

For discussion
15 November 2011

Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs

Support on Education and Career Planning for Elite Athletes

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on education and career planning support measures that are currently available for elite athletes, and outlines our plans to strengthen these measures.

Background

2. It is generally recognised 15 – 20 years of intensive training are needed to develop a world-class athlete. This timeframe inevitably intersects with the traditional timing of an athlete’s secondary and post-secondary education. The Government and sports organisations have developed education and career support measures for serving and retired elite athletes, with a view to helping young athletes to continue to pursue their education whilst training or taking part in competitions, and to helping athletes pursue further studies or a “second career” upon retirement from high-level competition. Details of these measures are set out in the ensuing paragraphs.

Support from educational institutions for outstanding student athletes

3. Of the 1 100 or so athletes receiving training and other support from the Hong Kong Sports Institute (HKSI), about 300 are studying in secondary schools and over 80 are studying at universities. To help maximise their sporting potential, these student athletes need to dedicate significant time to training, preparation for and participation in sports events. They therefore need to be able to balance the demands of their studies and their sporting careers.

(A) Support from secondary schools

4. The Education Bureau (EDB) considers it important for students to receive a broad and balanced education and believes that high-level student athletes should study in regular schools with tailor-made training programmes. To this end, EDB adopts a supportive policy that enables students to balance high-level sports participation with study and other needs, by -

- (a) encouraging schools to arrange a flexible timetable of study in collaboration with training bodies of the sports, e.g. late turnout or early leave, skipping classes, short to prolonged leave, etc;
- (b) encouraging schools to offer tailor-made support measures, e.g. grouping student athletes into same classes for individualised academic support and pastoral care, offering make-up classes or study groups by teachers or peers, exemption from school examinations when clashing with competitions, etc; and
- (c) allowing students representing Hong Kong to request special consideration when international sports competitions clash with public examinations – in such cases the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority can exempt students from taking an examination and assess their performance using other means.

(B) Support from tertiary institutions

(i) Admission of athletes

5. Student admission is a matter within the autonomy of tertiary institutions. When considering admission applications, tertiary institutions would make a holistic assessment of an applicant's performance in all relevant respects. If an applicant has achieved outstanding results in sporting competitions, institutions have special admission schemes or may give special consideration to such an applicant.

6. Under the Joint University Programmes Admissions System, the Sub-System for School Principal's Nominations and a Self Recommendation Scheme give due recognition to students who have achieved outstanding results in "non-academic" areas such as sport. The eight University Grants Committee-funded (UGC-funded) tertiary institutions¹ also accept athletes nominated for admission by the Sports Federation and Olympic Committee of

¹ These are the University of Hong Kong, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University, Lingnan University, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong Polytechnic University and Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

Hong Kong, China (SF&OC) and the HKSI. Institutions would allow athletes who have been admitted to their institutions to defer commencement of studies; take leave to take part in training and competitions; and extend their period of study on a case-by-case basis. They also make arrangements to cater to other needs of athletes, as explained in paragraphs 7 and 8 below. In 2010 and 2011, 29 athletes have been admitted to local tertiary institutions under this arrangement.

(ii) Special study arrangements for athletes

7. Tertiary institutions provide flexibility to allow student athletes to train and take part in competitions taking into account their individual circumstances. For example, institutions may provide special arrangements with regard to class schedules, coursework submission and examinations for student athletes. Athletes may also apply for leave of absence, suspension, deferral or extension of studies to suit their study pace, in accordance with the regulations of individual institutions.

8. Some institutions have dedicated personnel (e.g., team managers, coaches, mentors or academic advisers) to offer advice to student athletes on academic and other matters. Several institutions have designated financial aid, scholarships and awards for student athletes and some also make special arrangements to cater for athletes' accommodation needs.

Support from the Hong Kong Sports Institute

9. In fulfilling its role as the key delivery agent for high performance training for Hong Kong top athletes, the HKSI also stresses the importance of a “whole-of-person” development approach and aims to cater to the different needs of athletes during and after their sporting career.

