

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)2384/02-03
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 28 April 2003 at 8:30 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

- Members Present** : Dr Hon YEUNG Sum (Chairman)
Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung, BBS (Deputy Chairman)
Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP
Hon CHOY So-yuk
Hon SZETO Wah
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
Hon MA Fung-kwok, JP
- Members Attending** : Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee
- Members Absent** : Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok
- Public Officers Attending** : Item IV
Mrs Fanny LAW, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mr Chris WARDLAW
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (5)

Mr Steve LEE
Principal Education Officer (New Territories)
Education and Manpower Bureau

Item V

Mrs Fanny LAW, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mrs Betty IP
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and
Manpower (School Administration and Support)

Item VI

Mrs Fanny LAW, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mrs Betty IP
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and
Manpower (School Administration and Support)

Item VII

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

Mr LEE Kwok-sung
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and
Manpower (Education Commission and Planning)

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

Staff in Attendance : Mr Stanley MA
Senior Assistant Secretary (2)6

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I. Confirmation of minutes

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1705/02-03 and CB(2)1828/02-03]

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 March and 17 March 2003 were confirmed.

II. Information paper issued since the last meeting

2. Members noted that no information paper had been issued since the last meeting.

III. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[Appendix I to LC Paper No.CB(2)1826/02-03]

3. Ms Cyd HO expressed concern about the impact of class suspension on schools and kindergartens arising from the outspread of atypical pneumonia. She suggested that the Panel should discuss the support measures provided by the Government to assist kindergartens in overcoming their financial and administrative difficulties.

4. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong pointed out that if suspension of class in kindergartens would continue for a longer period, some parents would consider it reasonable that they should not be required to pay the tuition fee. He suggested that the Panel should invite deputations to express views and suggestions on the current problems in kindergarten operation, and discuss the possible options to resolve their problems.

5. At the Chairman's suggestion, members agreed that a special meeting should be held from 1:00 pm to 2:30 pm on Monday, 5 May 2003 to discuss problems arising from suspension of class in kindergartens to prevent the spreading of atypical pneumonia and related issues. Members also agreed that deputations from the pre-primary education sector would be invited to present their views at the meeting.

6. Mr SZETO Wah remarked that the Administration should learn the lesson from resumption of classes in secondary schools and improve the arrangements for resumption of classes in primary schools and kindergartens in future.

7. Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower (PSEM) acknowledged that the Administration had overestimated the cooperation of secondary students and their parents in taking precautionary measures against

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the spread of atypical pneumonia when senior secondary classes resumed on 22 April. She assured members that, in the light of this experience, the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) had stepped up publicity and communication with schools and parents in preparing for resumption of junior secondary classes on 28 April 2003. She stressed that EMB had formulated clear guidelines on precautionary measures, parent education, case follow-up, administrative matters, etc. The focus was to call on home-school co-operation for the provision of a safe learning environment for students.

IV. Enhanced school development and accountability

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1826/02-03(01) and (02)]

8. At the invitation of the Chairman, Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (5) (DS(EM)5) briefed members on the main points of the Administration's paper with the aid of power-point presentation. A set of presentation materials was tabled and subsequently forwarded to members vide LC Paper No.CB(2)1909/02-03(01).

9. The Chairman asked whether the outcome of an external school review conducted by EMB under the enhanced School Development and Accountability (SDA) Framework would have any implications on resources allocation for the school concerned.

10. PSEM explained that EMB aimed to develop key performance measures (KPMs) gradually as a common platform for balanced assessment of school performance in the four domains, i.e., management and organization, learning and teaching, student support and school ethos, and student performance. For this purpose, schools would be required to provide school level information on all KPMs for EMB to generate territory norms against which schools could compare and assess their performances. EMB would conduct external school reviews to validate schools' self-evaluation and to report on the standards of their performances. Depending on individual circumstances, the Quality Assurance Division of EMB would follow up with schools on their weaknesses and, where necessary, provide additional support or resources to help schools improve.

Measures for under-performing schools

11. Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung asked how EMB would provide appropriate support to under-performing schools as identified by external school review based on a set of KPMs. He also asked how EMB would intervene with the management of a school which failed to achieve the targets set for improvement.

