

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)2360/06-07
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 11 June 2007, at 4:30 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building

- Members present** : Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon SIN Chung-kai, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, SBS, JP
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Prof Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
- Members absent** : Dr Hon YEUNG Sum (Deputy Chairman)
Hon MA Lik, GBS, JP
- Public Officers attending** : Item IV

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

Mr Tony TANG
Principal Assistant Secretary (Quality Assurance),
Education and Manpower Bureau

Ms WU Po-ling
Principal Education Officer (Quality Assurance),
Education and Manpower Bureau

Professor John MacBeath
Professor of University of Cambridge

Item V

Mr Michael TIEN
Chairman, Standing Committee on Language Education
and Research

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

Mr Billy WOO
Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower
(Language Education)

Item VI

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

Mr Sheridan LEE Sha-lun
Principal Education Officer (Curriculum Development),
Education and Manpower Bureau

Mr LI Wing
Controller, Student Financial Assistance Agency

Clerk in attendance : Miss Odelia LEUNG
Chief Council Secretary (2)6

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

Miss Carmen HO
Legislative Assistant (2)6

Action

I. Confirmation of minutes

[LC Paper No. CB(2)2072/06-07]

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 May 2007 were confirmed.

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

2. Members noted the following papers issued since the last meeting -

- (a) extract from the minutes of the meeting of Legislative Council Members with Central & Western District Council members on 1 February 2007 concerning designation of Dr SUN Yat-sen's birthday as a school holiday [LC Paper No. CB(2)1861/06-07(01)]; and
- (b) research outline finalized by the Research and Library Services Division on academic freedom and institutional autonomy of higher education in the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Hong Kong [LC Paper No. CB(2)1880/06-07(01)].

III. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[Appendices I and II to LC Paper No. CB(2)2071/06-07]

3. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next regular meeting scheduled for Monday, 9 July 2007 -

- (a) Revision of senior secondary school fees;
- (b) Progress of "334"; and
- (c) Report of the Commission of Inquiry on allegations relating to The Hong Kong Institute of Education.

IV. Implementation of the School Development and Accountability Framework

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2071/06-07(01) and (02)]

4. Members noted the Administration's paper entitled "Report of the implementation of School Development and Accountability and the Planning for Second Cycle" and the background brief on school development and accountability framework prepared by the Legislative Council (LegCo) Secretariat.

Action

5. With the aid of PowerPoint, Professor John MacBeath briefed members on the findings of Phases I and II of "The Impact Study on the Effectiveness of External School Reviews (ESR) in Enhancing School Improvement through School Self-evaluation (SSE) in Hong Kong" (the Impact Study). The softcopy of the presentation materials was e-mailed to members on 18 June 2007.

Impact Study on SSE and ESR

6. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that the findings of the Impact Study did not reflect the actual situations in schools, as teachers were distressed with the heavy workload involved in SSE and ESR, and students were not as proficient in English as the model student was in the PowerPoint presentation. He urged the Administration to review the need to continue with the implementation of SSE and the second cycle of ESR at this stage, when the reforms in academic structure, school curriculum, examination and assessment systems were underway.

7. Dr Fernando CHEUNG concurred with Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong and said that SSE and ESR had been implemented too hastily and had created substantial workload and pressure for schools and teachers. He considered it unwise to put in substantial teaching resources and efforts in data collection and document preparation for SSE and ESR. Dr CHEUNG called on the Administration to review how SSE and ESR had benefited teaching and learning in school education before implementing the second cycle of ESR.

8. Mrs Selina CHOW said that teachers were the most key people in driving the necessary changes for education reform. She considered it imperative to convince the teaching profession of the need to establish an objective self-evaluation culture on the basis of school data to facilitate long-term development in school education. She appreciated the additional workload and pressure created on teachers, and urged for the provision of adequate support for the implementation of SSE and ESR.

9. In response, Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (5) (DS(EM)5) acknowledged the additional workload arising from data collection and documentation requirements and pressure created because of the performance ratings in the ESR report at the initial stage of implementation of the School Development and Accountability (SDA) framework. He pointed out that the SDA framework was developmental, improvement-driven and experiential that would be cautiously implemented in the light of stakeholders' feedback collected through various channels including the Impact Study. With the concerted efforts of the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) and schools to reduce the unnecessary paper work in the past years, teachers were now more receptive to SSE and ESR. In addition, the establishment of an electronic platform to support data collection as well as analysis had streamlined the SSE and ESR process.

