

Legislative Council Panel on Education

2007-08 Policy Agenda: New Initiatives on Education

Introduction

We have witnessed significant developments in the policy area of “Education” in the last 10 years. With the concerted efforts of all stakeholders, we have enhanced diversity in the education sector, reformed the curriculum to broaden the horizons of our students and promote life-long learning, enhanced professionalism in the teaching force, cultivated a spirit of self-evaluation and accountability in schools, and planned for an academic structure which would provide students with more opportunities to realize their potential. Looking ahead, we will continue to invest heavily in education, with a view to consolidating achievements and providing quality education services.

2. This paper introduces a number of new education initiatives on the 2007-08 Policy Agenda.

Free senior secondary education

3. The Government has been providing 9-year free and universal basic education (6 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education) through public sector primary and secondary schools (including government schools, aided schools and caput schools) since 1978. Currently, public sector secondary schools charge an annual tuition fee of \$6 020 for each student at Secondary 4/Secondary 5 and \$9 870 for each student at Secondary 6/Secondary 7.

4. To demonstrate the Government’s commitment to the nurturing and education of our next generation, as well as to respond positively to calls from the community, we will extend free education to include senior secondary education provided by public sector secondary schools starting from the 2008/09 school year. The beneficiaries will include students pursuing Secondary 4 to Secondary 7 under the current secondary school structure (meaning 13 years of free education) and students pursuing Senior Secondary 1 to Senior Secondary 3 under the New Senior Secondary (NSS) structure to be introduced from the 2009/10 school year (meaning 12 years of free education). Under existing policy, government subvention for schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) is determined on the basis of the average unit cost of aided schools. With the investment of additional resources into public sector schools for implementing free senior secondary education, the subvention to be received by DSS schools will be increased correspondingly. That said, DSS schools will continue to enjoy a high degree of autonomy in determining their school fees. The provision of free senior secondary education would mean additional recurrent funding requirement of about \$ 1 200 million for

the education policy area by the 2012/13 school year when all our secondary students are under the NSS structure.

5. Concomitant with the introduction of free senior secondary education, with effect from the 2008/09 school year, we will also provide full subvention for full-time courses offered by the Vocational Training Council (VTC) for Secondary 3 school leavers. Established under the VTC Ordinance (Cap. 1130) in 1982, the VTC is the largest provider of vocational education and training in Hong Kong. It currently runs a wide range of subsidized, full-time programmes, such as diploma courses, certificate courses and pre-employment courses, for Secondary 3 school leavers, charging an annual fee ranging from \$2 000 to \$ 6 000. Through providing full subvention for these courses, we will provide an alternative free avenue for senior secondary students to further their studies other than in mainstream education. For the 2008/09 school year, about 4 700 such full-time places will be offered by VTC. The additional funding required for subsidizing these places in full will be around \$30 million a year.

Small class teaching

6. Enhancing learning and teaching at the primary level is crucial to the laying of a good foundation for knowledge building. We have also been stressing the need to embed in our young students the right values and learning skills, enabling them to pursue whole person development. To this end, we will, where circumstances permit, implement small class teaching in our public sector primary schools (i.e. government and aided schools) progressively, starting with the cohort of students entering Primary 1 in the 2009/10 school year, and eventually covering Primary 1 to Primary 6 classes in the 2014/15 school year.

7. When implementing small class teaching, we need to take into account practical circumstances, as well as the wishes and needs of schools, parents and students. We must assess whether each school net has sufficient number of classrooms to meet demand for school places. Since the demand for classrooms would multiply as students in small classes progress from P1 up the different levels, we cannot focus just on the prevailing supply and demand balance of classrooms. Making reference to the latest population projections, our initial assessment is that there would be inadequate supply of school places in some school nets if each school in the net were to admit students on the basis of 25 per class. By the 2014/15 school year, about half of the 36 school nets would register a shortfall of school places. Furthermore, implementation of small classes across the board would significantly increase the demand for teachers. Since small class teaching needs to be supported by the appropriate pedagogical practices, we have to ensure an adequate supply of trained teachers to support this policy initiative. In the process, we need to take into account the capacity of our teacher education institutions to provide additional places and the competition for talents among different professions. All in all, we need to be pragmatic and flexible with

implementation, including giving schools the option of using alternative school-based measures to enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