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12. PSEM responded that EMB would provide appropriate support to schools focusing on the areas that required improvement as identified through the external school review. In case the school failed to improve as expected, EMB would consider changing the senior management of the school or appointing government officials and suitable persons as managers of the school to participate in the management of the school. If these arrangements still could not improve the performance of the school, EMB might consider taking over the operation of the school as the last resort.

13. Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung expressed concern about the response of School Sponsoring Bodies (SSBs) to possible intervention from EMB in the context of school-based management. He asked whether EMB was empowered to intervene with the management of a school, particularly schools with a long history, which had not entered into a service agreement with EMB.

14. PSEM responded that the spirit of school-based management was to provide schools with more flexibility within an overall regulatory framework. For example, schools could decide on the curriculum and pedagogy that would best meet the needs of students. Under school-based management, there must also be adequate accountability and quality assurance to protect the interests of students. She pointed out that EMB was empowered by the Education Ordinance to participate in or take over the management of an under-performing school as appropriate. She stressed that EMB would exercise such powers in a cautious manner, having regard to the circumstances in each case.

15. Ms Cyd HO pointed out that during the deliberations of the Bills Committee on the Education (Amendment) Bill 2002, concern had been expressed about role conflicts between the principal and School Management Committee (SMC) in school management. She pointed out that the causes for unsatisfactory school performance might due to the incapability of the principal or the SMC or both, and it would be unfair to terminate the appointment of the principal when actually the SMC should be accountable.

16. In response, PSEM stressed that the enhanced SDA Framework was aimed at improving student learning outcomes and strengthening schools' capacity for continuous development, and not to penalise schools. Government intervention in school management was the last resort and should not be blown out of proportion. She pointed out that the enhanced SDA framework would change the operation of the existing quality assurance mechanism from the existing elaborate quality assurance inspections to a combination of continuous self-evaluation by the school and external school reviews by EMB. She suggested that the Panel should see the SDA in a positive light and focus discussion on the merits and demerits of the SDA framework in enhancing school development and accountability. She expected most schools to be able to improve with self-evaluation. The need for government intervention in the school management or take-over should be few and far between.

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17. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered it essential to establish an independent mechanism to monitor the implementation of the three measures to improve the performance of under-performing schools. He cited examples to illustrate that the three measures had been adopted in the past, but the disputes or conflicts involved could have been settled in a more harmonious manner if an open and transparent mechanism was in place to assist in making the decisions for implementation of the measures. He agreed with PSEM that the exercise of these measures would not affect the implementation of the SDA framework.

18. PSEM responded that the Administration rarely intervened in the management of a school in the past. She agreed to consider involving independent persons in making the decision, in the event that the Administration found it necessary to take over a school.

Implementation and evaluation

19. The Chairman remarked that while the rationale for implementing the SDA framework appeared acceptable, members had concerns about the implementation aspects. He asked how EMB would implement the framework.

20. PSEM replied that a total of 21 pilot schools had started to practise a KPM-based performance management system since the commencement of the 2002-03 school year. With the support of EMB staff, these schools had agreed to adopt a common set of KPMs which were selected on the basis of their quality, usefulness and collectibility. The Administration would introduce the enhanced SDA framework to all schools and assist some 200 schools through training in enhancing their capacity to conduct self-evaluation in May to September 2003. The Administration would make available a set of guidelines, sample school plans and reports on the EMB website for schools' reference. The effective practices in strategic planning and reporting identified by the 21 pilot schools would be disseminated to other schools for reference.

21. The Chairman asked how evaluation of the effectiveness of the SDA framework would be conducted. PSEM replied that EMB would monitor the implementation of the SDA framework in the 21 pilot schools on a continuous basis. In particular, EMB would conduct external school review for eight pilot schools to validate the results of their self-evaluations as well as the results of the implementation of the SDA framework in school management.

22. Ms Cyd HO asked whether schools could add KPMs in addition to the 23 common KPMs set out in the Appendix A to the Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(2)1826/02-03(02)]. She held the view that SSBs should have discretion to add KPMs for self-evaluation in the light of their educational visions and missions as well as the traditional values and cultures of the school.