Action

10. DS(EM)5 further said that to facilitate implementation of the second cycle of ESR, EMB had been consulting the key stakeholders including schools councils and sponsoring bodies on reduction of the performance indicators and the key performance measures, and ways to simplify the data collection and document preparation and submission processes. Since the SDA framework incorporating SSE and ESR were new to EMB and schools when it was introduced, both would have to learn from the actual experiences gained in the course of implementation. According to the Impact Study, the twin approach of SSE and ESR had assisted schools to identify their strengths and areas of improvement, as well as to plan ahead for the implementation of the new academic structure in the 2009-2010 school year. The successful experiences of the early adopters and their good practices in the implementation of the SDA framework would be disseminated to other schools for reference.

11. Ms Audrey EU asked whether the key stakeholders in schools, including the principals, teachers, parents and students were early adopters or late adopters in the implementation of SSE and ESR as revealed by the Impact Study.

12. Professor MacBeath responded that at the leading edge, there were already schools in Hong Kong that were as advanced in self-evaluation as anywhere in the world. The principals and teachers in these schools were now assisting their fellow workers in other schools by way of participating in ESR teams. He considered that after implementing the SDA framework for three years, Hong Kong had reached a stage where other countries had taken six to eight years to achieve. To withhold implementation at this stage would disappoint schools which had significant achievement in the implementation of SSE and ESR and undermine the substantial investment in promoting and implementing the SDA framework in the past years.

13. Professor MacBeath further said that he had involved in independent studies on the implementation of the SDA framework in different countries for some 30 years. In conducting the Impact Study, he had visited some fifty schools and discussed with hundreds of principals and teachers the implementation of the SDA framework in schools. He considered it natural that there would be anxiety and pressure on the part of teachers who had to tackle the changes arising from implementing SSE and ESR. In fact, the move from quality assurance or inspection to SSE complemented by ESR would inevitably lead to changes which required adjustments by both schools and the systems. As in other places, there would be early adopters supporting the SDA framework and late adopters rejecting the framework at the initial stages of implementation. Given the findings from the Impact Study, it would be unwise to stop the process and give up the established momentum of conducting self-evaluations in schools.

Action

14. Ms Emily LAU asked whether the Administration had conducted a survey among teachers on the continuation of SSE and ESR in the 2007-2008 school year. She considered it imprudent to continue with SSE and ESR if the majority of teachers, parents and students did not support them.

15. Professor MacBeath responded that the Impact Study covered data collected from 35 000 teachers in the form of questionnaires, case studies, observations and focus group discussions. Analysis of these data revealed a generally positive response from schools, with a marked increase in perceived benefit since the inception of SSE/ESR in 2003. He pointed out that the findings of the Impact Study based on the data collected in the past three years were highly reliable. He was impressed with the high percentage of teachers who had responded that SSE and ESR had helped improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools, and that they and their students had become more effective teachers and learners.

Impact of SSE and ESR on learning and integrated education

16. Professor Patrick LAU enquired about the aims of SSE and its impact on student learning and performance assessment, in particular in public examination that would enhance admission to local universities. He expressed support for extending the teaching and assessment process outside the classroom, and the provision of sufficient time, space and support for schools and teachers to learn and develop the necessary knowledge and skills for the implementation of SSE and ESR.

17. Professor MacBeath explained that the dialogues and interactions between students and teachers in the course of the self-evaluation processes would facilitate teaching and learning in schools. The continuous evaluation of teaching and learning performances in schools would help improve the quality of school education which would ultimately be reflected by students' performances in the public examinations. In addition, students would learn from self-evaluations that would benefit their learning in universities.

18. Dr Fernando CHEUNG asked about the impact of SSE and ESR on the implementation of integrated education in ordinary schools. DS(EM)5 replied that the processes involved in SSE and ESR would provide opportunities for the teachers and students to reflect on the implementation of integrated education in the schools concerned.

