

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)2651/06-07
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 9 July 2007, at 4:30 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building

- Members present** : Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP (Chairman)
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon SIN Chung-kai, SBS, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, SBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Prof Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
- Member attending** : Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
- Members absent** : Hon MA Lik, GBS, JP
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, SBS, JP
- Public Officers attending** : Item III
Mr Michael M Y SUEN, GBS, JP
Secretary for Education

Mr Raymond WONG Hung-chiu, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education

Mrs Betty FUNG, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education (1)

Mr Michael STONE, JP
Secretary-General, University Grants Committee

Item IV

Mr CHENG Man-yiu, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education (3)

Mrs Fanny LAM
Principal Assistant Secretary (School Administration &
Support), Education Bureau

Item V

Mr Chris WARDLAW
Deputy Secretary for Education (5)

Dr CHAN Ka-ki
Principal Assistant Secretary (Curriculum
Development), Education Bureau

Dr Peter HILL
Secretary General, Hong Kong Examinations and
Assessment Authority

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)6

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I. Confirmation of minutes

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2358/06-07 and CB(2)2360/06-07]

The minutes of the meetings held on 25 May and 11 June 2007 were confirmed.

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

[LC Paper No. CB(2)2409/06-07(01)]

2. Members noted the update provided by the Administration on further appointment of teachers on civil service agreement terms in Government schools.

III. Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Allegations relating to The Hong Kong Institute of Education

[Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Allegations relating to The Hong Kong Institute of Education, LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2357/06-07(04) and CB(2)2357/06-07(05)]

3. The Chairman welcomed the Secretary for Education (SED) to the meeting. Ms Emily LAU and Dr YEUNG Sum suggested that as SED had newly taken up the office, he should take the opportunity to brief members on his work plans and receive members' views on education matters before discussion on the agenda item. Members agreed.

Briefing by Secretary for Education on his work plans

4. SED said that during the past few years, the Education Commission (EC) had introduced a series of education reform initiatives after extensive consultation with the stakeholders. The Education Bureau (EDB) would continue to monitor and review the implementation of these reform initiatives in the light of changing circumstances. At the present stage, EDB had no plan to introduce major new policy initiatives, and would focus on the reform initiatives in progress to facilitate the smooth implementation of the new academic structure in 2009-2010 school year. In particular, EDB would follow up on the Chief Executive's election pledges concerning the implementation of small class teaching (SCT) and the development of Hong Kong into an education hub in the region. SED added that he looked forward to exchanging views with Members of the Legislative Council (LegCo) and stakeholders on the various subjects.

5. Dr YEUNG Sum said that a series of education reforms were introduced in the past decade, and the key stakeholders had been hard pressed to implement the reforms and make adjustment. Time was needed to consolidate the reforms. He supported that EDB should not aim to introduce further reforms or new initiatives.

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6. Ms Emily LAU said that the education sector had had grievances and dissatisfaction about the various reform initiatives in recent years. She called upon SED to proactively discuss with the stakeholders and consider their views. Ms LAU also pointed out that as the principal official responsible for education matters, SED should attend the meetings of the Panel as far as possible.

7. Ms Audrey EU concurred with Ms Emily LAU. She further pointed out the grievances of the teaching profession about the recent civil service pay adjustment. She called upon SED to address the issue of the morale of the teaching profession

8. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan shared the view that SED should proactively address the concerns of the educator sector and mitigate their grievances about the implementation of the various reforms.

9. SED clarified that the work done and the contributions made by the former Secretary for Education and Manpower (SEM) and the former Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower (PSEM) should be affirmed. The former SEM and PSEM had built up the foundations for the successful implementation of the various reform initiatives. Having regard to the changing circumstances, the Administration would review the progress of the reform and to fine-tune them where necessary. SED noted the concerns and grievances of the educator sector about the implementation of some of the reform initiatives. He would continue to discuss with the stakeholders and examine measures to address their concerns.

