

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Review of the Adult Education Courses
Operated by the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB)

Purpose

This paper seeks Members' views on a proposal to hive off the operation of the adult education courses directly run by EMB.

Background

2. At present, EMB operates three evening adult education courses for people aged 15 or above who have missed the opportunity of formal education earlier in life. They are: the Adult Education Course (General Background) (AEC(G)) at the primary level, the Government Evening Secondary School Course (GESSC) at the secondary level, and the English Course (EC) at both primary and secondary levels. The provision in 2002/03 for these three courses is \$74.6 m. A brief description of the three courses is in Annex A.

Problem

3. EMB's adult education courses adopt the traditional school curriculum and follow a rigid schedule. They are not flexible enough to meet the changing social needs and the demands of a knowledge-based economy. This is borne out by the declining enrolment for both AEC(G) and GESSC over the years, falling to 60% and 83% respectively in 2002/03. Taking into account a drop-out rate of 23% for both courses, the effective completion rates were 46% and 64% only. Although the enrolment for EC was much higher, at 92%, the drop-out was as high as 42%, resulting in an effective completion rate of only 53%. It further begs the question whether EMB should continue to run these courses.

4. In a lifelong learning society, we need a flexible education system that provides multiple entry and exit points, extensive articulation arrangements

that will take account of prior learning and working experiences, and a qualifications framework that accords equal emphasis to academic and vocational education. In recent years, the government has introduced various initiatives to provide more education and training opportunities, a list of which is in Annex B. They fuelled the continuing education sector which thrives on its flexibility and responsiveness to changing market needs, and accounts for the drop in enrolment of EMB's adult education courses.

Proposal

5. Against this background, we propose that EMB should cease to operate the three adult education courses with effect from September 2003. This is in line with the first principle of small government, i.e. government should extricate itself from work that can be done better by the private sector. To minimize the disruption to those who are already enrolled in EMB's courses, we propose the following alternative and transitional arrangements to serve their needs.

Adult Education Course (General Background)

6. There are 13 centres offering AEC(G) providing a total of 1,295 places. The enrolment in 2002/03 was 771, compared to 1,400 in 1998/99. 85% of the enrolled are over 30 years of age; and 54% are working. We reckon that the programmes provided under the Continuing Education Fund (CEF), the Employees Retraining Board and the Skills Upgrading Scheme are more relevant to the needs of these adult learners. We are currently reviewing the CEF with a view to broadening its scope to include more programmes at the basic levels and to benefit more adult learners.

Government Evening Secondary School Course

7. There are 12 centres offering GESSC with a total of 8,280 places. The enrolment in 2002/03 was 6,858, down from 7,616 in 1999/2000. 75% of those enrolled are between 15 and 29 years of age. Repeaters make up 70% of the S5 enrolment, but only 30% attained 5E or above in the HKCEE, and less than 20% attained the minimum requirement in the HKAL. Although mainstream education is still the predominant preference among parents and students, students who are not academically oriented will be well advised to pursue alternative progression path, such as Project Yi Jin, Higher Diploma and

Associate Degree programmes. Although these programmes are more expensive, the government provides grants and loans for needy students to ensure that no one is deprived of education for lack of means.

8. Those who are aged between 15 and 19 should be studying in day schools, instead of the evening adult education courses. Eight senior secondary schools will come into operation in the 2003/04 school year, some of which also operate S1-3 classes. They provide more diversified curricula that will better meet the needs of learners with different talents and abilities.

English Course

9. At present, 15 centres offer a total of 3,850 places with an enrolment of 3,541, 76% of whom are over 30 years of age. 86% of those enrolled are working adults. To them, vocational English is more relevant than the formal school curriculum. The Language Fund (Workplace English Campaign) and the Continuing Education Fund offer a wide range of English programmes to suit different needs. There are also English language components in the Employees Retraining Board's courses and the Skills Upgrading Scheme that are geared towards low-skilled workers.

Transitional Arrangements

10. There are many experienced school operators and continuing education providers who are capable of taking over the three adult education courses. Most of the existing learners will have completed a key stage of study within two years (i.e. by the end of the 2004/05 school year). For example, a learner in S3 in the current (2002/03) school year will have completed S5 by the end of 2004/05 school year. To maintain continuity for these learners, we shall commission suitable operators to run the three courses for two years with government subvention. Thereafter, the operators will arrange other learning programmes in response to the needs of the learners.