8. In view of the above considerations, we plan to progressively implement small class teaching in our primary schools along the following direction –

- (a) for school nets with sufficient number of places to meet demand, we will let each school in the net decide whether or not to implement small class teaching, i.e. using 25 students per class as the basis for school places allocation. Schools not opting for small classes will continue to be allocated students on the basis of 30 students per class;
- (b) for school nets which may feature a shortfall of school places, we will first invite each school in the net to indicate whether it wishes to implement small classes. If there remains a projected shortfall of school places after taking into consideration the intentions of all schools in the net, we will explore ways to resolve the problem, considering measures such as borrowing places from neighbouring school nets and examining the feasibility of building new schools. If schools in the net could not implement small class teaching from the 2009/10 school year due to practical constraints, we will separately consider ways to assist these schools in taking forward school-based measures (e.g. the implementation of group teaching for individual subjects) that would enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

9. On teachers' professional development, we will plan the provision of additional teacher training places to meet new demand for teachers. The Study on Small Class Teaching will be completed in late 2008 and will recommend the professional support required to support small class teaching in Hong Kong. Making reference to the recommendations, we will provide in-service training for serving teachers. We will also provide eligible primary schools with additional time-limited posts so as to facilitate the participation of serving teachers in such training programmes and give them more room to take forward other preparatory work in support of small class teaching.

10. The objective of small class teaching is to improve the quality of teaching and learning through a reduction in class size. This objective will be compromised if individual schools opt for small classes, yet admit students over and above 25 per class outside the school places allocation system. We will therefore limit the enrolment per class. For schools which would continue to be allocated students on the basis of 30 per class, it is also undesirable for them to admit a large number of students outside the system. This would not be conducive to improvement in teaching and learning. It would also fuel unnecessary competition.

11. We will draw up implementation details on the basis of the above framework. We aim to consult this Panel and stakeholders on the details before the end of the year, with a view to confirming the arrangements before September 2008.

Developing Hong Kong as a regional education hub

12. As the Asian World City with world-class universities, internationally-recognised curriculum and quality assurance mechanism, Hong Kong is well positioned for development as a regional education hub. Leveraging on these strengths, our policy aims to attract quality non-local students to study in Hong Kong and, through this process, further internationalise our higher education sector and increase the exposure of our local students. Attracting non-local talents to live and work in Hong Kong will also address the immediate manpower needs of Hong Kong, and enhance the overall competitiveness of our economy in the long run.

13. We propose to implement a package of measures to further develop Hong Kong into a regional education hub. These include -

- (a) increasing in phases the non-local student quota for publicly-funded programmes at the sub-degree, degree and taught post-graduate levels from 10% to 20% of the approved student number targets for these programmes;
- (b) for self-financing programmes at the sub-degree and degree levels, replacing the existing programme-specific quota with a quota applicable at the institution level¹;
- (c) allowing admission of non-local students from the Mainland, Taiwan and Macao² for short-term studies at programmes offered by Hong Kong higher education institutions with degree-awarding powers, provided that the cumulative duration of short-term studies taken up by any student does not exceed 180 days within any 12-month period;
- (d) establishing a scholarship endowment fund of \$1 billion for local and non-local students in publicly-funded full-time programmes at degree or above levels;
- (e) exploring alternative options for the provision of student hostels under the existing hostel policy;

¹ Currently, the admission of non-local students from the Mainland, Taiwan and Macao studying full-time locally-accredited self-financing programmes at the sub-degree and degree levels is subject to a programme-specific quota, which is set at 10% of the local student enrolment in the same programme in the preceding year. We propose to replace this with a quota set at 10% of the local student enrolment of all such programmes of the institution in the previous year.

² Admission of non-local students from other countries pursuing short term studies is already permitted under the existing policy.

