

Legislative Council Panel on Education

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON INCREASE IN
POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES**

INTRODUCTION

On 23 April, the Administration submitted to this Panel a paper vide CB(2)/1317/00-01(03) (see **Annex I**) which set out the Administration's proposals to support the progressive increase in post-secondary education opportunities. Comments on these proposals from the Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong are at **Annex II**. This paper responds to the questions raised by Members and provides supplementary information for their reference.

RESPONSE AND SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

(I) & (X) Development Strategy and Consultation

2. We propose to explore the principles, strategy and direction from a macroscopic point of view before finalizing the specific details for implementation. In the paper vide CB(2)/1317/00-01(03), we have –

- (a) reiterated our policy objective;
- (b) taken stock of the present position;
- (c) proposed the principles and strategy to be adopted in achieving our policy objective;
- (d) outlined the Government's proposals to enhance the quantity and quality of post-secondary education; and
- (e) described the next step to be taken in our action plan.

3. We would be pleased to discuss with Members the policy direction and work together on the priorities for implementing these proposals. We hope to put in place the support measures as soon as possible so that an increasing number of students who aspire to continue their studies and have the ability to do so can have access to tertiary

education at the earliest possible opportunity. The funding for our proposals has yet to be approved by the Finance Committee. The Education Commission (EC) and the University Grants Committee are jointly conducting a study on the long-term development of tertiary education. Our proposal to expedite increase in post-secondary education opportunities has their full support. Studies on the future development of tertiary institutions will be conducted on the basis of this policy objective.

(II) Distribution of places

4. As indicated in paragraph 2 of CB(2)/1317/00-01(03), our target is that within ten years, 60% of our senior secondary school leavers should have access to tertiary education. We also propose that places provided under the present system should continue to meet the demand of about 30% of these students. Our planning target is to provide first-year first-degree (FYFD) places for about 18% of the relevant age group. However, in pursuing the target, we will take into account the findings of the 2001 Population Census and the availability of qualified candidates for admission to local universities.

5. Self-financing sub-degree or higher diploma courses will provide the remaining places. The Government will facilitate tertiary institutions, private enterprises and other organizations to provide options other than traditional sixth form education, such as professional diploma courses and allocate more resources by providing land and loans to eligible institutions interested in offering such courses. In addition, financial assistance will be provided to students to cover their tuition fees.

(III) Student Financial Assistance

6. At present, self-financing full-time post-secondary programmes are offered by tertiary institutions. The annual tuition fee ranges from \$25,000 to \$50,000, which is on a par with that of publicly-funded post-secondary programmes. To ensure that no qualified students are denied access to tertiary education because of a lack of financial means, the Administration proposes to provide the following financial assistance to students engaged in self-financing post-secondary programmes –

- (a) Means-tested Grant Scheme for the most needy students;

- (b) Means-tested Low-interest Loan Scheme for other needy students; and
- (c) Non-means-tested Loan (NLS) Scheme for all students.

7. The grant and low-interest loan will cover the full amount of the annual tuition fee, subject to a ceiling to be reviewed annually. The initial proposed ceiling is \$60,000. Students can also apply for assistance under the NLS Scheme to cover the tuition fees and basic living expenses. Details on the eligibility criteria are set out in CB(2)/1317/00-01(03). Having regard to the possibly higher loan ceiling and the repayment ability of students to be covered by the new scheme upon graduation, we propose that the maximum repayment period should be 10 years.

8. The total amount of financial assistance will depend on the number of applicants and the financial circumstances of their families. It is initially estimated that the total amount of assistance will increase annually over the next 10 years. By the end of the next decade, the annual total amount would have exceeded 1 billion.

(IV) Setting up branches outside Hong Kong

9. Currently, some of our local institutions are already offering programmes outside Hong Kong or have set up overseas offices. Institutions are encouraged to consider setting up overseas branches on a prudent basis and in accordance with their own development goals. This will increase the institutions' and students' exposure, facilitate expansion of tertiary places, enhance education opportunities for local and overseas students and foster the development of a diversified higher education system in Hong Kong.

