

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1794/07-08
(The minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 14 April 2008, at 4:30 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building

- Members present** : Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP (Chairman)
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum, JP (Deputy 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, SBS, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, SBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
Hon LI Kwok-ying, MH, JP
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, SBS, JP
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
- Member attending** : Hon CHAN Yuen-han, SBS, JP
- Public Officers attending** : Agenda item IV
Mr Michael SUEN
Secretary for Education

Mr Raymond H C WONG
Permanent Secretary for Education

Mr Michael WONG
Deputy Secretary for Education (1)

Mr Daniel CHENG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education (Further
Education)

Agenda item V

Mr Michael WONG
Deputy Secretary for Education (1)

Ms Amy WONG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education (Higher
Education)

Mr Jack CHAN
Chief Executive Officer (Higher Education), Education
Bureau

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

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

Miss Josephine SO
Council Secretary (2)1

Miss Carmen HO
Legislative Assistant (2)6

Action

I. Confirmation of minutes
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1567/07-08]

Dr Fernando CHEUNG proposed to amend paragraph 27 of the minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2008. The Chairman suggested that the Clerk follow this up with Dr CHEUNG after the meeting.

Action

[*Post-meeting note*: A revised version for confirmation was issued to members on 21 April 2008 vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1675/07-08. As members raised no further comments, the minutes were confirmed.]

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

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1450/07-08(01), CB(2)1572/07-08(01) and (02)]

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

- (a) Submission from the Hong Kong Unison Limited on the Consultation Paper on Developing a Supplementary Guide to the Chinese Language Curriculum for Non-Chinese Speaking Students [LC Paper No. CB(2)1450/07-08 (01); and
- (b) Submissions from the Hong Kong Institute of Technology concerning its application to Hong Kong Nursing Council for accreditation of an Associate Degree Programme in Nursing [LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1572/07-08 (01) & (02)].

III. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[Appendices I and II to LC Paper No. CB(2)1566/07-08]

Items for next meeting

3. Members noted Mr Abraham SHEK's letter dated 11 April 2008 and Dr Fernando CHEUNG's letter dated 14 April 2008 to the Chairman which were tabled at the meeting [LC Paper Nos CB(2)1647/07-08(02) & (03).]

4. Mr Abraham SHEK informed members that he would introduce the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (Amendment) Bill 2008 into the Legislative Council (LegCo) shortly. The Bill sought to, among others, establish a new position of Provost and reduce the membership of the Council of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) from 34 to 27 including a student representative. Mr SHEK said that as the Bill was relatively simple, he hoped that it could be enacted in the current session.

5. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that to facilitate early enactment of the Bill, HKUST should seek the views of staff and students on the proposals in the Bill. Should they support the proposals and so indicate to members, the legislative process for the Bill could be expedited. Ms Emily LAU echoed the view, and said that other parties might also have views on the Bill, and these parties should also be consulted.

Action

6. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that given the limited supply of hostel places and the proposal to increase non-local student intake from 10% to 20% of the total publicly-funded places in the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions, the allocation of hostel places by the institutions had aroused concern and controversy in the UGC sector recently. He suggested that the Panel should discuss the policy and criteria for the allocation of hostel places.
7. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next regular meeting scheduled for Thursday, 8 May 2008, at 2:30 pm -
 - (a) The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (Amendment) Bill 2008;
 - (b) Allocation of hostel places by the UGC-funded institutions; and
 - (c) Increase in financial provision for Project Yi Jin (proposed by the Administration).

Special meeting on 28 April 2008

8. Members noted the letter from Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong to the Chairman dated 7 April 2008 proposing the discussion of the application made by the Hong Kong Institute of Technology (HKIT) to the Nursing Council of Hong Kong for accreditation of an Associate Degree (AD) Programme in Nursing. Dr YEUNG Sum supported the proposal, and said that the Panel should invite the Nursing Council of Hong Kong and HKIT to the meeting.
9. The Chairman suggested the holding of a special meeting to discuss the matter at 10:45 am on 28 April 2008. Members agreed.
10. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong suggested that the Panel should invite the Education Bureau (EDB), the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) and the Consumer Council to the meeting. He explained that HKCAAVQ had a role to play on matters concerning professional accreditation of sub-degree programmes. The Consumer Council could give views from the perspective of consumer protection.
11. Mrs Selina CHOW said that the Panel should decide whether to focus its discussion on the specific incident or the general policy relating to academic and professional accreditation of sub-degree programmes. She was concerned that should the Panel go too far to include consumer right protection, there might be insufficient time to cover issues relating to the incident at the special meeting.

Action

12. Mr LEUNG Kwan-yuen said that the case in question was widely reported by the media, causing much public concern. To facilitate members' discussion, he suggested requesting the Research and Library Services Division of the LegCo Secretariat to prepare an information note on the subject matter. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed support for the suggestion.

