

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Policy Initiatives on Education in the 2006 - 07 Policy Agenda

Introduction

This paper elaborates on the new and on-going initiatives in education set out in the 2006 - 07 Policy Agenda.

The 2006 - 07 Policy Agenda – New Initiatives

Examine, through the inter-bureau steering committee chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration, strategic issues relating to promoting Hong Kong as a regional education hub.

2. Hong Kong is well-placed to provide high quality education for the region. Our strong connections with the Mainland, world-class universities and a diversified system of education that offers internationally recognized curriculum present unique attractions to both overseas and Mainland students. Nonetheless, Hong Kong is faced with keen competition from other countries especially those that are already well-established in the international education services market. We also need to resolve a number of issues arising from our existing policies (e.g. immigration control, land policies) in order to provide a better environment and foundation for the further development of Hong Kong as a regional education hub.

3. The Administration has set up a high-level steering committee (the Steering Committee), to be chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration, to examine the strategic issues relating to promoting Hong Kong as a regional education hub. Specifically, the Steering Committee will examine the following strategic issues relating to promoting Hong Kong as a regional education hub –

- (a) *positioning and priority of the education hub policy* – should our priority be (i) to increase the number of non-local students studying in Hong Kong; (ii) to assist our institutions to establish a presence in the region; and/or (iii) attract top foreign universities to set up campuses in Hong Kong?
- (b) *immigration control and related issues* – admission of non-local students is currently subject to a 10% quota (of approved student number targets). We need to consider how best we can meet the strong demand for quality higher education in the Mainland, as evidenced by the overwhelming response to admission to UGC-funded institutions¹, by further relaxing the quota. As for part-time work, some countries have already allowed non-local students to undertake a limited amount of part-time work (e.g. up to 20 hours per week). Allowing non-local students to work will not only increase their sense of belonging to Hong Kong, so that they would be more inclined to stay for work after graduation, it would also help alleviate their financial burden, in particular for those coming from developing economies;
- (c) *boarding facilities* – the lack of hostels has become the major barrier faced by institutions in admitting non-local students, and needs to be resolved as a matter of priority to facilitate local and non-local students to interact with each other in a multi-lingual and multi-cultural environment. Consideration will be given to whether the Government should provide hostel facilities or subsidize the provision of such facilities;
- (d) *financial assistance* - although the tuition fee and cost of living in Hong Kong are lower than those in many western countries, some outstanding non-local students may still be unable to afford the expenses and have to give up the opportunity to study in Hong Kong. It is for consideration whether the Government should provide more financial support (e.g. scholarships) for outstanding non-local students;

¹ Excluding City University and Chinese University of Hong Kong which have taken part in the PRC National Recruitment System, over 30,000 applications have been received by the other six UGC-funded institutions for undergraduate admission in the 2006/07 academic year.

- (e) *support local institutions to offer services outside Hong Kong* – some local institutions have been operating joint programmes with universities in the Mainland for some time and accumulated rich experience, though they are still not allowed to operate independently under the current Mainland legislation. The Committee will consider whether and how government should support institutions’ efforts in establishing operations in the Mainland and other places; and
- (f) *marketing and promotion* – it is for consideration whether Hong Kong should set up a dedicated agency to promote our education services in the region for brand and image building purposes.

4. The Steering Committee will take into account the long-term cost and benefits of developing Hong Kong as a regional hub, as well as the overall interest of the community, in deliberating these strategic issues.

Establish an Academy for Gifted Education to stretch the potential and nurture the talent of gifted students.

5. A key objective of the education system of the 21st century has been to turn potentials of gifted students into high achievements. Currently, the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) is implementing a three-tier gifted education framework. At Level 1, support is given within classes. At Level 2, pull-out programmes are provided within the school. At Level 3, off-site programmes are provided for the exceptionally gifted in collaboration with tertiary institutions and professional bodies.

6. There has been an increasing demand for a wider range of services and opportunities to cater for the diverse abilities, interests, social and emotional needs of gifted students in schools. At the moment, gifted education in Hong Kong largely focuses on mathematics, science and technology while gradually extending to languages and humanities in recent years. Hong Kong, with a unique blend of eastern and western

cultures, is well placed to nurture giftedness in leadership, creativity, languages, arts and humanities as well.

7. The mission of the proposed Academy for Gifted Education (the Academy) is to expand the pool of talents in terms of both numbers and diversity by providing learning opportunities and specialist services. To achieve this, it aims to catalyse and galvanise the efforts of teachers, parents and different sectors of the community to create a supportive, sustainable and enriching learning community for students. The Academy will also network with overseas institutions on gifted education to pool international expertise and to share experience with local practitioners and experts. While the Academy will cater primarily for the needs of local gifted students, it has the potential to be developed into a knowledge hub to serve gifted students in the Mainland and the Asia-Pacific region as well.

