

For discussion
on 21 October 2010

Legislative Council Panel on Education

2010-11 Policy Agenda: New Initiatives on Education

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the major new education initiatives on the 2010-11 Policy Agenda.

New initiatives

Providing multiple study pathways and developing education services

2. As pointed out by the Chief Executive in the Policy Address, the Government will continue to promote the development of education services, enhance Hong Kong's status as a regional education hub and provide multiple and flexible pathways for our young people. During the past few years, we have been making great effort to support the development of the self-financing post-secondary sector and promote the diversification of post-secondary education through various support schemes such as the Land Grant Scheme and Start-up Loan Scheme. Our objective is to provide young people with quality and diversified study pathways with multiple entry and exit points. Currently, apart from 340 degree programmes offered by 13 local tertiary institutions, various local post-secondary institutions also run around 500 sub-degree programmes covering different professional disciplines. In addition, there are also a wide variety of continuing education and vocational training programmes. Youngsters can choose the pathway that best suit their abilities and aspirations and develop their potential to the full.

3. To provide more diversified study pathways, we will adopt a two-pronged strategy of promoting the parallel development of the publicly-funded sector and the self-financing sector. For the publicly-funded sector, we propose to double the number of University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded senior year undergraduate places to 8 000 per annum (i.e. around 4 000 intakes) by phases starting from the 2012/13 academic year. This will provide meritorious sub-degree

graduates with more opportunities for articulation to the last two years of an undergraduate programme under the New Academic Structure (NAS) (i.e Year 3 and 4 in a four-year programme). We expect that this initiative will help foster a flexible, diversified and multiple-entry multiple-exit education framework with greater inter-flow between the self-financing and publicly-funded sectors, and between the sub-degree and degree sectors. In addition, we propose to increase the UGC-funded first-year first-degree (FYFD) places from 14 620 to 15 000 per annum starting from the 2012/13 academic year. By 2016, the number of undergraduates graduating from UGC-funded programmes is expected to rise to around 19 000, representing a 16% increase.

4. For the self-financing sector, we will strengthen our support in enhancing the quality of self-financing post-secondary education to provide students with more quality articulation opportunities and choices. We propose to establish a Self-financing Post-secondary Education Fund with a total commitment of \$2.5 billion to provide stable and sustainable resources for the sector's long-term development. The investment income from the Fund could be used to set up various schemes to enhance the quality of post-secondary education. These include –

- (a) *Government Scholarship Fund Scheme for the Self-financing Post-secondary Sector*, which will offer scholarships to outstanding students attending self-financing post-secondary programmes in recognition of their performance, and will also help attract outstanding local and non-local students to pursue studies in self-financing post-secondary programmes;
- (b) *Quality Enhancement Support Scheme*, which will provide support for the self-financing post-secondary sector to carry out projects to enhance the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning; and
- (c) *Quality Assurance Support Scheme*, which will provide support for education and training institutions to implement and strengthen quality assurance measures, with a view to encouraging them to provide quality programmes and enhance the quality of the self-financing post-secondary sector.

We will consult relevant stakeholders to work out the detailed arrangements.

5. Upon full implementation of the above new initiatives, we estimate that over 30% of our young people in the relevant age group will have the chance to study publicly-funded or self-financing degree programmes. Including sub-degree places, young people attending local post-secondary programmes will account for about 65% of the age group, more than double the level of about 30% a decade ago.

Textbook assistance for needy students

Increasing the Flat Rate Grant

6. To help needy primary and secondary students to purchase textbooks and to meet miscellaneous school-related expenses, the Administration has been providing textbook assistance to low-income families. The School Textbook Assistance Scheme (STAS)¹ administered by the Student Financial Assistance Agency (SFAA) comprises a Textbook Grant for purchasing essential textbooks and a Flat Rate Grant for meeting miscellaneous school-related expenses. In view of the continued increase in education-related expenses of primary and secondary students during the past few years, we propose to substantially increase the Flat Rate Grant under STAS from \$408 to \$1,000 per full-grant student and from \$204 to \$500 per half-grant student per annum in the 2011/12 school year. The proposed increase would entail an additional recurrent expenditure of about \$120 million per year. About 276 000 students are expected to benefit in the 2011/12 school year, including about 80 000 full-grant students who would receive \$1,000 each (as compared to \$408 in the 2010/11 school year) and about 196 000 half-grant students who would receive \$500 each (as compared to \$204 in the 2010/11 school year). Based on the established mechanism, the Administration will adjust the rate of grant each year in accordance with the movement of the Composite Consumer Price Index.

