

立法會

Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1571/09-10
(The minutes have been seen by
the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 12 April 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 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 CHEUNG Kwok-che
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Dr Hon Samson TAM Wai-ho, JP
- Members attending** : Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
Hon IP Wai-ming, MH
Dr Hon PAN Pey-chyou
- Members absent** : Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, SBS, JP
Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-yee, GBS, JP

**Public Officers
attending** : Agenda item III

Education Bureau

Mr Kenneth CHEN, JP
Under Secretary for Education

Ms Esther LEUNG, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education (6)

Commerce and Economic Development Bureau

Mr Gregory SO, JP
Under Secretary for Commerce and Economic
Development

Mr Duncan Pescod, JP
Permanent Secretary for Commerce and Economic
Development (Communications and Technology)

Mr Jeremy Godfrey
Government Chief Information Officer

Mr Bassanio SO
Deputy Government Chief Information Officer (Policy
and Customer Service)

Social Welfare Department

Ms LUNG Siu-kit
Assistant Director (Social Security)

Mr CHAN Wing-hoi
Chief Social Security Officer (Social Security)

Student Financial Assistance Agency

Ms Nancy SO
Controller

Ms Teresa CHEUNG
Deputy Controller

Agenda items IV and V

Education Bureau

Mr Kenneth CHEN, JP
Under Secretary for Education

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

Ms Amy WONG
Principal Assistant Secretary (Higher Education)

**Attendance by
invitation** : Agenda item V

Hong Kong Association for Continuing Education

Mr Mervyn CHEUNG Man-ping
Vice-Chairman

Department of Continuing Education, The Lutheran
Church-Hong Kong Synod

Mr CHEUNG Luk-kin
Chief Executive

Mr Joe CHAN Tsun-ho
Evening School Student

Former Yuen Long Government Evening Secondary
School

Mr WONG Hing-chuen
Clerk

Mr MAO Hiu-fung
Clerk

Former Kowloon Technical Government Evening
Secondary School

Mr KO Yuet-ming
Alumnus

Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers

Dr WU Siu-wai
Vice-Chairman

Miss CHENG Ka-yan
Secretary

Concern Group for Former Government Evening
Schools

Ms LEUNG Sau-ngor
Chairman

Mr SIN Wing-lung
Member

A Group of Adult Students from Government Evening
Secondary Schools

Mr CHOI Kwong-fai
Alumnus

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)

Action

I. Information paper(s) issued since the last meeting
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1125/09-10(01)]

Members noted the letter dated 17 March 2010 from the Deputy Secretary for Education concerning a review of non-means-tested loan schemes administered by the Student Financial Assistance Agency.

2. Members noted the letter dated 31 March 2010 from Dr Hon LAM Tai-fai (tabled at the meeting) concerning the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (Amendment) Bill. The Chairman said that it was up to the House Committee to decide whether a bills committee should be formed to scrutinize the Bill after its introduction into the Legislative Council ("LegCo").

Action

(*Post-meeting note*: on behalf of the Panel, the Chairman made a reply to Dr LAM on 16 April 2010.)

3. The Chairman reminded members that a special meeting would be held on Friday, 30 April 2010, at 10:45 am to discuss education for young drug abusers and relocation of the centres of the Christian Zheng Sheng Association as well as the progress of local and international recognition and promotion of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education qualification. Mr WONG Sing-chi presented to the Chairman a joint letter signed by a group of parents of Christian Zheng Sheng College ("CZSC") students appealing for members' support for CZSC's relocation.

4. The Chairman drew to members' attention a letter dated 12 April 2010 from the Security Bureau inviting the Panel to visit two residential drug treatment and rehabilitation centres for young drug abusers in the morning of 20 April 2010. Members agreed to conduct the visit.

II. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[Appendix I and II to LC Paper No.CB(2)1233/09-10]

5. The Chairman sought members' views on rescheduling the next regular meeting scheduled for 10 May 2010 as the LegCo delegation would conduct a duty visit to the Shanghai World Expo from 8 to 10 May 2010. Members agreed to hold the next regular meeting on Thursday, 13 May 2010, at 4:30 pm.

6. The Chairman invited members' views on the Administration's proposal to discuss the following items at the next regular meeting –

- (a) increase in commitment for Project Yi Jin;
- (b) injection into the Language Fund;
- (c) Final Report of the Study on Small Class Teaching; and
- (d) grievance procedures of the University Grants Committee ("UGC")-funded institutions.

7. Regarding (c), the Chairman sought members' views on the need to invite deputations to give views.

8. Mr Andrew LEUNG considered it not appropriate to invite deputations at the present stage so as to allow sufficient time for members to digest the findings of the study. He said that deputations could be invited after the consultant had briefed members on the findings.

Action

9. The Chairman pointed out that the Final Report of the Study on Small Class Teaching had been released in December 2009. She considered it important for the consultant to exchange views with the deputations. Sharing the view of the Chairman, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that some deputations, such as the Subsidized Primary Schools Council, would be eager to give views as some subsidized primary schools were the target group of the study.

10. As the Panel would not have sufficient time to discuss all the four items at the next regular meeting, the Chairman suggested and members agreed that she would discuss with the Secretariat and revert to members.

(Post-meeting note: after discussion with the Administration and the Secretariat, the Chairman advised that the next meeting be extended for one hour to discuss items (a) to (c) at paragraph 6 above.)

III. Subsidy on Internet access charges for needy students and related measures

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1233/09-10(01) and (02)]

11. Members noted the background brief entitled "Development of e-Learning and provision of Internet access charges" prepared by the LegCo Secretariat.

Briefing by the Administration

12. Under Secretary for Education ("US(Ed)") briefed members on the proposal for the provision of convenient and suitable Internet learning opportunities to students in need and the implementation details as set out in the Administration's paper.

Facilitating students and parents to access Internet for learning

13. While welcoming the proposed provision of a subsidy for Internet access charges for students in need, Mr WONG Kwok-hing was concerned that some low-income families could not afford to purchase computers. He enquired how the Administration would assist these families and about the criteria for providing affordable computers to needy families.

14. US(Ed) said that the Computer Recycling Programme had been in place to provide needy students with recycled computers and one year's free Internet connection. Under the proposed programme, affordable Internet access services and computers would be provided by the non-profit-making organization no later than the 2011-2012 school year. US(Ed) further said that the subsidy would be disbursed to eligible families on a non-accountable basis as from late August

Action

2010, and the subsidy rate would be reviewed in each school year with reference to the latest prices of Internet access services in the market and other relevant factors.

