

立法會

Legislative Council

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Report of the Panel on Education for submission to the Legislative Council 2001-2002

Purpose

The report gives an account of the work of the Panel on Education during the 2001-2002 Legislative Council (LegCo) session. It will be tabled at the Council meeting on 3 July 2002 in accordance with Rule 77(14) of the Rules of Procedure of the Council.

The Panel

2. The Panel was formed by a resolution passed by the Council on 8 July 1998 and as amended on 20 December 2000 for the purpose of monitoring and examining Government policies and issues of public concern relating to education matters. The terms of reference of the Panel are in **Appendix I**.

3. The Panel comprises 18 members, with Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung and Dr Hon YEUNG Sum as Chairman and Deputy Chairman respectively. The membership list of the Panel is in **Appendix II**.

Major work

Kindergarten (KG) Subsidy Scheme

4. The Administration briefed the Panel on the revised proposal of improving the KG Subsidy Scheme which aimed to encourage KGs to employ 100% qualified KG teachers and revise the disbursement mechanism to ensure effective use of resources.

5. Members in general welcomed the revised proposal as it would provide for a progressive phase-in arrangement so that the impact of the enhanced KG Subsidy Scheme on KG operating smaller classes would be minimised. However, members were concerned that as class size was a critical factor in the quality of early childhood

education, some KGs were still operating classes of large size. The Administration explained that the enhanced Scheme based on a group grant instead of a class grant would help reduce the class size in KGs. The Administration also informed the Panel that all KGs should meet the required teacher-pupil ratio of 1:15 for all levels of study by the 2003-04 school year, and KG classes comprising 16-30 and 31-45 pupils must be supervised by two and three teachers respectively.

Harmonisation of KGs and child care centres

6. The Administration consulted the Panel on the recommendations of the Working Party on Harmonisation of Pre-primary Services on the harmonisation of KGs and child care centres. Members noted that pre-primary services after harmonisation would still be governed by two ordinances and two monitoring authorities. Some members considered that for continuity purposes, pre-primary services should best be governed by one ordinance and monitored by one authority only. The Administration explained that the Working Party recommended that the minimum age for pre-primary education should remain at three. A clear distinction should therefore be made between child care and education by maintaining two ordinances and two Government departments to oversee their operation.

7. Some members also expressed reservations about the new KG Fee Remission Scheme recommended by the Working Party. Under the new Scheme, assistance to parents would be calculated on the basis of the school fee for half-day KGs only, and families would need to pass the social need test in order to receive full-day rates of fee remission. The Administration explained that from an education point of view, a half-day KG programme would suffice for children aged from three to six. The purpose of a full-day programme was to add care elements in response to social need or parental choice. The Administration further pointed out that the number of children attending full-day KGs who would be affected by the new KG Fee Remission Scheme would be very small.

8. Some members remained of the view that in unifying the existing assistance schemes for KGs and child care centres, the Administration should maintain the same level of subsidies to both existing and future beneficiaries irrespective of the number of children affected. They pointed out that parents should be allowed to choose, on the basis of educational considerations, either a full-day or half-day KG programme for their children and receive assistance accordingly.

Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) system and school internal assessments

9. The High Court ruled in June 2001 that the gender-based features of the original SSPA system were unlawfully sex-discriminatory. The Panel monitored closely the work of the Education Department (ED) to implement the relief measures to assist students who might have been affected by the 2001 SSPA and draw up proposals for a long-term replacement of the allocation system which would comply with the ruling.

10. The Panel received a report by ED on the implementation of the relief measures under the 2001 SSPA. The Panel also discussed the changes which would be introduced to the 2002 SSPA system by ED in order to comply with the ruling of the High Court.

11. Members noted that the school internal assessment results of students would continue to be a major deciding factor in SSPA. The Administration assured members that ED would encourage schools to adopt a greater variety of assessment methods and formats on broader content areas to assess students' diversified abilities and achievement fairly. Members considered that ED should conduct extensive research and public consultation before putting forward any major changes to the school internal assessment mechanism. They requested that the new assessment mechanism should be designed to assess the performance of boys and girls on a fair basis, rather than to cater for the differences in physical and cognitive development between them.

