

LegCo Panel on Education

Harmonisation of Kindergartens and Child Care Centres

Purpose

This paper seeks Members' advice on the recommendations of the Working Party on Harmonisation of Pre-primary Services (Working Party). The problem, major recommendations and implications for stakeholders are set out in Part 2 of the attached draft Consultation Document.

Background

2. At present, the care and education needs of children up to the age of 6 are governed by two ordinances and two monitoring authorities. The issue of unification of pre-primary services has been a key concern of the pre-primary sector since the early 1980s. It was also one of the key items deliberated in the Education Commission Report No.2 (1986) and the Reconstituted Working Party on Kindergarten Education (1995).

3. In September 1999, the Education Commission (EC) recommended that the Administration should examine the issue of unifying the systems of day nurseries (DNs) and kindergartens (KGs) (para. IV. 1 of "Review of Education System: Framework for Education Reform").

Recommendations

4. The Working Party co-chaired by the Education Department (ED) and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has recommended the following -

On admission age and monitoring authority

- (a) the minimum age for pre-primary education should remain at 3 (**paragraph 15**);
- (b) the edu-care services for children aged 3 to 6 should be provided at KGs and regulated by the Education Ordinance (EO), while child care services for children aged 0 to 3 at

child care centres (CCCs) should be regulated by the Child Care Services Ordinance (CCSO) (**paragraph 17**);

- (c) KGs and CCCs may operate at the same venue. Programmes and activities should be designed according to the developmental needs of the children (**paragraph 18**);
- (d) a joint office staffed by ED and SWD officers and managed by ED should be set up to monitor the co-located education and care services (**paragraph 19**);
- (e) special child care centres (SCCCs) should continue to be placed under the supervision of SWD and regulated through the CCSO (**paragraph 20**);

On fees, subsidies and fee assistance

- (f) the criteria for assessing fees in the future KGs and DNs should be rationalized (**paragraphs 21**);
- (g) the ambit of the Kindergarten Subsidy Scheme (KSS) should be expanded to cover CCCs (in place of the existing 5% Subsidy Scheme). The rate of subsidy for day crèches (DCs) will be based on groups of eight children or part thereof, taking account of the statutory staff to children ratio of 1:8 (**paragraph 24**);
- (h) the ambit of the Kindergarten Fee Remission Scheme (KGFRS) should be expanded to replace the existing Child Care Centre Fee Assistance Scheme (CCCFAS) to cover children who have a social need for, and are attending, full-time programmes in DCs/DNs. The KGFRS will also be modified so that the full-day rate for KG students is only payable upon proof of “social needs”, for example, to release the single parent to go out to work. (**paragraphs 26 and 27**);
- (i) upon harmonization of the financial assistance schemes as recommended in (h) above, the “no worse-off” principle will apply to beneficiaries under the existing KGFRS and CCCFAS until the children concerned leave the KGs/DNs/DCs (**paragraph 28**);

On staffing standards and operational requirements

- (j) the minimum ratio of KG teacher/child care worker to children aged 2 to 6 should be 1:15. The minimum ratio for children aged 0 to 2 should remain at 1:8;

- (k) the minimum floor space requirement for children aged 2 to 6 should be based on the existing standard for DNs of 1.8 m² per child including net activity areas for children but excluding ancillary areas. The requirement for children aged 0 to 2 will remain unchanged, i.e. 2.8 m² per child with activity areas included, or 3.3 m² per child with both activity areas and ancillary areas included;

On the qualification of KG teachers and child care workers

- (l) the basic qualification for appointment as a KG teacher or a child care worker should be the “qualified kindergarten teacher qualification”¹ or equivalent. However, efforts should be made by KG and CCC operators to encourage and facilitate their staff to acquire higher qualifications;

On quality assurance

- (m) existing DNs converting to KGs should adopt the current performance indicators for KGs;
- (n) the quality assurance mechanism for KGs should take a two-pronged approach: self-evaluation at the school level and external evaluation at the territory-wide level;
- (o) the current monitoring system for DCs should continue for future CCCs; and

On implementation

- (p) a Special Team should be set up to take charge of implementation details, and to further consider operational requirements relating to the planning mechanism for the provision of premises, safety measures and school facilities.

5. The background and justifications for these recommendations are detailed in the attached draft Consultation Document. Recommendations (a) to (i), which are key issues of concern for the pre-primary sector and directly involve the needs of the children and parents, the scope of services and financial support from the Government, are highlighted in the following paragraphs.

¹ This target will be achieved by the 2004/05 school year.

Justifications

Guiding principles

6. The Working Party has adopted the following principles in its deliberation on harmonisation -

- (a) the developmental and educational needs of children should always be put in the first place;
- (b) the diversity and scope of existing services should not be reduced;
- (c) the opportunity should be taken to enhance the quality of services; and
- (d) the effectiveness of regulatory work should be further improved.

Quality pre-primary services

7. Children at different ages have distinct developmental characteristics and needs. The key to quality pre-primary services is appropriate programmes to cater for the different needs of children at different ages, irrespective of the mode of operation of service (viz. half-day / full-day, age-group served) or the regulatory body / mechanism. To ensure that institutions offer appropriate programmes, the Working Party considers that it is essential to -

- (a) promote parent education, so that parents are more aware of the harmful effects of “over-education” and have more understanding about quality pre-primary services;
- (b) enhance the professionalism of frontline workers and operators. Operators / supervisors should steer their institutions in the right direction and help frontline workers better grasp the skills of designing appropriate programmes for the children;
- (c) strengthen the interface between pre-primary and primary education to avoid unnecessary pressure on pre-primary institutions for pre-mature drilling or excessive training; and
- (d) vigorously monitor the service delivery.

Existing pre-primary services

8. As at September 2001², out of an estimated 174 000 children aged between 3 and 6 in the whole of Hong Kong (excluding those in primary schools), 85% attended KGs and 15% DNs.

9. Among the KG pupils, over 95% of them attended half-day sessions. Two-thirds were in non-profit-making (NPM) KGs and the remaining one-third attended private independent (PI) KGs.

10. To cater for the various needs of children and parents, child care services are provided by -

- (a) aided DNs which provide whole-day services to meet the social needs of parents;
- (b) non-aided DNs where most places are half-day (see para 11(c));
- (c) SCCCs which provide rehabilitation, training and edu-care to children who have special needs and aged 2 to 6;
- (d) DCs which serve infants and toddlers up to the age of 2;
- (e) ancillary services, including occasional child care service and extended hours service, attached to DNs, DCs and SCCCs;
- (f) mutual help child care centres which provide occasional child care services to not more than 14 children under the age of 6; and
- (g) supervised child-minding services which are operated by some non-governmental organizations with some basic training and support offered to child-minders.

11. While the main purpose of these child care services is to address the social needs of parents, the following characteristics are noticed in recent developments -

- (a) more middle-class families have enrolled their children in aided or private DNs for socialisation purposes more than social need;
- (b) notwithstanding that the minimum admission age is 2, about 30% of the children attending aided DNs enter at the age of 3; and

² Taking into account all age groups, there were some 191 500 children attending either DNs or KGs. The percentages of children attending DNs and KGs were 18% and 82% respectively.

