

Draft

LC Paper No. CB(2)959/07-08(02)

立法會

Legislative Council

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

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

**Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 14 January 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
- Public Officers attending** : Item VII
Mr Chris Wardlaw
Deputy Secretary for Education (5)
Mr Eddie CHEUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education (Education Infrastructure)

Mr SHE Mang
Chief Curriculum Development Officer (Information
Technology in 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

X X X X X X X X

VII. The Third Strategy on Information Technology in Education

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)847/07-08(01), CB(2)766/07-08(07),
CB(2)502/07-08, CB(2)244/07-08(02) & (03), and CB(2)159/07-08(01)]

1. Members noted a submission from I.T. People Association of Hong Kong which was tabled at the meeting.

Briefing by the Administration

2. DS(Ed)5 introduced the Administration's paper on the outcome of the consultation on the Third Strategy on Information Technology (IT) in Education (the Third Strategy), highlighting that the majority of respondents supported the theme of the Third Strategy, i.e., the right technology at the right time for the right task, and the general direction of focusing on the human factor rather than the technical factor in further integrating IT into learning and teaching. Principal Assistant Secretary (Education Infrastructure) (PAS(EI)) showed the contents of www.starfall.com to demonstrate the availability of quality on-line open educational resources and the contents of www.free-reading.net, which was a wiki project where all materials and lesson plans for teaching English on the website were contributed by teachers for sharing, to demonstrate how Web 2.0 applications assisted learning and teaching. He explained that the availability of quality on-line open source materials and the popularity of Web 2.0 applications created room for resources redeployment by schools. It was also important to

Action

raise parents' information literacy and awareness of the role of IT in education to enable parents to provide effective guidance on e-learning at home for their children. He then explained the adjustments to the actions to be included in the Third Strategy in the light of the outcome of the consultation as set out in the Administration's paper.

IT Coordinator

3. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that he had received views from many principals who strongly requested for a permanent post of IT Coordinator (ITC) in schools for the development of school-based IT to enhance the teaching and learning outcomes. These principals pointed out that the Operating Expenses Block Grant (OEBG) and the Composite IT Grant (CITG) were for upgrading and replacing IT facilities in schools. Each school could only afford \$10,000 a month for the employment of an ITC. Such an amount was grossly insufficient for recruiting and retaining an experienced and competent ITC, resulting in a high turnover rate as stated in paragraph 21 of the Administration's paper. He asked for the reasons for not including a permanent post of ITC in schools in the proposals for implementing the Third Strategy.

4. DS(Ed)5 responded that the Administration was aware of the request from the school sector for a permanent post of IT technician. However, the Administration considered it more appropriate to provide schools with the flexibility in the deployment of resources for acquisition of technical support in the light of their needs and priorities. Through cost-effective deployment of the provisions under CITG and other funds including OEBG, schools currently adopted various models for providing technical support services in accordance with their needs and priorities in the use of IT in education. The Administration aimed to ensure that good planning advice was given in this regard.

5. Mr SIN Chung-kai said that the Administration had to understand the needs of and the problems encountered by school principals and teachers in the use of IT in education. Their need was to have a dedicated person in schools who was capable of taking care of matters relating to the use of IT, hence their request for a permanent post of ITC. In the commercial sector, such a problem could easily be resolved by way of outsourcing. He asked whether the Administration had considered such an option to address the concern of schools.

6. PAS(EI) responded that the Administration had held nine fora, which were attended by over 900 principals, teachers, parents and IT industry representatives, to collect the stakeholders' views on the proposals in the Third Strategy and had adjusted some of the plans and actions in the light of the views received. The school sector in general welcomed the establishment of the on-line depository of teaching modules which would lessen teachers' workload in integrating IT into learning and teaching. He pointed out that schools currently used the allocations under CITG and OEBG for procuring technical

Action

support services according to their needs. Some schools had used the savings from other IT related areas to employ IT technicians above the indicative salary level of \$10,000 per month.

7. Chief Curriculum Development Officer (Information Technology in Education) supplemented that with the increasing availability of free learning and teaching resources and software on the Internet and the decreasing need for computer consumables, schools should spend less in these areas and more provisions under CITG and OEBG could be used for the employment of IT technicians. For instance, the Administration was given to know that a school had offered a monthly salary of \$16,000 to retain a very competent IT technician.

