

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)663/09-10
(The minutes have been seen by
the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 14 December 2009, at 4:30 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

- Members present** : Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan (Chairman)
Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG Mei-fun (Deputy Chairman)
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, SBS, JP
Prof Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
Hon Starry LEE Wai-king
Dr Hon LAM Tai-fai, BBS, JP
Hon Tanya CHAN
Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon WONG Yuk-man
Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-yee, GBS, JP
Dr Hon Samson TAM Wai-ho, JP
- Member attending** : Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, GBS, JP
- Member absent** : Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, SBS, JP

Public Officers attending : Agenda items IV and V

Mr Michael SUEN Ming-yeung, GBS, JP
Secretary for Education

Mr Raymond H C WONG, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education

Ms Michelle LI, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education (1)

Mr Daniel CHENG
Principal Assistant Secretary (Further Education)

Agenda item VI

Mr Kenneth CHEN, JP
Under Secretary for Education

Dr CHEUNG Kwok-wah
Principal Assistant Secretary (Curriculum
Development)

Mr SHE Mang
Chief Curriculum Development Officer (Information
Technology in Education)

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

Staff in attendance : Ms Judy TING
Senior Council Secretary (2)8 (Acting)

Miss Jenny LEE
Legislative Assistant (2)6 (Acting)

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I. Confirmation of minutes
[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)352/09-10 and CB(2)477/09-10]

The minutes of the meetings held on 20 October and 9 November 2009 were confirmed.

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

2. Members noted the following papers issued since the last meeting -
 - (a) a letter dated 18 November 2009 from the Council of Non-profit Making Organizations for Pre-primary Education concerning the review of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme [LC Paper No. CB(2)367/09-10(01)];
 - (b) a letter dated 24 November 2009 from Concerning CSSA Review Alliance about the provision of internet access service fee for needy students [LC Paper No. CB(2)425/09-10(01)]; and
 - (c) a letter dated 7 December 2009 from the Secretary for Education attaching an information note concerning a proposed project of a special school in Area 16, Tuen Mun for students with physical disability [LC Paper No. CB(2)495/09-10(01)].
3. Regarding (a), the Chairman said that the Panel had discussed the subject of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) twice in the last legislative session. The Administration had taken on board members' request to adjust annually the fee remission ceilings under the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme on the basis of the respective weighted average fees, and whole-day kindergarten children received full fee remission increased from 46% to 71% after the adjustment in the 2008-2009 school year. However, the issue of professional upgrading of kindergarten teachers had remained to be resolved.
4. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that a working group had been formed under the Education Commission to take forward the PEVS review. He suggested and members agreed that the Panel should revisit the matter and the working group should be invited to brief members on the review.
5. As regards the letter from Concerning CSSA Review Alliance about the provision of internet access service fee for needy students requesting the Panel on Education and the Panel on Welfare Services to hold a joint meeting to receive views of stakeholders, the Chairman suggested that its request be considered under agenda item VI in connection with the request from the Hong Kong Educational Publishers Association and The Anglo-Chinese Textbook Publishers Organisation Ltd to give views on the Report of the Working Group on Textbooks and e-Learning Resources Development [LC Paper No. CB(2)479/09-10(07)] at a Panel meeting.
6. As regard LC Paper No. CB(2)495/09-10(01), the Chairman said that as

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no members had requested to discuss the project at a Panel meeting, the Administration would submit the proposal to the Public Works Subcommittee for consideration on 20 January 2010.

III. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[Appendices I and II to LC Paper No. CB(2)479/09-10]

7. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next regular meeting scheduled for 11 January 2010 at 4:30 pm –

- (a) briefing on the work of the University Grants Committee;
- (b) The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Amendment) Statutes 2009; and
- (c) review of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme.

IV. Development of education services and

V. Increasing the commitment for Start-up Loan Scheme

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)479/09-10(01), (02), (03) and (04)]

8. The Chairman proposed and members agreed to discuss items IV and V jointly as they were related.

9. Members noted the background briefs entitled "Development of education services" and "Start-up Loan Scheme for post-secondary education providers" prepared by the Legislative Council (LegCo) Secretariat.

Briefing by the Administration

10. Secretary for Education (SED) briefed members on the measures to develop education services including the proposal to increase the total commitment of the Start-up Loan Scheme (SLS) by \$2 billion as detailed in the Administration's papers. He highlighted that the Administration had earmarked three sites in the New Territories, in addition to the two urban sites announced earlier, to support the development of the self-financing higher education sector. The proposal to increase the total commitment of the SLS was to meet the expected loan requirements from institutions for developing new college premises at these five sites. He urged members to support the funding proposal.

