

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)110/05-06

(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

**Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 11 July 2005 at 4:30 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

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| Members present | : Dr Hon YEUNG Sum (Chairman)
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
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 |
| Members absent | : Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-yee, GBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon MA Lik, GBS, JP |
| Public Officers attending | : <u>Item III</u>

Mrs Fanny LAW, GBS, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower

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

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

Mr Sam HUI
Assistant Secretary (Special Duties), Education and
Manpower Bureau

Item IV

Mrs Fanny LAW, GBS, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mr Andrew POON
Principal Assistant Secretary (Quality Assurance),
Education and Manpower Bureau

Item V

Mrs Fanny LAW, GBS, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower

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

**Attendance by
invitation** : Item III

Native English-speaking Teachers' Association

Mr John MURNANE
Chairman

Ms Andrea MACKENZIE
Chairperson, Special Allowance and Gratuity
Subcommittee

Ms Kathy HILL
Member of the Special Allowance and Gratuity
Subcommittee

Mr Perry BAYER
Member of the Special Allowance and Gratuity
Subcommittee

Ms Mary SALTER
Member of the Special Allowance and Gratuity
Subcommittee

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

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

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I. Confirmation of minutes

[LC Paper No. CB(2)2165/04-05]

The minutes of the meeting held at 5:30 pm on 20 June 2005 were confirmed.

II. Information paper(s) issued since the last meeting

2. Members noted the following papers which were issued since the last meeting –

- (a) A letter from Pun U Association Wah Yan Primary School Parents Teachers Association to the Secretariat of the Working Group on Secondary School Places Allocation and Review of Medium of Instruction for Secondary Schools dated 22 June 2005 [LC Paper No. CB(2)2127/04-05(01)];
- (b) A submission on review of the medium of instruction of secondary schools and secondary school places allocation from the Federation of Parent-Teacher Associations of the Central and Western District dated 27 June 2005 [LC Paper No. CB(2)2141/04-05(01)]; and
- (c) Reply letter dated 6 July 2005 from the Secretary for Education and Manpower to the Chairman's letter dated 21 June 2005 on "Second Matching Grant Scheme for University Grants Committee-funded Institutions" [LC Paper No. CB(2)2215/04-05(01)].

III. Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme

3. Members noted the Administration's paper entitled "Updates of the Native-speaking English Teacher (NET) Scheme [LC Paper No. CB(2)2167/04-05(01)] and its letter dated 5 July 2005 [LC Paper No. CB(2)2191/04-05(01)] in response to the three submissions from the Native

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English-speaking Teachers' Association (NESTA) [LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1775/04-05(01)-(02) and CB(2)1783/04-05(01)].

4. Members also noted the background brief on Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme prepared by the Legislative Council (LegCo) Secretariat.

Language Standards in Hong Kong

5. Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (5) (DS(EM)5) conducted a power-point presentation on Language Standards in Hong Kong as summarised in its note tabled at the meeting [LC Paper No. CB(2)2253/04-05(01)].

Views and suggestions of NESTA

6. Mr John MURNANE said that the Special Allowance and Gratuity Subcommittee (SAGS) was established in May 2005 to represent NESTA on matters related to the special allowance under the NET Scheme. He pointed out that the popularity of the NET Scheme in the eyes of the professional native-speaking English teachers had declined in recent years. He requested the Administration to provide more support to NETs and improve the remuneration package with a view to retaining experienced NETs to continue their teaching in Hong Kong.

7. Mr Perry BAYER presented the views and suggestions of the SAGS as detailed in its submission [LC Paper No. CB(2)2191/04-05(02)]. He highlighted that as a result of the reduction in civil service salaries in recent years and the introduction of an adjustment mechanism for special allowance in mid-2004, the remuneration package for NETs in Hong Kong had become less competitive. He requested members to urge the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) to review the special allowance adjustment mechanism with a view to improving the recruitment and retention of NETs for implementation of the NET Scheme in primary and secondary schools.

8. Ms Andrea MACKENZIE said that there were diverse views among NETs on the adoption and operation of the special allowance adjustment mechanism. She considered that the introduction of the adjustment mechanism in mid-2004 had not been widely discussed in the NET community. She added that the views of the executive committee of NESTA in 2003 could not be regarded as fairly representative of the views of NETs at that time.

