

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)88/11-12
(The minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Tuesday, 21 June 2011, at 10:45 am
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Hon Starry LEE Wai-king, JP (Chairman)
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, SBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, GBS, JP
Prof Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
Hon KAM Nai-wai, MH
Dr Hon LAM Tai-fai, BBS, JP
Hon Paul CHAN Mo-po, MH, JP
Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG Mei-fun
Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che
Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon Tanya CHAN
Hon WONG Yuk-man
- Members absent** : Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Dr Hon Samson TAM Wai-ho, JP

Public Officers attending : Mr Michael SUEN, GBS, JP
Secretary for Education

Mr Kenneth CHEN, JP
Under Secretary for Education

Dr K K CHAN
Deputy Secretary for Education (5)

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

Attendance by invitation : Subsidized Primary Schools Council

Mr CHEUNG Yung-pong
Chairman

Mr SIN Kim-wai
Vice-Chairman

The Hong Kong Institute of Family Education

Mr TIK Chi-yuen
Chairman

Mr YU Wing-fai
Director

Hong Kong Parents Association Ltd.

Mr LAI Tsang-hing
Chairman

Mr Kenny TSUI Ka-keung
Committee Member

The Anglo-Chinese Textbook Publishers Organisation

Mr Edward WONG Sing
Chairman

Mr POON Chi-wai
Representative

Hong Kong Educational Publishers Association

Ms WONG Han
Representative

Mr SHEK Kwok-kei
Council Member

Consumer Council

Ms Connie LAU
Chief Executive

Ms Lillian MAK
Research & Trade Practices Officer

Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of
Hong Kong

Mr Vincent CHENG
Education Policy Deputy Spokesperson

關注香港教科書家長大聯盟

Mr LAU Chi-hung
Chief Executive Officer

Clerk in attendance : Ms Amy YU
Chief Council Secretary (2)6

Staff in attendance : Ms Judy TING
Council Secretary (2)6

Mr Arthur KAN
Legislative Assistant (2)8

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I. Debundling of textbooks and teaching and learning resources for pricing

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2083/10-11(01) and (02) and LC Paper No. CB(2)2169/10-11(01)]

Members noted the background brief entitled "Debundling of textbooks and teaching and learning resources for pricing" [LC Paper No. CB(2)2083/10-11(02)] prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat.

Briefing by the Administration

2. Secretary for Education ("SED") briefed members on the progress in the implementation of the policy of debundling textbooks and teaching/learning materials for pricing ("the debundling policy"), as detailed in the Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(2)2083/10-11(01)].

(*Post-meeting note:* The speaking note of SED was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)2169/10-11(01) on 22 June 2011.)

Oral presentation by deputations

Subsidized Primary Schools Council
[LC Paper No. CB(2)2567/10-11(01)]

3. Mr SIN Kim-wai presented the views of Subsidized Primary Schools Council as detailed in its submission.

The Hong Kong Institute of Family Education

4. Mr TIK Chi-yuen expressed concern about increasing textbook prices. He pointed out that textbook prices had increased in eight out of the past 10 school years, and the increases had far exceeded the inflation rates of the relevant periods. In his view, the problem of rising textbook prices was attributable to the monopoly of the textbook market by a small number of textbook publishers. Mr TIK added that debundling the sale of teaching/learning materials only for new textbooks could hardly help alleviate the financial burden of parents given that new textbooks accounted for only 5% of the textbooks in the market. He was also given to understand that the prices of some debundled textbooks had not actually been reduced. Mr YU Wing-fai stressed that it was unfair for parents to shoulder the costs of teaching materials.

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Hong Kong Parents Association Ltd.
[LC Paper No. CB(2)2083/10-11(03)]

5. Mr Kenny TSUI Ka-keung presented the views of Hong Kong Parents Association Ltd. as detailed in its submission.

The Anglo-Chinese Textbook Publishers Organisation
[LC Paper No. CB(2)2105/10-11(01)]

6. Mr Edward WONG Sing presented the views of The Anglo-Chinese Textbook Publishers Organisation as detailed in its joint submission with Hong Kong Educational Publishers Association.

