

For information
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LegCo Panel on Education School-based Uniform Groups

PURPOSE

This paper informs Members of the proposals to strengthen and support school-based uniform group (UG) activities.

BACKGROUND

2. At present, there are eleven UGs in Hong Kong (a list is at Annex). UGs receive recurrent subsidies from Government. The amount totals \$42 million in the 2001-02 financial year.

3. One of our education reform proposals is to offer more life-wide learning opportunities for our students. Participation in school-based UG activities helps students develop positive values and acquire leadership skills, and is one of the most effective ways to foster students' all-round development. In the Policy Objective Booklet on Quality Education published in October 2000, the Administration committed to set aside \$50 million to support UGs in organising school-based activities so as to recruit more students to the ranks of school-based UGs. A Steering Committee was set up in December 2000 to consider how the earmarked funding could best be used. The Steering Committee is chaired by the Director of Education and comprises representatives from relevant departments/non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as well as key stakeholders, such as schools, tertiary institutions, parents and community members. The proposals of the Steering Committee, which have Government's support, are set out in paragraphs 4 to 11 below.

PROPOSALS

Recruitment of students to the rank

4. Our long-term objective is for each student to join at least one UG in his or her school life. However, according to a survey conducted by the Education Department (ED) in late 2000, 20% of primary schools and 10% of secondary schools do not even have a UG unit. From what we have gathered, lack of funding for acquiring equipment for UG activities is one of the major difficulties facing schools and UGs.

5. To encourage the establishment of more school-based UG units, we propose to provide grants to UGs or schools to meet the start-up cost of these units, for example, the cost of purchasing basic equipment and training materials, and to organise promotional activities. In allocating funding, priority will be accorded to schools which do not have any UG units or have only a small number of UG units.

6. Apart from school-based units, there are also district-based UG units established by NGOs. The target participants of these units are mostly students. Since participation in these units will provide similar life-wide learning experiences for students, funding will also be made available to NGOs for setting up district-based UG units. Similarly, in allocating funding, priority will be accorded to NGOs proposing to establish UG units in districts where there are no district-based units or where there are only a small number of such units.

7. At present, expenditure in extra-curricular activities, including UG activities, incurred by students of families receiving the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) are covered by CSSA. Some UGs also sponsor the uniform cost of needy children. However, some less well-off families who are not CSSA recipients may not be able to afford the cost of their children participating in UG activities. To further encourage more students to join UGs, we propose to provide grants to UGs to subsidise needy students in joining UG activities.

Publicity campaigns

8. Many Hong Kong parents consider academic performance as the only important aspect of their children's development. Some parents even take the view that participation in extra-curricular activities, including UG activities, may adversely affect their children's academic performance. To maximize the impact of the recruitment drive in paragraphs 5 to 7 above, we need to solicit parents' support and cultivate in parents a positive attitude towards UG activities. We therefore propose to launch publicity campaigns through different channels to introduce to parents the diversified activities of UGs and their positive influence on children's personal development.

Grooming of leaders

9. Another major problem which UGs face in expanding their school-based activities is the lack of leaders. At present, school-based UG units are mostly led by teachers. While this provides good opportunities for teachers and students to interact, it may not be an ideal arrangement if schools rely solely on teachers to lead UGs as teachers are already heavily occupied by teaching duties. Indeed, parents, pre-service teacher trainees and university students would offer a pool of good candidates to lead school-based UG units. A larger pool of leaders will also facilitate the establishment of more school-based units.

10. To groom more leaders for UGs, we propose to launch publicity campaigns to recruit potential candidates and to provide them with training on generic or leadership skills which will be recognised by all UGs. This provides flexibility as trainees are free to choose to lead any UG unit. These trainees can become assistant leaders of school-based UG units upon completion of the training programme.

11. In addition, we will sponsor UG leaders/assistant leaders who have contributed significantly to UG activities to attend overseas training programmes/conferences. This will not only widen UG leaders' horizon and sharpen their leadership skills, but also serve as a form of recognition to their contributions to the UGs.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

12. The earmarked funding of \$50 million will be spent over a period of three school years (2001/02 to 2003/04). Tentatively, 45% of the funding will be spent on recruitment of students, another 45% will go to grooming of leaders, and the remaining 10% will be directed to mounting of publicity campaigns and administrative costs. The detailed breakdown is still being fine-tuned at this stage. We will be seeking funding approval from the Finance Committee in May 2001.

IMPLEMENTATION

13. We plan to invite funding applications in June 2001. Schools, UGs and NGOs could submit applications to ED anytime during the three-year period; applications will be vetted quarterly. The first round of grants will be disbursed in September/October 2001. All applications will be considered by the Steering Committee mentioned in paragraph 3 above. As regards the training programme for potential leaders, we will commission UGs or NGOs to conduct the training. We expect the first batch of the training will commence in October 2001.

14. The Steering Committee will conduct an evaluation of the effectiveness of the funding scheme by mid 2004.

CONSULTATION

15. We consulted the Board of Education in early April on the above proposals. The Board gave broad support to the proposals.

Education Department
April 2001

Uniform Groups in Hong Kong

Civil Aid Service Cadet

Hong Kong Adventure Corps

Hong Kong Air Cadet Corps

Hong Kong Girl Guides Association

Hong Kong Red Cross

Hong Kong Sea Cadet Corps

Hong Kong St John Ambulance

Road Safety Patrol

Scout Association of Hong Kong

The Boys' Brigade, Hong Kong

The Girls' Brigade (Hong Kong)