

Meeting of Panel on Education on 17 February 2003

Submission of Mr Wilson TONG

14 February 2003

Dear Sir,

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

I understand that there shall be discussion during a meeting in the afternoon of 17 February 2003 (Monday) among Members of the Legislative Council Panel on Education on the captioned subject, and it is Government's intention to hive off the operation of the adult education courses directly run by the EMB with effect from September 2003.

EMB proposed transitional arrangements in order to maintain continuity for the adult learners for a period of two years by outside operators with government subvention, after which the operators will arrange for other learning programmes according to the needs of these learners.

I am not satisfied with these arrangements as it appears to me that this is a great departure from the policy addresses of the Chief Executive of the HKSAR in respect of the priority accorded to education. I should be grateful if Panel Members would turn down the proposal by the EMB on the following grounds :-

1. Costing

- a) At present, there are only 15 centres for a total of 3,850 places with enrolment rate as high as 76% for the evening courses. The centres are in fact the premises of the existing government day schools. As such, no extra expenditures are to be incurred on accommodation. In fact, we just make fuller use of the resources that have been left unused.
- b) Payments to teaching and any other staff involved in the operation can be said to be very small. This explains as to why the EMB has not provided the Panel Members with information about such expenditure.
- c) The Government proposes subvention to shrug off the direct management responsibility in the operation of the adult education. Since subvention is

proposed, there is no way for the Government to save the operational cost, if the intention is to save money.

- d) It is therefore held that there is no basis for the proposal in terms of cost-effectiveness.

2. The Quality of Adult Education Run by Private Operators

- a) From the papers for discussion, there is no way to assure the quality of the courses proposed to be run by private operators. In the absence of any supervision measures by the Government, it can be envisaged that there is no way to assure the quality of such course. When effective supervision is contemplated, it means that extra administrative cost has to be incurred, thus being contrary to the principle of maintaining a small government, as more supervisory staff have to be employed for this purpose.

- b) Also, nothing was mentioned about the school fees once the courses are run by private operators. In considering the matter, it is therefore important that the present level of school fees should be maintained, even though the courses are transferred to private operators. This is a point Panel Members must not fail to perceive. It is therefore of vital importance that the commitment to that effect must be sought from the EMB in event that the Panel Members endorse the proposal of the EMB.

- c) There should be an effective complaint mechanism in order to check the performance of the private operators, and the EMB is the party responsible for drafting the complaint procedures for compliance by the private operators concerned.

- d) The same principles referred to above should be applied after the transitional arrangements for a period of two years.

3. The Principle of the Proposal

- a) It is fallacious of the EMB in principle to phase out the evening (full) course under the present education system by saying that it is not flexible enough to answer the needs of nowadays for the apparent reason that a sound grounding from basic education is indispensable in one's life. And for those who missed the basic education opportunity, the evening course

is a leeway for them to make up. As such, for a full dimensional education, such course is dispensable, in particular having due regard to the small scale of financial involvement in the operation, even though the Government regards it as a showcase.

- b) Apart from the dissatisfaction of those attending the evening courses, I have heard strong objection from the public saying that it was too mean for the Government to close the access to evening courses just for cost cutting and burden disposal. It appears to me that the Government is doing something against the tide and against public opinions.
- c) The attendees of the evening course are the genuine learners. A friend of mine at the age over 50 is now attending form three in the evening course. He has to work from 7.30 am to 6:30 pm daily without any rest day during the year. Why he has still to study after the toil of the day ? Because the pursuit of basic knowledge from formal education is important to him. He is now very upset and heartbreaking on seeing the unconscionable policy of the Government in this particular area. And most of his classmates share his views as well. Is our Government happy to see genuine learners angry and heartbreaking ? I am of the view that the Government is putting a spoke across the wheel of progress in this particular issue. The Government has invested a lot on the 7-year free and compulsory education and such education has produced countless mindless learners who have turned out to be a social burden, as can be seen from the way some young people behave nowadays. But now, our Government is too eager to take away the opportunity of the genuine learners. As such, the policy to hive off the operation is putting a cart before the horse. Honestly speaking, I am very angry with the unconscionable policy as can be seen from EMB's proposal. Some time ago, I heard personal commitment from a spokeswoman of the then Education Department during a phone-in program run by Albert Cheng (鄭大班) saying that the Government would not close adult education courses run by the Department, but just over a short period of time, the personal commitment has gone with the wind. We need a Government having the integrity to keep its commitments to the public, and not a Government who is breaching commitments in a shameless way.
- d) EMB proposes to give up course management responsibility in September 2003. There is no need to push the case in such a hurry even though the

proposal meets the endorsement from the Panel Members. It is therefore my request that even the Panel Members agree in principle to the implementation of the proposal, the matter should be deferred for a longer period of time, say, two academic years for the peace of the mind of the genuine learners as it is not good for them to study with an unsettled mind.

- e) As can be ascertained, no consultation has been made from the attendees of the courses. The views of the genuine learners are more important than anything else and the views from the three heads of the adult education courses, potential operators and relevant concern groups as revealed from the papers have little bearing in the matter for the apparent reason that they are not users of the subject under review. It is therefore my request that the Government should seek the views from the attendees of the courses during the interim periods before next move.

I should be grateful if the Secretary for Education and Manpower (SEM) Professor Arthur K.C. Li would review the matter and if possible withdraw the papers for discussion by referring to the aforesaid representations. And I should also be grateful if all Panel Members on Education would take a serious view in the matter and as far as possible do not support the proposal from EMB for the apparent reasons given above.

I should be grateful if you would let me have a substantive reply as soon as possible. Please acknowledge receipt of this letter.

Lastly, in view of the urgency of the matter, the Secretariat is requested to pass this letter to the individual Panel Members on Education before the commencement of the meeting, and the Secretariat is therefore requested to confirm in writing whether or not this has been done as requested.

Yours sincerely,

(TONG Wai-ping)

c.c. SEM (Attn.: Professor Arthur KC Li)