

For Information
19 April 2004

Legislative Council
Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

Radio Television Hong Kong

Purpose

This paper informs the Panel of the Administration's views on the role of Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) as a public service broadcaster and related issues concerning its accommodation needs, content licensing as well as the development of school educational television (ETV) service.

Background

2. At the invitation of RTHK, some Panel Members paid a visit to RTHK on 13 January 2004. RTHK briefed them on its programming and future development. Members would like to follow up on the following three issues:

- (a) the accommodation needs of RTHK and the proposed way forward on the proposed new Broadcasting House;
- (b) the possibility and implications of selling RTHK's popular or quality productions and generating some income therefrom; and
- (c) the current development of school ETV service, including the latest progress of the review by RTHK and the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) of its effectiveness and future direction, taking into account the recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) in its Reports No. 37 and 39.

The Role of RTHK

3. As a public service broadcaster, the mission of RTHK is to:
- (a) inform, educate and entertain audiences through multimedia programming;
 - (b) provide timely and impartial coverage of local and global events and issues;
 - (c) deliver programming which contributes to the openness and cultural diversity of Hong Kong;
 - (d) provide a platform for free and unfettered expression of views; and
 - (e) serve a broad spectrum of audiences and cater to the needs of minority interest groups.

Accommodation Needs

4. Currently, RTHK's broadcasting headquarters are accommodated in three separate buildings on Broadcast Drive in Kowloon, namely, the Broadcasting House, Educational Television House and Television House which came into operation in 1969, 1971 and 1975 respectively. Some of RTHK's facilities are accommodated in five other premises in Kowloon and on the Hong Kong Island.

5. RTHK proposes to re-provision all its facilities and offices scattered at different locations to a new, purpose-built building at Tseung Kwan O Area 86 since most facilities in the existing headquarters, which were built 30-odd years ago, are outdated. A new broadcasting house accommodating all RTHK's facilities and staff will help improve efficiency.

6. The Commerce, Industry and Technology Bureau (CITB) recognizes RTHK's accommodation needs. RTHK's reprovisioning project, which is under planning, is estimated to cost about \$1.3 billion. The estimated cost will be reviewed and revised according to the actual project scope and the price levels of the day. We will follow the established procedures to apply for the necessary resource to take forward the project in due course.

Content Licensing

7. Currently, there are no restrictions on the licensing and distribution of the content produced by RTHK. RTHK has licensed its content to various commercial entities over the years. The annual licence fee generated in the past five years ranged from \$1.64 million to \$6.9 million. RTHK incurs extra costs in the process of licensing its content. The extra costs arise mostly from copyright clearance, marketing and coordination, etc. Currently, RTHK has been absorbing such costs estimated at about \$600,000 annually, representing about 0.14% of its annual allocation of \$420.7 million for 2004-05 (excluding the provision for school ETV service).

8. According to section 3 of the Public Finance Ordinance (Cap. 2), except where otherwise provided by or under this Ordinance or any other enactment, any money raised or received for the purposes of the Government shall form part of the general revenue of the Government. Therefore, the gross licence fee generated from the licensing of RTHK's content must be returned to the general revenue of the Government.

School ETV Service

9. EMB provides the school ETV service to support the implementation of the school curriculum and RTHK is the production agent. The PAC in its Report No. 37 urged the then Director of Education to consult the Legislative Council at an appropriate time on the following issues:

- (a) whether the school ETV service has valid educational value;
- (b) whether the recommendations of the Standing Committee on the Development of the School ETV Service¹ (Standing Committee) will meet the needs of schools and students;
- (c) the methods that will be adopted for distributing VCDs, evaluating and tapping the utilization rates of VCDs, and surveying users' opinions on the ETV programmes provided in the form of VCDs; and
- (d) whether there is possibility of sourcing alternative producers, other than RTHK, on a more competitive basis.

10. Later in its Report No. 39, the PAC noted the Administration's follow-up actions on the above recommendations and expressed its wish to be kept informed of further developments. EMB further reported to the PAC in 2003 on the progress of the Administration's follow-up actions on the above recommendations.

Latest Development

11. To follow up on the PAC's recommendations, the Standing Committee reviewed various aspects of the school ETV service, including its educational value, utilization in schools, cost and production mode, and delivery mode. Based on the findings of the review, EMB is implementing a plan to revamp the school ETV service, which has been well received by school councils and the Committee on Home-School Co-operation. The latest development regarding programme production, delivery mode and cost-effectiveness of school ETV service is summarized below.

Programme production – The objective of school ETV service has been widened to include the development of generic skills and cultivation of positive values among pupils. The scope of new programmes has been diversified to cover other subjects such as

¹ The Standing Committee is set up by EMB to review the school ETV service. It comprises representatives from schools, a parent group, and the media sector and government departments including RTHK.

information technology, arts, physical education, space travel, understanding of the Basic Law and national identity. New programmes for secondary schools will be produced based on the feedback of secondary schools. The target audience of school ETV service has been extended to include pre-primary children.

Delivery mode – In response to the feedback of teachers, EMB has used VCDs and the Internet to replace live TV broadcast as the means of distributing ETV programmes for secondary schools since September 2003. The airtime released has been used to broadcast general educational programmes for primary schools. Although TV broadcast of ETV programmes for primary schools still continues for the time being, EMB is at the same time distributing such programmes in VCDs and via the Internet, which makes access more flexible. Furthermore, EMB is exploring various options for putting school ETV programmes on sale.

Cost-effectiveness – To enhance cost-effectiveness, EMB will re-prioritise programme production and re-engineer the function of its school ETV team from “design and production” to “monitoring and quality assurance”. Such measures will reduce the size of the team from 22 to 13. Although EMB is eager to speed up outsourcing of production as recommended by the PAC, progress has been slow due to RTHK’s concern that this would inevitably exacerbate the staff redeployment problem within RTHK.

Future Direction

12. Since school ETV service is a curriculum-based, supplementary educational aid, its future development must be considered in the context of the increasing availability of a variety of multi-media learning aids, and the curriculum reform which provides more flexibility for schools to design their school-based curricula to meet the needs of pupils. While acknowledging the value of educational videos, EMB believes that video-based educational aids need not necessarily take the form of live broadcast of television programmes. In fact, distributing interactive, multi-media materials via VCDs or the Internet is equally, if not more, effective and flexible in meeting the varied needs of pupils and

schools. According to a survey conducted by EMB in May 2003, among the teachers using school ETV programmes, only about 2% and 19% of teachers in secondary and primary schools respectively relied on live broadcasts. More and more schools are using the VCDs provided by EMB instead.

13. EMB is therefore contemplating the transformation of school ETV service into a more interactive, multi-media learning support service. It is envisaged that live broadcast of school ETV service will be phased out eventually and replaced by other economical forms of delivery with round-the-clock accessibility.

Advice Sought

14. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

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