Small class teaching

10. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered it appropriate that EDB should aim to fine-tune the implementation of the education reforms in the light of the experience gained, and would not introduce new initiatives. He asked whether the Administration would consider implementing SCT at primary one (P1) and secondary one (S1) levels in the 2008-2009 school year, and progressively extend the implementation to higher levels in subsequent years. He opined that the implementation of SCT at P1 and S1 levels could be on a pilot basis in the 2008-2009 school year and implementation details could be modified with the benefit of operational experience when SCT was to be fully implemented. Ms Emily LAU expressed support for the early implementation of SCT.

11. SED responded that the Administration had implemented a three-year pilot study on SCT (the Study) and would decide on the way forward on SCT in the 2009-2010 school year in the light of the findings of the Study. The Administration noted the strong views of members and the education sector, and would examine the issues involved and the financial implications of implementing SCT in the 2008-2009 school year. He aimed to provide an update to members on the subject at around the time of the 2007 Policy Address.

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12. Ms Audrey EU said that notwithstanding the Chief Executive's election pledge on SCT, the Administration had yet to be committed on its implementation. She was concerned about the interim findings of the Study according to which SCT was not as effective as it was intended in upgrading the quality of education for the primary students in the participating schools. Ms EU stressed the importance of education in the all-round development of students including their self-confidence and ethical values, and urged the Administration not to consider solely the financial implications in deciding whether SCT should be fully implemented.

13. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that there was a consensus among the stakeholders in the community that SCT should be implemented to improve the quality of education as soon as practicable. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung added that the implementation of SCT would help resolve the problem of under-enrolment because of the declining student population and alleviate teachers' anxiety about possible closure of schools under the consolidation policy. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung requested SED to estimate the cost for implementing SCT at different levels.

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Proficiency of English Language

14. Ms Audrey EU urged SED to work out strategies to improve the English proficiency of students in view of the overall decline in students' performance on the subject of English Language in public examinations in recent years.

15. SED responded that the Administration had all along emphasised the importance of English Language in schools under the policy of mother tongue teaching (MTT). Under MTT, schools adopting Chinese as their medium of instruction were given additional teachers and resources to enhance English teaching. The Administration would collaborate with the school sector to work out effective measures to upgrade the quality of English teaching in schools.

Higher education

16. Ms Emily LAU said that although the Commission of Inquiry had completed the investigation into the allegations concerning the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd), the issue of academic freedom and institutional autonomy had not been resolved. She urged SED to carefully consider the development blueprint of HKIEd, including the award of a university status.

17. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions had their own remuneration systems after the de-linking of university pay from the civil service pay scales on 1 July 2003. He expressed concern about the competitiveness of their remuneration systems for retaining quality staff in the universities in the long run.

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School-based management and assessment

18. Dr YEUNG Sum was concerned about the conflict between the Administration and the two major religious school sponsoring bodies concerning the implementation of the governance structure for public sector schools under school-based management. He requested SED to address the various issues concerning the implementation of school-based assessment.

Alternative Chinese Language curriculum for ethnic minority students

19. Dr YEUNG Sum also highlighted his concern about the requirement in Chinese Language for ethnic minority students to access vocational training and post-secondary education, in particular admission to the UGC-funded institutions. He requested SED to follow up with the UGC-funded institutions on the acceptance of alternative Chinese Language qualifications for admission of ethnic minority students to their undergraduate programmes. SED noted Dr YEUNG's concern.

Articulation for sub-degree programmes

20. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan considered the provision of 1 600 senior year places of undergraduate programmes in the UGC-funded institutions far from adequate to meet the demand of sub-degree holders. He requested the Administration to increase the provision in this regard.

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21. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung requested the Administration to work out the estimated cost for the provision of articulation places to meet the demand of the sub-degree holders.

Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme

22. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that the teaching environment as well as the salaries for new teachers in some pre-primary institutions had got worse after the announcement to implement the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (the Scheme) from the 2007-2008 school year onwards. He requested SED to follow up the matter with the pre-primary sector.

23. Mr Tommy CHEUNG expressed appreciation of the policy decision to implement the Scheme, but was disappointed that the Scheme did not cover private independent (PI) kindergartens. He considered that non-profit-making kindergartens and PI kindergartens should compete on a level playing field to enable parents to have a free choice in selection of kindergartens for their children. Pre-primary teachers in non-profit-making kindergartens and PI kindergartens should also be provided with the same support in pursuit of professional development.