Hong Kong Educational Publishers Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)2105/10-11(01)]

7. Mr SHEK Kwok-kei presented the views of Hong Kong Educational Publishers Association as detailed in its joint submission with The Anglo-Chinese Textbook Publishers Organisation.

Consumer Council
[LC Paper No. CB(2)2451/10-11(01)]

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

Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong
[LC Paper No. CB(2)2140/10-11(01)]

9. Mr Vincent CHENG presented the views of Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong ("DAB") as detailed in its submission.

關注香港教科書家長大聯盟
[LC Paper No. CB(2)2451/10-11(02)]

10. Mr LAU Chi-hung presented the views of 關注香港教科書家長大聯盟 as detailed in its submission.

11. The Chairman drew members' attention to the written submission provided by the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union [LC Paper No. CB(2)2104/10-11(02)].

The Administration's response

12. SED said that deputations were in general supportive of the debundling policy which allowed the market to operate on a user-pays basis, thereby lowering the upward pressure of textbook prices. The Administration would consider carefully the timetable for debundling to be put forward by the textbook publishers in August 2011. If textbook publishers still refused to debundle their teaching materials for pricing after the next school year, the Education Bureau ("EDB") would tender out the development of textbooks and teaching materials with a view to introducing more competition to the market. The Administration was currently working on details of the tendering procedure so that the tendering exercise could be conducted without delay if necessary.

Resources to schools for purchasing teaching materials

13. Referring to paragraph 6 of SED's speaking note, Mr WONG Kwok-hing expressed concern that while the Administration had assured the provision of adequate resources to schools for the purchase of teaching materials, there was no mentioning of any implementation timetable. He was also concerned how the Administration could ascertain the additional resources required by schools for purchasing teaching materials should textbook publishers still refuse to debundle the teaching materials for pricing.

14. SED said that EDB provided schools every year with block grants for meeting their operational needs, which could be deployed by schools for the purchase of teaching materials. The textbook publishers had requested the Administration to allocate a specific amount of fund to schools for the purchase of teaching materials and expected the Administration to make up for the shortfall in their revenue arising from debundling the sale of textbooks from teaching materials. He stressed that the Administration could not concede to such a request. Schools could make use of the surplus they had accumulated to purchase the teaching materials that suited their needs. At the end of each school year, EDB would conduct a survey to find out the actual amount spent by schools on teaching materials and reimburse them with the median value of the amount. If schools did not have adequate resources to purchase teaching materials, the Administration would allocate additional resources to them.

15. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong stressed the importance of providing schools with adequate resources to purchase teaching materials. In response to Mr CHEUNG, SED clarified that schools were not asked to shoulder the expenses for purchasing teaching materials. He was only suggesting that schools could

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use their surplus to pay for such expenses first and they would be reimbursed for their actual expenses on an accountable basis at the end of each school year.

16. As a member of the school sponsoring body of a Direct Subsidy Scheme ("DSS") School, Dr LAM Tai-fai highlighted the financial pressure faced by DSS Schools. He pointed out that the surpluses accumulated by DSS schools were normally earmarked for specific purposes such as procurement of computers, repair of school facilities and launching of school activities, and the schools did not have much spare resources for purchasing teaching materials. He was also concerned that the procedure for claiming reimbursements for expenses on purchasing teaching materials would add to the administrative workload of schools. Instead of asking schools to first use its surplus to buy teaching materials and claim for reimbursements later, he considered that the Administration should allocate a specific amount of fund to schools for purchasing teaching materials at the beginning of each school year.

17. SED said that the crux of the problem was that textbook publishers were unwilling to provide the debundled prices for textbooks and teaching materials. He reiterated that schools were not asked to use their surplus to meet the expenses for purchasing teaching materials. They were only asked to first pay for the expenses of teaching materials, and EDB would reimburse them later. EDB would review such an arrangement after textbook publishers had provided the prices of teaching materials.

18. The Chairman urged the task force set up by EDB to review issues arising from the debundling policy ("Task Force") to look also into the issue of provision of resources to schools for the purchase of teaching materials.

