

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)495/11-12
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by the Administration)

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Panel on Education

Minutes of special meeting
held on Friday, 21 October 2011, at 11:30 am
in Conference Room 1 of the Legislative Council Complex

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

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

Mrs Cherry TSE, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education

Mr Kenneth CHEN, JP
Under Secretary for Education

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

Ms Mable CHAN, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education (2)

Mrs Betty IP, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education (3)

Mrs Michelle WONG
Deputy Secretary for Education (4)

Dr K K CHAN
Deputy Secretary for Education (5)

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

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

Staff in attendance : Ms Catherina YU
Senior Council Secretary (2)6

Ms Judy TING
Council Secretary (2)6

Miss Meisy KWOK
Legislative Assistant (2)6

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I. Briefing by the Secretary for Education on the Chief Executive's Policy Address 2011-2012
[LC Paper No. CB(2)62/11-12(01)]

Briefing by the Administration

Secretary for Education ("SED") briefed members on the new education initiatives on the 2011-2012 Policy Agenda as detailed in the Administration's paper. The speaking note of SED was tabled at the meeting and issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)138/11-12(01) on 24 October 2011.

Review of the non-means-tested loan schemes

2. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that he had repeatedly requested the Administration to consider deferring the accrual of loan interest until students had graduated so as to alleviate their financial burden. Noting that the Administration was drawing up improvement proposals for the operation of the non-means-tested loan schemes administered by the Student Financial Assistance Agency, he enquired whether the Administration would include the proposed deferment of accrual of loan interest in phase 2 public consultation on the review of the non-means-tested loan schemes.

3. Permanent Secretary for Education ("PS(Ed)") said that interest would be accrued on means-tested loans only upon completion of studies of the borrowers. As for non-means-tested loans, interest would be charged once the loans were drawn down. Similar arrangements for interest payment were also adopted in countries such as New Zealand and the United Kingdom. As borrowers were required to repay their loans within 10 years after graduation or termination of study, the interest payment for each installment would not involve a large sum of money. The Administration had received many views on the interest rate and repayment arrangements for non-means-tested loans in phase 1 public consultation and would continue to listen to views in phase 2 public consultation.

4. Miss Tanya CHAN expressed concern about the lengthy process of the review of the non-means-tested loan schemes and sought information on the implementation table of the improvement proposals. She urged the Administration to take forward the improvement measures as soon as possible to relieve the financial burden of loan borrowers.

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5. SED responded that as complicated technical and implementational issues were involved, the Administration had taken longer than expected to draw up the improvement proposals for phase 2 public consultation. To enhance financial assistance to needy students, the Administration had proposed earlier the relaxation of the income ceiling for full grant under the means-tested schemes. It was the Administration's plan to implement improvement measures for the non-means-tested loan schemes by phases starting from the 2012-2013 academic year.

Provision of 15-year free education

6. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that the high tuition fees charged by some kindergartens ("KGs") had put great financial pressure on parents and there was a strong public demand for the provision of 15-year free education. He urged the Administration to consider implementing 15-year free education which, in his view, was more effective than the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme ("PEVS") in mitigating the financial burden of parents.

7. SED responded that as he had indicated at the motion debate on 15-year free education at the Council meeting of 16 February 2011, the Administration was studying the provision of 15-year free education. As far as financial resources were concerned, Government expenditures incurred in PEVS and free pre-primary education were not the most significant consideration. However, two major issues had to be resolved before consideration could be given to implementation of free pre-primary education, namely, whether a central school places allocation system should be put in place and the level of subsidies to be provided to KGs. Currently, there was a great disparity in the tuition fees charged by KGs, which was partly attributable to their different rental costs. For example, KGs located in commercial premises had to bear high rental costs. The tuition fees charged by these KGs was higher than those situated in housing estates. Should 15-year free education be implemented, the Administration had to work out a mechanism for standardizing tuition fees.

8. In response to Mr WONG Kwok-hing's enquiry on the completion time of the Administration's study on the provision of 15-year free education, SED said that the Administration was considering the two major issues he had mentioned earlier and would welcome views from members in this regard.