8. The direct services of the Academy will cover the following –

- (a) *for students* – the direct service mainly comprises off-site service for the exceptionally gifted students whose needs cannot be met by school-based programmes. Learning opportunities aim for ‘enrichment’ (i.e. knowledge not normally encountered in schools such as film, art, astronomy, marine science) and “acceleration” (such as programmes set at the undergraduate level or beyond);
- (b) *for teachers* – it provides an arena for teachers and specialists to exchange experiences, collaborate and enhance the overall capacity in supporting gifted education;
- (c) *for parents* – it provides advice on parenting the gifted at home to better cater for their cognitive and emotional needs; and
- (d) *for academics and professionals* – building on strengths and local experience, it should aspire to tap into and contribute to the development of gifted education both locally and worldwide as a long-term goal.

While EMB will continue our efforts in gifted education to serve schools and teachers at Levels 1 and 2, we will support the Academy in widening the range of services to the above stakeholders at Level 3.

9. Injection of funding would be necessary for the enhanced services on gifted education. The Administration will consult this Panel again at a later stage, and seek the Finance Committee's endorsement on funding allocation.

Provide direct subsidies for parents and further enhance the quality of pre-primary education, including professional upgrading of principals and teachers, and developing an effective quality assurance mechanism.

10. We have achieved in full the policy targets in respect of early childhood education set out in the Year 2000 Blueprint for Education in the 21st Century. Teachers and principals have now reached the required qualified kindergarten teacher training and certificate in early childhood education respectively. Our pre-primary education providers are supported through various subsidy schemes and fee remission is available for all those parents in need so that their children can attend pre-primary school.

11. We now propose to invest further in pre-primary education as enhanced and positive pre-school learning experiences can profoundly influence the likely success of young people as they progress through education.

12. Parents will be subsidized directly in the form of a voucher for their children² enrolled in kindergarten classes at eligible kindergartens and kindergarten-cum-child care centres (referred to collectively as kindergartens (KGs) hereafter.) Beginning in 2007/08 school year, the voucher value will be \$13,000 and progressively increasing to \$16,000 in 2011/12 school year to take account of inflation, salary increment and qualification creep over the years. During this period, part of the value

² Referring to children aged between 2 years 8 months and 6 years with the right of abode or approval to stay in Hong Kong.

of the subsidy will go towards supporting teachers and principals in their further professional upgrading. By 2011/12 school year, the whole amount of the voucher will go towards fee reduction.

13. Local non-profit-making (NPM) KGs eligible to redeem the parents' subsidy will be those setting fees within prescribed limits of \$24,000 for half-day classes and through quality assurance arrangements providing parents with all the necessary information to assist their choice of pre-school. Upon full implementation of the new scheme in 2011/12, only accredited NPM KGs may redeem the voucher.

14. The fee remission scheme for needy parents will continue to operate in the transition years. Upon full implementation of the new scheme in 2011/12, the scope of the fee remission scheme would be substantially reduced mainly to cater for needy students attending whole-day classes due to "social need". We shall ensure that the voucher value would provide reasonable choice of KGs for students with financial need.

15. On professional development, our goal is to upgrade principals to degree level and teachers to diploma level. We will continue to ensure that there are sufficient additional and diversified training opportunities for teachers' upgrading over the next five years.

16. We estimate that the total additional investment in pre-primary education will be around \$2 billion per annum.

17. School development of all KGs will be supported by a one-off grant in 2006/07 school year to purchase teaching resources, library books and other learning resources. We have already set aside \$68 million for this purpose.

The 2006–07 Policy Agenda – Ongoing Initiatives

Planning with about ten remaining primary schools to turn into whole-day schooling.

18. Of the 41 school premises which are still in use for bi-sessional operation in the 2006/07 school year, 29 have agreed plans for conversion to whole-day primary schooling. We will monitor the conversion of these 29 schools.

19. In the coming year, we shall continue to work on feasible conversion plans with the remaining schools and their sponsoring bodies.

Preparing for the implementation of the revised Secondary School Places Allocation System with effect from September 2007 and the revised Medium of Instruction arrangements for secondary schools from September 2010.

20. We are taking steps to implement the recommendations made by the Education Commission in its Report on Review of Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) and Medium of Instruction (MOI) for Secondary Schools published in December 2005.

21. Under the revised SSPA System, the quota of discretionary places will be increased from 20% to 30% and Primary 6 students can apply to two secondary schools during this first stage of allocation. Ten percent of the central allocation places of each secondary school will be set aside for allocation unrestricted by school nets. Providing parents with more choices, these revisions will be implemented for admission to Secondary One in the 2007/08 school year and thereafter. We have conducted briefing sessions for primary and secondary schools and for parents to familiarize them with the implementation details.

22. As regards implementation of the MOI policy, schools wishing to use English as the MOI starting from September 2010 must fulfill the three prescribed criteria of student ability, teacher capability and support measures, and announce their MOI arrangements one year

before implementation in a progressive manner. In the run up to 2010, we will provide secondary schools with information on their student ability intake according to the SSPA results. We will arrange classroom observations in the 2007/08 and 2008/09 school years for serving teachers using English as the MOI who do not possess the prescribed qualification, so that they may fulfill the requirement on teacher capability for teaching in the English medium.

