

# 立法會 *Legislative Council*

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## **Report of the Panel on Education for submission to the Legislative Council**

### **Purpose**

This report gives an account of the work of the Panel on Education during the 2003-2004 Legislative Council (LegCo) session. It will be tabled at the Council meeting on 7 July 2004 in accordance with Rule 77(14) of Rules of Procedure.

### **The Panel**

2. The Panel was formed by a resolution of this Council on 8 July 1998 and as amended on 20 December 2000 and 9 October 2002 for the purpose of monitoring and examining Government policies and issues of public concern relating to education matters.
3. The terms of reference of the Panel are in **Appendix I**.
4. The Panel comprises 15 members, with Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung and Dr Hon YEUNG Sum elected as Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Panel respectively. The membership list of the Panel is in **Appendix II**.

### **Major work**

#### Higher education

##### *University Grants Committee - funding for 2004-05*

5. The Panel discussed the Administration's funding proposal for the University Grants Committee (UGC) sector for the 2004-05 roll over year at two special meetings in December 2003. Representatives of 26 deputations presented their views and concerns about funding cuts for higher education. Members noted that funding for the UGC-funded institutions had been reduced by about 10% since the 1998-99 academic year. Many of the representatives expressed concern that a further 10% funding cut together with the withdrawal

of funding support for taught postgraduate and sub-degree programmes in the 2004-05 academic year would severely affect the operation of the institutions. They therefore considered that the Administration should maintain the funding for the UGC sector at the 2002-03 level.

6. The Secretary for Education and Manpower (SEM) explained that the proposed total recurrent grants to UGC-funded institutions would be \$10,657.8 million, which was around \$1,590 million below the same grants for the 2003-04 academic year. To assist UGC-funded institutions in diversifying their funding sources, the Administration had established a \$1 billion Matching Grant Scheme to provide dollar-for-dollar matching grants for private donations secured by the institutions.

7. Some members were concerned whether tuition fees of UGC-funded institutions would be increased as a result. Pointing out that the proposed funding cuts for such institutions had already given rise to an atmosphere of uncertainty and dissatisfaction within the university campuses, a member urged the Administration to clarify its stance on tuition fees. SEM clarified that the Administration did not propose to change the indicative fees for UGC-funded programmes and had been affirmative that such tuition fees should remain unchanged for the 2004-05 academic year. The Administration had, however, indicated that institutions could set higher fees for non-local students in UGC-funded and self-financing programmes.

8. Members agreed that non-local students should pay higher fees in order to allow institutions to recover a reasonable percentage of the costs of the UGC-funded programmes. As the enrolment of non-local students would stimulate competition and enhance the learning atmosphere in universities, members supported the policy of allowing UGC-funded institutions to recruit non-local and taught post-graduate students up to 4% of the publicly funded places, and another 4% using private funding without affecting the number of places for local students in publicly funded programmes.

#### *Matching Grant Scheme for UGC-funded institutions*

9. Members asked the Administration to explain why it had decided to reduce the funding support for the UGC sector by about \$1.1 billion on the one hand, and provide a \$1 billion dollar-for-dollar matching grant on the other. The Administration pointed out that local students were now subsidised at some 82% of the overall student unit cost of the UGC-funded programmes, a percentage which was among the highest on an international scale. Given the financial constraints, it would be in the interest of the institutions to diversify their funding source as overseas institutions often did, and for the higher sector as a whole to change their mindset and culture regarding the allocation of resources. To develop a philanthropic culture in support of higher education, the Matching Grant Scheme was established to encourage institutions to raise funds through the collective efforts of their management and staff.

10. Some members expressed concern that although the Administration had set a "ceiling" and a "floor" for the provision of matching grant, the large institutions with a long and reputable history were more capable of raising funds than the smaller ones with a short history. These members urged the Administration to ensure a fair distribution of matching grants to the smaller/newer institutions. The Administration said that having considered the relative performance of the institutions in the first phase and the needs of the smaller/newer institutions, the Administration would raise the "ceiling" and "floor" levels to \$250 million and \$45 million respectively. The adjustments were aimed at encouraging institution to make more efforts to raise funds and giving further assurance to the smaller institutions regarding the amount of grants they would be able to obtain from the Scheme.