Future challenges

19. Mrs Selina CHOW asked how EMB would collaborate with schools and teachers to overcome the challenges ahead.

Action

20. DS(EM)5 responded that although significant progress had been made in some schools in embedding SSE for sustainable school improvement, there were wide variations across schools, and at system level the challenges clearly remained. EMB would organize briefings to prepare teachers for ESRs and remove their anxieties and perceived pressure about ESRs. EMB would plan and implement the necessary support measures for schools to make use of external observations to collect feedback on performance improvement, remove the confusions about the purposes of ESR and the document preparation and data collection processes, and improve time, priority and process management for ESR.

Way forward

21. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong urged the Administration to reflect on its previous strategies for implementing the SDA framework such as the requirement for uploading the ESR reports in the Internet for public access, and to review the implementation of the SDA framework before proceeding to the second cycle of ESR. Mrs Selina CHOW expressed understanding of Mr CHEUNG's concern and urged the Administration to work out measures to enhance the necessary change in the school culture to facilitate smooth and successful implementation of SSE and ESR.

22. Ms Emily LAU urged the Administration to consult the key stakeholders including teachers, parents, schools councils and sponsoring bodies before proceeding with the second cycle of ESR in the 2008-2009 school year. She considered that if the majority of them did not support its further implementation, the Administration should rethink about it. She also suggested that the Panel should revisit the item in November 2007. Members raised no objection.

23. DS(EM)5 responded that EMB had relaxed the transparency requirement in respect of the ESR information in response to the strong views of schools on possible misuse of the ESR report data. The Administration would consult the key stakeholders on the matter and decide the requirements for the second cycle of ESR that would balance the interests of the stakeholders.

24. In closing, the Chairman said that members had not disputed about the benefits of SSE and ESR and the reliability of the findings of the Impact Study. Members were concerned about the additional workload and pressure generated to teachers who were already overloaded with the various reform initiatives in preparation for the implementation of the new academic structure.

Action

V. Strengthening support in language education at primary and pre-primary levels

[LC Paper No. CB(2)2071/06-07(03)]

25. Members noted the Administration's paper on the subject.

Briefing by the Administration

26. Mr Michael TIEN, Chairman of the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR), briefed members on the main points of the Administration's paper.

Implementation of professional development programmes

27. Mrs Selina CHOW asked whether the \$500 million injection into the Language Fund had all been used in the provision of professional development programmes for teachers. She also asked whether the Administration was satisfied with the progress of the implementation of the professional development programmes to strengthen support in language education at pre-primary level, and whether native-speaking English teachers were involved in any of these programmes.

28. Mr Michael TIEN responded that the \$500 million was largely being used to support language teachers in pursuit of professional development to enhance the quality of language education. SCOLAR would monitor the progress on the delivery of the professional development programmes for teachers in the light of the supply and demand of the programmes and the associated requirements such as the supply of experienced teachers for the programmes concerned. The implementation progress of the professional development programmes was not solely dependent on the availability of funds. For instance, the Administration would need to recruit some 30 to 40 experienced pre-primary principals and teachers and/or English Language educators for the establishment of a dedicated team on English Language education to provide structured support to English teachers at pre-primary level. The dedicated team would include native English-speaking teachers and the recruitment of appropriate team members would take time.

29. Mr Michael TIEN further said that according to the views of educators, early exposure to English would have positive impact on young children's learning of the language at a later developmental stage provided that the teachers were proficient in English and competent in introducing the language to young children in an authentic English environment through enjoyable and stimulating means such as stories, games, songs and real-life experiences. In the light of positive feedback from kindergartens on a pilot scheme, SCOLAR would set aside \$85 million for providing support to kindergartens on English Language education.

Action

30. Ms Emily LAU considered that apart from teaching pedagogies, the quality of pre-primary teachers was essential to enhance the quality of English teaching in kindergartens. She asked whether and how the Administration would upgrade the qualifications of pre-primary teachers in the long term.

31. Mr Michael TIEN explained that according to experts in early childhood education, the adoption of appropriate pedagogies for English teaching at pre-primary levels was most important. He pointed out that pre-primary pupils should be motivated to learn English through appropriate means, and should be taught to pronounce the English words accurately first, as correction of inaccurate pronunciation was difficult when they got older. SCOLAR would explore into using the remaining allocation to support pre-primary teachers in English teaching, with an emphasis on spoken English. Mr TAM Yiu-chung agreed with the view that children at early ages should be taught through appropriate pedagogies.

