

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)3034/02-03
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

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Panel on Education

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Monday, 23 June 2003 at 4:30 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Dr Hon YEUNG Sum (Chairman)
Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung, BBS (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, JP
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon CHOY So-yuk
Hon SZETO Wah
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
- Members absent** : Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP
Hon MA Fung-kwok, JP
- Public Officers attending** : Item I

Professor Arthur K C LI, GBS, JP
Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mrs Fanny LAW, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mr Steve LEE
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and
Manpower (School Development)

Item II

Mr CHENG Man-yiu
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (3)

Ms Susanna CHEUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and
Manpower (Professional Development and
Training)

Clerk in attendance : Mr Stanley MA
Senior Assistant Secretary (2)6

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I. Consolidation of high cost and under-utilized primary schools
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1826/02-03(01)]

Motion passed by the Panel at the meeting on 26 May 2003

The Chairman reminded members that at the special meeting on 26 May 2003, the Panel had received views from 10 deputations on a paper provided by the Administration which set out the criteria for consolidating high cost and under-utilized primary schools. Deputations attending the meeting unanimously expressed objection to the criteria put forward by the Administration. He said that members shared the concerns of the deputations and passed the following motion -

"That the Panel on Education calls for the Education and Manpower Bureau to withdraw its discussion paper entitled 'Consolidation of High Cost and Under-utilized Primary Schools', freeze immediately the implementation of the measures which include closing schools and arranging Primary One admission according to the criteria for such consolidation, discuss with the relevant bodies and reconsider the consolidation criterion that schools which fail to recruit 23 or more students in the 2003 school year will not be allowed to operate Primary One classes."

2. In response, Secretary for Education and Manpower (SEM) said that in the light of a fiscal deficit, the Administration would have to take steps to

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phase out high cost and under-utilized primary schools. He pointed out that the Director of Audit in its report on the planning and provision of primary school places had recommended that the Administration should take actions to reduce surplus school places, in particular those in high cost and under-utilized primary schools. The Administration had to act promptly in accordance with the recommendation. SEM further said that the Administration had informed primary schools in January 2003 of the criterion that schools which failed to recruit 23 or more students in the 2003 Primary One Admission (POA) exercise would not be allocated P1 classes in the 2003-04 school year.

Proposed criteria for consolidating high cost and under-utilized primary schools

3. Mr Tommy CHEUNG informed the meeting that he was a member of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and said that the Liberal Party supported the policy direction to consolidate high cost and under-utilized primary schools as soon as possible. He pointed out that the PAC report published in February 2003 had called for actions to reduce surplus school places. He recalled that in the course of PAC's deliberations of the Director of Audit's report, the Administration had advised that Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) had notified primary schools of the proposed criterion for allocation of P1 classes from the 2003-04 school year. Mr CHEUNG added that it would not be cost-effective to use public funds to support schools with a unit cost of \$300,000 while the territory-wide average was around \$24,000 only.

4. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that EMB had consulted a number of organizations in the primary education sector on increasing the minimum student intake from 16 to 23 for allocation of P1 classes in the 2003-04 school year. However, EMB had publicized the new requirement of 23 students in January 2003, after schools had completed the "discretionary place allocation" stage of the 2003 POA exercise. Given the time constraint, schools which failed to recruit 23 or more students were now unable to recruit sufficient students to meet the new requirement for allocation of P1 classes. He stressed that even the Subsidized Primary Schools Council (SPSC), which was consulted on the new requirement, had expressed strong objection to the increase in the minimum intake from 16 to 23 on the grounds that the discretionary places had not been correspondingly increased to 23. Mr CHEUNG considered that the Administration should consult primary schools before implementing the new requirement for allocation of P1 classes.

5. Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower (PSEM) responded that the criterion that schools with an intake of less than 23 students would not be allocated a P1 class was implemented in the 2003 POA exercise after consultation with relevant school councils including the POA Committee. She explained that it was an established practice for EMB to consult the POA

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Committee on matters relating to the POA exercise. She pointed out that EMB had notified schools of the new requirement of 23 students on 27 January 2003, and schools had not expressed any objection until the preliminary results of the central allocation were available in early April 2003. PSEM stressed that rural schools with a student intake of less than 23 students but was located in a school net with insufficient supply of P1 places would still be allocated with a P1 class.

6. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong highlighted that there were other criteria in the Administration's paper which had not been discussed by the primary education sector and the Legislative Council (LegCo), i.e., schools with a unit cost of 150% or more of the territory-wide average should not be allocated P1 classes from the 2003-04 school year and the phasing out period for these high cost schools should be restricted to three years. He considered that EMB should consult widely on these proposals before implementation as they would in effect force the affected schools to close down in three years or less. He also cited the school in Tap Mun to illustrate that only a very few rural schools in their final year of operation, normally with one to two classes and a very few students, would have a unit cost as high as \$300,000. Mr CHEUNG considered that there was no question of using public monies to fund these schools on an on-going basis as they would close down after the last lot of students had completed their studies or transferred to other schools.

7. SEM stressed that the primary purpose of the proposals in the Administration's paper was to ensure cost-effective provision of quality primary education, and not to force some schools, particularly the rural schools, to close down. He considered it unnecessary to conduct further consultation as the community would support proposals which would improve cost-effectiveness of primary education. He reiterated that the increase of the minimum student intake from 16 to 23 students for allocation of P1 classes in the 2003-04 school year was supported by the Director of Audit and PAC. He also explained that under the POA exercise, public sector aided schools were allowed to enrol up to 50% of the places in a standard primary class of 32 students during the "discretionary places allocation" stage and these schools would then participate in the "central allocation" stage. SEM said that members and the public should consider whether public money should be used to fund those schools which had not been chosen by seven or more parents out of all the parents of primary six graduates in the "central allocation" stage.

8. The Chairman said that SPSC had discussed with EMB the proposed criteria for consolidating high cost and under-utilized primary schools on 14 June and had subsequently written a letter to SEM to express their views on 16 June 2003 [LC Paper No. CB(2)2582/02-03(01)]. He referred to the letter and said that SPSC had made the following suggestions to EMB but no positive response was received -

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- (a) Primary schools with only one class at all levels should be allowed to operate a P1 class in the 2003-04 school year as long as they had enrolled 16 students during the "discretionary place allocation" stage;
- (b) Students who had enrolled in a school operating one class at all levels during the 'discretionary place allocation" stage should be counted even if they had subsequently transferred to other schools as arranged by the School Places Allocation Section of EMB; and
- (c) Primary schools with an enrolment of less than 16 students and were not allocated a P1 class in the 2003-04 school year should be included in the 2004 POA exercise. If they still failed to recruit sufficient number of students, they could then be excluded from subsequent POA exercises.

9. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong stressed the importance of a thorough consultation with the primary school sector as deputations attending the meeting on 26 May 2003 had expressed strong objection to the proposed criteria for allocating P1 classes and phasing out schools not allocated a P1 class in three years. He also stressed that schools which failed to recruit seven students at the "central allocation" stage of the 2003 POA exercise should not be excluded from the 2004 POA exercise.

10. PSEM explained that the Administration meant to submit the paper on consolidation of high cost and under-utilized primary schools for preliminary discussion with members at the meeting on 26 May 2003. She pointed out that the primary school sector in general accepted the criterion that schools with combined classes which required pupils of two or more levels to learn in the same classroom should be phased out. As regards the schools which would not be allocated a P1 class in the 2003-04 school year, they either could not recruit 23 students and/or had combined classes. She also explained that if a rural school operating one class at all levels was not allocated a P1 class in the 2003-04 school year due to insufficient enrolment, it would have only one P5 class and one P6 class, and one to two teachers after three years. It would then be more appropriate to transfer these teachers and students to other schools with better learning environment and facilities.

11. PSEM further explained that as a result of implementing the new requirement, some 53 primary schools would not be allocated a P1 class in the 2003-04 school year. The Administration considered it unlikely that these schools would be able to recruit 23 students or more in the 2004 POA exercise. Even if they could, they would not have a P2 class in the 2004-05 school year, a P3 class in the 2005-06 school year and so on. The absence of one level of students was not conducive to the completeness of education in the school, and

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would hamper cross-level subject grouping of students according to ability. In the light of a declining student population and related factors, the Administration considered it more desirable, from an educational point of view, to phase out these schools in three years and transfer students to other schools in the same school net.

12. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong pointed out that closing down a school three years after it had not been allocated a P1 class would disrupt the continuity of student learning and might affect the students' results in the Secondary School Places Allocation exercise. He pointed out that the deputations attending the meeting on 26 May 2003 represented a wide spectrum of the primary education sector, and had unanimously objected to the adoption of the 150% territory-wide average as a demarcation line for allocating P1 classes in the 2003-04 school year. Mr CHEUNG strongly urged the Administration to conduct an extensive consultation on the proposed criteria with a view to reaching a consensus with the primary education sector before implementation.