15. Under Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development ("US(CED)") said that a two-pronged approach would be taken to implement the proposal for providing convenient and suitable Internet learning opportunities to students in need, namely, by introducing a household-based cash subsidy scheme for Internet access charges from the 2010-2011 school year and facilitating needy students and parents to gain access to the Internet for learning by providing economical Internet access services, suitable computers and softwares and the necessary complementary services such as training and technical support. The non-profit-making organization would provide an alternative route to market for Internet service providers ("ISPs") wishing to provide affordable Internet access services and computers to low-income families.

16. US(CED) further pointed out that the broadband penetration rate of low-income families with children in primary and secondary schools, namely, the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance families with school-age children and families receiving student financial assistance, was about 92%. While financial resource was a relevant consideration, the 8% families that did not subscribe to Internet service might not have attributed as high a value to Internet learning. They were also concerned about the negative effects of being online. To promote the healthy and safe use of Internet, the non-profit-making organization would provide suitable guidance to parents on the education value of the Internet.

17. Government Chief Information Officer ("GCIO") supplemented that it was envisaged that the non-profit-making organization would be able to arrange for computers and softwares to be sold to low-income families on instalment plans so that the monthly payments should become affordable for them.

18. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong noted with concern that about 24 000 low-income families did not have computers at home and did not subscribe to Internet connection possibly due to a lack of financial resources or perceived negative effects of the Internet. To provide Internet learning opportunities for students of these families, he urged the Administration to approach them, bring home the positive value of Internet learning and secure a computer for each of them. Mr CHEUNG also expressed concern about Internet learning opportunities for the disabled. He pointed out that according to a survey conducted by the University of Hong Kong, the usage rate of computers and Internet among the disabled had decreased from 14% in 2005 to 12% in 2008. As computers and Internet access were necessary and useful tools for the disabled to express themselves, communicate with friends and seek employment, he urged the Administration to ensure and set an objective that students at special

Action

schools would use computers as a platform for communication so that they would continue to use them after leaving school.

19. In response, US(Ed) said that one of the objectives of the development of e-learning was to enable students with special educational needs ("SEN"), including the physically, visually, and hearing-impaired students, to have access to Internet learning. Applied learning of information technology ("IT") had become a component of the curriculum with a view to achieving IT literacy among students. US(Ed) undertook that the Administration would examine the curriculum for students with SEN to ensure their exposure to IT.

20. Echoing the concern of Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong, Dr Samson TAM stressed the importance of ascertaining the reasons for the low-income families not having computers and not subscribing to Internet connection. He was concerned that some parents might not use the subsidy for Internet access. He was given to understand that some schools were of the view that students did not need to have computers at home as they could use those at schools or centres. To better understand the situation, he urged the Administration to conduct an analysis in this regard for the formulation of the right strategies to meet the specific needs of the low-income families.

21. US(Ed) responded that schools were provided with recurrent grants to install computers and the relevant facilities under the three IT in education strategies. Many students made use of these facilities to complete homework at school. Responding to the call of the community for the provision of Internet learning opportunities for students in needs, the Administration therefore put forward the relevant proposal. The provision of recurrent grants to schools for installing IT facilities and the proposed subsidy to low-income families were not contradictory.

22. US(CED) pointed out that the non-profit-making organization would provide suitable guidance on healthy and safe use of the Internet for parents. It would also provide training and technical support in a cost-effective manner to the low-income families which might give up Internet service when their computers broke down as they did not have the financial resources or technical expertise to have them fixed.

23. The Chairman pointed out that some families living on roof-top structures did not have Internet connection, and called on the Administration to implement measures to assist these families. GCIO pointed out that based on the findings of the survey recently conducted by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer ("OGCIO"), the biggest distinction between the 92% families and the 8% families which had and did not have Internet connection at home was the attitude of the parents towards Internet learning. The latter families held a different view on the education value of Internet learning and were concerned about the risks associated with being online. To help these

Action

parents better understand the education value of Internet learning, the non-profit-making organization would implement programmes to educate parents on the healthy and safe use of Internet.

Dovetail of the disbursement of subsidy with the provision of affordable Internet access services

24. Mr WONG Kwok-hing was concerned about any time lag between the disbursement of the subsidy and the provision of affordable Internet access services by the non-profit-making organization and, if so, whether the time lag could be shortened.

25. Dr Samson TAM also shared the concern about the time lag between the disbursement of the subsidy and the operation of the non-profit-making organization. He pointed out that according to the Administration's table, it would only issue a Request for Proposal in May 2010 and the non-profit-making organization was expected to commence the implementation of the programme in 2011. By that time, most of the low-income families which had been disbursed with the subsidy might have signed up Internet access service contracts which normally lasted for two to three years. Under such circumstances, the non-profit-making organization might not have sufficient number of clients for sustainable operation. He asked how the Administration would address this problem.

26. GCIO said that the Administration had been liaising with the ISPs, and many of them were keen to make special offers targeting the low-income families to coincide with the introduction of the subsidy. The Administration would continue to discuss with them concerning the contract period. When suitable and affordable offers were available, the Administration would inform the families at the same time when they received the notification of their eligibility for the subsidy.

27. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that he supported the concept of corporate social responsibility incorporated in the proposal. He also welcomed the wide range of services to be provided by the non-profit-making organization to low-income families, especially the bulk-purchase of computers which would help reduce the prices. However, he shared the concern about the time lag between the disbursement of the subsidy and the provision of affordable Internet access services. He pointed out that the Internet access service contracts normally lasted for two years. Once the low-income families had signed such contracts with ISPs, they could not use the cheaper services to be provided by the non-profit-making organization. He called on the Administration to proactively liaise with the ISPs to offer contracts of a shorter period, say one-year, to low-income families. He further asked whether the subsidy would continue to be disbursed to the families or to the non-profit-making organization after its establishment, and enquired about the mechanism for reviewing the subsidy rate.

Action

28. US(Ed) replied that the subsidy would be disbursed directly to the eligible families. In reviewing the subsidy rate, the Administration would take into account a host of factors including the latest prices of Internet access services in the market as well as those of the services offered by the non-profit-making organization.