(V) and (IX) Pilot Scheme for Overseas Studies

10. The Administration proposes to provide financial assistance for students to study abroad. This will widen students' choice and increase their exposure. As a start, the Administration proposes to launch a pilot scheme to support students to study specified sub-degree programmes in selected overseas institutions in disciplines such as Information Technology (IT), Financial Services and Creative Media. Such disciplines should be confined to those with manpower shortages and for which a substantial increase in the number of places will be unattainable in the near future. The list of approved programmes will be

finalized in due course. Students enrolled in the approved programmes can apply for financial assistance. The eligibility and assessment criteria and mode of financial assistance under the pilot scheme are basically the same as those for students studying at local institutions. One of the requirements is that such students should be pursuing full-time post-secondary programmes and have not yet obtained any sub-degree or other higher qualifications. Students who receive financial assistance under the pilot scheme are required to return to Hong Kong to work after graduation. Depending on the effectiveness of the pilot scheme, the Administration will consider extending it to other areas with similar situations.

(VI) Accreditation

11. We intend to establish a clear, coherent and user-friendly framework that assures quality and facilitates new entrants and expansion. Details of our proposed framework are at **Annex III**. We are taking preliminary steps to consult relevant bodies by holding forums, conducting meetings with accreditation bodies, statutory professional bodies and potential providers, as well as consulting the views of relevant subcommittees under the EC. The proposed objective and agenda are well received by these bodies.

12. We are fully aware that legislative amendment will be necessary to put in place the new regulatory framework. Consultation and enactment of the new legislation will take some time. Most of our statutory institutions have acquired self-accrediting status, thus enabling them to conduct accreditation in accordance with existing arrangements. As for courses offered by other institutions, accreditation may be conducted by approved accreditation bodies (e.g. the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (“HKCAA”) and other statutory professional bodies). As such, we estimate that a considerable number of accredited courses and those to be accredited by means of the above channels may benefit under the Government's proposed support measures as early as possible. We will continue to consult public views on the future framework and put in place the necessary legislation in due course.

(VII) Associate Degree

13. To ensure that there is a common, internationally comparable benchmark of “associate degree”, we have commissioned the Federation

for Continuing Education in Tertiary Institutions (“the Federation”) 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 is now in its final stage and a draft summary of the report is at **Annex IV**. The HKCAA has also conducted an independent study on the same subject. The Federation and the HKCAA have conducted their studies from the perspectives of education providers and accreditation bodies respectively and their recommendations on the common descriptors are broadly the same. All members of the Federation have agreed to adopt the same set of common descriptors. The HKCAA will also conduct accreditation of different courses on the basis of these common descriptors. Henceforth, all local “associate degree” courses will adopt the same set of common descriptors and those failing to comply with these descriptors will not be accredited.

(VIII) Overseas studies

14. We **recommend** that the student financial assistance scheme should also cover –

- (a) accredited programme leading to a local award, comprising up to 50% of the modules offered outside Hong Kong; and
- (b) a programme offered wholly or partly (up to 50%) in Hong Kong leading to a non-local award as included in a list to be approved by the Administration.

15. Students enrolled in these programmes can apply for financial assistance. The eligibility and assessment criteria and mode of financial assistance will be basically the same as those for students pursuing studies in local institutions. One of the requirements is that such students should be engaged in full-time post-secondary programmes and have not obtained any sub-degree or above qualifications.

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- Annex I** Information Paper on Meeting of the LegCo Panel on Education on 23.4.2001
- Annex II** Questions raised by Hon Cheung Man-kwong on Information Paper of 23.4.2001
- Annex III** Proposed Regulatory Framework for
Post-secondary Education
- Annex IV** Executive Summary of Consultancy Study on Associate Degree in Hong Kong