Opportunities of local students for university education

11. Mr WONG Yuk-man pointed out that the number of the publicly-funded first-year-first-degree places had not been changed for many years but the

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number of self-financing places had been increasing. Many local students who had attained the minimum qualification for university admission were not offered publicly-funded degree places. These students had to pursue self-financing programmes to continue education and to shoulder onerous financial burden. However, the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions could admit non-local students up to 20% of their target number of students for attending publicly-funded university programmes. Referring to his experience in assisting a student prisoner to apply for non-means-tested loans, he considered that the loan repayment period should be extended and the loan should be interest free. He was concerned about the feasibility of developing education services and its impact on local students in pursuing university education.

12. SED said that the benefits of developing education services might not be visible in the short run. For example, the networks formed with non-local students studying in Hong Kong might have long term economic benefits to Hong Kong. He pointed out that the recurrent expenditure on education made up about 25% of the total expenditure of the Government. The financial position of the Government did not allow for a further increase in resources for education because the priorities of the Government would be in other areas such as health care financing and aging population.

13. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that internationalization of the higher education sector was far from successful since 90% of the non-local students studying in Hong Kong were Mainland students. He pointed out that some 5 600 local students who met the minimum qualification for university education were not offered publicly-funded university places and many sub-degree holders with outstanding performance were not offered articulated places in the publicly-funded universities. With the implementation of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination in 2012, some 80 000 students would sit for the examination and the demand for university places would be even greater.

14. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong opined that unless actions were taken to meet the needs of local students for university education, the development of education services would antagonize those students who could not gain access to publicly-funded university education. To resolve the problem, he suggested that the Administration should allow local students to take up the untaken places reserved for non-local students for attending publicly-funded degree programmes. Alternatively, the Administration might consider providing fee subsidies for those students who had attained the minimum qualification for university admission but without being offered publicly-funded degree places to study in self-financing private universities. The subsidies should ideally be fixed at 50% of the tuition fee, or should at least be fixed at a certain percentage to ensure that the self-financing private universities would be operating at the average university student unit cost of \$200,000 to provide quality education.

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This would facilitate the Administration to monitor the performance of these institutions to avoid a repeat of the blunders concerning sub-degree education.

15. SED reiterated that the Government's recurrent expenditure on education was very substantial and the expenditure could not be increased indefinitely. For the purpose of increasing university places, the Administration considered it an appropriate approach to develop the self-financing higher education sector and to provide supporting measures such as the Land Grant Scheme (LGS) and SLS. He highlighted the fact that there had been an increase in articulation places for sub-degree holders offered by both the UGC-funded institutions and self-financing post-secondary institutions. SED further said that for the time being, the Administration would have difficulty in funding the two solutions suggested by Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong. In the long run, their viability would hinge on the financial position of the Government.

16. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong pointed out that according to the Financial Secretary, the recurrent expenditure on education was some \$53.8 billion for the current year, representing about 23.6% of the total expenditure of the Government. Should the recurrent expenditure on education be maintained at 25% of the total expenditure of the Government, it should be some \$56.9 billion, and some \$3.1 billion had yet to be spent on education. The Chairman commented that the Government's expenditure on education in percentage of Gross Domestic Products was lower than that of other countries in the area. The Chairman and Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong urged the Administration to allocate the \$3.1 billion to help local students to access publicly-funded university education.

17. In reply, SED reiterated that in the light of the limited resources, the Administration proposed to increase post-secondary places by developing the self-financing higher education sector. The provision of the LGS and SLS related to non-recurrent expenditure. SED pointed out that the recurrent expenditure on education was around 25% of the total expenditure of the Government. The current financial position did not allow a further increase of recurrent expenditure on education.

Admission of non-local students to local education programmes

18. Mr Tommy CHEUNG shared the view that the articulation university places for sub-degree holders were inadequate. He considered that the Administration had not formulated policies to facilitate Mainland students to pursue senior secondary education in Hong Kong. He noted that some schools had senior secondary and boarding places readily available for non-local students. However, complementary measures on the part of the Administration to facilitate the admission of non-local students were lacking. Mr CHEUNG opined that many Mainland parents would welcome the opportunities to send their children to pursue senior secondary education in Hong Kong, including the

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International Baccalaureate programmes offered by local schools. He called on the Administration to liaise with the Mainland authorities in this regard.

