

2000 Policy Address
Briefing on Quality Education
Speaking Note for Mrs Fanny Law, JP
Secretary for Education and Manpower,
on Friday, 13 October 2000

Introduction

In his Policy Address announced last Wednesday, the Chief Executive mapped out a comprehensive blueprint for the development of education in Hong Kong. He reiterated that the task of nurturing talents still tops the SAR Government's agenda, and that the Government is firmly committed to investing in education. The Chief Executive announced the acceptance of all the reform recommendations put forward by the Education Commission (EC) relating to the academic system, the curricula, and the assessment mechanism. He also set as the key tasks for the next two years upgrading teacher qualifications, reforming the curricula and teaching methods, improving the assessment and examination systems, and providing more learning opportunities at the senior secondary and above levels.

2. I will now explain to you the SAR Government's philosophy of education, our key initiatives to raise the quantity and quality of education, the provision of resources and implementation timeframe.

Philosophy of Education

3. Education is the main avenue for social mobility; it also provides the ladder for personal success. Therefore, we must ensure that **everyone, rich or poor, has the opportunity to receive education as long as he strives for it.** We firmly believe that manpower is the most valuable social resources. As each of us has different natural endowments, education must be **"student-based" to cater for the difference in abilities.** As far as the system is concerned, there must be a diversity of schools and curricula which **offers multiple options for students,** so that the gifted and those with special educational needs alike will have the opportunity to develop their potentials to the full.

4. We believe that the essence of education is to enhance people's quality, to raise their cultural standard, and to build a harmonious and tolerant community. To this end, education should **aim at**

“whole-person development”. With the advent of a knowledge-based economy, education must also focus on **fostering students’ abilities and motivation to pursue life-long learning** to meet the changes of the times. We must, therefore, provide flexible and diversified channels **for everyone to pursue continuous education at different stages of their life** to broaden their knowledge base and strengthen their competitiveness in employment.

The Education Commission’s Review

5. The reform proposals put forward by the EC which focus on the academic structure, curricula and assessment mechanism have profound and far-reaching implications. Hence, many people might feel overwhelmed. Indeed, education issues are so closely inter-linked that it is inevitable that a single move in any one part will affect the system as a whole. Nevertheless, in implementing the education reform, we will proceed in **a gradual and orderly manner**. As a matter of fact, the success of the reform chiefly relies on the attitudes of parents and teachers, as well as the social atmosphere. We have tentatively **drawn up the priorities for implementation and their supporting measures**, as set out in Annex 1.

6. In implementing the reform, we **will closely monitor progress and coordinate different areas of work**. Where necessary, we will adjust the strategy and details of implementation. For this purpose, we have **set up a central coordinating team**, and will invite as members front-line educators who have actively participated in the EC’s review. The team will maintain close liaison with the schools and organizations concerned to assist them in solving any problems they may encounter in the reform process, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the reform.

Enhancing Learning Opportunities

7. To raise the general educational level of the population and to encourage life-long learning, the Chief Executive has announced that **starting from the 2002/03 school year, all Secondary Three students who have the ability and wish to continue their study will be given the opportunities to receive Secondary Four education or vocational training**. At the same time, the Government is committed to **increasing gradually the provision of tertiary places in the coming ten years, with the aim of providing tertiary education for 60% of the young people in the appropriate age group**. Whether these objectives can be

achieved depends on the learning ability of the students, the manpower demands of the community, and the community's commitment to the nurturing of talents.

8. We estimate that we will need to provide an additional 6 000 places at senior secondary level by the 2003/04 school year. The education sector will be fully consulted before we start detailed planning on the curricula and the mechanism for allocating the school places. Our preliminary idea is to provide all S3 students of public sector schools¹ with direct subsidy so that they can continue their study in the same schools or in other schools. During the early period of implementation, the new schools will mainly offer senior secondary programme with diversified curricula to cater for different abilities and interests. It is hoped that these schools will be able to develop their own characteristics and special strengths. In the long term, we expect that more secondary schools will switch to symmetrical structure so that students can complete their secondary school education in the same schools.