13. Ms Audrey EU considered that the case aside, the special meeting should also discuss the broader policy issues such as the need for the compliance of certain conditions before sub-degree programmes could be provided. In addition to HKIT and the Nursing Council of Hong Kong, other bodies with views on the subject should also be invited to the special meeting.

14. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong explained that academic and professional accreditation of sub-degree programmes were distinct but related, hence his proposal to invite HKCAAVQ. As regards the Consumer Council, he said that under the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance, all courses conducted in Hong Kong leading to the award of non-local higher academic qualifications or professional qualifications must be properly registered or be exempted from registration, and the operators should refund the relevant part of the course which ceased to be conducted due to cancellation of registration. However, the Ordinance did not apply to local post-secondary education programmes. The Consumer Council might have views on the matter.

15. The Chairman said that the Panel should focus its discussion on policies relating to academic and professional accreditation of sub-degree courses, with reference to the HKIT case. Members would also examine ways to prevent recurrence of similar incidents. Ms Emily LAU added that members should also consider measures to assist the relevant students.

16. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that like the AD Programme run by HKIT, two courses in Chinese Medicine offered by the Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK) and the Hong Kong College of Technology (HKCT) in collaboration with two Mainland Universities were not accredited by the Chinese Medicine Practitioners Board of Hong Kong. He suggested that the Panel should discuss as well and invite the institutions and students concerned to the special meeting. The Chairman agreed that the two courses quoted be included in the discussion.

Visit to schools admitting Non-Chinese speaking students

17. The Chairman informed members that the visit to schools admitting Non-Chinese speaking students was scheduled for 30 May 2008. The Administration was drawing up the itinerary and would inform members nearer the time.

Action

IV. Review of Post-secondary Education Sector

[File Ref.: EDB (MPE)CR 8/2041/04 and LC Paper No. CB(2)1566/07-08(01) and Report on Phase 2 Review of the Post-secondary Education Sector]

18. Members noted the background brief on sub-degree education prepared by the LegCo Secretariat.

19. The Chairman said that the Steering Committee published the Report on Phase Two Review of the Post-Secondary Education Sector (the Phase 2 Review Report) in April 2008. He invited members' questions on the Report.

Quality assurance

20. Referring to Recommendations 4, 5 and 6 of the Phase 2 Review Report, Mr TAM Yiu-chung asked how the establishment of the Tripartite Liaison Committee comprising EDB, the Joint Quality Review Committee (JQRC) and HKCAAVQ; the compilation of a set of "Good Practices for the Sub-degree Sector" by an Expert Group; and the launching of a new and comprehensive information portal for self-financing locally-accredited sub-degree programmes would help enhance the quality of sub-degree education. He noted that the Steering Committee had already recommended closer dialogue between JQRC and HKCAAVQ in the Phase I Review. Mr TAM was concerned about the effectiveness of the various non-mandatory measures on enhancement of quality assurance of sub-degree programmes.

21. Secretary for Education (SED) responded that the Administration had established the Tripartite Liaison Committee to provide a forum for discussing quality-related issues concerning the sub-degree sector and to enhance comparability of the quality assurance mechanisms and the programmes offered by institutions with or without self-accrediting status. The Administration had also established an Expert Group to draw up the good practices for sharing and reference by sub-degree institutions. These quality assurance measures would help enhance the quality of sub-degree programmes. Should providers repeatedly fail to meet the required standards, the accreditation of the sub-degree programmes concerned could be withdrawn by the quality assurance agencies.

22. Mr LEUNG Kwan-yuen welcomed the recommendations in the Phase 2 Review Report. He said that sub-degree programmes included AD and Higher Diploma (HD) courses. However, unlike HD programmes with a long history of development, the public could not discern the academic qualification of AD programmes. The Hong Kong Vocational Training Council had made substantial preparatory work in support of its application for academic accreditation of its HD courses in the past two years. He considered that the overall quality of sub-degree education would depend on the quality of sub-degree programmes, teaching staff and facilities, students and graduates. The Administration should ensure the comparability and consistency of

Action

academic accreditation conducted by HKCAAVQ and JQRC in terms of the standards and procedures adopted.

23. SED responded that institutions with self-accrediting status had established their internal quality assurance mechanisms to accredit their sub-degree programmes. In addition, the Heads of the Universities Committee had set up JQRC to oversee their self-financing programmes at sub-degree level. JQRC would conduct on-site visits and make observations on the quality assurance process of sub-degree programmes, including the intake and exit standards set by the institutions.

24. Ms Emily LAU considered that apart from improving the learning environment in sub-degree institutions, upgrading the quality of teachers was crucial to enhancing the quality of sub-degree education. She enquired whether the Steering Committee had made any recommendations in the Phase 2 Review Report concerning the allocation of additional resources to support the professional development of sub-degree teachers. Mrs Selina CHOW echoed Ms LAU's view, and asked how the Administration would enhance teachers' quality in the sub-degree sector.