19. Mr CHEUNG Yung-pong of Subsidized Primary Schools Council considered that the Administration should provide a specific amount of fund to schools at the beginning of each school year for purchasing teaching materials and reimburse them for any shortfall in actual expenditure at the end of the school year on an accountable basis.

Textbook prices and debundling timetable

20. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong noted with concern that textbook publishers had asked for three more years, starting from 2012, to debundle all prices for textbooks and teaching materials. As teachers' books, discs for listening exercises and assessment bank materials were most needed by teachers, Mr CHEUNG considered it important for textbook publishers to debundle these teaching materials within one year. Noting from Mr Edward WONG Sing of The Anglo-Chinese Textbook Publishers Organisation that textbook

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publishers were working on a debundling timetable to be announced in August 2011, Mr CHEUNG requested Mr WONG to provide more information on the debundling timetable and to give an assessment on how much textbook prices could be reduced after the implementation of the debundling policy.

21. Mr Edward WONG Sing said that textbook publishers shared the concern that schools should be provided with adequate resources to purchase necessary teaching materials. He clarified that it was not the case that textbook publishers requested the Administration to make up for the shortfall in their revenue arising from the implementation of the debundling policy. On the debundling timetable, Mr WONG said that textbook publishers were working on the debundling of primary and junior secondary textbooks in Chinese, English and Mathematics first from the 2012-2013 school year. It might take one more year to debundle textbooks in other subjects such as Music and General Studies on account of the complicated issue of copyright. The debundling of textbooks for the New Senior Secondary ("NSS") curriculum, in which textbook publishers had made substantial investments, would be dealt with at a later stage. Mr WONG further said that the trade had appealed to individual publishers to exercise restraint in increasing textbook prices. He also assured members that textbook publishers would strive to address the pressing needs of teachers for teachers' books, assessment bank materials and audio discs as appropriate.

22. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong requested the textbook publishers to provide more information to members on the debundling timetable before the summer recess.

23. Ms Cyd HO considered that a multi-pronged approach should be adopted to curb rising textbook prices. She welcomed the remarks made by Mr SHEK Kwok-kei of Hong Kong Educational Publishers Association that textbook publishers would review their marketing tactics. In her view, there would be room for reducing textbook prices for the coming school year if textbook publishers would cut their promotion costs.

24. Mrs Regina IP opined that teachers' reliance on teaching materials provided by textbook publishers was attributable to the design of the curriculum, in particular the introduction by the Administration of integrated subjects such as Integrated Humanities and Liberal Studies. As these subjects straddled various areas, teachers had to rely on a large amount of teaching materials to facilitate teaching.

25. Mrs Regina IP further said that according to her understanding, booksellers bought textbooks from publishers generally at 80% of the retail

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prices. She asked textbook publishers whether textbooks could be sold at schools instead with a view to reducing textbook prices by some 20%.

26. Mr POON Chi-wai of The Anglo-Chinese Textbook Publishers Organisation said that bookshops did not actually earn a 20% gross profit-margin as they usually offered a 10% discount to parents when they purchased textbooks.

27. Ms WONG Han of Hong Kong Educational Publishers Association said that about 60% of secondary schools and 90% of primary schools invited bookshops to sell textbooks at their schools. Of the 20% discount given by textbook publishers to bookshops, 5% to 8% was for the labour, delivery and administrative costs for organizing the sale of textbooks in schools. As parents were usually given a discount of 8% to 12% when purchasing textbooks, the 20% discount enjoyed by bookshops was in fact shared by parents.

28. Ms Audrey EU noted from the Consumer Council that textbook publishers had indicated that textbook prices would be reduced by 10% after debundling. She sought information from textbook publishers on the prices of debundled textbooks.

29. Ms WONG Han of Hong Kong Educational Publishers Association said that of the 15 textbook publishers in the market, more than half were operating at a loss while the others were operating with low profit-margin. As such, there was not much room for textbook publishers to reduce prices. She stressed that the issue under discussion was the debundling of textbooks and teaching materials for pricing, and not reduction of prices. The extent of reduction of textbook prices after debundling would vary among individual publishers, depending on the costs and quantity of teaching materials bundled with the textbooks. Using debundled primary textbooks in Chinese as an example, she said that prices could drop by 10% to 25%.

