

立法會

Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1074/09-10
(The minutes have been seen by
the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 8 February 2010, 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 Abraham SHEK Lai-him, 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 CHEUNG Kwok-che
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Dr Hon Samson TAM Wai-ho, JP
- Members absent** : Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-yee, GBS, JP
- Public Officers attending** : Agenda item IV
Mr Kenneth CHEN, JP
Acting Secretary for Education

Mr Tony TANG
Principal Assistant Secretary (Quality Assurance)

Education Commission

Professor Edmond KO, JP
Chairman of the Working Group on Review of
Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme

Agenda item V

Mr Kenneth CHEN, JP
Acting Secretary for Education

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

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

**Attendance by
invitation** : Agenda item V

Subsidized Primary Schools Council

Mr CHEUNG Yung-pong
Chairman

Mr SIN Kim-wai
Vice-Chairman

Consumer Council

Ms Connie LAU
Chief Executive

Ms Lillian MAK
Research & Trade Practices Officer

Hong Kong Educational Publishers Association

Mr WONG Wai-man
President

Mr LEE Ka-kui
Executive Council Member

The Anglo-Chinese Textbook Publishers Organisation

Mr LI Hing-sang
Chairman

Mr Edward WONG Sing
Vice-Chairman

Concerning CSSA Review Alliance

Mr LEE Tai-shing
Chief Community Organizer

Hong Kong Subsidized Secondary Schools Council

Mr Alex CHU Kai-wing
Committee Member

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

Staff in attendance : Ms Judy TING
Senior Council Secretary (2)7 (Acting)

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

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I. Confirmation of minutes

[LC Paper No. CB(2)866/09-10]

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2010 were confirmed.

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

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

- (a) a letter dated 7 January 2010 from Christian Zheng Sheng Association (CZSA) concerning the relocation of Christian Zheng Sheng College (CZSC) [LC Paper No. CB(2)826/09-10(01)];
- (b) a referral dated 25 January 2010 from the Complaints Division concerning proposals from 家長學校委員會 for tackling youth

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drug abuse [LC Paper No. CB(2)834/09-10(01)]; and

- (c) a submission from Educational Booksellers' Association Ltd concerning the Report of the Working Group on Textbooks and e-Learning Resources Development [LC Paper No. CB(2)891/09-10(02)].

3. Regarding (a), Ms Audrey EU said that the Administration should clearly state its stance on CZSC's relocation. She considered it necessary for the Administration to provide information on the options being contemplated to facilitate the relocation to meet the overall interests of the community and the timetable formulated in this regard.

4. Supporting the proposal to discuss CZSC's relocation, the Chairman added that it was important for CZSA to make known its financial accounts as public funds were involved. Notwithstanding that, the Administration had to follow up issues concerning the safety and overcrowding of CZSC.

5. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong shared the view that the Administration should provide the latest information concerning the acceptance or otherwise of CZSC's relocation by Mui Wo residents and the Islands District Council as well as the financial problem of CZSA. In his view, while the clarification of the financial problem of CZSA would help ease public concern on CZSC's relocation, it should not affect its relocation. The Administration had to address the concern about the safety of the existing school site of CZSC, in particular with the approach of the rainy season. He agreed that the Panel should discuss CZSC's relocation as soon as practicable.

6. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che agreed that the Administration should state its stance on CZSC's relocation and the financial problem of CZSA should not impede its relocation. He supported the proposal for the Panel to discuss the subject before the arrival of the rainy season.

7. The Chairman informed members that the Panel on Security would discuss the subject of 2008-2009 survey of drug use among students and implementation progress of the trial scheme on school drug testing in Tai Po District (the trial scheme) at its meeting on 2 March 2010. As the focus of the discussion of the Panel on Security was different from that of the Panel on Education, the Chairman considered that the two Panels should follow up the matter from different perspectives.

8. Sharing a similar view, Ms Audrey EU said that the crux of CZSC's relocation was the provision of education for young drug abusers during and after rehabilitation. She proposed that in addition to CZSC's relocation, the Panel should discuss the policy on the provision of education for young drug abusers during and after rehabilitation at the next regular meeting.

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9. The Chairman and Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong agreed to the proposal, and said that the trial scheme should be discussed at a later stage after it had been implemented for a longer period.

III. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[Appendices I and II to LC Paper No. CB(2)868/09-10]

10. The Chairman reminded that the Panel had agreed to hold the next regular meeting on 18 March 2010 at 4:30 pm as some members had to attend the annual meetings of the National People's Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference to be held in early March.

11. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong proposed to discuss the local and international recognition of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE). He pointed out that while the qualification of HKDSE had been benchmarked with that of the GCE A Level, there were no grading in HKDSE equivalent to Grades B and D of GCE A Level. He was concerned that this would affect the admission of local students to the universities in the United Kingdom.

12. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next regular meeting scheduled for 18 March 2010 at 4:30 pm :

- (a) Integrated Student Financial Assistance System;
- (b) HKDSE qualification; and
- (c) education for young drug abusers and relocation of CZSC.

Members also agreed that the meeting would be extended for 20 minutes to end at 6:50 pm.

13. The Chairman proposed to discuss education for students with special educational needs in April or May 2010 including assessment and recognition of qualifications as well as review of class structure of special schools.

IV. Review of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)665/09-10(05), (06) and CB(2)868/09-10(01)]

14. The Chairman welcomed Professor Edmond KO, Chairman of the Working Group on Review of Pre-primary Education Voucher (WG) for attending the meeting. On behalf of the Panel, she tendered an apology to

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Professor KO for deferring the subject for discussion to this meeting as the discussion on The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Amendment) Statutes 2010 at the last meeting was longer than expected.

Briefing by the Administration

15. Acting Secretary for Education (Atg SED) briefed members on the latest development of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) and the current status of the review of PEVS as detailed in the Administration's papers. He highlighted that to address the concern of needy families regarding choice of affordable kindergartens (KGs) under PEVS, the Administration had reinstated an annual adjustment mechanism for the fee remission ceilings with effect from the 2009-2010 school year onwards on the basis of the half-day and whole-day weighted average fees of the non-profit-making KGs in PEVS. Atg SED further said that the WG, set up under the Education Commission (EC), had held five focus group meetings from December 2009 to the end of January 2010 with over 70 stakeholders attending these meetings. It planned to submit a report to the EC by the last quarter of 2010.

16. Professor Edmond KO supplemented that the terms of reference of the WG included collecting the views of stakeholders on the implementation of PEVS and making recommendations to the Government via the EC for improvement of PEVS. The WG would hold further consultation sessions with key stakeholders at a later stage.

Consultation with stakeholders

17. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che said that he had received complaints from stakeholders of not having been invited to attend the focus group meetings of the WG. He enquired whether the stakeholders attended such meetings by invitation or they could make a request for attendance, and whether there was screening of attendees.

18. Professor Edmond KO explained that as there were practical constraints on the number of attendees at each focus group meeting, the WG had invited the representative organizations of each category of stakeholders to attend such meetings. The attendees of the meetings had been requested to relay the discussions to their organizations and to submit further views in writing if necessary, and the WG had received such submissions. To further solicit the views of the stakeholders, the WG was planning to conduct one or two public consultation sessions.

19. Principal Assistant Secretary (Quality Assurance) (PAS(QA)) added that the attendees of the first round of focus group meetings were those key stakeholders who had expressed views on PEVS. The second round of meetings would be organized at a later stage.

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20. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che opined that where views on a subject under review were either broadly positive or negative, the approach of inviting representative organizations of each category of stakeholders could be adopted. However, as views on PEVS were diverse, arrangements should be made to invite as many as stakeholders to give views as possible.

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21. Referring to the cost analysis of KGs as mentioned in paragraph 12 of the background brief prepared by the Legislative Council (LegCo) Secretariat on the subject, Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che enquired whether the Administration could provide such information to members for reference. PAS(QA) replied that the cost analysis of KG operations was a notional cost estimate made by the Administration when planning for the implementation of PEVS. It had taken into account a number of variables such as the operational expenses of KGs, teacher to student ratios as well as inflation assumptions for the period from the 2007-2008 school year to the 2011-2012 school year. Atg SED added that as KGs were required to disclose their key operational information, the Administration would examine whether and how far such information could be released and give a reply to the LegCo Secretariat.