9. As for tertiary education, we will encourage the tertiary institutions, continuing education providers and private enterprises to provide continuing education other than the traditional matriculation courses. School operators will be granted loans and land for building the schools. Various levels of subsidy will also be provided for students in the forms of fee remissions, low-interest loans and non-means tested loans to meet their financial needs. We need to ensure that no one will be deprived of the opportunity to receive education or continuing education for lack of financial means. To ensure the curricula quality, we will 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.** The task, albeit complicated, is essential in safeguarding the public interests. Besides, to ensure that the public moneys are put to good use, **the subsidy for students will only apply to recognised courses.**

Professional Development of Teachers

10. Apart from increasing the education opportunities at senior secondary level or above, the quality and effectiveness of basic education

¹ Public sector schools refer to schools that receive recurrent subsidy, including subsidised schools, grant schools and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools.

is also our main concern. The key is **to develop an outstanding and professional teaching force**. At present, 91% of primary teachers and 84% of secondary teachers are professionally trained, and degree holders are about 35% and 80% respectively. From the 2004/05 school year onwards, all new teachers graduating from teacher training institutions will be degree holders.

11. We set stringent demands on our teachers because what they do and say will have direct influence on our next generations. Basically, every teacher must have a solid foundation in subject knowledge and should genuinely care for the students. Excellent teachers must also have lofty sentiments and exemplary conduct; they should have a thorough understanding of learning psychology and be able to motivate students to learn; they must be equipped with good teaching skills and be able to teach students according to their aptitudes. Furthermore, they must keep abreast of the times and continue to learn as they teach.

12. To achieve these objectives, we **must first create more room for teachers** by cutting down unnecessary administration work, reducing meaningless examinations and useless home assignments, improving teaching arrangements and timetabling, strengthening community and parental support for teachers, and at the same time encouraging teachers to pursue continuing education, conduct classroom observation and share teaching experiences. As the situation of each school is different, the Education Department (ED) will provide on-site service under which officers from the Department will collaborate with teachers to work out improvement plans to enhance teachers' capacity to implement reform and to raise the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Subject to the approval of the Finance Committee, **we will increase the subsidy for schools** from this year. For example, for schools operating 19 classes or above, **each primary school will receive an additional \$550,000 each year, and each secondary school an additional \$300,000**. We will also allow schools to have **more flexibility so that they can put their resources to the best use**. To promote the professional development of teachers, we will make available in this school year a **total grant of \$23 million for the purchase of reference books on teaching and learning**. We hope that this initiative will facilitate school-based professional development.

13. On teacher training, we will collaborate with the training providers to formulate ways **to strengthen pre-service and in-service training** to be in line with the principles and direction of the education reform. We will work hand in hand with educators **to set up a**

professional development ladder for teachers and to develop a culture of life-long learning and professional self-improvement. We will also actively **consider the establishment of a General Teaching Council**. From next year onwards, the ED will **provide** new principals and teachers with **induction programmes**, and will include in the programmes for principals leadership training in professional development and curriculum design. We will also join hands with the education sector to explore how the appraisal and promotion mechanism could be improved to **reward the outstanding teachers**, and to mobilize their commitment and enthusiasm.

14. As for pre-primary education, at present the total number of qualified kindergarten teachers has already exceeded our 60% target. To further enhance teachers' qualifications, **all new kindergarten teachers are required to possess five passes in HKCEE (including Chinese and English) from the 2001/02 school year. From the 2003/04 school year, all new kindergarten teachers must have completed the pre-service training for qualified kindergarten teachers.**

15. To strengthen the professional and administrative leadership of 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, from the 2001/02 school year, a principal-ship training course.**

Reform in Curricula and Teaching Methods

16. The ultimate goal of education reform is to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The key to this lies in the reform of curricula and teaching methods. The Curriculum Development Council will consult the public and the education sector next month on the specific arrangements of curricula reform. The theme of the consultation is "Learning to Learn". Our aim is to **develop children's habit and interest in reading in the stage of early childhood**. In this connection, we will **provide a grant of \$20,000 in this school year to each non-profit making kindergarten and child care centre for the purchase of library books**. We will also **set aside \$50 million to promote parent education and home-school co-operation**, starting from the early childhood stage.