Curriculum reform

12. The Panel received a progress report on curriculum reform. Members supported the ED's initiative to provide each public sector school with an additional teacher as a curriculum development leader for five years from the 2002-03 school year. However, they considered that a curriculum development leader should have an all-round vision of the curriculum reform and be provided with sufficient room for performing their role and functions in the reform process. The Administration advised that schools would be suggested to assign around 50% of the average teaching workload of a subject teacher to their curriculum development leaders, and ED would provide them with necessary training.

13. Members pointed out that university admission system would have an impact on school curriculum. They requested that curriculum reform must dovetail with the programme requirements of local universities. The Administration informed the Panel that the Education Commission (EC) had established a working group to examine issues relating to the implementation of a three-year senior secondary education and a four-year degree programmes, and the interface between different stages of education. The Panel would follow up the issue when the recommendations of the working group were available.

Implementation of the "through-train" mode

14. The Administration briefed the Panel on the arrangements for implementing the "through-train" mode which sought to strengthen the collaboration between primary and secondary schools. Members noted that "through-train" schools must have the same education philosophy in order to provide students with a coherent learning experience.

15. Members stressed that the Administration must ensure that “through-train” schools would not become a closed system. They requested the Administration to ensure that popular existing secondary schools turning into “through-train” schools should reserve sufficient number of secondary one places for admitting students of other primary schools through discretionary places and central allocation.

Quality Education Fund (QEF)

16. Following the publication of the report of the Public Accounts Committee which raised a number of concerns about the management of QEF, the Panel held a special meeting to follow up the issue with organisations concerned, the QEF Steering Committee and the Administration.

17. In the light of the comments made by the organisations concerned about the assessment criteria and management of QEF, members considered that the QEF Steering Committee should improve transparency of the assessment mechanism, in consultation with the stakeholders. The QEF Steering Committee informed the Panel that a dedicated working group had been set up to devise improvement measures, and the Management Services Agency had been invited to conduct a management and process review. In addition, a survey covering both successful and unsuccessful applicants of QEF would be conducted to obtain feedback and suggestions.

18. Some members also pointed out that it appeared to be in conflict with the purpose of QEF if successful projects could not be disseminated to schools due to resources constraints, and that schools could not continue to implement their successful projects due to the one-off nature of QEF funding. The Administration explained that QEF had funded a total of 4 341 projects since its establishment, many of which were quality and successful projects, sufficient resources were simply not available to implement all these innovative initiatives in school education.

19. Members expressed concern that QEF had been used as a supplementary fund-provider for ED, and in particular some of the ED projects involved an approved grant of over \$10 million. They pointed out that it was tantamount to circumventing the normal financial control of LegCo over public expenditure. Although the Administration had agreed to report QEF grants exceeding \$10 million to the Panel, some members considered the arrangement inadequate, and that approval of the Finance Committee should be required. The Panel would revisit the issue when QEF had completed its overall review.

Information technology (IT) in education

20. The Administration briefed the Panel on the key findings and recommendations of the interim review of the five-year strategy on IT in education. Members expressed concern that despite the improvement in the computer-to-student ratio in recent years, students' access to IT facilities outside normal school hours were often

limited. They were also disappointed that only 560 of around 1 300 primary and secondary schools had used the incentive grant scheme to prolong the opening hours of their IT facilities. The Administration advised that starting from 2001-02 school year, all public sector primary and secondary schools had been provided with the incentive grant for making their IT facilities available for student access after school hours. ED would also encourage schools to extend the opening hours of IT facilities and open these facilities up on Saturdays and Sundays.

21. The Administration also consulted the Panel on the proposal for ED to continue to provide funding support to the Hong Kong Education City (EdCity) project upon the expiry of the QEF grant on 31 August 2002. Members in general supported setting up a non-profit-making limited company wholly owned by the Government to manage the EdCity project because it would allow ED's steer over the direction and operation of the project, while providing flexibility to the operation of the company. They considered it important to hold the Government responsible for maintaining the quality of IT education services provided by the EdCity.

