

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1881/05-06
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 10 April 2006 at 4:30 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building

- Members present** : Dr Hon YEUNG Sum (Chairman)
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon MA Lik, GBS, JP
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, SBS, JP
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
- Member absent** : Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
- Public Officers attending** : Item III
Mr LEE Kwok-sung
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (4)

Mr TAM Koon-che
Principal Education Officer (School-based Support Services)

Mr IP Cho-yin
Deputy Project Director (School-based Professional Support)

Principal Support Network

Mr Peter LAU Chiu-yin
Principal, St. Peter's Secondary School

School Support Partners Scheme

Mr YIU Tao-sang
Teacher, Hoi Ping Chamber of Commerce Secondary
School

Mr HO Moon-tim
Principal, Buddhist Sin Tak College

Professional Development Schools

Ms LAM Wai-ling
Tai Po Old Market Public School (Plover Cove)

Ms YEUNG Yun-ling
Christian Alliance HC CHAN Primary School AM

University-School Support Programmes

Quality School Improvement Project

Dr CHIU Chi-shing
Project Leader

*Partnership for Improvement of Learning & Teaching
Project*

Dr LEUNG Yat-ming
Representing Project Leader

*Variation for the Improvement of Teaching & Learning
Project*

Mrs Priscilla LO
Representing Project Leader

Project on Assessment

Prof Magdalena MOK Mo-ching
Project Leader

Item IV

Miss WU Po-ling
Acting Principal Assistant Secretary (Quality Assurance)

Mr LI Wing
Controller, Student Financial Assistance Agency

Mr CHAN Hung-to
Senior Education Officer (Joint Office for Pre-primary Services)

Attendance by invitation : Item IV

Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union

Ms YUNG Hau-heung
Spokesperson on Early Childhood Education

Hong Kong Baptist Kindergarten Education Convention

Ms CHAN Tsui-yuk
Secretary

Hong Kong Baptist University Early Childhood Education Society

Miss CHAN Hang
President

Ms SIU Lin-ying
Vice-President

Hong Kong Council of Early Childhood Education & Services

Ms Sansan CHING
Director

Mr LAU Ming-ki
Executive Committee Vice-Chairman

Hong Kong Institute of Education Past Student's
Association of Early Childhood Teacher Education Ltd.

Mrs MAK TSE How-ling
Chairman

Mrs MAK LEUNG Shuk-won
Vice-Chairman

Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers

Ms SZTO Yuk-lin
Vice-Chairman, Committee of Early Childhood Education

The Salvation Army

Ms Christie CHAN
Coordinator for Pre-School Education

Ms NG Yin-kam
Assistant Coordinator for Pre-School Education

Hong Kong Teachers' Association

Ms LAU Seung-man
Chairman, Kindergarten Section

Mr KO Gra-yee
President

Hong Kong Early Childhood Educators Association

Ms CHOW Wai-chun
Chairman

Ms LAM To-foon
Secretary

Alumni Association of Pre-School Education
Administration and Management Course – SPACE,
University of Hong Kong

Ms Cinda CHAN Shun-lai
Chairman

Ms LO Oi-lan
Vice-Chairman

Tai Po Early Childhood Education Principal Association

Ms KWOK Chor-kiu
Chairman

Ms CHAN Wai-ling
Vice-Chairman

The Non-profit-making Kindergarten Council of Hong Kong

Ms Harlanna YEUNG Chui-chun
Chairman

Ms CHENG Sau-yan
Vice-Chairman

S.K.H. Kindergarten and Nursery Council

Ms CHOW Wai-king
Headmistress

Ms CHEUNG Chui-wah
Headmistress

Education Convergence

Mr CHOI Kwok-kwong
Chairman

Hong Kong Kindergarten Association

Ms Mary TONG Siu-fun
Chairperson

Ms LIU Fung-heung
Vice-Chairperson

Council of Non-profit Making Organizations for
Pre-primary Education

Mrs Sanly TSANG
Chairman

Mrs CHAN LAU Yin-king
Committee Member

Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Ms Angela NG
Chief Officer (Children & Youth)

Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children

Ms Susan SO Suk-yin
Director

Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of
Hong Kong, Education Group

Mr Dennis T W LEUNG
Vice-Chairman

Society For Community Organization

Miss SZE Lai-shan
Community Organizer

World Organization for Early Childhood Education –
Hong Kong

Dr Hazel LAM Mei-yung
President

Dr Nirmala RAO
Vice-President

Hong Kong Kowloon and N.T. Kindergarten Education
Advancement Association Ltd.