25. SED responded that although the Steering Committee had not made any recommendations concerning the provision of direct subsidy to support the professional development of teachers in the sub-degree sector, other recommendations such as the launching of the Quality Enhancement Grant Scheme would enable providers to deploy more resources to upgrade the quality of their teachers. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong remarked that course providers had to repay the start-up loans and could hardly spare their limited resources to upgrade their teaching workforce.

26. Professor Patrick LAU pointed out that many local providers offered sub-degree programmes in conjunction with overseas or Mainland universities, leading to the award of a recognized degree. He expressed support for the establishment of a credit transfer system to enable students to attend different post-secondary institutions including the UGC-funded institutions in pursuit of further studies. He considered that this could be a way forward for the sub-degree education. SED replied that the Administration would discuss with post-secondary institutions including the UGC-funded institutions concerning the feasibility of a credit transfer system.

Academic and professional accreditation

27. Mr TAM Yiu-chung expressed support for the launching of a new and comprehensive information portal for self-financing locally-accredited sub-degree programmes to enhance transparency of sub-degree providers and programmes. Referring to the Nursing Council of Hong Kong's rejection of HKIT's AD Programme for accreditation, he asked whether the information

Action

portal would include information on academic and professional accreditation of sub-degree programmes to enable students to make informed choice regarding their studies.

28. SED responded that the establishment of the information portal in June 2007 to provide detailed and easily accessible information on individual course providers and their programmes had enabled students to make informed choice regarding their studies. He pointed out that academic accreditation and professional recognition were separate processes. For instance, a degree holder in engineering or architectural studies would be required to undergo the necessary in-service training and/or have the practical experience for admission as members by the relevant professional bodies.

29. Mr Albert CHAN said that members of the public were uncertain about the academic status and recognition of sub-degree qualifications. He was of the view that many students were misled by inaccurate advertisement and spent considerable time, monies and efforts in pursuing sub-degree education. He asked how the Administration would protect the interests of students in pursuit of sub-degree qualifications, in particular those who had enrolled in sub-degree programmes which were not recognized for civil service appointment and professional membership purposes. He considered that EDB should take the lead in collaborating with the stakeholders to work out remedial measures to protect the interests of sub-degree students, in particular those enrolled in the HKIT's AD Programme in Nursing.

30. SED responded that many sub-degree qualifications were recognized for employment purpose in the public and private sectors. The Administration would continue to monitor the development of the sub-degree sector and the operation of sub-degree institutions. The Steering Committee had recommended various measures in its Phase 2 Review Report to strengthen the quality assurance of the sub-degree sector. As regards the confusion over the distinction between academic and professional accreditation arising from HKIT's unsuccessful application for professional accreditation of its AD Programme in Nursing, SED responded that the case was an isolated incident and should be dealt with separately.

31. Professor Patrick LAU stressed that it was most imperative to differentiate professional recognition from academic accreditation. The Administration should ensure that members of the public could understand the distinction between academic and professional qualifications for recognition by higher education institutions for further studies and for employment purposes. For professional disciplines such as architectural studies, holders of a degree recognized by the Hong Kong Institute of Architects (HKIA) would still have to fulfil the post-graduate requirements including two years' practical experience and the passing of the written examinations conducted by HKIA for registration as its members.

Action

32. SED responded that the Administration considered it most crucial to enhance the transparency of the self-financing sub-degree programmes and accessibility of information through strengthening the information portal for the sub-degree sector. He also stressed that academic accreditation was not equivalent or linked to professional recognition. Application for professional recognition of a specific course was assessed by the relevant professional bodies in accordance with their profession-specific rules.

33. Mrs Selina CHOW shared the view of Professor Patrick LAU that professional recognition should be differentiated from academic accreditation given their different requirements and emphasis. She pointed out that the requirements for professional recognition of sub-degree programmes should be set by the relevant professional bodies. Academic accreditation of a certain programme did not necessarily lead to professional recognition.

34. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that accreditation of a sub-degree programme by HKCAAVQ and by the relevant professional body was not entirely unrelated. In considering whether a particular sub-degree programme should be accredited, HKCAAVQ should have regard to the design of the programme for its likelihood to be accredited by the relevant professional body.

Articulation and employment

35. Dr YEUNG Sum welcomed the recommendations in the Phase 2 Review Report to enhance the quality and recognition of sub-degree education. He said that sub-degree students who were admitted to senior year undergraduate studies in the UGC-funded institutions were outstanding. The Administration should increase the provision of articulation places in undergraduate programmes and take the lead in the recognition of sub-degree qualifications for civil service appointment purpose.