*Future provision of associate degree programmes in the City University of Hong Kong*

11. Following the Higher Education Review in 2002, UGC had set up an independent specialist group to review the existing UGC-funded sub-degree programmes offered by the City University of Hong Kong (CityU) and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU). The review was carried out according to the principle that only programmes requiring high start-up and maintenance costs, meeting manpower needs or regarded as "endangered species" should continue to be publicly-funded. The Government's decision to phase out public funding for most of the associate degree programmes offered by the CityU from 2004 to 2008 caused much concern amongst CityU staff and students about the future provision of associate degree programmes in the University.

12. Members noted that the Working Group on Associate Degree Programmes (the Working Group) established by the CityU Council held the view that CityU could continue to offer high quality associate degree programmes through a restructured college operating in a self-financing mode. To this end, the Chairman of the CityU Council requested the Administration to increase Government subvention for CityU's associate degree programmes and provide a suitable site and funding for the construction of a new community college campus.

13. Members welcomed CityU's plan and expressed support for the CityU Council's request for assistance. Members urged the Administration to collaborate with the CityU management to find a suitable site for the construction of a new college campus so that it could continue to provide quality associate degree programmes on a self-financing basis in the long run. Some members also considered that CityU should be allowed a longer transitional period for withdrawal of funding support for the associate degree programmes and a longer period to repay the start-up loans so that it could set the programme fees at more affordable levels.

14. The Administration explained that one of the guiding principles of the specialist group referred to in paragraph 11 above was that programmes with comparable alternatives in the market should go first. The schedule for withdrawal of sub-degree programmes in CityU and PolyU by 2008 was recommended by the specialist group having regard to the availability of similar programmes in the market. The Administration said that it could not change the policy and the implementation plan but would consider providing assistance to CityU in other areas, including the provision of more publicly-funded second-year and third-year undergraduate places for enrolment of its associate degree programme graduates.

15. Some members expressed concern that many students would have difficulties in paying the high tuition fees of self-financing associate degree programmes. The Administration pointed out that the savings from the sub-degree sector would be ploughed back to benefit students through measures such as improving the package of financial assistance to students of self-financing courses. The Administration expected that as a result of the students exercising their choice and preference in the pursuit of post-secondary studies, a level playing field would gradually be established with all programme providers competing on an equal basis without any of them enjoying privileges in one way or the other.

#### *Future developments in the higher education sector*

16. The Secretary General of UGC (SG(UGC)) briefed the Panel on the direction that UGC proposed to take in advising the Government and steering the development of the higher education sector in respect of role differentiation among institutions and achieving international competitiveness.

17. Following an initial discussion on recent and anticipated future developments in the higher education sector as set out in the document entitled "To Make a Difference, To Move with the Times" published by UGC in January 2004, members decided to revisit the subject and receive deputations.

18. Members were concerned about the performance and role related funding mechanism. Members noted that the scheme was first carried out in 2000 when 2% of the recurrent funding for the sector was allocated on the basis of the institutions' performance and role-related efforts. Based on the recommendations of the Higher Education Review, the performance and role related funding would be increased to 10% for the 2005-06 triennium. A member questioned how institutions could maintain their autonomy and academic freedom when their academic development proposals had to be critically examined by UGC for funding allocation purpose. SG(UGC) explained that in view of the current fiscal environment, it was reasonable to expect institutions to perform in accordance with their strategic roles in order to maximise the efficiency of the sector as a whole.

19. Some members also questioned the legitimacy of UGC's powers and authority to steer the higher education sector and monitor the performance of institutions on the basis of their strategic role statements. These members considered that UGC should continue to play the role of a "buffer" between the Government and the institutions, safeguarding academic autonomy on the one hand and ensuring value for money on the other. SG(UGC) pointed out that arising from the Education Review in 2002, the Administration had endorsed the recommendation that UGC should adopt a more proactive approach by strengthening its role in strategic planning and policy development in higher education. He undertook to revert to the Panel on the progress of the proposals in the Document at a later stage.

