

Comments on the Proposal for an Academy for Gifted Students

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Current situation

- Currently, supporting and enrichment activities for ‘level 1’ and ‘level 2’ students are provided by schools through in-school or extracurricular activities. Off-site programmes are provided for gifted students either directly by the tertiary institutions or through joint programmes between EMB and the tertiary institutions or professional bodies. Examples of these activities are Summer Science Institute (HKU) Science Students Research Programme (HKU), Young Scholar Programme for Biology (CUHK), Pilot Science Research Programme for Secondary School Students (CUHK), Enriching Students' Learning Experience in Science (CUHK), Enrichment Programme for Physics Talent (CUHK), Summer Camps for Secondary Schools (HKUST). There are indeed many similar enrichment and accelerated programmes available for the average as well as high-performing students. These programmes often compete for student participation.
- Most of the programmes are organized and funded by the universities. Many of these programmes are organised with the intention to facilitate student recruitment or for publicity. The imperative to promote interest in a certain subject has often become a secondary objective.
- Many of the accelerated learning activities are designed at the undergraduate level, necessitating universities to play a significant role as the training providers. It is not in the mandate of the tertiary institutes in Hong Kong, however, to organise programmes for training of secondary students. Consequently, many of the activities are conducted in an arbitrary and inconsistent manner. There is a general lack of coordination among the programmes in terms of timing, targeted groups and programme contents.

- Many of the programmes are fee-paying, rendering it difficult for some students from less-privileged families to participate.
- Only a few of these programmes accept non-local students and are conducted in English.
- While there are many accelerated learning programmes for the high-performance students, there is a relative lack of opportunities for the truly exceptionally talented students.

Regarding the idea of an 'Academy for Gifted Students'

- It should be pointed out that there is no consensus on the definition of 'gifted student' even by experts in education psychology. The proposed Academy should define clearly the targeted populations. There should be clear distinctions among 'good students' (top 40%), 'high-performing students' (top 10%) and 'exceptionally talented students' (perhaps less than 100 in Hong Kong). We must caution that the proposed Academy should not undermine or preempt secondary schools in the provision of learning activities for the good students.
- There are merits in establishing the proposed Academy to coordinate and provide organized and coherent learning opportunities for high-performing students.
- The proposed Academy can ensure opportunities for high-performing students from less-privileged families to participate in various enhancement activities.
- The proposed Academy can serve to identify and arrange for supervised training and mentorship for the truly exceptionally talented students.
- The proposed Academy should aim to facilitate the participation of high-potential non-local secondary students, which could enhance the image of Hong Kong as the regional education hub.
- The proposed Academy should be associated closely with tertiary institutions since they are likely the key training providers for the students. An independent governance structure consisting primarily of academic scholars is desirable.