

立法會 *Legislative Council*

LC Paper No. CB(2)1793/07-08(06)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 8 May 2008

Provision of hostels for tertiary students

Purpose

This paper sets out the existing policy on the provision of hostels for tertiary students and summarizes the areas of concern raised by Members.

Existing policy

2. Before 1982, the Government's primary objective was to provide adequate facilities for tuition and study, and student hostels and facilities would only be provided at public expense to the extent that their absence or inadequacy would frustrate the primary objective and only if the cost could not be met by private funds. In 1982, the Government reviewed the provision of student hostels at the tertiary institutions in the context of the review of post-secondary and technical education. The Government agreed that hostel places at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) and the University of Hong Kong (HKU) should be provided for up to 50% and 25% of their student population respectively. The provision was subject to the availability of suitable sites and necessary funds, and on condition that 75% of the capital cost would be met by the Government if the remaining 25% could be raised privately. The provision of hostel places for CUHK was pitched at a higher level in view of the longer travelling time then experienced by the students. In 1987, the Government advised the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) that student hostels should be provided for up to 30% of its student population.

3. As part of the overall review of the development of higher education in Hong Kong, the University Grants Committee (UGC) established a working group in September 1993 to review the space and accommodation provided to the UGC-funded institutions. Based on the working group's initial findings, UGC submitted in March 1996 its recommendations to the Government, among others, for a review of the policy on the provision of publicly-funded student hostels at the UGC-funded institutions.

4. In December 1996, the Government announced its revised policy on the provision of publicly-funded student hostels applicable to all UGC-funded institutions, including the City University of Hong Kong (CityU), the Hong Kong Baptist University and the Polytechnic University of Hong Kong (PolyU) which hitherto were not provided with student hostels. The criteria used for calculating the level of provision of student hostels at the UGC-funded institutions were as follows -

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

5. The above criteria did not apply to the Lingnan College (retitled as the Lingnan University in 1999) because the Government had approved a hostel project for the College in 1993 to provide accommodation for 50% of its full-time undergraduate population, having regard to its remote location in Tuen Mun and its aspirations to develop into a fully residential liberal arts tertiary institution as a means to fulfil its role and mission in the higher education sector.

Members' concerns

6. The Panel on Education discussed the subject of the provision of hostels for tertiary students over the past two years. Questions relating to the subject had also been raised at Council meetings and during the scrutiny of the Estimates of Expenditure of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administration Region (HKSAR). The issues of concern raised by Members are summarized below.

Adequacy of hostel places

7. Members had all along been concerned about the adequacy of hostel places for local and non-local students. Members first raised their concern when the Administration proposed in January 2005 to relax the immigration control to allow more non-local students, including those from the Mainland, Taiwan and Macau, to come to Hong Kong for studying publicly-funded programmes at post-secondary level in local institutions from the 2005-2006 academic year onwards. The quota then was set at 10% of the approved student number targets for these programmes. In October 2007, the Administration further proposed to increase in phases the quota to 20% in order to develop Hong Kong into a regional education hub. Members were concerned that the demand for hostel places would be further increased with the implementation of four-year degree programmes under the new academic structure in the 2012-2013 academic year, which would result in an increase of undergraduate

students by around one-third. While recognizing that the provision of sufficient hostel places was essential to achieve the policy objective of developing Hong Kong as a regional education hub, members considered it important to cater for the boarding needs of both local and non-local students.

8. To resolve the shortfall in hostel places, members suggested that consideration be given to redeveloping vacant factory buildings or converting the vacant school premises returned to the Education Bureau under the consolidation policy into student hostels for the UGC-funded institutions. Members also urged the Administration to assist proactively the UGC-funded institutions in finding ways to meet the anticipated demand.

9. According to the Administration, the UGC-funded sector should be provided with some 30 500 publicly-funded hostel places by the 2007-2008 academic year, based on the existing criteria for calculating the level of publicly-funded student hostel provision and taking into account the additional hostel places for exchange activities. With the current provision of about 21 400 publicly-funded student hostel places, the UGC-funded sector would have a shortfall of about 9 100 hostel places in the 2007-2008 academic year. The increase in non-local student quota to 20% of the approved student number targets for publicly-funded programmes would increase the shortfall by another 6 500 hostel places. An additional 2 100 hostel places would be needed to cater for the anticipated increase in demand arising from the implementation of four-year degree programmes from the 2012-2013 academic year. HKU's project at Lung Wah Street, Kennedy Town, and CUHK's project within its campus in Shatin had been approved by the Finance Committee, and would provide an additional 3 300 hostel places. Another four proposals had been received from institutions for construction of new hostels. Should all these proposals be implemented, the UGC-funded sector would be provided with about 3 300 additional publicly-funded hostel places. With six new hostel projects involving some 6 600 hostel places in the pipeline, the shortfall would be about 11 100 places.

10. The Administration advised that to cater for the additional demand, it had encouraged the UGC-funded institutions to submit proposals on hostel developments to UGC for consideration. The Administration had also been encouraging the UGC-funded institutions to make the best use of their existing stock of student hostels, and to explore imaginatively other possible options to meet students' demand for hostels. For example, CUHK and PolyU had entered into collaboration arrangements with the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd) whereby students of CUHK and PolyU were able to take up HKIEd's student hostels and provided with shuttle services transporting them to and from campuses.

11. The Administration further pointed out that some institutions were considering other short-term relief measures, such as temporary conversion of some existing hostel units so as to accommodate more students. The Administration was also considering giving the UGC-funded institutions an additional option of applying for a one-off grant to build, rent or purchase premises to meet with the agreed provision, in addition to the option of constructing "joint hostels" for shared use by institutions.

