

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1861/01-02
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by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

LegCo Panel on Education

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 15 April 2002 at 4:30 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

Members Present : Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung, BBS (Chairman)
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum (Deputy Chairman)
Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP
Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, JP
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, JP
Hon LAU Kong-wah
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon SZETO Wah
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
Hon MA Fung-kwok

Members Absent : Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi

Public Officers Attending : Item IV
Mrs Cherry TSE, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (2)

Mr LEE Kwok-sung
Assistant Director of Education (Planning and Research)

Item V

Mrs Cherry TSE, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (2)

Mr LEE Kwok-sung
Assistant Director of Education (Planning and Research)

Mr H W FUNG
Acting Commissioner for Census and Statistics

Mr Alvin W K LI
Assistant Commissioner for Census and Statistics

Clerk in Attendance : Miss Flora TAI
Chief Assistant Secretary (2)2

Staff in Attendance : Mr Watson CHAN
Head (Research and Library Services)

Ms Elyssa WONG
Deputy Head (Research and Library Services)

Ms Vicky LEE
Research Officer 3

Mr Stanley MA
Senior Assistant Secretary (2)6

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I. Confirmation of minutes
[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1565/01-02 and CB(2)1566/01-02]

The minutes of the meetings held on 28 February 2002 and 18 March 2002 were confirmed.

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II. Information paper issued since the last meeting

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1568/01-02(01)]

2. Members noted that the Administration's paper entitled "Start-up loan for post-secondary education providers" was circulated to members vide CB(2)1568/01-02(01) on 11 April 2002 and the proposal would be considered by the Finance Committee at its meeting on 26 April 2002.

III. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[Appendices I and II to LC Paper No. CB(2)1563/01-02]

3. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next regular meeting scheduled for Monday, 13 May 2002 -

- (a) Capital Works projects of University Grants Committee(UGC)-funded institutions; and
- (b) Research support for the education reform.

4. The Chairman informed the meeting that the Administration would launch the public consultation on the proposed "Harmonization of kindergartens and child care centres" on 30 April 2002. The Administration had indicated that it was prepared to brief the Panel before the commencement of the consultation if members so wished. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong therefore proposed and members agreed to hold a special meeting on Friday, 26 April 2002 at 10:45 am to discuss the consultation document. The Chairman instructed that members of the Legislative Council (LegCo) Panel on Welfare Services should be invited to the meeting.

5. The Chairman invited views and suggestions on how to follow up the discussion on the report of UGC entitled "Higher Education in Hong Kong". Ms Emily LAU suggested and members agreed to hold a special meeting on Tuesday, 7 May 2002 at 2:30 pm to meet deputations from UGC-funded institutions and relevant staff associations and students unions. Members also agreed that a notice should be posted on the Council's website on the Internet to invite submissions from interested organisations and individuals.

IV. Research report on "Education Voucher System"

[LC Paper No. RP 06/01-02]

6. At the invitation of the Chairman, Head, Research and Library Services (H(RL)) briefed members on the scope and the main findings of the research report on "Education Voucher System (EVS)" with the aid of power-point

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presentation. The presentation materials were tabled at the meeting and subsequently issued vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1618/01-02(01).

Scope of an EVS

7. Ms Emily LAU considered that an ideal EVS should involve the participation of both public and private schools to create competition for providing quality education, as well as to provide diversity in education to meet parents' and students' expectations. She asked why the majority of the education voucher programmes under the research study applied to private schools only.

8. H(RL) explained that EVS was primarily aimed at increasing parental choice, promoting school competition and facilitating students of low-income families to study in private schools. These objectives were in line with theoretical models on EVS which were largely formulated on the Friedman's Model (the liberal market approach) or the Jencks' Model (the social policy approach). According to Friedman, the quality of education provided by private schools was in general better than that of their public counterparts. On the other hand, Jencks' Model advocated that EVS as a way of providing education should be designed to ensure that disadvantaged students could also gain access to quality education. In the research study, the EVS in Chile and England followed the model of Friedman and the EVS in Colombia, Milwaukee and Cleveland resembled more of Jencks' model. Deputy Head, Research and Library Services (DH(RL)) supplemented that although there was no conclusive evidence on the merits of EVS in terms of improving the quality of education, implementation of EVS did increase competition between public and private schools for providing quality education.