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24. In response, SED said that the Administration had considered the views of various parties and had decided to provide a transition period of three years until the end of the 2009-2010 school year for PI kindergartens satisfying the prescribed requirements of eligible non-profit-making kindergartens to redeem the vouchers of parents whose children were enrolled at various study levels in such PI kindergartens as of the 2007-2008 school year throughout these children's education in the same PI kindergartens. SED undertook to review the Scheme in the light of members' views.

Special education and integrated education

25. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that the stakeholders in the special education sector were anxious to discuss with SED on the provision of special education. He requested SED to meet with them to map out the way forward at the commencement of the new term of the SAR Government.

26. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung requested SED to review the provision of resources and support for ordinary schools to implement integrated education for students with special educational needs. He opined that the implementation of integrated education should not lead to the reduction of special education. The need and the ability of the students concerned must be considered in deciding whether it was appropriate for them to study in ordinary schools.

Provision of hostel places

27. Professor Patrick LAU said that the provision of sufficient hostel places was essential for attracting overseas students to pursue university education in Hong Kong. He requested SED to consider converting the vacant school premises returned to EDB under the consolidation policy into student hostels for the UGC-funded institutions as well as private independent schools to cater for the residential needs of overseas students.

28. SED responded that most of the vacant school premises were relatively small in size and located in remote areas in the New Territories, and therefore were not suitable for the provision of student hostels for local schools and universities. However, the Administration would consider the use of suitable vacant school premises for the purpose as and when appropriate.

Provision of lunch boxes for school students

29. Ms Audrey EU suggested that EDB should collaborate with the Environment Bureau to work out appropriate arrangements for the provision of nutritious meals to school students in environmental-friendly ways.

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Report of the Commission of Inquiry (the Commission)

Role of University Grants Committee in higher education

30. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong cited the testimonies of a number of witnesses contained in the Report to substantiate his belief that it was highly likely that the former SEM had interfered with the institutional autonomy of HKIEd. He said that the recommendation of the Commission to establish an independent board to advise the Government on policies and development plans regarding teacher education institutions (TEIs), resolve the conflict between TEIs and EDB in case of a deadlock, and hear appeal from TEIs on UGC funding arrangements reflected the failure of UGC to perform its role and functions in the higher education sector. He considered that the merger of budgets for UGC and the then Education Department in the mid-90s had removed the autonomy of UGC in allocation of resources to higher education, and that the superior-subordinate relationship between the Secretary General, UGC (SG(UGC)) and the Permanent Secretary for Education (PSED) had affected the independence of the UGC Secretariat. He called for a review of the role of UGC as a buffer between the UGC-funded institutions and the Government.

31. SG(UGC) responded that it was factually incorrect to claim that SG(UGC) reported to PSED (or PSEM before the re-organization of the Government Secretariat on 1 July 2007) and that SED was the vote controller of UGC. SG(UGC) reported to the Chairman of UGC who was familiar with his work, and his appraisal report was signed by the Chairman of UGC, although it was counter-signed by PSED in line with the countersigning system in the civil service. SG(UGC) had always been the vote controller of the UGC Head of Expenditure (Head 190). UGC had not lost its independence in allocating resources, although, as always, the Administration had the right to decide how much resources should be made available for higher education as a whole. He referred members to paragraph 10.23 of the Report of the Commission which stated that “a number of funding cuts (for HKIEd) were the decision of UGC, and the suggestion that UGC was just a rubber stamp was totally unjustified”. He stressed that while UGC had been acting as a bridge between the Government and the universities and talked to both sides, it made its decisions independently.

32. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung considered SG(UGC)'s response ridiculous, and said that the one who controlled the resources was the one to make decisions.

33. Dr YEUNG Sum requested the Administration to review the role and functions of UGC as a buffer between the institutions and the Government for the protection of academic freedom and institutional autonomy. He quoted the findings of the Commission to substantiate his view that UGC had lost its autonomy and had become a subordinate organ of EDB in the higher education sector. He pointed out that based on the testimonies provided, UGC had referred Professor Paul Morris, the former President of HKIEd, to approach EMB on the

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proposed reduction of funding for teacher education in early childhood education, and the former SEM had deleted the recommendation of UGC to consider the merger of HKIEd and the Chinese University of Hong Kong on the basis of a federation system.