13. PSEM pointed out that the increase from 16 to 23 students for allocation of P1 class was the outcome of a consensus reached with the primary education sector. She believed that the primary school sector would accept that schools operating combined classes should be phased out. She agreed to work out the appropriate duration for phasing out the 53 schools which would not be allocated a P1 class in the 2003-04 school year based on individual circumstances. PSEM, however, pointed out that students and teachers in these schools might transfer to other schools even before the end of the three-year phasing out period. She added that the unit cost of a school would depend on the number of students enrolled in each class and the unit costs of the 53 schools to be phased out were all below 150% of the territory-wide average.

14. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong was of the view that the Administration should reconsider the historical role and functions of rural schools, and continue to allocate P1 classes to them on the basis of an enrolment of 16 students. He suggested that the Administration should also consider the request of SPSC that rural schools with an intake of less than 16 students should still be allocated a P1 class in the 2003-04 school year. The Chairman shared Mr CHEUNG's view and said that the Administration should consider the preference of parents and students residing in remote areas to enrol in rural schools located in the vicinity of their residence.

15. SEM responded that whether a school would be allocated with a P1 class would be determined by the collective parental choice during the "central allocation" stage of the POA exercise. The Administration had no intention to phase out rural schools by way of increasing the minimum student intake to 23 students. As long as there was adequate supply of P1 places in the same school net, the Administration considered it more important to enhance the quality of primary education than to retain a school with insufficient student intake. The

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Chairman remarked that there should be no direct correlation between the cost-effectiveness of and the quality of education provided by a school, and a rural school with a low student intake and a high unit cost could also provide cost-effective and quality primary education.

16. Miss CHOY So-yuk said that she shared the view that rural schools should be allocated a P1 class on the basis of 16 students. She also agreed that rural schools with a student intake of less than 16 students in the 2003 POA exercise should be allocated a P1 class in order to allow one year for them to improve and recruit sufficient students in the ensuing POA exercise. Miss CHOY held the view that any increase in the minimum student intake for allocation of P1 classes should be incremental and the increase from 16 to 23 was a big jump. She added that EMB should ensure that allocation of P1 places under the POA exercise followed the priority of parents' choices so that a student would not be allocated to a school of his sixth choice while a place in a rural school of his fifth choice was available.

17. PSEM responded that students' interest should be the primary consideration. If there were adequate P1 places in schools which had recruited sufficient students in a school net, there was no reason to allocate a P1 class to a school in the same school net which failed to recruit even seven students at the "central allocation" stage. She pointed out that there were reported improper practices adopted by some rural schools in student enrolment, and such practices would exacerbate if schools were allowed to enrol more than 50% of the places in a standard P1 class during the "discretionary place allocation" stage.

18. Mr WONG Sing-chi cited the parents' protest against the merger of two primary schools in Shek Wu Hui as an example to illustrate the need to let rural schools operate a P1 class for the students residing in the vicinity. He expressed dissatisfaction that while EMB said that it would continue to consult the primary education sector on the proposed criteria for allocation of P1 classes, EMB had ignored the strong objection from the sector and started to implement the new requirement in the 2003-04 school year.

19. SEM responded that the two primary schools in Shek Wu Hui had initiated the merger themselves and EMB had not played any role in the merger. He pointed out that it was natural that parents, whose children were required to attend another school located at a further distance from their residence, would object to the merger. As regards the consultation process, SEM reiterated that no school had expressed objection to increasing the number of students to 23 for allocation of a P1 class until the results of the "central allocation" were available in April 2003. He added that EMB had records of the correspondence and meetings with the primary school sector.

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20. The Chairman suggested that SEM should consider the strong views of SPSC, parents and schools on the impact of increasing the number of students from 16 to 23 for allocation of P1 classes on rural schools. Mr WONG Sing-chi also pointed out that EMB should listen to the views of North District Council (NDC) on the new requirement for allocation of P1 classes. He pointed out that NDC had all along objected to the new requirement. At the meeting of NDC in April 2003, the NDC Chairman had said that there was no point for representatives of EMB to attend future NDC meetings if they had no intention to consider the views of NDC members.

21. SEM responded that before the NDC meeting held in April 2003, staff of EMB had attended two NDC meetings to explain the reasons for increasing the minimum student intake for allocation of P1 classes in the 2003-04 school year. He stressed that EMB would consider any good reasons provided by NDC for reducing the minimum student intake for allocation of P1 classes, although it firmly believed that the new requirement would enhance quality of primary education and benefit the primary students in the long term.

22. Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung said that while EMB firmly believed that increasing the minimum student intake would enhance cost-effectiveness and quality of primary education, some members considered that a smaller class size would also enhance students' learning outcomes. Mr YEUNG considered that if the cost incurred was not substantial, the Administration should defer the implementation of the new requirement of 23 students for allocation of P1 class to the 2004-05 school year. He added that some heads of rural schools said that they would accept the phasing out arrangements if their schools could not enrol 23 students in the 2004 POA exercise.

23. SEM replied that the Administration did not have an estimate of the costs incurred for deferring the implementation of the new requirement of 23 students to the 2004 POA exercise. He stressed that EMB had the responsibility to ensure the cost-effective use of primary education resources and the delivery of quality primary education in schools. Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung remarked that EMB should work out an estimated cost for the community to decide whether implementation of the new requirement should be deferred for a year to provide rural schools with the last opportunity to demonstrate their competitiveness to enrol sufficient students.

24. The Chairman expressed understanding of EMB's responsibility to follow up the Director of Audit's recommendation on reduction of surplus school places and enhancement of cost-effectiveness in the provision of primary education. He reiterated that the quality of education in a rural school did not have a direct relationship with its student intake. SEM, however, was of the view that the collective parental choice at the "central allocation" stage of the POA exercise would to a certain extent reflect the quality of education provided by a school.

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25. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that like other efficiency saving measures, the new requirement of 23 students for allocation of P1 classes was just one of the measures to meet the target budget cut in education funding as proposed by the Financial Secretary. He urged the Administration to prolong the period of consultation and defer implementation of the new requirement in view of the strong objection of the primary school sector. He reminded the Administration that it was the Government's policy commitment that despite the fiscal deficit, investment in education would remain the priority.

26. SEM responded that an 11% increase in education allocation was provided in the current financial year. He reiterated that EMB had the responsibility to ensure cost-effective use of limited education resources. Given the proposed budget cut in education funding, the proposed cost-saving measures aimed at enhancing cost effectiveness in the use of public funding so that surplus resources could be re-deployed to other educational areas where additional resources were most needed.

27. SEM added that EMB had in its letter of 24 September 2002 stated that schools should enrol 16 students during the "discretionary places allocation" stage in order to be included in the "central allocation" stage of the 2003 POA exercise. The Chairman and Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung expressed dissatisfaction that EMB had not mentioned the increase of student intake from 16 to 23 for allocation of P1 classes at the same time.

28. Ms Cyd HO considered that SEM or PSEM should attend Panel meetings when deputations were invited to present their views so that the Administration had a direct interaction with the affected stakeholders in an open meeting. She anticipated that the Administration would propose more cost-saving measures as it was forecast that the fiscal deficit would rise to \$70 billion in the next five years. She suggested that EMB should discuss with members the cost-saving measures in education as early as practicable so as to reduce unnecessary conflicts which might arise during the implementation stage.

29. SEM responded that he would consider Ms Cyd HO's suggestion. He added that he would have the opportunity to listen to the views of affected stakeholders on different occasions.

Further consultation

30. The Chairman asked whether EMB would consider the views of members and the suggestions of SPSC on the proposed criteria for consolidating high cost and under-utilized primary schools. He also urged the Administration to reduce the minimum student intake for allocation of a P1 class to rural schools in the 2003-04 school year.

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31. SEM responded that EMB would consider prolonging the phasing out period for schools not allocated a P1 class from three to five years. PSEM supplemented that EMB would discuss with each of the schools concerned on an appropriate phasing out period and the necessary arrangements for the transfer of students to other schools. She, however, expressed reservations about deferring implementation of the new requirement for a year. She considered that in the light of a declining student population, it was unlikely that schools with an insufficient intake in the 2003 POA exercise could be able to recruit sufficient students in the 2004 POA exercise.

32. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed disappointment that the meeting had failed to reach a consensus between members and the Administration on the way forward. He reiterated that EMB should consult widely on the proposed criteria for consolidation of high cost and under-utilized primary schools, and discuss with SPSC on feasible options for allocation of P1 classes to rural schools with insufficient enrolment in the 2003-04 school year.

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33. In response, SEM assured members that EMB would discuss with the primary school sector and in particular SPSC on the proposed criteria for consolidation of high cost and under-utilized primary schools.

