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Panel on Education

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the special meeting on 30 April 2010**

Education for young drug abusers

Purpose

This paper summarizes the issues raised by the Panel on Education ("the Panel") concerning the provision of education for young drug abusers.

Background

Prevalence of drug among youth

2. In the past few years, Hong Kong had seen a significant rise in the number of young people under the age of 21 abusing psychotropic substances. The increase reversed the trend of overall decline in the total population of drug abusers in the past decade. The total number of reported young drug abusers increased from 2 578 in 2006 to 3 430 in 2008, representing an increase of 33%, and the mean age of first-time abusers under the age of 21 was 15.

3. According to the findings of the recently released "2008-2009 Survey of Drug Use among Students" conducted by Narcotics Division of the Security Bureau, drug prevalence among secondary students for the age group of 12 or below was 4.6 %, compared with 2.4% in the 2004-2005 survey. The percentage of lifetime drug-taking secondary students increased from 3.3% in 2004-2005 to 4.3% in 2008-2009, and that of drug-taking secondary students in the last 30 days of the survey increased from 0.8% in 2004-2005 to 1.5% in 2008-2009. The survey also confirmed the trend on the lowering of age of drug abusers.

4. In his 2007-2008 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced the appointment of the Secretary for Justice to lead a high level inter-departmental Task Force on Youth Drug Abuse ("the Task Force") to tackle the youth drug abuse problem. The Task Force, set up in October 2007, released its Report on

11 November 2008. The Report contained some 70 recommendations spanning the five prongs of the anti-drug policy, namely, preventive education and publicity, treatment and rehabilitation, law enforcement and legislation, external co-operation and research. In terms of treatment and rehabilitation strategy for young drug abusers, the Task Force recommended, among other things, enhancement of downstream programmes in terms of capacity and sophistication, as well as reintegration of young drug abusers into society. The strategy had been further developed and taken forward in the context of the Fifth Three Year Plan on Treatment and Rehabilitation Services in Hong Kong (2009-2011) released in April 2009. The recommendations put forward by the Three Year Plan regarding student drug abusers are in **Appendix I**.

Existing services for youth drug abusers

5. Under the existing mechanism, when students are found to be abusing drugs, schools are advised to notify the parents concerned, consult the respective Police School Liaison Officers and refer the case to school social workers and the student guidance personnel of schools for counselling and follow-up services.

6. High risk or confirmed cases will be referred to counselling centres for psychotropic substance abusers ("CCPSAs"), which are cluster-based, designated units providing preventive education services and community-based treatment and rehabilitation support to psychotropic substance abusers. There are currently seven CCPSAs operated by non-government organizations ("NGOs"), as well as two centres run by Caritas Lok Heep Club, that serve the whole territory. Students can continue their education in their original schools while receiving treatment and rehabilitation.

7. In cases where students wish to seek voluntary residential treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration through a medical or non-medical model (such as gospel affiliation model), they may consider residential drug treatment and rehabilitation centres and halfway houses ("DTRCs") operated by NGOs. Since 1995, the Education Bureau ("EDB") has been providing subvention for non-profit making voluntary agencies running DTRCs to operate educational programmes for young drug abusers aged 18 or below, preparing them for continuation of schooling or employment upon full rehabilitation. The educational programme is funded at a rate of \$320,000 per annum for each unit of 10 students. In June 2009, 18 such educational programmes were operated in nine centres run by five NGOs.

8. The drug treatment programmes in DTRCs subvented by the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") normally last for about 12 months. Students after receiving drug treatment may resume schooling in mainstream schools or pursue other programmes, such as courses run by the Vocational Training Council. If there are difficulties in placing students back to mainstream schools, EDB will offer placement service and adopt a low profile approach so as to avoid labelling effect on the one hand and to assist the students to integrate into normal school life on the other.