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9. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong opined that the two major issues mentioned by SED concerning school places allocation and level of subsidies could be resolved by transitional measures. On school places allocation system, he pointed out that as all KGs were privately run, the current distribution of KG school places was not based on the demography of a district as in the case of public primary and secondary schools. As such, it would not be viable to adopt a central allocation system from the start. He suggested that parents should be allowed to choose KGs freely and apply for admission on a voluntary basis in accordance with the current distribution of KGs.

10. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong further said that the great disparity in tuition fees among KGs was mainly attributable to the difference in rentals of school premises. Unlike those situated in Government premises, KGs located in private premises had to pay market rentals and not all of these KGs were eligible to receive Government subsidies for rental and rate. As a result, they had to charge higher tuition fees to cover their rental costs. He suggested that the Administration should compute a unit cost with reference to the rental costs of KGs situated in Government premises which should form the basis of subsidy for free pre-primary education. The Administration could also make reference to the collection of "Subscription" (堂費) in secondary schools. For KGs paying market rentals, the Administration should evaluate whether the level of their rental was reasonable and decide whether these schools should be allowed to charge a transitional "Subscription" to make up for the difference in rental costs.

11. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong added that there was support for these transitional measures in the education sector. He enquired whether the Administration would come to its view on the provision of 15-year free education and submit a transitional plan within the current legislative session.

12. SED thanked Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong for his suggestions which would be considered carefully by the Administration. The Administration had to examine all relevant considerations thoroughly before coming to a decision on the provision of 15-year free education. He could not tell at the present stage how long the study would take.

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13. Ms Cyd HO said that pre-primary education was an integral part of basic education and as such should not be excluded from the free education system. Given that all KGs were private schools, there should be a transitional period for their migration to the free education framework. She pointed out that some landlords of KGs would raise the rentals once they knew that the KGs were subsidized under PEVS. As a result, Government subsidies would end up in the pockets of the landlords. She considered it important for the Administration to ensure that the subsidies under PEVS dedicated for teachers' professional development would not be used to subsidize rental payments of KGs.

14. PS(Ed) said that the Administration would provide rental reimbursement to PEVS KGs operating in districts with a shortfall of KG places. She assured members that there was no cause for concern that subsidies reserved for teachers' professional development under PEVS would be used for subsidizing rental payments.

15. Ms Cyd HO expressed support for Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong's suggestion that as a transitional measure, KGs with high rental costs could use "Subscription" to subsidize their rental payments. However, she considered that in the long run, the Administration should provide Government premises to KGs as in the case of public primary and secondary schools. The Administration could explore the feasibility of using vacant adjacent residential flats in the first or second floor of public housing estates as well as vacant retail premises and carparks managed by the Hong Kong Housing Authority or the Hong Kong Housing Society as KG premises. The Administration could also require private developers to set aside premises for facilities providing community support services including KGs as a condition for land grant.

16. SED said that while it was desirable for KGs to be located in the proximity of students' residence so they did not have to commute a long way to school, the location of KGs would depend on the demand of school places in a district. The Administration would consider the issue of school premises for KGs in its study on the provision of 15-year free education.

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17. Ms Cyd HO further enquired whether the Administration would consider setting up a working group to study and collect views on the provision of 15-year free education, with representatives from the education sector, parents, Legislative Council Members and political parties. In response, SED said that there were different ways to collect public views and reiterated the Administration's commitment to study the matter carefully.

18. Mr Tommy CHUENG said that about 10% of KGs were still not eligible for PEVS. He urged SED to follow up the matter and come up with a proposal for the inclusion of these KGs into PEVS during the current-term Government.

19. The Chairman welcomed the Administration's study on the provision of 15-year free education. She said that many KG teachers had voiced strong demand for a salary scale on many occasions. She hoped that the Executive Authorities would provide a positive response in this regard within the current term of Government.

20. In response, SED said PEVS had brought about significant improvements to the professional development and salaries of KG teachers. As KGs had the autonomy in determining teachers' remuneration, they could develop a salary scale for teachers if considered necessary.

Small class-teaching in secondary schools

21. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong asked whether the Administration would consider seriously the implementation of small class teaching ("SCT") in secondary schools and increasing publicly-funded university places in the current legislative session.

