

**立法會**  
**Legislative Council**

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**Panel on Education**

**Minutes of special meeting  
held on Monday, 13 January 2003 at 12:30 pm  
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members Present** : Dr Hon YEUNG Sum (Chairman)  
Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung, BBS (Deputy Chairman)  
Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP  
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan  
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong  
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung  
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP  
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP  
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok  
Hon MA Fung-kwok, JP
- Members Attending** : Hon LEE Cheuk-yan  
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo  
Hon Henry WU King-cheong, BBS, JP  
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung
- Members Absent** : Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, JP  
Hon CHOY So-yuk  
Hon SZETO Wah  
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP  
Hon WONG Sing-chi  
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP

- Public Officers Attending** : Professor Arthur LI Kwok-cheung, GBS, JP  
Secretary for Education and Manpower
- Mrs Fanny LAW FAN Chiu-fun, JP  
Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower
- 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. Briefing by the Secretary for Education and Manpower on the Chief Executive's Policy Address 2003**

The Chairman welcomed Secretary for Education and Manpower (SEM) and Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower (PSEM) to the meeting.

2. At the Chairman's invitation, SEM briefed members on the new initiatives and ongoing initiatives on education as highlighted in the Policy Agenda booklet. His speaking note has been issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)886/02-03 after the meeting. He stressed that the Chief Executive had assured in his 2003 Policy Address that investment in education would remain the Government's priority, despite there being a need to tackle the fiscal deficits.

Review of tuition fees for senior secondary and tertiary education

3. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that the Chief Executive in his 2001 Policy Address had stressed that the Government would increase spending in education despite a deficit budget. However, in his 2003 Policy Address, the Chief Executive had only given an assurance that investment in education would remain the priority. In addition, the Chief Executive had hinted the possibility of a reduction in education resources in the face of the fiscal deficit during his Question and Answer Session on 9 January 2003. Mr CHEUNG expressed concern that the Chief Executive was retracting from his commitment to invest in education. He worried that the target to reduce Government's projected spending of \$220 billion in the operating accounts in 2006-07 by \$20 billion would mean a reduction of education resources, and subsequently lead to increase in service fees in education.

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4. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong pointed out that the community was most concerned about increases in public service fees as it would impose additional burden on the less wealthy, particularly during a period of economic downturn. Referring to the media reports on the Administration's review to increase the tuition fees for senior secondary and tertiary education, Mr CHEUNG cautioned that the Administration should seriously consider the feedback of parents to any proposal to increase the tuition fees. He asked about the percentage of the current education resources which would be cut as a result of the Government's target to achieve the expenditure cut of \$20 billion (i.e. 10% cut). Mr CHEUNG stressed that the burden to achieve such a Government's target should not pass on to parents and students. He also asked whether the Administration would consider withdrawing its proposal to increase tuition fees for senior secondary and tertiary education.

5. SEM responded that all bureaux should review their spending to help tackle the serious fiscal deficits, and make use of the opportunity to enhance administrative efficiency and effectiveness through re-engineering, re-organisation and re-prioritisation of service delivery. In line with the spirit of the system of accountability, the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) needed to review each and every one of its initiatives and policies to see whether there was room for savings or a need for more resources. In fact, EMB had already decided that the provision of nine-year basic education should continue. He stressed that the Government had not set a percentage of the reduction of education resources. SEM added that he personally would prefer a decrease instead of an increase in tuition fees for senior secondary and tertiary education, but the final decision would depend on the results of the overall review.

6. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong remarked that given the current economic conditions, he would not anticipate a decrease in tuition fees for senior secondary and tertiary education. He stressed that the Administration should take into account the importance of education and the impact of an increase in tuition fees on parents. In this connection, he asked whether the 10% cut would apply across-the-board, and if not, how the Administration would determine how education resources would be reduced.