Consultation

11. We have consulted the heads of the three adult education courses, potential operators and relevant concern groups. They support the direction of change, and the transitional arrangements. A number of operators have also expressed interest in taking over the existing adult education courses from EMB.

We shall explain to existing students the policy decision and offer advice on alternative learning opportunities.

Advice Sought

12. Members are invited to give their views on the proposal as set out in paragraph 5.

Education and Manpower Bureau
February 2003

Existing Adult Education Courses

Adult Education Course (General Background)

This Course provides free primary education which covers the basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy. The subjects offered include Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics and General Studies at lower, middle and upper levels, which are equivalent to Primary 3-4, Primary 5 and Primary 6 in day schools respectively. The course duration for each level of study is one year.

Government Evening Secondary School Course

This Course consists of both Chinese and English Sections. It offers seven subjects in Secondary 1-3, six subjects in Secondary 4 and 5 and four subjects in Secondary 6. Except for Secondary 6 which lasts for three years (Years 1-3), each level of study lasts for 1 year. Learners in Secondary 5 can take part in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) whereas learners in Secondary 6 (Year 3) can take part in the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination.

English Course

This Course provides learners with an opportunity to learn the English Language at the following levels:

- Primary 4 to 6 3 years
- Secondary 1 to 5 5 years
- General Certificate of Education (GCE) 'O' Level 1 year

Learners in Secondary 5 can sit for the subject of English Language (Syllabus B) in the HKCEE and those in GCE classes can sit for the subject of English Language in the GCE 'O' Level Examination.

List of Education and Training Opportunities Introduced by the Government in Recent Years

Education and Training Opportunities	Descriptions
Continuing Education Fund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Continuing Education Fund (CEF) aims at subsidizing adults with learning aspirations to pursue continuing education and training courses. Coverage: Industry specific sectors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) logistics; (b) financial services; (c) China business; (d) tourism; Generic skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (e) language (English, Putunghua and written Chinese); (f) interpersonal and intrapersonal skills for the workplace; and (g) design
Project Yi Jin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Project Yi Jin aims at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ providing an alternative route and expanding the continuing education opportunities for secondary five school leavers and adult learners; ➢ upgrading students' knowledge in bi-literacy, tri-lingualism and application of information technology through combining academic pursuits with practical skills training; ➢ promoting life-long learning; and ➢ upgrading our human resources and enhancing the competitiveness of Hong Kong in an increasingly knowledge-based society.
Workplace English Campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Workplace English Campaign aims at heightening public awareness of the importance of workplace English and raising the standard of English among the Hong Kong workforce. • The Campaign consists of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ the establishment of Hong Kong Workplace English Benchmarks for the following job types: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Clerks ○ Executives/ Associate Professionals ○ Frontline Service Personnel ○ Low Proficiency Job Types ○ Receptionists/ Telephone Operators

Education and Training Opportunities	Descriptions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Secretaries ➤ the provision of a Funding Scheme for Workplace English Training for employees' English training and for course development.
Youth Pre-employment Training Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The programme is to add value in the participants by enhancing their employability and competitiveness through the provision of a series of employment-related modular courses and workplace attachment training, and to make them better prepared for future employment during the economic upturn. • It is a self-enhancement opportunity to better prepare them for the first step into the employment world. • The programme plays a positive role in addressing the issue of youth unemployment.
Youth Work Experience and Training Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The programme enhances the employability and competitiveness of the young school leavers, helps them draw up career plans and gets them prepared for entering the employment market.
Skills Upgrading Scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This scheme provides continuous learning opportunities for in-service employees from different industries. • The courses are jointly designed by the representatives of employers, employees and training organizations. • The skills qualification a trainee received under the scheme will be widely recognized by employers in the industry.
Retraining Courses offered by the Employees Retraining Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board provides a great variety of full-time, part-time and evening courses broadly in the following categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Core course on job search skills ○ Job-specific skills courses ○ General skills, language and computer courses ○ Tailor-made courses for employers ○ Self-employment programmes
Senior Secondary Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These schools will come into operation in the 2003/04 school year. • They provide the learners with diversified curricula, practical and vocational training to suit different talent, abilities and needs of the learners. • More progression pathways for individual needs will be developed upon graduation.