¹ Primary 1 to Secondary 7 students of Government, aided, caput and local private schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme who pass the means test of SFAA can receive assistance under the School Textbook Assistance Scheme. For the Textbook Grant, SFAA would determine the rates of grant based on the results of the survey conducted by the Consumer Council before each school year on the average costs of textbooks for students at various levels of studies at the sampled schools. As regards the Flat Rate Grant, it was established under the STAS from 2000/01 school year upon the approval of the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council to replace the previous stationery grant. The grant rate was set at \$400 per full-grant student per annum in 2000/01 school year to meet various school-related expenses. The Administration has been authorised to adjust the rate of grant each year in accordance with the movement of the Composite Consumer Price Index. The rate of grant for the 2010/11 school year is \$408 per full-grant student per annum.

We plan to seek the approval of the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council for the additional resources required early next year.

Advancing disbursement of textbook assistance

7. All along, SFAA has to verify the student enrolment status through the relevant schools before disbursement of assistance, and schools can only carry out such verification work after the start of the school year. Therefore, SFAA can normally only disburse assistance to the majority of applicants in October the earliest². SFAA has implemented since the 2006/07 school year the Principal Recommendation Scheme, under which students recommended by the school principals can make early applications to SFAA and eligible students can receive textbook assistance before the start of the school year. After expansion of the Scheme³, the number of student beneficiaries has substantially increased from about 4 000 each year in the past to nearly 30 000 this year.

8. In order to enable the majority of students to receive textbook assistance before the start of the school year, SFAA would, after careful consideration, streamline the processing procedures from the 2011/12 school year onwards. With the support of increased manpower, SFAA aims to advance disbursement of textbook assistance in August to all those applicants who have received textbook assistance in the preceding school year, submit applications with complete information before end of May and pass the means test of the new school year.

9. Specifically, SFAA would disburse assistance to these students, and defer the verification of student enrolment status to after the start of the school year through data matching on the computer systems of the Education Bureau (EDB) and SFAA. If it is found that assistance has been wrongly provided to some ineligible students (e.g. students who have switched to study at other private schools), SFAA would recover the overpaid assistance from the applicants concerned. The revised

² SFAA has to verify the student enrolment status through the relevant schools before disbursement of assistance, and schools can only carry out such verification work after the start of the school year; and owing to the need to handle more than 200 000 applications for textbook assistance every year and the manpower constraints faced by schools and SFAA, SFAA can normally only disburse assistance to the majority of applicants in October the earliest.

³ To benefit more students, SFAA has expanded the Scheme this year. Apart from inviting principals to recommend students to submit early applications, SFAA has taken the initiative to invite families with relatively lower income as shown on SFAA's records to make early applications.

processing procedures would not only expedite disbursement of assistance to low-income families but also substantially relieve the pressure on schools to handle a large amount of verification work.

10. It is estimated that 170 000 families of about 220 000 primary and secondary students can receive textbook assistance before the start of the 2011/12 school year, representing about 90% of families who have submitted applications by end of August 2011. New Primary 1 students, students who have not received textbook assistance in the preceding school year and other students who submit applications later would receive the assistance after the commencement of the school year.

National education

Enhancing the Mainland exchange programmes

11. Since the 2009/10 school year, EDB has been annually subsidizing 37 000 students to participate in various Mainland exchange programmes. The contents of the exchange programmes link with the curriculum of the various school subjects covering different dimensions such as history, culture, social and economy. The programmes aim to enhance students' knowledge of the Chinese culture and their understanding of the latest developments of our country. Through these learning activities and exchanges, students can align experiential learning with curriculum objectives and content, strengthen and complement national education related learning, thus leading to deepening of national education.

12. Our target is that each student will have the chance to join at least one sponsored Mainland exchange programme in primary or secondary school. We will provide 4 500 additional exchange places every year as from the 2011/12 school year. It is expected that by the 2015/16 school year, we can reach this target.

