

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1181/07-08
(The minutes have been seen by
the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 14 January 2008, 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-yee, 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 Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
Hon LI Kwok-ying, MH, JP
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, SBS, JP
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
- Public Officers attending** : Item IV
- Mr Michael SUEN, GBS, JP
Secretary for Education
- Mr Raymond H C WONG, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education
- Mr Chris Wardlaw
Deputy Secretary for Education (5)

Mr Tony TANG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education (Quality Assurance)

Item V

Mr Michael SUEN, GBS, JP
Secretary for Education

Mr Raymond H C WONG, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education

Mr Michael WONG, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education (1)

Item VI

Miss Vivian LAU, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education (6)

Mr FOK Kam-hung
Chief System Manager (Information Technology Management), Education Bureau

Item VII

Mr Chris Wardlaw
Deputy Secretary for Education (5)

Mr Eddie CHEUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education (Education Infrastructure)

Mr SHE Mang
Chief Curriculum Development Officer (Information Technology in Education), Education Bureau

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

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

Miss Josephine SO
Council Secretary (2)1

Miss Carmen HO
Legislative Assistant (2)6

Action

I. Confirmation of minutes

[LC Paper No. CB(2)767/07-08]

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2007 were confirmed.

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

2. Members noted the following papers issued since the last meeting -

- (a) a submission from Professor Bernard LUK Hung-kay on the subject of academic freedom and institutional autonomy of higher education [LC Paper No. CB(2)703/07-08(01)];
- (b) a submission from the Democratic Party on the Research report on academic freedom and institutional autonomy of higher education in the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Hong Kong [LC Paper No. CB(2)710/07-08(01)];
- (c) a submission from the Executive Committee, Academic Staff Association of the Hong Kong Institute of Education on the Research report on academic freedom and institutional autonomy of higher education in the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Hong Kong [LC Paper No. CB(2)710/07-08(02)];
- (d) a letter dated 21 December 2007 from the Association of Principal and Senior Assistant Master and Mistresses of Education Bureau to the Permanent Secretary for Education concerning the post of Principal Assistant Master/Mistress [LC Paper No. CB(2)730/07-08(01)];
- (e) the Administration's reply dated 31 December 2007 to the Association of Principal and Senior Assistant Master and Mistresses of Education Bureau [LC Paper No. CB(2)730/07-08(02)];

Action

- (f) the Administration's paper on a capital works proposal for The Chinese University of Hong Kong to develop 1 500-place student hostels within its campus in Shatin [LC Paper No. CB(2)762/07-08(01)]; and
- (g) a submission from Professor Paul Morris on the Research report on academic freedom and institutional autonomy of higher education in the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Hong Kong [LC Paper No. CB(2)814/07-08(01)].

III. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[Appendices I and II to LC Paper No. CB(2)766/07-08]

3. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next regular meeting scheduled for Thursday, 21 February 2008, at 4:30 pm -

- (a) Proposed implementation details of small class teaching in public sector primary schools;
- (b) Review of the financial assistance scheme for designated evening adult education courses;
- (c) The School Development and Accountability Framework - the planning for the second cycle of implementation; and
- (d) Education for children of ethnic minorities - progress of support measures.

4. Members also agreed to extend the meeting to 7:30 pm.

[Post-meeting note: The meeting was subsequently re-scheduled to be held immediately after the House Committee meeting scheduled for Friday, 29 February 2008, at 2:30 pm.]

5. Ms Emily LAU was concerned about the implementation of school-based management in public sector schools, and the dispute between the Administration and the two major school sponsoring bodies over the establishment of Incorporated Management Committees in aided schools. Members agreed to enquire with the Administration about the matter.

[Post-meeting note: the Administration advised the Secretariat that it would provide a progress report on the matter to the Panel.]

Action

IV. Progress report on implementation of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)766/07-08(01) and (02)]

6. Members noted the background brief prepared by the Legislative Council (LegCo) Secretariat on the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (the Scheme).

Briefing by the Administration

7. Secretary for Education (SED) briefed members on the progress of implementation of the Scheme as detailed in the Administration's paper.

Scope of the Scheme

8. Referring to paragraph 4 of the Administration's paper which stated that around 100 of the 173 private independent (PI) kindergartens (KGs) approved to join the Scheme had taken action to convert to operate on a non-profit-making (NPM) basis, Mrs Selina CHOW sought information on the number of KGs not eligible for the Scheme or not intended to convert to NPM status, and of KGs that had closed down since the implementation of the Scheme in the 2007-2008 school year.

9. SED responded that as of December 2007, a total of 838 of some 980 KGs had joined the Scheme, among which 749 were NPM KGs and 89 were PI KGs eligible under the three-year transitional arrangement until the end of the 2009-2010 school year. Of the 142 KGs which had not joined the Scheme, some were still undecided and some might eventually not join the Scheme. SED stressed that with or without the Scheme, certain number of KGs closed down every year for various reasons. In the 2006-2007 school year, some 40 KGs had ceased operation.

10. Dr YEUNG Sum said that it had all along been the view of members that the Scheme should cover all KGs, irrespective of whether they were NPM or PI, and the choice for KGs should rest with parents. However, the Administration had insisted on the need for the NPM criterion, and only provided a three-year transitional period for PI KGs satisfying all prescribed requirements save for the NPM status to redeem the vouchers. He requested the Administration to either extend the Scheme to cover all KGs, or extend the transitional period. Ms Audrey EU expressed support for Dr YEUNG's view and pointed out that under the transitional arrangements, PI KGs could only redeem the vouchers of students enrolled in the 2007-2008 school year.