22. Members also considered that the provision of sufficient and appropriate software for teaching and learning was imperative in promoting the quality of school education. The Administration advised that the IT Education Resources Centre of ED was collaborating with the tertiary education sector, EdCity and IT professionals in software development for teaching and learning in school education. The software for teaching and learning would be made available in EdCity's web-site on the Internet.

Native-speaking English Teacher (NET) and English Language Teaching Assistant (ELTA) Schemes in public-sector primary schools

23. The Panel discussed the implementation of NET and ELTA Schemes in public-sector primary schools with effect from the 2002-03 school year. Members expressed support for extending the NET and ELTA Schemes to public-sector primary schools as improving language ability of students should start at primary education. However, members expressed reservations about the Administration's proposal of providing NETs to schools on a sharing basis, with one NET serving two schools. They queried how a NET could effectively enhance the language learning environment of two schools.

24. The Administration explained that the proposal was put forward on practical considerations as some schools might not be fully ready to take on a full-time NET. ED would also have difficulties in recruiting sufficient number of NETs for every school. Given the recruitment difficulties of NETs, members considered that the Administration should provide better support services to serving NETs in order to reduce the turnover rate and exercise flexibility in the recruitment of NETs. They also requested that the Administration should seriously consider the feasibility and effectiveness of allocating one NET for two primary schools.

Regulation of private schools offering non-formal curriculum (PSNFCs)

25. The Administration briefed the Panel on the measures proposed by ED to step up control through self-reporting by schools on essential information, increase the transparency of the performance and operating standard of PSNFCs, reinforce consumer education and enhance consumer protection. Members noted that ED would exempt PSNFCs with a good track record from the requirement of collecting fees on a monthly basis, if they had secured full protection for students by way of an insurance coverage or bank guarantee to guard against any financial loss of students in case of abrupt school closures.

26. Some members expressed concern that individual students might still suffer financial loss if exempted PSNFCs ran into financial difficulties. They suggested that there should be a limit to the number of monthly fee to be collected in advance by these PSNFCs, and the Administration should explore the feasibility of securing insurance coverage for individual students. The Administration informed the Panel that ED would encourage the trade to set up a compensation fund to facilitate self-regulation and protection of students' interests in the long term. The Administration would also determine carefully the terms and conditions of an exemption granted to a PSNFC.

27. Members stressed that ED should maintain close supervision over the operation of PSNFCs and should not leave the task to the trade for self-regulation. The Administration assured the Panel that ED would explore ways to step up monitoring and control of PSNFCs within resources constraints, including strengthening enforcement work under the Education Ordinance, without over-regulating the trade.

Support for students with specific learning difficulties

28. The Panel discussed the problems faced by students with specific learning difficulties and their families, as well as the support provided by ED with the Hong Kong Association for Specific Learning Difficulties and the Administration.

29. Members were of the view that early identification of students with specific learning difficulties was imperative in helping these students and facilitating the planning for the provision of support. The Administration informed the Panel that the "Hong Kong Test of Specific Learning Difficulties in Reading and Writing" jointly developed by the University of Hong Kong, Chinese University of Hong Kong and ED had been published to enhance identification of students with specific learning difficulties. The "Hong Kong Specific Learning Difficulties Behaviour Checklist for Primary One Students" had also been introduced to enhance early identification of children with specific learning difficulties and provision of timely intervention.

30. Members considered that subject to compliance with the Disability Discrimination Ordinance, it might be beneficial, as an interim measure, for students

with specific learning difficulties to be accommodated in schools which were equipped with qualified staffing and necessary facilities. Given the special needs of these students, members also considered that the Hong Kong Examinations Authority should adopt accommodative measures for them to sit for public examinations. The Panel would follow up the issue after the Administration had discussed with the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Hong Kong Examinations Authority accordingly.

Improvements to student financial assistance schemes

31. The Administration briefed members on its recommendations to improve and rationalise various student financial assistance schemes administered by the Student Financial Assistance Agency. Some members pointed out that it was unfair that under the revised student financial assistance schemes for primary and secondary students, only half of the assistance would be granted if the monthly income of a family slightly exceeded the maximum level of income for a family eligible for full assistance. They considered that in line with the proposed KG Fee Remission Scheme, the financial assistance schemes should at least set a new 75% level of assistance.