30. Ms Audrey EU invited Mr TIK Chi-yuen of the Hong Kong Institute of Family Education to elaborate his view on the monopoly of the textbook market. Given the dwindling student population, she expressed doubt on whether the introduction of more competition to the market would help resolve the problem.

31. Mr TIK Chi-yuen said that there was evidence to suggest that textbook publishers had acted collectively in fixing textbook prices. He noted that in the past 10 years, textbook publishers adjusted textbook prices at the same time and within certain ranges. He further pointed out that in the face of strong demand from the Administration and parents, it would be natural for some

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textbook publishers to capitalize on the situation and debundle their textbooks and teaching materials in order to gain a bigger market share. However, there was not even one textbook publisher willing to implement the debundling policy. Based on these observations, he had come to the view, which was shared by the Consumer Council, that the textbook market was monopolized by a small number of textbook publishers.

32. Mr Vincent CHENG of DAB said that he noted from the promotional information provided a large textbook publisher on a Chinese textbook that there were some 70 items of teaching materials for the textbook, including the provision of a booth for school activities relating to the textbook. Hence, it was not surprising that teachers tended to choose textbooks from large publishers, resulting in monopoly in the textbook market.

33. In response to Mrs Regina IP's enquiry on the quantity of teaching materials bundled with the textbooks, SED said that it would depend on the business practices of individual textbook publishers. The number of teaching materials bundled with a textbook could be as many as 100.

34. Noting the view of Mr LAU Chi-hung of 關注香港教科書家長大聯盟 that the vetting and approval procedure for inclusion of textbooks in the Recommended Textbook List ("RTL") should be abolished with a view to lowering the costs of textbooks, Ms Audrey EU asked Mr LAU by how much textbook prices would be reduced should the vetting and approval mechanism be abolished. Mr LAU said that he could not provide an estimate on the reduction of textbook prices, but it was his understanding that the vetting and approval procedure incurred high costs which took many years to recover.

35. Mr TIK Chi-yuen of The Hong Kong Institute of Family Education said that parents were helpless in face of the ever-increasing textbook prices and were disappointed that the debundling policy would not be implemented in the coming school year. He stressed that the request of textbook publishers for further deferring the implementation of the debundling policy for three years was unacceptable.

Tendering out the development of textbooks and teaching materials

36. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong stressed the importance of competition and diversity in the textbook market. He said that the public was concerned about the Administration's proposal of tendering out the development of textbooks and teaching materials. Their concerns included whether the tendering practice of awarding the contract to the lowest bidder would affect the quality of textbooks; the lack of diversity in the textbook market and control of content

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of textbooks by the Administration should the contract be awarded to only one or a small number of bidders; and whether an independent committee would be set up to oversee the tendering process. He sought clarification on whether the Administration would proceed with tendering out the development of textbooks and teaching materials only if textbook publishers refused to debundle teaching materials.

37. SED said that the Task Force, which included representatives from the academia and the business sector, would review issues arising from the debundling policy including the tendering out of the development of textbooks. It would give recommendations on how best to conduct the tendering exercise. EDB would seek the views of the Panel on the report of the Task Force which would be submitted to EDB by the end of 2011.

38. Ms Cyd HO said that the general public had lost confidence in the Administration's tendering system following the recent incident concerning the selection of implementer for the Internet Learning Support Programme. She expressed reservation about the Administration publishing textbooks by itself and stressed the importance of maintaining diversity in the textbook market. She was also concerned about the lack of representation of textbook publishers in the Task Force. She urged the Administration to include representatives of textbook publishers and enhance the transparency of the operation of the Task Force.

39. SED responded that the Task Force would not only look into issues relating to the publication of textbooks, but also the operation of the RTL and introduction of more competition into the market. Membership of the Task Force included university professors in economics, a Dean in the Hong Kong Institute of Education, representatives of the business sector with publishing background, the Consumer Council, parents and teachers. The Task Force had a balanced membership and the Administration did not consider it necessary to include representatives of textbook publishers. SED further said that the Administration had only stated that it would tender out the development of textbooks and teaching materials if the publishers still refused to debundle teaching materials for pricing, and had not indicated that it would publish textbooks itself. All interested parties were welcomed to participate in the tendering exercise if conducted.