- (c) an emerging trend of PIKGs operating DNs in part of their original KG premises³. Children generally stay in the DNs for one year and then progress to the related KGs.

Characteristics of young children

12. Children aged 0-2 have distinct needs and require intensive care and individual attention. They need prompt response from adults who are to help, guide and encourage them individually. Family is the best and most natural environment for their growth and development.

13. Children aged 2 still require intensive care and attention because they are energetic but unaware of danger. Most of them are self-centred. They do not understand the concept of sharing as shown by their solitary and parallel play. Education experts consider that at this age children learn better in a one-to-one situation. Because of their limited vocabulary, 2-year-old children may find it difficult to understand instructions in a group environment. Hence, these children are not ready for pre-primary education.

14. Children aged 3 have developed better co-ordination of their limbs, a longer attention span, better mastery of vocabulary and can take part in two-way communication. They are more ready to socialize and interact with their peers to foster their social and emotional development.

Admission age for pre-primary education

15. Having regard to the developmental needs of children as explained in paragraphs 12-14 above, the Working Party recommends that the minimum age⁴ for pre-primary education should remain at 3. To tie in with the admission age of 5 years 8 months at Primary One, flexibility should be allowed for KGs to admit children aged 2 years 8 months or more as at 31 August of the year, and appropriate programmes should be designed to cater for the needs of this younger group.

³ As at September 2001, 51 PIKGs and 5 NPMKGs have registered part of their original KG premises as DNs. There are in addition some PIKGs operating DNs in separate premises in the vicinity. These institutions are called co-registered centres.

⁴ A review conducted by the Hong Kong Institute of Education in 1999 indicates that none of the ten countries studied provided KG education for children aged below 3.

Governance arrangements

16. As children's development is a continuum, one option is to have one governance authority overseeing all edu-care services for children aged 0 to 6 to ensure coherence, continuity and diversities in such services. Programmes with different emphases on care and education will cater for different needs of children at different ages.

17. In most countries/regions, KGs and CCCs are regulated by different government departments (Ministry of Education; Social Services Department/Social and Health Department) and subject to different ordinances (Education Ordinance; Child Welfare/Service Ordinance). For Hong Kong, the desirability of having one single authority in the long term has to be further considered in the context of the interface of the early developmental programmes for infants and young children and their care needs arising from social factors. Accordingly, the Working Party recommends that for the time being a clear distinction should be made between child care and education by maintaining two ordinances and two Government departments to oversee their operation. This will send a clear signal to parents that pre-primary education should not start until the age of 3. On this basis, ED will regulate through the EO the edu-care services provided by KGs for children aged 3 to 6. SWD will regulate through the CCSO the child care services provided by CCCs for children at or below the age of 3. These ordinances will be amended accordingly to reflect the change.

Service delivery mode

18. In order not to limit parental choice and to provide flexibility for operators to meet different needs, the Working Party recommends that service providers may operate KGs and CCCs at the same venue. Indeed, DNs are already catering to children aged 2 to 6 and so are co-registered centres (see note 3). Under the proposed arrangement, it will not be necessary for the KG and DN sections to maintain separate toilet/sick bay facilities. Programmes and activities will be designed according to the developmental needs of the children.

A joint office

19. In the light of the recommendation at paragraph 18, all existing DNs and co-registered centres will automatically come under both the CCSO and EO. To provide one-stop services to these operators and parents, the Working Party recommends the establishment of one joint office to monitor these KG-cum-DNs. The joint office will be managed by ED and staffed by ED and SWD officers who will monitor the co-located education and care services in accordance with the EO and CCSO.

Governance arrangement for centres serving children with special needs

20. Services for children with special needs have their rehabilitation functions and special nature. The Working Party recommends that SCCCs covering children up to the age of 6 should continue to be regulated under the CCSO as a distinct category and should remain under the monitoring of SWD. While these children are catered for by rehabilitation services in SCCCs, there should be multiple exit points at appropriate ages for them to receive education in integrated programmes at KGs, special schools, or mainstream schools if they are assessed to be suitable.

Assessment of inclusive fees

21. To strike a balance between the existing practices of DNs and KGs, while at the same time considering reasonableness, the Working Party recommends the following in harmonising the fee assessment criteria for future KGs and DNs -

- (a) reasonable above-standard staff provision can be recognized in the fee assessment;
- (b) lunch fees should be collected separately;
- (c) expenses on air-conditioning should be subsumed in the inclusive fees; and
- (d) a surplus of not more than 5% will be allowed for NPMKGs to build up reserves for measures to enhance the quality of services. For PIKGs, the Working Party would welcome views on whether the profit margin should be set at 10% or 15%.

22. The existing fee assessment mechanism for DCs should continue to apply in the future.

Subsidies for service providers

23. At present, aided and NPM DNs/DCs and NPMKGs are eligible to apply for reimbursement of rent, rates and government rent. In addition, aided DNs and aided DCs receive a direct subsidy equivalent to 5% of the fee approved on the basis of the approved capacity, while NPMKGs may receive grants under the KSS, the terms of which have been enhanced with effect from 2002.

24. As KGs and CCCs are both offering services to pre-primary children, the Working Party considers that the same mechanism for determining subsidy should be available to both types of institutions. It recommends expanding the ambit of the KSS to CCCs to replace the existing 5% Subsidy Scheme. The rate of subsidy for KGs and DNs will be based on groups of 15 children while that for DCs on groups of eight children which is the statutory staff to children ratio.

Financial assistance to parents

25. For KGs, financial assistance to parents is provided through a means-tested KGFRS. Both whole-day and half-day pupils are eligible for fee remission. The scheme will be improved as from the 2002/03 school year, with three levels of assistance (100%, 75% and 50% remission) and a common means-testing mechanism that will apply to all student financial assistance schemes, from KG to tertiary levels. For parents who send their children to DNs and DCs for whole-day care, we provide financial assistance through a mean-tested CCCFAS according to a sliding scale, with a parental contribution based on income and with no pre-set ceiling.

26. Similar to subsidies for service providers, the Working Party considers it appropriate to have one single means-testing mechanism for determining financial assistance to all pre-primary children and proposes to adopt the newly improved KGFRS. Accordingly, the Working Party recommends that the ambit of the KGFRS should be expanded to replace the CCCFAS and cover children aged 0 to 6.

27. From an educational point of view, a half-day KG programme will suffice for children aged 3 to 6. The assistance for these children should therefore be calculated on the basis of the school fee for half-day KGs. The purpose of a full-day programme is to add care elements in response to social needs or parental choice. The full-day rates of fee remission for KG pupils should only be payable when the families have also passed a social need⁵ test, for example, to release the single parent to go out to work.. As for children aged 0 to 3 attending DCs/DNs, financial assistance will continue to be available only to those with social needs attending full-time programmes. The amounts of fee remission would be based on the lower of the actual fees charged and the weighted average fee of NPM KGs/DNs/DCs as appropriate.

