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LegCo Panel on Education

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Tuesday, 3 July 2001 at 10:45 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members Present** : Dr Hon YEUNG Sum (Chairman)
Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung, BBS (Deputy Chairman)
Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, JP
Hon SZETO Wah
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
- Members Absent** : Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, JP
Prof Hon NG Ching-fai
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon SIN Chung-kai
Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP
Hon LAU Kong-wah
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok
Hon WONG Sing-chi

**Public Officers
Attending** : Item I

Mrs Fanny LAW
Secretary for Education and Manpower

Miss Janet WONG
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (3)

Mr John LEUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and
Manpower (9)

Mr Matthew CHEUNG, JP
Director of Education

Mr Peter P Y LEUNG
Assistant Director of Education (Special Duties)

Item II

Mr John LEUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and
Manpower (9)

Mr Matthew CHEUNG, JP
Director of Education

Mr Peter P Y LEUNG
Assistant Director of Education (Special Duties)

Mr Andrew C S POON
Assistant Director of Education (Chief Inspector of Schools)

Item III

Mrs Avia LAI
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and
Manpower (3)

Mr Matthew CHEUNG, JP
Director of Education

Mr K S LEE
Assistant Director of Education (Planning & Research)

Item IV

Mr Matthew CHEUNG, JP
Director of Education

Mr K S LEE
Assistant Director of Education (Planning & Research)

Clerk in Attendance : Miss Flora TAI
Chief Assistant Secretary (2)2

Staff in Attendance : Mr Stanley MA
Senior Assistant Secretary (2)6

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I. Review of the Kindergarten Subsidy Scheme
[Paper Nos. CB(2)1982/00-01(01)-(02)]

At the invitation of the Chairman, Secretary for Education and Manpower (SEM) briefed members on the salient points of the Administration's paper [Paper No.CB(2)1982/00-01(01)] which detailed the possible improvements to the Kindergarten Subsidy Scheme (KSS) to provide incentives to enhance the quality of early childhood education (ECE) as well as to ensure more cost-effective use of resources. Notably, the rate of subsidy would be calculated on the basis of a group of 15 pupils at \$23,600 for kindergartens (KGs) which employed 60% qualified KG teachers (QKTs), instead of the existing arrangement whereby the subsidy was calculated on the basis of a class size of 30 pupils at \$41,000. To encourage KGs participating in KSS to upgrade the qualifications of their teachers, the rate of subsidy would be increased to \$27,200 and \$31,300 to correspond to 80% and 100% QKTs attainments. In other words, should the aforesaid proposals be pursued, there would be three KSS group rates for KGs, namely, \$23,600 for 60% QKTs; \$27,200 for 80% QKTs and \$31,300 for 100% QKTs. (These rates represented increases of 15%, 33% and 53% over the existing rate of class grant of \$41,000 based on 30 pupils.) SEM further said that subject to any views which members might have on the proposals contained in the paper, the Administration would formally consult all KG operators during the summer before deciding on the way forward.

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2. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed support for the proposals set out in the Administration's paper. Mr CHEUNG, however, was of the view that the proposals could only achieve more effective deployment of resources, but could not alleviate the financial burden on parents. In this connection, Mr CHEUNG urged the Administration to allocate more resources to KSS which currently only stood at \$150 million per annum or representing a meagre 2.7 % of the total \$55.3 billion spent on education for the current financial year.

3. SEM responded that although Mr CHEUNG's proposition was understandable, there were many equally deserving public programmes competing for resources. Given that resources were finite, the overriding principle was to use them on areas most in need rather than pre-set a certain percentage of expenditure for a particular public programme. SEM, nevertheless, pointed out that money spent on KSS would exceed \$150 million a year and many KGs would receive more subsidy following the implementation of the improvement measures proposed in the Administration's paper. SEM explained that under the existing arrangement, a KG already employing 60% QKTs would receive a class grant of \$41,000 based on 30 pupils; whereas, under the new arrangement, a KG would receive a group rate of \$23,600, \$27,200 or \$31,300 if it had already achieved 60%, 80% and 100% QKTs attainments respectively. KGs already employing 100% QKTs would have room to reduce school fees, which averaged about \$11,946 per annum in 2000-01, and/or improve the level of service if they had no enrollment problem. SEM also pointed out that money spent on ECE was more than \$150 million a year, having regard to the fact that some \$300 million had been set aside for teacher education and training for the coming five years. Moreover, this \$300 million had not included courses run by University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions. SEM further said that the Administration was currently reviewing the Fee Remission Scheme to examine how best to improve financial support for needy families.