32. The Administration explained that the 75% level of fee remission under the KG Fee Remission Scheme was proposed on the EC's recommendation that Government should relax eligibility criteria of the means-tested assistance schemes for pre-school students and increase the level of assistance to benefit more families. The Administration undertook to consider members' suggestion in future reviews of Student Financial Assistance Schemes.

Higher Education Review

33. The University Grants Committee (UGC) briefed the Panel on the Review Report on Higher Education in Hong Kong. The Panel also received views from academics, staff associations and students' unions in the higher education sector and other concern organisations, and discussed the Review Report with the Administration and UGC.

34. Some members shared the grave concerns of staff associations in the higher education sector about the proposal of delinking the terms and conditions of service of staff of UGC-funded institutions from the civil service pay and conditions (the "delinking" proposal) which was put forward in the Review Report. Members objecting to the proposal considered that it would eventually bring about reduction of funding allocation to higher education, decrease in staff salary levels, and adverse effects on staff morale.

35. Members pointed out that if the concerns of the staff associations about the "delinking" proposal could not be addressed, it would be difficult to rely on the support of stakeholders in the higher education sector to push ahead with the reform measures proposed in the Review Report. They considered that the Administration

must give an undertaking that funding allocation to higher education would not be reduced after implementation of the "delinking" proposal, and there should be a fair and transparent mechanism for making the salary differentiation when the proposal was implemented.

36. UGC had advised that provision of flexible remuneration package for the recruitment of academics of the highest standing was the prevailing international trend, and the "delinking" proposal was put forward as an integral part of the strategic developments for certain UGC-funded institutions to achieve international excellence. It was also the UGC's view that the Administration must give an undertaking that the funding allocation to higher education would not be affected by implementation of the "delinking" proposal, when the budget-neutral concept was adopted in public finance, and institutions must be provided with adequate funding if they chose to retain the linkage of their terms and conditions of service of their staff with the civil service pay and conditions.

37. The Administration stressed that it was not the policy intent to reduce funding allocation to higher education by way of the "delinking" proposal. The Administration considered that the proposal was worth consideration as a further deregulatory step to provide institutions with greater flexibility in recruiting and retaining talent. The Administration would work out a concrete funding mechanism with UGC if the "delinking" proposal was to be implemented.

38. Some members also objected to the proposed provision of associate degree and sub-degree programmes on a self-financing basis. They were concerned that if a majority of associate degree and sub-degree programmes would not be publicly-funded, many students simply could not afford to pay the high programme fees and had to rely on loans to pursue their studies. As a result, the social mobility of students from low-income families would be unfairly blocked. These members further pointed out that UGC-funded institutions currently receiving public funds for provision of sub-degree programmes would be severely affected during the transition from full subsidy to self-financing. Under the circumstances, they expressed doubts whether the policy objective of enabling 60% secondary school leavers to receive post-secondary education could be achieved.

39. The Administration advised that it was the Government's policy to ensure that no eligible students would be deprived of their rights to education for a lack of financial means. The Government provided financial assistance to students in commensuration with their family or personal income through the Student Financial Assistance Agency. The Administration also pointed out that programmes which met specific manpower needs and programmes which required protection to survive would remain to be publicly-funded.

40. Some members expressed concern about the protection of academic freedom and institutional autonomy in the context of limited resources allocated to higher education and mission differentiation among institutions. UGC advised that the

purpose of mission differentiation among UGC-funded institutions was to strategically identify their strengths as the focus of public and private sector support, with the explicit intention of creating institutions capable of competing at the highest international levels. UGC stressed that there should be clear diversity of missions in publicly-funded institutions to ensure cost-effective use of scarce resources and to meet the development needs of the community. UGC would develop performance indicators to assess the outputs of teaching and research, which would be incorporated in the development of mission- and performance-related funding mechanisms.

41. The Chairman of the Panel, Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung, moved a motion on the Report for debate at the Council meeting on 26 June 2002.

Administration of UGC-funded institutions

42. The administration of UGC-funded institutions had been a major area of concern to the Panel. The Panel discussed supervision of the administration of UGC-funded institutions with staff associations of the institutions, concern organisations, UGC and the Administration. Some members considered that the scope of institutional autonomy should not be narrowly interpreted as the power of the management of an institution to manage the affairs of the institution because other stakeholders of the institution including staff and students should also have their say. These members also pointed out that there should be an effective mechanism for handling staff grievances and appeal within the higher education sector and that mechanism must be accepted by all stakeholders in the sector.