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She considered that participation in social services should be included as a KPM under the domain of student performance. She also asked how KPMs in the domain of student support and school ethos could be quantified for the purpose of performance assessment.

23. PSEM responded that she shared the view of Ms Cyd HO that schools should have flexibility to include other KPMs such as participation in social services for the purpose of self-evaluations. She stressed that the Administration's strategy was to develop KPMs gradually as a common platform for the balanced assessment of school performance in the four domains. EMB would aim to develop territory-wide norms against which school performance could be compared and assessed. In addition, schools would be required to upload their strategic plans, annual school plans and school reports to their own website for stakeholders to access. She agreed that some KPMs could not be quantified and would be assessed on the basis of subjective perception. She added that the purpose of KPMs was to provide the directions for school development, and schools should assess whether they were moving towards achieving their performance targets by means of KPMs.

24. The Chairman remarked that EMB should refine and update the common set of KPMs in the light of actual experience gained from implementation and develop a set of territory-wide norms for schools to assess their own performances.

25. Ms Cyd HO noted that schools were required to manage their performance against developmental needs and targets set and to make their evaluation reports accessible to the public for enhanced transparency and accountability. She asked how a school would be compared with other schools in terms of its performance in the KPMs.

26. PSEM replied that a school could assess its own performance by reference to the territory norms for the KPMs. It would be up to the schools to decide whether, and if so, how to publicize such information to its stakeholders and the general public.

27. Mr SZETO Wah considered that EMB should provide an evaluation report on the results of implementation in the 21 pilot schools before full implementation of the SDA framework and adoption of KPMs for assessment of school performance. He also asked whether the existing quality assurance mechanism would be replaced by the implementation of the proposed SDA framework in schools.

28. PSEM clarified that the proposed SDA framework would not replace the quality assurance framework which was introduced in September 1997 to give impetus to the school improvement process and to accentuate accountability in the school system. She, however, pointed out that the existing quality

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assurance mechanism which comprised mainly quality inspections conducted by EMB staff was too labour intensive and should be replaced with a more cost-effective system such as the proposed SDA framework. She explained that assessment of school performance by KPMs was not new to schools. EMB would provide standard stakeholder survey questionnaires for assessment of KPMs which could not be quantified. She reiterated that EMB would work closely with the 21 schools to develop the KPMs and identify effective practices for schools to conduct self-evaluations. Besides, EMB would also assist schools in establishing a close network to facilitate dissemination of effective practices in strategic planning and reporting.

29. DS(EM)5 supplemented that EMB would review and revise the implementation programme in the light of feedback from the 21 pilot schools. He stressed that the initial stage of implementation was crucial to the development of a set of effective KPMs as well as an open and transparent performance management culture in schools. He added that the practice of conducting self-evaluation on the basis of a set of KPMs was neither new nor revolutionary in the assessment of school performance.

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30. The Chairman concurred with Mr SZETO Wah that EMB should provide a progress report on the implementation of the SDA framework. In response, DS(EM)5 undertook to provide the report by the end of the 2003-04 school year.

31. Referring to paragraph 10 of the Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(2)1826/02-03(02)], Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that EMB should monitor the implementation of SDA framework to increase transparency and public accountability in school education so as to ensure that no "league tables" of certain performance measures was used in isolation to promote student intake or other purposes. He pointed out that "league tables" on the results of students' achievements in Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination would be most welcomed by parents. He anticipated that schools would strive to improve their performance in KPMs and avoid being led by parental preference in their provision of school education.

32. PSEM responded that the Administration shared the concern of Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong on possible mis-use of KPMs. She said that EMB would strengthen communications with parents on the correct interpretation of KPMs, and the importance of all-round development of students.

33. Mr David CHU expressed support for enhancing school development and accountability to improve student learning outcomes through school self-evaluation and external school review. He suggested that the Administration should encourage competition among schools in pursuit of better performance through different measures such as allowing schools to disclose their self-evaluation reports and KPM achievements.

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34. PSEM agreed that a degree of competition would provide the impetus for improving school performance. However excessive competition might be counter-productive, causing schools to focus on superficial achievements not related to student learning outcomes. Given a declining birth rate and the diversity in school education provided by Direct Subsidy Scheme schools and private independent schools, schools were already experiencing keen competition in student enrolment.