9. Should students continue to have behavioural, emotional or family problems, they may be placed to Schools for Social Development ("SSDs") through a central referral mechanism. SSDs provide intensive counselling and education guidance for the students with a view to helping them tide over their transient development difficulties and strengthening their life skills. Students with improvement will be reintegrated into mainstream schools. Currently, there are seven aided SSDs providing about 1 000 school places under the subvention of EDB. SWD also provides subvention for on-site residential care for students of six of these schools, including two for girls and four for boys.

10. For students who have committed drug-related or other crimes, professional intervention and support may be rendered through the Community Support Service Scheme and the Family Conference Scheme for those subject to the Police Superintendent's Discretion Scheme.

Deliberations of the Panel

11. In the current Legislative Council term, the Panel had held five meetings to discuss issues relating to youth drug abuse and had invited deputations to present views at two of these meetings. The provision of education for young drug abusers was one of the major concerns raised by the deputations and members. The relevant issues are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

Christian Zheng Sheng College

Relocation

12. Members noted that the Christian Zheng Sheng Association ("the Association") operated a private school co-located with two DTRCs at Ha Keng, Lantau to provide both drug treatment and educational programmes to school-aged drug abusers. The Association was established in 1985 and had since then run six DTRCs at Ha Keng, Tai O, Mui Wo and Cheung Chau. The private school at Ha Keng was registered in 1998 under the Education Ordinance (Cap. 279) and was named Christian Zheng Sheng College ("CZSC"). About 90% of its students were admitted to CZSC by court order, and most of them were drug addicts.

13. CZSC had two registered classes with a total of 30 places. The two co-located DTRCs had a total intake capacity of 64 inmates and were operating under a Certificate of Exemption issued by the Director of Social Welfare under the Drug Dependent Persons Treatment and Rehabilitation Centres (Licensing) Ordinance (Cap. 566). The facilities in CZSC were considered below the acceptable standard. To relieve its overcrowding and unsatisfactory conditions as well as to address the safety concern of its present site at Ha Keng, CZSC submitted a relocation application to the Administration in 2007. The Administration had agreed in principle to relocate CZSC to the former New

Territories Heung Yee Kuk Southern District Secondary School ("ex-SDSS") in Mui Wo. However, the relocation plan was opposed by some Mui Wo residents who considered that the ex-SDSS site should be used as a secondary school for local children as many of them had to travel long hours to go to schools outside Mui Wo.

14. Although members had expressed diverse views on whether the ex-SDSS was a suitable permanent site for relocation of CZSC, they agreed on the need for its relocation. Some members considered the ex-SDSS not an ideal site as it had only 24 classrooms and could not accommodate the boarding facilities of CZSC. Moreover, the structural requirements of classrooms and boarding facilities were very different. Members urged the Administration to consult the Heung Yee Kuk, Islands District Council and Mui Wo residents to resolve the relocation matter. Members stressed that the need of Mui Wo residents for local school places should not be overlooked. Members noted from the media report in August 2009 that the school funds of CZSC might have been funnelled to the Association, which allegedly had been making some questionable investments in the Mainland and Japan. While appreciating that the clarification of the matter would take time, members considered that the safety concern of the existing site of CZSC had to be addressed. To expeditiously resolve the problem, there was a view that the Association should open a separate account for CZSC and transfer the existing assets of CZSC thereto. Thereafter, the Administration could make the relocation arrangements, provide subvention to CZSC, and monitor its services. There was also a view that as the geographical location of CZSC provided a favourable environment for students receiving residential drug treatment services, the existing centres should be renovated and redeveloped in-situ. The crux of the matter was the readiness of the Administration to recognize CZSC as a treatment and rehabilitation centre-cum-school and provide resources for it.

15. The Administration stressed that it supported in principle the relocation of CZSC. However, in the second half of 2009, some issues, including the background and operating account of the services provided by the Association, the transparency and accountability of the operation after relocation, had been raised. The Administration considered that these issues had to be addressed before the relocation was taken forward. The Administration had received a letter from the Association in January 2010 indicating that the process of clarifying the operating account was still in progress. The Administration had been urging the Association to submit its audited accounts on many occasions, but as of March 2010, the information had yet to be provided.