40. Mrs Regina IP was concerned that the quality of textbooks of the winning bidder(s) might not be up to standard. She sought information on the measures to be taken by the Administration to safeguard the quality of textbooks should their development be tendered out.

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41. SED said that should tendering be conducted, all the requirements relating to the content and prices of textbooks would be set out clearly in the tender document. He added that many professionals including teachers were involved in the mechanism for vetting and approving textbooks for inclusion in RTL and assured members that the mechanism had been working well.

42. Ms Audrey EU and Mr WONG Yuk-man expressed reservations about tendering out the development of textbooks and teaching materials which, in their views, would create a host of problems.

43. Dr Priscilla LEUNG also considered it undesirable for the Administration to tender out the development of textbooks and teaching materials. Instead, the Administration should provide additional resources to schools to support the development of teaching materials by teachers, which, in her view, were of better quality and better suited the needs of students than those provided by textbook publishers.

44. SED said that the issue at stake was that textbook publishers refused to separate the sale of textbooks from teaching materials. The Administration had been urging textbook publishers to provide the prices for teaching materials such as teachers' books as soon as practicable. He welcomed the textbook publishers' initiative to work out a debundling timetable by August 2011.

45. Mr Tommy CHEUNG declared interests that his wife was a textbook writer. He shared the view that the Administration should provide resources to schools to support the development of teaching materials by teachers according to school-based circumstances.

46. Mr CHEUNG Yung-pong of Subsidized Primary Schools Council also expressed support for the provision of resources by the Administration to schools for development of teaching materials by teachers. He however stressed that schools should be given the choice of purchasing or developing their own teaching materials.

47. SED said that EDB had been providing assistance to teachers in developing teaching materials and had achieved good results in this regard. On the other hand, some teachers might prefer to continue to use the teaching materials provided by textbook publishers which they had been using for a long time and were familiar with.

48. Dr LAM Tai-fai did not consider that the Administration would actually tender out the development of textbooks and teaching materials as it was well aware of the problems arising from tendering.

49. Mr LAU Chi-hung of 關注香港教科書家長大聯盟 considered it important to maintain diversity in the textbook market and expressed objection to the publication of textbooks by the Administration. In his view, the textbook market should be more efficient than the Administration in terms of development of textbooks.

Textbook recycling and e-Learning

50. Mr WONG Kwok-hing considered that the solution to curbing rising textbook prices lay in textbook recycling. He shared the view of Hong Kong Parents Association Ltd. that the Administration should collaborate with parent-teacher associations ("PTAs") to promote the provision of textbooks by schools for loan to students, which could alleviate the financial burden of parents on the one hand and protect the environment on the other. He also suggested that instead of printing revised editions, replacement sheets could be provided by textbook publishers when there were amendments to textbooks.

51. Under Secretary for Education ("US(Ed)") said that the Administration supported in principle the provision of textbooks by schools for loan to students and had conducted a pilot scheme on it a few years ago. However, the response from parents was not encouraging. This notwithstanding, the Administration had implemented the recommendation of the Working Group on Textbooks and e-Learning Resources Development on the "five-year rule of no revision" to ensure that textbooks could be reused for a long period of time. In view of the concern about textbook prices and with parents' better understanding of textbook recycling, the Administration would discuss again with PTAs on promoting initiatives on textbook recycling. In response to Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung's enquiry on the reasons for the failure of the pilot scheme, SED said that as many textbooks contained exercises and students tended to write answers in textbooks, many parents would prefer buying new ones.

52. Prof Patrick LAU said that in the past, it was common to reuse old textbooks. He sought information from textbook publishers on the percentage of textbooks that could be re-used. He also enquired about the average costs for purchasing primary and secondary textbooks.

53. Mr TIK Chi-yuen of The Hong Kong institute of Family Education said that the number of schools and organizations launching textbook recycling programmes had increased in this school year. He noted that more parents

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were supportive of such programmes and urged the Administration to work together with parents to promote textbook recycling. On textbook prices, Mr TIK said that according to his knowledge, the average total costs for purchasing primary textbooks was some \$2,000 while that for secondary textbooks was some \$3,000.