36. SED responded that the Administration would continue to take the lead in enhancing recognition for sub-degree qualifications for civil service appointment purpose, and would establish a comprehensive Qualifications Framework to institutionalize the recognition of academic and non-academic qualifications including sub-degree qualifications. The relatively small number of sub-degree graduates in the civil service was mainly due to a freeze in civil service recruitment in previous years. Currently, 13 civil service grades accepted sub-degree qualifications for appointment purpose. Given the economic recovery in recent years, the Administration would take the lead in considering whether more civil service grades could accept sub-degree qualifications for appointment propose and in promoting the recognition of sub-degree qualifications in the community, in particular by employer associations in the commercial sector.

Action

37. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that he noted the aspirations of sub-degree graduates to further their studies in local universities, and was aware of the constraints in increasing the senior year places in terms of both resources and capacity of the universities. Enrolment of non-local students in the UGC-funded institutions would be increased by phases to 20% of the total publicly-funded places. Of these, 4% was publicly-funded and the other 16% was self-financing. This 16% was not fully utilized by some institutions partly because of the insufficient provision of hostel places for non-local students. At present, institutions admitted non-local students up to 7-8% of the total publicly-funded places. It was roughly estimated that about 1 400 to 1 500 places had not been filled. Mr CHEUNG suggested that EDB should allow institutions to make use of this unfilled quota to admit their sub-degree graduates who should be required to pay tuition fees at the same level as non-local students. Mr CHEUNG considered that his suggestion would increase the articulation opportunities for sub-degree students but would not increase public expenditure or affect institutional autonomy.

38. SED explained that the purpose of the new policy initiative to increase non-local student intake was to enhance internationalization of the student body in higher education and development of Hong Kong as a regional education hub. The new initiative would promote more student exchange programmes between local and overseas or Mainland universities that would enhance cultural diversity and exchanges within university campuses. The Administration noted that the question of providing sufficient hostel places had yet to be resolved. As the policy initiative had yet to be introduced, the capability of individual institutions to attract non-local students remained to be seen. The Administration would keep in view the implementation of the initiative and consider Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong's suggestion in the light of the actual enrolment of non-local students.

39. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that the crux of the issue was the positioning of sub-degree qualification. The way forward should be to provide sufficient articulation places for sub-degree holders to pursue undergraduate studies in the UGC-funded institutions. In an increasingly knowledge-based global economy, manpower training and development was essential to sustain the development and competitiveness of Hong Kong in the international arena. He considered the provision of 1 927 second-year undergraduate places insufficient to meet the demand of some 30 000 sub-degree graduates in a year. He asked whether the Administration had planned or set a policy target for the enrolment of sub-degree graduates in publicly-funded undergraduate programmes.

40. SED explained that currently, of the 60 000 sub-degree students, around 40 000 and 20 000 were enrolled in HD and AD programmes respectively. Given the stronger vocational emphasis of HD programmes, many HD graduates would be prepared to seek employment after graduation, whilst a larger proportion of AD graduates could share stronger aspirations to pursue further

Action

education following completion of their AD programmes. Apart from the 1 927 senior-year undergraduate places in the UGC-funded institutions, AD graduates might further their studies in the self-financing degree sector including top-up degrees offered by private universities. While the Administration appreciated the aspirations of sub-degree graduates to further their studies at the UGC-funded institutions, there was practically a limit on the number of articulation places that could be provided in these institutions.

41. Dr Fernando CHEUNG shared the view of Mr LEE Cheuk-yan that the positioning of sub-degree education was important. Dr CHEUNG expressed support for improving financial assistance to sub-degree students. He made reference to the Community College system for both young persons and adults in the United States which was publicly-funded. He said that young persons could bridge over to university studies after completing their studies in community colleges, whereas adults could have lifelong learning opportunities. He considered that the Administration had resorted to an easy-way-out approach and looked to the development of a self-financing degree sector to address the aspirations of sub-degree graduates to pursue university education. Given their resources constraint, private universities would unlikely deliver programmes with quality comparable to that of publicly-funded undergraduate programmes. He enquired whether the Administration had a mission for higher education and whether the development of a self-financing sub-degree and degree sector would be beneficial to the long-term development of Hong Kong.

42. SED explained that the positioning of sub-degree education was clear. The policy objective was to provide 60% secondary school leavers with access to post-secondary education. The AD qualification was a standalone and valuable qualification within the qualifications framework. The Administration noted the concern about the quality of sub-degree programmes, and the focus of the Phase 2 Review had been on measures to improve the quality of sub-degree programmes. The Administration would continue to engage the higher education sector on the merit of adopting a credit-transfer system to enhance the provision of continuing education and lifelong learning opportunities.

43. Referring to paragraph 14 of the LegCo Brief on the Phase 2 Review which stated that AD had been misperceived by many students as a bridging qualification for further studies, Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung considered it inappropriate to use the word "misperceived" as it was natural for AD as well as HD graduates to seek further studies. He sought clarification from the Administration.