16. The Administration advised that it could not respond on behalf of the Association on the proposal for opening a separate account for CZSC. As regards the proposal for redeveloping the centres in-situ, the Administration pointed out that a similar proposal had been put forward by members of the community before but could not be taken forward as the issue of temporary relocation of the centres during the redevelopment/renovation period could not be resolved. The provision of resources for the purpose was another concern. In the Administration's view,

the concern about resources might be addressed with the proposed injection of \$3 billion into the Beat Drug Fund and if private donations could be secured. The Administration would welcome any proposals for redevelopment of the centres at the existing sites provided that the issues about temporary relocation and resources could be resolved.

17. Members sought clarification on the actions taken by the Administration and the information required in relation to the relocation proposal. The Administration advised that since the end of 2009, it had been requesting the Association to provide information in relation to the operation of the new senior secondary curriculum including the estimated budget, tuition fees, manpower of teachers, curriculum plan, operation details, etc. The relocation would involve not only the school section but also the facilities of treatment and rehabilitation. It was therefore necessary for the Association to provide information with regard to its mode of operation, management arrangement as well as transparency and accountability after the relocation to address the concerns of the local community raised during the consultation process. The Association would have to take up refurbishing works at the ex-SDSS site should the centres be relocated there. The project proponent should be a charitable organization under the Inland Revenue Ordinance, and had to submit yearly audited accounts and set up a management structure with the participation of local residents to enhance the accountability and transparency of its operation. The Administration assured members that in case the relocation could not be effected and if the students came under immediate danger, they could be relocated to other treatment centres with gospel affiliations.

Provision of resources

18. Apart from the relocation issue, the provision of resources for CZSC was another area of concern to members. Members were given to understand that the students of CZSC were recipients of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") Scheme, and their CSSA payments were used for settlement of their school fees and boarding and living expenses. Members expressed serious concern about the Administration's inaction in providing appropriate assistance to CZSC. Members considered that the current subsidy policy was confined to grammar schools and the role of special schools, such as rehabilitation centres-cum-schools, had not been duly recognized. As CZSC was currently operated with a private school licence, members sought clarification on whether the Administration supported the operation of CZSC as a school or a DTRC at the ex-SDSS site.

19. The Administration indicated that it fully supported CZSC's relocation together with its existing private school registration. There were currently no policies or prescribed procedures regarding the provision of resources to rehabilitation centre-cum-schools such as CZSC. The Administration acknowledged the need to explore new services to meet the specific needs of young drug abusers. Being the only rehabilitation centre-cum-school, CZSC served as an example to develop complementary services comprising drug treatment and

rehabilitation programmes as well as education programmes to school-aged youngsters. Since rehabilitation centre-cum-school was a new model, the Administration considered it important to consider the matter from a holistic and integrated manner and examine the relocation plan and the future mode of operation of CZSC in allocating resources to it.

School places in Mui Wo

20. Members considered that the need of CZSC for relocation and the need of Mui Wo residents for local school places were not opposing and both needs should be addressed without delay. The education needs of Mui Wo students could not be met by the mere provision of school places in Tung Chung, Cheung Chau and the Hong Kong Island as Mui Wo students had to spend considerable time and money travelling to school. Members noted the call of Mui Wo residents as well as Island District Council members for the establishment of a local secondary school and the lack of local secondary school places being one of the reasons for their rejection of the relocation of CSZC to the ex-SDSS site. Members requested the Administration to seriously consider providing local secondary school places for Mui Wo students.