12. Regarding the suggestion to convert vacant school premises into student hostels, the Administration's view was that most of the vacant school premises were relatively small in size and located in remote areas in the New Territories, and were not suitable for conversion into student hostels. Nevertheless, the Administration would consider using suitable vacant school premises for the purpose as and when appropriate.

13. In view of the scarcity of suitable land for hostel development and the substantial lead time required for design, consultation and funding procedures, members strongly urged the Administration to set up a working group, comprising representatives from departments responsible for planning, lands and works, to review the demand for student hostel places at various institutions in the next three to five years. The working group should report to the Panel the outcome of its study together with its recommendations. The Administration noted the request.

Criteria for allocating hostel places

14. Members noted that many institutions had accorded priority to non-local students and students enrolled in self-financing programmes in the allocation of hostel places in order to increase the appeal of their courses to these students. Members were concerned that many local students including those living in remote areas were not provided with hostel places. They sought information on the criteria for allocating hostel places.

15. The Administration explained that the existing policy on the provision of publicly-funded student hostels at the UGC-funded institutions was promulgated in 1996, based on the recommendations of a working group formed under UGC. According to the existing criteria for calculating the overall provision of publicly-funded student hostel places at the UGC-funded institutions, all non-local students attending full-time, publicly-funded sub-degree, degree and taught postgraduate programmes offered by the UGC-funded institutions would be provided with hostel places throughout their studies in Hong Kong, and local undergraduate students would be given the opportunity to stay in student hostels for one year of their courses. Although non-local students pursuing publicly-funded programmes were also staying in student hostels, the overall quota for non-local students to attend publicly-funded full-time programmes at post-secondary levels was 10% (to be increased by phases to 20%) of the approved student number targets for these programmes.

16. The Administration also pointed out that allocation of student hostel places was a matter within institutional autonomy, and each UGC-funded institution had devised its own set of admission and allocation criteria. For example, HKU had adopted a marking scheme under which students living in remote areas or overcrowded environment would have a greater chance to get a hostel place. The details of student hostel places allocated to local and non-local students enrolled in the UGC-funded and self-financing programmes are in **Appendix I**.

17. Notwithstanding the Administration's explanations, some members considered it unsatisfactory for non-local students to be provided with hostel places throughout their studies in Hong Kong, whereas local students with poor living environment could only stay in hostels for one year of their courses. They called on the Administration to review the existing criteria for calculating the provision of student hostels at the UGC-funded institutions with a view to increasing the opportunity for local students staying in hostels.

Occupancy rates

18. During the scrutiny of the 2006-2007 Estimates of Expenditure of the HKSAR Government, members sought information about the occupancy rates of student hostel places at the UGC-funded institutions.

19. The Administration advised that based on the information provided by the various institutions, the average occupancy of student hostels in the UGC-funded institutions exceeded 98%, except for HKIED which was experiencing a relatively low occupancy of about 70% owing to a reduction in the number of full-time students.

Relevant papers

20. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in **Appendix II**.

**Allocation of student hostels to local and non-local students
enrolled in the UGC-funded and self-financing programmes
as in September 2007**

Institution	Local students enrolled in		Non-local students enrolled in		Exchange student	Total ^{Note}
	UGC-funded programme	non-UGC-funded programme	UGC-funded programme	non-UGC-funded programme		
City University of Hong Kong	1 357	15	755	496	296	2 919
Hong Kong Baptist University	926	-	427	240	182	1 775
Lingnan University	1 283	-	106	31	80	1 500
The Chinese University of Hong Kong	3 565	-	1 782	13	367	5 727
The Hong Kong Institute of Education	1 136	8	182	303	69	1 698
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University	1 551	-	896	278	279	3 004
The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology	1 637	22	1 195	484	368	3 706
The University of Hong Kong	2 704	2	1 131	-	486	4 323
Total	14 159	47	6 474	1 845	2 127	24 652

Note : The above figures include hostel places funded by the Government as well as those built by the institutions using their own sources of funding (but exclude those not currently available for occupancy by students such as those under renovation). There are about 5 400 privately-funded hostel places in the UGC-funded sector available for occupancy in 2007-2008. Under the existing hostel policy, each place in the wholly-privately-funded student hostels should be counted as one quarter of a place when assessing the provision of publicly-funded student hostels required by each UGC-funded institution.

**Relevant papers on
provision of hostels for tertiary students**

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
--	--	Legislative Council Brief entitled "Review of the Provision of Student Hostels in the UGC-Funded Institutions" [File Ref: EMB17/2041/95II T/C 13/96]
Legislative Council	3.12.2003	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 68 - 69 (Question)
Panel on Education	20.1.2005 (Item I)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	20.10.2005 (Item I)	Minutes Agenda
Finance Committee	14.3.2006	Administration's replies to Members' initial written questions (Reply Serial Nos. EMB102, EMB154-156 and EMB175)
Legislative Council	21.6.2006	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 121 - 180 (Motion)
Legislative Council	22.11.2006	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 7 - 15 (Question)
--	--	Legislative Council Brief entitled "Provision of Boarding Facilities for Non-local Students in the School Sector" [File Ref: EMB(I)P/EHUB/1/1]
Panel on Education	11.12.2006 (Item V)	Minutes Agenda CB(2)993/06-07(01)
Finance Committee	20.3.2007	Administration's replies to Members' initial written questions (Reply Serial Nos. EMB072, EMB210, EMB211, EMB227 and EMB228)

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Education	9.7.2007	Minutes
Panel on Education	18.10.2007	Minutes Agenda
Legislative Council	21.11.2007	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 47 - 51
Panel on Education	10.12.2007	Minutes Agenda
Finance Committee	1.2.2008	FCR(2007-08)51
Finance Committee	2.4.2008	Administration's replies to Members initial written questions (Reply Serial Nos. EDB191, EDB196 and EDB210)

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6 May 2008