34. Dr YEUNG also called for a revamp of the composition of UGC in the light of changing social and political circumstances. He said that as Hong Kong had well developed its education system, it was no longer necessary to appoint a large number of overseas academics to UGC. More local education experts who were familiar with the characteristics of the higher education sector in Hong Kong should be appointed to UGC.

35. SED responded that the Administration had no plan to review the role and functions of UGC for the time being. The Administration would examine the findings and recommendations of the Commission with a view to enhancing academic freedom and institutional autonomy of higher education. As Ms Audrey EU would raise a question about the reduction in student numbers for early childhood education courses in HKIEd at the Council meeting on 11 July 2007, he would respond to related issues then. As regards the question of merger, SED pointed out that its meaning varied among institutions, academics and individuals.

The Commission's findings

36. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung believed that both the former SEM and PSEM had interfered with the academic freedom and institutional autonomy of HKIEd. He had written to the Chief Executive urging him to follow up on the findings of the Commission and to initiate disciplinary proceedings against the former SEM and PSEM as appropriate. He asked SED to request the Chief Executive to give him an early reply.

37. Ms Audrey EU pointed out that the Commission admitted in paragraph 15.28 of the Report that it was no expert, but opined that while institutional autonomy was certainly to be defended and celebrated, it should not be given absolute immunity from justified intervention from a stakeholder such as EDB. She questioned what the Administration had learnt from the findings of the Commission and how it would draw a line between justified and unjustified intervention. She considered that the Administration should explain the justifications for the 30% reduction in recurrent funding for HKIEd in the 2007-2008 academic year, and review the operation of the funding mechanism for the UGC sector.

38. SED responded that there was no dispute in the community at large on the need to protect academic freedom and institutional autonomy of higher education. However, there were divergent views on what constituted unjustified intervention, and the Commission had not provided a clear guide in this regard.

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SED further said that it was important to agree on a yardstick to measure what amounted to unjustified intervention, otherwise disputes would arise in future. He assured members that the Administration would discuss with the relevant parties and revert to the Panel on the matter in the new legislative session. SG(UGC) supplemented that the principles, procedures and criteria for allocation of recurrent funding to HKIEd were detailed in the paper entitled "Recurrent Funding for Hong Kong Institute of Education" [LC Paper No. CB(2)1182/06-07(03)] submitted for the Panel meeting on 28 February 2007.

39. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan asked how the Administration would respond to the findings and recommendations of the Commission, in particular the findings relating to the allegations against the former SEM. He opined that although the Commission did not find sufficient evidence to determine any improper interference by the former SEM or other Government officials with the institutional autonomy of HKIEd, the Commission believed it was highly likely that the former SEM had said the relevant offensive sentences. In his view, this had already caused serious consequences.

40. SED responded that the Administration would examine the findings and recommendations of the Commission and revert later to the Panel on its views. He referred members to the findings of the Commission in Chapter 16 of the Report which stated that the allegations against the former SEM were not established.

41. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that the problems revealed in the Report concerning academic freedom and institutional autonomy of higher education were not isolated incidents. The matter did not end with the completion of the Commission's inquiry. The inquiry had revealed the influence and pressure exerted by senior EDB officials on the funding of and staff management matters in HKIEd. As a staff member of an UGC-funded institution, he was convinced that EDB had developed a culture to suppress dissenting views through direct or indirect interference with the operation and staff management of individual schools and the UGC-funded institutions. He highlighted paragraph 17.17 of the Report which stated that UGC's decisions were not susceptible to further review or appeal, and the only way to challenge them, other than a "plead for mercy" or "taking the issues to the street", was to seek assistance from the Chief Executive in Council or LegCo, or went to EDB. The Commission therefore suggested the establishment of a board independent of the Government, separately or as part of EC, consisting only of individuals trusted and respected by higher education institutions, and moderated by UGC, to, among others, resolve disputes between EMB and TEIs in case of a deadlock. Dr CHEUNG requested SED and PSED to follow up on the findings and recommendations of the Commission.