13. As regards implementation, EDB will continue to organize Mainland study and exchange activities. Through the "Passing the Torch" national education platform, we will expand the scope of the exchange programmes, including organizing or outsourcing related study activities, collaborating with experienced institutions and non-government organizations to plan and organize the related programmes, as well as subsidizing school-based exchange activities. EDB will develop clear guidelines and monitoring mechanisms to ensure

that the learning experience can be aligned with curriculum objectives and content.

Strengthening the curriculum on national education

14. Since 2000, EDB has been enriching the elements of moral and national education in relevant school curricula. Alongside this, the Mainland Government has adhered to the principles of “One Country, Two Systems” and “Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong” as stipulated in the Basic Law since our reunification with China 13 years ago. The Basic Law provides a constitutional basis for maintaining the rule of law as well as promoting the continuous development of Hong Kong. As such, we consider it necessary to further enhance students’ understanding of the Basic Law so that they could promote the development of our society within the framework of the Basic Law in future. To achieve the goal of “developing students’ sense of national identity and enabling them to contribute to society, the nation and the world”, two curriculum initiatives are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of Basic Law education, and moral and national education.

15. First, EDB will strengthen the support for the learning and teaching of the Basic Law in primary and secondary schools. A learning package will be developed this school year for schools’ reference. Furthermore, EDB will develop a question bank on the Basic Law. Apart from making arrangements for their students to attempt the questions online, schools may download them for inclusion in their test and examination papers. To further enhance teachers' competency to strengthen Basic Law Education in schools, we will offer professional development programmes and provide additional multi-media resources on topics related to Basic Law Education. We also propose to extend the lesson time for the learning of the Basic Law and related topics.

16. In addition to the above initiative, EDB will invite the Curriculum Development Council to review the existing curriculum framework for moral and civic education at primary and secondary levels, and further enhance the elements of national education through developing an independent subject on moral and national education. We believe that the values involved in moral and national education are intertwining. Moral values such as sense of responsibility and respect for others are simultaneously qualities of a good national. It is also important to develop in students their sense of national identity and civic responsibility so as to encourage them to actively contribute themselves

to the progress of both China and Hong Kong as a citizen under “One Country, Two Systems”. This initiative is expected to be implemented in the 2013/14 school year.

Supporting student teachers

17. In order to enhance the effectiveness of the above-mentioned national education activities and to strengthen the integration of students’ learning experience with the school curriculum, we need to provide more support to student teachers to better prepare them in this regard. To this end, we will provide subsidy to student teachers to participate in professional study courses in the Mainland and work out the implementation details with the teacher education institutes.

Strengthening schools’ internal administration management

18. We will launch a pilot exercise between 2011 and 2012 in some public-sector schools to strengthen their internal administration management. Participating schools will be provided with resources for hiring administrative staff to assist schools in devising relevant internal guidelines / mechanisms for more effective management of administration work and to take up the assigned administrative duties so as to further reduce teachers’ administrative work. The pilot scheme will provide useful information for our consideration of the extension of the initiative to other public-sector schools.

Assistance to students with autism spectrum disorder

19. The Government has been providing ordinary schools with additional resources and professional support to help them cater for students with special educational needs (SEN), including those with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). We review the implementation of the support measures from time to time and make adjustments where appropriate. With regard to the support services for students with ASD, there are concerns among teachers and professionals that due to their inherent impairment in social communication and cognition, these students have a high level of support need, including differentiated instruction during lessons and remedial support after class.

20. In this connection, we plan to launch a three-year pilot scheme on enhancement of support for students with ASD. The scheme aims to develop major support strategies for improving the students’ social

communication, emotional regulation and learning skills. Under the scheme, we will organize structured on-top group training for primary and secondary school students with ASD. We will also pilot a school-based support model in selected primary schools with a view to consolidating effective support strategies in students' learning and developing resource materials for dissemination to other schools. We will give priority to schools with larger clusters of students with ASD and thus facing more difficulties in catering for their needs. It will also facilitate the professionals to build up their expertise and acquire more experience to cope with the service demand. We will consider the way forward in the light of the practical experience of the pilot scheme, with due regard to the capacity of the sector to meet the demand.

Conclusion

21. The Government has all along attached great importance to education and has made significant financial commitment. Looking ahead, we will continue to allocate resources to provide quality and diversified education for our people and nurture talent for the community. We look forward to maintaining good communication and effective co-operation with stakeholders in taking forward various education policies in the coming year.

Education Bureau
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