22. SED responded that while secondary student population had been declining in recent years, according to available information including data provided by the Census and Statistics Department, the secondary student population was projected to start increasing from 2016 onwards. The actual level of increase would depend on factors such as the number of children born to Mainland women in Hong Kong returning to Hong Kong to study. Should SCT be implemented and there indeed be a rebound in secondary student population in 2016, more schools would have to be built to accommodate the additional demand for school places. The Administration would monitor and assess the trend of secondary student population in the coming few years and take appropriate measures to deal with the situation.

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23. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that the class size for SCT did not necessarily have to be a fixed number and could be within a flexible range. SED reiterated that the Administration would adopt the most appropriate measure in the light of the situation. It would continue to listen to the views of the education sector on SCT and would also make reference to overseas experience.

Support for students with special educational needs ("SEN")

24. Mr Albert HO referred to the case of a student with early psychosis committing suicide in a mainstream school in Tung Chung last year. The school concerned was aware of the student's illness and the case had been followed up by a social worker before the tragic incident. The student was punished for criticizing a teacher openly during a school event. Disciplinary actions were taken against the student who was asked to take medication under the supervision of a teacher before the commencement of classes. It was suspected that the school's actions had caused the suicide.

25. Mr Albert HO said that he was involved in the inquest into the death of the student and was surprised to learn that the school concerned was not aware of the appropriate ways for handling students with mental illness including the need to seek professional advice from doctors or clinical psychologists before taking disciplinary actions against these students. The jury recommended that the Administration should review whether integrated education was suitable for students suffering from mental illness and provide more resources to schools to help them deal with students with mental illness, including reduction of the teacher-student ratio and enhancing training for teachers in handling these students.

26. Referring to the Administration's initiative of extending the provision of the School-based Educational Psychology Service ("SBEPS") to all publicly funded primary and secondary schools by the 2016-2017 school year, Mr Albert HO said that SBEPS was for students with SEN (such as dyslexia) which did not cover those suffering from mental illness such as psychosis. He expressed concern about the lack of training and support to teachers in rendering assistance to students with mental illness.

27. SED responded that over the years, the Administration had put in much effort to enhance support measures to students with SEN. The importance of manpower resources and training in rendering support services was also recognized. The Administration would make reference

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to the recommendations made by the jury when considering plans to strengthen support to students with mental illness.

28. In response to Mr Albert HO's question on whether provision for integrated education would be extended to cover students suffering from mental illness, PS(Ed) said that unlike SEN, mental illness could be finite in duration and curable with proper treatment. Nevertheless, the Administration had allocated resources to schools for helping students with different behavioral problems, including those suffering from mental illness. In respect of support for SEN, the Administration had formulated a five-year professional development programme to provide teachers with training on assisting students with SEN in schools providing integrated education. The programme was launched in the 2007-2008 academic year and would end in the 2011-2012 academic year. While the programme had been progressing well in primary schools, its progress in secondary schools was not as satisfactory owing to the implementation of the new academic structure. PS(Ed) added that to enhance the support to students, the ratio of student guidance personnel to students for primary schools would be improved from 1:800 in 2002 to 1:450 upon full implementation of small class teaching, and an additional subvention of \$15,000 for each additional class would be provided to enhance support to students.

29. The Chairman said that early identification and intervention was important for students with SEN. She enquired whether the Administration would consider the education sector's call for the extension of support to pre-primary students with SEN.

30. SED responded that students with SEN had different needs and the Administration had to take a step-by-step approach in expanding the support to students with SEN. The Administration would consider the suggestion of extending the support to pre-primary students with SEN.

31. Ms Audrey EU said that the Administration had recently declined the request of a school for a native-speaking English teacher ("NET") for students with mild intellectual disability ("ID") on the ground that the NET Scheme was not applicable to ID students. The school was furious about the Administration's decision and considered it a discrimination against ID students. In her view, NETs could be deployed to ID schools on a shared basis and the resources involved would not be substantial. She enquired about the reasons for excluding ID students from the NET Scheme and urged the Administration to reconsider its policy on the matter.

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32. Deputy Secretary for Education (5) responded that English Language was not a core subject in ID schools. The Administration would study the needs of students with mild ID in learning English and review the relevant policy if necessary.

33. Ms Audrey EU said that there was a long waiting queue for English-medium school places for non-Chinese speaking ("NCS") students with SEN. At present, such school places were only provided by schools run by the English School Foundation. She called on the Administration to increase the supply of school places for NCS students with SEN and provide a timetable in this regard.