44. SED explained that the misconception referred to misconceiving the AD qualification as solely a bridging qualification without its own value. Both AD and HD studies prepared graduates to seek employment or further studies. The Administration would continue to engage the higher education sector on the merit of adopting a credit transfer system to facilitate sub-degree graduates to

Action

seek employment after graduation and resume further studies after a certain time should they wish to.

45. Ms Emily LAU referred members to paragraph 1.6 of the Phase 2 Review Report which stated that "*While the AD qualification sought to prepare graduates for both employment and further studies, the fact was that most sub-degree students aspired to further their studies at the degree level immediately after graduation and hence demanded the provision of more articulation opportunities.*" She considered that given the huge fiscal surplus and reserves, the Administration was financially capable of providing more articulation opportunities for sub-degree graduates.

Admin

46. SED explained that according to surveys on sub-degree graduates, most HD graduates sought employment immediately after graduation. He undertook to provide a written response to members' concern about the aspirations of sub-degree graduates to pursue further studies or to seek employment.

47. Mr SIN Chung-kai enquired how sub-degree graduates would be remunerated in comparison with secondary school leavers in civil service appointments, and whether and how sub-degree curriculum would be designed to tie in with the manpower demand in the market.

48. Permanent Secretary for Education (PSED) responded that AD qualification was broadly equivalent to HD qualification, and sub-degree qualifications were accepted for appointment to many civil service ranks. Generally, sub-degree qualifications were recognized and pitched at a level between degree and matriculation qualifications. The Administration would explore the feasibility of getting more civil service grades to accept sub-degree qualifications for appointment purpose. In particular, the Administration would continue to take the lead in enhancing recognition for AD and HD qualifications and intensify publicity efforts to promote better understanding of the sub-degree qualifications for employment purpose in both the business community and the public sector. To facilitate the employability of the sub-degree graduates, the Administration would collaborate with post-secondary institutions to maintain regular dialogues with professional bodies, employers' federations and the business sector in the curriculum development and internship arrangements to improve employers' involvement in the development of sub-degree programmes and provide pre-employment job experiences for sub-degree students.

49. Mrs Selina CHOW shared the view that the HD qualification had fared much better than AD in terms of recognition by employers. Generally speaking, AD programmes were more generic than HD in content and less popular in enrolment. She pointed out that the expansion of the sub-degree sector was proposed in 2003 at a time of economic downturn when secondary school leavers had experienced serious difficulties in seeking employment. She supported the continued development of sub-degree education to enable

Action

secondary school leavers who had not been admitted to universities to pursue further education and have lifelong learning opportunities.

Subsidy for providers

50. Dr YEUNG Sum supported the proposed initiatives in the Phase 2 Review Report to assist providers in enhancing the quality of sub-degree programmes and the learning environment for their students. However, he considered that although full subsidy for all sub-degree programmes was not feasible at this stage, the Administration should at least provide direct subsidy to certain quality sub-degree programmes which would be conducive to the long-term development of Hong Kong.

51. SED responded that the Administration had invested substantially in the development of sub-degree education over the past years, and would continue to fund publicly certain sub-degree programmes in line with the established criteria. Pursuant to the Phase 2 Review, the Administration had proposed a number of initiatives to enhance the quality and development of the sub-degree sector. For instance, the Administration would continue to provide start-up loans and suitable sites at nominal premium, and identify suitable vacant school premises to support sub-degree providers in enhancing the quality of sub-degree education and the learning environment in sub-degree institutions.

52. Ms Audrey EU said that since the tuition fee of the UGC-funded programmes was pitched at about 18% of the average unit cost, whereas sub-degree programmes were self-financing, the Administration should explore the feasibility of narrowing the gap between these two types of programmes in terms of public funding support by providing a certain level of subsidy for sub-degree programmes.

53. SED responded that to take on board the recommendations of the Steering Committee in the Phase 2 Review Report, the Administration had proposed extending the maximum loan repayment period of medium-term loans under the Start-up Loan Scheme from 10 years to 20 years, subject to interest payment after the first 10 years and proven financial difficulties of the borrowing institutions. The extension would relieve the financial burden of the institutions concerned to a certain extent and enable them to devote more resources to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

54. Professor Patrick LAU expressed support for the modified Land Grant Scheme and the allocation of suitable vacant school premises for providers to improve the learning environment for students. He sought information on land sites and vacant school premises which could be made available to providers and was concerned whether the provision would be sufficient.

Action

55. SED replied that the Administration would identify suitable vacant school premises for allocation to sub-degree institutions and modify the Start-up Loan Scheme and Land Grant Scheme to facilitate post-secondary institutions to enhance teaching, learning and other facilities as well as to re-provision existing college premises. At the present stage, the Administration did not have detailed information about vacant school premises which could be made available to providers.