22. The Chairman sought information on the focus group meetings, the criteria for inviting representative organizations to attend such meetings, the availability of discussion papers and the duration of such meetings. Professor Edmond KO explained that each focus group meeting normally lasted for about one to one and a half hours. Despite the constraints and the fact that some of the views and concerns were known to the WG, he considered them useful as face-to-face communication facilitated better understanding of the concerns of stakeholders. He said that many stakeholders had enthusiastically expressed their views. Questions on issues of concerns were sent to attendees before the meetings, and minutes of meetings were distributed to them to ensure that their views were recorded accurately.

Clerk

23. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that members had received complaints from stakeholders about not being invited to the focus group meetings. He considered that the WG should receive views of as many stakeholders as possible in its first round of consultation. To facilitate the WG to solicit views from the stakeholders, he proposed and members agreed that the LegCo Secretariat should forward a list of the deputations and individuals which/who had given views on PEVS at Panel meetings to the WG for reference. Professor Edmond KO welcomed the proposal.

(Post-meeting note: the relevant list was sent to the Education Bureau for passing on to the WG on 10 February 2010.)

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Scope of review

24. Noting that about 90% of KG teachers were either holding or pursuing the Certificate in Early Childhood Education, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that it was a remarkable improvement as a large number of KG teachers had achieved upgrading of their qualifications in a short period of time. He pointed out that primary and secondary school teachers would receive salary increase after they had upgraded their qualifications. However, such a mechanism did not apply to KG teachers. While PEVS aimed at alleviating the financial burden on eligible parents, it did not help KG teachers achieve salary increase after upgrading their qualifications. In his view, unless this issue was addressed, grievances of KG teachers would build up.

25. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong further said that the overall salaries of KG teachers had increased as shown in the recent survey conducted by the Administration. However, the survey did not indicate whether the increase was attributed to inflation, upgraded qualifications or work experience of KG teachers. In this connection, he asked whether the WG would consider conducting a survey on KG teachers' salaries in this regard. He considered that the information collected would help the WG to assess whether a salary framework commensurate with the qualifications of KG teachers should be formulated, or whether a qualification subsidy should be provided to KG teachers.

26. In response, Professor Edmond KO said that the WG had received views about salaries of KG teachers. In view of the tight timetable for the review, he was doubtful whether a comprehensive and credible survey on KG teachers' salaries could be carried out by the WG. Nevertheless, he assured members that as one of the main objectives of the review by the WG was to enhance the quality of pre-primary education, the career prospect and morale of KG teachers were important factors for such enhancement, and the WG would aim to make recommendations in this regard.

27. Acknowledging the limitations of the WG on time and resources, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong enquired whether the Administration would carry out the proposed survey by sending questionnaires to KGs to enquire about salary change, if any, after KG teachers had upgraded their qualifications. He considered it important to recognize the efforts of KG teachers in upgrading their qualifications.

28. Atg SED stressed the importance of the principle of free market in respect of the operation of KGs. He pointed out that KGs were allowed to determine teachers' salaries by themselves. There had been salary increases for KG teachers in recent years. The average monthly salaries of full-time KG teachers teaching half-day and whole-day classes were \$9,800 and \$16,300

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respectively in the 2009-2010 school year. It was a normal practice for KGs to attract quality teachers by better remuneration. He added that the Administration had to balance various factors such as time and resources in considering whether the proposed survey should be conducted.

29. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong disagreed with the view that KGs operated in a free market. He pointed out that there were Government interventions as seen in its requirement for KG teachers to obtain the Certificate in Early Childhood Education within five years by the 2011-2012 school year and its abolition of the Recommended Normative Salary Scale for KG teachers. He considered it unethical on the part of the Administration to claim that KGs operated in a free market.

30. Ms Audrey EU did not accept that KGs should operate in a free market. She had all along stressed that the Government should provide free pre-primary education. She pointed out the many shortcomings of PEVS. For example, for the 2009-2010 school year, the fee remission ceilings including the voucher subsidy were \$18,000 per half-day student per annum but only \$29,300 per whole-day student per annum.

31. Ms Audrey EU further said that many stakeholders as well as LegCo Members had expressed consensual views on PEVS-related issues, such as the eligibility of private independent KGs for PEVS, equitable provision of subsidy for whole-day KGs, teachers' salaries and professional upgrading of teachers. She hoped that the WG could expeditiously make recommendations to the Administration on ways to improve PEVS.