- (f) continuing to assist the development of self-financing, non-profit-making local private universities;
- (g) allowing non-local students of full-time locally-accredited programmes at degree or above levels to take up study-related internship arranged by the institutions they are studying in, part-time on-campus employment for not more than 20 hours per week, and off-campus summer jobs during the summer months; and
- (h) allowing non-local students who have obtained a degree or higher qualification in a full-time and locally-accredited programme to take up employment in Hong Kong so long as the job is at a level commonly taken up by degree holders and the remuneration package is at market level and, in respect of non-local fresh graduates with such a qualification, allowing them an initial stay of 12 months on time limitation only.

14. The Administration will consult various stakeholders, including the Mainland authorities, on the implementation details of the above measures. With the concerted efforts of relevant parties, we are confident that the new measures will provide a strong impetus for the development of Hong Kong as a regional education hub.

Expanding the international school sector

15. We are keen to develop a vibrant international school sector to underpin our aspiration to be a global metropolis and fortify our status as a regional education hub. With the robust recovery of the local economy and the inflow of capital investment, there has been increasing demand for international school places from families relocating to Hong Kong.

16. We have been taking measures to facilitate the expansion of international schools, through the allocation of suitable vacant school premises and facilitation of in-situ expansion for individual cases. We will step up our efforts by making available at least three greenfield sites at nominal premium for the development of new international schools or the expansion of existing schools. We also plan to provide interest-free loans to support the capital development and will seek necessary funding approval from the Legislative Council. Moreover, we will study the feasibility of allowing the international school sector to develop hostel facilities on individual greenfield sites on a trial basis, with a view to attracting students from different parts of the world and hence further developing Hong Kong as a regional education hub.

17. We are examining the details of the potential greenfield sites. We expect to invite expressions of interest by early 2008 at the latest. With the benefit of the

responses received, we will then invite the interested parties to submit detailed proposals and bid for the available sites through an open process. The mechanism and details of the selection process will be announced later.

Improving ratios of graduate teacher posts in public sector schools

18. Under the existing policy, 35% of the teaching posts in the basic teaching establishment in public sector primary schools are graduate teacher posts, while in public sector secondary schools, 70% of teaching posts in the basic teaching establishment are graduate teacher posts.

19. To further enhance the status and professional standards of teachers and hence the overall quality of education, we will increase the respective overall ratios of graduate teacher posts in public sector primary and secondary schools by two phases, i.e. to 45% and 80% respectively in the 2008/09 school year and to 50% and 85% respectively in the 2009/10 school year.

20. We estimate that additional annual recurrent funding of about \$500 million is required when the proposal is fully implemented by the 2009/10 school year.

Creation of a new Deputy Head rank in public sector primary schools

21. Under the existing teaching grade structure, there is no Deputy Head (DH) rank in public sector primary schools. Instead, a senior teacher (Primary School Master/Mistress (PSM) or Assistant Master/Mistress (AM)) is assigned to take up the position of DH of a primary school with 12 classes or more. The senior teacher taking up the position receives a Responsibility Allowance (RA) provided at a rate equivalent to three-quarters of one increment above his/her substantive salary.

22. With the implementation of various new education initiatives by the Government in recent years, such as school-based management, curriculum reform, whole-day primary schooling and the teachers' continuing professional development framework, the duties of a DH has become more complex and diverse. The RA could no longer adequately reflect the increasing workload on DHs and attract the best teachers to take up the post.

23. We propose to create a new DH rank in public sector primary schools with 12 classes or more to help the principals in leading the schools and better coordinate the various tasks with an aim to enhance the quality of primary school education services. The main duties of the DH cover curriculum development, whole school pastoral care and student support, human resource management, school management and school self-evaluation etc. An additional annual recurrent funding of about \$50 million is required.

24. Subject to the progress of the necessary procedures for the creation of a new rank in the civil service and the confirmation of financial arrangements, we aim to create the DH rank with effect from the 2008/09 school year. We will consult stakeholders on details of the proposal.

Education Bureau
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