4. Referring to members' calls to include ECE as part of basic education to be provided free for all, SEM said that the Administration had no intention to do so at this stage because it was questionable whether money should be spent in this way, at a time when there were competing demands for resources from various sectors of education. The Administration was also aware of the vagaries of market forces and the problems of market failure, and considered that it had a role to play in planning and regulating the provision of ECE, and in providing financial assistance, where necessary. In view of the aforesaid, the Administration considered that the existing three-pronged approach of subsidising non-profit making KGs aiming at minimising the impact of fee increases on parents, helping needy families through the Fee Remission Scheme and investing in teacher education and training should continue.

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5. Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung echoed Mr CHEUNG's view that more resources should be allocated to ECE. Mr YEUNG then enquired about the expenditure on KSS under the new group grant system, and action(s) taken by the Administration to encourage non-profit making KGs which did not join KSS to improve their teacher to pupil ratio and employ more QKTs.

6. SEM responded that although she could not give an answer on the increase in expenditure on KSS under the new group grant system at this stage, such an increase would definitely exceed \$10 million a year. As to Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung's second question, SEM said that all KGs were required to follow the regulatory requirements that teacher to pupil ratio for KGs should be 1:15 for all KG classes and that all new teachers must have completed pre-service training for QKT by 2003-04.

7. As there was no timetable requiring serving KG teachers to become QKTs, Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung wondered whether a long time would be taken to achieve the target that all KG teachers must be QKTs. SEM responded that all KGs should have no great difficulty in achieving 100% QKT attainment by 2003-04, having regard to the facts that the wastage rate of non-qualified KG teachers averaged about 20% in the past years and that there were sufficient QKT training places for all serving non-qualified KG teachers. SEM further said that the Administration would not rule out the possibility of requiring all KGs to employ 100% QKTs when there was an adequate supply of QKTs in the market.

8. Referring to paragraph 8 of the Administration's paper which stated that the Administration aimed to raise the entry qualifications of KG teachers to sub-degree or higher levels in the longer term after achieving 100% QKTs through training and natural wastage by 2003-04, Mr SZETO Wah was of the view that the Administration should not wait after 2003-04 to raise the entry qualifications of KG teachers to sub-degree or higher levels, and should encourage UGC-funded institutions and continuing education providers to run sub-degree or higher levels courses in KG education as soon as practicable. Mr SZETO was also of the view that the Administration should increase subsidy to those KGs which employed people who were holders of sub-degree or higher levels in KG education.

9. SEM responded that the Administration would encourage UGC-funded institutions and continuing education providers to operate sub-degree or higher levels courses in KG education as soon as practicable. SEM explained that raising the entry qualification of KG teachers to sub-degree or higher levels was set as a longer term target because Hong Kong had to first achieve the target that all KG teachers must receive QKT training and that all serving KG principals and child care centre supervisors who had not been professionally trained must receive suitable professional training. As the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIED) was presently occupied with providing such training and education, it was

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doubtful whether it had the capacity to train a sizeable number of people wishing to attain a sub-degree qualification in KG education. To address the problem of the lack of sub-degree or higher levels places in KG education in Hong Kong, the Administration was currently exploring with institutions providing ECE in the Mainland and overseas on the feasibility to provide the places required. On the suggestion of increasing subsidy to those KGs which employed people who were holders of sub-degree or higher levels in KG education, SEM said that there was no need to do so as KGs, which had achieved 100% QKTs under the existing class grant system, would stand to receive up to 53% increase in subsidy if they could achieve 100% QKTs under the new group grant system. SEM added that KGs were not required to spend the extra resources to reduce school fees, and could use them to enhance the quality of their teachers.

10. Ms Audrey EU enquired about the number of KGs which might be forced to close down as a result of implementing the new group grant system. Ms EU further enquired whether pupils affected would need to travel far to attend another KGs.

