

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)350/04-05
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seen by the Administration)

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Panel on Education

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Friday, 29 October 2004 at 4:00 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Dr Hon YEUNG Sum (Chairman)
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, SBS, JP
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
- Member absent** : Hon MA Lik, JP
- Public Officers attending** : Prof Arthur LI, GBS, JP
Secretary for Education and Manpower
- Mrs Fanny LAW, GBS, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower
- Dr K K CHAN
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and
Manpower (Curriculum Development)

Dr Peter W HILL
Secretary General
Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority

Dr S K KWAN
Principal Education Officer (New Senior Secondary)
Education and Manpower Bureau

Clerk in attendance : Miss Flora TAI
Chief Council Secretary (2)2

Staff in attendance : Mr Stanley MA
Senior Council Secretary (2)6

Action

I. Reforming the Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education

[LC Paper No. CB(2)90/04-05(01) and consultation document entitled “Reforming the academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education – Actions for investing in the future”]

At the invitation of the Chairman, Secretary for Education and Manpower (SEM) briefed members on the major proposals set out in its consultation document entitled “Reforming the academic structure for secondary education and higher education – Actions for investing in the future” (the consultation document). SEM added that the initial response of the higher education sector and the community at large to the proposed reforms was positive. The Administration would solicit views from all stakeholders and the community on the proposals in the consultation document through various channels in the coming three months.

The new curriculum and supporting measures

New curriculum

2. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that the community as a whole supported the introduction of a new academic structure composing of a three-year junior secondary and three-year senior secondary education, linking to a four-year undergraduate university programme (the “3+3+4” structure). Mr CHEUNG pointed out that a three-year senior secondary structure would mean the shortening of the duration for subject teaching and learning from four to three years, which would in turn require a restructuring and re-engineering of the school curriculum in secondary schools. He considered that building on the

Action

existing curriculum, schools should be able to re-design their school-based curriculum to meet the needs of their students at senior secondary levels. Mr CHEUNG suggested that the Administration should extensively consult the school sector and the community before deciding the secondary subjects to be retained or removed from the senior school curriculum.

Teaching Liberal Studies as a core subject at senior secondary levels

3. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed concern about the curriculum design, assessment, teaching and learning, and class size for teaching Liberal Studies as a core subject under the proposed new curriculum framework. He questioned the need to require schools to start teaching Liberal Studies as a core subject in alignment with the implementation of the “3+3+4” structure in the 2008-09 school year. He suggested that the Administration should consider incorporating Liberal Studies initially as an elective subject under the new curriculum framework in the first three years of implementation, and determine the timing for the subject to become a core subject in the light of the experience gained from implementation and the university admission requirement.

4. SEM responded that Liberal Studies was not a new subject and was currently studied at the Advanced Supplementary Level (ASL), although the proposed design expanded and improved the ASL syllabus to meet the changing circumstances in Hong Kong. The good practices, experiences and reflection developed from teaching ASL, Integrated Humanities, and Science and Technology under the existing structure would be used to support other schools that had little experience in the teaching of the subject. The curriculum and assessment design would be flexible enough to allow for a range of different ways for schools, teachers and students to teach and learn Liberal Studies. SEM acknowledged that teachers would have to put in extra efforts in the course of implementing the “3+3+4” structure, and anticipated that teachers would proactively attend the professional development programmes offered by the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) in preparation for teaching Liberal Studies at senior secondary levels.

5. SEM further said that the Administration would consider the views of the stakeholders and the community collected during the consultation, and decide the appropriate timing for implementing the “3+3+4” structure as well as incorporating Liberal Studies as a core subject in the senior secondary curriculum. If the outcome of the consultation was negative, the Administration would consider deferring the implementation of the new structure. SEM added that the Heads of University Committee had expressed support for the “3+3+4” structure, and had announced its intention to incorporate the proposed new core subjects, including Liberal Studies, as the general admission criteria for undergraduate programmes.

6. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that there was no need to

Action

synchronise the implementation of the “3+3+4” structure with the incorporation of Liberal Studies as a core subject in the senior secondary curriculum. In view of the profound impact of the “3+3+4” structure on school operation, Mr CHEUNG suggested that the Administration should carefully consider the views of the school sector before determining the timing for implementing the new curriculum and incorporating Liberal Studies as a core subject for senior secondary education.

7. Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower (PSEM) pointed out that the curriculum framework for Liberal Studies was designed to ensure that all senior secondary students could experience a broad and interconnected education. The curriculum design would aim to broaden students’ knowledge base and enhance their social awareness through the study of a wide range of contemporary issues. After studying the subject, students were expected to have a better understanding of Hong Kong society, the development of China and its place in the modern world, globalisation, and citizenship at the community, national and global levels.

8. PSEM acknowledged that many teachers had expressed concern about teaching Liberal Studies in senior secondary classes. She pointed out that starting from 2002, around one-fourth of the secondary schools had included the subjects of Integrated Humanities and Science and Technology in their curriculum, and the curriculum design of Liberal Studies was largely a combination of the existing curriculum of these two subjects. Teachers who had taught Integrated Humanities in general did not see any major difficulty in teaching Liberal Studies in senior secondary classes. PSEM added that teachers had responded enthusiastically to the seminars and workshops on Liberal Studies organised by EMB in November 2004. She envisaged that teachers would be more confident in teaching Liberal Studies when they had learnt more about the curriculum design and assessment methods of the subject during the consultation period.

9. Dr Fernando CHEUNG shared Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong’s view that the timing for incorporating Liberal Studies as a core subject in senior secondary curriculum needed not be linked to the implementation of the “3+3+4” structure. He suggested that the Administration should plan the necessary manpower, resources and arrangements for teaching Liberal Studies in all secondary schools.

10. PSEM responded that Liberal Studies was an essential component of the proposed reform. She pointed out that the subject provided students with opportunities to know more about themselves and improve their communication and interpersonal skills that would enhance their employability after graduation. PSEM considered that all senior secondary students should develop a broad knowledge base, and deeper understanding of self, society, the nation, and the natural and human world.

Action

Support measures for teachers

11. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung noted that EMB would collaborate with different institutions to provide professional development programmes for school teachers with special emphasis on whole curriculum management, knowledge updating, new learning and teaching approaches to reach the wider cohort, new assessment approaches and the new single examination. He expressed reservations about the sufficiency and effectiveness of a 30-hour or 35-hour professional development programme for teachers teaching their own subjects or a new subject such as Liberal Studies. Mr LEUNG considered it difficult for a teacher to become competent in teaching a new subject such as Liberal Studies in senior secondary classes after attending a 35-hour or even a 100-hour development programme.

12. SEM responded that the Administration was confident that teachers were capable of tackling the challenges which might arise in the course of implementing the curriculum reform under the proposed “3+3+4” structure. He added that teachers would do their utmost to improve the quality of education for the benefits of the future generations. To ensure smooth implementation of the “3+3+4” structure, the Administration would consult teachers thoroughly for the design of appropriate development programmes for different subjects.

13. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that most teachers and principals had expressed concern about the wide range of issues covered under the new secondary Liberal Studies curriculum. Under the proposed curriculum design, teachers would also have to assist students to conduct an Independent Enquiry Study on an issue of their own choice. Citing the smaller class sizes of the existing ASL Liberal Studies classes as an example, Mr LEUNG considered that Liberal Studies should be taught in smaller classes of 20 – 30 students.

14. PSEM informed members that the Administration had sent questionnaires to schools to solicit information on the demand for teacher training and views on the desired mode of delivery. The Administration had also set aside non-recurrent resources to assist schools to migrate to the new academic structure. Depending on their circumstances, the Administration would work with individual schools to discuss possible arrangements for subject offer, deployment of resources, reorganisation of class structures and any other transitional issues. The Administration would also consider small group teaching for Liberal Studies at senior secondary levels.

15. Ms Emily LAU asked whether the Administration would collaborate with the Hong Kong Institute of Education and other institutions to provide sufficient and appropriate training for teachers to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for teaching the new subjects such as Liberal Studies under the new senior secondary curriculum.

Action

16. Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower (Curriculum Development) (PAS(CD)) responded that serving teachers should possess the basic pedagogical knowledge relevant to the implementation of Liberal Studies in the new senior secondary curriculum. Schools were also encouraged to formulate staff development plans, organise school-based professional development programmes, and nurture work-based learning culture for their teachers. As lifelong learners, teachers were also encouraged to pursue individual and other self-learning programmes to enhance their knowledge and skills in support of student learning. There were refresher studies offered by various institutions which would upgrade their knowledge and skills in teaching individual modules under the three areas of study of Liberal Studies. Furthermore, some institutions were planning to offer higher level studies in Liberal Studies for serving teachers. PAS(CD) added that the competence of a teacher to teach a new subject such as Liberal Studies would increase as he accumulated more teaching experience in classes. The Administration would encourage teacher education providers to put an appropriate emphasis in their current pre-service and in-service courses on the new three-year senior secondary curriculum.