7. SEM responded that reduction in education resources would depend on the actual fiscal deficits and the share to be borne by EMB. He stressed that the Chief Executive attached great importance to education. As the principal official in education, SEM would strive towards maintaining adequate provision of resources for education, taking into account the outcome of the review on all educational expenses.

8. Ms Cyd HO asked whether the Administration had conducted a consultation and reached consensus in proposing an increase in tuition fees for senior secondary and tertiary education. She suggested that if there was an

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increase, the Administration should establish a mechanism for providing financial assistance to needy students and parents who were unable to pay the increased fees, similar to the mechanism in place for needy students in schools who had joined the Direct Subsidy Scheme.

9. SEM said that being the principal official in education, he had a duty to review all education expenses with the aim of improving overall cost-effectiveness. Subject to the outcome of the review, there might be upward, zero or downward adjustment to individual items of expenditure.

10. Ms Cyd HO considered that Government would not review the level of tuition fees for senior secondary and tertiary education if it did not consider that there was the need to increase the fees. She suggested that the Administration should draw up a "bottom line" for reducing operating expenditure in education. Ms HO also considered that the Administration should be cautious in releasing information that might cause public fears.

11. SEM responded that a review of the provision and delivery of services did not necessarily mean that the Government had decided to increase charges. He stressed that an accountable government would review its expenditure from time to time to enhance its cost-effectiveness. He stressed that EMB would review the expenditure items in education in a holistic manner. The "bottom line" of the Administration in education was to ensure the provision of quality education to students. SEM also explained that he had mentioned the review of tuition fees for senior secondary and tertiary education in response to an enquiry at a press conference. As it was a fact that EMB was reviewing all items, he must say so. SEM considered that releasing more information was beneficial to improving the transparency of the policy making process as it would stimulate public discussion on the subject.

12. The Chairman asked when EMB would know the budget cut in education. SEM responded that the reduction in education resources for 2003-04, if any, should be known in March 2003.

13. Mr Andrew CHENG opined that given the effects of deflation and savings achieved from streamlining and re-organising work procedures and departmental structures such as the merger of the EMB and the Education Department, EMB should consider reducing instead of increasing the tuition fees for senior secondary and tertiary education. He pointed out that decision on investment in education should not be made only in the light of the prevailing economic conditions. As education was a long term commitment, its economic benefits could only be seen after years of dedicated efforts of the stakeholders concerned. Mr CHENG also considered that principal officials should be tactful and prudent in disclosure of sensitive information such as a review of fees and charges so as to avoid creating unnecessary anxieties in the community.

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14. SEM reiterated that the consideration of whether tuition fees should be increased or not did not necessarily mean that fees would be increased. An open and transparent administration should wherever practicable let the public know what it was considering or doing to enhance efficiency and effectiveness.

15. Mr Andrew CHENG remarked that the Administration would normally conduct a review to substantiate or justify an intended policy direction. He urged the Administration to consider the views of Members and give an undertaking that the outcome of the review would not lead to increase in tuition fees for senior secondary and tertiary education.

16. SEM responded that the Administration would seriously consider the views of Members and make a decision after the review.

17. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that as the Chief Executive and SEM had made opposing remarks on allocation of resources to education, he felt very confused. He requested the Administration to give an assurance that education resources would not be reduced in the light of a fiscal deficit.

18. SEM reiterated that whether education resources should be reduced as a result of the fiscal deficit would have to be decided after the review. SEM explained that investment in education remained the Government's priority. Nevertheless, in the face of a fiscal deficit, he as SEM had to ascertain whether there were areas for improvement of cost-effectiveness in the education sector. He cited the consultation document entitled "An Action Plan to raise Language Standards in Hong Kong" as an example to illustrate that the Government had, after conducting a review on language education, decided to allocate more resources for improving language competencies of the population. However, it would be irresponsible for him to say before the overall review that not a single cent should be deducted from the allocation for education.