Members' views and concerns

Role of NETs and effectiveness of the NET Scheme

9. Ms Audrey EU said that while the Administration in its power-point

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presentation had claimed that there was evidence showing a modest but steady improvement of English language standards in Hong Kong, the commercial sector in general considered that the English standards of Hong Kong people had declined in recent years. Mr LEUNG Kwan-yuen echoed that the industrial sector shared the same concern that the overall English standards of school and university graduates had declined in recent years. In this connection, Ms EU asked how NESTA would consider the role and contributions of NETs in upgrading the English language standards in Hong Kong.

10. Ms Mary SALTER responded that one of the major contributions of NETs was to help establish a concept of learning English through an understanding of the English phonetics. She explained that a basic understanding of English phonetics would enhance the self-learning ability of primary and secondary students in learning English. She highlighted that NETs brought about new teaching methodologies and enjoyment in learning English in schools. Most importantly, NETs played a significant role in the fostering of students' confidence in learning and speaking English in schools. Such confidence was crucial for school graduates to communicate with others in English in a proactive manner. She added that to enhance teaching and learning effectiveness, each primary school should be provided with one NET.

11. Mr Tommy CHEUNG and Mr LEUNG Kwan-yuen pointed out that some local English teachers had complained about the large disparity in remuneration packages between NETs and local teachers. They considered that EMB should play an active role in enhancing the cooperation of NETs and local English teachers in schools. They suggested that EMB should consult NETs and schools on ways to improve effectiveness in teaching and learning English in schools.

12. Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower (PSEM) responded that according to the preliminary findings of the evaluation study on the effectiveness of the NET Scheme in primary schools, around 20% of respondents said that NETs did not help them much in teaching English, and some 10% of local English teachers said that they had difficulty to collaborate with NETs to enhance English teaching and learning in primary schools. PSEM acknowledged that there were interpersonal problems among NETs, and principals and local English teachers in some schools. For this reason, EMB had established Advisory Teaching Teams to support English panels in primary schools and planned to strengthen support for secondary schools. She added that most schools and NETs disliked the arrangement for two primary schools to share one NET. EMB was exploring various options to improve the situation, such as the provision of a cash grant in lieu of the sharing of a NET.

13. Dr Fernando CHEUNG asked about the role of the NET Scheme in the Administration's plan to enhance the English standards of school students in the long term. He considered that given the substantial resources incurred, EMB should evaluate the cost-effectiveness of the NET Scheme in terms of its effect

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on upgrading students' English standards. Mr Tommy CHEUNG and Mr LEUNG Kwan-yuen expressed a similar view.

14. PSEM responded that, as detailed in the consultation document entitled "An Action Plan to raise Language Standards in Hong Kong" issued in 2002, the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research had recommended a package of measures to improve language education and the language proficiency of the community. She pointed out that the purpose of the NET Scheme was to enrich the English language environment for school students. NETs were expected to bring in more lively and innovative pedagogical practices and assist in school-based teacher development. She added that the three-year evaluation study on the effectiveness of the NET Scheme in primary schools was on target. It would provide information on how EMB should improve and make effective use of the NET Scheme in the long term.

Recruitment and retention of NETs

15. The Chairman expressed concern that according to paragraph 4 of the Administration's paper, some 75 (49%) and 67 (46%) of the serving NETs in secondary and primary schools respectively reaching the end of their contract at the turn of the 2005 school year would not renew contracts. Ms Audrey EU and Ms Emily LAU asked whether the terms and conditions of employment under the NET Scheme were competitive in a global search. Ms LAU also invited NESTA to elaborate on the competitiveness of the remuneration package of the NET Scheme in recruitment of professional NETs as compared with similar schemes in other places.

16. Ms Andrea MACKENZIE responded that with the reduction in salaries and special allowance in recent years, Hong Kong was gradually losing out in competition with other places for professional NETs. She explained that the remuneration package under the NET Scheme was becoming less attractive than before and the support provided to NETs was inadequate in comparison with those provided in other places. With increasing demand from principals, the workload of NETs in schools was heavier than before. She also cited her personal experience to illustrate the lack of attractiveness of the remuneration package and insufficient support for NETs. She added that NETs were now more inclined to work in Brunei where a very competitive remuneration package and a wide variety of support were offered to professional NETs.

17. Ms Audrey EU considered the projected turnover rate of NETs in primary and secondary schools at the turn of the 2005 school year unacceptable. She asked how EMB would improve recruitment and retention of NETs in the long term. In view of the resources incurred for the recruitment of NETs and the role and importance of NETs in upgrading students' English proficiency in schools, Ms EU and Dr Fernando CHEUNG suggested that EMB should examine the causes for the high turnover rate and take appropriate remedial measures to

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improve the situation.