Consolidation of high cost and under-utilized primary schools

35. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that the Administration's paper entitled "Consolidation of high cost and under-utilized primary schools" [LC Paper No.CB(2)1826/02-03(01)] was not directly related to enhancing school development and accountability. He pointed out that under the criteria set out in the paper, schools with unit cost 150% or more of the territory-wide average would not be allocated primary one classes in the 2003-04 school year. He suggested that the Panel should discuss the proposed criteria for consolidating high cost and under-utilized primary schools at a special meeting and deputations should be invited to present their views on the proposed criteria.

36. PSEM explained that the paper was prepared in response to the request of Mr SZETO Wah at the meeting on 17 March 2003. She added that the Administration would also consult the school sector on the proposed criteria for consolidating high cost and under-utilized primary schools.

37. Mr SZETO Wah remarked that given a declining birth rate in Hong Kong, the proposed criteria for consolidating high cost and under-utilized primary schools would affect more than 77 schools in the years to come. He concurred with Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong that the issue should be thoroughly discussed before implementation. PSEM pointed out that, following the advice of the Public Accounts Committee, the Administration had already implemented the requirement to have a minimum of 23 students for allocation of one primary 1 class. For educational reasons, combined classes would also be phased out from 2003-04 school year.

38. After discussion, members agreed to hold a special meeting to discuss the issue. The Chairman instructed the Clerk to make the necessary arrangements for the special meeting.

[*Post-meeting note* : The special meeting to discuss the item was scheduled for Monday, 26 May 2003 at 4:30 pm.]

V. Follow-up discussion on the proposal of outsourcing adult education courses

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1826/02-03(03)]

39. At the Chairman's invitation, PSEM stressed that outsourcing of adult education courses run by EMB would not deprive adult learners of education opportunities. As a matter of fact, the Government had allocated more resources for the provision of more diversified education and training opportunities at various levels to facilitate people of Hong Kong in pursuing continuing education and life-long learning. The Administration planned to commission non-profit-making operators to run the existing adult education courses for two years from September 2003 and all existing learners would continue to pay the current level of course fees over the next two years. After two years, the level of tuition fees would be determined by the market.

40. PSEM further said that, in two years' time, the proposed qualifications framework should be up and running. The framework was made up of a hierarchy of qualifications which set out the general outcome standards at each level. It would help adult learners to draw up their own road maps to upgrade their skills and to pursue lifelong learning. It would also help employers ensure that the skills and standards required of their workforce would be included in various education and training programmes.

41. PSEM added that with the current development of information technology, learning would no longer be restricted to attending lessons in a classroom setting. To provide sufficient life-long learning opportunities for adult learners including the unemployed and housewives in the long term, the Administration would collaborate with the public media to provide more flexible and cost-effective modes of adult education through television and radio broadcasts to meet the diversified needs of adult learners. She pointed out that due to resources constraints, maintaining the existing mode of operation and providing the current level of subsidy for the adult education courses run by EMB would not be sustainable and restrict accessibility.

42. The Chairman pointed out that at the meetings on 17 February and 7 April 2003, members had expressed different views on whether adult education courses run by EMB should be outsourced or not. However, members in general had expressed support for the Government to continue the existing subsidization and ensure the quality of the courses after outsourcing. He invited members to raise questions on the way forward for provision of adult education opportunities as briefed by PSEM as well as the Administration's response to the views and concerns of members expressed at the special meeting held on 7 April 2003 [LC Paper No. CB(2)1826/02-03(03)].

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Members' concerns and suggestions

43. Mr SZETO Wah asked about the details of the continuing education and training opportunities for adults funded by the Government in recent years. PSEM replied that Annex B to the Administration's paper for discussion at the meeting on 17 February 2003 [LC Paper No.CB(2) 1125/02-03(04)] had provided a brief description on the various subsidized education and training opportunities for adults. In addition, the Administration had provided a flow chart on the progression paths for the existing learners of Government Evening Secondary School Course (GESSC) upon completion of their key stages of study was subsequently issued to members vide LC Paper No.CB(2)1321/02-03(01) on 27 February 2003.

44. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that although the Administration would aim to develop a qualifications framework and set out the various progression paths available for adult learners in pursuit of academic qualifications, unfortunately all employers would include qualifications in Hong Kong Certification of Education Examination (HKCEE) as a requirement for staff recruitment. He pointed out that so far the various continuing education programmes such as Project Yi Jin were not accepted by employers as qualifications equivalent to five passes in HKCEE, but were only recognized as having attended certain job-related training for employment purposes. Furthermore, successful completion of these courses would not qualify the graduates for admission to higher level academic programmes offered by local or overseas tertiary institutions. He suggested that EMB should consult the stakeholders on the feasibility of increasing tuition fees for adult education courses instead of proceeding to outsource the provision of GESSC.

45. In response, PSEM stressed that the proposed outsourcing of GESSC to selected operators did not mean an end to the provision of secondary education opportunities to adult learners, since there were schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme offering day and evening secondary education programmes in the market. She considered that the crucial issue was whether tuition fees would substantially increase and whether taxpayers would consider it reasonable and acceptable to continue the provision of the existing level of subsidy to GESSC two years after the take-over. She pointed out that full remission of tuition fees for programmes offered by the Employee Retraining Board (ERB) required a monthly family income of below \$6,300. She queried whether adult learners of GESSC should have the privilege to receive government subvention simply because they should be provided with a second opportunity to pursue secondary school education. PSEM also cited a survey which showed that some GESSC participants admitted that they attended GESSC as a pastime and to make friends. PSEM considered it unreasonable to use taxpayers' monies to subsidize such adult learners. She suggested that given the limited resources, EMB would examine the actual tuition fee levels charged by the selected operators two years after outsourcing and review

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whether, and if so, the appropriate level of subvention for needy adult learners who were committed to pursuing secondary education.

46. PSEM further said that to encourage more course providers to offer courses leading to recognized qualifications, the qualifications framework to be established would provide objective benchmarks for qualifications in different sectors including mainstream academic education, continuing education and vocational education. Under the framework, a quality assurance mechanism would be established to assess and ensure the quality of various educational programmes which were qualified for inclusion onto the qualifications framework register. In other words, operators of these programmes would have to apply for the necessary accreditation procedures before their programmes would be recognized by the Government, employers and other tertiary institutions for the purpose of employment or enrolment to higher level studies.

47. Mr WONG Sing-chi asked when the qualifications framework would be publicized. PSEM replied that EMB had consulted the public and major stakeholders on the proposed qualifications framework and was currently working on the details of a proposed framework for four selected trades. She added that the Administration would publish the details of the proposed framework for the four selected trades after June 2003.

48. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that he had all along objected to outsourcing the provision of public services to the private sector. He considered that all adults willing to attend classes five evenings a week should be provided with an opportunity to pursue subsidized secondary education, regardless of whether their family income had exceeded \$6,300 or not. He asked how the Administration would assist existing learners of the adult education course (General Background) (AEC(G)) in pursuing secondary 1 or 2 studies two years after outsourcing.

49. PSEM replied that existing learners of the AEC(G) aged between 15 to 19 would be encouraged to continue their secondary education in day schools. She pointed out that eight senior secondary schools would come into operation in the 2003-04 school year, some of which would also operate secondary 1-3 classes. She also pointed out that secondary 1-2 school curriculum was not suitable for adult learners, particularly day-time workers, who aimed to attend the HKCEE. She reckoned that most adult learners aimed to obtain HKCEE qualification in language and other practical subjects, rather than academic subjects. As such, there was no need to take the full range of subjects at secondary 1 to 3. PSEM also pointed out that the drop-out rate in both AEC(G) and GESSC was 23%. The resources wasted on these places could well be re-deployed to fund other more flexible educational programmes, more suited to the needs of adult learners.

