

**For discussion
11 December 2006**

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Provision of Hostels for Non-Local Students

Purpose

This paper sets out the current policies on the admission of non-local students¹ to Hong Kong and the provision of hostels for them, the major issues involved and the measures taken to address the increasing demand for boarding facilities.

Current Policy and Major Issues

Below Post-secondary level

2. In general, overseas students may be admitted to private schools in Hong Kong on a self-financing basis² subject to the fulfillment of the relevant immigration requirements. In practice, overseas primary and secondary students come to Hong Kong mainly for short-term exchanges, rather than for full-time enrollment into our schools. Insofar as student exchanges are concerned, our schools have been admitting overseas students, notably through the arrangement of the American Field Service (AFS)³. In the 2006/07 school year, 33 local secondary schools will accommodate, through host families, a total of about 50 overseas students admitted through the AFS.

¹ In this paper, “non-local students” refer to persons entering Hong Kong for the purpose of education with a student visa/entry permit issued by the Director of Immigration. They are to be distinguished from people who come to Hong Kong as dependants of persons admitted to work, study, reside or as capital investment entrant in Hong Kong and are treated as local students for the purpose of admission to local education institutions.

² There have been occasions where non-local students are admitted to schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) or the English Schools Foundation (ESF). Nevertheless, no government subsidy is provided in such cases.

³ The AFS is a non-profit, non-government organization 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. As regards admission of non-local students from the Mainland below the post-secondary level, 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 schools"⁴. Under the current policy, secondary school students from the Mainland who are accompanied by teachers are allowed to enter Hong Kong for short-term exchange programmes up to two weeks.

4. The lack of boarding facilities has posed a problem on the further development of student exchange programmes at the school level. At present, only a handful of secondary schools offer a very limited number of boarding places for non-local students. Although under the sister schools schemes, exchange students from the Mainland can stay in Hong Kong for up to two weeks, some participating schools have encountered difficulties in identifying enough host families to accommodate the visiting students, mainly due to the relatively small size of residential flats in Hong Kong. By the same token, the AFS has indicated that, without appropriate boarding facilities, it would be difficult to support further expansion of its academic exchange programmes in Hong Kong.

Post-Secondary level

5. From the 2005/06 academic year onwards, local institutions may admit non-local students (including students from Mainland, Taiwan and Macau) at the sub-degree, degree and taught postgraduate levels to their full-time publicly-funded programmes up to 10% of the approved student number targets. For self-financing programmes at sub-degree and degree levels, only students from the Mainland, Taiwan and Macau are subject to a quota, which is currently set at 10% of the actual local student enrolment in the same programmes offered by the individual institutions in the preceding year. There is no quota for research postgraduate students and self-financing taught postgraduate students. In the 2005/06 academic year, there were about 4 800 full-time non-local students studying in our University Grants

⁴ Over 90 schools in Hong Kong have joined sister school schemes with over 90 Mainland schools in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong and Shenzhen.

Committee (UGC)-funded institutions and self-financing post-secondary institutions. Entry of non-local students for part-time study is allowed for locally-accredited taught post-graduate programmes⁵.

6. Apart from full-time and part-time studies, our tertiary institutions have entered into a number of student exchange arrangements with overseas and Mainland universities. Under the current immigration policy, non-local students may enter Hong Kong for exchange programmes at the degree or above level lasting up to one year without quota restrictions. In the 2005/06 academic year, the UGC-funded institutions received some 3 100 exchange students from all over the world.

7. For the purpose of calculating the overall provision of publicly-funded student hostels at the UGC-funded institutions, one of the assumptions adopted by the Administration is that all non-local students undertaking publicly-funded full-time sub-degree, degree and taught postgraduate programmes at UGC-funded institutions will be provided with hostel places throughout their studies in Hong Kong. The institutions nonetheless have the autonomy in determining how to put their stock of hostels into the best use. For non-local students admitted to self-financing programmes of the UGC-funded institutions or other self-financing post-secondary institutions, the institutions are responsible for working out the boarding arrangements with the students concerned.

