

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL BRIEF

PROVISION OF BOARDING FACILITIES FOR NON-LOCAL STUDENTS IN THE SCHOOL SECTOR

INTRODUCTION

At the meeting of the Executive Council (ExCo) on 4 July 2006, the Council ADVISED and the Chief Executive ORDERED that –

- (a) the Administration should relax the existing policy so that schools in operation may develop boarding facilities in-situ for the purpose of student exchange programmes, subject to the approval by the Director of Lands and support of the Secretary for Education and Manpower (SEM);
- (b) the development and the operation of such facilities should be on a self-financing basis and subject to the conditions that –
 - (i) the total land requirement for the school will not be increased because of the need to develop boarding facilities;
 - (ii) the development of boarding facilities is considered by SEM to be necessary for the school's student exchange programmes; and
- (c) request for additional land to develop boarding facilities will continue to be subject to the approval of the ExCo on a case-by-case basis.

JUSTIFICATIONS

Hong Kong as a Regional Education Hub

2. Hong Kong aspires to be Asia's World City. The 2004 Policy Address states that "Hong Kong's education, medical and health care services enjoy high professional standards. Apart from catering for local needs, they can be further developed into industries to serve people in the Mainland and elsewhere in Asia."

3. Institutions with experience of admitting non-local students (including exchange students) confirm that these students create a multi-lingual and multi-cultural environment, which helps broaden the perspectives of local students and enhance their understanding and tolerance of cultural differences. Non-local students bring with them new thinking and fresh perspectives which are a source of intellectual stimulation and healthy competition with local students. Building friendship with non-local students, in particular Mainland students, also facilitate local students to build up and expand their social network which is important for their personal and career development.

Present Constraint for the School Sector

4. We believe that schools in Hong Kong would be attractive to Mainland students, especially those in Guangdong province, who should have little difficulty using Cantonese as the medium of instruction. So far, the admission of non-local students from the Mainland and Taiwan below the post-secondary level is yet to become feasible under the existing immigration control regime. The Ministry of Education of the Central People's Government has specifically advised that we should first try out short-term student exchanges between sister schools¹. Although exchange students under the sister schools schemes would only stay in Hong Kong for a short period of time (currently up to two weeks), some schools participating in these schemes have encountered difficulties in developing these programmes because of the problems in identifying enough host families to accommodate the visiting students given the relatively small size of residential flats in Hong Kong.

¹ At present, there are three sister schools schemes with Beijing (involving 20 secondary schools from each side); Shanghai (involving six secondary schools from each side); and Guangdong (involving 23 secondary schools and 10 primary schools from each side).

5. As regards non-Chinese speaking students from overseas, they normally come to Hong Kong for short-term exchanges rather than for full enrolment into our local schools, probably due to the language barrier and the reluctance of parents to send their children for schooling overseas at this young age. In this regard, our schools have been admitting exchange students from overseas, notably through the arrangement of the American Field Service (AFS)². In the 2006/07 school year, 33 secondary schools will accommodate, through host families, a total of about 50 overseas students admitted through the AFS. The AFS has already indicated that, without appropriate boarding facilities, it would be difficult to support further expansion of its academic exchange programmes in Hong Kong.

6. Focusing on short-term exchanges at the moment, there is already an emerging need for boarding facilities. The general policy, however, does not provide for the development and operation of boarding facilities on school sites, save for a few exceptional cases. In the absence of a practical need among local students, boarding facilities are not normally taken as facilities associated with school operation.

The Proposal

7. We should encourage the development of student exchange programmes, both for the exposure of our students and to pave the way for opening up our schools for admission of students outside Hong Kong, particularly from the Mainland, in the longer term. Since the scale and development potential of the student exchange programmes would have to be continuously explored, as a start, we find it prudent to require the schools to maximize the use of their existing school sites by developing boarding facilities in-situ. The decline in student population may give individual schools greater room to pursue such in-situ development.

8. Accordingly, we propose that the existing policy be relaxed such that with appropriate modifications to the land grant conditions as approved by the Director of Lands with the support of SEM, boarding facilities could be developed for student exchange programmes within the site boundaries of existing schools in operation³. This should however

² The AFS is a non-profit, non-government organisation that arranges inter-cultural student exchange programmes. It has a presence in over 50 countries and has been operating in Hong Kong since 1982.

³ For the avoidance of misunderstanding, the proposal covers all non-profit-making primary and secondary schools offering full curriculum and satisfying the relevant conditions stated in paragraph 8 above. As we would like the non-Government sector to take the lead with the

be subject to the conditions that –

- (a) the total land requirement for the school would not be increased because of the need to develop boarding facilities; and
- (b) the development of boarding facilities is considered by SEM to be necessary for the school’s student exchange programmes.