17. Ms Emily LAU also asked how the teaching workforce had responded to the proposed duration of the professional development programmes for teachers teaching a new subject. PAS(CD) responded that the minimum of a 35-hour professional development programme for teaching a new subject under the new senior secondary curriculum was proposed after consulting the teaching profession. She added that depending on individual needs, the duration of professional development programmes for a teacher to teach a new subject could range from 35 to 100 hours.

18. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong urged the Administration to re-consider the implementation plan for Liberal Studies under the new curriculum framework for senior secondary education. He considered it unnecessary to require all schools to offer Liberal Studies concurrently as a core subject on the commencement of the “3+3+4” structure. He pointed out that apart from a minimum of 35 hours professional development for teaching new subjects, some teachers would have to attend other optional courses, and all principals, vice-principals or academic masters and career/student guidance teachers would have to attend a minimum of 25 hours professional development on curriculum matters related to whole-school curriculum management and the design of curriculum choices to suit the different aptitude, interests and abilities of students. He requested the Administration to provide an information paper on existing number of hours teachers and principals were required to attend as well as the anticipated number of hours in the next few years. He stressed that the Administration should consider the existing workload of teachers and their availability to attend these programmes whilst the education reform was in progress.

Admin

Action

19. SEM responded that the Administration had sent detailed questionnaires to schools to collect information on the needs of teachers in professional development. He considered it unnecessary to decide to defer the inclusion of Liberal Studies as a core subject in the new senior secondary curriculum at this stage. The Administration would consider the views of the stakeholders on the appropriate timing for incorporating Liberal Studies as a core subject in the new senior secondary curriculum, and examine feasible ways to resolve the problems which might emerge in the course of implementing the proposed “3+3+4” structure.

Interface between senior secondary curriculum and university admission system

20. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong and Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung were of the view that Heads of University Committee should not announce the incorporation of Liberal Studies as a mandatory subject for university admission at the present stage before parents, teachers and principals in the secondary school sector had expressed their views. They, however, considered that institutions should set out the criteria for admission to their undergraduate programmes in detail as early as possible so that teachers and principals in the school sector could plan their school curriculum, as well as to provide more specific views and suggestions on the proposed “3+3+4” structure during the consultation exercise. Mr LEUNG added that the new sets of criteria for university admission, under which students might be admitted by faculty rather than by specific departments, would have tremendous impact on the curriculum design in secondary schools.

21. SEM responded that a working group comprising both EMB staff and university staff had been set up to work out the detailed arrangements for university admission before the implementation of the new academic system. He pointed out that universities had all along expressed support for four-year undergraduate degree programmes and were keen to implement the new system as soon as practicable. The working group aimed to provide schools and the public with general advice on new admission arrangements and specific details of requirements for each faculty in 2005. The working group would ensure that the interface between the secondary and tertiary levels of academic learning was coherent and well coordinated.

22. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung remarked that the Administration should advise schools on the new criteria for university admission as early as practicable so that principals could plan their school curriculum from the next school year. PSEM responded that if the result of the consultation was positive, the proposed “3+3+4” structure would be implemented in the 2008-09 school year. Secondary schools should then plan the provision of the four core subjects and the number of elective subjects from the 2005-06 school year. PSEM considered that schools would review and design their curriculum based on the needs of their students on an on-going basis.

Action

23. Mr LAU Sau-sing expressed support for an early implementation of the new academic structures for senior secondary education and higher education. He pointed out that universities would broaden their admission criteria and exercise flexibility in order to enrol the best students who should preferably possess a wide range of academic calibers as reflected by their achievements in different disciplines. He pointed out that a four-year university structure would enable undergraduates to receive more comprehensive professional training in different academic areas, and be equipped with the basic knowledge and skills for continuing learning. Mr LAU also considered that the provision of quality pre-primary and primary education was essential to the healthy development of young children. He asked how the Administration would enrich the pre-primary and primary curriculum to facilitate smooth interfaces between pre-primary, primary, secondary and university education, in order to enhance public confidence on the proposed “3+3+4” structure.