54. Mr SHEK Kwok-kei of Hong Kong Educational Publishers Association said that according to a survey conducted by the Consumer Council during the last school year, the average costs for purchasing primary, junior secondary and senior secondary textbooks were \$2,091, \$2,425 and \$2,369 respectively. He further advised that as only a small number of revised editions of textbooks were published in the last school year, the great majority of the textbooks could be re-used. However, textbooks for senior secondary subjects published before the implementation of NSS academic structure in the 2009-2010 school year could not be reused. The reusability of old textbooks also depended on the situations of individual schools. Sometimes, teachers would change textbooks to suit the learning interests and abilities of students.

55. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that teachers would not normally change textbooks unless the quality of the existing ones was not satisfactory. Hence, unless revised editions had been published, most of the old textbooks could be reused, and the "five-year rule of no revision" should facilitate the reuse of old textbooks. He urged the Administration to work closely with schools and parents and make greater efforts to promote initiatives on textbook recycling.

56. Ms Audrey EU shared the view that promoting textbook recycling was the key to resolving the problem of rising textbook prices. She considered that the sale of second-hand textbooks in schools was more viable than the provision of textbooks by schools for loan to students. She suggested that second-hand textbooks in good condition could be sold at a discount of 20% to 40%; those with scribbles in them could be sold at a discount of 50% to 70%; while those that were in poor condition should be given out free of charge. She believed that students would cherish their textbooks when they knew that the textbooks could be re-sold after use. She urged the Administration and schools to put more efforts to promote textbook recycling.

57. Mr Kenny TSUI Ka-keung of Hong Kong Parents Association Ltd highlighted the difficulties he had encountered in purchasing second-hand textbooks for his child. As only a small number of second-hand textbooks were available for sale, choice was limited. Many parents were unwilling to buy second-hand textbooks as they might have to spend considerable time removing the scribbles and answers written in the textbooks.

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58. Mr LAI Tsang-hing of Hong Kong Parents Association Ltd said that under textbook loan programmes, students were required to pay a fee for borrowing textbooks from schools. They were required to return the textbooks at the end of the school year and to pay for any damage to the textbooks.

59. The Chairman said that it was difficult to buy primary second-hand textbooks, as stickers were often provided with primary textbooks and students were required to put the stickers in the exercises attached to the textbooks.

60. Mr TIK Chi-yuen of The Hong Kong Institute of Family Education and Mr Vincent CHENG of DAB also expressed support for promoting initiatives on textbook recycling.

61. Mr WONG Yuk-man opined that the problem of high textbook prices was complex and difficult to resolve. In a market economy, textbook publishers could not be blamed for using different marketing tactics to generate profit. In his view, the Administration should shoulder the main responsibility for the problem of high textbook prices. In his generation where money was a concern for many families, students took good care of their textbooks which were to be reused by their younger siblings. Nowadays, as the society became more affluent, many parents did not mind paying for expensive textbooks for their children, and it was the low-income families which had to face the problem of ever-increasing textbook prices. He further said that his children studied overseas and their textbooks were provided by schools. He wondered why the same could not be done in Hong Kong.

62. While expressing support in principle for the reuse of old textbooks, Dr Priscilla LEUNG said that the condition of second-hand textbooks and textbook hygiene were of concern to many parents.

63. Mr Andrew LEUNG said that when he studied secondary school in the United Kingdom, textbooks were provided by schools on loan. The textbooks were in good condition and students did not write answers on the exercises in the textbooks. He supported the provision of textbooks by schools for loan to students and urged the Administration to provide resources to schools for the purpose. The Administration should also promote e-Learning and encourage teachers to develop teaching materials. He pointed out that the teaching materials of the Vocational Training Council were mostly developed by its teachers. He considered that the Administration should adopt a multi-pronged approach to address the problem of increasing textbook prices.

64. US(Ed) said that the Administration had allocated a huge amount of resources to promote initiatives on e-Learning. A pilot scheme was launched

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in early 2011 to provide support to schools for developing e-Learning. Many schools participating in the pilot scheme had used e-Learning packs to replace textbooks. He assured members that the Administration would continue to promote e-Learning. The Chairman, however, expressed the view that it would be difficult to implement e-Learning in schools.