### Primary and secondary school education

#### *Planning and provision of public sector school places*

20. In considering the proposal on the construction of two public sector schools in Sheung Shui at the meeting of the Public Works Subcommittee (PWSC) on 29 October 2003, some members expressed doubts on the demand for secondary school places in the district. They requested the Administration to withdraw the proposals and consult the Panel on Education on its policies for planning and provision of public sector school places.

21. The Panel met with the Administration and representatives of 30 deputations from the education sector to discuss the subject. Some members were concerned that if the construction of new schools under the School Building Programme was to continue as planned, there would be a substantial increase in the number of surplus secondary school places in the 2007-08 school year when the secondary student population would start to decline. The Administration explained that due to volatility of demand and site availability, it was not always possible to achieve a perfect match. Any surplus in the number of new schools could be used to meet the demand for reprovisioning existing schools with meritorious performance and substandard facilities. The Administration also pointed out that the provision of a certain percentage of surplus school places was necessary to facilitate student movement and stimulate competition. Some members agreed that the provision of a buffer in the supply of school places would stimulate competition in student enrolment and enhance the quality of education.

22. At the end of the discussion, members expressed support for the Administration to submit its school building proposals to PWSC for consideration, in particular proposals to reprovision and redevelop existing substandard schools and construction of new schools for implementation of whole-day primary schooling. To facilitate members' consideration of the proposals, members suggested that the Administration should provide detailed background information including the supply and demand situation and the views of the school heads in the districts concerned.

*Small class teaching*

23. SEM briefed the Panel on the preliminary findings of the first stage of the Study on effective strategies of classes and group teaching in primary schools (the Study) and the design framework for the second stage of the Study commencing in February 2004.

24. Some members queried the need to conduct the four-year Study when all agreed that teaching in small class would be better than large classes if all other factors were equal. SEM explained that there were views in the education community that small class teaching was not necessarily the best way to improve the quality of education, and the professionalism of teachers was more important in improving the quality of education. The Study was necessary to ascertain the benefits of small class teaching and the preconditions for securing the identified benefits.

25. Some members expressed concern about the restrictive criteria for the selection of 40 participating schools. They shared the view that the proposed criteria would restrict the scope of the Study by focusing on students from socially disadvantaged families, and as a result, the findings might not be applicable to other public sector schools with different characteristics. The Administration pointed out that overseas research studies had found that small class teaching would benefit students from socially disadvantaged families. Feedbacks from local schools and teachers also confirmed that students from low socio-economic families and new arrival children from the Mainland were in greater need of individualised attention. Given the fiscal deficits, the Administration had to use the limited resources allocated for the Study in the most cost-effective manner.

*Schools not allocated primary one class in the 2004-05 school year*

26. The declining population in the 6-11 age group had led to a reduction of classes in schools in many districts. For the 2004-05 school year, the number of children applying for primary one allocation had dropped by 5 500 as compared to the figure for the previous year, resulting in a corresponding reduction of some 160 primary one classes. Parents, students and teachers of some of the 31 primary schools not allocated primary one class in the 2004-05 school year staged a demonstration in protest against the decision.

27. The Panel discussed the problem of surplus primary school places and the Administration's follow-up measures. Some members considered that the contradictory policies in primary school administration had caused dissatisfaction in the primary school sector. Some of the examples were stressing the provision of quality education but refusing to implement small class teaching when there were surplus school places, and constructing new schools to create more school places on the one hand and closing existing schools on the other. The Administration explained that as a result of a sharp

decline in the birth rate and decrease in newly arrived children from the Mainland, there was a surplus supply of school places. Given the fiscal deficits, the Administration had the responsibility to ensure cost-effective use of public funds. In view of the surplus school places, the Administration considered it inappropriate to continue funding the operation of a primary one class in primary schools which had enrolled less than 23 primary one students.

28. Members urged the Administration to assist the schools concerned in merging with other schools and formulate a long-term policy to resolve the problem of surplus school places. Some members considered that the Administration should maintain close contacts with primary schools in need of assistance before the problem of insufficient student intake emerged. A member suggested that the Administration should form a task group to assist such schools in a proactive manner.