24. SEM responded that the Administration had taken the initiative to reform the primary and junior secondary curriculum since 2000. With the abolition of the Academic Aptitude Tests in 2000, primary students were now under less pressure and could enjoy more in their learning experience at schools. The Administration considered that it was the right time to reform the senior secondary curriculum to include, among others, career-oriented studies alongside other academic subjects and learning experiences to cope with the particular needs, aptitudes and interest of individual students.

25. Mrs Selina CHOW considered that while universities might focus less on examination results, parents and teachers in secondary schools were very much concerned about the examination results of their children in those subjects which would be counted in the university admission requirement. She suggested that apart from the questionnaires to schools, EMB should maintain a close dialogue with teachers and parents on the proposed reform for senior secondary education.

Language education and generic learning

26. Mrs Selina CHOW considered that quality language education was vital to the on-going development of students and the community. She agreed that proficiency in both Chinese and English was a key to helping Hong Kong enrich its culture and maintain and strengthen its competitiveness as a world-class city. Referring to paragraph 3.8 of the consultation document, Mrs CHOW asked how the Administration would collaborate with the teaching workforce to assist students, through teaching and learning Chinese Language and English Language in senior secondary classes, to develop generic learning skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving and creativity, as well as positive values and attitudes conducive to lifelong learning.

27. PAS(CD) responded that under the curriculum reform in recent years,

Action

modifications and refinement had been made in different subjects of the school curriculum to pave the way for the implementation of the proposed “3+3+4” structure. Apart from assessing students’ abilities in listening, speaking, reading and writing, the design of the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examinations (HKCEE) in Chinese Language and English Language would be revised in 2007 to incorporate more open-ended questions in order to cope with curriculum reform in language education. PAS(CD) pointed out that across the curriculum there was a wide range of generic skills such as communication skills, higher-order thinking skills, problem solving skills, creativity, etc., which were essential for work and for further study, and were highly valued in the modern world. Students could also develop these generic skills through learning in different disciplines and participating in different activities.

28. Mr LEUNG Kwan-yuen asked how the new senior secondary curriculum would help enhance students’ competency in English language. PSEM responded that the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research would continue to collaborate with schools to improve the quality of language education by way of pedagogical improvement and curriculum reform. Schools were encouraged to create an environment and organise activities such as debates for students to learn and practise the use of English. PSEM pointed out that there would be individual differences in students’ ability to learn English and it would be difficult for all students to achieve the same level of proficiency in English. In view of this, the HKCEE would adopt standards-referencing in 2007 for English and Chinese language to enable student performance to be reported with reference to a set of standards. The standard achieved by a student in a subject such as English Language would reflect the competence level of the student in the subject.

Career-oriented studies

29. Mrs Selina CHOW asked about the professional development of teachers for teaching career-oriented subjects. She also asked whether and how professionals in different trades would participate in the provision of career-oriented studies to secondary students.

30. PSEM responded that a total of 12 career-oriented studies, involving 17 classes, relating to different trades had been included in the senior secondary school in 2003 to offer choices and diversities in the curriculum. Students might select them as alternatives to the elective subjects in the light of their particular needs, aptitudes and interests. Some students joined the programmes at the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (HKIVE) or Caritas. Alternatively, schools could invite tutors from HKIVE or Caritas to run the programmes in the school. PSEM added that the number of career-related programmes had increased from 12 in 2003-04 to 31 in the 2004-05 school year. The 12 programmes operated since the 2003-04 school year would be quality assured by an accreditation agency external to the school in 2005, and the

Action

qualifications awarded would be recognised under the qualifications framework.

31. Mrs Selina CHOW considered that the policy on medium of instruction would affect the quality of education in secondary schools and the provision of professional development programmes for teachers. She asked whether the policy would be reviewed in the consultation exercise on the proposed “3+3+4” structure.

32. SEM responded that a review of the medium of instruction for different subjects in the school curriculum would be carried out in a separate exercise in early 2005. Mr Tommy CHEUNG remarked that the Administration should carefully plan the transitional arrangements for teachers who would be required to teach new subjects such as Liberal Studies in a different medium of instruction.