29. GCIO supplemented that ISPs generally welcomed the proposal and had expressed interest in becoming a supplier to the project. The Administration did not envisage that every low-income family would become a client of the non-profit making organization in the short or medium term. The eligible families would continue to receive the subsidy directly from the Government, and they could choose to become a client of the non-profit-making organization or remain a client with the existing ISPs. Nevertheless, the non-profit-making organization would provide a unique channel to market because it would be able to work with a number of government departments and non-governmental organizations ("NGOs") to deliver the services to the families. GCIO further pointed out that the sales and marketing costs of ISPs were substantial. As the non-profit-making organization would not need to incur these costs, it could offer affordable prices of computers and Internet access services to low-income families.

Selection and governance of the non-profit-making organization

30. While welcoming the proposal, Mr Ronny TONG enquired whether the provision of the subsidy and the implementation of the programme by the non-profit-making organization were linked or separate, and whether the non-profit-making organization would be commercial or charitable in nature. Should it be the former, he queried what incentive and commercial considerations a commercial organization would have to take on the task. He asked if the Administration had any target organizations to be invited for implementing the programme and whether it would take on the task should there be no organizations interested in doing so.

31. GCIO explained that two groups of organizations were envisaged to be interested in implementing the programme, namely, industry organizations and NGOs. The Administration had not shortlisted any organizations but had had conversation with three to four organizations which had already showed interest. The Administration was confident that there would be organizations interested in taking up the project. GCIO further said that the Administration did not expect the non-profit-making organization to be sponsored by profit-making service providers but its sponsors could include associations of industry participants. It was of paramount importance that the prospective organization would be able to draw on business skills in the area of Internet to make the project a success. The Administration would not rule out the possibility of commercial organizations showing interest in order to fulfil the corporate social responsibility. However,

Action

the concern of conflict of interest would need to be addressed. The Administration did not think it would need to consider taking up the project by itself given the interest already shown by some capable organizations.

32. Permanent Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development (Communications and Technology) ("PSCED(CT)") supplemented that the Administration had established relationship with some organizations under the District Cyber Centre Scheme whereby a non-profit-making organization worked in conjunction with the Cyberport Management Company to provide IT training programmes and technical support through the district-based cyber centres to needy families. As the Scheme had been working well, the Administration had therefore proposed to adopt a similar approach for the implementation of the programme.

33. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that Members belonging to the Liberal Party supported the proposal. As he understood, the implementation of the programme by a non-profit-making organization did not mean that the organization should not make profits as profits were necessary to sustain its operation. An organization was regarded as non-profit-making provided that the profits generated would not be distributed to its shareholders. He was concerned about the charging of administrative fee by the non-profit-making organization for implementing the programme. He was also doubtful about the availability of an organization capable of delivering the wide variety of services, including Internet access services, computer procurement, training and technical support to low-income families.

34. GCIO elaborated that the non-profit-making organization was expected to operate as an enterprise, incorporated under the Companies Ordinance and registered under Section 88 of the Inland Revenue Ordinance as a charitable organization. It could eventually generate a surplus of income over expenditure. However, the surplus generated would not be distributed to shareholders but would be redeployed to enhance the education programmes, increase the scope of the hardware support office, or reduce the prices of computers and Internet access charges further.

35. To follow-up, Mr Tommy CHEUNG and the Chairman suggested that a ceiling of administrative cost be set for the non-profit-making organization.

36. GCIO replied that the Administration would scrutinize the business proposals to be put forward by interested organizations to ensure that the administrative cost would be kept to the minimum. However, there was currently no predetermined figure of administrative cost which would be considered acceptable. The Administration would provide capital for starting the business and select the most suitable organization which had the expertise to deliver the objectives of the programmes.

Action

37. GCIO further said that the District Cyber Centre Alliance had been helping needy students' access to information and communication technology and online services through the tripartite collaboration among the Cyberport Management Company, the Hong Kong Council of Social Service and the Internet Professional Association. Also, the "*Be NetWise*" Internet Education Campaign was in place to educate young people as well as parents on the safe use of the Internet. Through these programmes, the Administration had had the experience in working with a number of NGOs in delivering the relevant services.

Admin

38. The Chairman requested the Administration to provide written information concerning the administrative cost of the non-profit-making organization.

39. While welcoming the proposal, Dr PAN Pey-chyou was concerned about the approach adopted by the Administration in implementing it. He pointed out that unlike the existing ISPs which had readily available equipment and technical support, the non-profit-making organization would need to rely on a number of subcontractors to deliver the wide range of services, which might possibly result in exploitation in the process and high administrative cost. In his view, the Administration should consider inviting the ISPs direct to implement the programme through open tender. Dr PAN also highlighted parents' concern about the negative effects of the Internet on children, and enquired about the measures to be adopted to help parents and children in this regard.

40. US(CED) replied that the non-profit-making organization would provide multi-level services for low-income families. Some of these families living in remote areas often paid high Internet access charges as some ISPs did not extend their services to remote areas. The non-profit-making organization could market for ISPs wishing to provide affordable Internet access charges to the low-income segment. In addition to the provision of Internet access services, the organization would also offer suitable guidance to parents on the healthy and safe use of the Internet. Under the "*Be NetWise*" Internet Education Campaign, led by OGCIO, home visits were conducted to educate young people as well as parents on the proper use of the Internet. Building on the experience of the Campaign, the organization would design its tailor-made programmes to enhance the knowledge of parents and students on the healthy and safe use of the Internet.

41. The Chairman criticized the adoption of both Chinese and English in the Chinese name of "*Be NetWise*" Internet Education Campaign, *i.e.*, "*做個智 Net 的*". She sought information on the monitoring of the non-profit-making organization, in particular to which government department it would report. She also expressed concern about the possibility of censorship of Internet information conducted by the non-profit-making organization.

Action

42. GCIO explained that the Administration and the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups had discussed the merits of the name of "做個智Net的". The name was chosen because the Federation was of the opinion that it was trendy and would appeal to young people. GCIO further said that OGCIIO would be responsible for monitoring the organization as funds would be provided to the organization through OGCIIO, and a funding agreement would be signed between OGCIIO and the organization.

