

For the meeting on 11 July 2005
Information Paper

Legislative Council Panel on Education
Development on Kindergarten Teacher Training

Purpose

This paper briefs Members of the policy background, current situation and future development on kindergarten (KG) teacher training to enhance the quality of pre-primary education.

Background

2. The Government always recognizes the importance of early childhood education and has been actively promoting high quality education in the sector. In the Policy Address in 1997 and ensuing years, a series of new policy targets have been announced to upgrade the qualifications of KG teachers and principals, to be implemented by phases. The targets aimed at training up a team of committed, high quality and professional teachers and equipping them with professional skills and expertise in aspects of curriculum design, learning and teaching, school management, assessment of school experience, public relations, child development and child care. These targets have laid a solid foundation for quality early childhood education. The major policy measures include:

- (a) to raise the entry requirements of KG teachers from two passes in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education (including one language subject) to five passes, including both Chinese and English, from the 2001/02 school year;
- (b) to require all newly appointed KG principals to have completed Certificate in Early Childhood Education (C(ECE)) from September 2002;
- (c) to require all new KG teachers to possess a Qualified Kindergarten Teacher (QKT) qualification from the 2003/04 school year;

(d) to require 100% of QKTs (based on a teacher to pupil ratio of 1:15) by the 2004/05 school year; and

(e) to require all serving KG principals to have completed C(ECE) by the 2005/06 school year.

Current Situation

3. In the past ten years, the Administration has allocated sufficient resources to ensure adequate training provision to implement the above policy measures. Full support has been gained from the sector and training institutions on the policy targets and implementation schedule, which have been clearly stated in school circulars and fully explained at meetings with the stakeholders concerned. Generally speaking, all these ambitious policy targets have been achieved.

4. On KG teachers, as of the 2004/05 school year, the percentage of QKTs already exceeds 100% if based on the required teaching establishment calculated on a teacher to pupil ratio of 1:15. On serving KG principals, as of September 2004, over 87% of serving KG principals by headcount have possessed C(ECE) qualification or its equivalent or are enrolling the course.

Way Forward

5. Hong Kong is an international city. In order to keep up with the era of knowledge and to keep abreast of the rapid technological development, we must have well-educated and capable individuals with creativity and flexibility to embark on maintaining the competitive advantage of an international cosmopolitan city. We truly believe that talents should be developed right from early childhood. As high quality education stems from high quality teachers, it is our primary goal to develop a professional team of early childhood educators by establishing a ladder for their continual professional development. The future direction on kindergarten education will focus on the following three aspects:

Additional Training Provision

6. As in the past, in-service training places are provided to meet policy needs. The number of subsidized training places provided through University Grants Committee (UGC) reflects the demand of the policy target to be achieved. Since the target of 100% QKT has already been achieved, the demand for in-service QKT course has lapsed. Thus, it is no longer necessary for the Administration to provide subsidized in-service QKT courses starting from the 2005/06 school year. Regarding the C(ECE) course, the Administration has retained an annual provision of 200 UGC-funded in-service C(ECE) places in the coming triennium to cater for the demand of the small number of untrained serving KG principals and for their replenishment.

7. At the same time, the Administration has planned to provide extra subsidized C(ECE) training places to upgrade serving teachers. Although the present policy only requires KG teachers to possess a QKT qualification, as of September 2004, there were 1,438 (18.3%) KG teachers having completed C(ECE) course, a higher qualification. In appreciation of the strenuous effort of KG teachers to further enhance their academic qualifications, the government aims at using the available resources to provide additional in-service training places at certificate level by other mode of funding such as open tendering, which can increase the diversity and flexibility of the training and maximize the cost-effectiveness of the available resources. While the government bears majority (82%) of the course expenditure, serving teachers aiming at self professional enhancement are to pay tuition fee which is equivalent to 18% of the unit cost. This practice is in line with the current policy on tertiary education.

8. The tender for a three-year part-time in-service certificate course for the 2005 intake was lodged in March 2005. The tendering process has just completed and contracts have been successfully awarded to three training institutions providing a total of 760 subsidized training places. The additional number of places procured has nearly doubled the original estimate of 400 places. In other words, in the 2005/06 school year, the in-service subsidized training places at certificate level will increase from 464 in last year to 1,000, which represent an increase of 500 places compared with last year's provision. Including the self-financed training places, the total number of training places will boost up to 1,400.

9. We have to emphasize that, during the tender selection process, the Administration did not take price as the main consideration, but rather based on the overall quality of the course provider and the course content to ensure that the course can best suit teachers' training needs and professional demand. In fact, all the three successful tenderers have more than 10 years' experience in operating relevant training courses, both government subsidized and self-financed, and enjoy recognition as quality providers in the field. In the coming years, the Education and Manpower Bureau will collaborate with the institutions in our endeavour to provide the sector with high quality training opportunities. In addition, we shall revisit the existing C(ECE) course framework so as to align the programme with the latest developments in early childhood education for teachers in the sector.