32. Mrs Selina CHOW asked whether teachers in kindergartens not eligible for the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (the Scheme) were eligible for the support services by SCOLAR.

33. DS(EM)5 responded that all kindergartens would be eligible to apply for the said support services in English language teaching by SCOLAR, regardless of whether they had joined the Scheme. The Administration would also further examine how best to use the Language Fund to complement the overall professional upgrading of pre-primary teachers under the Scheme, including measures to enhance their language proficiency.

34. Ms Audrey EU asked whether the Language Fund at its current level of resources was sufficient to support the continuous growth of Hong Kong as an international city.

35. Mr Michael TIEN considered that while Hong Kong people might not rank first among the Asian-Pacific nations in either English or Chinese standards, our biliterate and trilingual abilities were our unique competitive edge over neighbouring nations and regions in Asia and were sufficiently good to cope with the need. Relevant studies conducted by the academia in this regard had confirmed that Hong Kong people were competitive in both written and spoken communications in a global context. Mr TAM Yiu-chung concurred with Mr TIEN in this regard.

Participation in Professional Development Incentive Grant Scheme

36. Ms Emily LAU asked whether the Administration had examined why over 14 000 eligible language teachers had not yet applied for grants under the Professional Development Incentive Grant Scheme (PDIGS).

Action

37. In response, Mr Michael TIEN said that since the inception of PDIGS, some 7 500 language teachers had already successfully applied for grants to pursue professional development. The total allocation of \$525 million could support at least 17 500 serving language teachers to pursue professional development. SCOLAR envisaged that the remaining 14 000 eligible language teachers would apply for the provision of grants in accordance with their personal plans and the manpower needs of their schools in the next few years.

Immersion programmes

38. Ms Audrey EU sought information on the participation rates of overseas immersion programmes for primary teachers, and was concerned about the adequacy of the fund and places to support serving primary teachers to participate in these programmes.

39. Mr Michael TIEN explained that some 150 of around 7 000 serving primary teachers had participated in the six overseas immersion tours under the pilot scheme in the 2006-2007 school year. As each immersion tour included academic programmes offered by the host overseas institutes, coupled with visits and placement in local primary schools, cultural visits and activities, and home-stay accommodation arrangement, the supply of places was limited. Given the capacity constraint, around 150 to 200 places for immersion programmes would be provided in the next school year.

40. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung noted that on a trial basis, SCOLAR had allocated \$1.7 million from the Language Fund to sponsor 20 serving kindergarten teachers to participate in an immersion programme in Canada. He expressed reservation about deciding the way forward on the basis of the cost-effectiveness of the immersion programmes for pre-primary teachers.

41. Mr Michael TIEN explained that unlike the case of primary teachers, the Administration did not have much experience in overseas immersion programmes for pre-primary teachers in Hong Kong. The Administration would therefore need to examine the benefits of such programmes for pre-primary teachers before deciding on the way forward.

42. DS(EM)5 supplemented that currently, pre-service primary and secondary school teachers of the English Language subject in local teacher education institutes were already required to participate in a compulsory overseas immersion programme lasting for eight to ten weeks before graduation. There was however no similar training for serving English teachers who did not have the opportunity of participating in an immersion programme. Given the difference in qualification requirements, and hence the needs in professional development between pre-primary and primary school teachers, SCOLAR would further assess the outcomes of the immersion programmes for

Action

pre-primary teachers before suggesting the way forward. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung remarked that as the decision did not relate to cost-effectiveness, the Administration should state clearly the factors in assessing the success or otherwise of the overseas immersion programmes for pre-primary school English teachers in any future submission to the Panel.

Provision of graduate posts in schools

43. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that currently the proportion of graduate teachers in secondary schools and primary schools had already exceeded the approved graduate posts in schools. He considered it unfair for graduate teachers to receive the pay of a non-graduate post when the Administration had required new language teachers to possess a degree qualification for teaching language subjects in schools. He urged the Administration to consider increasing the proportion of graduate posts in schools.

44. Mr TAM Yiu-chung echoed the view of Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong. He considered that as it was the Administration's policy to encourage teachers to pursue university education, it should review the proportion of graduate posts in schools, in particular in primary schools where only 35% were graduate posts.

45. DS(EM)5 replied that the Administration was aware of the situation that many graduate teachers were offered non-graduate posts in schools. The Administration would examine the proportion of graduate posts in primary and secondary schools in the context of the competing priorities in education.