18. PSEM responded that EMB had consulted NESTA on possible ways to improve recruitment and retention of NETs. In view of the concern of the NET community and to assess whether the support and remuneration arrangements for the NET Scheme were adequate, EMB had conducted a survey among NETs to collate information on the living patterns and expenses, and to find out how NETs felt about working in local schools. The findings would facilitate EMB in evaluating whether the remuneration package and the support for NETs were competitive and adequate.

19. PSEM pointed out that there was a range of professional and personal factors affecting the decision of a NET to continue teaching in Hong Kong. According to the response of NETs in the survey, NETs rated job satisfaction the most important consideration, followed by the remuneration package. Overall, some 70% of the respondents had indicated willingness to continue working in Hong Kong. As a result of the civil service salary adjustments and changes in the currency exchange rates in recent years, the remuneration package for NETs had become less attractive than before. The Administration could consider providing NETs with currency options in salary payments, e.g., 50% of salary paid in Hong Kong dollars and 50% in the currency of their native countries if the NETs felt this could assist. She added that the low tax rate in Hong Kong was clearly an advantage in attracting NETs to work in Hong Kong.

20. PSEM further said that NETs might discontinue their work in Hong Kong for various professional and personal reasons. According to past experience, around 50% of NETs left the service before or after completion of their first contract. The other 50% would complete their second contract, and would consider leaving the service after completion of their third contract.

21. Mr Tommy CHEUNG considered that EMB should conduct an exit interview for each NET not renewing their contracts, in order to identify the causes for the high turnover rate of NETs. He suggested that EMB should examine the competitiveness of the remuneration package in comparison with the offers under similar schemes in other places.

22. PSEM confirmed that EMB had conducted exit interviews to find out the reasons for not renewing the contract and collect feedback on the operation of the NET Scheme. She pointed out that around 25% and 30% of NETs had resigned to work in private schools in Hong Kong and in other places respectively. She undertook to collect information on the remuneration packages for teachers in other jurisdictions such as the United States and the United Kingdom for members' reference.

23. DS(EM)5 supplemented that despite the reduction in salaries and special allowance, the remuneration package under the NET Scheme was still attractive

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to professional English Language teachers in Australia. He pointed out that the demand for professional English teachers had significantly increased in recent years as a result of similar schemes offered in places such as the Mainland and some Middle-East countries. He pointed out that the turnover rate of NETs in secondary schools had hitherto been above 25%, but agreed that a 50% turnover rate was unacceptable. He added that EMB was considering various options to reduce the turnover rate of NETs and in particular, retain the experienced NETs.

Improving the remuneration package and support for NETs

24. Ms Audrey EU said that according to EMB, rentals in Hong Kong varied widely depending on quality and location of the property and many other factors. The current special allowance of \$10,500 per month might not be adequate for renting an 800 square feet flat in South Horizon of Hong Kong Island, but was more than adequate for renting a similar flat in the New Territories. She asked whether NETs would consider finding a flat in districts where the monthly rentals were below \$10,500.

25. Ms Andrea MACKENZIE responded that according to a property agent, a 800 to 900 square feet apartment at a monthly rental of around \$9,000 would not be readily available in Tai Po these days. She pointed out that while the monthly rental of a flat located in remote districts such as Cheung Chau or Discovery Bay was lower, the transportation costs for a NET residing in these districts but working in schools located in other districts would be considerably high. In addition, the time taken for a NET to travel between his living and working locations was also an important factor to consider. She added that the NET community considered the 19.3% reduction in special allowance unacceptable, and SAGS was established to follow up the matter with EMB. She also explained the needs of NETs to live in the vicinity of their friends and peers for social and security reasons.

26. Mr Tommy CHEUNG considered that if the downward adjustment of special allowance was the sole reason of the high turnover rate of NETs, the Administration should review the special allowance adjustment mechanism in the light of the rising rentals in recent years. Dr Fernando CHEUNG, however, remarked that given the high living costs in Hong Kong, it would not be realistic for NETs to expect a living environment which was more or less the same as those in their native countries.

27. PSEM responded that EMB had carefully examined the parameters for re-adjusting the special allowance for NETs, but considered that there was no reasonable justification for not following the approved adjustment mechanism at this stage. According to the survey, about 72% of serving NETs were residing in flats with monthly rentals below the current special allowance of \$10,500 per month. On the other hand, about 6% of respondents said that they were residing in a flat with a monthly rental of \$14,000 and above.

