore, all new kindergarten teachers will need to have completed pre-service professional training from the 2003/04 school year. To strengthen the professional and administrative leadership in kindergartens and child care centres, we will provide child care education courses for all serving kindergarten principals and child care centre supervisors in the coming five years. We will also introduce a principal-ship training course from the 2001/02 school year.

16. Moreover, the ED will provide new kindergarten principals and teachers with induction programmes, and will include leadership training in the programmes for principals' professional development.

Improving the Assessment and Examination Systems

17. The Administration has also accepted the EC's proposal to introduce "Basic Competency Assessments" (BCA) by phases starting from the 2001/02 school year in order to help teachers and parents understand students' learning needs and thus ensure students achieve the basic standards required in the core subjects of Chinese, English and Mathematics (paragraphs 8.2.30--8.2.41 of the Report). The BCA will comprise the Student Assessment and the System Assessment. The Student Assessment can be conducted at any time during the school year so that schools may provide timely and appropriate assistance for individual students based on their performance and progress. The System Assessment will show whether students in all schools have reached the basic standards in the key learning areas, and the information will facilitate assessment of the effectiveness of teaching. In parallel with the development of the BCA,

we will introduce a secure version of the existing Hong Kong Attainment Test to strengthen its function in facilitating learning and teaching.

18. The Hong Kong Examinations Authority will introduce a number of improvements to the public examinations by stages, such as the introduction of a core competence element to a number of key subjects in the HKCEE from the 2003/04 school year, the extension of the Teacher Assessment Scheme to more Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) subjects from the 2002/03 school year, and the abolition of fine grades in the HKCEE and HKALE from the 2001/02 school year.

WAY FORWARD

19 The Administration will make its best efforts to implement the various reform measures, but success of the education reform will depend to a large extent on the collaboration of the school sector, the teaching profession and the community as a whole. The achievement of the 60% target for tertiary education, in particular, will hinge on the initiatives of the tertiary institutions and the private sector. An Education Reform Liaison Team, consisting of experienced frontline educators and education experts, has been established to liaise widely with schools and major stakeholders in the education community to ensure that the reform measures are effectively implemented on the ground. As we proceed, we will be critically examining our implementation plan in the light of feedback and any new developments, to ensure that the changes are in line with the expectations of the stakeholders.

20 We will also work with the EC to pursue a number of issues which need further examination, such as the feasibility of a three-year structure for senior secondary education, issues relating to post-secondary education, and the qualifications framework and promotion of continuing education. The EC will set up working groups to pursue these issues and the Administration will support and work closely with these working groups.

Education and Manpower Bureau
October 2000