11. SEM responded that on the basis of the enhanced group grant of \$31,300, it was estimated that about 100 KGs which were under-enrolled might not be financially viable. SEM, however, pointed out that the actual number of KGs which would face closure could be smaller if the KGs concerned could secure financial backing from the sponsoring bodies. Regarding Ms EU's concern that children might need to travel far to attend another KGs if the KGs they previously attended were forced to close down because of financial difficulty, SEM said that this situation should not arise as it was the Administration's intention that there should be an adequate number of KGs in each public housing estate or area to meet demand. Assistant Director of Education (Special Duties) (AD of E(SD)) supplemented that the rationalisation of KGs was primarily aimed at addressing the problem of over-supply of KGs in a particular public housing estate or area to avoid too many KGs chasing after too few students.

12. Mr TSANG Yok-sing said that the Government's policy on ECE failed to ensure the quality of ECE, as only some 68 000 out of some 160 000 pupils in all KGs or 295 out of 789 KGs participated in KSS. To remedy the situation, Mr TSANG was of the view that the Administration should draw up a set of minimum standards on the qualification of teachers, teaching facilities and other pertinent areas for all KGs to follow. On providing financial assistance to non-profit making KGs, Mr TSANG suggested that the rate of subsidy could be based on student unit cost and granted in a group size of 15 pupils.

13. SEM responded that the Education Department (ED), in collaboration with representatives of the education sector, had already drawn up a set of standardised quality indicators to provide a common basis for evaluating ECE in Hong Kong,

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which would be put into practice shortly. Moreover, the Administration had been encouraging KG operators to formulate the framework, procedures and tools for self-evaluation as early as possible, and to systemically review the various key aspects so as to help them better understand their own effectiveness and areas for improvement. SEM reiterated that it was the Administration's intention to require all KGs to employ 100% QKTs by 2003-04. The reason why this could not be done at this stage was because there were not enough QKTs in the market. On the suggestion of using a planned economy-like approach in providing subsidy to KGs, SEM expressed doubt about its workability given the varied circumstances of KGs. To find out whether the current expenditure on KSS was sufficient to meet the two targets of raising the teacher-pupil ratio to 1:15 and employing 100% QKTs, the Administration had recently carried out a simulation of income and expenditure for KGs. The results showed that current KSS expenditure, if equitably distributed, was generally sufficient to meet both targets. To address the problem that only 51% of existing KSS KGs could still maintain 100% QKTs under the enhanced manning ratio of 1:15, the Administration had proposed an increase of the group rate from \$23,600 in two steps to \$27,000 and \$31,300 to encourage KGs to achieve 80% and 100% QKTs.

14. Mr TSANG Yok-sing further enquired why some non-profit making KGs did not join KSS. AD of E(SD) responded that the main reasons were that these KGs did not wish to disclose their accounts and pay their teachers according to the recommended salary scales. SEM added that the Administration envisaged that more non-profit making KGs not in KSS would join KSS in the long run. This was because very few of them could compete with KSS KGs which employed 100% QKTs and had a manning ratio of 1:15 and be financially viable.

15. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed concern that there was no government monitoring of the quality of education provided by private KGs and non-profit making KGs not in KSS, and enquired about the actions to address such. Mr CHEUNG further enquired whether consideration would be given to setting a timetable requiring KSS KGs to achieve 80% and 100% QKTs.

16. SEM responded that it was not true that private KGs and non-profit making KGs not in KSS were not subject to monitoring by the Government. For example, all KGs were expected to achieve 100% QKTs by 2003-04. Another example was that ED would carry out random checks on KGs to ensure that their operation was in line with the legislation. Other measures to ensure the quality of service provided by private KGs and non-profit making KGs included the Administration's plan to put in place common standards for all KGs and a self-evaluation mechanism mentioned in paragraph 13 above. The publication of KG profiles by ED also served as a useful monitoring tool, as parents would choose to send their children to KGs which employed more QKTs and had a high teacher to pupil ratio. As regards Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong's second question, SEM agreed

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to consider the suggestion of setting a timetable requiring KSS KGs to achieve 80% and 100% QKTs, and, possibly to extend such requirement to all private KGs and non-profit making KGs not in KSS.