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28. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong pointed out that when the Panel considered the proposed adjustment mechanism for the special allowance under the NET Scheme, members had urged the Administration to consult the NET community and review the impact of the adjustment mechanism on the recruitment and retention of NETs in the long term. He asked whether EMB would agree that the downward adjustment in special allowance was a major factor for the 49% and 46% turnover rate of NETs reaching the end of their contracts at the turn of the 2005 school year in secondary and primary schools respectively. He considered that EMB should work out measures to retain experienced NETs who had completed their first contract in Hong Kong.

29. PSEM responded that the Administration also considered the high turnover rate in the 2004-05 school year unacceptable. She acknowledged that the entire NET remuneration package was becoming less attractive in the light of various factors including salary adjustments in line with the civil service. She pointed out that EMB had discussed with NESTA on measures to improve retention of NETs. One of the options under consideration was to increase the gratuity payment on the basis of their seniority in service. EMB would evaluate the support for the NET Scheme including remuneration package in the light of the findings of the survey, and revert to the Panel with its recommendations after discussion with the NET community.

30. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that initially NETs were attracted by the remuneration package to work in Hong Kong. They would decide to stay teaching in Hong Kong on the basis of the working and living environment in Hong Kong. He considered it reasonable to review the remuneration package for NETs in the light of changing circumstances, and to adjust the remuneration package in commensuration with their experience in the service.

31. Mr Tommy CHEUNG remarked that the Administration should consider the provision of higher gratuity rates to retain experienced NETs on the basis of their seniority in service. The Chairman said that EMB should consider the suggestion of the SAGS to increase the rate of gratuity payment from 15% to 25% of the earned salaries during the contract period.

32. Ms Emily LAU suggested that EMB should allow flexibility in the design of the remuneration package and arrangements for NETs for the purpose of attracting and retaining experienced NETs who were professionally capable of upgrading the English proficiency of students in schools. She urged the Administration to consider the suggestions of SAGS on improving the competitiveness of the remuneration package and the support for NETs in the long term.

33. Mr LEUNG Kwan-yuen, however, considered it difficult for the Administration to justify and provide additional monetary support to NETs in

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areas where relevant provisions in the civil service and aided sector were found long obsolete. He advised EMB to ensure that the provision of flexibility in the remuneration package for NETs should not be in conflict with the relevant civil service policies and regulations for employment of expatriate staff.

34. PSEM responded that EMB would consult the Civil Service Bureau and the Treasury on the provision of flexibility in the remuneration package and arrangements for NETs. She pointed out that apart from a competitive remuneration package, a sense of achievement and satisfaction in the workplace was equally important for the retention of experienced NETs. Through conducting the survey and exit interviews, EMB would develop a profile of the NETs who had decided to leave the service. Meanwhile, EMB would continue to collaborate with principals, NETs and local English teachers to enrich the job contents and enhance job satisfaction of NETs, as well as to resolve disputes between principals and NETs over teaching and non-teaching matters. In addition, EMB would continue to maintain regular contacts with NESTA on improving the remuneration package and support for NETs.

35. Ms Andrea MACKENZIE said that at present, there were some 787 NETs in Hong Kong and 231 of them had joined the NESTA. She considered that EMB should maintain close contacts with the NET community and consult them on issues affecting their interests. She agreed that the NET Scheme at its inception was very competitive, but such competitiveness had diminished as a result of the civil service salary adjustments, the changing currency exchange rates and the downward adjustment on special allowance. Responding to Ms Emily LAU's enquiry about the support measures provided under similar schemes in other places, Ms MACKENZIE described the supports to NETs in various places to substantiate the request of SAGS to adjust the special allowance for NETs from \$10,500 to \$13,000 in the light of rising living costs in recent years.

Follow-up

36. Members in general expressed concern about the increasing turnover rate of NETs. They considered that the Administration should review the NET Scheme in a comprehensive manner with a view to enhancing the job satisfaction of NETs and recruitment and retention of NETs. The Chairman requested the Administration to consult NESTA and SAGS on improvements to the NET Scheme, and revert to the Panel with the findings of the survey and its recommendations to enhance the competitiveness of the NET Scheme in the new session. PSEM agreed.