Education voucher programme in Chile

9. Mr SZETO Wah asked why teachers' union was ordered to be dismantled under the Chilean education voucher programme. DH(RL) explained that the Pinochet military regime of Chile had ordered the dismantlement of teachers' union in order to privatise public school teacher contracts for implementing an EVS for primary and secondary education in 1980.

Education voucher programme in Milwaukee

10. Dr YEUNG Sum asked whether EVS was considered by the relevant authority in Milwaukee as having more merits than demerits, and should be extended to other areas of education. He also asked whether EVS was implemented in other states or cities in the United States.

11. H(RL) responded that the authorities in Milwaukee had not yet decided to extend EVS to other areas of local education. Research Officer 3 (RO3) of the Research and Library Services Division (RLSD) supplemented that the Wisconsin

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Legislature required both the Department of Public Instruction (which was authorised to administer and monitor the performance of the EVS programme) and the Legislative Audit Bureau to evaluate the results of EVS in 1990, 1995 and 2000, but no conclusion was drawn on EVS so far. She added that many states and cities in the United States were considering the incorporation of EVS in their education systems. Currently, there were three cities implementing EVS in the United States, namely, Milwaukee of Wisconsin, Cleveland of Ohio and a city in Florida.

12. Dr YEUNG Sum enquired how participating schools under the Milwaukee education voucher programme would allocate their school places when the demand was larger than supply.

13. RO3 of RLSD responded that the Milwaukee education voucher programme was designed to provide low-income students with the opportunities to attend private schools. Participating schools were required to admit all eligible applicants. In case the number of applications exceeded the number of available places, enrolment of students should be determined by a lottery draw. However, preference might be given to applicants who were previously enrolled in the programme and to siblings of students.

14. Ms Emily LAU asked whether all students who preferred to enrol in a private school had been allocated a place in the private schools under the Milwaukee education voucher programme. RO3 of RSLD responded that participating private schools should enrol students with a cash voucher as long as places were available. Students could apply for enrolment to other private schools when places in schools of their first priority had already been filled.

15. Mr SZETO Wah enquired about the higher tax levy on property taxpayers in Milwaukee arising from implementing an EVS. RO3 of RLSD explained that 55% of the Milwaukee education voucher programme was funded by state general revenue and the remaining 45% by re-allocation of revenue reserved for public schools. As a result, higher property taxes were imposed to offset the deficit in funding for public schools.

Applicability to Hong Kong

16. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung noted that there were positive and negative feedback on the effects of the different EVSs covered by the research study. He asked whether EVS could be implemented in Hong Kong in the light of the experience gained from the programmes under study.

17. H(RL) responded that it was difficult to ascertain whether EVS would be feasible for implementation and beneficial to improving the quality of education in Hong Kong since there was no conclusive evidence in this respect at the present

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stage. Further researches and more information would be required before a conclusion on the pros and cons of EVS could be drawn.

18. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed reservations about the effects of EVS on improving the quality of education in the Hong Kong environment. He considered that EVS might in practice restrict rather than increase parental choice if the value of the education voucher was insufficient to cover the costs of enrolment in the better schools. He pointed out that the operation of Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) was similar to that of an EVS in that schools under the Scheme received Government grant on the one hand and school fees from parents on the other. Mr CHEUNG was worried that for the sake of cream-skimming, DSS schools providing quality education would not be willing to allocate places by a lottery draw. Instead, they would set higher fees to deter applications from less wealthy families. As a result, students of low-income families would be at a disadvantageous position in competing for admission to better schools and conflicts between different social classes might subsequently arise. Mr SZETO Wah expressed a similar view.

19. Dr YEUNG Sum considered that an EVS would inevitably fuel the already fierce competition for admission to the most famous schools and universities. He pointed out that allocation of school and university places could hardly be determined by lottery draw and the scarcity of land resources in Hong Kong had limited the supply of schools to satisfy the demand. He therefore doubted whether EVS would really have the effect of increasing parental choice and creating competition among schools for providing quality education. Mr SZETO Wah asked and (RO3) of RLSD confirmed that EVS had not been implemented in overseas countries for provision of higher education.