10. As pointed out by some organizations, serving teachers may have to wait for too long for their turn to further pursue qualifications and to complete the certificate course if we only count on those UGC-funded training places. But as the redeployment of resources has substantially increased the subsidized training provision, the waiting time will be shortened considerably. The Administration will continue to maximize the available resources to provide adequate provision so that all eligible kindergarten teachers who wish to undertake further study may take up training at certificate level in six years' time.

Fully Upgrade Teacher Qualification Requirement

11. In the long run, we concur that teachers' qualification requirements should be further improved and we shall conduct a comprehensive review on kindergarten teacher training in the 2005/06 school year to explore feasibility of upgrading the basic entrance requirement to certificate level. When conducting the review, we shall draw reference from the qualification requirements of early childhood education practitioners in other countries, but at the same time we have to consider the resource implications as well as the workload of teachers. Thus we are not inclined, at this time, to set any mandatory timelines on the attainment of the qualification so that teachers may complete the training at their own pace. We shall ensure that sufficient training places will be provided to cater for their needs. In parallel, when planning

UGC training provision in the next triennium and beyond, we shall fade out the one-year pre-service QKT training and the resources will be redeployed to increase the three-year pre-service C(ECE) places so as to gradually raise the entry qualifications of new teachers to certificate level which is in line with the recommendation of the Education Reform proposed by Education Commission in 2000. These are, we believe, effective measures to enhance the quality of teachers of early childhood education and actualize the target for upgrading KG teacher qualification to sub-degree level.

12. The existing recommended salary scales, devised in 1995, give KG operators a reference to pay for teachers and principal. KGs joining the Kindergarten Subsidy Scheme (KSS) are required to pay according to the recommended pay scales but the government does not have objection if individual operators are willing to pay more to attract teaching staff with higher qualifications. In fact, the recommended pay scales have already a stabilizing effect in the sector. The wastage rate of QKTs of KGs joining the KSS has remained steady at about 9% in the past three years. We agree with the sector that reasonable salary reward plays a significant part in recruiting and retaining well-qualified teaching staff who are of prime importance in raising the overall standard of early childhood education. Therefore, we shall include the recommended salary pay scale when conducting the review on kindergarten teacher qualification upgrading in the coming year.

Increase Professional Training Opportunities

13. In fact, early childhood teacher training does not focus only on the attainment of formal qualifications. The Education and Manpower Bureau has provided other diversified staff professional development programmes and training opportunities to raise the professionalism of KG teachers, such as organizing workshops on promoting the performance indicators for quality KG education; professional development seminars and workshops to strengthen teachers' pedagogical knowledge and skills; and tailor-made courses for serving KG principals and child care centre supervisors to enhance their leadership and management skills. A summary on the training and workshops organized by the Education and Manpower Bureau in this year is attached at the Appendix. The

professional development thematic training activities and courses run by the Education and Manpower Bureau were well received by the sector. The activities attracted far more enrolments than planned and positive feedback was received from the participants. We shall continue to provide more diversified in-service programmes for all teachers in the pre-primary institutions to enhance the professional development of KG teachers and principals.

Conclusion

14. In conclusion, the Administration pledges to continue providing adequate opportunities for the professional development of principals and teachers so that KG teacher qualification will be upgraded gradually with well-defined targets. On pre-service training, the QKT course will be replaced by C(ECE) training. On in-serving training, it will be further enhanced in three aspects. First, the number of subsidized C(ECE) places will be increased and the existing programme will be revisited. Second, more professional training opportunities will be offered with better variety and match the practical needs of KG professional staff. Thirdly, we shall review the tailored-made principal-ship training course to ensure it is professionally recognized and contemporary. We shall monitor the progress and ensure the effective use of available resources to upgrade quality of teaching so that we will strive for excellence in early childhood education.

*Education and Manpower Bureau
July 2005*

In-service professional development programmes
organized by Education and Manpower Bureau for pre-primary teachers

Title

Seminar on School Self-evaluation

Practical Skills of Reporting School Self-evaluation Findings

Seminar on Using Data to Drive School Improvement

Seminar on Enhancing School Self-evaluation through Effective Lesson Review

Workshop on Reviewing Early Language Activities

Workshop on Reviewing Early Art/Craft Activities

Workshop on Reviewing Early Science Activities

Workshop on Processing and Analyzing School Data

Seminar on “Music” in Early Childhood Education

Workshop on Singing

Workshop on Music Playing

Workshop on Dancing

Workshop on Music Appreciation

Seminar on Multiple Intelligences

Visit to KGs and Primary School in Macau, focusing on Multiple Intelligences