Subsidy for students

56. Dr YEUNG Sum welcomed the proposal to provide means-tested loans under the Financial Assistance Scheme for Post-secondary Students (FASP) to cover the living expenses of students. Nevertheless, he considered that undergraduate and sub-degree students should equally be subsidized at about 82% of the average student unit cost. The Government should provide students who were not admitted to undergraduate programmes with affordable opportunities to pursue quality sub-degree education, and contribute to the development of Hong Kong after graduation. The Administration should allocate additional resources to subsidize sub-degree providers and students in order to enhance the quality of sub-degree programmes, quality of teachers as well as quality of students and graduates. Given the substantial fiscal surpluses, the Administration should demonstrate its determination to enhance the quality of sub-degree education by injecting additional resources to the sub-degree sector

57. Ms Audrey EU appreciated that the recommendations in the Phase 2 Review Report had addressed members' views and suggestions raised on the subject at previous meetings. She considered that in view of the high tuition fees of sub-degree programmes, the Administration should consider deferring the effective date for calculating the interest on loans under FASP until after the student had completed their sub-degree courses.

58. SED responded that students of accredited post-secondary programmes currently had access to means-tested grants and non-means-tested loans. FASP provided a means-tested grant to cover tuition fees for locally accredited, self-financing full time post-secondary programmes on the basis of the financial circumstances of the applicants' families. Students who did not meet the criteria for means-tested grant might apply for non-means-tested loans. SED also pointed out that the implementation of the recommendations in the Phase 2 Review Report would incur substantial resources. The Administration would seek the necessary funding approval from the Finance Committee shortly. The Administration had to adopt a prudent approach in financial management and the use of public funds. SED pointed out that the Administration had to carefully consider any proposals which would incur expenditure of a recurrent nature.

Action

59. Mrs Selina CHOW said that Members of the Liberal Party supported the operation of self-financing sub-degree programmes but were concerned about the heavy debts shouldered by the sub-degree graduates after completing the studies. She requested the Administration to work out measures to reduce their financial burden such as by lowering the interest rate under FASP.

60. SED replied that the Steering Committee had recommended in the Phase 2 Review Report the provision of means-tested loans under FASP to cover the living expenses of students and to extend FASP to cover sub-degree graduates pursuing self-financing full-time locally-accredited degree and top-up degree studies in Hong Kong.

Development of a self-financing degree sector

61. Ms Audrey EU asked how the Administration would facilitate the healthy development of a self-financing locally-accredited degree sector, in particular ways to avoid the recurrence of problems arising from self-financing sub-degree education, for example becoming second-class qualification.

62. Mr LEUNG Kwan-yuen expressed support for the development of self-financing private universities and the introduction of support measures in this regard. He said that the Administration should assist reputable post-secondary institutions with a long history of development and a good track record in academic performance to become private universities to increase competition in the sector. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong also expressed support for the development of quality private universities in the long term.

63. SED responded that the Administration would consider introducing suitable support measures to facilitate the development of self-financing degree-awarding institutions and private universities to expand the articulation opportunities for sub-degree graduates.

64. Referring to the development of Hong Kong Shue Yan University, PSED highlighted that the development of a private university required a good track record of academic performance and involved a long and comprehensive accreditation process. The Administration recognized the importance of ensuring the healthy and sustainable development of a self-financing degree sector and the need for quality assurance and transparency mechanisms. The Administration would consult the sector and the accreditation bodies including HKCAAVQ and the Quality Assurance Council of UGC in this regard.

65. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong suggested that the Panel should receive views of deputations on the Phase 2 Review Report at a future meeting. The Chairman noted his suggestion, and said that he would follow this up with the Clerk.

Action

V. Review of the Financial Assistance Scheme for Designated Evening Adult Education Courses

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1397/07-08(01)&(02), CB(2)1566/07-08(02)&(03) and CB(2)1567/07-08]

66. The Chairman recapped briefly the discussion on the subject at the last meeting on 26 March 2008, and invited the Administration to update the Panel on the outcome of its consideration of various suggestions made by members to further improve the Financial Assistance Scheme for Designated Evening Adult Education Courses (the Scheme).

Briefing by the Administration

67. Deputy Secretary for Education (1) (DS(Ed)1) took members through the Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(2)1566/07-08(02)] which set out the Administration's response to views and concerns raised by members at the last meeting. The salient points were as follows -

- (a) as members' suggestions to provide adult learners with free education under the Scheme and to review the existing payment mode involved making changes to certain fundamental aspects of the Scheme, it would be necessary for the Administration to carefully assess factors, such as whether the proposals represented an effective use of public resources, their possible impact on other private evening schools and any read-across implications on other financial assistance schemes for adult learners, before taking a decision;
- (b) in the light of the comment made by some members that providing more centres could obviate the need of some adult learners to travel a long way to attend courses, the Administration was exploring the possibility of establishing more designated centres. It was, for example, likely that a new designated centre would, subject to there being adequate demand, be established in Tseung Kwan O in the 2008-2009 school year; and
- (c) the Administration would also make arrangement for the enhanced Scheme to be reviewed shortly after the completion of the 2008-2009 school year, when it had a better grasp of the effectiveness of the improvements to be made under the current proposal.