21. The Administration clarified that there were sufficient public sector primary schools in Mui Wo to meet the demand of local students. Mui Wo School offered 29 primary school places and Bui O Public School offered 28, and the primary student population of Mui Wo had been stable in recent years. At the secondary level, about 50 Primary Six ("P6") students in Mui Wo took part in the Secondary School Places Allocation System every year and this student number had remained stable for the past eight years. As only 50 students required secondary school places in Mui Wo, such a small number of students could not sustain the operation of a secondary school with at least three classes at each level, a scale marginally viable to offer a broad and balanced curriculum under the new senior secondary academic structure.

22. Members called on the Administration to adopt a new mindset in considering the provision of school places for Mui Wo residents. Members pointed out that there were more than 100 P6 students in Mui Wo seeking secondary school places annually. The reason for the low participation of Mui Wo P6 students in the Secondary School Places Allocation was the absence of a quality local secondary school. Having regard to the remoteness of Mui Wo and the long travelling time taken by local students to go to school, members stressed the need for the Administration to relax its policies and to build a secondary school in the area.

23. The Administration clarified that the ex-SDSS was a government school, and its teaching quality was on par with that of other public sector schools. It was at the request of Lantau residents that the Administration had expanded the Island school net to allow Mui Wo students to choose schools in other districts. The closure of the ex-SDSS was the result of a low intake of students. The

Administration was willing to consider any proposals for a new school put forward by the residents of Mui Wo as well as South Lantau provided that the proposed school could attract a sufficient number of students for sustainable operation.

Education for young drug abusers during rehabilitation

24. Members stressed the importance of providing formal education to young drug abusers while they were receiving rehabilitation treatment. Members pointed out that like other school-aged children, drug abusers were entitled to 12-year free education. Some deputations also opined that the Administration had not respected the educational needs of young drug abusers and deprived them of the right to education.

25. The Administration clarified that the service mode adopted by CZSC, i.e. treatment and rehabilitation centre-cum-school, did not fall within the category of special schools. The main function of treatment and rehabilitation centre-cum-school was to provide drug treatment and rehabilitation services to youth drug abusers instead of providing formal education. Nevertheless, the Administration acknowledged that formal study in mainstream schools might not be appropriate for youth drug abusers while receiving treatment and rehabilitation, and would look into new ways to expand the existing support measures.

26. The Administration also advised that there were about 40 DTRCs providing residential treatment services for school-age drug abusers. Since 1995, NGOs running DTRCs could apply for subvention from EDB to operate education programmes, i.e. Chinese, English and Mathematics, plus other complementary education activities, for young drug abusers aged 18 or below, preparing them for continuation of schooling or employment upon full rehabilitation. As the number of school-age drug abusers continued to rise, the Administration had been encouraging operators of DTRCs to provide wider and more structured education programmes. Students aged 14 or above who had committed drug-related offences would receive education at drug addiction treatment centres operated by the Correctional Services Department.

27. Members pointed out that some youth drug abusers chose to stay in CZSC to finish education after drug rehabilitation. As such, the Administration should not regard the provision of education in CZSC as transient in nature, and should enhance the provision of education programmes to students in CZSC. There was a view that the Administration should study the experiences of CZSC and formulate a new mode of services for other DTRCs to follow.

28. While acknowledging the effective mode of services provided by CSZC, the Administration considered that such a mode might not be suitable for all DTRCs as they had their specific backgrounds and their inmates had different needs. The Administration stressed that the 40 DTRCs provided about 1 600 places but only a small proportion of drug abusers required residential treatment services. The majority of them received community-based treatment, such as those provided by

CCPSAs, outreaching service, and doctors. DTRCs were in the process of enhancing their educational programmes, and the programmes provided by some DTRCs without subvention were of a fairly good standard. The Administration would later invite operators of DTRCs to suggest new and effective mode of residential treatment services. In considering their proposals, the Administration would look at the proposed educational programmes, counselling and medical support, and pre-vocational training, etc. The Administration stressed that flexibility should be allowed for operators to provide different residential treatment services which suited their backgrounds and needs.