20. Mr TSANG Yok-sing considered that an EVS should be implemented to meet local educational needs and circumstances. He pointed out that the five overseas places had their political, economic and educational reasons for implementing an education voucher programme. He shared the view that DSS was to a certain extent an EVS in that it provided participating schools with a fixed grant for each student enrolled and autonomy in school management. In addition, DSS provided parents and students with choices in school education. Mr TSANG was of the view that the real issue should be what kinds of improvement would be needed in the present education system rather than whether EVS should be adopted in Hong Kong.

The Administration's views

21. The Chairman invited the Administration's views on the research report. In response, Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (2) (DS(EM)2) thanked RSLD of the LegCo Secretariat for preparing the research report which contained comprehensive information on EVS. She said that it should be noted that none of

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the overseas places under study had carried out a full implementation of EVS, as restrictions had been imposed either on the eligibility criteria or operation mode of participating schools. The strategies and conditions adopted in these overseas places hinged on the objectives for implementing EVS which would also affect the assessment of its outcomes. As regards the applicability of EVS to Hong Kong, DS(EM)2 said that the following issues should be considered -

- (a) whether there was a sufficient surplus of school places to enable a genuine exercise of parental choice;
- (b) whether there was adequate transparency on schools' characteristics and effectiveness;
- (c) the social implications, including whether the EVS was available to all or only to certain groups as defined by income or asset levels;
- (d) whether cream-skimming would be allowed; and if so, the extent and the resultant implications for student diversity within the same schools;
- (e) the possible consequential implications for the structure and other conditions of service of the teaching force arising from greater competition among schools; and
- (f) administrative costs for implementing EVS.

22. DS(EM)2 further said that in her opinion, DSS should not be equivalent to EVS because the former only sought to inject greater diversity and choice in the education system. The proposed credit accumulation and transfer system recommended in the UGC's report on "Higher Education in Hong Kong" which sought to facilitate greater student mobility and competition/collaboration among institutions did not amount to EVS. She pointed out that approval of the home institution and the receiving institution would be required for a student to transfer his credit. DS(EM)2 remarked that various critical issues needed to be addressed if EVS was to be implemented in tertiary education.

V. Briefing on the Summary Results of the 2001 Population Census relating to Education Matters

23. Members noted that the Administration had provided a paper which briefed members on the summary results of 2001 Population Census in the area of education with analyses on the key trends and policy implications [LC Paper No. CB(2)1563/01-02(01)].

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24. At the Chairman's invitation, Acting Commissioner for Census and Statistics (Atg C for C&S) highlighted the differences in findings in respect of the proportion of population by educational attainment, age groups, sex, type of course and field of education and subject and level of field of education between the years 1991 and 2001 as tabulated in the presentation materials [LC Paper No. CB(2) 1618/01-02(02)].

Early childhood education

25. Ms Emily LAU noted that 94.7% of the population aged 3-5 had attended pre-school education in 2001. She urged the Administration to consider providing free kindergarten education to all eligible children, similar to the provision of nine-year free basic education. She also asked about the current proportion of government subsidy to the total expenditure in kindergarten education.

26. Assistant Director of Education (Planning and Research)(AD of E (P&R)) responded that the Administration operated a Kindergarten Subsidy Scheme to encourage kindergartens to employ more qualified teachers and provided participating kindergartens with reimbursements to expenditure on rents and rates. In addition, the Kindergarten Fee Remission Scheme would be enhanced to allow more low-income families to obtain full remission of school fees from the 2002-03 school year onwards. He undertook to provide an estimate of the percentage of government subsidy to the total expenditure for kindergarten education. In this connection, DS(EM)2 pointed out that the Administration could only provide a rough estimate. Since kindergartens were privately run, the total expenditure on kindergarten education could hardly be accurately assessed.

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Secondary education

27. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong noted that the percentage of population within the age group of 15 - 24 with secondary/matriculation standard had dropped from 82.3% in 1991 to 78.8% in 2001. He asked about the percentages of the same age group who had not attended secondary education or above in 1991 and 2001.

28. In response, Atg C for C&S said that the percentage of population who had not attended secondary education or above within the age group of 15 - 24 had decreased from 4.0% in 1991 to 1.9% in 2001. He pointed out that the improvement was a result of the increase in percentage of the population of the same age group with tertiary education from 13.7% in 1991 to 19.3% in 2001.