Discussion

68. Dr YEUNG Sum reiterated his view expressed at the last meeting that the Administration should continue its commitment to increase the overall

Action

investment in education and endeavour to develop its human capital, in order to support and sustain Hong Kong's development as a knowledge-based economy. He said that human capital was the single most important asset of Hong Kong, and access to learning opportunities was crucial to helping those from disadvantaged background to move up the social ladder. As education was widely recognised as a key source of impetus for social development, he urged the Administration to address the needs of working adults, particularly those who did not have the opportunity to receive basic education in the past. While expressing support for the Administration's proposal to extend the scope of the Scheme to cover junior secondary levels and to add a 50% tuition fee reimbursement assistance level starting from the 2008-2009 school year, he hoped that the review to be conducted by the Administration after the completion of the 2008-2009 school year would be geared towards the objective of providing eligible adult learners with free education.

69. DS(Ed)1 responded that the Administration was willing to consider members' views and suggestions on the Scheme. He assured members that the Administration would make arrangement for the enhanced Scheme to be reviewed shortly after the completion of the 2008-2009 school year.

70. Dr Fernando CHEUNG considered the proposal to continue the Scheme with enhancements starting from the 2008-2009 school year a good initiative. He, however, expressed disappointment at the reluctance of the Administration to take forward members' recommendations made at the last meeting, except for the establishment of a new designated centre in Tseung Kwan O. He stressed that the purpose of the Scheme was to provide working adults who, for various reasons, had not attended or completed secondary education during their early ages with a second learning opportunity to enable their pursuit of education. As implementation of the enhanced Scheme would only cost about a few million dollars per year even with the proposed extension of coverage to include junior secondary levels and introduction of a 50% tuition fee reimbursement assistance level, he considered the suggestion to provide students with full tuition fee reimbursement reasonable. Regarding the review to be conducted after the completion of the 2008-2009 school year, he asked about the considerations of the Administration in deciding whether free education would be extended to adult learners attending evening secondary courses.

71. DS(Ed)1 responded that the Administration would have to balance the interest of students and the need for prudent and effective use of public resources. He pointed out that under the enhanced Scheme, adult learners who enrolled in junior and senior secondary courses provided by the approved course provider(s) and who met the eligibility criteria, such as having at least 80% attendance, would be eligible for 30% reimbursement of the tuition fees, regardless of their financial position. To assist students with financial hardship, full tuition fee reimbursement (100% of the tuition fees) or half reimbursement (50% of the tuition fees) would be provided for those who had met the eligibility criteria and

Action

had passed the means test administered by the Student Financial Assistance Agency for full grant or half grant respectively. DS(Ed)1 stressed that the objective of the Scheme was to provide an affordable pathway to facilitate adult learners to complete mainstream secondary school courses so that no willing adult learners would be deprived of the chance to pursue their studies due to lack of means. He said that the provision of financial assistance on a non-means tested basis (30% tuition fee reimbursement) was not a common arrangement for the granting of training subsidy. The Scheme served to reduce the financial burden of adult learners and provide them an incentive to complete the course. The Administration was of the view that the direction taken by the existing Scheme, viz providing financial assistance to the learner rather than directly to the course operator, represented the right way forward and should be continued.

72. Miss CHAN Yuen-han welcomed the proposed improvements to the Scheme. She, however, expressed concern that many working adults were facing great difficulties in pursuit of education. While those receiving a meagre income might have difficulty in making upfront payment of the initial tuition fees, some adult learners who enrolled in evening secondary courses might sometimes have to be absent from classes due to work engagement. She strongly requested the Administration to improve the Scheme further, by increasing the support and amount of financial assistance for adult learners.

73. DS(Ed)1 responded that the Administration would carefully consider Miss CHAN's suggestion. He said that the demand for the Scheme had been quite stable in the past three years, with the figures of students enrolled in mainstream evening secondary courses under the Scheme hovering around 1 000 each year. Since working adults might sometimes have to be absent from classes due to work engagement, the Administration had provided the following relaxations in respect of the 80% attendance requirement -

- (a) at least 60% attendance plus an overall pass in the final examination; or
- (b) at least 60% attendance plus inclusion of an exemption for the remaining 20% attendance to be proved by prescribed means including medical certificates or employers' certification of work commitment.

74. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung enquired whether the 80% and 60% thresholds could be further lowered. Citing the subsidized retraining courses of the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) which provided retrainees with retraining allowance, he strongly requested the Administration, on the grounds of fairness and consistency, to increase the subsidy level under the Scheme to make it comparable to the retraining allowance provided by ERB.