19. Ms Emily LAU asked whether there were any educational bodies which had expressed support for an increase in tuition fees for senior secondary and tertiary education. SEM responded that the Administration would consult the relevant parties if it was proposed that the tuition fees should be increased after the review. Ms Emily LAU remarked that the Administration should consult the Legislative Council (LegCo) before a decision would be made. She also suggested that the Administration should consult the community in the course of its review so that the community would be more acceptive of the proposal to be made.

20. Mr Andrew CHENG asked whether implementation of the recommendations of the University Grants Committee (UGC) after the Higher Education Review would be affected if further budget cuts for UGC-funded

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tertiary institutions were proposed in the light of the fiscal deficit. He was worried that the quality of university education would suffer as a result.

21. SEM responded that the problem of fiscal deficits had not been focused on in the recommendations of UGC after the Higher Education Review was made. However, arising from the Review, UGC had already advised the institutions to enhance cost-effective use of resources and to differentiate by developing their respective areas of excellence in the light of the community's needs and expectations.

22. Ms Cyd HO said that one of the five guiding principles in the 2003 Policy Agenda was building a caring and just society and such principle was of primary importance as far as education was concerned. She stressed that the right of needy students to education should be protected, and an increase in tuition fees might lead to further polarisation of the rich and the poor in the community. Ms HO remarked that the Administration should provide sufficient funding for sub-degree programmes which provided an alternative path for students who were less successful in secondary school to pursue professional studies and develop a career.

23. SEM responded that the Administration would examine the possible effects of increasing tuition fees for senior secondary and tertiary education before making any decision. Being the principal official for education, he had the duty to examine every expenditure item to ensure that scarce public resources were used in a cost-effective manner.

24. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong held a strong view that education resources should not be reduced because of a fiscal deficit. He considered that budget for education should be increased for implementation of the reform initiatives and measures in education. Mr CHEUNG pointed out that some parents were facing a very tough situation during a period of economic downturn such as increase in medical fees, decrease in salaries, the problem of negative assets, etc. These parents could only place their hopes on the future of their children by giving them the best education. He stressed that these parents simply could not cope with an increase in tuition fees. The community therefore had reacted strongly against the Administration's idea of increasing the tuition fees. Mr CHEUNG urged SEM to consider the impact of an increase in senior secondary and tertiary education fees from different perspectives. He suggested that being a responsible principal official, SEM should try his best to fight for an adequate budget in education in the financial years ahead. Mr CHEUNG also invited members to express their support for maintaining the existing allocation of resource for education during the debate on the Motion of Thanks in respect of the 2003 Policy Address.

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25. SEM responded that the Administration shared the views of Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong on the importance of education. The Administration would also consider the views of the community in this regard.

Subsidy for the English Schools Foundation (ESF)

26. Ms Emily LAU said that ESF had reacted strongly to a possible cut in subsidies and she hoped that the Administration would thoroughly consult the stakeholders on a cut in subsidies for ESF. She considered it acceptable if the subsidies provided for local students and non-local students were more or less at similar level so that there would not be any concern of privileged treatment. She anticipated that the Administration would provide detailed information for the Panel to discuss the subject in due course. SEM responded that the Administration was reviewing the issue and would consult the stakeholders on the proposal to be made.

27. Ms Emily LAU asked why the Administration considered it necessary to cut subsidies to ESF. SEM explained that the review was based on the principle of fairness because other international schools which were doing an excellent job as the ESF were not subsidised. In fact, these international schools had queried why only the ESF was subsidised.

Review of the teaching grade structure

28. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan expressed concern that the new initiative to rationalise and simplify the teaching grade structure of public sector schools would adversely affect the morale of the teaching force. He was worried that the new initiative would mean lower salaries and fewer benefits to the teaching profession.

29. SEM responded that under the existing grade structure, serving teachers would receive an annual salary adjustment regardless of their teaching performance. The Administration considered that teachers played a decisive role in enhancing the quality of education and good teachers should be recognised and better rewarded under a new grade structure.