19. SED pointed out that the Administration had been exploring the possibility of allowing senior secondary students from the Mainland to pursue senior secondary education at non-public schools in Hong Kong. It would continue to liaise with the Mainland authorities in this regard.

Development of a self-financing higher education sector

20. Mr Tommy CHEUNG was concerned that the sites made available for the development of self-financing post-secondary institutions might be bid by overseas institutions with a view to making profit.

21. Mr TAM Yiu-chung supported the development of education services which would enhance the quality of the higher education sector and broaden the horizons of local students. Nevertheless, he shared the view that the needs of local students for university education must be addressed. In this regard, he enquired whether the Administration would take proactive steps to invite renowned overseas universities to set up branches and offer non-local programmes in Hong Kong. To resolve the shortage of boarding facilities for non-local students, the Democratic Alliance for Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong had made a proposal for a host family scheme for non-local students under which local families would rent out their vacant residential rooms or flats to provide accommodation for non-local students.

22. SED replied that the Administration welcomed education institutions to bid for greenfield sites reserved for the development of self-financing degree programmes. Harrow International School was successful in bidding for the greenfield site in Tuen Mun because of, amongst other things, its track record of operating international schools in Bangkok and Beijing. A thorough scrutiny process would be undertaken to assess the quality of the proposals taking into account various factors such as track record of operators, etc. SED further pointed out that Singapore had invited overseas institutions to operate education programmes. Although such programmes were operated by the renowned universities, the teaching staff might not be deployed from the headquarters overseas. SED added that any proposal to invite overseas education institutions to operate local education programmes with favourable measures provided by the Government would need to be carefully considered. The Administration would continue to monitor the provision of boarding facilities and would not rule out any proposal.

23. Mrs Regina IP was frustrated with the Administration for overlooking the needs of local students for university education and wasting the valuable land resources to support prospective self-financing post-secondary institutions in order that they would provide articulation places for sub-degree holders. She

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sought information on paragraph 4(a) of the Administration's paper concerning the possibility of allowing Mainland students to pursue non-local courses at degree level or above. Referring to paragraph 6(a) of the Administration's paper she was gravely concerned about the little time to be taken by the Administration to scrutinize the applications of the prospective institutions for the sites under the LGS for the construction of purpose-built premises. She was astonished that the applications for the sites would be invited in the first quarter of 2010 and the results could be announced in the latter half of 2010. She pointed out that the Hong Kong Baptist University and the Hong Kong Shue Yan University had taken many years to acquire the university title. The fast pace in scrutinizing the relevant applications was tantamount to the operation of a fast-food restaurant.

24. Mrs Regina IP was concerned whether Hong Kong could attract quality Mainland students. She noted from the information provided by the Administration that the number of Mainland students studying in Hong Kong had been decreased by 2% in 2006-2007, 10% in 2007-2008 and 30% in 2008-2009. In her view, Mainland students would prefer studying in an English-speaking environment. Mr TANG Jie, Deputy Mayor of Shenzhen, had said that Mainland students would not choose to study in Hong Kong should the annual tuition fees be as high as \$100,000. Mrs IP expected that institutions would charge high tuition fees in order to make a profit or at least to break even. Based on the experience of renowned institutions operating courses jointly with universities in Singapore and Hong Kong, exceedingly high tuition fees would be charged although the teaching staff might not be as excellent as expected. Mrs IP pointed out that an even higher tuition fees would be charged on non-local students. She was concerned how local and non-local students could afford high tuition fees and how institutions running post-secondary programmes in revitalized industrial buildings without a proper campus in Hong Kong could attract Mainland students. The lack of boarding facilities was also a concern. Without boarding facilities for local and non-local students, they did not have the opportunity for extensive exchange. In her view, the policy objective of developing education services was lacking in common sense and extremely irresponsible.

25. In response, SED stressed that having regard to the current financial position, the Administration proposed to increase the provision of degree places by developing a self-financing higher education sector. Apart from the LGS and SLS, the Government would not subsidize private universities. They would be operating on a self-financing basis. He pointed out that the greenfield sites would be bid by private but not necessarily overseas institutions. The Administration would scrutinize the applications taking into consideration the quality of the proposal, track records of the operators, etc. The institutions would be required to implement their operation plans as outlined in their applications. Their performance would also be closely monitored and thoroughly assessed. As in the case of local universities, the conferment of a university title would need to follow the prescribed procedures and meet the

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prescribed requirements. There would be no short-cut to achieve the status of a university.