43. PSCED(CT) clarified that the non-profit-making organization would not undertake any censorship activities in connection with Internet information, and stressed that Government was determined to ensure that all people in Hong Kong should have the same access to the Internet. This meant that there would be no difference between people who went online using a commercial service bought from an ISP and those who would qualify for the new service to be provided by the non-profit-making organisation.

44. Concluding the discussions, the Chairman said that members supported the submission of the proposal to the Finance Committee for consideration.

IV. Fifth Matching Grant Scheme for local degree-awarding institutions
[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1233/09-10(03) and (04)]

45. Members noted the background brief entitled "Matching Grant Schemes for local degree-awarding institutions" prepared by the LegCo secretariat.

Briefing by the Administration

46. US(Ed) briefed members on the proposal for allocating \$1 billion to launch the Fifth Matching Grant Scheme ("MGS") for matching private donations secured by the 12 local degree-awarding institutions as detailed in the Administration's paper.

Expansion of MGS to cover sub-degree education

47. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong recalled that he had supported the introduction of the Fourth MGS as it provided additional resources for the UGC-funded institutions and the two self-financing universities, namely Open University of Hong Kong ("OUHK") and Hong Kong Shue Yan University ("HKSZYU"), for supporting outgoing student exchange programmes and offering scholarships for meritorious non-local students, etc. He had then queried why the Administration did not expand MGS to cover sub-degree programmes. The explanation given by the Administration was that some institutions might have made a verbal undertaking to their prospective donors for the designated use of their donations which might not include sub-degree education.

Action

48. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong was disappointed that the proposed Fifth MGS still did not cover sub-degree programmes. He held the view that sub-degree students had all along been subject to discrimination. He considered that if private donations for sub-degree education were eligible for matching grants, institutions would have more resources for investment in sub-degree education, thereby alleviating the financial burden of sub-degree students. He asked whether the Administration would consider expanding the Fifth MGS to cover sub-degree education so that private donations designated for sub-degree education, such as construction of school premises and installation of facilities, could be matched.

49. In reply, US(Ed) clarified that as far as the provision of scholarships was concerned, for the UGC-funded institutions and the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts ("HKAPA") which was under the auspices of the Home Affairs Bureau ("HAB"), the government matching grants could only be used for offering scholarships for meritorious non-local students enrolled in UGC or HAB-funded programmes under the Fifth MGS. For OUHK, HKSYU and Chu Hai College of Higher Education ("CHC") which were self-financing local institutions, the government matching grants could be used to provide scholarships for local and non-local students enrolled in the locally-accredited self-financing programmes at degree or above level. The Administration had considered the view to expand MGS to cover sub-degree programmes but decided that having regard to the need for priority allocation of resources, the Fifth MGS should cover programmes at degree or above level but not at sub-degree level.

50. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that the crux of the matter was not priority allocation of resources but discrimination of the Government against sub-degree students. He elaborated that sub-degree students, without receiving any assistance from the Government, had been using their own resources or relying on high-interest loans to pay for their tuition fees. These students had been assisting the self-financing tertiary institutions in repaying the mortgage of their school premises. Should a donor intend to make a specific donation for sub-degree education, the institution concerned might be inclined to persuade the donor to donate for degree programmes as donations for sub-degree education would not be eligible for matching grants.

51. US(Ed) pointed out that in order to provide further support for the development of self-financing higher education sector, the Fourth MGS had already covered the OUHK and HKSYU. The Administration had proposed to expand MGS to include HKAPA and CHC in the Fifth MGS. He added that there were other schemes in place, such as the Land Grant Scheme and Start-up Loan Scheme, for assisting sub-degree education.

Action

52. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong remained unconvinced and reiterated that as long as sub-degree education was not included in MGS, institutions would have no incentive to seek private donations for sub-degree education. He urged the Administration to expand the Fifth MGS to include sub-degree education, and added that such inclusion would not affect the total amount of government grants.

53. Echoing the view on the need to expand the Fifth MGS to include sub-degree education, the Chairman pointed out that sub-degree students were facing heavy financial burden as the total cost of completing a sub-degree programme could be as high as \$300,000 per student. The Administration could consider including sub-degree education in the Fifth MGS without increasing the financial commitment.

54. Dr LAM Tai-fai shared the view that excluding sub-degree education from MGS would convey a negative message to the general public that sub-degree education was of lesser importance.

55. Mr Tommy CHEUNG declared interest as a member of the Council of The Chinese University of Hong Kong. While supporting the proposal for launching the Fifth MGS, he expressed concern about the adequacy of the \$1-billion commitment as the scheme would be open to 12 local degree-awarding institutions. He pointed out that the number of eligible institutions had been increased from eight in the first three rounds to 12 in the proposed fifth round but the financial commitment remained unchanged, i.e. \$1 billion for each round. Noting Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong's remark that about 20% of the tuition fees for sub-degree education were used to repay the mortgage of school premises of self-financing institutions, he called on the Administration to verify the claim. He considered that should the claim be correct, MGS should include sub-degree programmes. He pointed out that some sub-degree graduates who had been successful in their career might wish to make donations for building premises for sub-degree education. Sub-degree students who had articulated to publicly-funded degree programmes required less than four years to complete degree education and this would reduce the resources deployed by the Government to the publicly-funded degree education.

56. US(Ed) pointed out that the Government had all along had strong commitment in education which made up the largest portion of Government expenditure. The recurrent expenditure on education in 2009-2010 was over \$55 billion, and would reach \$60 billion after including the one-off expenditures. He stressed the importance of prioritizing the needs of different sectors in making the financial commitment for the Fifth MGS which was proposed to cover programmes at degree or above level.

Action

57. Mr Tommy CHEUNG remained of the view that the financial commitment should be increased to around \$1.5 billion by proportion as 12 institutions would be eligible for the Fifth MGS. He opined that the tuition fee payable by students pursuing programmes at degree level at UGC-funded institutions only made up 20% of the cost and the remaining 80% was subsidized by the Administration. The disparity of treatment of degree and sub-degree students was too great as far as Government subsidy was concerned. He considered that the education need of sub-degree students should be taken care of.