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50. Ms Cyd HO held the view that the Government should provide subsidized primary and secondary school places to adults who for various reasons had given up or no opportunity to attend nine-year compulsory basic education. She considered that the basic education was not intended to enhance adult learners to find employment, but to equip them with the basic reading and writing abilities to teach their children as well as to keep up with the developments of the community. Ms HO agreed that the existing AEC(G) and GESSC were inflexible as reflected by their declining enrolment, high drop-out rate and low completion rates in recent years. However, she pointed out that outsourcing would inevitably bring about higher tuition fees which many adult learners would find it difficult to afford. She suggested the establishment of a standing committee comprising adult learners, serving teachers, prospective operators and EMB representatives to work out feasible implementation plan for outsourcing which would achieve the aim of cost saving and meet the needs of adults to receive basic education at an appropriate level of subsidization.

51. PSEM responded that EMB shared the concern of Ms Cyd HO on the provision of education opportunities to adults who had not attended primary or secondary schools. She pointed out that the Government would review the Continuing Education Fund (CEF) with a view to including more programmes at the basic levels, and take appropriate steps to ensure that adult learners would not be deprived of education due to lack of means. In addition, EMB would encourage training providers to offer more courses to meet the diversified needs of adult learners under the current ambit of the CEF. It would also continue to explore the feasibility of making better use of the public media in the provision of distance learning programmes to interested adult learners at lower costs.

52. PSEM further said that a manpower projection study in 2000 had forecast a surplus of more than 135,000 low-skilled workers in 2005. The Government had decided to impose a levy on foreign domestic helpers with effect from October 2003. The levy income could be used to fund more training and retraining programmes for adult learners through the Employee Retraining Board. She added that the English Language component in ERB's courses had demonstrated a 96% enrolment and a completion rate of 80%, suggesting that the provision of more practical and flexible programmes were more appropriate for adult learners than the formal school curriculum.

53. Ms Cyd HO urged the Administration to maintain the current level of subsidy for GESSC after outsourcing, i.e. an annual subvention of \$5,200 for each student. She also suggested that the provision of adult education courses should be managed in the form of school-based management which allowed learners and serving teachers to participate in the decision-making process. She anticipated that the participation of these stakeholders could contribute to reduce the drop-out rate and enhance cost-effective use of the limited resources.

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She pointed out that the maximum provision of subsidy under CEF was only \$10,000 and the tuition fees charged by private operators for secondary 4-5 courses would be in the range of \$1,400 to \$2,400 a month. In other words, CEF was insufficient to fund adult learners to complete secondary 4-5 studies.

54. PSEM responded that adult learners should make use of the CEF to pursue studies of their own choices and interests. She pointed out that any Hong Kong resident aged 18 to 60 without a university degree who enrolled in an accredited course could apply to the Students Financial Assistance Agency to open a personal continuing education account and, subject to the availability of funds, an amount of \$10,000 would be earmarked.

55. The Chairman asked whether the selected operators would be able to charge the existing level of fees for GESSC if they were provided with the existing level of subvention.

56. PSEM replied that private operators were currently charging around \$600 a month for secondary 1-2 studies to recover their operating costs, inclusive of rents and rates for their school premises. She suggested members to discuss the level of fees which would be charged by selected operators after EMB had received some preliminary proposals from interested operators. She added that the Administration would require the selected operators to continue to run adult education courses for existing learners two years after the take-over and to indicate in their tender documents other measures such as scholarships and fee remission schemes to help learners who were in need of financial assistance, as well as the fees to be charged .

57. Mr WONG Sing-chi expressed support for EMB to invite interested operators to submit proposals for taking over the adult education courses run by EMB to facilitate in-depth discussion of the outsourcing proposal. He said that members in general were concerned about the continuous provision of subsidy to the adult education courses, the quality and continuity of the adult education courses after outsourcing. He considered that the Administration should make more efforts in promoting the new concepts on provision of adult education and continuing education such as the concept that adults need not attend primary classes. He suggested that the Administration should conduct consultation on the community's response to these new concepts. He also asked whether the Administration would undertake that the interests of existing learners of the adult education courses run by EMB would not be affected by the proposed outsourcing.

58. PSEM responded that EMB would ensure that the selected course operators would continue to run the existing courses for all the existing learners until they completed a key stage of study in two years or earlier, and all existing learners would continue to pay the course fees at the present level over the next two school years. She pointed out that the Administration's new

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concepts in the provision of continuing education for adults had been thoroughly discussed by the Panel on Manpower. She anticipated that LegCo Members and the media would assist in promoting public awareness of the new concepts.