32. Professor Edmond KO clarified that the task of the WG was to review PEVS and not pre-primary education as a whole. Nevertheless, the WG recognized that the improvement of PEVS might be related to certain policies of pre-primary education. The WG therefore would consider the pre-primary education in that context and make appropriate recommendations in its report. While noting the terms of reference of the WG, Ms Audrey EU urged Professor Edmond KO to take the opportunity of the review to make concrete recommendations on pre-primary education.

33. Atg SED reiterated that the Administration had responded to the requests of needy families and reinstated an annual adjustment mechanism for the fee remission ceilings with effect from the 2009-2010 school year onwards. The existing policy was to provide free primary and secondary education but not free pre-primary education, and the Administration did not have plan to change the status quo. Nevertheless, the Administration was fully committed to assisting the development of pre-primary education. The existing annual recurrent expenditure on PEVS was about \$1.6 billion, and was estimated to increase to \$2 billion.

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34. Ms Starry LEE said that as different stakeholders had diverse views on PEVS, she requested the WG to reflect their different views including those of parents in its report. She pointed out that some issues had not been well-thought before implementing PEVS with the result that whole-day KGs and private independent KGs were struggling for survival. Issues such as eligibility of private independent KGs for PEVS and fee remission ceiling for whole-day KGs must be addressed in the review. She stressed that the WG should uphold the principle of not reducing parental choices for KGs in its review. Professor Edmond KO confirmed that the review would cover those issues mentioned by Ms Starry LEE.

35. The Chairman disagreed with the view that KGs should operate in a free market. In her view, the Government should provide free pre-primary education as it was fundamental to primary and secondary education. Stressing the importance of professional upgrading of KG teachers, she considered that the Administration should formulate a salary framework commensurate with their qualifications in order to encourage teachers to pursue further study. She called on the WG to identify the problems with the existing pre-primary education policies and make concrete recommendations to the Administration with a view to enhancing the quality of pre-primary education. She considered that instead of providing voucher to subsidize pre-primary education, the Government should make pre-primary education part and parcel of free education.

36. Professor Edmond KO said that there was no dispute on the need for the Government to subsidize pre-primary education but how it should be done had to be examined.

37. The Chairman expressed worry that the Administration might make use of the review conducted by the WG to address only peripheral issues concerning PEVS without tackling the major and root issues concerning pre-primary education.

V. Prices of school textbooks and development of electronic learning resources

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)479/09-10(05), CB(2)518/09-10(01) and CB(2)868/09-10(02)]

38. The Chairman informed members that the Committee on Home-School Co-operation notified the Secretariat in the morning that its representative could not attend the meeting due to urgent commitment.

Oral presentation by deputations

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Subsidized Primary Schools Council
[LC Paper No. CB(2)927/09-10(01)]

39. Mr CHEUNG Yung-pong presented the views of Subsidized Primary Schools Council as detailed in its submission.

Consumer Council
[LC Paper No. CB(2)868/09-10(03)]

40. Ms Connie LAU presented the views of the Consumer Council as detailed in its submission.

Hong Kong Educational Publishers Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)891/09-10(01)]

41. Mr LEE Ka-kui and Mr WONG Wai-man presented the views of Hong Kong Educational Publishers Associations as detailed in its joint submission with the Anglo-Chinese Textbook Publishers Organisation.

The Anglo-Chinese Textbook Publishers Organisation
[LC Paper No. CB(2)891/09-10(01)]

42. Mr Edward WONG and Mr LI Hing-sang presented the views of the Anglo-Chinese Textbook Publishers Organisation as detailed in its joint submission with Hong Kong Educational Publishers Association.

Concerning CSSA Review Alliance

43. Mr LEE Tai-shing presented the views of Concerning CSSA Review Alliance. He expressed concern about the educational needs of children of grassroot families, for whom any changes of education policies would entail financial burden. He said that many of these families had to rely on the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme to make ends meet. However, the base factors for calculating the CSSA rates and the grants under the School Textbook Assistance Scheme had remained unchanged for more than a decade, and the current level of assistance was not adequate.

44. Noting that the Financial Secretary was co-ordinating the efforts of relevant bureaux to examine options to provide Internet learning opportunities for students in need, Mr LEE enquired whether the Administration would only implement e-Learning after the concern about the provision of Internet access charges had been addressed.

