



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部教育局
Education Bureau
Government Secretariat, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
The People's Republic of China

本局檔號 Our Ref. : EDB(CDI/TR)/300-30/1/12 (1)
來函檔號 Your Ref. : CB4/PL/ED

電話 Telephone : 3509 8529
傳真 Fax Line : 3104 0425

27 May 2013

Miss Polly YEUNG
Clerk to Panel
Legislative Council Panel on Education
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central
Hong Kong
(Fax no.: 3151 7052)

Dear Miss YEUNG,

**Panel on Education
Prices of school textbooks**

I refer to your letter dated 8 May 2013. Our written response is set out below.

The Education Bureau (EDB) attaches great importance to the quality of textbooks for students and is concerned about textbook prices at the same time. The pricing of textbooks is a business decision of the publishers, which the Government should not overly interfere. Given its impact on the livelihood of ordinary families, the EDB strives to rationalise the practice of bundling the sale of textbooks with teaching materials.

To tackle the issue of textbook prices, the EDB set up the Working Group on Textbooks and e-Learning Resources Development comprising a wide spectrum of stakeholders and professionals in 2008 to examine the development and prices of textbooks as well as to study the success factors contributing to the extensive use of e-learning resources. Based on the recommendations from the Working Group's report issued in 2009, the EDB demanded that the publishers should debundle their textbooks from the related teaching/learning resources for pricing (the debundling policy) from the 2010/11 school year to allow the market to operate on a "user-pays" basis. The EDB agreed to postpone the actual implementation of the debundling policy to the 2011/12 school year to allow the publishers time to clear the copyright on the teaching materials as requested. They should in the same time freeze textbook prices in the

2010/11 school year. However, the two Publishers Associations only agreed to debundle their textbooks by phases, i.e. the core subjects of primary and junior secondary levels in 2012, the other subjects of primary and junior secondary levels in 2013, and all subjects of senior secondary level in 2014.

To review and examine the issues in connection with the debundling policy, the EDB set up the Task Force to Review Learning and Teaching Materials in 2011. In the same year, the Task Force issued a report and proposed six recommendations which were adopted by the EDB and implemented accordingly:

- to develop quality and reasonably-priced e-textbooks in order to provide users with a greater choice of effective learning/teaching resources;
- to add new criteria to the existing requirements for reviewing textbooks to facilitate textbook recycling;
- to allow textbooks submitted in batches to lessen the publishers' risk and lower the entry barrier to the textbook market;
- to introduce the "double-blind" system to enhance the objectivity and impartiality of the textbook review exercise;
- to provide information such as comparisons and changes of textbook prices in the EDB's Recommended Textbook List (RTL) to enhance transparency of the pricing of textbooks; and
- to include commentaries on the core areas of textbooks in the RTL to facilitate schools' selection of textbooks.

To implement the debundling policy, the EDB has issued circular memoranda to schools and conducted seminars for teachers to advise them to refrain from accepting free teaching materials from the publishers. Taking into consideration that the debundling policy will not be fully implemented until 2014, the EDB announced the "special measures". From the 2012/13 school year, the EDB allows schools to borrow from the publishers inspection copies of textbooks, which should be returned to the publishers at the end of the school year, and to accept on conditions free teacher's handbooks from the publishers.

Since the introduction of multi-pronged measures by the EDB, there are notable signs that the textbook prices have been stabilised in recent years and could even beat the inflation rate from the 2012/13 school year (Table 1). As in 2013, 70% of the textbooks have been debundled and their price increase is lower than that of the bundled ones (Table 2).

Table 1: Textbook price increase as compared with the CCPI

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Increase in Textbook Prices	Prices frozen	3.5%	2.9%	3.2%

Inflation*	0.4%	2.5%	5.8%	4.1%
------------	------	------	------	------

Remarks : *The average Composite Consumer Price Index (CCPI) of the last 12 months from March of each year.

Table 2: A comparison of the price increase between debundled and bundled textbooks

	Price increase	Remarks
Debundled Textbooks	2.98%	Prices frozen or reduced for 22.4% of the textbooks (Total no. of textbooks: 2 044)
Bundled Textbooks	3.67%	Prices frozen or reduced for 3.44% of the textbooks (Total no. of textbooks: 900)

The debundling policy is part of the EDB's multi-pronged measures to tackle the issue of textbook prices. To further stabilise the textbook prices and alleviate the financial burden of parents, the EDB will continue to implement the following measures:

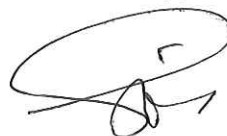
- to urge the publishers to expedite the debundling of all textbooks and learning/teaching materials for pricing, and to appeal to them to exercise "corporate social responsibility" by not marking up textbook prices drastically;
- to advise schools to refrain from accepting learning/teaching materials from the publishers for free under the debundling policy;
- to review and optimise the textbook review system to lessen the publishers' risk and lower the entry barrier to the textbook market;
- to encourage various textbook recycling schemes in schools or with environmental protection agencies;
- to implement the "e-Textbook Market Development Scheme" (EMADS) to introduce competition and to provide an alternative to the printed textbook market;
- to minimise teachers' reliance on teaching materials from the publishers by promoting and enhancing the "EDB One-stop Portal for Learning and Teaching Resources", which has been launched since May 2012; and
- to promote school-based curriculum development to enhance the capacity of schools in developing teaching/learning materials.

Besides, we understand that textbook prices may cause financial hardship to low-income families. Through the School Textbook Assistance Scheme of the Student Financial Assistance Agency and the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme of the Social Welfare Department, eligible families can be subsidised to buy textbooks for their

children. In the 2012/13 school year, there are over 337,000 students benefiting from the Schemes, accounting for 45% of the student population. The total subsidy granted is over 980 million dollars. Generally speaking, families with an average monthly income at or below the median monthly household income are eligible for assistance.

We will regularly review the progress and effectiveness of the abovementioned measures and take action as required.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Stephen Y W Yip', written over a large, light-colored oval scribble.

(Stephen Y W Yip)
for Secretary for Education

c.c. SExO(AS)2, EDB