IV. Training of kindergarten teachers

37. Members noted the Administration's paper entitled "Development on

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kindergarten teacher training” [LC Paper No. CB(2)2167/04-05(03)] and the background brief on training of kindergarten teachers prepared by the LegCo Secretariat [LC Paper No. CB(2)2167/04-05(04)].

Entry qualification and training for kindergarten teachers

38. Referring to appendices I and II to the background brief prepared by the LegCo Secretariat, Ms Emily LAU expressed disappointment that the number of subsidised undergraduate places for in-service early childhood educators would be reduced from more than 100 to 60 in the school years ahead. She asked whether the Administration had any plan to upgrade the qualification of kindergarten teachers to degree level.

39. PSEM welcomed discussion on the priorities for allocation of education resources for the tertiary, secondary, primary and early childhood education sectors, given limited resources. She pointed out that the current entry requirement of kindergarten teachers was the completion of a one-year Qualified Kindergarten Teacher (QKT) course. The Administration considered it appropriate to upgrade progressively the qualification of in-service kindergarten teachers to certificate level and above.

40. PSEM further said that the current policy was to provide 14 500 first-year-first-degree places in University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions. Unless the quota was expanded, any increase in undergraduate places for early childhood education would have to be offset by corresponding reduction in other disciplines, which might not be easy.

41. Ms Emily LAU agreed that the community as a whole should reach a consensus on the appropriate share of the education resources for early childhood education. She added that the provision of quality early childhood education would benefit pupils in their progression from kindergarten to school and university education, and contribute to the fostering of necessary human capital for the on-going development of Hong Kong as an international city.

42. The Chairman pointed out that there were some 7 000 in-service kindergarten teachers who had not completed a certificate programme in early childhood education. It would take a long time for all serving kindergarten teachers to achieve a degree qualification in early childhood education.

43. PSEM responded that the Administration would conduct a comprehensive review on kindergarten teacher training in the 2005-06 school year. She pointed out that the Administration would have to consider the provision of an appropriate long-term career path for kindergarten teachers if the entry qualification was raised to degree level. At this stage, the Administration would collaborate with the pre-primary sector and the UGC-funded institutions to explore the feasibility of providing two-year extension programmes for

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kindergarten teachers who had completed an approved sub-degree programme.

44. Mr Jasper TSANG asked whether the Administration would consider the formulation of a long-term policy objective to upgrade the entry requirement of kindergarten teacher to degree level in order to upgrade the quality of the workforce in the long run. He considered that the Administration should set out a policy vision and mission to upgrade the quality of early childhood education in the future.

45. PSEM responded that the Education Commission had discussed the matter in 2000, but considered it more appropriate to upgrade the entry requirement of kindergarten teachers to the sub-degree level initially. She pointed out that if the entry requirement was upgraded to degree level, it would be necessary to consider a progression path for these teachers to teach in primary or even secondary schools.

46. Mr Jasper TSANG did not agree that kindergarten teachers with a degree must be provided with advancement opportunities to teach in primary and secondary schools. He considered that early childhood education laid the foundation for life-long learning and all-round development, and experienced kindergarten teachers and principals should continue to work and develop their expertise in early childhood education with the aim of enhancing the quality of early childhood education on an on-going basis.

47. PSEM responded that under the existing civil service pay system, the salary scale of a post was determined by the entry qualifications required and the level of responsibilities involved. The Chairman remarked that the qualification requirement for kindergarten teachers had all along been set at a lower level. Given the importance of early childhood education in the development of a child, the Administration should review the entry qualification and the level of responsibilities required for kindergarten teachers with a view to upgrading the quality of early childhood education in the future.

48. Mr Tommy CHEUNG agreed that from a management perspective, teachers with a degree in early childhood education should be provided with a career development path for their progression to higher level posts with corresponding salary adjustments. He considered that the existing pay structure for pre-primary, primary and secondary school teachers should be reviewed in a comprehensive manner. He suggested that the Administration should consider the provision of subvention to early childhood education in order to upgrade the entry qualification of kindergarten teachers and the quality of early childhood educators in the long run.

49. The Chairman pointed out that during the motion debate on “Enhancing the quality of Early Childhood Education” at the Council meeting on 22 June 2005, many members had expressed support for the provision of subvention to

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early childhood education.

Cost and quality of training for pre-primary teachers

50. Ms Audrey EU asked about the tuition fees of the certificate courses for kindergarten teachers offered by the three training institutions appointed through open tenders. PSEM replied that programme participants would bear about 18% of the course expenditure, and the annual tuition fee would be around \$3,700 to \$6,000.