29. The Administration assured members that it had all along shared the concern of teachers, parents and students who were affected by the closing of schools. The Administration had proposed four follow-up measures to help schools which were not allocated a primary one class in the 2004-05 school year. Seven of the 31 bi-sessional schools would phase out one session for conversion to whole-day schools. EMB would provide assistance to primary schools contemplating a merger with another school and would also take the initiative to discuss with schools feasible alternatives to resolve the problem of under-enrolment. Based on the experience from the implementation of the follow-up measures, EMB would provide the Panel with an information paper on the principles and policy on consolidation of under-utilised schools in the long run.

#### *Bullying and violence in schools*

30. In the wake of media reports on a number of bullying incidents in schools, the Panel discussed the issue of bullying and violence in schools in February 2004. SEM stressed that the Administration adopted a policy of zero-tolerance towards bullying and violence in schools and was committed to supporting schools in managing and preventing bullying. Members noted that a resource package entitled "Co-creating a harmonious school" had been issued to schools in January 2004 with a view to presenting to teachers a systematic and comprehensive set of reference materials and tools in dealing with the problem.

31. Members pointed out that insufficient weight had been given to moral and civic education for young students. As the factors involved were complex, members suggested that the Administration should appoint an independent academic institution to conduct a comprehensive research study with a view to identifying the problem of bullying at school and making recommendations for implementation in the longer term.

32. After reviewing the research studies on bullying, the Administration had provided an information paper setting out the findings of three recent research studies on the subject and reiterating the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB)'s commitment to tackle the problem. To assess the support required by schools in managing bullying, a survey had been conducted recently whereby all primary and secondary schools were required to furnish EMB with information on the physical bullying cases in schools from September 2003 to February 2004. The survey revealed that 72% of the schools reported no such cases, 23% reported having to manage one to three cases and 5% reported four or more cases. Those schools which reported having difficulties in managing the cases would be provided with intensive support by the Educational Psychologists and School Development Officers of EMB. Schools with cases which required teachers' long term follow-up support to the students would also be provided with support by EMB through the regional network of training and exchange facilities. A pamphlet on "Help Your Child Develop a Harmonious Peer Relationship in School" was issued to parents to raise their awareness on the issue of bullying. The Administration undertook to monitor the situation closely and review the support strategies as and when necessary.

#### Other items discussed

33. Other items discussed by the Panel included the way forward on information technology in education, review of the handling of missing examination scripts by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, allocation of secondary school places for children of the ethnic minorities and school-based professional support for teachers. The Panel was consulted on the regulation of private schools offering non-formal curriculum and the injection of funds to the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority to support its assessment development, policy and research activities.

#### Meetings and visit held

34. The Panel held a total of 13 meetings from October 2003 to June 2004 and made one visit to two schools in February 2004.

Council Business Division 2  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
2 July 2004



**Legislative Council  
Panel on Education**

**Terms of Reference**

1. To monitor and examine Government policies and issues of public concern relating to education matters.
2. To provide a forum for the exchange and dissemination of views on the above policy matters.
3. To receive briefings and to formulate views on any major legislative or financial proposals in respect of the above policy area prior to their formal introduction to the Council or Finance Committee.
4. To monitor and examine, to the extent it considers necessary, the above policy matters referred to it by a member of the Panel or by the House Committee.
5. To make reports to the Council or to the House Committee as required by the Rules of Procedure.

**Legislative Council  
Panel on Education**

**Membership list for 2003-2004 session**

<b>Chairman</b>	Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung, BBS, JP
<b>Deputy Chairman</b>	Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
<b>Members</b>	<p>Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung Hon SIN Chung-kai Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP Hon SZETO Wah Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP Dr Hon LO Wing-lok, JP Hon WONG Sing-chi Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP Hon MA Fung-kwok, SBS, JP</p> <p>(Total : 15 Members)</p>
<b>Clerk</b>	Ms Doris CHAN
<b>Legal Adviser</b>	Ms Bernice WONG Sze-man
<b>Date</b>	2 July 2004