28. Upon harmonization of the financial assistance schemes, the “no worse-off” principle will apply to beneficiaries under the existing KGFRS and CCCFAS until the children concerned leave the KGs/DNs/DCs.

⁵ The social need criteria are set out in the Appendix to Part 5 of the draft consultation document.

Consultation

29. The Working Party organised a total of nine focus group meetings to solicit the views of representatives of training institutes, operators, frontline workers and parents. Besides, members of the Working Party have also taken other opportunities, such as briefing sessions, formal and informal meetings, written enquiries / suggestions, etc. to collect the sector's views on the future of pre-primary services. The Working Party has in its deliberations taken fully into account the views expressed.

Way Forward

30. We will launch a 2-month public consultation exercise until 30 June 2002.

Advice Sought

31. Members are invited to comment on the recommendations of the Working Party.

Education and Manpower Bureau
Health and Welfare Bureau

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**Working Party on
Harmonisation of Pre-primary Services**

Consultation Document

Education Department
Social Welfare Department

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Part 1

Introduction

Background

1.1 At present, kindergartens (KGs) admit children aged 3 to 6 and are registered under the Education Ordinance (EO). Child care centres (CCCs), comprising day nurseries (DNs) which admit children aged 2 to 6 and day crèches (DCs) for infants and toddlers up to the age of 2, are registered under the Child Care Services Ordinance (CCSO). As DNs and KGs are providing similar services to a similar target group, there has been suggestion that they should be subject to similar requirements, registered under the same ordinance and monitored by one single authority.

1.2 Since the early 1980s, the issues of improving the quality, and unifying the system, of pre-primary services have been key concerns of the pre-primary sector. Various recommendations have been made in the White Paper on Primary Education and Pre-Primary Services (1981), the Education Commission Report No. 2 (1986) and the Report of the Reconstituted Working Party on Kindergarten Education (1995). Unification of pre-primary services has been considered as a long term goal. The foremost task is to raise service quality while harmonizing the different aspects of DNs and KGs.

1.3 Over the past years, many aspects of DNs and KGs have been harmonised, including a common “Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum”, harmonised qualification/training requirements and pay scales for child care workers and KG teachers. The remaining operational differences, summarized at the Appendix, are either to serve different needs of clients or can be removed administratively. However, there are still a few key issues to be resolved, namely the admission age, subsidies for service providers and fee assistance/remission to parents.

The Working Party on Harmonisation of Pre-Primary Services

1.4 In September 1999, the Education Commission recommended that the Administration should examine the issue of unifying the systems of DNs and KGs (para. IV.1 of “Review of Education System: Framework for Education Reform”). In April 2000, the Working Party on Harmonisation

of Pre-Primary Services (the Working Party) was formed. Its terms of reference are -

“to advise the Government on matters related to the harmonisation of pre-primary services, with special reference to the long term goal of unification of practices between child care centres and kindergartens and formulation of implementation strategies for pursuing this long term goal, in the light of government policies, societal demands, and developmental and educational needs of local children”.

1.5 Children at different ages have distinct developmental characteristics and needs. The Working Party considers that the key to quality pre-primary services is appropriate programmes to cater for the different needs of children at different developmental ages, irrespective of the mode of operation (viz. half-day/full-day, age-group served) or the regulatory body/mechanism. To ensure that pre-primary institutions offer appropriate programmes, it is essential to -

- (a) promote parent education, so that parents are more aware of the harmful effects of “over-education” and have more understanding about quality pre-primary services;
- (b) enhance the professionalism of frontline workers and operators, so that operators/supervisors will steer their institutions in the right direction and frontline workers will better grasp the skills of designing appropriate programmes for the children;
- (c) strengthen the interface between pre-primary and primary education to avoid unnecessary pressure on pre-primary institutions for pre-mature drilling or excessive training; and
- (d) vigorously monitor service delivery.

1.6 In formulating proposals, the Working Party considers that harmonisation, and the long-term goal of unification, of pre-primary services should be pursued on the basis of the following principles -

- (a) the developmental and educational needs of children should always be put in the first place;
- (b) the diversity and scope of existing services should not be reduced;

- (c) the opportunity should be taken to enhance the quality of services; and
- (d) the effectiveness of regulatory work should be further improved.

Involvement of the Sector

1.7 In exploring the way forward, the Working Party treasures very much the views and suggestions of professionals and stakeholders of pre-primary services. Nine focus group meetings were held to solicit views from representatives of training institutes, operators, frontline workers and parents. Members of the Working Party have also taken other opportunities, such as briefing sessions, formal and informal meetings, written enquiries/suggestions, to collect the sector's views on the future of pre-primary services. Views collected from various channels have been carefully considered.

Public Consultation

1.8 The Working Party welcomes views on the recommendations set out in this document, and will take all suggestions into consideration in formulating the final recommendations.

**Major Operational Differences
Between Existing Day Nurseries and Kindergartens**

Aspects	Day Nurseries	Kindergartens
Admission age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> children aged 2 to 6 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children aged 3 to 6 Flexibility allowed to admit children having reached the age of 2 years 8 months as at 31 August of the year
Staff to children ratio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1:14 at all levels for both half-day or full-day programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For the current school year: 1:15 for Nursery classes; 1:20 for full-day Lower and Upper KG classes; and 1:30 for half-day Lower and Upper classes The improved ratio of 1:15 will be extended to Lower KG classes in the 2002/03 school year, and to all classes in the 2003/04 school year
Trained staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 2/3 of the total number of the staff of the centre should be trained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 60% of teachers should be qualified KG teachers.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (Note: New recruits for both DNs and KGs must have received pre-service training as from August 2003) 	
Floor space for children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.8 m² per child with area of any passageway, store room, kitchen, office, toilet facility or staff room <u>excluded</u>; OR 2.3 m² per child with area of any passageway, store room, kitchen, office, toilet facility or staff room <u>included</u>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0.9 m² per child in the classroom It is also recommended that where outdoor facilities are not available, there should be an indoor play area equivalent to the size of 1 classroom for every 2 classrooms.
First aid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 1 employee in every centre shall hold a valid certificate of competency in first aid. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 2 teachers in every school should be trained in administering first aid.
Kitchen (if full-day programmes are offered)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of kitchen is required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is acceptable to have meals supplied by licensed caterers.