51. Dr Fernando CHEUNG expressed support for the Administration's measures to upgrade teacher qualification requirements as set out in paragraph 11 of the Administration's paper. He asked how the Administration would monitor the quality of certificate programmes offered by the three institutions appointed by way of competing bids.

52. PSEM responded that the three institutions were selected on the basis of the quality of their programmes and not on the costs incurred. She pointed out that the three institutions had a good reputation and a long history in the provision of certificate programmes in early childhood education. The Administration would monitor the quality of their programmes through collection of feedback from course participants and the pre-primary sector. Principal Assistant Secretary (Quality Assurance) supplemented that staff of EMB would conduct regular visits and class observations to monitor the quality of these programmes.

Way forward

53. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong pointed out that the qualifications and training requirements of kindergarten teachers and principals had been progressively raised over the years, and would be raised to certificate level in line with the recommendations of the education reform proposed by the Education Commission in 2000. He considered that the Administration should continue to upgrade the quality of the pre-primary workforce on a pragmatic basis. He anticipated that the Administration could ensure that all eligible kindergarten teachers who wished to undertake further study could receive training at certificate level in six years' time, and to review the recommended salary scales for kindergarten teacher in its overall review on pre-primary education in the 2005-06 school year. Mr CHEUNG suggested that the Administration should make reference to the existing Kindergarten Subsidy Scheme in considering the provision of subvention to non-profit-making kindergartens in the recruitment of teachers with a certificate in early childhood education.

54. PSEM responded that the Administration would conduct a comprehensive review on the pre-primary education in the 2005-06 school year which covered issues including professional upgrading of kindergarten teachers

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and their salary scales. The Administration would also take into account the views expressed by LegCo members and the pre-primary sector when conducting the review.

V. Proposed revision of senior secondary school fees

55. The Chairman, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong and Dr Fernando CHEUNG expressed regret that despite members' repeated enquiries at the meeting on 3 June 2005, the Secretary for Education and Manpower had refused to confirm that the Administration had already decided to increase senior secondary school fees.

56. Referring to Chapter Six of the consultation document entitled "Reforming the Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education – Actions for Investing in the Future", Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong pointed out that the Administration had indicated its policy intent to gradually increase the tuition fee for senior secondary education to the target recovery level of 18% from the 2005-06 to 2008-09 school years. He requested the Administration to set out the details and timetable for phasing in the proposed increase for public consultation. He pointed out that the unit cost of senior secondary education would increase as a result of the implementation of the new academic structure in the 2009-10 school year. He considered that the Administration should consult the community on any further increase of senior secondary school fees after the implementation of the new academic structure.

57. PSEM responded that the existing policy was to recover 18% of the unit cost from tuition fees for senior secondary education. As indicated in paragraph 5 of the Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(2)1924/04-05(01)], the Administration would progressively restore the cost recovery rate from the existing level of 15% to the target recovery level of 18% in phases. Since the economic conditions might change each year, the Administration considered it more appropriate to propose the increase of senior secondary fees for the 2005-06 school year first. The Administration would propose the increase of fees for subsequent school years in the light of changing circumstances, including the unit cost estimate and the affordability of parents.

58. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong remarked that he did not object to reasonable increase of senior secondary school fees on the basis of the increase in student unit cost under the new academic structure. He held a strong view that the Administration should set out a detailed schedule of the increase in senior secondary school fees, having regard to the economic outlook and the financial impact on parents.

59. PSEM responded that as stated in section 12.12 of the consultation report entitled "The New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and

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Higher Education – Action Plan for Investing in the Future of Hong Kong”, the Government would bring the senior secondary school fee level back to 18% of recurrent cost at a measured pace, tentatively over a period of four years starting from the 2005-06 school year. The Administration would carefully consider the affordability of parents in determining the pace of achieving 18% cost recovery.

60. Dr Fernando CHEUNG expressed concern about the impact of the proposed increase in senior secondary school fees on needy families. He requested the Administration to review the various student financial assistance schemes with a view to ensuring that no students would be denied access to senior secondary education due to a lack of means.

61. PSEM responded that the Administration would continue to provide financial assistance to needy students so that no one would be deprived of the opportunity to study due to a lack of means. The Administration was reviewing the student financial assistance schemes including the assistance level and the loan and repayment arrangements. She undertook to revert to the Panel on the Adminstration's review of the various student financial assistance schemes in the new legislative session.

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VI. Any other business

62. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 7:10 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
20 October 2005