8. While agreeing that schools should be provided with flexibility in the deployment of IT resources, Ms Emily LAU was concerned whether sufficient resources had been made available to them to enable the recruitment and retention of competent ITCs or IT technicians under the prevailing market conditions. She considered that the Panel should consult the school sector on the matter. Referring to paragraph 18 of the Administration's paper, Ms LAU also enquired whether the Administration would consider following the practice of some advanced jurisdictions to require schools to formulate annual resources and strategic plans for integrating IT into teaching and learning on a mandatory basis and set a timetable in this regard.

9. DS(Ed)5 explained that the Administration recognised the issues encountered by schools in integrating IT into learning and teaching, but did not consider the establishment of a permanent post of ITC could help resolve these issues. The Administration believed that the best approach was to allow schools to determine the best models for developing their school-based IT plan including the procurement of technical support services. Under the Third Strategy, the Administration aimed to support schools in drawing up the cost-effective models most suited their needs and facilitate the dissemination of good models among schools for reference.

10. DS(Ed)5 further pointed out that there was an emerging consensus among some advanced countries on the importance of annual resources and strategic planning in enhancing resources utilisation as they had made substantial investment in the use of IT in education. As for Hong Kong, the Administration did not consider it necessary to make it mandatory for schools to formulate annual resources and strategic plans for integrating IT into learning and teaching. Schools could make reference to overseas experiences in enhancing resources utilisation in the use of IT in education. The Administration would provide various supports for schools to formulate their own plans in the light of their priorities and current stages of development. PAS(EI) supplemented that the school sector supported the proposal of making school-based IT in education development plans for more effective resources utilization but had indicated that this should not add burden on the school management and teachers. The

Action

Administration understood the reservation of the school sector about the introduction of a mandatory requirement for annual school resources and strategic planning, and hence did not have any timetable in this regard.

11. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong pointed out that as quoted by the Administration, a monthly salary of \$16,000 was already the highest amount that could be offered by schools for the employment of an experienced ITC. Given that the IT personnel were currently sought after by all industries, it was unrealistic to expect schools to be able to recruit or retain them with such a salary level. He urged the Administration to provide either a permanent post of ITC for each school, or sufficient financial resources for each school to recruit an ITC.

12. DS(Ed)5 responded that the Administration noted the call of the school sector and members for a permanent post of ITC in schools. However, the Administration genuinely believed that as far as the procurement of technical support was concerned, providing schools with the flexibility in the deployment of resources was a better approach. Schools could work out the models which most suited their needs. As mentioned in the proposals under the Third Strategy, the Administration would investigate and remove any impediments that would affect the flexible deployment of resources at the school level.

13. Responding to the Chairman's enquiry about the adequacy of funding for schools to employ an ITC, DS(Ed)5 said that how schools would use the resources would be important. As schools could flexibly use their resources, they could enjoy add-on benefits through effective utilisation.

14. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that the Administration should not shift its responsibility for resolving the problem to schools under the pretext of providing them with flexibility in the use of resources.

15. PAS(EI) said that the roles of an ITC and an IT technician should not be confused. According to overseas experiences, principals were the leader in the formulation of school-based IT in education development plans for their schools. The Administration would provide on-site support to help the school management develop and implement their plans.

16. The Chairman sought clarification on whether the Administration considered it necessary for schools to employ ITC. PAS(EI) responded that the Administration would leave it to schools to decide the need or otherwise for an ITC. CITG provided resources for the employment of an IT technician or procurement of technical services from technical service providers.

17. The Chairman remarked that if schools were only given the resources sufficient for employing an IT technician, it made no sense to leave it to them to decide the need for an ITC. He further said that the Administration had invested substantially in the use of IT in education. The concern of schools was how the

Action

resources could be used effectively, and human factor instead of technical factor should be the focus. Although schools could decide how to use their resources, from the perspective of school administration, they were inclined to use their IT resources on the procurement of hardware and software than to employ a dedicated person to manage IT as the benefits brought by the former could readily be seen.

18. Ms Audrey EU shared the view that the focus in the use of IT in education should be on human factor. It was therefore necessary to consider the importance of and the need for an ITC in schools. However, she questioned if it was necessary to employ a permanent ITC in each school in the long run. Other alternatives such as the feasibility of sharing an ITC among a number of schools could be considered.