58. Deputy Secretary for Education (1) ("DS(Ed)1") supplemented that the coverage of MGS had been expanded gradually since the third round. The fourth round of MGS had been expanded to include OUHK and HKSYU, and the proposed fifth round would include HKAPA and CHC. Sub-degree students could be benefited by way of studying articulation programmes in all these institutions. She also clarified that for the UGC-funded institutions, private donations for various purposes would be eligible for matching grants including construction projects, the carrying out of activities within the ambit of recurrent grants provided by UGC, providing scholarships to students of UGC-funded programmes, and supporting outgoing student exchange programmes for students enrolled in UGC-funded programmes. She stressed that the coverage of MGS would be expanded in a progressive manner.

59. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung commented that the coverage of MGS was narrow and the Administration had all along discriminated against the education needs of sub-degree students under the pretext of the need for priority allocation of resources. As long as sub-degree education was excluded from MGS, institutions would not be able to raise private donations for the purpose. To benefit sub-degree students in the long run, the Administration should expand MGS to cover sub-degree education and allow institutions the flexibility in using the donations raised.

60. The Chairman said that other students would benefit from having more campus space if private donations could be secured for building campuses for sub-degree students.

61. US(Ed) clarified that institutions were free to raise private donations for sub-degree education but these donations were not eligible for matching grants. He also said that were sub-degree education included in MGS, the matching grants for programmes at degree or above level would be reduced correspondingly. The Administration noted the views of members but considered that with limited resources, only private donations for programmes at degree or above level should be matched with Government grants.

Action

62. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung requested the Administration to clarify its claim that the resources for programmes at degree or above level would be reduced if sub-degree programmes were included in MGS. In reply, US(Ed) said that should sub-degree education be included in the Fifth MGS, the matching grants to be received by each of the 12 institutions for programmes at degree or above level would be lesser. That explained the need for priority allocation of resources.

63. The Chairman said that the fifth round of MGS should benefit sub-degree students as the first four rounds had already catered for the needs of students enrolled in programmes at degree or above level. She remarked that sub-degree students should not be discriminated in the allocation of public resources solely because they had not performed as good as other students in the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination. She called on the Administration to consider the views of members and revise the proposal before submitting it to the Finance Committee ("FC") for approval.

64. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that all members who had expressed views were in support of expanding MGS to cover sub-degree education. There was no excuse for the Administration not to provide matching grants for private donations for sub-degree education. He pointed out that even if private donations for sub-degree education were eligible for matching grants, many donors might not donate for sub-degree education. Nevertheless, the Administration should still change its policy so as to convey a positive message to the community of its recognition of sub-degree education. He further pointed out that as the UGC-funded institutions were offering both sub-degree and degree programmes, private donations secured for sub-degree education would benefit other students as well. He reiterated that the expansion of the Fifth MGS to include sub-degree education would not increase the financial commitment of the Government.

65. Mr Andrew LEUNG declared interest as the Chairman of the Vocational Training Council ("VTC"). He said that should the Administration change its policy to include sub-degree education for matching grants, VTC should be included as the eligible institution. He pointed out that VTC currently had about 50 000 full-time sub-degree students and had been able to raise private donations. He had all along been urging the Government to duly recognize the education needs of sub-degree students.

66. Follow-up the remarks of Mr Andrew LEUNG, the Chairman considered it necessary for the Panel to discuss issues concerning VTC's sub-degree and higher diploma students, as well as teachers' qualifications and remuneration.

67. DS(Ed)1 reiterated that the coverage of MGS had been expanded to include the eight UGC-funded and four self-financing tertiary institutions. For

Action

the UGC-funded institutions, they offered programmes at sub-degree, degree or above level. Private donations would be eligible for matching grants if they were used for activities within the ambit of recurrent grants provided by UGC, providing scholarships to students of UGC-funded programmes, supporting outgoing student exchange programmes for students enrolled in UGC-funded programmes, and capital works projects on campus in Hong Kong. In other words, sub-degree students could also be benefited. She further said that the policy was to expand MGS progressively.

68. Concluding the discussions, the Chairman requested the Administration to consider members' views and revise the proposal. She said that members raised no objection to the submission of the proposal to FC for consideration.

V. Review of the Financial Assistance Scheme for Designated Evening Adult Education Courses

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1233/09-10(05) and (06)]

69. Members noted the background brief entitled "Financial Assistance Scheme for Designated Evening Adult Education Courses" prepared by the LegCo Secretariat.

Briefing by the Administration

70. US(Ed) briefed members on the results of the review of the Financial Assistance Scheme for Designated Evening Adult Education Courses ("the Scheme") and the proposals for improving the Scheme from the 2010-2011 school year onwards as detailed in the Administration's paper. He took the opportunity to thank adult education students and organizations for their suggestions on ways to improve the Scheme in the past discussions.

Oral presentation by deputations

Hong Kong Association for Continuing Education
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1233/09-10(07)]

71. Mr Mervyn CHEUNG Man-ping presented the views of Hong Kong Association for Continuing Education as detailed in its submission.

Department of Continuing Education, The Lutheran Church - Hong Kong Synod
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1290/09-10(01)]

72. Mr CHEUNG Luk-kin presented the views of Department of Continuing Education, The Lutheran Church-Hong Kong Synod as detailed in its submission.

Action

*Former Yuen Long Government Evening Secondary School
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1290/09-10(02)]*

73. Mr WONG Hing-chuen presented the views of Former Yuen Long Government Evening Secondary School as detailed in its submission.

*Former Kowloon Technical Government Evening Secondary School
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1259/09-10(01)]*

74. Mr KO Yuet-ming presented the views of Former Kowloon Technical Government Evening Secondary School as detailed in its submission.

*Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1290/09-10(03)]*

75. Dr WU Siu-wai presented the views of Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers as detailed in its submission.

*Concern Group for Former Government Evening Schools
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1259/09-10(03)]*

76. Ms LEUNG Sau-ngor and Mr SIN Wing-lung presented the views of the Concern Group for Former Government Evening Schools as detailed in its submission. Ms LEUNG supplemented that the Administration should consider including adult learners in the School Textbook Assistance Scheme to alleviate their financial burden and subsidizing adult learners to study the Applied Learning courses under the New Senior Secondary ("NSS") academic structure. Mr SIN, an existing evening school student, said that he was shouldering high travelling cost between work and school, and urged the Administration to extend the Student Travel Subsidy Scheme to cover evening school students.