33. Mr LEUNG Kwan-yuen asked how the 82% senior secondary graduates who were not admitted to university programmes under the new academic structure would be educated to possess the necessary knowledge and skills for finding an employment. He also asked whether the breadth and depth of the career-oriented studies, in particular those computer-related studies, were sufficient to enhance senior secondary graduates’ employability and their abilities to pursue continuing education.

34. PSEM responded that both primary and secondary students had demonstrated keen interests in computer-related studies. One of the recommendations in the proposed reform was to create a “Senior Secondary Student Learning Profile” which would record all the learning experiences and the achievements of a student throughout the years of senior secondary schooling. Students could have their learning acknowledged progressively over time, and the profile would serve both as a means to motivate ongoing work, and also as a passport for entry into the world of work, further education and training. Employers and higher education institutions would then have a more complete picture of the achievements and qualities of their potential employees and students.

Space requirements

35. Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked how the Administration would assist University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions to accommodate the double cohort of students entering university undergraduate programmes in the academic year following the first senior secondary public examination for the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE). SEM responded that sufficient land sites had been reserved for additional buildings and facilities to be constructed for the accommodation of both the S7 and the HKDSE graduates. The institutions would be required to draw up campus development plans accordingly.

Action

Consultation and implementation

36. Ms Audrey EU expressed concern whether a three-month period was adequate to solicit public views on the wide range of proposals in the consultation document, and whether sufficient details were available for the public to assess their feasibility. She pointed out that in the absence of planning and implementation details, it was difficult for parents to understand the implications of the proposals and express their views and suggestions. Mr Tommy CHEUNG also expressed concern about whether the targets and objectives set out in the consultation document could be achieved during implementation.

37. SEM responded that parents could make use of the hot line service and the e-mail address in the EMB website on the Internet to enquire about the details and implementation of the proposals in the consultation document. Prior to the publication of the consultation document, the Administration had been in continuous dialogue throughout 2004 to exchange views with the education sector and thrash out issues of concern for implementation of the new academic structure. This included the development, in consultation with teachers, principals, academics and community members, of more subject details under the proposed new curriculum and assessment system and a timetable for implementation. To facilitate expression of views and suggestions by parents, the Administration would conduct seminars to explain the rationale for the reform and the implementation of the reform proposals to parents. SEM added that the stakeholders in education and the community as a whole should determine the major directions for the reform in senior secondary education and higher education in the long term. The Administration had no pre-determined policy for the reforms.

38. Ms Audrey EU considered that EMB should organise separate workshops in specific areas for teachers and principals to acquire a better understanding of the reform measures and objectives. Schools should in turn organise briefing sessions for parents on the new academic structures so that parents could clarify their doubts and express their views to schools and the Administration. Ms EU considered a three-month consultation insufficient for soliciting public views on a major reform in academic structure. The Chairman expressed a similar view. He said that teachers and principals were now overloaded with the reform initiatives introduced in recent years. They should be given more time to consider the proposals and make suggestions.

39. SEM responded that EMB had organised a series of workshops for teachers and principals to acquire a better understanding of the reform proposals in the consultation document. He also invited parents and teachers to visit the EMB's website on the Internet for more information on the proposed new academic structures. SEM added that EMB could organise a briefing workshop for members, if considered necessary.

Action

40. PSEM supplemented that apart from the workshops for teachers and principals scheduled in November 2004, EMB would work with individual schools on the arrangements for implementing the new academic structure in the light of their circumstances. PSEM pointed out that there would be problems which had to be resolved and issues to be re-considered in the light of the outcome of the consultation. The Administration would continue to monitor the developments in school curriculum in the next four years before the implementation of the new senior secondary structure. She considered that the consultation exercise should progress as planned, and the period of consultation could be extended if the stakeholders and the community so demanded.

41. Ms Emily LAU considered that the consultation on the proposed “3+3+4” structure should be divided into two stages. The Administration should aim to establish consensus on the directions for change at the first stage, and present a full design of the new structure and implementation plans and timetable for further consultation at the second stage.

Assessment

42. Referring to paragraph 4.11 of the consultation document, Ms Audrey EU asked how school-based assessments in different subjects could be fairly administered and how the standards of students in different schools could be fairly assessed.