45. Mr LEE regretted that many concern groups were eager to express their views on the subject of textbook prices and e-Learning but only the Alliance was

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invited to the meeting to give views. He emphasized that the subject was of grave concern to needy families as their financial burden would be increased. He stressed the need for the Administration to consult the concern groups and the grassroot families before implementing any changes to the existing policies.

*Hong Kong Subsidized Secondary Schools Council
[LC Paper No. CB(2)940/09-10(01)]*

46. Mr Alex CHU supported the proposal of setting a transitional period for the implementation of the "debundling" policy. He said that under such an arrangement, textbook publishers should not provide free teaching materials to schools, thus lowering textbook prices. Schools would not suffer any losses without such provision, and parents would immediately benefit from decreased textbook prices. Mr CHU also supported e-Learning, and suggested that a mechanism should be established to help teachers develop teaching materials that met the specific needs of their students.

47. Responding to Mr LEE Tai-shing's remark that only one concern group had been invited to the meeting, the Chairman clarified that the Panel had decided to invite only representative organizations of each category of stakeholders as this would facilitate in-depth exchange of views between members and the representative organizations.

"Debundling" policy

48. Noting the clarification made by the Consumer Council on the increases of textbook prices, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan expressed concern about the hefty increases of textbook prices by 103.8% and 23.7% for the primary and secondary school sectors from the 1997-1998 school year to the 2009-2010 school year. He pointed out that the increases far exceeded the average rise of gross domestic product and inflation of the same period, and had posed serious financial hardships for low-income families. Stressing the importance of the "debundling" policy for alleviating the financial burden on low-income families, Mr LEE sought information on the extent of reduction of textbook prices after implementation of the policy.

49. Atg SED advised that the Administration believed that there was room for lowering textbook prices and was implementing both short-term and long-term measures in this regard with a view to balancing the interests of parents, schools as well as textbook publishers. One of such measures was the implementation of the "debundling" policy which aimed to rationalize the current situation of bundled sale and purchase of textbooks and teaching/learning materials. Atg SED pointed out that with the development of the Depository of Curriculum-based Learning and Teaching Resources, some teaching materials might not be useful. The Administration would issue guidelines to schools stating clearly that they were not allowed to solicit any free

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teaching/learning materials from textbook publishers, including promotional items.

50. Atg SED allayed the concern of textbook publishers about the small market of teaching materials. He said that the market of teaching materials would be activated following the implementation of the debundling policy. Schools could purchase teaching materials that suited their specific needs and were no longer required to use the teaching materials produced by the same publishers. Moreover, following the approval of the \$140 million funding proposal at the meeting of the Finance Committee on 5 February 2010, the publishing and the information technology sectors could participate in developing e-Learning materials and there were new business opportunities for textbook publishers.

51. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong thanked the Consumer Council for conducting the relevant surveys on textbook prices. He highlighted the increases of textbook prices over the past years which showed the legitimate concerns of parents about the ever increasing textbook prices. Mr CHEUNG considered it important that in implementing the "debundling" policy, the various interests of stakeholders, i.e. parents, schools and textbook publishers, had to be balanced. Parents hoped that the policy would bring forth reduction of textbook prices. Schools requested that the Administration should provide them with resources to purchase teaching materials. He accepted that the grants for the purpose should not be unlimited and a prescribed ceiling should be set.

52. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong noted the request of textbook publishers for the provision of a transitional period for implementing the "debundling" policy in 2012. He suggested that the Administration should consider allowing a transitional period of one to two years. During the period, textbook publishers would not longer offer free teaching materials to schools since schools had already had excessive stocks of such materials, and this would reduce textbook prices to the immediate benefit of parents. In 2012 when the debundling policy was implemented, textbook prices should be further reduced. The Administration should also take concrete actions to prevent textbook publishers from providing gifts and donations and free teaching materials to schools.

53. Ms Connie LAU agreed that a workable option should be identified so as to balance the interests of different stakeholders in implementing the "debundling" policy. In her view, whether a transitional period was required should be worked out by the Administration with textbook publishers. The important considerations should be that parents were given choices to buy the appropriate learning materials for their children and schools would not receive unnecessary teaching materials from textbook publishers.