8. Tertiary institutions have expressed concern that the lack of hostel places would pose a constraint on the admission of more non-local students to Hong Kong. While the institutions generally support further increases in the admission quota for non-local students, they opined that the hostel issue must be resolved urgently before they could take on more non-local students. And whilst under the current policy, self-financing post-secondary institutions are responsible for providing accommodation for their non-local students, the institutions are also faced with difficulties in providing boarding facilities on their own, which in turn inhibits the recruitment of non-local students to their sub-degree and degree programmes.

⁵ Entry of non-local students for part-time studies in publicly-funded taught postgraduate programmes is subject to a quota of 10% of the student number targets. Mainland students may be admitted to locally accredited part-time taught post-graduate programmes of the eight UGC-funded institutions.

Measures to Address the Issues

Below post-secondary level

9. To encourage the development of student exchange activities for the benefit of our secondary school students and to pave the way for an expanded scope of the sister school arrangement in the longer term, the Executive Council (ExCo) endorsed in July 2006 a proposal to relax the policy so that schools in operation may develop self-financing 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. Such boarding facilities could be developed within the site boundaries of non-profit-making primary and secondary schools offering full curriculum. 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.

Post-secondary Sector

10. There are currently some 21 400 publicly-funded student hostel places provided at the UGC-funded institutions. About 4 000 additional hostel places are in the pipeline, where funds have been earmarked by the Administration pending funding approval of the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council. Another 2 400 publicly-funded hostel places are currently being planned by the institutions. Hence, a total of 27 800 places will be available upon the completion of the planned projects, which should be sufficient to meet the existing shortfall calculated on the basis of the prevailing hostel policy⁶.

11. In addition to the above-mentioned standard hostel provision, the Administration has decided earlier this year to provide the

⁶ Under the existing policy, the criteria for calculating the level of provision of publicly-funded student hostels at the UGC-funded institutions as follows –

- (a) all undergraduate students should be given the opportunity to stay in student hostels for at least one year of their courses; and
- (b) all research postgraduates, all non-local students, and all undergraduate students whose daily travelling time exceeds four hours should be provided with student hostel places.

UGC-funded sector with an additional 1 840 publicly-funded student hostel places to support institutions' increasing student exchange activities, thereby increasing the overall level of student hostel provision for non-local students. The UGC has already allocated these places to the UGC-funded institutions, which are in the process of drawing up their student hostel projects.

12. We are mindful of the keen demand for hostels from local and non-local students in the tertiary sector. In view of the lead time required for planning and executing hostel projects, the Government has been encouraging the UGC-funded institutions to make the best use of their existing stock of student hostels and to explore all possible options, both interim and long-term, to meet the increasing demand for hostels. For example, the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) have entered into collaboration arrangements with the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd) whereby students of CUHK and PolyU will be able to take up HKIEd's student hostels and be provided with shuttle services transporting them to and from campuses. Meanwhile, some institutions are considering other short-term relief measures, such as temporary conversion of some existing hostel units so as to accommodate more students. The tight supply of hostel places in UGC-funded institutions is expected to be ameliorated with the completion of the planned hostel projects a few years down the road.

13. The high-level Steering Committee chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration to consider the strategic issues relating to the development of Hong Kong as a regional education hub will look at, among other things, the provision of boarding facilities for non-local students in both the UGC sector and the self-financing sector.

Conclusion

14. Hong Kong faces a unique problem of land supply for the construction of hostels (and other facilities), particularly for institutions situated in the urban areas. To ensure the most effective use of scarce land and public resources, institutions are encouraged to, wherever possible, identify suitable sites within campus for hostel development, or

redevelop existing campus buildings/facilities into hostels so as to maximize the development and utilization of their own campus sites.

15. If institutions have genuine needs to develop hostels or other facilities outside campus, and if their requests for additional land are supported by the UGC and the Administration, the Administration will follow established mechanisms to help institutions identify land for such purpose and take forward the proposals to the Public Works Subcommittee and the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council for approval.

Education and Manpower Bureau
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