Aspects	Day Nurseries	Kindergartens
Fire precaution system (for full-day operation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smoke detection system is required. If the area exceeds 230m², a sprinkler system is also required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only smoke detection system is required.
Toilet facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unisex toilets are provided. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Separate toilets are provided for each sex.
Holidays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public holidays 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approved holiday list (usually not exceeding 90 days per school year)
Inclement weather	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centres close when Typhoon Signal No. 8 or Black Rainstorm Signal is hoisted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KGs close when Typhoon Signal No. 3 is hoisted or deteriorating weather (such as Red Rainstorm Signal).
Operating hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 a.m. – 6 p.m. (Some centers have even longer service hours) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time-tabled activities should be over by 4:30 p.m. each day for full-day classes (at Lower and Upper KG levels). Full-day Nursery classes are not allowed.
Financial assistance: - for parents - for operators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child Care Centre Fee Assistance Scheme Reimbursement of rent, rates and Government rent 5% Subsidy Scheme Capital grant for initial fitting-out, furniture and equipment (Lotteries Fund Grants) Major repairs, replacement of furniture and equipment (Lotteries Fund Grants) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kindergarten Fee Remission Scheme Reimbursement of rent, rates and Government rent Kindergarten Subsidy Scheme
Ancillary services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Occasional Child Care Service Extended Hours Service Integrated Programme for Mildly Disabled Children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrated Kindergartens for Mildly Disabled Children

Part 2

The Problem, Major Recommendations and Implications for Stakeholders

The Problem

At present, day nurseries and kindergartens, both of which include children aged 3 to 6 as their service targets, are regulated by two authorities (i.e. Education Department and Social Welfare Department) under two ordinances (i.e. Education Ordinance and Child Care Services Ordinance). This has led to disparities in the delivery of service and financial assistance to children. It has also created inconvenience and confusion to operators and parents.

Major Recommendations

- Harmonising the regulatory framework
 - Through the Education Ordinance, the Education Department (ED) will regulate all edu-care services for children aged 3 to 6. These institutions will be called kindergartens (KGs). They may continue to admit children reaching the age of 2 years 8 months as at 31 August of the year.
 - Through the Child Care Services Ordinance, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) will regulate care services for children aged 0 to 3. These institutions will be called child care centres (comprising day nurseries (DNs) for children aged 2 to 3 and / or day crèches (DCs) for children aged 0 to 2).
 - KGs may operate a DN in the same premises for children aged 2 to 3. These KG-cum-DNs will have dual registration under the Education Ordinance and the Child Care Services Ordinance. Their applications will be processed by a joint office under ED which will comprise both ED and SWD staff to provide “one-stop” service.
 - Service providers may also operate a DC cum DN in the same premises to provide a through-train care service for children aged 0 to 3.

- Sufficient training places will be provided to ensure that there will be a fully-qualified pre-primary teaching/child care workforce by the 2004/05 school year.
 - Additional training places at Certificate in Education / Associate Degree level will be provided to encourage continual upgrading of staff qualification.

- Harmonising the financial assistance schemes for parents
 - An enhanced Kindergarten Fee Remission Scheme (KGFRS) will take effect from the 2002/03 school year.
 - The ambit of the enhanced KGFRS will be expanded to cover CCCs to replace the existing Child Care Centre Fee Assistance Scheme (CCCFAS) for children attending full-day programmes.
 - The administration of financial assistance will be simplified and better understood by potential applicants. The means-testing mechanism adopted for primary, secondary and tertiary students will apply to all pre-primary children. The Student Financial Assistance Agency will centrally process all applications.

- Harmonising the subsidy schemes for service providers
 - Non-profit-making DN and DC operators with reasonable enrolment will receive a higher level of grant under the expanded Kindergarten Subsidy Scheme than the existing 5% Subsidy Scheme. This would help to keep down the fee level.

Implications for Key Stakeholders

- Children in KGs (156 200 as at September 2001)
 - The enhanced KGFRS will benefit some 40 000 KG pupils.
 - About 5% of KG pupils attend full-day classes. Those newly admitted after harmonisation has been in place (tentatively scheduled for 2003/04) will have to pass a social need test for the grant of the full-day rate of fee remission, e.g. to release the

single parent to go out to work. Otherwise, they will only receive remission at the half-day session rate.

- Existing beneficiaries (including those children enrolling for the first time in the 2002/03 school year) will not be affected.
 - Parents may choose to send their children to a KG or KG-cum-DN depending on when they wish their children to receive education service. Their children may stay with the same institution until they go to a primary school.
- Children in DNs (35 300 as at September 2001)
 - Parents will receive the same financial assistance as if their children were to attend KGs.
 - Existing beneficiaries (including those children enrolling for the first time in the 2002/03 school year) will not be affected.
 - Children aged 3-6 attending a half-day DN session is now not eligible for financial assistance under the CCCFAS but will become eligible under the new arrangement.
 - Children may remain in the DN or DN-turned-KG until they go to a primary school.
 - Children in DCs (940 as at September 2001)
 - Parents will receive financial assistance under the same scheme applicable to KGs and DNs.
 - Existing beneficiaries (including those children enrolling for the first time in the 2002/03 school year) will not be affected.
 - The current small market share of day crèches indicates that only those parents with social needs and no other alternatives will choose to place their young children aged 0 to 2 under full-day institutional care. In line with the objective to promote home and family care to cater for characteristics of young children, a variety of non-institutional care such as day foster care, supervised child-minding and mutual help child care

services will be promoted as the preferred option for children under the age of 3, particularly those aged 0 to 2.

- Service Providers

- All non-profit-making service providers covering children from 0 to 6 will be eligible for subsidy under the same scheme. DNs / DCs with reasonable enrolment will receive more subsidy which will help enhance the quality of service and / or reduce fees.
- Service providers who cater for children aged 0 to 3, or 3 to 6 will only have to deal with one set of regulations and one regulator.
- Existing DNs serving children aged 2-6 may register as a KG serving children aged 3-6 by completing certain formalities. There would be no further vetting of eligibility. If these centres continue to operate a DN in the same premises for children aged 2-3, they will have dual registration under the Education Ordinance and the Child Care Services Ordinance. It will however not be necessary for the KG and DN sections to maintain separate toilet/sick bay facilities.
- KG-cum-DNs which serve children aged 2 to 6 will have to follow different regulations in respect of services for children aged 2 to 3, and 3 to 6, but will only have to deal with one joint office staffed by ED and SWD officers.
- In considering whether to operate future CCCs, existing DCs and DNs will need to take into account parental preference as indicated by the current low enrolment in DCs, and the Government's efforts in promoting other services for children under the age of 3, particularly those aged 0 to 2.

Part 3

Unification of Pre-Primary Services

Role and Function of Pre-Primary Services

3.1 Internationally, it is recognized that quality services for young children must integrate education and care elements to meet children's needs. In the local context, both CCCs and KGs are providing edu-care services, though they have different emphases, with CCCs focusing more on care and KGs more on education.

3.2 We consider that pre-primary services should continue to play the dual roles of providing child care and education. The social needs of parents as well as the developmental characteristics and learning needs of children at different stages should be carefully considered. We also consider that children under the age of 3 should best be taken care of by their parents at home. The current small market share of day crèches as compared with that of day nurseries indicates that only those parents with social needs and no other alternatives will choose to place their young children aged 0-2 under full- day institutional care. While the policy is for pre-primary education to start at the age of 3, those below the age of 3, particularly the group of 0-2, should as far as possible be taken care of in their own families.