17. In primary education, we should focus on developing students' interest in reading, enabling them to be bi-literate and tri-lingual,

equipping them with the basic ability in numeracy and IT application, and enabling them to learn by themselves. We should also strengthen moral and civic education. For secondary education, the curricula will be grouped into eight learning areas to encourage all-round development. We must enable our students to learn from daily life and to put their learning into practice. Greater emphases should be put on creative thinking. Rote learning and mechanical drilling should be minimized.

18. The above changes will demand a lot more from teachers than merely “teaching by the books”. The ED will assist schools to implement curriculum integration and make arrangements for teachers to receive training, in particular, in **helping teachers to look after students of mixed abilities** and in strengthening the connection between student assessment and teaching for the purpose of devising appropriate “remedial and enhancement measures”. We have **earmarked \$10 million to provide enrichment programmes for gifted students, and will continue to promote integrated education**. It is estimated that the recurrent spending for the latter purpose will increase to \$50 million in four years.

19. The reform in curricula and teaching methods need to be developed in a new school culture. Hence, there is no shortcut for the reform. We will implement the reform step by step. Through piloting the reform measures, we will gain first-hand experience for further promotion. We will also allow a period of transition so that schools may implement the reform measures at their own pace.

Improve the Assessment and Examination Systems

20. Assessment should aim at reflecting the effectiveness of teaching for the purpose of enhancing the effectiveness of learning. To ensure that all students reach the basic standards in the key learning areas, we will **introduce the “Basic Competency Assessments in Chinese, English and Mathematics” (BCA) by phases starting from the 2001/02 school year**. The Student Assessment of the BCA 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 performances and progress. The System Assessment will show whether students in all schools have reached the basic standards in the key learning areas; the information will facilitate assessment of the effectiveness of teaching.

21. The Hong Kong Examinations Authority will also **reform**

the marking system of the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination by introducing an element of core competency to a number of key subjects to set an objective standard for the passing grade.

Improve the School Environment

22. To expedite school improvement works, we will **complete the feasibility studies for all remaining 358 schools in the School Improvement Programme by the end of 2002**. We have earmarked \$10 billion to carry out improvement works for schools, subject to the results of the feasibility studies. **Our target is to complete all the works in the 2004/05 school year**. As for schools which cannot benefit from improvement works to the existing school premises, we will consider the possibility of redevelopment or reprovisioning.

23. In addition, the Steering Committee of the **Quality Education Fund (QEF)** has agreed to provide matching funds for **public sector schools to cover 50% of the cost of installing air-conditioners in classrooms and libraries**. Schools in need may apply directly to the QEF but they have to foot half the installation cost plus the electricity bills.

Resources Support

24. Currently, the **resources spent in education account for about 4.25% of our GDP or 24% of the total government recurrent expenditure**. In the coming five years, the Government will continue to implement whole-day primary schooling, promote IT in education, expedite the Schools Improvement Programme, increase the ratio of primary graduate posts, and improve the teaching and learning of languages, etc. All these measures involve huge public resources. In addition, the various education policies announced by the Chief Executive in his Policy Address this year will entail a further \$2 billion in recurrent expenditure when implemented.

25. Nurturing talents is an important social investment in building up Hong Kong's future. Subject to the fiscal management principles stipulated in the Basic Law, the SAR Government is firmly committed to the provision of education resources if social circumstances permit and when the conditions are ripe. Meanwhile, we call upon the public to take concrete action to support education, and the education sector to use the precious resources prudently and in the most cost-effective manner.