Ms Joyce CHAU Choi-ngo
Chairman

Ms Angela TAM Siu-hing
Chairman

Clerk in attendance : Miss Odelia LEUNG
Chief Council Secretary (2)6

Staff in attendance : Mr Stanley MA
Senior Council Secretary (2)6

Miss Carmen HO
Legislative Assistant (2)1

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I. Information paper(s) issued since the last meeting

Members noted that no information paper had been issued since the last meeting.

II. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[Appendices I and II to LC Paper No. CB(2)1667/05-06]

Discussion item for next meeting

2. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next regular meeting scheduled for Monday, 8 May 2006 at 4:30 pm –

- (a) Grant to support the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority in establishing its centralised onscreen marking centre on Hong Kong Island;
- (b) Restructuring of classes under the new academic structure for senior secondary education; and
- (c) University tuition fees.

Discussion item for future meeting

3. Members noted Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung's proposal to discuss issues relating to the bidding mechanism for research fund administered by the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB). EMB was alleged to have unduly influenced the work of academics in the conduct of publicly-funded academic research projects. Ms Audrey EU considered it appropriate that the Panel should discuss the matter at a future meeting. Members agreed to include the item in the Panel's list of outstanding items for discussion.

4. Dr Fernando CHEUNG suggested that the Panel should revisit issues relating to governance and administration of University Grants Committee-funded institutions at a future meeting. Members agreed.

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III. Progress report on school-based professional support programmes, Education Development Fund

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1667/05-06(01) and (02)]

5. Members noted the Administration paper on the implementation progress of the school-based professional support (SBPS) programmes financed by the Education Development Fund [LC Paper No. CB(2)1667/05-06(01)] and the background brief prepared by the Legislative Council (LegCo) Secretariat [LC Paper No. CB(2)1667/05-06(02)].

Participation in the SBPS programmes

6. Referring to paragraph 3 of the Administration's paper, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong asked how the Administration would ensure that the implementation of the SBPS programmes would not increase the workload of teachers in schools. He also asked how EMB would ensure that schools would consult their teachers before deciding whether to participate in the SBPS programmes.

7. Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (4) (DS(EM)4) responded that EMB had conducted briefings for principals and teachers on the principles and implementation of the SBPS programmes. Schools were only required to indicate their wish to take part in the SBPS programmes to EMB in a simple proforma. No other paper work or submissions would be required on the part of schools for participation in the programmes.

8. Principal Education Officer (School-based Support Services) (PEO(SBSS)) supplemented that EMB had encouraged principals to consult their teachers in order to reach a consensus before participating in the SBPS programmes. Participation was voluntary and schools were advised to participate in the programmes appropriate to their specific needs and contexts.

9. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong suggested that to avoid unnecessary disputes during the implementation of the SBPS programmes, principal and teachers of schools should be advised to take a vote to decide whether to participate in the SBPS programmes. DS(EM)4 undertook to relay the suggestion to schools for consideration.

School Support Partners (SSP) Scheme

10. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong noted with concern that only 35 teachers had participated in the SSP Scheme. He asked whether EMB had encountered difficulties in recruiting sufficient number of excellent teachers to implement the SSP Scheme.