17. Miss Cyd HO referred to paragraph 16 of the Administration's paper which stated that the unhealthy competition amongst KGs had not only affected the financial viability of some KGs but also driven down quality. To avoid the aforesaid situation from occurring, Miss HO enquired whether consideration could be given to subsidising the salary of QKTs in full. Noting that some 44 subsidised classes had less than five pupils, Miss HO enquired about the number of KGs involved.

18. SEM responded that the provision of full subsidy to the salary of QKT teachers would not necessarily ensure the quality of ECE. The Administration considered that measures such as enhancing professional competency, the quality assurance mechanism, the transparency of KGs and the interface between early childhood and primary education would be more effective and direct in enhancing the quality of ECE. Responding to Miss HO's second question, AD of E(SD) said that the some 44 subsidised classes having less than five pupils occurred among 20 to 30 KGs which were mainly located in public housing estates.

19. Mr Tommy CHEUNG noted that in order to rectify the situation of too many KGs chasing after too few students, the Administration intended to encourage KGs which were under-enrolled to apply for new premises in developing new towns where the population was building up. Mr CHEUNG enquired about the criteria used to select KGs for re-provisioning. Mr CHEUNG expressed concern that if there was only one KG operating in a public housing estate, the quality of service provided by the KG concerned would drop because of the lack of competition.

20. AD of E(SD) responded that the concern highlighted by Mr Tommy CHEUNG about having only one KG in a public housing estate should not arise. This was because over-supply of KGs generally occurred in a public housing estate where there were three KGs, and that this situation could be rectified if the number of KGs were reduced to two. On selection criteria, AD of E(SD) said that as a rule of thumb, the Administration would encourage the one which had a good track record of providing quality education to apply for new premises in developing new towns. Mr Tommy CHEUNG further enquired about the action which would be taken by the Administration if all three KGs had a good track record of providing ECE. AD of E(SD) responded that if that were the case, the Administration would encourage the three KGs concerned to discuss among themselves as to which one of them should move to another premises. This approach normally worked, as it was a matter of survival for all of them.

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21. The Chairman said that members were supportive of the proposals contained in the Administration's paper. Their main concern, however, lied in the lack of adequate government funding for ECE. In this connection, the Chairman urged SEM to raise members' request to the highest level of the Government for consideration.

II. Library grant for kindergartens and child care centres
[Paper No. CB(2)1982/00-01(03)]

22. Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower (9) (PAS(EM)9) introduced the Administration's paper which detailed the proposal to provide, in the 2001-02 financial year, a one-off grant of \$20,000 to each non-profit making KG and child care centre (CCC) to buy library books and teaching resources.

23. Miss Cyd HO enquired whether the library grant could only be used to buy books. Miss HO further said that the Administration should consider making the provision of library grant to non-profit making KGs and CCCs a standing practice, though the amount might not necessarily be \$20,000. Mr SZETO Wah, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong, Mr Tommy CHEUNG and Ms Audrey EU shared Miss HO's view.

24. AD of E(SD) clarified that apart from books, the library grant could also be used to acquire other teaching resources such as manipulative toys, dramatic play materials and art materials. On the suggestion of making the library grant a standing practice, PAS(EM)9 responded that the Administration would review the effectiveness of the grant and other pertinent factors before coming to a decision. He further said that all KGs and CCCs had their own stock of library books for their pupils, and the library grant only served as a supplement to enable them to acquire more quality books of a wide variety and other teaching resources. It was hoped that the enrichment of the resources in KGs or CCCs for borrowing by the pupils would greatly facilitate parents in cultivating reading habits among their children.

25. Mr SZETO Wah suggested that the Administration should conduct a survey on the children books market in Hong Kong, having regard to the fact that the library grant could not achieve its desired effect if there was a very limited selection of quality children books in the market. An opportunity should also be taken to find out the reading habit and preferences of young children. As publication of children books was not a lucrative business, Mr SZETO further suggested that the Administration should approach charitable organisations or philanthropists about the possibility of setting up a fund to underwrite the publication of quality children books. Mr SZETO also hoped that the

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Administration would give recipients of the library grant the latitude to acquire the types of library books and other teaching resources they wished.

26. AD of E(SD) agreed to give Mr SZETO's suggestions further thoughts. AD of E(SD) further said that the only condition which would be imposed on non-profit making KGs and CCCs on the use of the library grant was that at least 50% of the grant must be used to acquire books. Assistant Director of Education (Chief Inspector of Schools) (AD of E(CIS)) supplemented that ED would provide suggestions/guidance on the selection of library books for kindergartens' reference in the circular. AD of E(CIS) further said that at present some non-government organisations in Hong Kong such as the Hong Kong Council of Early Childhood Education and Services also produced children books.