54. Ms Starry LEE also expressed concern about the increases of textbook prices, which had risen to \$2,032 in 2009 for the primary sector. She pointed out

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that the prices of some exercise books in the Mainland were only about one third of those sold locally. She enquired with the publisher associations about the extent of reduction of textbook prices after the implementation of the "debundling" policy. She also enquired about the feasibility of publishing only the modified parts of textbooks or publishing loose-leaf textbooks to address the problem of frequent revision of textbooks. She was concerned whether textbook publishers would wholeheartedly implement the debundling policy or were making use of the transitional period as a delaying tactic.

55. Mr Edmond WONG said that research and development constituted the most significant component of textbook production cost as compared with number of textbook pages and quality and weight of papers. He envisaged that the investment in research and development of e-Learning resources would be no lesser. Mr WONG added that textbook publishers had been working closely with the Administration and were determined to implement the debundling policy. There was no question of resorting to a delaying tactic. He advised that as the costs for developing textbooks were different for different textbook publishers, he could not give a categorical reply on the extent of reduction of textbook prices after the implementation of the policy. Mr WONG further said that textbook publishers had all along published supplementary sheets of the modified parts of textbooks but the response in the market was not favourable.

56. The Chairman opined that the costs of promotional items provided by textbook publishers for schools were substantial and savings on these items might reduce textbook costs by some 20%.

57. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that the issues of textbook prices and development of e-Learning should be discussed separately as both were major issues. He was doubtful whether the Administration would really address the long-standing problem of increasing textbook prices. He further said that unless there were changes in syllabus or needs to rectify editorial errors, textbooks should not be revised, in particular for primary school textbooks given no public examination. Mr LEUNG also said that like overseas countries, schools should provide recycled textbooks to students; and students should only need to pay a deposit for borrowing the books and for any damages made to the books.

58. In reply, Atg SED said that in the spirit of free market economy, the Administration avoided unnecessary intervention in the textbook trade, and left the pricing of textbooks to publishers. Nevertheless, the Administration sought to provide an environment to facilitate the development of textbooks and would implement various measures including the "debundling" policy and "five-year rule of no revision" and the issue of guidelines to schools stating clearly that they were not allowed to solicit any free teaching or learning materials from textbook publishers. Atg SED added that textbook recycling was not welcomed by some parents, in particular those of primary students. He was concerned about possible textbook price increase should textbook recycling be implemented

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extensively and the quantity of printed textbooks be reduced.

59. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che called on the Administration to implement the "debundling" policy with determination. To lower textbook prices, he supported textbook recycling, and suggested the adoption of one set of textbooks for use by schools for five years. He said that the Administration should shoulder the research and development cost of textbooks and produce one set of textbooks for use by primary schools.

60. Atg SED reiterated his concern that if one set of textbooks was provided to schools for use for five years, the textbook prices shouldered by parents would be around 20% of the current prices. However, with the quantity of textbooks reduced correspondingly, textbook prices might increase fivefold which would defeat the purpose of reducing textbook prices.

61. Atg SED further said that the Working Group on Textbooks and E-learning Resources Development (the Working Group) had looked into various options including textbook recycling under which textbooks were provided to schools by the Government for loan to students. As this arrangement would contrast greatly with the current practice of allowing schools to choose textbooks that suited their specific needs, the Working Group considered it not viable to adopt such an arrangement. The Working Group recommended the implementation of the "debundling" policy as well as the "five-year rule of no revision" to achieve reduction of textbook prices in the long term.

62. Dr Priscilla LEUNG did not agree to the publication or provision of textbooks by the Government as schools should be given the right to choose textbooks.

63. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong also disagreed to the proposal for the Government to provide one set of textbooks to schools as this would amount to ideology control. He reiterated the view that a way could be found out to implement the "debundling" policy that could balance the interests of the stakeholders. The question was whether a transitional period should be provided. In his view, it would not be feasible to implement the policy in 2010 as proposed by the Administration as textbook publishers were required to make known the prices of textbooks in April/May. The aim should be for textbook publishers to debundle the complementary teaching materials from new textbooks in 2011 and from all textbooks in 2012. During the 2010-2011 transitional period, there was room for textbook publishers to lower textbook prices as they no longer needed to provide free teaching materials and promotional items to schools, and the benefit to parents would be immediate. When the debundling policy was fully implemented in 2012, textbook prices should be further reduced. In the meantime, the Administration should work out a formula to calculate the grants with a prescribed ceiling to be provided to schools for purchase of teaching materials. Mr CHEUNG called on the Consumer Council to monitor the

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implementation of the policy with a view to safeguarding the interests of stakeholders, in particular parents.

