

Letterhead of THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Legco Panel on Home Affairs: 14 September 1998

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Preamble

The government's review of local administration provides the ideal opportunity for reviewing the structures of administering arts and culture in HK.

Large sums of public money are spent annually in this area, but because of fragmented coordination, uncreative bureaucratic supervision, and monopolistic control of venues, the resources spent on the arts have not been fully maximised. Nor has any leadership been shown by the municipal councils or government departments in trying to work out a comprehensive cultural policy which would take in arts education and creative industry.

These are policy issues that should be carefully scrutinised and the results publicly debated because they involve the public at large.

It has been the usual practice of government and the municipal councils to prepare and circulate consultative papers without taking heed of expert opinion or of independent assessment. And it has also been their practice to keep the evaluation of the results of the consultation and the steps to be implemented secret from the public. This has meant that we do not know what steps they have chosen to implement nor the reasons for taking these steps. Neither are we told the timetable for the implementation. Therefore monitoring has not been possible.

Proposal

We therefore propose that:

1. government should announce what policies it has decided to formulate with regard to the structure of the arts and culture in Hong Kong subsequent to its consultative paper.
2. Government should submit its draft plans for independent evaluation by local as well as external experts. We would like to add that in order to secure an objective opinion, government should be careful not to choose local consultants who were once civil servants attached to either the municipal councils or central government.
3. Following the publication of the independent evaluation, there should be a public consultation to discuss the evaluation.
4. Government should ensure that apart from the Home Affairs Bureau, other relevant bureaus like the Education and Manpower Bureau, Economic Services Bureau, Information Technology and Broadcasting Bureau and Trade and Industry Bureau should also be involved in the drafting of the cultural policy and in its evaluation. This is to guarantee that the eventual policy on arts and culture will be fully comprehensive.