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11. PEO(SBSS) agreed that schools would consider their manpower needs before releasing the experienced teachers to participate in the SBPS programmes. He pointed out that to encourage participation, EMB had flexibly provided a range of part-time working options over an extended period for the experienced principals and teachers to participate in the Principal Support Network (PSN) Scheme and SSP Scheme. EMB would offer schools adequate compensation for releasing their staff to participate in the programmes. In addition, these SBPS programmes offered participants with professional development opportunities in teaching and management work. Principals and teachers were expected to apply the knowledge and skills they learnt during the secondment to enhance the quality of management and teaching in their mother schools.

12. PEO(SBSS) further said that with the efforts and inputs injected into the SBPS programmes in the past 18 months, a firm groundwork for smooth implementation of the SBPS programmes had been established. EMB anticipated that with more schools being aware of the benefits of the SSP Scheme in staff development, there would be an expansion in the scope and scale of the SSP Scheme in the 2006-07 school year.

13. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong remarked that EMB should appreciate the difficulties of schools in releasing their experienced teachers to join the SSP Scheme. EMB should not try to persuade schools to do so. He considered that EMB should direct more efforts and resources in implementing the more popular areas of the SBPS programmes. PEO(SBSS) reiterated that it rested with schools to decide whether to release their staff to join the SSP Scheme and other SBPS programmes.

Principal Support Network

14. Mrs Selina CHOW noted that 42 principals had been seconded on a part-time basis to form networks with 88 partner principals in schools. As partner principals had indicated that the provision of support in school management and leadership development to serving principals was most important in facilitating teachers' development and implementation of education reform, she asked how EMB would speed up and expand the scope of the PSN Scheme.

15. PEO(SBSS) responded that the PSN Scheme was now operated in the form of small networks each comprising one seconded principal and two partner principals. In view of the positive feedback collected, EMB would expand the scope of the Scheme and devise networks on a thematic basis such as curriculum leadership, human resources management, financial management and crisis management.

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16. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr Peter LAU said that he had participated in the pilot scheme and had collaborated with two partner principals to tackle a number of difficult teaching and management issues in the implementation of the education reform. He highlighted that although he had been a school principal for some 20 years, he still had learnt new skills and knowledge in resolving problems and meeting challenges through collaboration with partner principals.

17. In response to Mrs Selina CHOW, Mr Peter LAU further said that where the problems identified related to personnel matters or management of very high level, he and the partner principals would explore ways to deal with them in the sensible way.

Resources utilisation

18. Mr MA Lik noted that the Education Development Fund was set up in July 2004 with a grant of \$550 million to implement the SBPS programmes for five years. He pointed out that after two years of implementation, only \$52 million had been spent. He asked whether the Administration had over-estimated the budget for the implementation of the SBPS programmes.

19. DS(EM)4 responded that EMB had adopted an incremental approach in the implementation of the SBPS programmes. With the establishment of a basic groundwork for expanding the scope of the programmes, EMB considered that the allocation of \$550 million was reasonable and would be sufficient for the expansion and implementation of the SBPS programmes in the next three years.

20. Mr MA Lik said that EMB should continue to make prudent use of the public resources. He hoped that there was no need to seek additional funding for the implementation of the SBPS programmes for a long period. PEO(SBSS) responded that EMB had all along aimed at making cost-effective use of the Education Development Fund to assist schools in taking forward the education reform measures. EMB would consult participating principals and teachers on the effectiveness of the SBPS programmes and redeploy resources to the popular programmes to meet the development needs of principals and teachers. EMB hoped that the initial allocation of \$550 million would suffice for the implementation of the SBPS programmes for more than five years.

Way forward

21. In response to the Chairman's enquiry on the way forward, DS(EM)4 said that EMB would continue to implement the SBPS programmes on an incremental basis. PEO(SBSS) added that EMB would consolidate the experience gained from implementation and aim at the establishment of a collaborative culture in schools to facilitate teachers' professional development in the long term.