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42. SED responded that the Administration respected the findings of the Commission and would consider its recommendations in a prudent and comprehensive manner. The Administration would provide a response to the Report in early October 2007.

Redress mechanism of UGC-funded institutions

43. Ms Emily LAU expressed disappointment that the Administration would not consider the establishment of an inter-institutional redress mechanism to deal with complaints from staff of all UGC-funded institutions on the ground that such a proposal would undermine the institutions' autonomy. She pointed out that many staff in the UGC-funded institutions considered the existing appeal and grievances mechanisms in individual institutions ineffective in resolving disputes over staff administration matters. As UGC was unable to resolve these disputes either, the establishment of an inter-institutional redress mechanism to handle such disputes should be seriously considered.

44. PSED explained that individual institutions had established their own appeal and grievances mechanisms which were unique to the particular circumstances of each institution, and some of them had reviewed their mechanisms in the context of the "fitness for purpose" review. The Administration considered that the establishment of an inter-institutional redress system would undermine the institutional autonomy in handling staff matters and complaints having regard to the institutions' own policies, practices and individual circumstances.

Early termination of service of the former President of HKIED

45. Ms Emily LAU and Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed grave concern about the decision of the Council of HKIED to terminate the service contract of the former President of HKIED before its expiry in September 2007, shortly after the release of the Report on 20 June 2007. They considered that the decision was blatantly an act of revenge and would create unrest and anxiety among the HKIED staff. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong further said that the decision of the HKIED Council to terminate the service of Professor Morris two months before the expiry of the contract had raised the concern of HKIED staff and students about the ability of the Council to lead the development of HKIED in the long term. Many staff and students considered that the Administration should review the composition of the HKIED Council and re-appoint its members to meet with the expectations of the community.

46. SED responded that the HKIED Council had earlier on decided not to renew the contract with Professor Morris after its expiry. Without knowing the details, he considered it inappropriate to comment. He would seek to understand the matter.

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Follow-up

47. In concluding, the Chairman said that the Panel would discuss the major issues of concerns raised by individuals and deputations at the meetings on 28 February and 13 April 2007 concerning academic freedom and institutional autonomy in the new legislative session. Members could further discuss the findings and recommendations of the Commission then.

IV. Revision of senior secondary school fees

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2357/06-07(01) and CB(2)2357/06-07(02)]

48. Members noted the Administration's paper and the background brief prepared by the LegCo Secretariat on the subject.

Briefing by the Administration

49. Deputy Secretary for Education (3) (DS(Ed)3) briefed members on the background and justifications for increasing senior secondary fees from \$5,670 to \$6,020 for Secondary 4 (S4) and S5, and from \$9,450 to \$9,870 for S6 and S7 in the 2007-2008 school year, i.e., an increase of \$350 and \$420 per annum respectively.

Justifications for increase

50. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that the proposed fee increase of \$350 and \$420 in the 2007-2008 represented an increase of 6.2% and 4.4% for S4-S5 and S6-S7 classes respectively. With the proposed increases, the cumulative increases over the past three consecutive school years would be 19.2 % for S4-S5 and 12.8% for S6-S7 classes. He questioned whether and how the parents had been consulted on the fee increases which exceeded the inflation rates. He called on the Administration to review the schedule and percentages of school fee increases with regard to the affordability of parents.

51. DS(Ed)3 explained that school fees had been frozen for seven years until the 2005-2006 school year. The Administration had considered the average unit costs, prevailing economic conditions and the affordability of parents in proposing the mild increases in the 2007-2008 school year, with a view to achieving the 18% cost recovery target in the 2009-2010 school year when the new academic structure would be implemented. The Administration had consulted the schools councils and some parent-teacher associations on the proposal, and there was general acceptance of the proposed increases.