26. Mrs Regina IP pointed out that LGS and SLS were already Government subsidies. She cautioned that local students would be further antagonized if they could not afford the high tuition fees charged by private universities and could not be benefitted from the development of a self-financing higher education sector. The Chairman shared a similar view, and said that the private university programmes seemed to target at those local students who met the minimum qualification but were not admitted to publicly-funded degree places.

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27. Dr Priscilla LEUNG sought information on whether the various bureaux were involved in planning for the development of education services, in particular identifying the greenfield sites for developing self-financing degree programmes. She opined that some industrial buildings, such as those in Shamshuipo, were not suitable for education purpose. Dr LEUNG enquired whether population projection had been considered in the planning of education provision. She pointed out that in addition to the prospective Mainland students studying in Hong Kong, the number of Mainland children having the right of residence in Hong Kong should also be considered. These two groups of students would affect the demand for degree places.

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28. Dr Priscilla LEUNG was also concerned whether the issue of articulation places for sub-degree holders was covered in the overall planning of the education services. She commented that there were flaws in the planning of sub-degree education which had resulted in a large number of sub-degree holders without access to articulation places in the UGC-funded institutions. These institutions preferred enrolling overseas students instead of sub-degree holders in their programmes. Noting the successful development of education services in the Mainland, Dr LEUNG asked whether the Administration would make reference to the experiences of the Mainland in this regard.

29. SED said that given the scarcity of land in Hong Kong, five sites had been identified for developing non-profit-making post-secondary institutions for the time being. One of the policy objectives of revitalizing industrial buildings was to offer choices for potential operators of self-financing post-secondary programmes. He pointed out that the suitability of an industrial building for a particular purpose hinged on various factors, such as its existing usage and ownership. Increasing the supply of self-financing post-secondary programmes would provide more education opportunities for Hong Kong students, and admitting non-local students to study in Hong Kong would help broaden the horizons of local students.

30. Dr Priscilla LEUNG requested the Administration to provide a written response to her questions.

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31. Miss Tanya CHAN opined that the development of education services might end up having local institutions instead of overseas institutions extending their operations to meet the education needs of local students. These students would mainly be sub-degree holders and those who met the admission requirement but were not admitted to publicly-funded degree places. She was concerned that the development of a self-financing higher education sector to resolve the education need of local students would increase their financial liability and they might need to take long years to repay the loans. She considered such an approach irresponsible. She enquired whether the Education Bureau (EDB) had communicated with the UGC in planning for the development of the higher education sector.

32. SED said that while the EDB had regular dialogue with the UGC, the development of a self-financing higher education sector did not involve the UGC. He emphasized that the ranking of local institutions in the region and worldwide was high. Local universities had renowned track records of operating post-secondary programmes. SED added that one of the measures to develop education services was to develop private universities instead of extending the operation of the UGC-funded institutions.

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33. The Chairman shared the concern of many members about the target students of private universities. She enquired whether a quota would be set for local and non-local students. She considered that the Government seemed to give up local students who had attained the minimum requirement for university admission but were not offered publicly-funded degree places and to let them shoulder the high tuition fees for studying private degree programmes.

34. Mrs Sophie LEUNG supported the development of a self-financing higher education sector as it would provide students with more education opportunities and a wider choice. In her view, it should not be assumed that the self-financing programmes would target at low achieving students. She called on members to examine the issue from a positive perspective and not to be over-worried about the financial position of the institutions operating self-financing programmes. She pointed out that should the institutions consider the operation financially not viable, they would wind up their programmes and the site could not be developed for purposes other than education. Moreover, students would be offered grants or loans for pursuing further study and the loans would be repaid at no public expenses. Mrs LEUNG added that some programmes such as sports administration might be welcome by students. She supported the provision of greenfield sites for developing self-financing degree programmes.

35. Mr Andrew LEUNG declared that he was the Chairman of Vocational Training Council (VTC). He was supportive of the development of a self-financing higher education sector, and shared the view that it would provide students with more education opportunities and a wider choice. Also,

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internationalization would help bring benefits to Hong Kong in the long run. Mr LEUNG said that excellent programmes would attract non-local students. One such programme was dentistry which was successfully run and well sought after by overseas students.