Language education

30. Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung expressed support for the new initiative to improve language education and the language proficiency of the community, i.e., biliterate in written Chinese and English and trilingual in Cantonese, Putonghua and spoken English. He considered that the overall English standard of students had not improved in the past decade, despite the fact that huge resources had been spent in some ongoing initiatives such as the native English-speaking teachers scheme and the various projects to promote students' reading habits. Mr YEUNG asked how the Administration would assess and

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monitor students' progress in English proficiency in the next decade. Mr YEUNG stressed that a benchmark must be set. Otherwise, it would not be possible to measure the effectiveness of the initiative and the overall English competence of students might stay at the present level after another decade.

31. SEM responded that schools would implement an internal assessment mechanism for assessment of students' performance. The Curriculum Development Council was now developing a full set of learning outcomes, which would describe the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes in Chinese Language and English Language which students were expected to achieve on completion of the key learning stages at Primary 3, Primary 6 and Secondary 3. All students were expected to achieve the basic competencies at the end of each learning stage. The Administration was also examining the feasibility of converting the assessment of candidates' performance in Chinese language and English Language of the Hong Kong Certificate of Education and the Hong Kong Advanced Level examinations from a norm-referenced to a standards-referenced basis. In other words, an absolute standard would be set for assessment of students' abilities in the two language subjects.

32. Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung further asked whether the Government would set a target for enabling students to achieve the prescribed basic competencies at the key stages of learning in five years or more.

33. SEM responded that the Administration would consider setting a target after knowing the percentage of students who had achieved the basic competencies at the key learning stages.

34. Ms Emily LAU pointed out that the quality of language teachers was most important in promoting the language standards of students. She asked how the Administration would recruit the best candidates for teaching languages, and in doing so, how it would ease the concerns and anxiety of serving language teachers in schools.

35. SEM responded that the Administration had implemented a number of measures to improve language education in schools, including the requirement for serving English Language teachers to reach a benchmark and the recruitment of native English-speaking teachers for secondary schools. He added that the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research would attend the meeting of the Panel on 20 January 2003 to explain the proposals in its consultation document and exchange views with members on improving language education in Hong Kong.

36. Mr MAK Kwok-fung asked how the Administration would upgrade the overall education level of the population and in particular the English standard of university students. He considered that the decline of students' English



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standard was largely a result of inconsistent policies in language education and the implementation of Mother Tongue Teaching (MTT).

37. SEM responded that the current education reform should be a right direction for improving the quality of education in Hong Kong. PSEM supplemented that MTT was implemented for secondary one students in 1998 and the first lot of students under MTT would attend the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination in 2003. Hence, the perceived decline in the English standard of university students could not be attributed to the implementation of MTT in secondary schools. She added that some members of the community had ignored or misunderstood the spirit of MTT which aimed to facilitate learning by removing any language barrier, i.e. by teaching in mother tongue.

Merger of universities

38. Mr MAK Kwok-fung asked about the progress of the proposed merger of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST). He pointed out that staff and students were not in support of the proposed merger. He suggested that the Administration should consult students, staff and the community before making a decision on the proposed merger.

39. SEM responded that the proposed merger was mentioned during an informal gathering with the media. While he considered the idea worthy of support, it would be up to the two universities to examine the feasibility, conduct consultations and work out the proposal for merger. The two universities would submit their proposals to the Administration after internal consultation. The Administration would consider the proposals and decide a course of action which would be in the best interest of the higher education sector. He added that the Administration had received the recommendation of HKUST and was awaiting the proposal from CUHK.

Degree and sub-degree places for the medical and paramedical personnel

40. Mr MAK Kwok-fung said that the supply of nurses and paramedical professionals should be increased to meet the long term needs of the community. He pointed out that the proposed reduction of places in the two disciplines at local universities, which was largely based on the manpower needs of the Hospital Authority, were not in line with the growing demand of the community for the services.