27. Mr SZETO further said that apart from books and other teaching resources such as those mentioned by the Administration in paragraph 24 above, video and audio cassettes and the Internet should also be used to develop children's interest in reading.

28. Mr Tommy CHEUNG enquired whether there was a time limit for KGs and CCCs to spend the library grant. Mr CHEUNG hoped that this would not be the case, as these institutions would be compelled to spend the money for the sake of spending it instead of using the money when needed. Mr CHEUNG also expressed concern that some non-profit making KGs and CCCs might divert part of their library grants to subsidise their textbook expense, having regard to the fact that many KGs and CCCs now included the provision of textbooks in their tuition fees.

29. AD of E(SD) responded that non-profit making KGs and CCCs were not required to spend the entire \$20,000 grant in one year, and could spread the use of it over two to three years' period. AD of E(SD) further said that the likelihood of non-profit making KGs and CCCs diverting part of their library grants to subsidise their textbook expense was remote, as such expense was not a significant amount and should have been fully incorporated in the tuition fees.

30. Ms Audrey EU expressed concern at the paucity of good quality Chinese children books in Hong Kong, and urged the Administration to do something to rectify such situation. The Chairman concurred with Ms EU. Ms EU then enquired about the basis for setting the library grant at \$20,000.

31. AD of E(SD) admitted that the selection of good quality Chinese children books in Hong Kong could be improved, and would explore with the trades and other concerned parties on the matter. On the question of the basis for setting the library grant at \$20,000, AD of E(SD) said that no formula was used in coming up with the amount as the grant was intended as a one-off subsidy.

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32. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that one quick and cost-effective way to increase the varieties of book collections for pupils of KGs and CCCs was for these institutions within a school net to exchange their library books. Mr CHEUNG pointed out that such an arrangement was being adopted by some primary schools with very positive results. AD of E(SD) agreed to consider Mr CHEUNG's suggestion.

III. Consultation Document on Arrangements for Implementing the “Through-train” Mode

[Consultation Document issued by the Education Department]

33. Assistant Director of Education (Planning and Research) (AD of E(PR)) briefed members on the salient features of the Consultation Document on Arrangements for Implementing "Through-train" Mode (the Consultation Document).

34. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed concern that as a result of implementing the "through-train" proposal, competition for places in popular schools would be advanced to Primary One Admission (POA) stage and that primary and secondary schools forming a "through-train" might become a closed system denying access to other students, having regard to the fact that in the Consultation Document, it was proposed that existing secondary schools switching to "through-train" schools were only required to reserve not less than 7% of their total number of Secondary 1 (S1) places for pupils of other primary schools seeking admission through the discretionary places admission stage or central allocation.

35. Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower (3) (PAS(EM)3) responded that the concern that competition for places in popular schools would be advanced to POA stage should be ameliorated with the implementation of the reform to the POA system whereby about 50% of Primary One (P1) places would be earmarked for central allocation by computer according to school nets and parental choices from the 2002-03 school year. As regards the existing point system for admission to P1, PAS(EM)3 said that the Administration planned to review it before the long-term mechanism was implemented in 2005/06. Regarding the concern that primary and secondary schools forming a "through-train" might become a closed system denying access to other students, AD of E(PR) said that one possible solution to the problem was to reduce the number of classes in the "through-train" primary schools. However, such a move would need to have the consent of the "through-train" primary and secondary schools. AD of E(PR) further said that as the "through-train" mode was a brand-new concept, the

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Administration would continuously explore, implement and verify as it went along. Therefore, a progressive approach for future development would be adopted.

36. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed doubt about the desirability of reducing the number of classes of "through-train" primary schools so as to enable their linked secondary schools to reserve more S1 places for other students, as this would mean that P1 places in these schools, which were generally the most sought-after schools by parents, would be curtailed. Mr CHEUNG pointed out that merely reducing the number of P6 graduates of a "through-train" primary school might not necessarily increase the number of places reserved for outside students by its linked secondary school, having regard to the Administration's plan of reducing the class size of secondary school. In his view, a better approach would be to build more classrooms for the "through-train" secondary schools under the School Improvement Programme. Mr CHEUNG further said that consideration should also be given to increasing the number of classrooms for those secondary schools which though well-run were not well-known. AD of E(PR) agreed to consider Mr CHEUNG's suggestions. He, however, pointed out that secondary schools interested in forming "through-train" schools were mostly those which had been in existence for a long time and their capacity were fully utilised. It was unlikely that there would be any leeway for adding more classrooms.

37. Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung referred to the third principle for considering applications to form "through-train" schools which stated that "primary and secondary schools must have the same financing mode to ensure that a consistent mechanism is applied in admitting students. (In this context, private schools and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools are regarded as having the same mode.) In case there is new development in the financing modes in future, this principle may need to be reviewed". He enquired about the reason for putting in the last sentence. Given the advantages of a "through-train" school, Mr YEUNG enquired why the Administration estimated that "through-train" schools would only constitute a small number of schools in Hong Kong.

38. Responding to Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung's first question, PAS(EM)3 said that the third principle for considering applications to form "through-train" schools was exactly the same as what was recommended in the Report on Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong published by the Education Commission (EC) in September 2000. The reason for stating that the third principle might be reviewed was because the possibility of new development in the financing modes for schools in future could not be entirely ruled out. PAS(EM)3 further said that the reasons why it was estimated that only a small number of schools in Hong Kong would form "through-train" schools was because such formation was voluntary. Moreover, such primary/secondary schools must be able to meet the

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three principles for forming a "through-train" school set out in the Consultation Document and willing to realise the principle of "not giving up on any student".

39. Responding to the Chairman's enquiry about the number of applications which had been received for forming "through-train" schools, AD of E(PR) said that ED had approved eight such applications to date. It was envisaged that about 20 "through-train" schools would come on stream in the next two to three years. Although only about 10% to 20% of schools would form "through-train" at the initial stage of development, AD of E(PR) said that he would not rule out the possibility that if the "through-train" mode became widely accepted by the stakeholders, it could become a mainstream mode in the education system.

40. Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked the following three questions -

- a) What was the percentage of their total number of S1 places which "through-train" secondary schools should reserve for students of other primary schools, i.e. not less than 7% or 20%, if they were newly-operated schools and their linked primary schools were existing ones and vice versa;
- b) Whether the medium of instruction of "through-train" secondary schools and their linked primary schools must be the same; and
- c) Whether primary schools and secondary schools from different districts and/or operated by different school sponsoring bodies could form "through-train" schools.

41. Responding to Mr Tommy CHEUNG's first question, AD of E(PR) said that whether the "through-train" secondary schools should reserve not less than 7% or 20% of their S1 places for students of other primary schools would depend on the class size of their linked primary schools and assuming that the number of P6 classes of the linked schools was the same. For example, given that the class size of secondary school was 40, a "through-train" secondary school would therefore need to reserve not less than 7% and 20% of its S1 places for students of other primary schools if the class size of its linked primary school was 37 and 32 respectively. AD of E(PR) explained that the reason for the difference in the class size of primary school was due to the different teaching methodologies it adopted, i.e. the class size of a primary school was no more than 37 or 32 if it adopted non-activity or activity mode of teaching respectively. AD of E(PR), however, pointed out that whereas existing primary schools could continue to adopt non-activity mode of teaching if they wished to form "through-train" schools, newly-operated primary schools would be required to adopt activity mode of teaching if they wished to apply for the same. AD of E(PR) added that a "through-train" secondary

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school could reserve more than 20% of its S1 places for students of other primary schools if the number of its classes exceeded that of its linked primary school.

42. Regarding Mr Tommy CHEUNG's second question, AD of E(PR) said that there was no need for linked schools to adopt the same medium of instruction so long as the teaching curriculum of the primary schools could ensure that students could adapt to a new medium of instruction used in their linked secondary schools. As to Mr Tommy CHEUNG's last question, AD of E(PR) said that there was no rule prohibiting schools located in different districts and/or run by different school sponsoring bodies from applying to form "through-train" schools. AD of E(PR), however, pointed out that it would not be conducive to the provision of a coherent and comprehensive learning for students if the linked schools were located wide apart, say, the secondary school was located in Tin Shui Wai and the linked primary school was located in the Southern District.