Developmental Characteristics and Learning Needs of Children

Characteristics of Children aged 0 to 2

3.3 Children aged from birth to 2 require intensive care and individual attention. They are forming their trust in others and begin to develop a sense of attachment to adults. They look for autonomy as reflected by the wish to hold their feeding bottles and to reach the toys themselves. They are at the stage of learning through the five senses, as shown by putting things in their mouths and a strong desire to grasp items that attract their attention.

3.4 Children begin to learn since birth. From birth to the age of 2, they learn to master the basic movements, such as sitting, crawling, standing, walking, etc. They need prompt response from adults who are to

help, guide and encourage them individually. Family is the best and most natural environment for their growth.

Characteristics of 2-year-olds

3.5 Children aged 2 still require intensive care and attention because they are usually energetic but unaware of danger. They are developing their links between language and thinking, as well as their individual identity. They can use limited vocabulary to express their wishes. However, their pronunciation may not be accurate and their language still includes some self-created words or sounds. Besides, their attention span is short and they have limited self-control.

3.6 They are self-centred and do not understand the concept of sharing as shown by their solitary or parallel play. Though they can wait for their turn and take part in simple play activities under the guidance of adults, they easily feel jealous and unhappy when their peers distract the attention of adults from them. They need constant attention and assistance from adults. Hence, they are not yet ready for socialization through interaction with peers.

Characteristics of 3-year-olds

3.7 Children at the age of 3 have developed better co-ordination of their limbs, as shown by their ability to eat by themselves with spoons and forks, to dress and undress, to do up and undo simple buttons, etc. They have better mastery of vocabulary, can better understand adults' instructions and use simple language to express their wish and feelings. They like to sing simple songs or nursery rhymes, imitate words and phrases and can formulate short sentences. They also have a longer attention span and are able to concentrate on listening to simple stories.

3.8 They tend to play by themselves at the beginning but gradually get into the habit of sharing toys with others. Some children, however, remain egocentric and often want others to do what they want, resulting in frequent antagonistic behaviour. Adults need to guide them patiently.

Recommendations

Minimum Age for Pre-primary Education

3.9 Having regard to the developmental needs of children, We recommend that the minimum age for pre-primary education should remain at 3. To tie in with the admission age of 5 years 8 months at Primary One,

flexibility should be allowed for KGs to admit children aged 2 years 8 months or more as at 31 August of the year.

Governance Arrangements of Pre-primary Services

3.10 Children's development at various stages is a continuum. One option is for one authority to oversee all edu-care services for children aged 0 to 6 to ensure coherence, continuity and diversity in such services. Programmes with different emphases on care and education will cater for different needs of children at different ages.

3.11 In most countries/regions, KGs and CCCs are regulated by different government departments (Ministry of Education; Social Services Department/Social and Health Department) and subject to different ordinances (Education Ordinance; Child Welfare/Service Ordinance). For Hong Kong, the desirability of having one single authority in the long term has to be further considered in the context of the interface of the early developmental programmes for infants and young children and their care needs arising from social factors. Accordingly, we recommend that for the time being a clear distinction should be made between child care and education by maintaining two ordinances and two Government departments to oversee their operation. This is to send a clear signal to parents that pre-primary education does not start until the age of 3.

3.12 With this distinction, the Education Department (ED) will regulate through the Education Ordinance (EO) services for children aged between 3 and 6, which are more education-oriented. These institutions will be called KGs. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) will regulate through the Child Care Services Ordinance (CCSO) services for children aged below 3, which are more care-oriented and more welfare-related in nature. These institutions will be called CCCs.

Service Delivery Mode

3.13 At present, there are over 300 operators running services for children aged between 2 and 6 at the same venue. These include some 250 aided DNs and over 50 KGs operating DNs in part of the original KG premises. In order not to limit parental choice and to provide flexibility for operators to meet different needs, we recommend that service providers may operate KGs and CCCs at the same venue under the auspices of two ordinances.

A Joint Office

3.14 To provide one-stop services to operators / parents and better monitoring of both services, the Working Party recommends that one joint office, managed by ED and staffed by SWD and ED officers, should be established to monitor the co-located education and care services in accordance with the EO and CCSO.

Pre-primary Services for Children with Special Needs

3.15 Services for children with special needs have their distinct nature. In view of their rehabilitation functions, we recommend that special child care centres (SCCCs) should continue to be regulated through the CCSO and remain under the monitoring of SWD. While these children are catered for by rehabilitation services in SCCC, there should be multiple exit points at appropriate ages for them to receive education in integrated programmes at KGs, special schools or mainstream schools if they are assessed to be suitable.

Parents' Role

3.16 Many overseas researchers now give a renewed prominence to the parents' role in a child's early years from birth to the age of 3, which is the most critical and vulnerable time in a child's development. There are also observations that too early imposed or over-scheduling of activities to a young child will hamper creativity. Some studies therefore concluded that it is not imperative to have children aged under 3 in an organized setting for learning, unless their working parents do not have other choices.

3.17 Hence, though care and education can be provided in the same premises, it should not become a venue to start structured learning in advance. While pre-primary services are responsive to parental choices, there is an urgent need to promote parent education, so that parents are more aware of their roles in nurturing their children and adopt appropriate criteria in choosing the services for their children.

3.18 To relieve parents' concern on preparing their children to cope with the requirements at Primary One, primary school teachers should adjust the pace of teaching and offer support in school routines to ensure "pleasurable and effective learning" at the beginning of primary education, and to avoid pressure of pre-mature learning and drilling in CCCs and KGs.

Part 4

Staffing Standards and Operational Requirements

Overview

4.1 As recommended in paragraph 3.12, future pre-primary services to be provided by mainstream pre-primary institutions should be grouped into two main types:

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Target-group</u>	<u>Service Content</u>
Child Care Centre	0 to 3 years old	More care-oriented
Kindergarten	3 to 6 years old	More education-oriented

Kindergartens

4.2 Professionals generally agree that the core learning activities at pre-primary level can be provided in a half-day programme. To cater for the social needs of some families, we recommend that full-day programmes up to 6:00 p.m. may also be allowed at all levels. Operation during school holidays and inclement weather (such as Red Rainstorm Signal and Typhoon Signal No. 3) will be determined by the demand and nature of services provided by the centre.

Child Care Centres

4.3 CCCs are mainly to cater for families in need of full-day care services for children from birth to the age of 3. To offer more choices to suit parents' various needs, half-day sessions may continue to be allowed.

Other Child Care Support to Parents

4.4 Other forms of child care support in the community, such as day foster care, supervised child-minding, and mutual help child care service should be encouraged to provide flexible child care alternatives for parents. Mutual help child care centres, which are operated by non-profit-making organizations, are currently available to provide temporary care to not more than 14 children aged under 6. These centres help to build a support network on a district level and promote the spirit of mutual help in the neighbourhood. Supervised child-minding service is operated by some

non-governmental organizations with some basic training and support offered to the child-minders. In the long run, a variety of non-institutional care will be promoted as the preferred option for children under the age of 3, particularly those aged 0 to 2.

