

LegCo Panel on Education
Response to the Written Submission from the Education Convergence
on 19 July 2001

- (1) Parents who wished to appeal through the Relief Measures (RM) were required to complete an application form and return the form to the primary schools their children attended during the period from the announcement of the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) results on 17 July 2001 to noon 20 July 2001. As the application form was simple and the parents could return the form to their children's primary schools, they should have sufficient time to complete the application procedure. On 12 July 2001, the Education Department (ED) held two seminars for school heads and teachers to brief them on the RM. The school heads were requested to explain directly to the parents the application procedures. In addition, ED issued a leaflet to illustrate the RM with diagrams to parents of every Primary 6 student. ED also operated enquiry counters and 30 telephone hotlines from 8:00 am to 9:00 pm daily during 17 – 20 July 2001. Moreover, the RM information was uploaded onto the ED website. There had been enough channels for parents to understand the RM. In order not to hold up the operation of the RM, and as a consequence, delay the reallocation process, late applications were not considered.
- (2) During the court hearing, ED conveyed to the Court that the Education Commission, in accordance with the timetable for education reform, would conduct a review on the current interim SSPA System in 2003. Subject to the results, ED would introduce a new mechanism to process the internal assessments of schools in 2005. Under the new mechanism, boys and girls would be processed together. Apart from this, the percentage of discretionary places would be increased from 20% to 30%. For each primary school, students who failed to obtain a discretionary place would be divided into 3 allocation bands according to their internal assessment results. They would be allocated Secondary 1 (S1) places according to parental choices, school nets and their allocation bands. ED also explained to the Court that this new mechanism had to synchronize with the curriculum development and the other enhancement and remedial measures. If the Court did not accept ED's points of view and required adjustment to the existing allocation system, a reasonable time scale should be allowed for making the changes. In addition, if combined processing was to be

adopted immediately, ED had, for the sake of fairness, to explain clearly to all stakeholders, including parents and teachers, the impact of the change. ED would have to:

- explain to parents of 80,000-odd students about the features of the new mechanism and the differences between the new and old mechanisms, in particular the impact of the new mechanism on the allocation of school places to their children;
- allow parents to re-indicate their school choices to meet their requirements under the new mechanism; and
- conduct seminars for primary and secondary schools to explain the new mechanism and their necessary actions to comply with the new mechanism.

Since the above tasks would take at least 2 to 3 months to complete, release of allocation results would unavoidably be delayed, and the next school term might not be able to start in September 2001. At the same time, secondary schools would not be able to conduct support programmes such as bridging courses for the new S1 students or parent-teacher meetings before the commencement of the new school term.

For these reasons and to avoid the possibility that the sudden change might bring chaos and anxiety to schools, parents and students, ED considered it not appropriate to adopt combined processing this year and decided to maintain the existing SSPA system and release the allocation results on 17 July 2001 as scheduled.

During the Court hearing, we advised the Court that ED would implement relief measures to deal with appeals after the allocation results were released on 17 July 2001. The Court pointed out in its judgment that EOC had not required ED to dismantle the existing SSPA System "at a stroke". Instead, EOC urged that ED should eliminate direct sex discrimination from the SSPA System within a reasonable time scale and that, meanwhile, introduce an effective and user-friendly mechanism to deal with and to remedy complaints of sex discrimination. The measures undertaken by ED were consistent with the Court's judgment.

- (3) If students did not register with their allocated schools on 19 and 20 July 2001, they would be deemed to have given up their allocated school places. This practice has been in operation for many years and was also clearly stated in the leaflet on RM. Parents were also informed of this practice through primary schools. Therefore, parents should register with the originally allocated schools, irrespective of whether or not they would appeal under the RM. The registration did not undermine their rights of appeal.
- (4) Under the RM, simple and generous criteria were employed to identify those students likely affected by the sex discriminatory elements of the SSPA System. It should be pointed out that the SSPA System is a very complex system. Even if a student could meet the criteria, he/she might not necessarily have been affected by the separate processing for boys and girls. ED had as far as possible reallocated all the 3001 students classified as likely affected students to schools of their higher choices. The whole process was completed before 1 August 2001. If schools had vacancies on or after 1 August 2001, they were allowed to fill these vacancies at their own discretion.
- (5) Secondary schools have to admit those students allocated to them through the SSPA System, the RM and other special placement arrangements. Normally, the standard class size is 40 students per class (41 students for this year). This has been the standard figure adopted for the allocation of school places. Whether or not schools can admit more than 40 students per class is dependent on the actual size of the classrooms and other supportive facilities. There is provision under the Education Regulations, Cap. 279 governing the minimum classroom floor space for each student. If all school places in a school have been filled up, it would be difficult for the school to admit any more student.
- (6) In accordance with the RM, students reallocated to schools of their higher choices had to register with schools on 30 and 31 July 2001. Failing this, they were deemed to have given up the school places allocated to them. On and after 1 August 2001, schools could fill the remaining S1 vacancies at their own discretion. Parents were fully aware of this arrangement.

- (7) ED already completed processing all appeal cases under the RM and many students were reallocated to schools of their higher choices. At the same time, if all school places in a school have been filled up, it would be difficult for the school to admit any more students.

Education Department
September 2001