36. Mr LEUNG further pointed out that following the release of the Sutherland Report in March 2002, government subvention to VTC had been reduced from \$2.4 billion to \$1.6 billion per year. To ride over the rough time, VTC had successfully established its self-financing School for Higher and Professional Education to offer top-up degree programmes for higher diploma graduates who wished to pursue further studies at degree level. Based on past experience, about 30% of the higher diploma holders would pursue further study which was comparable to the student size of a local university. VTC was interested in operating a self-financing university to offer articulation places for higher diploma holders of VTC. While he did not expect the Administration to provide funding for the operation of a self-financing university, he asked whether the Administration would provide assistance to facilitate its establishment in the development of education services.

37. SED stressed that the programmes provided by the prospective institutions should be of a wide variety and should not necessarily be articulation places for sub-degree holders. In fact, the UGC-funded institutions had been offering such places to sub-degree holders. The Administration would welcome VTC to submit proposals according to the prescribed procedures.

38. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that the Administration had misplaced its priority in developing education services. He pointed out that many students had grievances against the Government for overlooking their education needs. In his view, instead of attracting non-local students to study in Hong Kong or developing private universities, the Administration should address the education need of local students first. The LGS and SLS involved public resources and it was incorrect to say that the development of private universities would not incur additional public resources. He further commented that the Administration had all along discriminated the low achieving students as they were not given grants or low-interest loans to study in non-publicly-funded post secondary programmes.

39. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that the development of self-financing post-secondary institutions was to absorb those students including the sub-degree holders who were not admitted into the UGC-funded institutions. In his opinion, by paying high tuition fees for sub-degree education, these students had assisted the self-financing tertiary institutions in repaying the mortgage of their school premises. After completion of the sub-degree education, they then assisted the private universities in repaying the mortgage of their school premises by paying the high tuition fee again for attending the self-financing degree programmes. Mr CHEUNG considered that such students were unfairly

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treated. He urged the Administration to address the education needs of local students for university education before developing education services.

40. Mrs Regina IP appealed to members not to support the proposal to increase the commitment of the SLS. She reiterated that the sites identified for the development of private universities were too small to attract renowned institutions to operate self-financing programmes successfully. She did not see the urgency to approve the financial proposal.

41. SED reiterated that many local students pursued further study overseas and they had to shoulder the high tuition fees. The development of private universities in Hong Kong was to provide a wider choice to local students.

42. The Chairman drew members' attention to the submission of the financial proposal to the Finance Committee for consideration in January 2010. She appealed to members to express their views and stance at the meeting of the Finance Committee.

VI. Report of the Working Group on Textbooks and e-Learning Resources Development

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)479/09-10(05), (06), (07) and CB(2)518/09-10(01)]

43. Members noted the background brief entitled "Prices of school textbooks and e-learning" prepared by the LegCo Secretariat.

Briefing by the Administration

44. At the invitation of the Chairman, Under Secretary for Education (US(Ed)) referred members to the Administration's paper on the report of the Working Group on Textbooks and e-Learning Resources Development (WG) and the proposed measures to take forward the WG's recommendations. He highlighted that the WG comprised school principals, teachers, parents, textbook publishers, representatives of information technology sector, the Consumer Council, and Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, incumbent LegCo Member, and Mr SIN Chung-kai, former LegCo Member. On the basis that all discussions concerning the development of textbooks and e-learning resources should focus on the quality of learning and teaching, the WG had deliberated on measures to improve the existing textbook system and promote e-learning. It had proposed the directions for developing e-learning which should be diversified and of high-quality. The WG also set out measures for reducing textbook prices to address the public concern, in the principle of not interfering with the free market.

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The "debundling" policy

45. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong noted that the "debundling" policy would be implemented to rectify the current situation of bundled sale and purchase of textbooks and teaching/learning materials, thereby lowering textbooks prices and alleviating the financial burden on parents. He indicated that a number of schools had views on the policy because at present, teaching materials were provided by textbook publishers free of charge but after the implementation of the debundling policy, schools would have to purchase teaching materials. Mr CHEUNG considered it necessary to provide schools with grants of a prescribed ceiling to purchase teaching materials. He pointed out that as textbook prices were expected to decrease following the implementation of the "debundling" policy, the annual expenditure on textbook subsidies for needy students under the School Textbook Assistance Scheme would be reduced. In his view, the money thus saved should be deployed to schools for purchasing teaching materials.

