

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Prices of school textbooks and development of electronic learning resources

Purpose

At the meeting of the LegCo Panel on Education held on 8 February 2010, the Administration was requested to provide the criteria for selecting the schools to participate in the Pilot Scheme on e-Learning (the Scheme) and the outcome of the discussion with textbook publishers on the issue of copyright of e-Learning resources. Separately, in response to a letter dated 4 May 2010 from Hong Kong Education Publishers Association and the Anglo-Chinese Textbook Publishers Organisation, the Administration was requested to provide written information concerning its discussion with publishers associations on the prices of school textbooks. This information note sets out the necessary information.

Pilot Scheme on e-Learning in schools

2. The Steering Committee on Strategic Development of Information Technology in Education (SC) has been expanded to advise and oversee the implementation of the Scheme. Its membership includes representatives from the school sector, the tertiary institutes, parents, IT Sector and education publishing sector. The SC met in April 2010 to discuss the selection criteria for selecting the schools to participate in the Scheme.

3. The SC considers that in selecting pilot schools, it is important to have a set of selection criteria to assess the school proposals. Selection of pilot schools will be based on the merit of their proposals and their commitment to develop and promote e-Learning. The SC has endorsed that the principles underpinning the proposed strategies, pedagogies and related curriculum design; benefits to learning-and-teaching through collaboration; sustainability and scalability; school's IT in education development capacity; evaluation and feedback mechanism for the project; effectiveness of the proposed dissemination of process and practices, as well as any other relevant factors, will form the basis for selection of the pilot schools. On the other hand, noting that the participating schools will be the research and development centres and change agents to facilitate future wider adoption and adaptation of e-Learning, the SC considers it equally important to maximize variations amongst the pilot schools in terms of school and curriculum contexts as well as partnership arrangements. Following this, the Education Bureau (EDB) announced the above criteria vide a circular memorandum to schools in April 2010. We also provided schools with a briefing session in May 2010 to explain the implementation details of the Scheme, including clarifications on the selection criteria.

Copyright of e-Learning resources

4. With regard to the discussion with textbook publishers on the issue of

copyright of e-Learning resources, we plan to include this as an agenda item on the next Textbook Committee meeting which will be scheduled in September 2010. The outcome will be reported to the Education Panel once available.

Prices of school textbooks

5. With regard to the discussion with publishers associations on the prices of school textbooks, publishers have raised that they need to clear the copy-right of a large number of teaching resources which they have provided to schools free of charge, and they have great difficulty to complete the task if the “debundling of textbooks and teaching and learning resources for pricing policy” (debundling policy) is to be implemented in the 2010/11 school year. In view of the publishers’ difficulties encountered and the effort made by publishers in freezing textbook price for the 2010/11 school year, EDB has decided to postpone the implementation of the debundling policy one year, i.e. it will be implemented in the 2011/12 school year. However, EDB will implement the “five-year rule of no revision” rule from the 2010/11 school year onwards as recommended by the Working Group on Textbooks and e-Learning Development.

6. EDB will continue the discussion with publishers associations to establish a detailed arrangement for the implementation of the debundling policy in the 2011/12 school year.

7. Meanwhile, EDB has appropriately revised the guidelines and principles on the selection of textbooks and learning materials in the school circular “Notes on Selection of Textbooks and Learning Materials for Use in Schools” (CM No. 87/2010) this year, particularly drawing schools’ attention to:

- (a) Schools are not allowed to accept any donations, or any form of benefits from textbook publishers or textbook retailers such as equipment on free loan, free teaching aids and supplementary teaching resources (e.g. overhead projector, television set, computer hardware, computer software), cash grants for purchase of equipment or teaching aids, free on site services to schools, funding for school functions, speech day floral baskets, advertisements for school publications, scholarships, prizes, etc, so as not to increase the cost of publishers or that the choice of textbooks to be in any way influenced. In addition, teachers should not accept advantages or luxurious entertainments offered during the marketing activities of textbooks so as to avoid public criticism and hence adversely affecting the reputation of the school and the image of teachers.
- (b) Prior to the implementation of the debundling of textbooks, learning and teaching materials for pricing policy, schools should use effectively the teaching resources provided by the publishers and recycling them within schools as far as possible to alleviate publishers’ costs, and to maintain stable textbook prices.