52. Dr Fernando CHEUNG considered it unreasonable to increase school fees above the inflation rates for three consecutive years, when there was deflation in the preceding seven years and no reduction of school fees. He

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pointed out that under the new academic structure, the costs for the provision of senior secondary classes in special schools would be included in the calculation of the average student unit costs at S4-S6 levels. As a result, the average unit costs might increase, and further increases of school fees would be proposed after the 2009-2010 school year. He requested the Administration to work out a projection of school fee increases for the coming five years.

53. DS(Ed)3 explained that notwithstanding the deflation, the Administration had allocated additional resources for the implementation of new education initiatives. In other words, the average unit costs at various senior secondary levels had increased in the past years. He confirmed that the expenditure incurred for operating senior secondary classes in special schools would be included in the calculation of average unit costs from the 2009-2010 school year. The Administration would consider a number of factors including the prevailing social and economic conditions, and the new initiatives in education on the agenda before proposing any school fee increase. Given these variable factors, it was difficult for the Administration to provide an accurate projection of school fee increases.

54. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that the proposed increases of school fees would increase substantially the financial burden on low income families with two children attending senior secondary classes. With the Gini Coefficient increasing to 0.533, the number of families in poverty had increased in the past years. Given the fiscal surpluses, the Administration should freeze the senior secondary school fees. Mr LEE added that the upward adjustment of civil service salaries would mean higher average unit costs, and further increases in school fees for achieving the 18% cost recovery rate could be expected.

55. DS(Ed)3 responded that it was the stated policy of the Government that no student would be deprived of education due to a lack of means. Needy students could apply for financial assistance under the existing fee remission scheme administered by the Student Financial Assistance Agency (SFAA). As stated in the footnote of the Administration's paper, the impact of the civil service salary adjustments from 1 April 2007 as approved by the Finance Committee on 6 July 2007 had not been included in the calculation of the proposed cost recovery rate in the 2007-2008 school year.

56. Dr YEUNG Sum said that the Gini Coefficient had increased from 0.525 in 2001 to 0.533 in 2007, indicating an increasing disparity between the wealthy and the poor in the community. Given the fiscal surpluses and in view of the possible fee increases in public housing and healthcare services, the Administration should freeze the secondary school fees for the time being to alleviate the financial burden of families which were not eligible for the fee remission scheme or the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme.

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57. DS(Ed)3 explained that the proposal on fee increases was made after careful consideration of the prevailing social and economic circumstances. The Administration had no plan to freeze the school fees in the coming school year. He pointed out that under the existing fee remission scheme administered by SFAA, about 14% and 34% of the S4 to S7 students were currently receiving full grants and half grants respectively. Families with an income marginally above the eligibility criteria for CSSA would be benefited under the fee remission scheme.

58. Mr TAM Yiu-chung said that the Administration should consider the additional financial burden on families arising from the large increases of school textbook prices and suspending the increase of school fees for the time being. The Chairman considered a 6.2% fee increase for S4 and S5 classes significantly high. He asked how the Administration would address members' concern about increases of school fees.

59. DS(Ed)3 responded that the Administration considered it appropriate to increase the school fees as proposed in the 2007-2008 school year. The Administration would consider members' views and suggestions in deciding the school fees for the 2008-2009 school year.

Motion

60. Dr Fernando CHEUNG proposed the following motion –

(Translation)

"That, since the Government has revised senior secondary school fees for three consecutive years, with the increases exceeding inflation by a large margin and probably further upward adjustments in the coming years, this Panel urges the Administration to immediately review and relax the criteria for remission of schools fees, and to freeze senior secondary school fees temporarily pending completion of the review."

61. The motion was supported by all the members present at the meeting. The Chairman declared that the motion was carried.

[*Post-meeting note* : The Administration was requested to provide a written response to the motion which was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)2485/06-07(01)].

V. Progress of "334"

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2382/06-07(01), CB(2)1886/06-07(01) and (02)]

62. Members noted the Administration's response to the requests raised by Dr Fernando CHEUNG and Ms Audrey EU at the meeting on 25 May 2007.