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IV. Kindergarten subsidy and fee remission

22. Members noted the Administration's paper entitled "Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme" [LC Paper No. CB(2)1667/05-06(03)] and the background brief on "Financial assistance to pre-primary service providers and parents of children receiving pre-primary services" prepared by the LegCo Secretariat [LC Paper No. CB(2)1667/05-06(04)]

Oral presentation by deputations

Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1667/05-06(05)]

23. Ms YUNG Hau-heung presented the views of the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Union considered it absolutely unreasonable that the share of pre-primary education constituted only 2.7% of the education budget. The Administration should increase resources to subsidise the provision of pre-primary education and professional development of pre-primary teachers to improve quality of pre-primary education, and formulate a pay system commensurate with qualifications for pre-primary teachers. On remission of fees to needy parents, the Administration should review the eligibility criteria and remove the social needs test from the Kindergarten and Child Care Centres Fee Remission Scheme (KCFRS).

Hong Kong Baptist Kindergarten Education Convention

24. Ms CHAN Tsui-yuk said that the Hong Kong Baptist Kindergarten Education Convention suggested that the Administration should subsidise the provision of pre-primary education and professional development for pre-primary teachers, and remove the social needs test from KCFRS.

Hong Kong Baptist University Early Childhood Education Society
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1730/05-06(01)]

25. Miss CHAN Hing presented the views of the Hong Kong Baptist University Early Childhood Education Society as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Administration should provide subsidy for pre-primary teachers in pursuit of professional development; review the pay levels for pre-primary teachers with different qualifications; increase the level of subsidy for pre-primary service operators; and adopt a voucher system to subsidise and assist parents in pursuit of quality pre-primary education for their children.

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Hong Kong Council of Early Childhood Education & Services
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1707/05-06(01)]

26. Ms Sansan CHING presented the views of the Hong Kong Council of Early Childhood Education & Services as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Administration should assist the early childhood education sector in the provision of quality programmes for children and education programmes for pre-primary teachers. The Council considered that in the long term, all pre-primary teachers should hold a degree qualification in education.

Hong Kong Institute of Education Past Student's Association of Early Childhood Teacher Education
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1677/05-06(01)]

27. Mrs MAK TSE Hau-ling presented the views of the Hong Kong Institute of Education Past Student's Association of Early Childhood Teacher Education. She highlighted that the Administration should provide subsidy to pre-primary teachers in pursuit of professional development and formulate a policy on provision of subvention to early childhood education. The Administration should also remove the social needs test from KCFRS so that full-day fee assistance could be provided to needy parents.

Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1707/05-06(02)]

28. Ms SZETO Yuk-lin presented the views of the Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Administration should provide subvention to kindergartens in arranging extra-curricular programmes and activities for their pupils; lower the income limits for the provision of fee remission to needy families; allocate resources to upgrade the learning environment and teaching equipment and facilities in kindergartens; support professional development of pre-primary teachers; and formulate a salary structure commensurate with qualifications for pre-primary teachers as well as staffing ratios for kindergartens.

Hong Kong Teachers' Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1707/05-06(03)]

29. Mr KO Gra-yee and Ms LAU Seung-man presented the views of the Hong Kong Teachers' Association as detailed in its submission. They highlighted that the Administration should allocate resources for the provision of three-year free pre-primary education; provide subsidy to support pre-primary teachers in pursuit of professional development; relax the criteria for reimbursement of rent; and allocate resources to support kindergartens in organising parent education courses to facilitate student learning.

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*Hong Kong Early Childhood Educators Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1684/05-06(01)]*

30. Ms CHOW Wai-chun presented the views of the Hong Kong Early Childhood Education Association as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Administration should fully subsidise pre-primary education and professional training and development of pre-primary teachers; formulate a salary structure commensurate with qualifications for pre-primary teachers; and promote home-kindergarten collaborations to facilitate student learning. The Association held a strong view that the Government should allocate a higher percentage of education resources for early childhood education.

*Alumni Association of Pre-School Education Administration and Management Course – SPACE, University of Hong Kong
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1684/05-06(02)]*

31. Ms Cinda CHAN presented the views of the Alumni Association of Pre-School Education Administration and Management Course – SPACE, University of Hong Kong as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Association supported the provision of free pre-primary education. The Association requested the Administration to formulate a remuneration structure commensurate with qualifications for pre-primary teachers, and increase the number of publicly-funded places in diploma programmes on early childhood education for serving kindergarten teachers.