46. In response, US(Ed) said that the WG had held in-depth discussions on the bundled sale and purchase of textbooks and teaching/learning materials. It acknowledged that textbook publishers had all along provided a large amount of teaching/learning materials to schools, and only some of them were used. As confirmed by the findings of a number of surveys, textbook publishers also provided a large amount of promotional items to schools. The WG considered that through the implementation of the debundling policy, the user-pays principle should be enforced, i.e. teaching materials should be paid by schools and learning materials by parents.

47. US(Ed) further said that under the existing Operating Expenses Block Grants (OEBG) and Expanded Operating Expenses Block Grants (EOEBG), schools had already been given grants which could be deployed for the purchase of teaching materials. The Administration would closely monitor the situation, and if schools had genuine financial difficulties in purchasing teaching materials, the Administration would provide more funding for schools to ensure that they had the required materials for teaching. US(Ed) added that the WG had cautioned against the conveyance of a wrong message to the public that the Administration would compensate textbook publishers by public funds for their reduced profits as a result of the implementation of the debundling policy.

48. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that OEBG and EOEBG were not intended for the purchase of teaching materials. He considered that it did not matter under which expenditure heading the grants for the purchase of teaching materials were subsumed as long as schools would be provided with extra resources to purchase such materials. While he shared the view that schools should not be provided with unlimited grants to purchase teaching materials, a prescribed ceiling of grants had to be provided to schools for the purpose.

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49. Referring members to paragraph 22 of the Administration's paper, US(Ed) said that the Administration proposed to set aside \$50 million for providing a one-off grant to government, aided, caput, and Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools (including special schools) in the 2010-2011 school year. Schools might spend the grants over three years to purchase e-learning resources. In the long run, schools should use more e-learning resources instead of printed teaching materials. For this purpose, the Education Bureau would strengthen and expedite the development of the Depository of Curriculum-based Learning and Teaching Resources (the Depository).

50. With regard to the provision of \$50 million one-off grant to government, aided, caput, and DSS schools to purchase e-learning resources over three years, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong pointed out that should the provision be distributed equally among the 1 000 primary and secondary schools, each school would receive about \$50,000 for a period of three years, or about \$16,000 per year. He was concerned about the basis for arriving at the amount and whether the provision was adequate. Mr CHEUNG reiterated that unless the Administration would provide additional funding to schools to purchase printed teaching materials, the debundling policy would create conflict with schools. The Chairman shared his view that the Administration should provide grants to schools to purchase both printed and electronic teaching materials.

51. US(Ed) replied that the original plan was to provide the \$50 million grant to schools to purchase e-learning resources in one year. As only limited suitable e-learning resources were available on the market, schools requested an extension of the one-year period to three years. He stressed that schools were encouraged to make use of the Depository for e-learning resources. The Administration would monitor the trend of using e-learning resources, and should schools have financial difficulties in purchasing the necessary printed teaching materials, the Administration would provide more funding for schools.

e-Learning opportunities for needy students

52. While acknowledging the irreversible trend of e-learning, Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung was concerned about the widening of digital divide between students with and without means. He opined that both hardware and software were important for effective e-learning. He considered it important to provide students of low-income families with appropriate computer hardware and software, as well as access to Internet service to facilitate their e-learning. He asked how the Administration would ensure that students of low income families would have equal opportunities as other students in the implementation of e-learning.

53. US(Ed) said that the Administration was also concerned about the provision of equal opportunities of e-learning for needy students. As announced by the Chief Executive in the 2009-2010 Policy Address, the Financial Secretary

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would co-ordinate the efforts of relevant bureaux to examine, through tripartite collaboration between the community, business sector, and the Government, options to provide convenient and suitable Internet learning opportunities for students in need. At the school level, EDB had granted recurrent subsidies to all primary and secondary schools to encourage them to make available computer rooms and facilities for the use of needy students after school. At the community level, EDB had launched a "Computer Recycling Programme" for primary and secondary school students. Under the Programme, recycled computers and one-year free Internet access service were provided for successful applicants. In view of the positive response to the Programme, the funds allocated for the purpose had been increased from \$25 million to \$62 million, and would be further increased if necessary. EDB would continue to negotiate with Internet service providers to offer concessionary service fees to the beneficiaries under the Programme.

