

Information Paper

Relief Measures under

Secondary School Places Allocation System

Purpose

This paper informs Members of the latest development on the relief measures to assist those students who may have been likely affected by the current Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) System.

Background

2. The SSPA System has been used to allocate Secondary 1 (S1) school places to Primary 6 students since 1978. For the educational reasons that boys and girls have different inherent rates of development and that the form and content of internal assessments are inevitably biased in favour of girls, boys and girls are processed separately in scaling and banding. Gender quotas are also set so that co-educational secondary schools will have a balanced sex ratio to facilitate co-education.

3. The Equal Opportunity Commission applied for judicial review on the SSPA System on 14 July 2000. It alleged that the following features of the SSPA System were sex-discriminatory:

- (a) the scaling of internal assessment scores using separate gender curves;
- (b) the banding of students by sex; and
- (c) the existence of sex quotas in co-educational secondary schools

4. Court hearing was conducted between 14 and 25 May 2001. The judge handed down his ruling and judgement on 22 June 2001, and declared that all three features of the SSPA System were unlawfully sex-discriminatory. In his judgement, he did not require the Education Department (ED) to quash the three features immediately but believed that ED would take steps to honour his findings and deal with substantiated cases of discrimination in such a way as to remedy the effects of such discrimination.

Present Position

5. A hasty change in this year's allocation system will unavoidably cause confusion, chaos and anxieties to schools, parents and students. For the sake of parties concerned, it is decided that there will be no immediate change to the current cycle of allocation, which is being processed as scheduled. Accordingly, the allocation results were released on 17 July 2001 and students should report to the allocated secondary schools for registration on 19 and 20 July 2001.

6. However, to assist those students who are likely affected by the current system, we have devised practical measures to relief the problems. Details of the Relief Measures are at Appendix I. The Relief Measures will be taken after the release of allocation results from 17 to 31 July 2001. Put simply, parents who have reason to believe that their children may have been affected by the current allocation system are required to fill in a simple application form and send it via the primary schools to ED.

7. To let primary and secondary schools understand more about the Relief Measures and to seek their co-operation and support, we held two briefing sessions for all primary and secondary school heads and teachers on 12 July 2001.

8. At the same time, a circular letter was issued to advise primary schools on the detailed operation of the Relief Measures and seek their assistance in explaining the Measures to parents of the Primary 6 students. Schools were also requested to collect application forms from parents and forward them to ED for processing. A Leaflet on the Relief Measures (a copy of the Chinese version at Appendix II) has been prepared and distributed together with the allocation results to all Primary 6 students.

9. Another circular letter was issued to secondary schools to appeal for their assistance in providing one additional S1 place per class and to freeze all vacant places arising from students who fail to register with the allocated schools on 19 and 20 July for placement of students who are likely affected by the current system.

10. For the sake of transparency and fairness in the operation of the Relief Measures, a Monitoring Group has been set up under the Secondary School Places Allocation Committee. The Group is chaired by the Chairperson of the Committee with members from secondary and primary school representatives in the Committee, as well as a parent and a community member. The terms of reference of the Group are to oversee the operation of the Relief Measures and, where necessary, to advise on matters concerning the implementation of the Relief Measures.

Way Forward

11. A Task Force has been set up within the Education Department with the Director of Education as the Chairman to oversee the operation and draw up proposals for a longer-term replacement of the allocation system which should both be fair and free from sex discriminatory elements, and conforms to educational principles. We will consult local and overseas experts on the best way forward. Our aim is to come up with initial proposals for public consultation by the end of this year.

Advice Sought

12. Members are invited to note paragraphs 5 to 11 above for information.

Education Department
July 2001

Details of the Relief Measures

Pursuant to the Court judgement, the Education Department (ED) will try its best to place those students who have reason to believe that their allocation results are likely affected by the sex-discriminatory features to schools of their higher choices. The main points of the Relief Measures are as follows :

- Students must have reason to believe that their allocation results are likely affected by the sex-discriminatory features under the current allocation system.
- Students have to register with the schools allocated on **19 and 20 July**. Failing to register is regarded as forfeiture of the allocated places.
- Applicants must complete an Application Form and return it to their children's primary schools on **20 July** before noon.
- A computer programme will be used to vet the applications. The method of combined scaling of internal assessments and combined banding is adopted to examine if a student's allocation band is adjusted upward. If the student's new allocation band is **higher** than the original band, he/she will preliminarily be classified as a likely affected student. Then, the computer will scan through the choices of schools the student made in May this year, from his/her first choice up to the one immediately **above** the choice of school to which the student is allocated. The computer will check whether students allocated to these schools are of the **same** or a **lower** band than the student's new band. Should this be the case and if there are vacancies in these schools, a Secondary 1 place of the highest choice will be offered to the student.
- If the student's band remains the **same** as the original band after the combined process, the computer will again scan through the student's higher school choices to see if any students of the opposite sex with a **lower** allocation band have been allocated to these schools. Should this be the case and if there are vacancies in these schools, a Secondary 1 place of the highest choice will be offered to the student.
- Students will be classified as unaffected students under the following two conditions. Their applications will not be further processed and there will not be any placement :
 - (1) the new allocation band remains the **same** as the original band and no student of the opposite sex with a **lower** band has been allocated to schools of the applicant's higher choices; or
 - (2) the applicant's new allocation band is **lower** than the original band.
- According to the allocation procedure, Band 1 students will be allocated first, followed by Band 2 and so on. The order of allocation within the same band is determined by the random number.
- Applicant students should return to their primary schools on **28 or 30 July 2001** to see if they are placed to the schools of their higher choices, and if so, they should register with the secondary schools to which they are placed on either **30 or 31 July 2001**. Failing to register will be regarded as forfeiting the school places offered.
- As vacancies are limited, those students preliminarily classified as likely affected students may not be able to be successfully placed to a school of their choice.
- **School places allocation involves a high degree of randomization. It is therefore unable to verify that a student's original allocation result is affected by sex-discriminatory factor whether or not he/she is preliminarily classified as a likely affected student in the placement process or he/she is successfully offered a place.**
- **Students successfully offered school places have to agree to accept ED's arrangements to transfer their originally allocated S1 places to other likely affected students who have not yet been placed. Parents should therefore consider seriously before lodging their applications.**

The Education Department will inform applicants of their placement results through their respective primary schools on **28 July 2001**. Parents may check the application results through their children's primary schools on **28 or 30 July**. Before that date, parents need not make enquiries to the schools or the Education Department regarding results of their applications.