Request for additional land to develop boarding facilities should continue to be subject to the approval of the ExCo on a case-by-case basis. Noting that exchange programmes may not be conducted all year round, and to ensure that the use of such boarding facilities is maximized, the schools would be given the flexibility to use the facilities for other education-related purposes, e.g. “adventure camps” for local students.

9. The proposed in-situ development of boarding facilities would probably entail the conversion of some existing rooms in the school building or the construction of additional floors. When considering a proposal for in-situ development of boarding facilities, we will take into account the requirements of school facilities in that particular school and the demand for school places in the district in which the school is located. We will only support cases where the adequacy in school infrastructure for an effective learning environment and in meeting the demand for school places would not be affected. Under no circumstances would Government compromise quality of education in individual schools and education provision in a district in exchange for boarding places.

10. As far as funding is concerned, we do not propose to offer any capital or recurrent funding for the boarding facilities which, not being standard school infrastructure, should be developed and operated on a self-financing basis⁴. The school sponsors of schools with boarding facilities would have to shoulder the capital cost and to meet the recurrent operating and maintenance cost by, say, donations or charging appropriate fees on users of those facilities. We will request schools to keep separate accounts of the operations and implement proper overhead

support of private funding, we do not intend to involve government schools in the provision of such facilities.

⁴ In line with the self-financing principle, no capital assistance from Government for any new school projects shall be applied to develop boarding facilities.

charging, so as to ensure that there is no cross-subsidy from the recurrent grants on the school section (if any) to the operation of the boarding facilities. The school sponsors shall also accept that in case the school premises are no longer used for the permitted purposes, the concerned school site shall be returned to Government in accordance with the land lease conditions and as a matter of principle, we will not make any reimbursement to compensate their investment in the school facilities (including the boarding facilities). Government will also reserve the right to require the school to return a cleared site, free of structure, if appropriate.

OTHER OPTIONS

11. Although individual schools might choose to rent off-site premises for the visiting students, the general feedback from the school sector is that having the facilities in-situ does have its advantage from management and security angles, particularly for secondary or even primary students.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSAL

12. The proposal has financial, economic, environmental and sustainability implications as set out at the Annex. The proposal is in conformity with the Basic Law, including the provisions concerning human rights. It has no civil service or productivity implications.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

13. We have not launched any specific public consultation as our proposal does not entail major changes to existing policies. After all, it seeks to better enable the development of Hong Kong as a regional education hub, which is a strategic vision widely shared by the community.

PUBLICITY

14. We will make available a spokesman to handle media enquiries. We will promulgate the relaxed policy among the schools through standing communication channels and deal with applications on a case-by-case basis.

BACKGROUND

15. Most of our schools do not have boarding facilities, save for a few historical exceptions and other cases with specific policy support on consideration of special factors such as remoteness of the schools.

OTHERS

16. Enquiries on this brief may be directed to Mrs Michelle Wong, Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower (School Development) at 2892 6655.

Education and Manpower Bureau
October 2006

Implications of the Proposal

Financial Implications

The proposal to allow the development of boarding facilities within the original land requirement and site boundaries of existing schools would theoretically entail some land premium forgone, but any loss would be notional since the case of Government releasing the land for sale should not arise. In any event, we would strive to ensure that scarce public resources are put to their best possible use, and that they are not expended at the expense of local students.

2. The proposal does not carry any recurrent financial implications, except for reimbursement of rates and government rents payable for the additional boarding facilities in the school premises. In line with existing arrangement for all non-profit-making schools, EMB will continue to favourably consider applications for reimbursements.

Economic Implications

3. The proposal will facilitate the education sector in Hong Kong to attract more non-local students. Further internationalization in our education sector will promote a better understanding of Hong Kong amongst the incoming students. More incoming non-local students will also benefit our local students, giving them the opportunity to develop a broader and deeper understanding of the multiplicity of language, culture and business around the world since their early stage of study in the primary and secondary levels. In the long term, this will improve our human capital and international competitiveness, particularly given the rapid globalization trend around the world. The proposal will serve as a strategic investment in maintaining Hong Kong's role as a major international business and financial centre, to the benefit of long-term economic development in Hong Kong.

Environmental Implications

4. As some school sites might be close to roads, any boarding facilities to be developed should be properly designed to protect students against excessive road traffic noise or other noise sources. Proper environmental protection considerations would need to be given during detailed design stage.

Sustainability Implications

5. The proposal would help facilitate the admission of non-local students and other short-term academic exchanges with schools outside Hong Kong. It would be conducive to enhancing the quality of education in Hong Kong and thereby the sustainability principle of achieving a competitive economy in a long run. Any environmental impacts arising from the construction of new boarding facilities would need to be carefully examined and adequately addressed.