59. Mr WONG Sing-chi remarked that EMB should thoroughly consult the stakeholders before proceeding with the outsourcing proposal. He considered that EMB had taken a hasty course of action on the matter, probably because of the need to achieve a saving of \$74.6 million.

60. PSEM responded that EMB had followed the original schedule for implementation of the outsourcing proposal in September 2003, and the outsourcing proposal was not primarily intended to achieve savings. She stressed that in the face of a rapidly changing global environment, EMB should react readily and adjust its policies and strategies on education to cater for the changing manpower needs of the community in the future.

61. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that his major concerns were the provision of choices and subsidies to adult learners who had aspirations in pursuing secondary school education and the quality of the adult education courses after outsourcing. He considered that the Government should subsidize adults who for various reasons could not attend secondary schools at their early ages, and the provision of such courses by EMB or reputable non-profit-making organisations should not be an issue for public debate. He stressed that the fees charged by selected operators should be reasonable and accepted by the majority of adult learners. He considered that the use of CEF to assist adult learners in pursuit of secondary school education should be reviewed with the aim of providing sufficient subvention for learners to complete their secondary school education. Mr CHEUNG said that he would not doubt the quality of the adult education courses if EMB would require selected operators to employ teachers with suitable qualifications to conduct the class lessons. He, however, pointed out that the key issue remained the provision of sufficient subvention to the selected operators for recruitment of qualified teachers and setting the tuition fees at levels affordable to adult learners. He therefore urged the Administration to invite proposals from interested operators on the outsourcing proposal and allow sufficient time for members to consider all relevant issues at a future meeting.

62. Mr Frederick FUNG was of the view that EMB should continue to run the existing adult education courses. He considered that the various vocation-related courses advocated by EMB such as Project Yi Jin for adult learners could not be substitutes for AEC(G) and GESSC which aimed to provide all-round education to adult learners. He pointed out that a certificate in HKCEE was commonly recognised by employers as a basic requirement for employment and by local and overseas institutions for admittance to their higher level programmes. He also considered the enrolment and effective

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completion rates of GESSC (64%) acceptable. He suggested that EMB should consult existing adult learners if there was a need to adjust the tuition fees for a higher cost-recovery ratio in the provision of GESSC, but should not sacrifice their rights to pursue GESSC at this stage.

63. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung also considered that the Administration should not sacrifice the right of adults to pursue conventional primary and secondary school education which were intended for the all-round development of individual learners. He also considered that the Administration had not responded to the problem encountered by existing AEC(G) learners who would have no access to GESSC after the take-over by selected operators. He considered that the Government should encourage people to pursue vocation-related studies, but should not restrict the opportunities for adults to pursue secondary school education. He suggested that the Administration should consider deferring the implementation of the outsourcing proposal for one year in order to conduct a thorough review and consultation.

64. PSEM responded that the primary issue was whether the tuition fees would be kept at affordable levels after outsourcing. She pointed out that students at secondary 4 and 5 classes in day schools were required to pay some \$5,000 a year. She stressed that EMB maintained an open mind whether adult learners of GESSC should continue to enjoy public subsidy after outsourcing.

65. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung asked whether the Administration was in compliance with Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which protected the right of everyone to basic education. He was not convinced that the provision of various diversified education programmes and continuing learning opportunities by the Government for persons aged 15 years or above had already protected their right to receive basic education.

66. PSEM responded that the Administration's commitment was only to provide nine-year free basic education to persons aged 15 or below, not all residents. She pointed out that, according to the last census, about half of the population aged 15 or above had educational attainment secondary 3 or below. The Government simply could not afford to provide free education for all of them. PSEM stressed that the cost of providing basic education should not be borne entirely by the society.

67. The Chairman asked whether the Administration would consider the motion passed by the Panel at the meeting on 7 April 2003 requesting the Administration to shelve the outsourcing proposal and determine the course of action after a review and consultation for one year. He also asked when the Administration would revert to the Panel with the proposals from interested operator for follow-up discussion on the appropriate level of subvention, the

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quality assurance and the continuity of the adult education courses after outsourcing.