43. Secretary General, Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (SG(HKEAA)) explained that in order to ensure alignment between what was taught and what was assessed, a wider range of approaches to assessment was proposed to supplement the public examination system which had been adopted in the past. The inclusion of a school-based assessment component could help assess the set of generic competencies that could not be assessed in the context of a public external written examination. To ensure objectivity and fairness in assessment of students’ performance among different schools, school-based assessment results of students would be statistically moderated with reference to their external examination results. Other methods of moderation would be explored, particularly where the subject was not suited to assessment solely by a written examination, to facilitate fair and consistent assessment of the students’ all-round abilities.

44. SG(HKEAA) further said that school-based assessment had already been used in a number of examinable subjects to assess key outcomes, and was being extended to another nine HKCEE subjects over the period 2004-07. Building on local experience and on the more extensive experience of examination authorities overseas, more systematic use would be made of school-based assessment in all subjects. In the first instance, it was proposed that school-based assessment would account for between 20-30% of the total assessment for each subject. Support services and guidelines would be provided

Action

for schools and teachers to conduct school-based assessments. SG(HKEAA) stressed that the Administration would maintain close dialogue with the education sector and monitor the progress of school-based assessment in schools to ensure that it would not lead to an increase in the student's assessment load and affect teacher workload unduly.

45. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that assessment of a student's achievement in an examination in some overseas institutions was based on his percentile position relative to other students participating in the same examination. He asked about the accuracy and consistency of the proposed standards-referenced approach with a school-based assessment component in reporting results.

46. SG(HKEAA) responded that the current system of reporting student achievements by means of a norm-referenced system under which students were awarded a grade of A-F in each subject based on pre-defined percentages of control-group students being awarded the different grades. The norm-referenced system was designed for a relatively elite group of students most of whom aspired to university study. The new assessments and examinations would be designed to accommodate the full spectrum of student aptitudes and abilities. Under a standards-referenced system, students would be matched against standards, which said that students had to know and be able to do to merit a certain grade. SG(HKEAA) pointed out that the new system would continue to report results in ways that allow comparisons among students to facilitate selection decisions, in particular the high flyers for university admission purpose. It would also establish standards that were appropriate for the full range of students in their sixth year of secondary schooling. Certain levels would be benchmarked to international and current standards to facilitate interpretation and recognition of the new system.

47. Mr Tommy CHEUNG considered that students should be provided with the choice to sit for HKDSE or not, and be awarded a certificate of graduation issued by their schools. SEM responded that students were free to decide whether they should participate in the examination. He, however, pointed out that unlike the results of a public examination, the acceptability of a certificate of graduation issued by a secondary school would vary from persons to persons and from institutions to institutions.

Funding for implementing the "3+3+4" structure

48. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung considered the proposed funding arrangements for implementing the "3+3+4" structure unfair to parents and students. He pointed out that needy parents and students would have financial difficulties in affording the recommended increases in tuition fees for senior secondary education and higher education, i.e., about \$7,200 on a weight average basis and \$50,000 per annum for senior secondary classes and undergraduate studies at current prices respectively. He asked whether the Administration would

Action

consider reducing the proposed share of parents in the additional recurrent costs for implementing the “3+3+4” structure. He added that apart from ensuring that no students would be deprived of their right to education through lack of means, the Administration should protect unemployed graduates from being forced to run into bankruptcy if they were unable to repay loans granted under the various student financial assistance schemes

49. SEM responded that apart from a total capital and non-recurrent costs of about \$6.7 billion which would be funded from the public purse, the Government and the parents would contribute about \$1.1 billion and \$750 million respectively of the additional recurrent cost on full implementation of the new academic systems. Since the benefits of the reform would accrue to both students and the community, the Administration proposed that the additional recurrent costs should be shared between parents by paying higher tuition fees, and the community through the general revenue of the Government. SEM added that the Administration considered it reasonable for financially capable parents to share part of the costs incurred. As regards the financial difficulties of needy parents and students, the Administration would consider ways to improve the student financial assistance schemes such as extending the repayment period to cater for the different needs of students. He stressed that the Administration would consider the views collected during the consultation.

50. Dr Fernando CHEUNG considered that the proposed increase in tuition fees for senior secondary education and higher education would add substantial financial burden to low income families and needy students. He pointed out that the high interest rate of loans granted under the Non-means Tested Loan Scheme for post-secondary students had forced undergraduates to seek part-time employment. He urged the Administration to re-consider the proposed increase in tuition fees with a view to assisting needy and capable students to pursue further education.