Tertiary education

29. Dr YEUNG Sum asked how Hong Kong compared with Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Shanghai and Taiwan in respect of percentage of population with post secondary education at the age of 15 or above. Atg C for C&S pointed

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out that in this regard, the percentage of Hong Kong was slightly below that of Singapore. He undertook to provide similar information pertaining to South Korea and Taiwan as far as possible for members' reference. At Ms Emily LAU's request, Atg C for C&S also agreed to provide the Panel with further information from the 2001 Population Census relating to education.

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30. Ms Emily LAU remarked that it was very likely that Hong Kong was lagging behind its major competitors in the Asian region and cities in European countries in term of the percentage of population with tertiary education. She asked how the Administration could improve the situation. Noting that the percentage of population with tertiary education in the field of education had dropped from 7.2% in 1991 to 5.3% in 2001, Ms LAU also expressed concern about the quality of pre-service teachers who played a decisive role in enhancing quality of education in the future.

31. Atg C for C&S said that while the percentage of population with tertiary education in the field of education had dropped, the actual number had increased from 35 368 in 1991 to 48 968 in 2001. DS(EM)2 elaborated that around 52% of the population aged 15 and above had attended upper secondary school education in 2001. By a provision of some 14 500 first-year-first-degree places a year, more than 90% of students who met the minimum requirements for enrolment would be provided with university education. Recognising the need of a knowledge and globalised economy, the Administration had set in train measures to help raise the participation rate in higher education of the 17-20 age cohort to 60% by 2010. In the light of such policy objective, the provision of associate degree programmes had rapidly increased in recent years, some 30% of which fell within the field of business and commercial studies. As a result, the percentage of population with tertiary education in the field of education had dropped in the past decade.

32. Ms Emily LAU remarked that the Administration should endeavour to ensure satisfactory quality of teachers and work out measures to attract quality graduates to pursue a career in teaching. DS(EM)2 responded that the Administration had taken various measures to enhance quality of the teaching force. In this connection, Mr SZETO Wah requested and AD of E (P&R) agreed to provide information on the professional qualifications of the existing teaching workforce.

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33. Mr MAK Kwok-fung expressed concern about the decreasing percentage of population with tertiary education in the field of medical and health-related studies from 7.8% in 1991 to 6.4% in 2001. Although the actual number of participants had increased from 38 322 in 1991 to 59 092 in 2001, Mr MAK considered that the increase was insufficient to meet the increased demand for health and care services. He pointed out that there was at present a serious shortage of healthcare manpower in Hong Kong. He questioned whether the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) should be held responsible for the mismatch between the provision

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of tertiary education in medical and health-related studies and the manpower requirements of the community.

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34. DS(EM)2 explained that the manpower and hence training/education requirements of a particular profession would have to take into account the supply and demand for services rendered by that profession; and in this connection, EMB would be guided by the advice of the relevant policy bureau. She pointed out that the percentage of population with tertiary education in the field of education should be interpreted in the light of changing socio-economic circumstances. She undertook to relay Mr MAK Kwok-fung's views to the Health and Welfare Bureau for consideration.

Continuing education

35. Mr TSANG Yok-sing noted that although the percentage of population aged 15 and over with lower secondary education or below had decreased from 57.1% in 1991 to 47.8% in 2001, the size of the population had increased from 2 495 626 persons to 2 678 701 persons representing an absolute increase of 183 075 persons. Although the Government had increased the opportunities for continuing education opportunities by provision of mainly part-time and distance learning tertiary education programmes in recent years, he was concerned that persons with only lower secondary education or below would not be able to enrol in these programmes. Mr TSANG asked how the Government would help improve the educational attainment of these persons in the face of a knowledge-based economy.

36. DS(EM)2 responded that finer analyses of the age/education and other profile of the population would be needed to facilitate an informed assessment of the precise educational programmes that deserved focussed attention. Nevertheless, the Administration had worked hard, and would continue to work hard, to enhance the education opportunities and the diversity within the education system. The Administration's efforts to enlarge the number of subsidised senior secondary school places, to provide greater diversity in school curricula, to promote post-secondary education and the development of the continuing education sector were examples. In particular, the Administration had started developing a qualifications framework which aimed to set out the schema and interface of various streams of education and training, including the formal, vocational/professional and continuing sectors, so as to facilitate articulation and recognition among them. Through this, the Administration wished to foster a lifelong learning community by increasing the flexibility of the education/ training system and providing multiple entry, exit and articulation points to suit individual learners' interests, abilities and personal plans.

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VI. Any other business

37. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:30 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
10 May 2002