68. PSEM replied that the Administration at this stage saw no particular reason that the outsourcing proposal should not proceed as originally planned. She undertook to revert to the Panel with more implementation details in June 2003 when potential adult education course providers had submitted their proposals. However, for reasons of confidentiality of tenders, details on individual proposals could not be revealed.

69. Ms Cyd HO considered that the Administration should consult existing adult learners and teaching staff in its discussion with interested operators and provide information on the level of subvention and support facilities which would be provided to the selected operators such as waiving the rent and rates of the school premises. PSEM noted her views.

70. Members agreed to continue discussion of the proposal on outsourcing of adult education courses run by EMB in June 2003 when the implementation details were available.

VI. Annual adjustment of rates of Operating Expenses Block Grant for aided schools

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1826/02-03(05)]

71. At the Chairman's invitation, PSEM introduced the Administration's paper on the annual adjustment of the rates of Operating Expenses Block Grant (OEGB) for aided schools. She highlighted that the Administration had met a total of 46 representatives from 32 organizations including school councils, teacher unions, major SSBs and clerical staff and janitor unions, and 44 of the representatives had raised no objection to the proposals set out in paragraphs 7 and 8 of the paper.

72. The Chairman informed the meeting that the Administration intended to submit the proposal to the Finance Committee for consideration at its meeting on 30 May 2003.

73. Referring to paragraph 11 of the paper, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that the salaries of clerical and janitor staff should be covered under the Salaries Grant instead of the Administration Grant or Revised Administration Grant. He pointed out that during the spread of atypical pneumonia in public hospitals, only those cleansing staff who were employed by the Hospital Authority on permanent terms would adhere to their job requirements and continue to provide services, despite the risk of possible exposure to the virus. Mr LEE suggested that the Administration should learn the lesson from the recent outbreak of atypical pneumonia in some public hospitals and consider linking

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the salaries of clerical and janitor staff in aided schools with the civil service pay system.

74. PSEM responded that, as a matter of principle, the Administration would not agree to the retrograde step of including the salaries of clerical and janitor staff under the Salaries Grant. Schools generally welcomed the flexibility to vary the establishment of clerical and janitor staff. Indeed, some schools had contracted out janitor services and found the arrangements more cost-effective. Hence, it was not possible to revert to past practices.

75. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan asked whether schools would have cash flow difficulty if the downward adjustment of the Composite Consumer Price Index (CCPI) turned out to be more than 1.5%. He also asked whether the Administration would interfere with the salary adjustments of clerical and janitor staff in aided schools.

76. PSEM responded that the Administration had studied the impact of different adjustments of CCPI on schools' cash flow situation and had found that even a downward adjustment of 5% in CCPI would not cause substantial cash flow difficulty to schools. She added that the Administration could not interfere with the salary adjustments of clerical and janitor staff who were employed by SSBs on non-civil service terms.

77. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong suggested that the expense on electricity consumption in aided schools should be excluded from the OEBG because the unit charge of electricity consumption had remained unchanged despite the recorded deflation in recent years.

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78. In response, PSEM undertook to take into account Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong's suggestion in the overall review of school grants with aimed to merge existing grants and to allow more flexibility in the use of funds.

79. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung asked whether EMB would consider issuing an administrative circular to advise SSBs not to reduce the salaries and benefits of their clerical and janitor staff during a period of economic downturn.

80. Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower (School Administration and Support) replied that she had reminded the 46 representatives attending the five consultation sessions conducted on 15 and 16 April 2003 that they should adopt the practices of good employers in dealing with their clerical staff and janitors. She added that EMB had discussed with the Hong Kong School Clerks and Janitors General Union during the consultation sessions and noted their views. EMB would remind SSBs and School Supervisors to be good employers in its circular to be issued to aided schools on the OEBG after the Finance Committee had given its approval.

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VII. Study on effective strategies of class and group teaching in primary schools

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1826/02-03(06)]

81. Due to time constraint, members agreed to defer discussion of the item to the next regular meeting scheduled for Monday, 19 May 2003 at 4:30 pm.

VIII. Any other business

82. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 11:20 am.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
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