65. While agreeing in principle that textbook recycling should be promoted, Dr LAM Tai-fai considered it practically infeasible, as the prevailing social values and expectations of parents were very different from the past.

66. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that e-Learning was a global trend. He pointed out that e-Learning resources were affordable and environmental friendly and expressed support for its active promotion. He asked whether it was viable for textbook publishers to convert textbooks into e-books.

67. US(Ed) responded that some e-Learning resources currently in use by schools were developed in collaboration with textbook publishers. The Administration had also invited universities and educational organisations to participate in the development of e-Learning resources with a view to ensuring diversity.

68. Mr Edward WONG Sing of The Anglo-Chinese Textbook Publishers Organisation said that textbook publishers supported the development of e-Learning and had collaborated with the Administration in promoting such initiatives. He added that textbook publishers had made substantial investments in the research and development of e-Learning resources in recent years.

Adequacy of the debundling policy

69. The Chairman opined that the textbook market was distorted in that parents had to pay high prices for textbooks chosen not by them but by schools. In order to attract schools to choose their textbooks, textbook publishers used different marketing tactics such as providing free gifts and donations to schools, which added to the costs of textbooks. She recognized that textbook publishers were facing many difficulties including the dwindling student population; the complicated and costly mechanism for vetting and approval of textbooks; and rising operational costs such as staff salary and paper. In her view, the debundling policy could not help solve the problem of rising textbook prices and fundamental changes had to be introduced to the textbook market.

70. The Chairman further said that the proposed tendering out of the development of textbooks and teaching materials could be considered and the possibility of the Administration publishing textbooks by itself should not be ruled out as well. To address the concern about control of content by the Administration, the Administration could tender out or publish those textbooks that attracted little controversies, such as textbooks in Chinese, English and Mathematics.

71. The Chairman further suggested that the mechanism for vetting and approving textbooks should be simplified with a view to lowering the costs of textbooks and introducing more competition to the market. She also shared the view that schools should be encouraged to follow the practice of international schools of providing textbooks to their students on loan, at least for subjects such as Music and General Studies.

72. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong agreed on the need to improve the mechanism for vetting and approving textbooks. He considered that textbook publishers should enter into a pact to follow an agreed timetable for debundling textbooks and teaching materials and to refrain from providing free gifts and luxurious hospitality to schools.

73. Ms Cyd HO hoped that the issues relating to the implementation of the debundling policy could be resolved within the current legislative term. She shared the view that a multi-pronged approach should be adopted to resolve the problem of high textbook prices, including promotion of textbook recycling; non-acceptance of free gifts and donations from textbook publishers by schools; implementation of the debundling policy; and rationalization of the procedure for vetting and approving textbooks.

74. SED reiterated that the Task Force would review the operation of RTL as well as the mechanism for vetting and approving textbooks. The Administration would continue to discuss with the textbook publishers with a view to resolving the problems with debundling as soon as practicable.

75. The Chairman asked representatives of textbook publishers whether the prices of the textbooks for the coming school year could be reduced should the promotion costs for textbooks be cut. Mr Edward WONG Sing responded that the prices of textbooks could not be adjusted as they were already being sold in the market. He further pointed out that the prices of textbooks had been frozen in the last two school years, and the prices were adjusted in the coming school year in accordance with the inflation rate. Furthermore, some textbook publishers had debundled their textbooks and teaching materials and reduced

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the relevant textbook prices. He reiterated that textbook publishers were working on the details of a debundling timetable which would be submitted to EDB as soon as possible. The primary and junior secondary textbooks in Chinese, English and Mathematics would be debundled first in the 2012-2013 school year, with other textbooks to be debundled hopefully in the following school year.

Admin 76. Concluding the discussions, the Chairman requested the Administration to report to the Panel by the end of 2011 on the progress in the implementation of the debundling policy and the recommendations made by the Task Force in its report to be submitted to EDB.

II. Any other business

77. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 1:00 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
17 October 2011