Computer Recycling Scheme

19. Ms Emily LAU noted with concern that about 4% of primary and secondary school students did not have access to computers at home. She asked for the estimated number of these students, and whether the Administration had plans and measures to bridge the digital divide among students.

20. PAS(EI) responded that the Administration estimated that about 20 000 students did not have access to computers at home when the Second Strategy was launched. So far, around 10 000 recycled computers had been distributed under the Computer Recycling Scheme (the Scheme). There could be still around 10 000 students without access to computers at home. The Administration was confident that sufficient recycled computers were available to meet their needs. According to some school principals, some families, such as ethnic minority families, newly arrived families from the Mainland, or those residing in partitioned cubicles, might not wish to have a computer at home. EDB would continue to collaborate with schools and non-governmental organisations to raise parents' awareness of the role of IT in the emerging learning environment and of the availability of recycled computers under the Scheme.

21. Ms Emily LAU enquired whether the Administration could identify the students who had no access to computers at home and about concrete measures taken to assist these students.

22. PAS(EI) responded that schools were in the best position to know whether their students had access to computers at home. Starting from the 2001-2002 school year, all public sector primary and secondary schools had been provided with an incentive grant for making their IT facilities available for students' access after school hours. The Administration would continue to collaborate with schools to raise parents' awareness of the Scheme.

Action

Consultation

23. Ms Emily LAU considered it necessary for the Panel to consult the school sector on the Third Strategy before the Finance Committee considered the Administration's funding proposal given the views expressed by members concerning the issue of ITC.

24. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong also considered it necessary for the Panel to receive views from the school sector on the Third Strategy. The issue of ITC had been of grave concern to the school sector for a long time. Indeed, the Administration acknowledged in paragraph 6 of its paper that the school sector believed that the establishment of a permanent post of school IT technician would help address the problem of higher turnover of IT technicians in schools.

25. DS(Ed)5 stressed that the Administration had conducted an extensive consultation on the proposed actions for implementing the Third Strategy, and there were strong support from the school sector. The Administration did not consider it appropriate to address under the current proposal, which focused on non-recurrent financial support, the issue of ITC which would entail recurrent financial implications and should be carefully examined. In the course of implementing the Third Strategy, the Administration would be able to consider other issues which might arise in a fast-changing context and might not have been resolved to the satisfaction of all in the sector at this point in time.

26. PAS(EI) supplemented that the Administration had uploaded the 45 submissions received during the consultation period onto the EDB's website. The respondents included those from the school sector such as the Hong Kong Subsidized Secondary Schools Council had expressed support for the proposed plans and measures for implementing the Strategy.

27. In response to the Chairman on the urgency of and timetable for the submission of the funding proposal, PAS(EI) said that schools hoped to receive the funding for upgrading and replacing their IT facilities as early as practicable. The Administration therefore intended to submit the funding proposal to the Finance Committee for approval on 1 February 2008. If the proposal was approved, the funding could be released to schools within the current financial year.

28. The Chairman enquired about the possibility of deferring the submission of the funding proposal to the Finance Committee to allow time for the Panel to receive views from the school sector. PAS(EI) replied that the school sector was looking forward to the early allocation of the funding for upgrading and replacing IT facilities in schools, and would be disappointed if the proposal could not be submitted to the Finance Committee for consideration on 1 February 2008.

Action

29. Mr TAM Yiu-chung informed members that the Finance Committee had scheduled a meeting on 22 February 2008. The Chairman said that in view of members' concerns, the Panel would schedule a special meeting to receive the views of the school sector. He hoped that the Administration would take this into account in deciding the date for submission of the funding proposal to the Finance Committee. Should the Administration decide to submit its proposal to the Finance Committee for consideration at its meeting on 1 February 2008, the Panel would report its deliberations and members' views expressed at the current meeting to the Finance Committee.

30. DS(Ed)5 responded that although the Administration would prefer to submit the proposal to the Finance Committee for consideration on 1 February 2008, it would respect members' views and consider deferring the submission to the Finance Committee to 22 February 2008.

[*Post-meeting note* : the special meeting was scheduled for 31 January 2008 at 2:30 pm.]

X X X X X X X X

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
29 January 2008