34. PS(Ed) said that the Administration recognized the long waiting time for school places for NCS students with SEN and was exploring measures to address the problem. The Administration was studying the Report of the Working Group on Education for Ethnic Minorities of the Equal Opportunities Commission and had solicited some Members' views on educational support to NCS students, including those with SEN. The Administration was open-minded in its study on the support for NCS students. The long term policy direction was that NCS students who were born and grew up locally should study in mainstream schools to facilitate their integration into the community. They would be provided with the necessary learning support, particularly in Chinese learning through the tailoring of the curriculum. The Administration would also review the support for NCS students with SEN studying in mainstream schools.

National Education

35. Miss Tanya CHAN said that contrary to the Administration's summary of the public views received during the consultation on moral and national education, she was given to understand that many members of the public including the Civic Party had requested the Administration to withdraw its proposal for implementing moral and national education. She enquired whether the Administration would conduct further consultation to gauge public views given the controversy over the proposed implementation of national education.

36. SED responded that the majority of the views received by the Administration recognized the importance and goals of moral and national education, although views on the mode and schedule of implementation, curriculum contents and support measures had also been expressed. The Administration was studying the views collected and aimed to come to its view on the matter in early 2012.

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Youth College

37. Miss Tanya CHAN sought clarification on whether the specialized support provided by the additional youth college would include support for both NCS students and students with SEN. SED responded in the affirmative.

Financial assistance to self-financing degree-awarding institutions

38. Mr TAM Yiu-chung said that the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong ("DAB") was concerned about the high tuition fees borne by students of self-financing post-secondary institutions. Given that the high costs for campus construction was one of the main reasons for the high tuition fees charged by self-financing post-secondary institutions, DAB suggested that matching grants for campus construction be provided to these institutions to alleviate the pressure for increase in tuition fees.

39. Referring to the proposal in the 2011-2012 Policy Address for the provision of start-up loan for self-financing degree-awarding institutions for the construction of student hostels, Mr TAM Yiu-chung was worried that institutions with weaker abilities to repay loans would eventually transfer the financial burden to students by increasing tuition fees. When considering loan applications, the Administration should take into account the loan repayment records of the borrowing institutions and the impact of the loans on tuition fees. While various financial assistance schemes were available, there were students who were not eligible for such schemes and the high tuition fees had imposed great financial pressure on them. He urged the Administration to face squarely and address the problem of high tuition fees of self-financing post-secondary institutions.

40. SED responded that the new initiative of extending the ambit of the Start-up Loan Scheme would help relieve the financial burden of self-financing degree-awarding institutions to some extent, and the Administration would not consider the proposal of providing matching grants to these institutions for campus construction at the present stage. Regarding student financial assistance, both means-tested and non-means-tested grant and loan schemes were available to provide financial assistance to students pursuing self-financing programmes. The Administration had recently implemented enhanced financial assistance measures for needy students and grants and loans were also made available to students studying in self-financing post-secondary institutions. In

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addition, with the imminent launch of the scholarship scheme under the Self-financing Post-Secondary Education Fund, scholarships would be granted to meritorious students pursuing self-financing programmes.

41. The Chairman said that one of the initiatives in the Chief Executive's 2011-2012 Policy Address was to promote the parallel development of publicly-funded and self-financing post-secondary institutions so that over two-thirds of the young people in the relevant cohort would have access to post-secondary education by 2015. Concern had been raised about the huge disparity between the financial subsidies provided by the Government to students studying in University Grants Committee ("UGC")-funded institutions and those in self-financing post-secondary institutions. As self-financing institutions received no subsidy from the Government other than grant of land at a nominal premium and loans, students studying in these institutions had to shoulder high tuition fees. Many of them had to borrow loans and were in heavy debt. Since more resources were provided to the UGC-funded institutions, the quality of these institutions was generally considered higher than that of the non-UGC-funded institutions. In her view, the existing mode of subvention was not only unhealthy for the development of the self-financing higher education sector but was also unfair to students studying in self-financing post-secondary institutions. She urged the Administration to reconsider the suggestion of providing matching grants for campus construction to self-financing post-secondary institutions.