Ancillary Services

4.5 As at present, integrated programmes will be provided for children aged 2 to 6 in selected KGs and DNs. Other ancillary services, including occasional child care service and extended hours service, will also be provided in CCCs and KGs on demand.

Staff to Children Ratio

Present Requirements

4.6 The statutory staff to children ratios in DCs and DNs are 1:8 and 1:14 respectively. Starting from the 2001/02 school year, the teacher to pupil ratio in KGs is being improved to 1:15 in phases over 3 years. By 2003/04, a teacher to pupil ratio of 1:15 should be achieved at all study levels.

Recommendations

4.7 There is a marginal difference between the staffing ratios for DNs and KGs. In the case of KGs, we note that they are in the process of improving the teacher to pupil ratio and it would be undesirable to make further changes in the near future. In addition, given that the number of children attending KGs¹ is far greater than those in DNs, we recommend adopting the ratio of 1:15 for all children aged 2 to 6 as the minimum standard. We further recommend that operators consider adopting a more generous staffing ratio to give children more individual attention. With this further recommendation, we believe that the level of service rendered to children currently in DNs would be maintained or even improved.

4.8 For children aged 0 to 2, we recommend that the existing statutory staff to children ratio of 1:8 should be retained as the minimum standard. This has taken into account the relatively younger age of the children and more care-oriented nature of the services.

¹ Taking into account all age groups, there were some 191 500 children attending either DNs or KGs as at September 2001. The percentages of children attending DNs and KGs were 18% and 82% respectively.

Floor Space Requirements for Children

Present Requirements

4.9 The statutory minimum floor space requirement for each pupil in a KG classroom is 0.9m². In the Manual of Kindergarten Practice (1994), it is recommended that where outdoor facilities are not possible, there should be an indoor play area equivalent to the size of one classroom for every two classrooms in the school. KGs in public housing estates and many private residential developments have largely adopted this recommendation.

4.10 For CCCs, the statutory minimum floor space requirements for each child are:

- (a) 2.8m² (for DCs) and 1.8m² (for DNs) per child with the area of any passageway, storeroom, kitchen, office, toilet facility or staff-room excluded; or
- (b) 3.3m² (for DCs) and 2.3m² (for DNs) per child with the area of any passageway, storeroom, kitchen, office, toilet facility or staff-room included.

Recommendations

4.11 We observe that DNs with large ancillary areas, though satisfying the minimum standard of 2.3m² per child, might be too congested in terms of activity areas for children. We therefore recommend abolishing this option in the future. Instead, new DNs and KGs (excluding those converted from existing DNs) should follow the current requirement of 1.8m² per child inclusive of indoor activity areas, but exclusive of other ancillary area.

4.12 We recommend no change for DCs.

Provision of Kitchen

Present Requirements

4.13 At present, DNs/DCs offering full-day services are required to have a kitchen to provide meals for their children. For KGs, it is acceptable for meals to be supplied by licensed caterers.

Recommendation

4.14 In the light of experience in DNs/DCs and KGs, we recommend that service providers should be given flexibility to provide meals either through their own kitchens or licensed caterers.

Other Requirements

Recommendations

4.15 At present, there are different requirements between CCCs and KGs in respect of the fire precaution system, first aid training of staff, provision of toilet facilities (unisex toilets or separate toilet for each sex), nap facilities, etc. As input from other professionals, such as the Fire Services Department, medical practitioners, psychologists, etc. will be required, we recommend that these issues should be further studied by a Special Team to be set up to plan and administer the unification process. The Special Team will also consider the planning mechanism for the provision of premises.

Part 5

Subsidies, Fees and Fee Assistance

Assistance to Service Providers

Present situation

5.1 Non-profit-making (NPM) KGs are eligible for reimbursement of rent, rates and government rent. In September 1995, the Government introduced the Kindergarten Subsidy Scheme (KSS) to provide a further subsidy to NPMKGs so that they may employ more qualified kindergarten teachers (QKTs) and meet the proportion of QKTs required without having to increase school fees substantially. KGs joining the KSS must meet the requirement on the percentage of QKTs, pay teachers according to the recommended salary scales, and charge school fees not exceeding 1.5 times of the weighted average school fee of NPM KGs in the previous school year.

5.2 The KSS was revised in the 1998/99 school year and reviewed again in the 2000/01 school year. An enhanced scheme has been approved for implementation in 2002.

5.3 Aided and NPM DN/DCs are also eligible for reimbursement of rent, rates and government rent. Some aided DN/DCs receive, in addition, reimbursement of management fee and air-conditioning fee because of site constraints which render air-conditioning necessary. In 1982, a 5% Subsidy Scheme was introduced for aided DN/DCs to provide financial assistance to operators to cover cash flow problems arising from fluctuations in enrolment and to meet unexpected increase in operating costs.

5.4 In addition, aided and NPM DN/DCs may apply to the Lotteries Fund for setting up grants for new projects and for fitting-out works, renovation and repair of the premises and purchase/replacement of furniture and equipment.

Recommendations

5.5 As KGs and CCCs are both offering services to pre-primary children, we consider that the same mechanism for determining financial assistance should be available to both types of institutions as follows -

- (a) NPMKGs and NPM/aided CCCs may continue to receive reimbursement of rent, rates and government rent for accommodation appropriate to approved capacity which may be reviewed if necessary;
- (b) the reimbursement of management fees and air-conditioning fees to future KGs converted from DNs may continue, but should be restricted to existing recipients;
- (c) the 5% Subsidy Scheme for CCCs will no longer be in place. Instead, the ambit of the KSS should be expanded to cover CCCs. The rate of subsidy for DCs will be based on groups of eight children or part thereof, taking full account of the statutory staff to children ratio of 1:8; and
- (d) similar to CCCs, NPM KGs may apply for grants under the Lotteries Fund if they meet the following conditions -
 - provision of full-day programmes at all levels (i.e. nursery, lower kindergarten and upper kindergarten);
 - provision of services from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm, Monday to Friday; 8:00 am to 1:00 pm on Saturday; during school holidays and inclement weather including Typhoon Signal No.3 or Red Rainstorm Signal; and
 - provision of ancillary services: extended hours service/occasional child care service/integrated programme for mildly disabled children as required.

Assessment of Inclusive Fees

Present Situation

5.6 At present, the fee components for DNs/DCs and KGs differ as follows -

- (a) for aided DNs/DCs, staff cost is based on a standard establishment and provision above this standard is not recognized for fee assessment. For KGs, a teacher to pupil ratio reasonably above the recommended requirement can be recognized for fee assessment;

- (b) lunch fees are included in the inclusive fees of full-day DNs/DCs but are collected separately in KGs;
- (c) air-conditioning fees are collected separately in DNs/DCs but are included in the inclusive fees of KGs; and
- (d) private, NPM and aided DNs/DCs are allowed a surplus of 15%, 5% and 0% respectively. A surplus of 5% and 10% is allowed for NPM and private independent (PI) KGs respectively.