*Tai Po Early Childhood Educational Principal Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1667/05-06(06)]*

32. Ms KWOK Chor-kiu presented the views of the Tai Po Early Childhood Education Principal Association as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Administration should provide direct subsidy to kindergartens for the provision of three-year free early childhood education; increase resources for provision of free professional development to kindergarten teachers; remove the social needs test from KCFRS; and relax the criteria for reimbursement of rent to operators.

*The Non-profit-making Kindergarten Council of Hong Kong
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1684/05-06(03)]*

33. Mrs Harlianna YEUNG presented the views of the Non-profit-making Kindergarten Council of Hong Kong as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Council strongly requested the Administration to provide free early childhood education and free professional development and continuing education opportunities for kindergarten principals and teachers. In addition, the Administration should formulate a salary structure commensurate with qualifications for kindergarten teachers, and review the criteria for fee

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remission to needy parents and reimbursement of rent to operators.

S.K.H. Kindergarten and Nursery Council
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1707/05-06(04)]

34. Ms CHOW Wai-king presented the views of the S.K.H. Kindergarten and Nursery Council as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Administration should upgrade the quality of early childhood education as soon as possible. The Council suggested that the Administration should provide three-year free early childhood education; revise the salary structure commensurate with qualifications for pre-primary teachers; provide professional development for pre-primary teachers; review the levels of fee remission for different ranges of family income; remove the social needs test from KCFRS; and formulate a blueprint for the long-term development of early childhood education.

Education Convergence
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1707/05-06(05)]

35. Mr CHOI Kwok-kwong presented the views of the Education Convergence as detailed in its submission. He highlighted that in line with the target cost recovery rate for senior secondary and higher education, the Administration should increase resources allocation for provision of early childhood education to the level such that parents would be required to pay tuition fees at 18% of the average student unit cost. To improve the quality of early childhood education, the Administration should enhance the qualifications of and salaries to pre-primary teachers; improve the pre-primary curriculum; and set up a special committee to review and monitor the operation of kindergartens and the quality of education programmes for pre-primary teachers.

Hong Kong Kindergarten Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1667/05-06(07)]

36. Ms Mary TONG presented the views of the Hong Kong Kindergarten Association as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Association strongly supported the provision of three-year subsidised early childhood education. The Association suggested that the Administration should consider adopting a voucher system or a one-line vote to kindergartens; increase resources for recruitment of quality pre-primary teachers and their professional development; review the criteria for provision of fee remission; and remove the social needs test from KCFRS.

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Council of Non-profit Making Organizations for Pre-primary Education
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1684/05-06(04)]

37. Mrs CHAN LAU Yin-king presented the views of the Council of Non-profit Making Organizations for Pre-primary Education as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Administration should review pre-primary education with a view to formulating relevant policies on the provision of three-year free pre-primary education. The Council suggested that the Administration should formulate long-term policies to upgrade the qualification requirement of pre-primary teachers to degree level; support and monitor the quality of education programmes for pre-primary teachers; enhance the learning environment in kindergartens; and promote the establishment of a collaborative culture in the community to support the development of pre-primary education. In the meantime, the Administration should streamline the application procedure for fee remission; increase the financial assistance to parents; and remove the social needs test from KCFRS.

Hong Kong Council of Social Service
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1677/05-06(02)]

38. Ms Angela NG presented the views of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Administration should review the levels of fee remission to needy families and remove the social needs test from KCFRS. The Student Financial Assistance Agency (SFAA) should simplify the application procedures for KCFRS. EMB should conduct regular briefings on the operation of KCFRS for pre-primary principals and teachers, and parents. In the long term, the Administration should review the provision of pre-primary services for children aged zero to six and the policy on support to needy families.

Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1707/05-06(06)]

39. Ms Susan SO presented the views of the Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Administration should invest for the provision of quality pre-primary education and provide three-year free pre-primary education. In addition, the Administration should improve KCFRS to ensure that no children would be denied access to full-day pre-primary education due to lack of means.

Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong, Education Group

40. Mr Denny LEUNG said that the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB), Education Group called on the Administration to collaborate with the pre-primary sector to enhance the future

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development of pre-primary education. DAB suggested that the Administration should provide free pre-primary education; increase the number of publicly-funded places in education programmes for pre-primary teachers; and review the pay structure for pre-primary teachers and the provision of subsidy to operators and fee remission to needy parents. In particular, the Administration should review the need to maintain the social needs test under KCFRS.

Society For Community Organization
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1707/05-06(07)]

41. Miss SZE Lai-shan presented the views of the Society For Community Organisation as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the cost of pre-primary education was too expensive for low income families, in particular families with two or more children. The Society suggested that the Administration should relax the eligibility criteria for fee remission and remove the social needs test from KCFRS immediately. The Society considered it most important that the Administration should provide three-year free pre-primary education as soon as possible.

World Organization for Early Childhood Education – Hong Kong
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1746/05-06(01)]

42. Dr Hazel LAM presented the views of the World Organization for Early Childhood Education – Hong Kong as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Administration should subsidise the provision of pre-primary education to children aged three to six. To improve the quality of pre-primary education, the Administration should provide more publicly-funded places for professional development of pre-primary teachers at certificate/diploma level in the short term and at degree level in the long term. The Administration should formulate policies for the long-term development of pre-primary education and funding kindergartens such as the establishment of a kindergarten development fund.

Hong Kong Kowloon and New Territories Kindergarten Education Advancement Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1707/05-06(08)]

43. Ms Angela TAM presented the views of the Hong Kong Kowloon and New Territories Kindergarten Education Advancement Association as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Administration should provide full subvention to promote the quality of pre-primary education which should operate on a whole-day basis. Specifically, the Administration should provide reimbursement of rent to kindergartens in public estates; increase the number of places for pre-primary teachers to pursue further education at certificate and degree levels; and allocate resources to support the operation of parent-teacher associations in kindergartens and parent education programmes. In the

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meantime, the Administration should review and relax the eligibility criteria for KCFRS.

Submission received from organisation not attending the meeting

44. Members noted the submission from the New Territories School Heads Association [LC Paper No. CB(2)1707/05-06(09)].

The social needs test

45. The Chairman invited the Administration to respond to the concerns of deputations about the application procedures, the eligibility criteria and the levels of fee remissions under KCFRS. He highlighted that deputations in general were concerned about the need to pass the social needs test for entitlement to full-day fee assistance. The Chairman further pointed out that full fee remission would only be provided to a four-member family with a monthly income of \$8,055 or below.

46. Acting Principal Assistant Secretary (Quality Assurance) (PAS(QA)) responded that the social needs test had all along been used by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) in assessing the eligibility of applicants for the Child Care Centre Fee Assistance Scheme (CCCFAS) since the early 1980s. Upon harmonisation of pre-primary services, the same social needs test was adopted in KCFRS to cover all eligible children attending kindergartens and child care centres. They were no more or less stringent than before.

47. PAS(QA) further explained that at the age of three to six, there was no educational basis to support whole-day schooling. The provision of full-day kindergartens and child care centres was to add further care in response to social needs or parental choice. The assistance for these children should therefore be calculated on the basis of the fees charged for half-day classes at kindergarten. The full-day rate of fee remission should only be payable when the applicant family had passed the social needs test. This requirement had been put forward for consultation with the pre-primary service sector and at the meetings of the Panel on 13 February 2003 and 14 March 2005, and was finally approved by the Finance Committee on 24 June 2005. The Administration considered it necessary to retain the social needs test under KCFRS, but was prepared to review the existing social needs criteria in the light of changing social circumstances.