*A Group of Adult Students from Government Evening Secondary Schools
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1259/09-10(02)]*

77. Mr CHOI Kwong-fai presented the views of the Group as detailed in its submission. He specifically requested the Administration to consider providing school textbook assistance to evening school students with financial difficulties. According to his calculation, the annual expenses would be less than \$200,000 if school textbook assistance were provided to those eligible for half grant or full grant of tuition fee under the Scheme.

Provision of free evening secondary education

78. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan expressed support for the implementation of evening adult education courses. He recapitulated that such courses had been ceased from operation by the Administration from September 2003 despite the strong

Action

objection by members. When compared with the previous arrangements, the existing mode of operation of evening adult education courses was retrogressive and far from adequate to meet the education needs of adult learners. In his view, the Administration should provide 12-year free education for adult learners, including the new immigrants. He was disappointed that the Administration had all along accorded priority to prudent use of public funds over the education needs of adult learners.

79. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan suggested that as adult learners would be reimbursed for 30% of tuition fee irrespective of financial position and given their difficulty in making upfront payment of tuition fees, which were in the range of some \$7,000 to \$10,000 per year, the Administration should consider reducing tuition fees across the board by 30%. To achieve the principle of prudent use of public resources, a mechanism could be established under which the attendance of adult learners at evening courses should be reviewed at a three-month interval. Should adult learners fail to meet the attendance requirements, they would be required to pay the tuition fees for the next three months. He supported the requests of the deputations for extending the Student Travel Subsidy Scheme and the School Textbook Assistance Scheme to cover evening course students and relaxing the eligibility of the Scheme to cover adult learners repeating a level of study in the light of the new curriculum under the NSS structure.

80. US(Ed) pointed out that the purpose of the Scheme was to provide financial assistance for adult learners aged 17 or above studying evening secondary courses in the form of reimbursement of tuition fees. Adult learners were eligible for a basic subsidy of 30% of the tuition fees, regardless of their financial position if they fulfilled the attendance requirements. Furthermore, they would be eligible for either 50% or 100% reimbursement of tuition fees if they fulfilled the relevant attendance requirements and passed the means test administered by the Student Financial Assistance Agency ("SFAA"). He clarified that there was no ceiling on the expenditure under the Scheme, and the amount incurred was determined according to the attendance record and financial situation of the adult learners.

81. US(Ed) informed members that in view of the implementation of the NSS academic structure and after gauging the views of stakeholders, the Administration decided to provide tuition fee reimbursement for adult learners who had to repeat a year of study for the purpose of articulating to the NSS academic structure. He also pointed out that adult learners with financial hardship could apply for low-interest loans under the Non-means-tested Loan Scheme administered by SFAA. Those adult learners under the age of 22 and without a day-time job who were eligible for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") might apply for school grants (under the CSSA Scheme) which covered tuition fees and other related expenses. To balance the need for prudent use of public resources and address the financial hardship faced by adult learners, the Administration had proposed reimbursing tuition fees to eligible

Action

adult learners twice a year instead of once a year under the Scheme.

82. The Chairman considered the proposal for half-yearly reimbursement of tuition fees not sufficient to address the financial difficulties faced by adult learners. She pointed out that the interest rate under the Non-means-tested Loan Scheme was as high as about 6%. US(Ed) clarified that the current interest rate was about 3.5%. To provide assistance for adult learners, eligible adult learners were reimbursed 30%, 50% or 100% of tuition fees.

83. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that the Democratic Party had all along been concerned about the implementation of the Scheme. A number of new immigrants and young people had not attended or completed secondary education for various reasons, and they should be given a second opportunity to pursue higher education on the equity principle in view of the provision of 12-year free education to daytime students. The Democratic Party had clearly expressed to the Financial Secretary that in considering whether to support the Appropriation Bill 2010, its Members would take into account whether free evening secondary education would be provided and whether assistance would be provided for students attending private universities in the form of education voucher. He noted with concern that the Finance Committee ("FC") had approved the Scheme for three years from the 2005-2006 school year with a total provision of \$36 million but the unspent balance of the Scheme was some \$23 million. The estimated expenditure of the Scheme in the 2009-2010 school year was only some \$3.3 million. In his view, the large unspent balance reflected the failure of the Scheme.

84. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong pointed out that the average enrolment figures for the mainstream evening secondary schools (including courses operated under the Scheme and courses offered by other private evening schools) were about 5 000 students per year, and the average adult learner unit cost was about \$9,000 per year. The annual cost of providing free education to these students would be some \$45 million, about 2% of the \$2.3 billion surplus funds earmarked for the education sector but refunded to the Treasury in the 2009-2010 financial year. He further pointed out that the expenditure of evening secondary courses run by the Government was around \$70 million per year, which was substantially more than the current expenditure. Under these circumstances, he did not see the reason for not providing free evening secondary education.

85. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong elaborated that Secondary 6 was the basic qualification for pursuing higher education or career advancement. Lacking such qualification, a person would have no chance for upward mobility. He found it inadequate on the part of the Administration to simply continue to monitor the implications of the new academic structure on the demand for and operation of adult evening education to consider if further improvements were warranted. As a temporary measure, the Democratic Party was ready to accept

Action

an arrangement under which the Administration would purchase about 3 000 places from the course operators for adult learners and provide subsidy for the other 2 000 adult learners under the existing Scheme. Once financial resources were available, evening secondary education should be free.

86. The Chairman was of the view that the substantial increase of tuition fees after the outsourcing of evening adult education courses in September 2003 had resulted in significant decline in student enrolment, especially among adult women. She regretted that the Administration had all along neglected the education needs of adult women as well as their contributions to the economy. She requested the Administration to resume the responsibility for operating evening education courses, or at least to provide free evening secondary education.

87. In response, US(Ed) said that the Administration had taken note of the changing education needs of students, and had therefore implemented the provision of 12-year free education. Acknowledging that a number of adult learners had not attended or completed secondary education, the Administration implemented the Scheme for providing financial assistance to adult learners to attend evening adult education courses. He referred members to the other programmes in place such as Project Yi Jin ("PYJ"), Skills Upgrading Scheme and Continuing Education Fund which provided different pathways for adult learners. US(Ed) assured members that the Administration would continue to improve the Scheme as far as practicable. At the present stage, there was no plan for providing free evening secondary education.

88. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong stressed that there were no justifications for not providing free evening secondary education. Although various programmes were in place providing different pathways for adult learners, Secondary 6 was the basic qualification for further study and employment. As the average unit cost for attending evening adult education courses was about \$9,000 as opposed to the average student unit cost of some \$40,000 for day-time Secondary 6, the great disparity in resources allocation between these two groups pointed to the need for free evening secondary education.

89. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung recalled that the Administration had decided to cease the operation of government evening schools in September 2003, in the face of strong request for the continuation of the courses by adult learners, in order to save some \$70 million. He commented that it was irresponsible for the Administration to encourage adult learners to pursue other programmes as such programmes could be taken at any stage of life while secondary education was basic in order to pursue further studies. The improved Scheme was imperfect as it failed to include primary education. Indeed, the improved Scheme was retrogressive as its annual expenditure had been reduced from some \$70 million under the previous arrangement to some \$10.7 million.

Action

90. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung remarked that the Government had been promoting knowledge-based economy. In his view, it was equally important to promote the value of culture which helped adult learners pursue career advancement, adapt to the community and contribute to the development of Hong Kong. Drawing on his experience of teaching evening adult education courses, Mr LEUNG said that a number of female adult learners worked very hard to complete secondary and even tertiary education and then became self-support. He strongly requested the provision of free evening secondary education and objected to the proposals.

91. The Chairman requested the Administration to clarify whether it was viable for adult learners to pursue further education without completing secondary education.

92. In response, US(Ed) said that the Government had all along encouraged life-long learning. However, basic education and adult evening education were different. While it was the Government's responsibility to provide free basic education for the younger generation, the provision of free evening education for adult learners would not be considered as adult learners had the earning ability. Taking into account the views of members and the requests of adult learners, the Administration had proposed to improve the Scheme by making it as a recurrent programme, increasing the number of designated centres throughout the territory, and reimbursing tuition fees to eligible adult learners twice a year instead of once a year.

93. As regards the Applied Learning courses under the NSS academic structure, US(Ed) explained that adult learners could take the Applied Learning courses under the NSS academic structure, and the course providers were allowed to include the operating cost of such courses in the tuition fees to be charged. Tuition fees would be reimbursed to adult learners in accordance with the existing mechanism. Under the improved Scheme, course operators could propose to use their own centres as possible premises for operation.

94. Dr Priscilla LEUNG did not agree with the Administration's view to classify learners into the younger generation who should receive 12-year free education and adult learners who should pay for adult evening education. In her view, adult learners should be treated equitably in the same manner as was the younger generation provided that they had yet to have the opportunity to receive basic education. Basic education offered a wide range of opportunities for adult learners to pursue higher education and tertiary courses such as those related to history or sociology. She considered that the Administration should take into account the needs of adult learners for basic education in the allocation of public resources.

95. Referring to the views of Mr SIN Wing-lung, Dr Priscilla LEUNG requested the Administration to consider providing adult learners with travel and

Action

school textbook subsidies as many of them earned little income. Noting that some members did not support the proposals, she invited the deputations to indicate their stance on the proposed improvements to the Scheme.

96. Mr Mervyn CHEUNG Man-ping said that adult learners had protested strongly against the cessation of the operation of the government evening schools in 2003. He regretted that the former Education and Manpower Bureau had made some unfair comments on adult learners such as poor academic results, low attendance, and being too old to take History and Geography which were not practical subjects. He shared the view that without basic education, adult learners could not progress to tertiary education or vocational training. He would definitely welcome the resumption of government evening secondary schools which had enrolled more than 10 000 students. With the outsourcing of evening courses and the subsequent increase of tuition fees, the enrolment of adult learners had been declining. Unfortunately, the former Education and Manpower Bureau had made use of this to justify the cessation of the government evening secondary schools. Mr CHEUNG appreciated the efforts made by US(Ed) and other officials in the Education Bureau ("EDB") in improving the Scheme. In order to facilitate more adult learners to pursue evening secondary education, he supported the proposals to improve the Scheme.

97. Referring to his submission to the Panel at its meeting on 26 March 2008, Dr WU Siu-wai said that he had expressed the view on the need to eradicate illiteracy among adults, as promulgated at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2000 World Education Forum. He pointed out that eradication of illiteracy among adults was also an important agenda in the Mainland. He regretted that the Government had all along neglected its responsibility for providing basic education for adult learners. To alleviate the financial burden of adult learners, especially those who were receiving 50% tuition fee reimbursement, the Administration should provide them with travel and school textbook subsidies.

98. Dr WU Siu-wai also opined that other than the five schools/centres operated by the approved course operators under the Scheme, there were NGOs and private operators running evening adult education courses. To balance the needs of different stakeholders, he considered it important to allow NGOs and private operators to continue their operation. Dr WU expressed support for the improved Scheme, and suggested that a review on the Scheme should be conducted, say after two years.

99. Mr KO Yuet-ming considered it important to monitor the operation of evening education. In his view, to safeguard the prudent use of public resources, adult learners should not be allowed to repeat study of a level more than three times. Referring to his experience, he did not agree that adult learners had different pathways. Secondary education qualification was essential for further

Action

study and career advancement. He suggested maintaining at least three schools/centres for providing primary education for aged people and female immigrants. He considered it an age discrimination for providing 12-year free education for the younger generation but not for adults.

100. Ms LEUNG Sau-ngor said that from her personal experience, she considered evening adult education very important in enabling her to find a gainful employment. She expressed support for the improved Scheme under which the number of designated centres would be increased from five to a maximum of 15 (or one to three centres in each of the five regions) throughout the territory, and this would greatly help adult learners. In view of the time required for inviting interested course operators to operate evening secondary courses, she called on the expeditious approval of the improved Scheme in order to benefit as many adult learners as possible. She also called for the provision of travel and school textbook allowances and a review of the Scheme after one or two years with a view to providing free evening secondary education.

101. At the invitation of the Chairman who had to leave the meeting for a short while, the Deputy Chairman took the chair.

102. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che pointed out the common characteristics of adult learners. He said that most of them were employed, eager to study but might need to cease study because of change of job or residential address. Adult learners always preferred to study evening English courses. He noted with concern that the education needs of adult learners were not fully met. Adult learners were not provided with tuition fee reimbursement for repeat of study. According to his understanding, adult learners could not sit for the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education ("HKDSE") examination as private candidates unless they had attempted once under the arrangement of schools. This would mean that they had to complete the secondary education in school in order to sit for the examination arranged by schools.

103. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che suggested that to resolve the problem of low enrolment of students which might render the courses unviable, instead of reimbursing the tuition fee to adult learners, the Administration should consider covering the administrative costs incurred by course operators so that they could recruit teachers in accordance with student number and run the courses irrespective of the enrolment situation. Mr CHEUNG said that in the long run, there should be online secondary education so that adult learners could undertake self-study and attend the HKDSE examination.

104. Mr WONG Sing-chi said that the Scheme was insufficient to meet the needs of adult learners attending evening education courses. The Administration should recognize that many adults had not attended or completed secondary education for various reasons. With the implementation of the 12-year free education, adult learners should be given an opportunity for completing the basic

Action

education. Referring to the passage of the motion on "Adding impetus for promoting upward social mobility" at the Council meeting on 17 March 2010, Mr WONG highlighted the concerns of Members on the need to expand the existing education programmes and enhance the quality of education for the whole community.

105. Mr WONG Sing-chi further drew on the experience of himself, his wife and friends to illustrate the success of adult learners in evening study and career. He pointed out that many new immigrants had a genuine need to attend evening secondary education because the academic structure of Hong Kong was different from that of the Mainland, and they should be provided with education opportunity in order to contribute to the community. He enquired whether the Continuing Education Fund ("CEF") could be extended to cover basic education, and whether the maximum amount of tuition fee reimbursement could be increased from \$10,000 to \$20,000.

106. US(Ed) reiterated the Administration's commitment to adult evening education as shown in the proposal to make the Scheme a recurrent programme. US(Ed) stressed that while it was the Administration's responsibility to provide free basic education for the school-aged children, it would not consider the provision of free evening education for adults as they had the earning ability to pay for their education. The Administration considered it necessary to balance the needs of different stakeholders. Financial assistance had been provided for adult learners in the form of reimbursement of tuition fees by 30%, 50% or 100% according to the prescribed eligibility criteria.

107. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan suggested the removal of the requirement for passing the means test administered by SFAA in order to be eligible for the 50% or 100% reimbursement of tuition fees. He said that given the small expenditure on the Scheme, the Administration should at least increase the reimbursement to 50% or 100% of tuition fees.

108. In response, US(Ed) said that the Administration had taken into account the views of members and the relevant organizations in proposing the improvements to the Scheme. One major improvement was the proposed running of the Scheme as a recurrent programme. The application of the means test for reimbursement of 50% or 100% of tuition fee was in line with the existing policy for other financial assistance schemes. US(Ed) believed that with increased coverage of the Scheme, there would be room for reducing tuition fees for evening education courses operated at some of the designated centres.

109. While appreciating the efforts made by US(Ed) and other government officials of EDB in improving the Scheme, Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung remained of the view that the Administration should allocate more resources and make further improvement to the Scheme. He said that the improvements were only small steps taken, and called on the Administration to formulate a road map for

Action

reviewing and further improving the Scheme.

110. US(Ed) assured members of the Administration's commitment in education. He pointed out that different programmes had been put in place to assist adult learners, such as CEF which provided fee reimbursement for attending English courses. The Administration would continue to review the Scheme.

111. Dr Priscilla LEUNG remarked that the crux of the issue was the mindset of the Administration. She did not agree to the Administration's view that 12-year free education should be provided for the younger generation but not for the adults. She considered that the quality of Hong Kong citizens was important. Citizens had to receive basic education in order to raise their quality. She reiterated her view that the Administration should attach equal importance to the education needs of the younger generation and adults and allocate resources equitably to meet the needs of both.

112. Mr Mervyn CHEUNG Man-ping thanked EDB for its hard work in improving the Scheme. He called on the Administration to consider further improvements to the Scheme as suggested by members. He was worried that as the Administration had to conduct an open exercise to invite interested course providers to operate evening secondary courses under the Scheme, by the time all the procedures had been completed, there would be little time left before the 2010-2011 school year for preparation work including enrolment. He called on the Administration to help promote the courses to be offered by the prospective course providers. Mr CHEUNG disagreed with Mr KO Yuet-ming's observations that many adult learners did not wholeheartedly pursue evening education and had other improper motives. He said that he and a large number of adult learners had studied hard in evening schools.

113. Mr KO Yuet-ming said that he only shared his experience with members, and he did see some adult learners who had attended evening schools with improper motives. His concern was that public resources should not be wasted. He expressed support for the provision of 12-year free evening education.

114. Mr CHOI Kwong-fai said that at the Panel meeting held on 28 April 2003, the Administration had replied in response to the Chairman's remark that it would review CEF with a view to including more programmes at the basic levels, and take appropriate steps to ensure that adult learners would not be deprived of education due to a lack of means. He asked whether the Administration had conducted any review on CEF since then; and if not, the reason for not doing so; and if yes, the programmes that had been included in CEF.

115. Mr SIN Wing-lung indicated acceptance of and urged the early implementation of the improved Scheme as it would provide more designated centres which would help reduce his travelling expenses.

Action

116. The Chairman reiterated her view that the Administration should resume the operation of government evening schools. The provision of basic education had its social benefits as it could help adult learners to find employment, keep contact with the community and improve their living skills. She acknowledged the efforts made by US(Ed) in improving the Scheme. She reiterated her request for the provision of more financial assistance for adult learners, in particular in paying tuition fees.

Conclusion

117. The Deputy Chairman invited members to indicate their stance on the proposed improvements to the Scheme.

118. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that he did not support piece-meal improvements to the Scheme only. In his view, 12-year free education should be extended to cover adult learners attending evening adult education courses on the principle of equity. He indicated that he would abstain from voting.

119. The Chairman, Mr WONG Sing-chi and Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che did not consider it necessary for members to indicate their stance on the proposals as members had already expressed their views on the inadequacy of the Scheme. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung added that as the Administration might make further enhancement to the Scheme, members should not be requested to indicate their support or otherwise for the Scheme.

120. At the invitation of the Deputy Chairman, the Clerk referred members to the Administration's paper the purpose of which was to brief members on the results of the review of the Scheme and seek members' views on the proposals for improving the Scheme. The Clerk said that the proposals did not involve the seeking of funding approval by the FC.

121. In conclusion, the Deputy Chairman said that the Panel did not have a unanimous view on the proposals.

VI. Any other business

122. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 7:38 pm.