(A) *Hong Kong Athletes Fund*

10. The HKSI administers the Hong Kong Athletes Fund (HKAF), which provides grants to individual athletes for educational and other academic training, so as to enable them to continue their studies and to develop alternative careers upon retirement from competitive sport. Grants can be used to fund a range of study options, including certificate, diploma and degree courses offered by the following educational institutions -

- (a) UGC-funded tertiary education institutions;
- (b) post-secondary institutions;
- (c) Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education;
- (d) university continuing education departments; and
- (e) approved overseas colleges or universities (if no comparable courses are offered locally).

Athletes may apply for grants to cover tuition fees as well as a subsistence allowance during the course of study. To date, the HKSI has granted a total of about \$11 million from the HKAF to 117 athletes.

(B) Other education and career services

11. The HKSI provides education and career planning services to athletes through the Enhanced Athletes Educational and Vocational Development Programmes, which comprise support programmes to cater to the different needs of athletes. For example, under the Elite Athletes Tutorial Support programme, athletes may receive one-to-one instruction in languages, mathematics and other subjects. Special services, such as on-line learning materials, may be arranged when athletes are away from Hong Kong for training or competition. On average, more than 120 athletes benefit from the programme each year. Other programmes include the Elite Coaching Apprenticeship Programme and the Elite Athletes Coach Education Support programme, which provide a pathway for athletes to become accredited coaches, whilst the Elite Athletes Development Programme provides training in areas such as communication, time management and financial management skills to more than 360 athletes on average per year. Detailed descriptions of these programmes are at **Annex I**.

12. In addition, the HKSI and the Beijing Sport University (BSU) jointly offered a “Bachelor of Education in Sports Training” programme for Hong Kong athletes. The Programme is a five-year part-time bachelor degree course covering sports anatomy, exercise physiology, sports nutrition, sports-specific theory and practice. So far, 58 participants have completed the course and 23 are currently studying on this course.

Support by the SF&OC

13. Whilst the HKSI focuses on the education and career planning needs of athletes during their sporting career, the SF&OC addresses the needs of athletes who have retired or will soon retire from high-level competition.

14. In 2008, the Government allocated about \$11 million to the SF&OC to launch the Hong Kong Athletes Career & Education Programme (HKACEP). The HKACEP now has ten programmes and has benefited more than 200 athletes (many of whom have taken part in more than one programme). From 2011-12 onwards, we have allocated a further \$1 million to the SF&OC annually to enhance the HKACEP.

15. As with the support programmes run by the HKSI, the HKACEP offers grants to athletes to enrol in English and other language courses, and has scholarship programmes for certificate, diploma, higher or advanced diploma, associate degree and degree courses run by educational institutions. The maximum grant that an eligible athlete may receive (for full-time degree courses) is \$240,000. As at October 2011, 33 retired athletes have benefited from the scholarship programmes to enrol in post-secondary education, vocational skills training or undergraduate courses. Also, the Academic Enhancement Scheme for Post-Secondary and Undergraduate Programme provides subsidies to retired athletes who need additional education assistance such as private tuition during their post-secondary or undergraduate studies.

16. The HKACEP also runs programmes for retired athletes and those who are about to retire to help them plan for a “second career”. These include seminars, workshops, consultation services and placement schemes. So far 30 retired athletes have secured full-time or part-time jobs through the HKACEP. More information on the HKACEP programmes is at **Annex II**.

Assessment and Way Forward

17. There have been some clear improvements in the level of education and career planning support for athletes in recent years, in particular with the introduction of the programmes developed by the HKSI and the SF&OC described above. Nonetheless, there remain issues of concern to athletes and their families, in particular the perception that training as a full-time athlete means giving up formal education and limiting future career options.