48. The Chairman said that at the Finance Committee meeting on 24 June 2005, members had expressed support for the social needs test criteria on the condition that the Administration would explore any possible measures to support the low-income applicant families that would be affected by the change of financial scheme.

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49. PAS(QA) responded that the Administration had undertaken to ensure that no CCCFAS and the Kindergarten Fee Remission Scheme (KGFRS) recipients receiving subsidies under the respective schemes in the 2004-05 school year would be worse off. In this connection, the no-worse principle had been applied to these recipients until the children concerned proceeded to primary schools.

50. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that some 90 000 families were paying kindergarten tuition fees of more than \$10,000 a year without any subsidy. He considered that as in the provision of free primary education, the Administration should let parents decide whether half-day or full-day pre-primary education was suitable for their children.

51. Referring to the submission of the Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children, Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that many parents had decided not to send their children to attend day nursery and full-day classes in kindergartens as they were unable to pass the social needs test. He considered that the Administration should review the social needs criteria as soon as possible.

52. In response, PAS(QA) said that EMB would collaborate with SWD in the review of the social needs criteria in the light of the views and concerns expressed by deputations and members at the meeting. The Administration would have to examine the financial implications for implementing any changes to the social needs criteria.

53. Mr LEUNG Kwan-yin considered that the Administration should speed up its review on the social needs criteria so that changes, if any, could be implemented in the 2006-07 school year. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong and Dr Fernando CHEUNG also stressed that the Administration should ensure that the removal of the social needs test from KCFRS or the adoption of the new social needs criteria should be implemented from the 2006-07 school year. PAS(QA) replied that the Administration would aim to complete the review the soonest possible.

54. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that according to feedback from the pre-primary sector, SFAA should improve its efficiency in verifying and vetting applications for fee remission. He considered that additional resources should be allocated to SWD's Integrated Family Service Centres for assessment of the social needs of applicants.

55. Controller, Student Financial Assistance Agency responded that additional manpower had been provided for SFAA to handle the applications for fee remission. He acknowledged that there was room for SFAA to speed up the vetting process. He said that with the experience gained from the 2005-06 school year, SFAA would improve efficiency in vetting the applications for fee remission in the 2006-07 school year. In this connection, SFAA would review

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the relevant application guidelines and elaborate on the supporting documents required to prove the applicant's social needs. As regards late reimbursement of fees to parents, he explained that although SFAA received applications well before the commencement of a school year, reimbursement of fees to parents could only be effected after confirmation of student enrolment by the kindergartens concerned after the commencement of the school year.

56. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that in formulating public policies, the Administration had always listened to the views of deputations on a selective basis. He considered that the provision of whole-day pre-primary education was in alignment with the provision of whole-day primary and secondary education. He questioned why the Administration considered it appropriate that whole-day schooling was not necessary for children aged three to six from an educational point of view. He added that the levels of fee remission would affect the student enrolment, which in turn had an impact on the salary levels of pre-primary teachers and quality of pre-primary education.

57. PAS(QA) explained that the social needs test was adopted in KCFRS after consultation with the pre-primary sector before harmonisation of pre-primary services. Being aware of the concerns raised by the pre-primary sector and applicants, the Joint Office for Pre-Primary Services (JOPS), SWD and SFAA had held a meeting with representatives from the pre-primary sector to discuss the issues. As a follow-up to the meeting, JOPS and SFAA had conducted a briefing session on 22 February 2006 for all kindergartens and child care centres to clarify the details of KCFRS and explain the rationale for the social needs test. Upon request of the pre-primary sector, SFAA had agreed to review the relevant application guidelines and elaborate on the supporting documents required to prove the applicant's social needs.

58. PAS(QA) further explained that the current policy was to implement whole-day schooling in primary and secondary education. From an educational point of view, children aged below six should preferably attend learning activities on a half-day basis. In fact, the afternoon session of full-day classes in kindergartens comprised mainly of a lunch session, an afternoon sleep, and some interesting activities conducted in a pleasant atmosphere. The Administration considered that children should spend more time with their parents and families in home environments and the creativity of children aged three to six would be adversely affected if they were required to attend structured learning activities on a whole-day basis.