Action

75. In response, DS(Ed)1 said that since further relaxation of the attendance requirement might affect the incentive for adult learners to complete the course, the Administration would have difficulty to lower the thresholds. DS(Ed)1 further said that the provision of retraining services with retraining allowance was unique to courses offered by ERB. He pointed out that other financial assistance schemes for adult learners, such as the Project Yi Jin, the Skills Upgrading Programme and the Continuing Education Fund (CEF), did not have such a feature. Nevertheless, in view of members' suggestions to further strengthen the support for adult learners attending evening secondary education, the Administration would make arrangement for the enhanced Scheme to be reviewed shortly after the completion of the 2008-2009 school year, when it had a better grasp of the effectiveness of the improvements to be made under the current proposal. It would allow the Administration some valuable time to work through the implications of the various suggestions made by members.

76. Mr TAM Yiu-chung asked about the reason for choosing Tseung Kwan O as the location for establishing a new designated centre in 2008-2009 school year. He said that at present, Hong Kong residents were eligible for a maximum subsidy of \$10,000 under CEF without having the need to undergo the asset limit test. He suggested that the Administration should consider adopting a similar approach in the provision of financial assistance under the Scheme.

77. In response, DS(Ed)1 explained that there were currently 10 designated centres under the Scheme, one on Hong Kong Island, three in Kowloon and six in the New Territories. However, no courses were run in five centres, including the Lung Cheung Government Secondary School situated in Wong Tai Sin, in the 2007-2008 school year due to insufficient enrolment. The main reason why the Administration recommended the setting up of a new designated centre in Tseung Kwan O was because it wished to cater for the needs of adult learners living in this area. As regards Mr TAM's suggestion, the Administration would draw reference to the practices adopted by different subsidy schemes when conducting the review after the completion of the 2008-2009 school year.

78. Ms Emily LAU said that she agreed with Dr Fernando CHEUNG on the need to provide more incentive to encourage adult learners to pursue education. She sought clarification on the meaning of "effective use of public resources" as referred to in paragraph 5 of the Administration's paper, and asked about the magnitude of the possible impact on other private evening schools and the read-across implications on other financial assistance schemes for adult learners if further changes were made to the Scheme.

79. In response, DS(Ed)1 explained that when the evening adult education courses were operated by the Government, the overall drop-out rate of adult learners was high. Since the Administration believed that the Scheme could achieve cost effectiveness with subsidies going direct to the adult learners, it would include such a factor, viz effective use of public resources, in its review of

Action

the Scheme when considering whether the broad direction taken by the existing Scheme, i.e. providing financial assistance to the learner rather than directly to the course operator, should continue or be changed. DS(Ed)1 further said that out of the 5 000 students currently studying in mainstream evening secondary schools, about 4 000 of them were taking courses offered by private evening schools. The Administration would need to assess the impact of any changes to be made to the Scheme in the future, on private evening schools and other financial assistance schemes for adult learners. The Administration would therefore need to carefully consider the implications of the proposals before taking a decision.

80. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong strongly suggested that the Administration should consider providing financial assistance to eligible adult learners in the form of vouchers, and the Scheme be expanded to cover non-profit-making course providers which could meet the quality standard and teacher qualification requirements as set by the Government for running the evening adult education courses. In his view, adult learners could benefit most from the Scheme if they were allowed to enrol in courses offered by private evening schools, and had greater flexibility in the selection of the location of education/training centre.

81. DS(Ed)1 responded that since the service agreement with the existing approved course provider would expire in August 2008, the Administration would, subject to Finance Committee (FC)'s approval of the proposal, conduct an open invitation exercise to select suitable non-profit-making course provider(s) to operate the enhanced Scheme. The Administration would take into account the views and concerns of members when evaluating the tender submissions. It would also continue to collaborate with the sector to optimize the use of educational resources to provide and promote more life-long learning opportunities to meet the diversified development needs of adult learners.

82. Miss CHAN Yuen-han was of the view that the Administration should adopt a holistic approach in planning the continuing education opportunities for adult learners, with due regard to their diversified needs to pursue basic education and to seek vocational training/retraining. In this connection, government bureaux, including EDB and the Labour and Welfare Bureau, should work closely in areas of course planning, programme design and resource allocation. DS(Ed)1 assured members that the Administration would take into consideration the views and suggestions of members in the review to be conducted after the completion of the 2008-2009 school year.

Conclusion

83. Concluding the discussion, the Chairman said that members present at the meeting in general had no objection to the submission of the proposal to FC for consideration on 9 May 2008. He requested the Administration to take note of members' views and concerns about the Scheme. Dr YEUNG Sum requested the

Action

Administration to make it clear in its paper to FC that it would review the enhanced Scheme shortly after the completion of the 2008-2009 school year, and that the review would be geared towards the objective of providing eligible adult learners with free education.

VI. Any other business

84. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:44 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
7 May 2008