23. On support measures, we launched in March 2006 the English Enhancement Scheme for secondary schools using Chinese as the MOI and the Additional Support Scheme for schools using the English medium. The two Schemes are open to applications in the 2006 and 2007 calendar years. We are considering the first batch of some 150 applications. Separately, we will start in January 2007 a three-year study on extended learning activities conducted in English in schools using Chinese as the MOI, with a view to identifying good practices and developing the necessary teaching materials for dissemination.

Preparing for the new senior secondary education and higher education reform and continuously engaging and consulting stakeholders in the run-up to implementation in 2009.

24. The key actions and critical milestones recommended for the implementation of the New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education have been taken and met as scheduled. Final drafts of the New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum frameworks were prepared in response to feedback collected in the second consultation and international benchmarking exercises on curriculum and assessment frameworks. Workshops for school leaders and middle managers were held to help schools build professional capacity and manage the upcoming change. Professional development programmes for teachers of all NSS subjects have started. Special grants were given to schools to make space for teachers and to prepare for the changes. The eight universities have announced further on specific requirements of elective subjects in addition to the four core subjects (i.e. Chinese, English, Mathematics and Liberal Studies.) Universities have also prepared their initial proposals for a four-year university programme.

25. Concerted efforts have been made to engage stakeholders in the on-going planning and development in 2006. A report on *Action for the Future – Career-oriented Studies and New Senior Secondary Academic Structure for Special Schools* was released in August after a three-month public consultation. A third consultation focusing in public assessment in the curriculum and assessment frameworks was launched in September. The Curriculum and Assessment Guide for each subject will be completed by January 2007. There is now expanded on-site support to schools to help prepare the curriculum for the first cohort of NSS students and enhance learning and teaching in schools. Close communication with schools, teachers, parents and the public has been maintained through the “3+3+4” web-bulletin board and ongoing seminars, meetings, and visits to schools.

Implementing specialised teaching in English, Mathematics and/or Chinese subjects in public sector primary schools with the creation of permanent teaching posts with effect from the 2006/07 school year.

26. Additional teaching posts in the permanent staff establishment have been provided to public sector ordinary primary schools and extended to those with less than 12 classes for the implementation of specialised teaching with effect from the 2006/07 school year. This measure aims to provide a more stable environment for teachers so that they can focus on the teaching of the subject they specialise in. Under this initiative, a total of about 800 additional teaching posts are created.

Strengthening school-based professional support for kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, so as to enhance the professional capacity of teachers and help them take forward education reform initiatives in a strategic manner.

27. In view of the positive response from schools to the School-based Professional Support (SBPS) programmes funded by the Education Development Fund, we will expand the scope and scale of SBPS in the 2006/07 school year. With the establishment of the

pre-primary education support team in September 2006, we will extend our support services to KGs. We will continue to identify and introduce new SBPS Programmes as appropriate to help teachers take forward the education reform initiatives.

Continuing our efforts in enhancing the standards of Chinese (including Putonghua) and English of the community, using the Language Fund and other available resources.

28. We continue to invest in enhancing the language proficiency of students and working adults in Hong Kong.

29. On specifying a clear and realistic set of expected language competencies, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority will begin implementing the standards-referenced Hong Kong Certificate of Education examinations for Chinese Language and English Language in 2007. We also aim to pilot run a Putonghua assessment in the 2007/08 school year for voluntary participation by Secondary 3 students.

30. On supporting language teachers' professional development, as of end September 2006, over 6 500 serving language teachers in primary and secondary schools have already successfully applied for grants under the Professional Development Incentive Grant Scheme for attaining qualifications relevant to subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge and skills in the language that they teach. We are also operating overseas immersion programmes for English teachers in over 100 primary schools in 2006/07 school year and will continue to run a Putonghua immersion programme in the Mainland for Chinese language teachers in primary and secondary schools in summer 2007. We will also implement measures to support schools and teachers interested in using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject in such areas as networking and experience sharing, teacher training and additional manpower to provide for the necessary space of teachers in preparing for the change. Following a small-scale pilot scheme in the 2005/06 school year, we would step up our efforts in providing relevant training and support to teachers of KGs in the teaching of English.

31. In addition, we would continue to support the teaching and learning of languages in schools through a wide range of ongoing initiatives including the Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme, promotion of co-curricular activities, specialised teaching in English and Chinese subjects in primary schools, the English Enhancement Scheme for secondary schools using Chinese as the MOI and the Additional Support Scheme for schools using the English medium, as well as the Task Force on Language Support as part of the SBPS programmes. The Workplace English Campaign and Continuing Education Fund will also continue to support the life-long learning of working individuals.

Deferring the review of the teaching grade structure of public sector schools. On the advice of the Education Commission, it was decided to shelve the review as teachers are pre-occupied with the senior secondary education reform and teacher establishment will be affected by the decline of student population in the coming years. The review will be revisited in 2009.

32. A review of the existing teaching grade structure was completed, and the initial recommendations presented to the Education Commission for discussion. Since teachers are pre-occupied with senior secondary reform and teacher establishment will be affected by the declining student population in the coming years, the Education Commission advised to shelve the review and revisit it in 2009.

Education and Manpower Bureau
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