64. The Chairman said that while she acknowledged the importance of research and development of textbooks and the substantial costs involved, there was room for reducing textbook prices by 20% if every textbook publisher would cut promotion costs.

65. Mr LEE Hing-sang said that the direction proposed by textbook publishers for implementing the debundling policy was in line with the views of Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong. The publishing trade was sincere in implementing the debundling policy with the provision of a transitional period, and would continue discussion with the Administration and the school sector to identify an option that could balance the interests of stakeholders.

66. Responding to the Chairman's enquiry on the time for setting textbook prices in the 2010-2011 school year, Mr LEE Hing-sang said that it would be around May/June this year. The Chairman urged textbook publishers to take actions to reduce the costs of textbooks for the 2010-2011 school year.

67. Atg SED said that the Working Group noted that the teaching materials for existing textbooks had already been provided to schools by textbook publishers, and the debundling policy might not bring about immediate reduction of textbook prices. However, in the long term, the "debundling" policy would help reduce textbook prices. In the short term, textbook publishers should discuss with schools and refrain from offering gifts and promotional items to schools. He acknowledged that textbook publishers had made substantial investment in research and development of textbooks and noted their requests for a transitional period for implementing the policy.

Copyright of e-Learning resources

68. Ms Audrey EU sought information on the criteria for selecting the 20 to 30 schools for participating in the Pilot Scheme on e-Learning (the Pilot Scheme). Regarding the funding of \$50 million for providing a one-off grant to government, aided, caput, and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools to purchase e-Learning resources, she asked the deputations of the school sector whether the amount was sufficient to meet the purpose. Ms EU raised serious concern about the copyright of e-Learning resources and possible high copyright fees. She enquired about the guidelines for setting the relevant fees. She noted the Administration's view that additional funding was not required for carrying out in-depth studies on the copyright of e-Learning resources.

69. Mr CHEUNG Yung-pong said that as set out in the submission of Subsidized Primary Schools Council, different types of schools in terms of student background and experience in e-Learning should be selected for

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participating in the Pilot Scheme. The findings of the Scheme would shed light on whether e-Learning could be implemented extensively in schools. He opined that one could not say that the \$50 million one-off grant for schools for purchasing e-Learning resources was adequate as each school would only receive about \$20,000 to \$30,000. [The actual amount should be \$30,000 to \$50,000.] However, the grant would serve as an incentive for schools to embark on e-Learning.

70. Mr LEE Ka-kui said that textbook publishers had all along been concerned about the copyright of their materials and materials the permission for use of which had been obtained from the copyright owners. The copyright fees demanded by copyright owners had posed a financial burden on many textbook publishers. One of such examples was the fee charged by the Hong Kong Examination and Assessment Authority for permitting to use the examination papers on Mathematics. While the copyright fees for printed textbooks could be set in accordance with the number of copies sold, there was no established mechanism for determining the copyright fees for e-Learning resources and the patronage of e-Learning resources would be more difficult to ascertain. He considered that the issue warranted in-depth study, and unless this was properly addressed, the market for e-Learning resources could not be developed.

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71. Following up the issue of copyright of e-Learning resources, Ms Audrey EU requested the Administration to thoroughly discuss it with publishers, and provide written information on the outcome of its discussion to members. She also called on the Consumer Council to follow up the issue. She requested the Administration to provide written information on the criteria for selecting the schools for participation in the Pilot Scheme.

72. The Chairman proposed and members agreed to extend the meeting to 7:00 pm.

73. Dr Priscilla LEUNG stressed the importance of respecting the intellectual property and copyrights of owners. She pointed out that it was normal practice for universities to pay a lump sum to copyright owners for use of certain e-Learning resources by their students with passwords. The more the number of students with the right to access the e-Learning resources, the cheaper the average copyright fees would be. She enquired whether the same arrangement could be adopted to address the issue of needy students to access e-Learning resources.

74. Mr WONG Wai-man said that currently, many publishers provided schools with free access to e-Learning resources developed by themselves. With the implementation of e-Learning, publishers had to look into the copyright of such resources. He also pointed out that some overseas copyright owners charged high fees for on-line access to their materials as the materials would become easily accessible. Some copyright owners even refused to permit

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on-line access to their materials.