42. SED responded that the funding allocated to education had already accounted for the largest share of Government expenditure. Given the limited public resources, the demand for increase in undergraduate student places would be met mainly by the expansion of the self-financing post-secondary education sector. While the non-UGC-funded post-secondary institutions operated on a self-financing basis, the Administration had provided them with various forms of assistance. He reiterated that grants and loans were available to needy students to ensure that they would not be denied access to tertiary education due to a lack of means.

Liberal Studies

43. Dr Priscilla LEUNG said that many parents and students had grave concern about the curriculum and assessment criteria of Liberal Studies ("LS") under the new senior secondary school system. She said that as LS lacked a structured curriculum, the mode of teaching and contents of the subject could vary greatly. Given that LS was a mandatory

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subject for university admission, many students were worried that their results in the subject would affect their chance of being admitted to local universities and were considering pursuing senior secondary studies abroad. She reiterated her view that LS should not be a mandatory subject for university admission and there should not be any examinations for the subject.

44. SED responded that the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority ("HKEAA") had implemented specific measures to address parents and students' concern about LS. Many workshops had been conducted to provide LS teachers with more information on the curriculum and assessment criteria for students' performance in LS. HKEAA would provide mock LS examination papers to schools early next year with a view to illustrating the assessment criteria and how LS examination papers should be marked to ensure objectivity and consistency in the evaluation of students' performance. He understood the concern about the LS examination given that it was the first time it would be conducted. He was confident that students, teachers and parents would have a better idea on the teaching and assessment criteria and of the subject after the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination ("HKDSE") had been implemented for a few years.

45. Given that LS results in HKSDE would affect university admission, Dr Priscilla LEUNG stressed the importance of putting in place an appeal mechanism to handle requests for review of the results in LS examination.

Mainland senior secondary students studying in Hong Kong

46. Dr LAM Tai-fai said that some schools, Direct Subsidy Scheme schools in particular, had difficulties in recruiting sufficient number of new students for various reasons, the decline in student population being one of them. These schools would have to cease operation if they could not meet the Administration's requirements for the minimum number of students. It was therefore important for schools to identify new sources of students in order to sustain operation. He pointed out that it was stated in the 2009-2010 Policy Address that the Administration would explore the possibility of allowing Mainland senior secondary students to study in Hong Kong. In his view, the initiative would not only increase the supply of students, but would also facilitate exchanges between local students and Mainland students. He sought information on the progress of the Administration's study and the implementation schedule.

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47. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that he was given to understand from the Administration that the preliminary plan was to start with senior secondary students in the Guangdong province. He shared the concern about the time taken by the Administration to liaise with the Mainland authorities and enquired whether the Administration would be able to confirm the implementation details within the current-term Government.

48. SED responded that the Administration had been liaising with the Mainland authorities on the matter and would continue to pursue it actively.

International Cuisine College

49. Dr LAM Tai-fai expressed support for the policy initiative of setting up an International Cuisine College ("the College") under the Vocational Training Council ("VTC") given Hong Kong's reputation as a gourmets' paradise. As the College was expected to be established in 2014 to provide 2 000 training places in international cuisines, he was concerned whether VTC could recruit adequate teaching staff with the required qualifications and experience to tie in with the establishment of the College. He further enquired whether the training courses offered by the College were internationally recognized.

50. SED responded that Hong Kong, being a gourmets' paradise, had attracted many outstanding members of the culinary profession from around the world. The Administration would capitalize on their expertise and make reference to relevant overseas experience. PS(Ed) supplemented that through the operation of Chinese Cuisine Training Institute ("CCTI"), VTC had built up networks with prominent cuisine colleges and catering organizations in many countries including France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and Japan. These networks had provided strong support for the development of the College. The Administration was confident that VTC would be able to recruit the required teaching staff for the College.

51. Mr Tommy CHEUNG also indicated support for the setting up of the College. He said that one of the reasons underlying the success of CCTI was that its students were not required to pay tuition fees. CCTI had attracted many outstanding students and the employment rate of its graduates was 100%. He was given to understand that VTC was considering constructing the College in Pokfulam. In his view, if the College would provide training also to those who were working, Pokfulam might not be an ideal location as the College should be located where there was convenient transport to facilitate these students to attend the courses.

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52. SED responded that VTC was looking for a suitable site for the construction of the College. Locating the College near CCTI in Pokfulam could achieve synergy which would be beneficial to the development of the College.

II. Any other business

53. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:42 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
9 December 2011