18. We acknowledge these concerns, and we will continue to work with EDB, the tertiary institutions and leading sports organisations to identify ways of allowing student athletes more flexibility in their study programmes so as to allow them to pursue with confidence a career in sport without having to sacrifice their continued education. In this regard, the improvements to the facilities at the HKSI under its \$1.8 billion re-development project and the additional funding available from the newly-established Elite Athletes Development Fund will help to provide a strong resource base. Areas that we will pursue include –

- (a) strengthening the existing education and career planning services offered by the HKSI and the SF&OC;
- (b) developing tailor-made in-house education programmes for student athletes at the HKSI that can cater for their individual training needs;
- (c) encouraging post-secondary institutions to allow more flexibility for high-level student athletes to pursue their studies and to recognise the educational value of the experience gained by athletes during their years of high-level training; and
- (d) working with tertiary institutions to develop accredited programmes in areas that are relevant to sports development such as sports science and coaching.

Advice Sought

19. Members are invited to note the measures currently in place to support athletes' education and career planning, and to comment and advise on areas for further improvement.

Home Affairs Bureau
November 2011

**Enhanced Athletes Educational and Vocational Development
Programmes of the HKSI**

	Programme	Details
1.	Elite Athletes Tutorial Support	Supporting athletes requiring additional assistance in languages, mathematics, and other subjects. Subject tutors align classes with athletes' training schedules and provide one-to-one guidance. Special tutorial services, such as online learning materials, can be arranged to facilitate athletes' learning when they go overseas for training and competitions.
2.	Elite Athletes Education Subsidy	Athletes may apply for reimbursement of tuition fees for academic and vocational programmes.
3.	Elite Athletes Coach Education Subsidy Programme	Athletes may apply for full reimbursement of fees for the Coach Accreditation Programme conducted by the HKSI as they receive training to become qualified coaches.
4.	Elite Athletes Development Programme	This programme focuses on personal development and offers workshops on themes such as communication and public speaking skills, time management and goal setting, financial management and team building
5.	Elite Athletes Exchange Programme	This programme offers athletes an opportunity to participate in exchange activities in different parts of the world so that they may widen their

	Programme	Details
		knowledge of sports development in other countries.
6.	Elite Coaching Apprenticeship Programme	This prepares athletes who will retire from competition in two years with training to become coaches. Athletes participating in the programme receive coach training and are employed by the HKSI as part-time coaches for hands-on experience.

SF&OC Hong Kong Athletes Career & Education Programme

	Programme	Details
1.	Integrated General English Course	Grants are provided to eligible athletes enrolling in a one-year English course with continuity possibility.
2.	Seminars and Workshops on Education, Career Development and Athletes Affairs	This programme seeks to enhance athletes' personal skills. Seminars and workshops covering topics such as education and vocational training, public relations, legal knowledge and investment are offered free of charge.
3.	Scholarship Programme for Post-secondary Education & Vocational Skills Training	This programme provides scholarships for courses offered by tertiary and post-secondary institutions, Vocational Training Council Technical Colleges and Technical Institutions, and university continuing education department. Courses provided by overseas colleges or universities may be covered if there are no comparable courses provided in Hong Kong.
4.	Language Enrichment Course	This programme provides grants to athletes who wish to enhance their skills in English, Putonghua and other languages to help meet their long-term career development needs.
5.	Scholarship Programme for Undergraduate	This programme provides scholarships for athletes enrolling in undergraduate courses offered by a local UGC-funded university. Courses provided by overseas colleges or universities may be covered if there are no comparable

	Programme	Details
		courses provided in Hong Kong.
6.	Academic Enhancement Scheme for Post-secondary and Undergraduate	This programme provides support to athletes enrolling in post-secondary education who may require additional assistance in their studies. Language preparation classes or private tuition classes may also be covered.
7.	Consultation Services on Athletes' Education and Career Development	This programme helps athletes prepare for their post-athletic career through improving interview skills, training on CV writing, business foundation courses and professional counselling
8.	Career Programme (Job Opportunities)	Suitable candidates will be recommended to HKACEP supporting corporations for jobs. The Programme matches suitable candidates with supporting corporations for permanent or temporary placement opportunities.
9.	Ambassador Programme	This programme appoints retired athletes as ambassadors to help promote sport in schools and in the community.
10.	Life Skills and Mentorship Programme	This programme provides life skills training, such as leadership and team building, computer applications, public speaking and inter-personal skills. Prominent public figures and former athletes are appointed as mentors to give guidance to retired athletes under the mentorship programme.