41. SEM responded that the Administration had no intention to reduce the first-year-first-degree (FYFD) places in UGC-funded tertiary institutions. In fact, the Administration intended to increase places in senior years of undergraduate programmes to provide more opportunities for sub-degree programme graduates to pursue university education. UGC would collaborate

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with the UGC-funded institutions, the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (HWFB) and relevant departments regarding provision of FYFD places in medical and paramedical studies. He undertook to relay Mr MAK Kwok-fung's views to UGC for consideration. PSEM supplemented that the medical and paramedical personnel should continue to convey their views to HWFB for consideration in the context of the manpower projection studies.

42. Dr LO Wing-lok asked whether all sub-degree programmes for paramedical professionals in UGC-funded tertiary institutions would be required to operate on a self-financing basis and if not, how provision of subsidies was determined for these sub-degree programmes. He pointed out that some of these sub-degree courses such as higher diploma programmes for Chemists could hardly operate on a self-financing basis as they required high start up and maintenance costs, and access to expensive laboratories/equipment. Dr LO cautioned that without government subsidies, these sub-degree programmes would have to charge a high fee and very few people could pursue such studies. The community as a result would suffer from a shortage of these professionals in the long term.

43. SEM responded that not all sub-degree programmes in UGC-funded tertiary institutions would switch to operation on a self-financing mode. In general, the Administration would continue to subsidise sub-degree courses that required high start up and maintenance costs or access to expensive laboratories/equipment; courses that met specific manpower needs; and courses that lacked market appeal to the provider and the average student, such as pure arts or science which were inadequately provided in the market. He added that students already enrolled in subsidised sub-degree programmes would not be affected before their graduation.

44. Dr LO Wing-lok asked whether SEM would give an assurance to UGC-funded tertiary institutions that sub-degree programmes for paramedical professionals would continue to be subsidised. SEM responded that he had repeatedly explained the three criteria for subsidising sub-degree programmes and UGC was collaborating with UGC-funded tertiary institutions to identify the sub-degree programmes which should continue to be publicly funded.

45. Dr LO Wing-lok asked whether the Administration would decrease FYFD places of medical discipline in UGC-funded tertiary institutions in the face of a decreasing demand of fresh graduates in public hospitals.

46. SEM responded that there were opposite views in the community about the demand and supply of medical graduates. He pointed out that while the medical sector considered a reduction of these FYFD places appropriate, there were complaints about the long waiting time for consultation in public sector hospitals.

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47. Dr LO Wing-lok pointed out that many medical graduates were now unable to secure a training place in public hospitals. Given the high costs incurred for the training of a medical graduate, he asked how the Administration would balance the supply and demand of medical graduates in the long run.

48. SEM responded that the Hospital Authority would collaborate with the Hong Kong Medical Council and the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine on the provision of post-graduate training to medical graduates. The Administration would continue to provide funding for sufficient places for the medical discipline in UGC-funded tertiary institutions in the light of the needs of the community as a whole. Dr LO Wing-lok remarked that EMB should collaborate with HWFB to ensure a balanced supply of medical graduates in the cost-effective use of public funds.

49. The Chairman thanked SEM and PSEM for attending the meeting. He stressed that the Administration should consult LegCo before an important policy decision was made. He suggested that EMB should where practicable consult the Panel on important education policies and decisions before they were made known to the public. If necessary, the Panel would hold special meetings to discuss major policy items proposed by the Administration. Ms Emily LAU expressed support for the Chairman's suggestion and requested SEM to discuss with the Panel on important policies and decisions as early as practicable.

50. SEM agreed that EMB should consult the Panel on important education policies and decisions as early as possible. He pointed out that the review on education expenditure in the light of the fiscal deficits and specifically the review on the tuition fees for senior school and tertiary education as well as the subsidies to the ESF were still in progress. He assured members that EMB would consult the Panel on important policy proposals.

**II. Any other business**

51. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 2:05 pm.