43. Members expressed grave concern about the allegations made by some concern organisations regarding the irregularities in the review mechanism for non-renewal for contract in the School of Law at the City University of Hong Kong (CityU). The Panel held a special meeting to discuss the issue with staff associations, students' union, student representatives, concern organisations, UGC and the Administration.

44. Members noted that the Appeal Committee which was appointed by the President of CityU to consider appeals from seven affected staff members in the School of Law at CityU had concluded that there existed procedural and other flaws in the evaluation process undertaken by the School Staffing Committee. Some members considered that the flaws in the evaluation process undertaken by the School Staffing Committee were very serious, and those who had committed serious mistakes in the process should be held responsible.

45. Members in general expressed support for the principle of institutional autonomy of UGC-funded institutions. They considered that LegCo should refrain from interfering with the internal administration of tertiary institutions. Some members felt strongly that the Council of CityU should appoint an independent committee to investigate the procedural and other flaws identified by the Appeal Committee. The Panel would keep in view the development of the matter.

46. The Panel held a meeting to discuss the implementation of the Management-Initiated Retirement Scheme (MIRS) with the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIED), Association of Lecturers of HKIED, concern organisations, UGC and the Administration. Most members understood that HKIED needed to implement the MIRS in order to fulfil its new mission of providing predominantly degree and postgraduate programmes by 2005. However, they were concerned that the MIRS had not been implemented in a fair, open and transparent manner. The Panel passed a motion urging HKIED to suspend the MIRS immediately and solve the problems through peaceful negotiations with all staff. The Panel had also set up a subcommittee to follow up the matter. The Subcommittee had held one meeting and requested information from HKIED on the progress of work of the working group established by the Council of HKIED to explore the possibility of improving the retirement package for affected staff members on frozen pension terms and assisting the affected staff in seeking other employment opportunities.

Other issues

47. The Panel had requested the Research and Library Services Division to conduct a research on education voucher system and its implementation in overseas places. When the Panel was briefed on the research report, some members expressed reservations about the effects of education voucher system on improving the quality of education in Hong Kong. They considered that the real issue was how the present education system should be improved.

48. The Administration briefed the Panel on the Chief Executive's 2001 Policy Objectives and summary results of 2001 Population Census in the area of education. The Panel also received briefing from the Administration on a number of financial and public works proposals, including enhancing the rate of Capacity Enhancement Grant for secondary schools, enhancing staffing support to EC as well as the research capacity in the Education and Manpower Bureau, enhancing support for education and manpower policy making in the Education and Manpower Bureau, the Student Exchange Programmes and Scholarship Scheme for Mainland students of UGC-funded institutions, constructing a Landmark Building and a Multi-media Building for CityU, and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University Phase 7 development.

49. During the period between October 2001 and June 2002, the Panel held a total of 14 meetings. Panel members also visited the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and three kindergartens.

Legislative Council

Panel on Education

Terms of Reference

1. To monitor and examine Government policies and issues of public concern relating to education matters.
2. To provide a forum for the exchange and dissemination of views on the above policy matters.
3. To receive briefings and to formulate views on any major legislative or financial proposals in respect of the above policy area prior to their formal introduction to the Council or Finance Committee.
4. To monitor and examine, to the extent it considers necessary, the above policy matters referred to it by a member of the Panel or by the House Committee.
5. To make reports to the Council or to the House Committee as required by the Rules of Procedure.

**Legislative Council
Panel on Education**

Membership List

Chairman	Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung, BBS
Deputy Chairman	Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
Members	Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, JP Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP (up to 11.10.2001) Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, JP Hon LAU Kong-wah Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP Hon SZETO Wah Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung Dr Hon LO Wing-lok Hon WONG Sing-chi Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP Hon MA Fung-kwok (Total : 18 Members)
Clerk	Miss Flora TAI Yin-ping
Legal Adviser	Miss Kitty CHENG Kit-yee
Date	12 October 2001