Recommendations

5.7 We recommend that the following items may be recognized for fee assessment purpose of future KGs and DNs -

- (a) reasonable above-standard staff provision, which helps improve service quality, can be included;
- (b) expenses on air-conditioning should be subsumed in the inclusive fees;
- (c) the cost of food and employing cook(s) should be reflected in the lunch fee which is to be charged separately; and
- (d) a surplus of not more than 5% will be allowed for NPMKGs to build up reserves for measures to enhance the quality of services. For PIKGs, the Working Party would welcome views on whether the profit margin should be set at 10% or 15%.

5.8 The existing fee assessment mechanism for DCs should continue in the future.

Assistance to Parents

Present Situation

5.9 At present, the Child Care Centre Fee Assistance Scheme (CCCFAS) is available to children attending DCs and DNs, while the Kindergarten Fee Remission Scheme (KGFRS) provides assistance to KG

pupils. Both schemes are means-tested and aim at providing financial assistance to low income families but their objectives are quite different.

5.10 To be eligible for CCCFAS, a family also has to demonstrate a social need for child care, for example, to release the single parent to go out to work. It provides assistance on a sliding scale with a parental contribution based on income, with no pre-set ceiling. On the other hand, the KGFRS is to ensure that no children will be deprived of KG education due to a lack of means. Applicants are not required to prove their social need. Both half-day and full-day children are eligible at rates appropriate to half-day and full-day sessions.

Recommendations

5.11 In the course of our deliberation, we did consider improving the KGFRS to facilitate its interface with the CCCFAS. We are pleased to note that the Administration has subsequently sought approval to enhance the KGFRS as from the 2002/03 school year. Under the enhanced scheme, there will be three levels of assistance (100%, 75% and 50% remission) and a common means-testing mechanism that will apply to all student financial assistance schemes, from KG to tertiary levels.

5.12 Similar to subsidies for service providers, we consider it appropriate to have one single means-testing mechanism for determining financial assistance to all pre-primary children and propose to adopt the newly enhanced KGFRS. Accordingly, we recommend that the ambit of the KGFRS should be expanded to replace the CCCFAS and cover children aged 0 to 6. The Student Financial Assistance Agency will centrally process all applications.

5.13 From an educational point of view, a half-day KG programme will suffice for children aged 3 to 6. The assistance for these children should therefore be calculated on the basis of the school fee for half-day KGs. The purpose of a full-day programme is to add care elements in response to social needs or parental choice. The full-day rates of fee remission for KG pupils should only be payable when the families have also passed a social need test (see criteria at Appendix).

5.14 With regard to children aged 0 to 3 attending DCs/DNs, we recommend that financial assistance should continue to be available to those with social needs attending full-day programmes. The amounts of fee remission for children in KGs/DNs/DCs would be based on the lower of the actual fees charged and the weighted average fee of the respective type of institutions.

5.15 Upon harmonisation of the financial assistance schemes as recommended in paragraphs 5.11-5.14 above, the “no worse-off” principle will apply to beneficiaries under the existing KGFRS and CCCFAS, i.e. if they will receive less assistance under the revised scheme, they will continue to receive assistance under the existing schemes until the children concerned leave the KGs/DNs/DCs.

Criteria for Assessing Social Need

- Category (a) Children who cannot receive proper care at home as a result of one parent working full-time and the other working 104 hours or more in a month
- Category (b) Children whose parents are chronically ill, disabled, or in long-term hospital care -
- (i) Children with a parent in hospital who is likely to require long-term hospitalization or long period of convalescence after discharge
 - (ii) Children with a parent suffering from ill health such as carcinoma, kidney disease, tuberculosis, venouscardiac disease, etc
 - (iii) Children with a parent who is physically or mentally handicapped or mentally ill
- Category (c) Children of single-parent families or children from broken families -
- (i) Children whose parents are widowed, divorced, separated or deserted
 - (ii) Children of unmarried parents, i.e. born out of wedlock, not under the care of both parents
 - (iii) Orphans/semi-orphans under the care of relatives
- Category (d) Children themselves having a need for full day care -
- (i) Mild-grade mentally retarded children and those having a slight physical handicap admitted under the Integrated Programme (cases usually referred by medical staff)
 - (ii) Children being members of twins and triplets etc (at least one other child under 6 must be resident in the family)
 - (iii) Children who are victims of child abuse
 - (iv) Children with a parent who is a drug abuser or alcoholic or is aged, and is considered as being unable to exercise proper care of the children
 - (v) Children with a parent or guardian in prison or absent from home or other valid reason for long periods of time

- Category (e) Children considered to have need for care because of special conditions of other family members -
- (i) Children with parents who have to take care of a family member who is physically or mentally handicapped, chronically ill, senile, aged (over 70), or incapable of self-care
- Category (f) Children from large families -
- (i) Children with two or more siblings (at least two children aged below 6 must be resident in the family)
 - (ii) Children from families with four or more children aged below 12 (at least three children must be resident in the family)
- Category (g) Other cases recommended by social workers -
- Any child referred and recommended by social workers

Part 6

Kindergarten Teachers and Child Care Workers

Policy Objectives

6.1 The following policy objectives have been announced to enhance the professionalism of KG teachers and principals / child care workers (CCWs) and child care centre supervisors (CCSs) -

- (a) raising the entry requirements of KG teachers/CCWs from two passes in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (including one language subject) to five passes, including both Chinese and English, from the 2001/2002 school year;
- (b) requiring all newly appointed KG teachers/CCWs to possess pre-service Qualified Kindergarten Teacher (QKT) training from the 2003/2004 school year;
- (c) requiring all newly appointed KG principals to possess a Certificate in Education (Early Childhood Education) [CE(ECE)] as from September 2002;
- (d) requiring all serving KG principals/CCSs to have received CE(ECE) training by the 2005/2006 school year;
- (e) introducing from the 2001/2002 school year a tailor-made principal-ship training course for KG principals/CCSs; and
- (f) requiring all KGs to employ 100% QKTs by the 2004/05 school year.

Increased Provision of Training Opportunities

6.2 To facilitate achievement of the above policy objectives, the Government has made special provision to supplement the normal output of QKTs from tertiary / vocational institutions. We started commissioning one-year pre-service early childhood education courses in the 2000/01 school year with 200 places. This has been increased to 440 places in the 2001/02 school year.

6.3 As for more advanced training, the Government formed an expert group with training institutions in 2001 to produce a common core framework for the CE(ECE) course. Awards from training institutions following this core framework are recognized as fulfilling the academic requirement for appointment as KG principal / CCSs. A programme for additional training provision for the CE(ECE) course (with an initial 40 places) has started in the 2001/02 school year.

6.4 To strengthen and revitalize the knowledge and skills of KG principals/CCSs and to equip them as more effective leaders in the pre-primary field, the Government initiated a tailor-made principal-ship training course in the 2001/2002 school year to provide 120 training places annually. The course includes a short study visit outside Hong Kong to widen the experience of course members.