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Preparation for the double cohort year

63. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong stressed that the Administration should carefully plan the arrangements for the implementation of the new academic structure (the 334 structure) in the double cohort year in 2012-2013. He pointed out that in the double cohort year, S7 and Senior Secondary Three (SS3) graduates would apply for admission to three-year and four-year undergraduate programmes in the UGC-funded institutions under the existing academic structure and the 334 structure respectively. Given the reforms in the academic structure, curriculum, and examination systems in the 2009-2010 school year, the Administration should withhold the implementation of school self-evaluation (SSE), external school reviews (ESR) and school-based assessment (SBA) for subjects currently without a component of SBA for the time being. This would allow schools and teachers some time and space to prepare for the implementation of the 334 structure in order that both S7 and SS3 students could be adequately supported in preparation for the final Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) and the new Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) examination in 2012.

64. DS(Ed)5 responded that the Administration had all along considered it critical and fundamental to plan the necessary support and arrangements for schools to prepare for the HKALE and HKDSE examinations in the double cohort year. The Administration had conducted three rounds of consultation to collect feedback on the implementation of the 334 structure, with particular emphasis on tackling the challenges in the double cohort year. The Administration would provide the necessary resources and support for schools to implement the 334 structure and develop their articulation plans to tackle the challenges in the double cohort year. SSE and ESR were parts of the education reform that would assist schools in preparation for the implementation of the 334 structure from the 2009-2010 school year. As reported at the previous Panel meeting, the evaluation study on SSE and ESR showed that most teachers and school leaders agreed that the processes were valuable.

65. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong was not convinced, and stressed that it was unrealistic to expect schools to implement the reforms in academic structure, curriculum and examination systems, SSE, ESR and SBA at the same time. He cautioned that should anything go wrong in the implementation of the 334 structure, the consequences on student admission to universities in the double cohort year could be detrimental.

66. DS(Ed)5 said that to facilitate the implementation of the 334 structure, the Administration would continue to consult the stakeholders and collect feedback from school leaders and teachers through seminars and workshops. The Administration had accepted the views of stakeholders and had made substantial accommodations in the implementation of SSE, ESR and SBA under the new

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assessment system for HKDSE examinations. In particular, the second cycle of ESR would be completed in six years, and it was agreed that there would be no ESR for secondary schools in the second half of the 2011-2012 school year when teachers would be fully engaged in preparing students to sit for the HKALE and HKDSE examination. The Administration would bear in mind members' concerns and provide timely support for schools with difficulties in implementation during the transition period from 2009-2010 to 2011-2012 school years.

67. The Chairman said that the Administration should provide evidence to support its claim that school leaders and teachers supported the implementation of SSE, ESR and SBA in parallel with the reforms in academic structure, curriculum and examination systems. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong remarked that schools might not have considered the workload and pressure arising from the implementation. He pointed out that some schools were not aware of the Administration's plan to implement the second cycle of ESR. He cautioned that once the second cycle of ESR had started, it would be difficult to withhold its implementation.

68. DS(Ed)5 responded that the Administration had mechanisms in place to solicit feedback from schools on the implementation of SSE, ESR and SBA. The Administration would continue to consult school leaders and teachers on the implementation of ESR and was already working and discussing with schools on planning for the next cycle of ESR. DS(Ed)5 also said that the school leaders 334 preparation workshops and seminars indicated the commitment of schools to a smooth implementation from 2009. Responding to the Chairman that 334 preparation inevitably led to extra work for schools, DS(Ed)5 said that school leaders and teachers did welcome the seminars and workshops on preparation for the new senior secondary structure. The relevant data were uploaded on EDB's website for public access.

University education for ethnic minority students and students with special educational needs

69. Dr Fernando CHEUNG expressed disappointment that there was no progress on the provision of flexibility and the making of arrangements for ethnic minority students and students with special educational needs (SEN) to enrol in undergraduate programmes in the UGC-funded institutions.

70. DS(Ed)5 explained that the Administration was discussing with the UGC-funded institutions on the provision of flexibility on the Chinese language requirement for ethnic minority students and would provide a progress report to the Panel by the end of July 2007. As regards the admission requirements for students with SEN, the Administration would revert to the Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to the Provision of Boarding Places, Senior Secondary Education and Employment Opportunities for Students with SEN which had

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raised the same issue and other matters concerning post-secondary education for students with SEN.

VI. Any other business

71. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:40 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
29 August 2007