59. Mr MA Lik said that there was no requirement for applicants to pass a social needs test for fee remission before harmonisation, and the community considered it unnecessary to maintain such a test under KCFRS. He asked about the additional costs incurred should the social needs test be removed from KCFRS and the number of families which would be benefited.

Admin

Action

60. Ms Audrey EU considered that the Administration should conduct a survey on the preference of parents to send their children to half-day or full-day classes in kindergartens. She also requested the Administration to provide a comparison of the levels of fee remissions to applicant families of different income ranges under KCFRS and CCCFAS.

Admin

61. PAS(QA) agreed to follow up with SWD to provide a comparison of fee remission levels under KCFRS and CCCFAS. She explained that the Administration considered it appropriate and reasonable to prescribe a set of eligibility criteria for remission of fees under KCFRS. Under KCFRS, low income families could be eligible for 100%, 75% or 50% fee remission. The three levels of assistance and a common means-tested mechanism of KCFRS could ensure that no children would be deprived of education and care due to lack of means. She added that the means-tested mechanism of KCFRS was a common mechanism applicable for all other means-tested student financial assistance schemes, covering the pre-primary, primary, secondary and university education sectors.

62. The Chairman invited members to indicate whether they supported the removal of the social needs test from KCFRS. All members present indicated support for the removal. The Chairman requested the Administration to consider the request of members and revert back to the Panel before the end of the current session.

Admin

Qualifications, salaries and professional development for pre-primary teachers

63. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong asked whether the Administration considered it acceptable that only one-fourth of serving kindergarten teachers held a certificate in pre-primary education, and that some serving pre-primary teachers were paid within a salary range of \$3,000 to \$5,000 a month.

64. PAS(QA) responded that the allocation for pre-primary education had increased from about \$400 million in the 1997-98 school year to about \$1,300 million in the 2005-06 school year, and the percentage of qualified kindergarten teachers in kindergartens had increased from 40% in 1997 to 100% at present. She added that the Administration had launched a review on the provision of pre-primary education which covered the qualification requirement, salary structure and professional development for pre-primary teachers.

65. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong remarked that the review should aim to design a competitive salary structure to attract new entrants and retain experienced pre-primary teachers. PAS(QA) replied that the review would also consider matters relating to appropriate qualifications and salary structure for pre-primary teachers.

Action

66. Ms Audrey EU remarked that the requirement of a degree qualification for pre-primary teachers should be a long-term objective to upgrade the quality of pre-primary education. In the short term, the Administration should increase publicly-funded certificate/diploma programmes to cater for the needs of serving pre-primary teachers to upgrade their qualifications.

Review on provision of pre-primary education

67. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong sought clarifications of reports that the Administration was prepared to provide two-year free or subsidised pre-primary education for all children. He considered that the Secretary for Education and Manpower (SEM) and the Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower (PSEM) should attend the meeting to clarify the matter.

68. PAS(QA) replied that the review on the provision of pre-primary education was in progress. The Administration had no pre-set policies and was open on the matter. She added that SEM and PSEM had scheduled a meeting in late April 2006 with representatives from the pre-primary education sector to collect views on the future provision and development of pre-primary education.

69. Dr Fernando CHEUNG asked whether the Administration would publish a consultation document and set out a timetable for the review on the provision of pre-primary education. He also asked how stakeholders could express their views to EMB for consideration. PAS(QA) replied that EMB would decide the way forward after the completion of the review exercise.

70. The Chairman said that the Panel would further discuss pre-primary education at future meetings. Dr Fernando CHEUNG expressed support for the Chairman's suggestion.

V. Any other business

71. The Chairman asked whether members considered it necessary to discuss the Administration's proposal to increase the level of recurrent funding for the University Grants Committee-funded institutions in the 2007-08 academic year by \$504.3 million. Members agreed that there was no need to discuss the proposal at a Panel meeting.

72. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 7:01 pm.