43. Mr Tommy CHEUNG was of the view that the requirement that newly-operated primary schools must adopt activity mode of teaching in order to be eligible for applying to form "through-train" schools should be stated clearly in the Consultation Document, in order to avoid any misunderstanding. AD of E(PR) agreed to consider stating such a requirement in the documents in future.

44. Referring to paragraph 14 of the executive summary of the Consultation Document which set out the three options for S1 admission mechanism for P6 students in "through-train" schools, Ms Audrey EU enquired why option three which was not in line with the EC's recommendations set out in paragraph 8.2.70 of its Report on Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong was put forward for consideration. In her view, option one was the best option because it appeared to provide the biggest flexibility for students. (Under option one, P6 students in "through-train" schools could either enter the linked secondary schools direct or apply for discretionary places of other secondary schools. If they were not successful in gaining admission to other secondary schools, they could have the choice to enter the linked secondary schools or participate in central allocation.) Ms EU hoped that the best interests of students should be the sole reason for implementing the "through-train" mode, and not to benefit the schools such as enabling them to have greater flexibility in curriculum development, teaching methodology and mode of assessment. Ms EU also enquired whether the reason behind for implementing the "through-train" mode was to enable popular secondary schools to retain their primary six graduates and admit a small number of students from other primary schools as far as possible.

45. PAS(EM)3 responded that the reason why option three was proposed as another option for S1 admission mechanism for P6 students in "through-train" schools even though it failed to comply with the principles in the EC's recommendations set out in paragraph 8.2.70 of its Report on Reform Proposals

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for the Education System in Hong Kong was to allow greater coherence and continuity in the primary and secondary education provided by "through-train" schools. PAS(EM)3 assured members that in deciding which option to adopt, the best interests of students was the paramount consideration. PAS(EM)3 further said that the Administration's reason for implementing the "through-train" mode was clear and that was to provide students with a coherent and comprehensive learning experience.

46. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that a right balance needed to be struck between the interests of "through-train" and "non-through-train" students. In view of the nature of the POA system and the fact that popular "through-train" secondary schools would only need to reserve not less than 7% of their S1 places for students of other primary schools, it was inevitable that many parents of "non-through-train" students would feel that their children had less choice than "through-train" students in admitting to schools of their choice. Mr CHEUNG was of the view that if such concern could not be addressed to some extent, complaints from parents of "non-through-train" students could be numerous. Mr CHEUNG was also of the view that the number of "through-train" schools should not constitute a large percentage of schools in Hong Kong because of their inherent closed system nature. AD of E(PR) responded that the Administration would carefully consider members' views and suggestions given at the meeting as well as public feedback on the Consultation Document before deciding on the way forward.

IV. Secondary School Places Allocation System

47. Director of Education (D of E) said that following the judgment delivered by the High Court on 22 June 2001 that the current Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) system was contrary to the Sex Discrimination Ordinance and was therefore unlawful, ED had now devised a series of relief measures to assist those students who might have been likely affected by the current SSPA system. A press conference would be held later in the week to brief the public on the details of the relief measures. D of E further said that both the Court and the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) accepted the Administration's proposal of devising a relief mechanism to handle substantiated cases of complaint after the release of the allocation results on 17 July 2001, as a hasty change in this year's allocation system would unavoidably cause confusion, chaos and anxieties to schools, parents and students.

48. Miss Cyd HO enquired about the timetable for implementing a new SSPA system devoid of any sex-discriminatory elements. Miss HO hoped that in doing so, ED would consult with EOC to avoid facing similar lawsuit in future. D of E responded that as a new SSPA system had to synchronise with the curriculum

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development and the other remedial and enhancement measures, the Court had accepted that a reasonable time scale was needed for making the required changes. Notwithstanding, D of E assured members that every effort would be made to introduce a new SSPA system as soon as practicable and that EOC would be consulted along the way.

49. The Chairman, Mr SZETO Wah and Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong hoped that the relief measures could help to placate complaints which could run up to a very substantial number. D of E responded that the Administration had anticipated such a situation and was well prepared to assist those students who might have been affected by the current SSPA system.

V. Any other business

50. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 1:15 pm.

Legislative Council Secretariat
6 December 2001