51. SEM responded that the Government had allocated some \$1.2 billion to provide financial assistance to needy families and students under various financial assistance schemes. The Administration would review with a view to improving the terms and conditions of these schemes within the constraints and demands on public finance in general. He added that needy families would be assisted on the basis of their financial situation, and the interest rate under the Non-means Tested Loan Scheme was lower than the market rates.

52. Dr Fernando CHEUNG asked why the proposed increase of tuition fees in UGC-funded institutions did not follow the existing calculation, i.e., 18% of the average student unit cost. SEM acknowledged that the proposed increase would change the cost recovery rate from 18% to about 24% in the higher education sector, but pointed out that the cost recovery rates in neighbouring and some overseas countries were above 24%. He stressed that the community as a whole should determine the appropriate cost recovery rate for higher education.

Action

53. The Chairman remarked that the Administration should remain open to public views in respect of the share of the additional funding for implementing the new academic structures by parents. He considered that the issue of whether or not the university tuition fee should be increased should be discussed at a later stage, and not in the current consultation exercise.

Review on the nine-year free basic education

Admin

54. Ms Emily LAU considered that the Administration should review the policy on the provision of nine-year free basic education with reference to the resources provision and the duration of free education in overseas countries, in particular the trading partners and competitors of Hong Kong. She believed that given the importance of education, the community would accept a slight increase in tax in order to fund the provision of free senior secondary education. She requested the Administration to provide a paper to compare the provision of free education in Hong Kong and neighboring countries.

55. SEM responded that the Administration would continue to provide assistance to students and ensure that no student would be deprived of the opportunity to study through lack of means. He undertook to provide a paper on provision of free education in overseas countries.

56. Dr Fernando CHEUNG suggested that the Administration should take the opportunity of reforming the senior secondary education to extend the provision of free education from nine to 12 years. He pointed out that under the existing policy, many students were forced to leave schools at the age of 13, and currently around one-third of secondary school leavers aged 15-19 were unemployed. He added that many children of the lower income families, particularly those single-parent families, were forced to discontinue their secondary studies after S3.

57. PSEM acknowledged that young school leavers at the age of 15 could hardly find employment under the prevailing economic conditions. They were encouraged to continue their secondary education by way of the Project Yi Jin or the career-oriented studies offered by new senior secondary schools established in 2003 and afterwards. In fact, 99% of S3 graduates were now continuing their studies in senior secondary schools. With the assistance of social workers, the Administration envisaged unemployed adolescents between the ages of 15 to 19 would consider resuming their secondary studies in those new senior secondary schools or joining the Project Yi Jin.

Follow-up

58. Members in general expressed support for the implementation of the proposed “3+3+4” structure. In view of members’ views and concerns on the proposals in the consultation document, the Chairman suggested that the

Action

Administration should consider the views of stakeholders and the community collected from the consultation extensively. Specifically, the Chairman requested the Administration to -

- (a) re-consider the timing for incorporating Liberal Studies as a core subject under the proposed curriculum framework for senior secondary education and as a compulsory subject for university entrance in the light of the views of stakeholders and the community;
- (b) provide appropriate support services and professional development programmes for the teaching workforce to prepare for the implementation of the new senior secondary structure, in particular the teaching of Liberal Studies;
- (c) re-consider the proportion of increase in tuition fees for senior secondary education and higher education having regard to the financial difficulties of needy families and students;
- (d) consider extending the consultation period to facilitate solicitation of views from stakeholders and the community; and
- (e) consider organising briefing sessions and workshops for parents, teachers and principals to acquire a better understanding of the proposals in the consultation document.

59. Members also agreed to hold a special meeting to receive views of deputations on the consultation document in December 2004/January 2005. On the instruction of the Chairman, the Clerk would consult members on the date of the special meeting by circulation of a paper.

[Post meeting note : The special meeting would be held on Monday, 20 December 2004 from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm.]

IV. Any other business

Change of agenda item for the meeting on 8 November 2004

60. Members noted the Administration's request of the Panel to discuss "Review of the Student Travel Subsidy Schemes" on 8 November 2004 and its intention to submit a funding proposal to the Finance Committee for consideration at the meeting on 19 November 2004. Members agreed to include the item on the agenda for the meeting on 8 November 2004 and defer discussion of "Native-speaking English Teachers for primary schools" to the meeting on

Action

13 December 2004.

61. The meeting ended at 6:15 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
9 December 2004