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17 July 2006

Miss Odelia LEUNG
Clerk to Panel
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road
Central, Hong Kong

Dear Odelia,

Panel on Education
Follow-up to meeting on 10 July 2006

Thank you for your letter of 12 July 2006. The responses of the Administration to the two motions passed by the Panel on Education on 10 July 2006 are as follows:

Motion on Class Restructuring

Para. 12 was originally included in the Paper provided to LegCo Secretariat on 3 July 2006.

The Chairman argued there might be unnecessary speculation from the education sector on its intention and we initially acceded to the request to take out Para.12. However, on reflection, we believed that we should give a comprehensive picture on all the issues affecting progress of 334. It should be noted that the title of the Paper was “An update on *the latest developments of 334* including the feedback on Further Consultation on Career-oriented Studies and the New Senior Secondary Academic Structure for Special Schools. The paragraph on Class Restructuring was one of the **six** areas where we reported on progress. It is for this reason that Para.12 has to be re-inserted in the Paper.

Para.12 is factual. During the consultation period, the issue of a framework for class restructuring was consistently raised in the series of 3-day School Leaders Workshops which have just ended at late June. Schools were of the view that uncertainty in this regard would adversely affect their planning for 2009. The urgency of the matter is reinforced when we consider the need to plan the future for Secondary One students entering schools this coming September. The information in Para. 12 was directly relevant to the matter under discussion.

It is therefore not possible to update Panel on the latest developments of 334 without consideration of the class restructuring issue. Its non-inclusion would confuse the Members and the public.

We note the motion passed by the Panel, in particular requesting the Administration not to raise the issue with the Panel or implement the proposals in 2007 before a consensus is reached with the education sector.

The Administration at the Panel on Education Meeting on 12 June heard the views of Members. Members would understand the difficulty in reaching consensus on this subject given the conflicting interests and divergent views among stakeholders including schools, teachers and parents. We are also acutely aware of the urgency of the matter and the strongly expressed desire to create as much certainty as possible for future planning.

Consultation with all stakeholders is ongoing. We will refine our proposals based on the principles set out in the Panel Paper “Class Restructuring of Secondary Schools” and balance as far as possible the competing views in the interests of students.

Motion related to ethnic minority students

Our Chinese curriculum for primary and secondary schools is designed for all who are learning the language for integration into the local Chinese society (irrespective of whether they are native Chinese speakers). The curriculum framework, divided into key stages, is robust, open and flexible. It accommodates different extent of adaptations to the teaching contents and materials by schools in catering for a wide range of learner abilities and interests. The modified curriculum for senior secondary education under the new academic structure will be broader still to provide even greater flexibility for adaptations. In fact, the promotion of school-based curricula is a fundamental approach applicable to every academic subject.

In order to assist designated schools that have admitted non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students in developing the relevant school-based curricula, we will strengthen our provision of on-site support. In other words, the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) will work together with the Chinese subject teachers of these schools to continue the development of different school-based curricula and teaching resources (including teaching strategies, contents and assessment designs, etc.) for NCS students, capitalizing on the practical experience of these teachers. Seen from the professional perspective of curriculum design, the curriculum supplement developed with the assistance of EMB is essentially a curriculum blueprint for NCS students.

We think it is neither appropriate nor necessary for the Government to develop a new open examination, specifically an easier Chinese examination similar to the English Language (Syllabus A) in the HKCEE, to facilitate the entry of non-Chinese speaking students into our universities and other post-secondary institutions. If an examination is solely designed to facilitate the attainment of passing grades, its function would be undermined. Moreover, the reality is that obtaining a pass in an easier examination does not necessarily mean that the students would possess the language proficiency required for further education or employment.

We will be adopting standards-referenced reporting in Chinese Language and English Language from the 2007 Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) onwards. By then, each of the levels to be attained will be accompanied by descriptors that make it clear what a typical student obtaining a given level is able to do. By having standards-referencing, an NCS student taking HKCEE or the future Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (Chinese Language) will be able to demonstrate his/her proficiency in Chinese reading, writing, listening, and speaking for further education and employment purposes. If we were to develop an easier examination, we would be taking a retrogressive step in our assessment mechanism.

As far as admissions into universities are concerned, local students applying for programmes funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC) must currently obtain a pass in Advanced Supplementary Level Use of English and Chinese Language and Culture in the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) before the institutions would consider their applications. That said, the UGC-funded institutions also accept alternatives to the “pass in Chinese Language” requirement. Under the

Joint University Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS), students, including NCS students, may use the HKCEE result in another language other than English in place of the Chinese Language result in order to apply for admission to undergraduate programmes. Institutions may also consider the students' applications according to their outstanding performance in other academic subjects. Besides, students may apply for admission with the UGC-funded institutions direct by using results other than those in HKALE under the non-JUPAS route.

We also understand that the Vocational Training Council, the Construction Industry Training Authority, the Clothing Industry Training Authority and other non-publicly funded post-secondary institutions are prepared to provide suitable flexibility in implementing any Chinese Language requirement when considering NCS students' applications.

In summary, the institutions, within the framework of existing public examinations, are already able to suitably allow flexibility for NCS students when applying the Chinese language requirement. We will nonetheless convey the requests of the NCS students to the institutions so that they could take the circumstances of these students into account when exercising the flexibility.

Yours sincerely,

(Ms Irene YOUNG)
for Secretary for Education and Manpower

c.c. Dr Hon YEUNG Sum (Chairman)