VI. Supply and prices of school textbooks

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2071/06-07(04), CB(2)2071/06-07(05) and CB(2)2135/06-07(01)]

46. Members noted the Administration's paper and the background brief prepared by the LegCo Secretariat on the subject, and the submission from the Anglo-Chinese Textbook Publishers Organisation and the Hong Kong Educational Publishers Association.

Prices and weight of textbooks

47. Mrs Selina CHOW said that according to publishers, electronic textbooks could reduce costs but were not widely utilized in Hong Kong. She asked how the Administration would collaborate with publishers to reduce the costs of textbooks by various measures such as the use of electronic textbooks and reduction of indirect costs. She added that EMB should promote parental awareness of the issue by publishers of addenda or corrigenda for updating of information in textbooks to discourage publishers from revising textbooks within three years after their first publication (the three-year rule).

Action

48. DS(EM)5 responded that the use of electronic textbooks was a relatively new concept and its development depended on the culture in learning and education in the specific places concerned. Currently, some institutes in the United States were using electronic textbooks to assist students with specific learning disabilities such as the visually impaired in learning. He considered that the development and application of electronic textbooks, teaching and learning resources were progressing at a slow pace. With the increase of electronic learning and teaching resources, teachers and students might become less reliant on the use of textbooks in teaching and learning.

49. DS(EM)5 further said the learning environment in schools was changing in the light of changing circumstances and new developments in information technology. At present, more than 80% of schools had a local area network which enabled electronic transmission of student assignments and communications between teachers and students and their parents. With the increasing learning and teaching resources developed at the school level, the supply of and demand for textbooks in the market, as well as their role and functions in school education would change in the years to come.

50. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that EMB should formulate policies and guidelines to require schools to -

- (a) specify the edition of the textbooks in the school textbook lists to facilitate students' and parents' consideration of using second-hand textbooks;
- (b) indicate in the textbook lists that old editions of reprint textbooks could be used so that parents could decide the need to purchase the reprint textbooks;
- (c) differentiate in the textbook lists textbooks from reference books/materials such as dictionaries and atlas so that parents and students could decide the need to buy the latter;
- (d) provide story books in school libraries for loan to students; and
- (e) organize old textbook fairs and donation.

51. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong further suggested that apart from contents and quality, the weight and prices of textbooks should be factors for considering the inclusion of the textbooks in the Recommended Textbook List (RTL) compiled by EMB. Parent-teacher associations of schools should be invited to comment on the weight and prices of textbooks. In addition, EMB should advise publishers against providing free gifts, luxurious hospitality or donations to schools. Publishers should provide only one complimentary copy of textbooks

Action

to each teacher, as teachers used to make notes on their personal copy and would not use new copy unless necessary.

52. DS(EM)5 responded that schools and their professional teachers should decide the appropriate list of textbooks in the light of their circumstances and the learning needs of their students. EMB provided the RTL for schools' reference and selection of their textbooks, and provided guidelines for schools to compile their textbook lists. Since textbook development in Hong Kong was market-driven, the Administration would have to balance the interests of the key stakeholders, and avoid unnecessary intervention in the production and procurement of textbooks in the free market.

53. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that although EMB had urged publishers to make use of printing methods with low cost features to print textbooks, the prices and weight of textbooks had been increasing in recent years. He asked how EMB would ensure publishers follow its advice on the use of paper, colour, finishing cover and binding of textbooks. Mr TAM Yiu-chung expressed a similar concern and enquired how EMB ensured publishers and encouraged schools to follow its advice on printing and use of low-cost textbooks respectively.

54. Principal Education Officer (Curriculum Development) (PEO(CD)) explained that a number of factors would affect the prices of textbooks, and the weight of textbooks would vary in accordance with their contents and design. As textbook development in Hong Kong was a market-driven commercial activity, the Administration considered it inappropriate to set out the prices and weight of textbooks, or the printing methods for publishers to follow. To facilitate schools and parents to make their choice of textbooks, EMB had required publishers to specify the prices and weight of their textbooks for parents' reference.

55. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that parents and students had not been given any choice on selection of textbooks. DS(EM)5 responded that schools should consult their parent-teacher associations in deciding the textbook lists for different levels of studies. PEO(CD) supplemented that EMB and schools would brief teachers and parents on the selection of textbooks and invite their feedback at relevant seminars and workshops.

56. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that according to the annual textbook price survey conducted by the Consumer Council, the prices of textbooks had been increasing above the Composite Consumer Price Index (CCPI) over the past 11 years. In 2006, textbook prices had on average increased by 4.2% and 5.2% respectively for the primary and secondary school sectors, which far exceeded the average rise of 1.5% in CCPI in the preceding 12-month period. The burdens on parents of primary pupils could have been higher had it not been for a sharp turnaround drop of 16.1% in the subject of Music. Otherwise, the four main

Action

subjects of English Language, Chinese Language, Mathematics and General Studies had jointly accounted for an average increase of 6.1%. He queried how EMB had monitored the prices of textbooks over the years.

57. Ms Audrey EU said that some publishers had attributed the increase of textbook prices to the frequent changes to and updates on the school curriculum as a result of the curriculum reform in recent years. Publishers were often informed of such changes and updates very late and would need to employ additional staff to revise or update urgently the contents of textbooks, hence increasing the labour costs. She suggested that EMB should examine the causes for the increases in prices of school textbooks exceeding the CCPI over the years.

58. DS(EM)5 explained that there were a number of factors affecting the prices of textbooks, including direct costs such as paper, labour and business accommodation and indirect costs arising from content research and development, promotion and support services for teachers. Recently, publishers also quoted the weakening currency exchange rates, schools' demand for free references and support services, etc, as the factors. Some publishers suggested that the changes to and updates on the school curriculum had increased the costs of textbooks. DS(EM)5 stressed that such revisions were intended to enhance the quality of student learning and should not give rise to substantial increase in costs.

59. Ms Audrey EU considered that the quality of school textbooks in contents and printing could facilitate teaching and learning, and should not be compromised for the purpose of reducing cost. From the perspective of environmental protection, quality textbooks should be reused as far as possible, and schools should organize more textbook fairs to promote the re-use of textbooks. She sought information on the percentage of schools which had organised textbook fairs in a school year.

60. DS(EM)5 responded that EMB agreed that appropriate use of quality textbooks would enhance effective teaching and learning. EMB adopted a multi-stage textbooks review process to ensure that school textbooks were in alignment with the central curriculum developed by the Curriculum Development Council. Only textbooks assessed to be of an acceptable standard were included in RTL. He pointed out that students would make notes on their textbooks during the teaching and learning processes in classes. Parents and students would decide on the purchase of new or second-hand textbooks on the basis of individual needs. PEO(CD) supplemented that EMB had no statistics on the number of schools organising textbook fairs in a school year.

61. Mr TAM Yiu-chung asked how EMB would ensure publishers' compliance with the three-year rule in compilation of revised editions of textbooks. PEO(CD) explained that EMB adhered strictly to the three-year rule

Action

and would reject publishers' application to issue new editions without substantial justification or qualitative improvement to textbook content and design. Where minor updating of information was necessary, EMB would advise publishers to issue addenda or corrigenda to students using second-hand textbooks free of charge. He added that the number of successful applications for issuing new editions had declined from 21 in 2003 to 17 in 2005. Two applications for issuing new editions in 2005 had been rejected. EMB would follow up on the contents and design of the new editions.

62. Ms Audrey EU asked whether the acceptance of free gifts and donations from publishers would contravene the provisions of the Prevention of Bribery Ordinance.

63. DS(EM)5 responded that EMB continued to work with the Independent Commission Against Corruption, the Consumer Council and publishers on matters relating to the acceptance of advantages by schools such as free textbook copies and gifts from publishers. EMB had issued guidelines to schools in this regard. The textbook committees in schools were required to declare and involve their school management committees concerning acceptance of gifts from publishers. Schools were also required to inform parents of the acceptance of textbook copies and gifts from publishers.

Provision of textbooks by the Government

64. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung considered that the Administration should consider providing textbooks to schools for use by students. He suggested that the Administration should make reference to the experiences in the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada, and conduct a survey among parents and students to ascertain their needs and preference on the matter. He considered that the Administration should proactively promote the concept and foster a culture on re-use of textbooks provided by the Administration.