75. Dr Priscilla LEUNG noted that it was a common practice for students to share e-textbooks on-line. She enquired whether the copyright issue was involved, and how the Administration could provide assistance to students to respect the copyright of owners.

76. Atg SED replied that there were different modes for charging copyright fees for using on-line resources, such as by monthly payments or lump sum payments. There was no copyright fee for the use of certain resources, such as the "Creative Commons Hong Kong", for the benefit of the education sector. The Administration was aware of the importance of respecting the right of copyright owners and this issue had been considered by LegCo Members in the scrutiny of the relevant bill. The principle was that copyright materials could be used for education purpose. The Administration had all been educating teachers and students on legal use of copyright materials.

e-Learning opportunities for needy students

77. While acknowledging the irreversible global trend in e-Learning, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan enquired about the financial impact on students, and whether Internet access charges would be provided for needy students. In his view, e-Learning and provision of Internet access charges for needy students should be implemented in parallel, otherwise the problem of disparity between the rich and the poor would be exacerbated, and the learning outcome of needy students would be adversely affected.

78. Atg SED explained the measures in place to help low-income families meet the costs of e-Learning. He elaborated that funds allocated for the "Computer Recycling Programme" (the Programme) had been increased from \$21 million to \$63 million to cater for increased demand. Some 21 000 families had successfully applied for the Programme. A number of non-profit making organizations were also offering the service of on-loan laptops to needy students. Furthermore, the Administration had launched three Information Technology in Education Strategies with an investment of some \$8 billion to ensure that all schools were equipped with computers and Internet connectivity for the use of students. Also, the Financial Secretary was co-ordinating the efforts of relevant bureaux to examine options to provide Internet learning opportunities for students in need.

79. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung opined that for the implementation of e-learning, the issues involved were not only the provision of Internet access charges but also suitable hardware. The recycled computers provided to needy students were not updated and might not be compatible with the software required for e-Learning. The slow speed of recycled computers dampened the incentive of needy students to learn.

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80. Atg SED explained that the Administration had been providing recurrent grants for schools for development of information technology. For a 29-class school, it received an annual grant of \$340,000 part of it could be used for upgrading its computer hardware and software. He reiterated that the Financial Secretary was co-ordinating the efforts of relevant bureau to examine options to provide convenient and suitable Internet learning opportunities for needy students. The outcome of examination would be reported to members.

81. Mr CHEUNG kwok-che said that according to his understanding, the Internet access charges would be covered in the CSSA provided that the expenditure was considered inevitable. The provision of Internet access charges for needy students under the School Textbook Assistance Scheme should not be a problem as the number of students involved was small.

82. The Chairman expressed concern about the impact of e-Learning on needy students. To better understand the situation, she requested the Concerning CSSA Review Alliance to apprise members of the equipment necessary for e-Learning, whether the recycled computers were adequate for e-Learning, and where needy students used to access the Internet.

83. In response, Mr LEE Tai-shing said that the Programme did not operate satisfactorily entirely. It took several months for the receipt and installation of the recycled computers. Moreover, the beneficiaries could only use one internet service company, namely, the Hutchison Telecommunications International Limited. However, the Internet coverage provided by the company could not cover all residential buildings. Though Hutchison Telecommunications International Limited would offer wireless internet services to students, the service provided was unstable. While many of the recycled computers were acceptable for the current use, Mr LEE was afraid that these computers might not be compatible with the new software required for e-Learning. Mr LEE considered that computers were extensively used not only for learning but also for connecting with friends without which the social development of needy students would be hindered.

84. In response to Atg SED's enquiry on the delivery of computers and Internet coverage under the Programme, Mr LEE elaborated that the Internet coverage of the provider could not cover all public housing estates, some village houses and old buildings where needy students lived. The Chairman called on the Administration to provide flexibility to beneficiaries of the Programme to use different Internet service providers. She added that in the long run, the provision of Internet access charges for needy students should be a recurrent and not an ad hoc expenditure item of the Administration.

85. In conclusion, the Chairman urged the Administration and textbook publishers to thoroughly discuss issues relating to the debundling policy, and

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brief the Panel the outcome of their discussion in May or June this year.

VI. Any other business

86. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 7:00 pm.

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