54. US(Ed) further said that the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer was spearheading the District Cyber Centres (DCCs) pilot scheme in partnership with private sectors, professional associations and community organizations. DCCs provided computing facilities, Internet connectivity and technical support as well as laptops on loan for students from low income families. Some non-governmental organizations had implemented similar schemes for needy students.

55. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that the current measures implemented by the Administration could not resolve the problem. Recycled computers might not be compatible with the software necessary for completing school assignments and the provision of one-year free Internet access service for students in need was far from adequate. Some schools were located in remote areas and it was inconvenient and unsafe for students to stay after school to use the school computers. With the heavy demand for use of computers in public libraries, students had to wait for a long time in order to use computers for a limited time. He cautioned that digital divide would be worsened should proper measures not be taken to assist needy students in time.

56. The Chairman shared the concern of Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung that on safety reasons, it might not be suitable for primary school students studying in schools in remote areas to stay after school to use the school computers. She drew members' attention to the funding proposal of \$140 million required for implementing the various e-learning initiatives which did not include internet access service fee for needy students. She called on EDB to liaise with the Financial Secretary to address the issue expeditiously before implementing the e-learning initiatives, otherwise the problem of digital divide would worsen.

57. US(Ed) stressed that e-learning was a long term policy objective. To achieve the objective, the WG proposed the launch of a three-year pilot scheme on "Promoting e-learning" in 20 to 30 local schools in the 2010-2011 school year.

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He pointed out that schools were provided with recurrent grants for replacement of information technology facilities. Also, free Internet facilities were made available to students at various locations across the territory such as at Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres and public libraries. He reiterated that the Government would take the lead in coordinating the efforts of the community as well as the business sector to address the issue of providing suitable Internet learning opportunities for students in need and developing e-learning concurrently.

58. The Chairman pointed out that Internet access service fee was a recurrent expenditure, and a one-off measure to provide free service for a certain period could not address the issue. As a long-term solution to the issue, Internet access service fee should be included in the School Textbook Assistance Scheme as a recurrent grant.

59. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that he had just discussed with the Financial Secretary on operational details in relation to the provision of Internet access service for needy students. He believed that the concern of members could be addressed.

Gifts and donations offered by textbook publishers

60. The Chairman was gravely concerned about the school culture of receiving gifts, donations and promotional items from textbook publishers. Referring to a recent school function attended by her, she noted a large number of flower arrangements donated and advertisements placed by textbook publishers in school publications. In her view, these ceremonial and promotional items only added to the costs of textbooks which would inevitably be passed onto parents. Such costs made up a substantial percentage of textbook prices but without any positive impact on the quality of textbooks. She noted the worry of textbook publishers about losing out if they did not do the same as their competitors. To address the problem, the Chairman called on the Administration to issue guidelines to schools to forbid their acceptance of luxurious gifts and donations from publishers. The Chairman considered that textbook publishers should make use of e-learning platforms to promote their products.

61. US(Ed) agreed to the views of the Chairman. He pointed out that in order to reduce cost of textbooks and avoid wastage, EDB would issue circulars/guidelines to schools stating clearly that they were not allowed to solicit any free teaching or learning materials from textbook publishers, including promotional items. He also advised that the Textbook Committee would soon convene a meeting to discuss the implementation of the "debundling" policy.

Action

Way forward

62. The Chairman invited members' views on the need to receive views from deputations on the subject. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong opined that as each category of stakeholders held similar views on the subject, a more efficient approach would be to invite a representative organization of each category instead of different organizations in each category to give views. The Chairman echoed the view and said that the Panel should invite a representative organization each of parent-teacher associations, primary schools council, secondary schools council, textbook publishers, teacher associations and concerned groups to present the views of their respective categories. Members agreed to the proposal.

63. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong further proposed that in order to receive views from deputations on a matter of concern in an efficient and effective manner, the Panel should adopt a two-level approach. Where the subject was of wide public concern and involved important policy issues, the Panel should receive views from members of the public and interested or relevant organizations. Where the subject was of lesser public importance or impact, the Panel should receive views from a representative organization of each category of stakeholders. Members agreed to the proposal. Members also noted the Administration's plan to submit the funding proposals on e-learning to the Finance Committee in parallel.

(Post-meeting note: on the advice of Chairman, the Panel would receive views from a representative organization from each category of stakeholders on the issue of textbooks and e-learning at its regular meeting in February 2010.)

VII. Any other business

64. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:30 pm.

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