65. PEO(CD) explained that parents and students in Hong Kong were accustomed to doing homework assignments and making notes on the textbooks. EMB had conducted a pilot study on the provision of textbooks in four schools in 2001. However, after discussion with teachers and parents, the four schools considered the study infeasible in that students and parents could not make notes on the textbooks provided by schools and they would prefer to use new or second-hand textbooks to facilitate learning. Moreover, additional administrative workload would be generated to teachers in the procurement, storage and stock-taking of the textbooks.

Financial assistance

66. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that the results of a survey conducted by the Society for Community Organization released on 27 May 2007 indicated that

Action

about 90% of the low-income families eligible for the School Textbook Assistance Scheme had financial difficulties to pay the cost of textbooks, and the majority of them considered the grants under the Scheme insufficient to meet the total textbook costs. He asked whether the Student Financial Assistance Agency (SFAA) could speed up the release of the grants under the Scheme to parents. Mr TAM Yiu-chung also expressed concern about the financial burden on low-income parents in purchasing textbooks for their children at the commencement of a school year. He said that the total cost of textbooks for Form One was around \$3,000.

67. Controller of SFAA responded that SFAA had since the 2006-2007 school year requested schools to nominate to the SFAA students of needy families who could not afford to pay for their textbooks in advance before the commencement of the school term while awaiting receipt of their grants under the Textbook Assistance Scheme. Of the 320 000 students eligible for applying for assistance under the Scheme in the 2006-2007 school year, some 5 000 students had been recommended by schools to the SFAA for early processing of their applications so that they would be provided with the assistance before the commencement of the school term. Only around 2 600 of these students did eventually apply for the assistance and were provided with the grants before the start of the school term. The applications for the coming school year were being processed and the number of nominations from schools was comparable to that of 2006-2007.

Follow-up

68. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that EMB should include the prices and weight of textbooks as criteria for selecting textbooks in RTL and require schools to indicate the total prices and weight of textbooks for different levels on their textbook lists. EMB should follow up with schools should the textbooks selected by them were of very high prices and heavy weight.

69. DS(EM)5 responded that EMB would explore the feasibility of adding the prices and weight of textbooks as basic criteria for inclusion in RTL in the context of a free market economy in Hong Kong. EMB had already asked textbook committees in schools to consider the prices and weight of textbooks in compilation of their textbook lists, and would explore the feasibility of requiring schools to provide the gross prices and weight of textbooks in their textbook lists for different levels.

70. Dr Fernando CHEUNG considered that the Administration should formulate policies and measures to reinforce monitoring of textbook price increases and to prohibit the provision and acceptance of advantages or gifts between schools and publishers, except for the provision of a limited number of complimentary textbooks for teachers.

Action

71. DS(EM)5 responded that EMB would continue to liaise with schools and publishers on the provision and acceptance of advantages such as free gifts and textbooks and learning resources to reduce unnecessary expenditure that would ultimately add on the prices of textbooks. PEO(CD) supplemented that in a recent meeting with EMB on 16 May 2007, publishers said that they would make concerted efforts to reduce or limit the number of complimentary copies to teachers with a view to lowering the indirect cost and protecting the environment by producing less copies.

72. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong suggested that the Panel should write to the Administration to request for a written response on members' suggestions to contain textbook prices. Members agreed.

VII. Academic freedom and institutional autonomy of higher education
[LC Paper No. CB(2)2071/06-07(06)]

73. The Chairman invited members' views on the paper entitled "Major issues of concern raised by individuals and organisations at the meetings on 28 February and 13 April 2007" prepared by the LegCo Secretariat.

74. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that the Panel should examine the major issues identified in the paper. The paper had summarized the views and suggestions raised by academics, organizations and members. He considered that except for the cases quoted, the Administration should be requested to provide a written response to the paper.

75. Ms Audrey EU said that the Administration should also be requested to respond to the cases quoted, although the Panel might not examine them in depth.

76. Dr Fernando CHEUNG opined that the Administration should provide a written response. The Panel should discuss the role, function and composition of the University Grants Committee and its funding and appeal mechanisms as soon as the Administration had provided its response. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong agreed that the Panel should consider the subject from the system level.

77. The Chairman informed members that the Panel had already written to the Administration to request for a detailed response. The Chairman said that the Panel would discuss the issues in the order set out in the paper.

Action

VIII. Any other business

78. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 7:01 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
6 July 2007