Education for young drug abusers after rehabilitation

29. Members were given to understand that students after drug rehabilitation had difficulties in resuming normal schooling. It was reported in the media that only 5% of the rehabilitated students were able to reintegrate into normal school life.

30. According to the Administration, DTRCs had all along been provided with resources to organise educational programmes for school-aged young drug abusers. Upon the completion of the educational programmes, the respective DTRCs would, having regard to the interest and ability of the students, plan for their future exit paths. Some students might choose to resume mainstream schooling while others might prefer undertaking vocational training or starting an employment.

31. As of June 2009, 140 young drug abusers were receiving educational programmes as well as vocational training at various DTRCs. Of these, more than 90% were above the age of 15. For those who preferred mainstream schooling, the respective NGOs would contact the schools and arrange for the students to return to normal school life. The respective NGOs would seek assistance from the Administration where the rehabilitated students encountered difficulties in resuming mainstream schooling. To enhance the referral mechanism, the Administration was promoting the formation of a network of schools which shared the same belief in helping rehabilitated students. The Administration stressed that the low percentage of rehabilitated young drug abusers returning to normal schooling might be due to their preference for vocational training.

32. Some members suggested reinstating the operation of practical schools to cater for the specific needs of at-risk students who might not be suitable for the mainstream school curriculum. The Administration clarified that although the curriculum and academic structure of practical schools had been aligned with those of the mainstream schools, their specific role in catering for at-risk students still remained. Practical schools maintained its referral mechanism and the related manpower of school social workers were also transferred to the respective NGOs designated by the schools concerned. These schools continued to maintain a small class size and offer boarding services to needy students.

33. The Administration also advised that Regional Education Offices and the Non-Attendance Team of EDB would follow up every student aged below 15

leaving school and ensure that the student concerned would return to normal schooling. In recent years, follow up services to students aged 15 or above had also been stepped up.

Latest development

34. The CZSC announced at a press conference held on 11 April 2010 that it had received a letter from the Independent Commission Against Corruption dated 22 March 2010 advising that no evidence of corruption or malpractice had been found after an investigation into the Association and CZSC had been conducted.

35. It was reported in the media that the accounting firm appointed by the Association to separate its accounts from those of CZSC had decided to resign from the task due to internal reasons.

Relevant papers

36. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in **Appendix II**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
26 April 2010

**Recommendations on treatment and rehabilitation services
for student drug abusers in
The Fifth Three Year Plan on Treatment and Rehabilitation Services
in Hong Kong (2009-2011)**

- (a) EDB should, apart from increasing service capacity, encourage development and advancement of new or proven service models that would better address the needs due to the changing drug scene. Quoting the Christian Zheng Sheng Association as an example, one idea is to develop more complementary services comprising drug treatment and rehabilitation programmes as well as educational programmes to school-aged youngsters. Another idea is providing shorter-term treatment and rehabilitation programmes for young psychotropic substance abusers which may cause less disruption to their work or schooling, help break the vicious cycle of those early experimenting with drugs, and can better motivate them to seek assistance;
- (b) EDB should continue to provide subvention for non-government organizations running residential drug treatment and rehabilitation centres and halfway houses to operate educational programmes for young drug abusers aged 18 or below and keep reviewing the programme operation to meet the changing needs of young drug abusers;
- (c) EDB and SWD should take into account the special educational needs of students rehabilitating from drug problems when they consider the service demand and enhancement for Schools for Social Development; and
- (d) The placement services by Regional Education Offices and Non-Attendance Team of EDB should continue to help rehabilitated students return to normal schooling.

Source: Extracted from the Administration paper [CB(2)2058/08-09(01)] provided in July 2009.

Relevant papers on education for young drug abusers

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Legislative Council	29-30.4.2009	Motion on "Concern about the youth drug problem" Hansard (English) (page 35-112) Progress report
Panel on Education	25.5.2009	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	17.6.2009 (Agenda item II)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	2.7.2009	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	8.9.2009	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	18.3.2010 (Agenda item IV)	Minutes Agenda

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