A Fully-trained Pre-primary Workforce

6.5 As at October 2001, there were 8 778 KG teaching staff, with 6 221 (70%) of whom possessing a QKT or higher qualification. As for CCCs, there were a total of 4 162 serving child care staff. Among them, 3 835 (92%) have already completed training.

6.6 A recent survey indicates that the majority of KG operators are prepared to release their unqualified teachers for training. As for trainee CCWs, they are required by statute to complete their training within one year upon taking up employment. The Government has made available sufficient training places for all unqualified pre-primary staff to receive the necessary in-service training to become qualified by September 2004. We are therefore confident that the target of a fully trained pre-primary workforce will be attained by the 2004/05 school year.

6.7 We would like to remind serving untrained pre-primary staff to acquire the necessary qualification in the 2002/03 and 2003/04 school years. Serving untrained teachers above the required staff establishment, calculated on a teacher to pupil ratio of 1:15, will be tolerated only as teaching assistants in the 2004/05 school year and afterwards.

Recommendations

6.8 As explained above, we will have attained our target of a fully-trained pre-primary workforce by September 2004. We recommend no change to this basic qualification (i.e., QKT or equivalent) for the time being. As a long-term goal of providing a professional and life-long learning ladder for pre-primary practitioners, we recommend that efforts should be made by KG and CCC operators to encourage and facilitate their staff to acquire higher qualifications such as a CE(ECE) or an associate degree in ECE.

Part 7

Quality Assurance Mechanism

Present Situation

7.1 In monitoring the quality of pre-primary services, both ED and SWD have adopted a pressure and support strategy: pressure is exerted through inspections and support is provided through in-service training, curriculum guidelines and related documents, as well as subsidies for non-profit-making operators.

Monitoring of Kindergarten Education

7.2 ED considers that schools should be the centres for improvement and that the most effective quality assurance mechanism would be through the complementary processes of self-evaluation by schools and external evaluation.

7.3 To provide KGs and the external evaluators with clear quality performance measures, ED has issued the *Performance Indicators for Pre-primary Institutions* to KGs for reference. ED has also produced a handbook on self-evaluation by schools. Seminars/ workshops are also organized to equip KG principals and teachers with the basic knowledge and skills on the subject.

7.4 To enhance transparency, ED publishes annually a profile containing basic information of KGs. Starting from the 2000/01 school year, Quality Assurance Inspection (QAI) has been adopted for KGs and reports of QAI will be uploaded to the ED Homepage in the 2001/02 school year. Other visits, such as compliance visits and complaint visits, are also conducted.

Monitoring of Child Care Centres

7.5 The Inspectors of SWD pay surprise visits to child care centres to ensure that the centres have complied with the legal requirements. Starting from 1999, the performance of aided DNs/DCs is assessed on the basis of Funding and Service Agreements and a generic set of 16 Service Quality Standards (SQSs). As with other subvented service units, DNs/DCs have to submit annual self-assessment reports and receive external assessment once every three years.

Recommendations

Future Monitoring of KGs

7.6 We recommend the adoption of a two-pronged approach to quality assurance (QA), i.e. internal quality assurance through self-evaluation and improvement at school level and external evaluation at the territory-wide level.

7.7 To provide clear, specific, reliable and valid criteria to measure various aspects of performance, the *Performance Indicators for Pre-primary Institutions* will be further refined with exemplars. These indicators will also be adopted by DNs converting to KGs. In the meantime, KGs are also encouraged to develop institution-based performance indicators for self-evaluation.

7.8 To assist KGs in the process of self-evaluation, ED will provide support through in-service education programmes, disseminating good practices through seminars and district networking, assistance in development/ action planning, production of relevant guidelines/ handbooks, establishing QA resource centres, etc.

7.9 When the culture of self-evaluation is well established, KGs will continuously review and evaluate their own progress, identify areas for improvement and plan for necessary follow-up actions. They should also keep parents informed of their self-evaluation findings.

7.10 We also recommend that upon unification, NPMKGs receiving government subsidies should be required to conduct annual self-evaluation. External evaluation will be conducted by ED/Joint Office in the form of self-evaluation audit. The composition of external evaluation teams could include members from early childhood academics, professionals and front-line practitioners.

7.11 KGs not receiving government subsidies should be encouraged and induced by market force to conduct self-evaluation and to appoint external authorities to conduct external audit. They should also be subject to random audit inspections by ED/Joint Office on a need basis.

7.12 We consider that regular inspections by ED should continue to ensure the service quality and that advice given to the institutions is followed. Assistance on remedy should also be given. ED should exercise power under the EO and Education Regulations as appropriate should performance continue to be unsatisfactory.

7.13 We further recommend that in the longer term, researches relating to QA should be conducted and a database should be set up to provide relevant information to support KGs in conducting self-evaluation and planning improvement measures. Furthermore, in view of the continuous economic and social changes, the criteria on quality pre-primary education need to be developed and reviewed.

Future Monitoring of CCCs

7.14 We recommend that the monitoring of future CCCs should be maintained in the current mode. Inspection visits and internal/external assessment will continue to be conducted. The Inspectors of SWD will visit the centres to ensure that they have complied with the legal requirements. Advice and support for improvement of service quality will also be provided to the service operators. The internal/external assessment will be carried out to ensure that the centres have complied with the requirements as set out in the current 16 SQSs.

Part 8

Implementation Strategies and Concluding Remarks

General Principles

8.1 We consider that the unification of pre-primary services should be pursued with the primary concern on the needs of children and parents. To ensure that the measures are appropriate and the unification process is smooth, the following factors are considered essential -

- (a) participation of the sector in planning the implementation details;
- (b) the scope and provision of existing services to be maintained or enhanced;
- (c) sufficient time for the sector and parents to prepare for the changes; and
- (d) close co-ordination of the departments concerned, particularly ED and SWD.

Implementation Plan

8.2 The tasks ahead in achieving unification of pre-primary services will have significant implications on the sector, parents and children, requiring the input and close co-operation of ED and SWD and the professionals concerned. Hence, we recommend the setting up of a Steering Group to steer and a Special Team to administer the implementation details. The Steering Group will be made up of representatives from ED, SWD and the sector, while the Special Team will comprise professional staff from ED and SWD. Other government departments, bureaux and concerned parties will be invited to give their views whenever necessary.

8.3 Subject to the Government's endorsement of the Working Party's recommendations, the unification measures will be implemented by phases starting from 2002. One of the major tasks is to amend the Child Care Services Ordinance/Regulations and the Education

Ordinance/Regulations and to prepare new codes of practices. Stakeholders will be consulted whenever necessary. It is expected that the process will be completed by end 2004.

Concluding Remarks

8.4 Views of stakeholders and the general public will be essential to ensure that the Working Party's recommendations meet the needs of children and parents. You are welcome to send your views to ED or SWD by post, by fax or by e-mail **on or before 30 June 2002** -

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8.5 The Working Party will hold a series of seminars to hear your views. You are welcome to participate in these seminars to discuss the Working Party's recommendations.