II. Results of the 2003 Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers
[LC Paper No. CB(2)2560/02-03(02)]

34. At the Chairman's invitation, Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (3) (DS(EM)3) highlighted the main points of the Administration's paper on the results of the 2003 Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (LPAT).

Supply and demand of qualified English teachers

35. Mr TSANG Yok-sing expressed concern about the supply of qualified English teachers to replace the 333 English teachers who joined or re-joined the profession in the 2001-02 school year (the new English teachers) but had not attained the Language Proficiency Requirement (LPR) in the 2003 LPAT. Noting that some 450 student teachers would graduate this summer, he also asked about the supply of qualified English teachers in the years ahead.

36. DS(EM)3 replied that these teachers were now working in some 230 primary and secondary schools. He pointed out that some schools might have more qualified English teachers than the average. The actual demand for English teachers to replace these teachers would depend on the aggregate needs of individual schools. As an interim measure, English teaching load in the 230

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schools would be taken up either by their existing English teachers or by new recruits.

37. Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower (Professional Development and Training) (PAS(EM)PDT) supplemented that along with the announcement of LPR Policy in 2000 and the introduction of LPAT in 2002, the Administration had liaised with tertiary institutions to increase training places for English teachers. According to the forecast provided by the University Grants Committee, there would be some 3 500 English graduates from various pre-service and in-service training programmes during the years from 2003 to 2006. EMB would work with tertiary institutions to deal with the supply and demand of English teachers regularly.

38. Ms Emily LAU expressed disappointment that after putting so much efforts and resources on education, 333 out of the 643 new English teachers had not attained LPR in the 2003 LPAT. She asked why so many new English teachers had failed and how the Administration could ensure that all public sector primary and secondary schools would have sufficient and qualified English teachers to teach English in the 2003-04 school year.

39. In response, DS(EM)3 said that the 333 new English teachers who had not attained LPR had different backgrounds. Some of them had not attended a recognized training in teaching English and were not suitable for teaching English in schools under the LPR policy. He explained that many new English teachers were graduates of the former two-year certificate programme in teaching English offered by the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd) which could not meet the LPR. DS(EM)3 informed members that graduates of HKIEd's current four-year programme in Bachelor of Education and major in English were exempted from LPR. He anticipated that with more four-year degree graduates who were exempted from LPR, there should be an adequate supply of qualified English teachers to meet the needs of schools in the future.

40. The Chairman said that persons with high proficiency in English were very competitive in the labour market. He asked how the Administration would attract graduates of the four-year degree programme in Bachelor of Education to work in the field of English teaching.

41. DS(EM)3 agreed that graduates of HKIEd's four-year degree programme in Bachelor of Education with a major in English might seek employment in fields other than teaching, particularly when the economic conditions were good. Nevertheless, he believed that these graduates had the interest to teach English and would aim at pursuing a career in teaching English after graduation. He also believed that given the prevailing economic downturn, recruitment of competent English teachers would not be difficult.

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42. Ms Emily LAU expressed concern that a total of 230 primary and secondary schools had serving English teachers who would become ineligible to teach English as from September 2003. She asked whether and why teachers without a recognized training in teaching English were assigned to teach English in schools in the first place.

43. DS(EM)3 explained that English was a major subject in school education and around 9-10 English lessons were scheduled weekly at different levels of classes. To make even the workload among English teachers, some schools would assign some teachers who were not English majors to teach English. With the implementation of LPR policy for new English teachers from 1 September 2003, schools with ineligible teachers would have to work out plans to deal with the situation.

Training and professional development of new English teachers

44. Ms Emily LAU asked why new English teachers who were graduates of HKIEd's former two-year certificate programme in teaching English were not eligible for the grant of \$13,500 to pursue further studies in English. DS(EM)3 explained that the grant was intended for in-service English teachers who had not completed a recognized training in teaching English and not for new English teachers who had completed a recognized education programme. He added that new English teachers who were committed to passing LPAT should be able to attain LPR. Those who were unsuccessful in the 2003 LPAT would be encouraged to take related language training courses and re-sit LPAT.

45. Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung said that serving English teachers who had not attained LPR should not be labelled as incapable as they were only ineligible to teach English, and would become eligible to teach English again once they passed LPAT. He considered it unfair to require graduates of HKIEd's former two-year certificate programme in teaching English to attain LPR as they were not trained for LPAT, and might not be aware of the LPR policy at the time of their enrolment to the programme. He held the view that the Government should provide further training and allow a longer grace period for them to attain LPR.

46. DS(EM)3 said that the current LPR Policy was announced in September 2000 with the aim of providing an objective reference against which a teacher's proficiency in the language he taught could be gauged. He anticipated that graduates of HKIEd's former two-year certificate programme in teaching English would pursue further language training and re-sit LPAT. In the mean time, schools should re-deploy new English teachers who had not attained LPR to teach in other subjects for which they were qualified to teach.

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Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers

47. Mr SZETO Wah considered that the low passing rate of new English teachers in LPAT could be attributed to the fact that they had not been trained to take LPAT. He questioned whether the existing education programmes for English teachers offered by tertiary institutions would prepare their graduates to take LPAT.

48. In response, DS(EM)3 said that EMB had advised tertiary institutions of the need to prepare graduates of their education programmes in teaching English to take LPAT. He then explained the design and structure of LPAT and cited some examples to illustrate the types of questions which would be tested in LPAT. He considered that a person having attended a recognized training in teaching English should be able to meet the requirements of LPAT.

49. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong pointed out that a candidate had to obtain a pass in all parts of LPAT at one sitting in order to attain LPR and failure to pass in any part would result in an overall failure in LPAT. He considered the requirement too stringent. Mr CHEUNG pointed out that some qualified English teachers from overseas countries had also failed in LPAT.

50. DS(EM)3 responded that the structure and requirement of LPAT had been pre-tested and adopted after extensive consultation with experts. The Administration considered it essential that all English teachers should achieve a proficiency level in reading, writing, listening and speaking, and demonstrate a competent level of using English as the classroom language in English lessons.

Way forward

51. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that both the Government and the providers of programmes for English teachers, in particular HKIEd, should accept the blame for the provision of sub-standard English teachers. He pointed out that with the upgrading of the former Hong Kong Polytechnic and the City Polytechnic of Hong Kong to university status in the 1990s, the minimum requirements for admission to HKIEd certificate/diploma programmes were lowered. As a result, secondary school graduates with a pass in six subjects taken at two sittings of the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination were qualified for admission to the two-year certificate/diploma programme in teaching English run by HKIEd. Mr CHEUNG also considered that HKIEd should be aware that graduates of these two-year programmes did not meet LPR and should provide relevant upgrading training to the graduates.

52. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered it unfair to expect graduates of HKIEd's certificate programmes in teaching English to attain LPR within two years after they joined the teaching profession in the 2001-02 school year. He considered that the Government should provide subsidy and HKIEd should

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offer further training opportunities for these young graduates to upgrade their level of English proficiency to that of a four-year degree programme in Bachelor of Education. In the circumstances, Mr CHEUNG suggested that EMB should collaborate with HKIEd to provide appropriate continuing education opportunities for these young graduates to enhance their capability in teaching English. In this connection, the Chairman asked whether funding support would be given to these graduates to attend further training in teaching English.

53. DS(EM)3 responded that EMB would continue to collaborate with HKIEd and other tertiary institutions for provision of appropriate professional training to in-service and ex-service English teachers. In the light of a lifelong learning community, English teachers should proactively pursue continuing education to enhance their proficiency in teaching English. However, given the prevailing fiscal deficit, it would be difficult to offer financial assistance to English teachers who would become ineligible for teaching English from September 2003 in pursuit of continuing education.

54. Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung said that the Administration should work out feasible measures to enhance the proficiency of English teachers in order to restore the community's confidence on the quality of English teachers. He pointed out that if the results of the 2004 LPAT turned out to be equally disappointing, the Government as well as the whole education sector would have to take the blame.

55. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that the majority of new English teachers who had not attained LPR were at their early twenties and should endeavour to pursue further studies to upgrade their level of competence in teaching English. He also cautioned that EMB and HKIEd should work as close partners to ensure a satisfactory match between what were required to meet LPR and what should be taught in relevant education programmes offered by HKIEd. He concurred with Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung that if the future graduates of HKIEd were still incapable of meeting the standard of LPR, the damage on the reputation of the English teaching workforce would be disastrous. In view of the community's concern of the results of the 2003 LPAT, Mr CHEUNG also urged EMB to ensure that only qualified English teachers should be assigned to teach English in schools from September 2003 onwards.

56. In concluding the discussion, the Chairman said that an overall competent workforce in English teaching was paramount to Hong Kong's continued success as an international commercial and financial centre. He urged the Administration to explore the workable options for upgrading the quality of English teachers and provide the Panel with a paper in October 2003.

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III. Any other business

57. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:25 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
3 September 2003