11. SED explained that the Administration had to respect the decision approved by the Finance Committee (FC) on 15 December 2006 concerning the principles and eligibility criteria for the Scheme. Since the Scheme had just been

Action

implemented, it was too early to say whether the transitional period should be extended. He pointed out that a small number of PI KGs would prefer to maintain their mode of operation. The Administration would discuss with PI KGs the administrative and operational problems they might encounter in converting to NPM status where necessary. The Administration would in due course assess the situation and take into account the number of KGs decided to maintain the PI status.

12. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that members and the pre-primary institutions were given no choice but to accept the principles and eligibility criteria for the Scheme set by the Administration as non-acceptance would mean non-implementation of the Scheme. It had been the consensus of different political grouping that the Scheme should benefit all parents. He considered it inappropriate to compel PI KGs to change their mode of operation to NPM in order to be eligible for joining the Scheme. The shrinkage of PI KGs was not conducive to the healthy development of pre-primary education. He requested the Administration to review the eligibility criteria for the Scheme immediately, and extend the scope of the Scheme to cover all KGs. Ms Emily LAU, Ms Audrey EU and Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung expressed the same view.

13. SED reiterated that the principles and eligibility criteria for the Scheme were generally accepted by the pre-primary education sector and approved by FC. As a substantial number of PI KGs had converted to NPM operation consequently, the Administration considered it inappropriate to change the approved principles and eligibility criteria before the end of the transitional period. Any changes at this stage of implementation would create confusion, and some stakeholders might consider such changes unfair.

14. Mr Tommy CHEUNG stressed that the Scheme was introduced without comprehensive consultation. Members had not objected to the Scheme in order not to affect 90% of the parents with pre-primary children who could benefit from it. It was unfair to say that members supported the NPM criterion for the Scheme.

15. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung opined that PI KGs had been given no choice but to convert to NPM operation for joining the Scheme. If the Administration was genuine in extending the Scheme to cover all KGs, it could discuss with the PI KGs which had converted to NPM on the feasibility of reverting back to their former mode of operation.

16. SED replied that the Administration had been in touch with individual KG sponsors concerning the Scheme, and some did not consider it appropriate to make any changes to the Scheme at this stage to avoid creating implementation problems. Nevertheless, the Administration welcomed further views and suggestions from the pre-primary education sector on the matter.

Action

17. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that it was difficult to distinguish NPM and PI KGs. PI KGs changed to NPM operation might offer remunerated posts to chosen persons, and in such a way, the surplus, if any, would not be spent on education. It made no difference whether KGs were profit-making or not. The Administration should appreciate the benefits of the co-existence of PI and NPM KGs and extend the scope of the Scheme to cover all KGs. SED replied that NPM KGs were required to invest their operating surplus to improve the quality of education.

18. Professor Patrick LAU asked whether the Administration would adopt the mode of the Direct Subsidy Scheme for the provision of pre-primary education in future. Permanent Secretary for Education (PSED) replied that the Administration had no intention to provide full subvention or adopt the mode of Direct Subsidy Scheme for pre-primary education at this stage.

19. Professor Patrick LAU asked whether KGs for children with special educational needs (SEN) were eligible for joining the Scheme. Principal Assistant Secretary for Education (Quality Assurance) (PAS(QA)) responded that all KGs meeting the prescribed eligibility criteria, including those providing education for students with SEN, could join the Scheme.

Ceiling of tuition fees

20. Mrs Selina CHOW queried the need for setting a ceiling on tuition fee of \$24,000 per student per annum (pspa) for a half-day KG place and \$48,000 pspa for a whole-day KG place. She called on the Administration to remove the ceiling to encourage PI KGs to change to NPM operation and invest more in enhancing the quality of education such as improving their student-to-teacher ratios.

21. PSED explained that the Administration considered it necessary to set a ceiling on tuition fees of KGs to ensure that children could benefit from an affordable and quality pre-primary education under the voucher scheme. The Administration had conducted a cost analysis of KG operations for the voucher value that would sustain KG in providing quality education. The ceiling on the tuition fee for half day KGs had provided a margin of around \$8,000 above the maximum voucher value to accommodate KGs with a higher fee level.

22. Mrs Selina CHOW urged the Administration to review the need for a fee ceiling under the Scheme to facilitate KGs to improve the quality of education without increasing the value of the voucher. She pointed out that the Government had provided subsidies to schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme without imposing a fee ceiling.

Action

23. SED responded that in deciding the fee ceilings, the Administration had taken into consideration the need to improve the quality of pre-primary education, subsidize the pre-primary workforce to upgrade themselves and improve the learning facilities and environment of KGs.

24. Ms Audrey EU said that she was given to know that some KG fees had been increased by 60% in the 2007-2008 school year, probably as a result of the rising inflation. She was concerned whether the value of the voucher under the Scheme would be adjusted in accordance with inflation in the coming years.

25. SED responded that the factor of inflation had been considered in the design of the Scheme. The Administration would consider the need to adjust the value of the voucher should inflation keep on rising. PSED supplemented that after the implementation of the Scheme, KGs formerly in receipt of subsidy under the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Subsidy Scheme (KCSS) had to reflect the amount of fee subsidy in their fee adjustments in the 2007-2008 school year. This might explain the large increase of tuition fees of certain KGs. The Administration would keep in view the situation for one to two years to assess whether the increase in tuition fees was attributed to inflation as well. Where necessary, the Administration would consider the need for adjusting the value of the voucher.

26. Mr TAM Yiu-chung said that some families in receipt of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) had only applied for the Certificate of Eligibility under the Scheme for their children attending KG classes in December 2007, and had therefore not been provided with the fee subsidy for October and November 2007. He asked how the Education Bureau (EDB) would assist these families to pay the KG fees for the two months. PAS(QA)) responded that the parents concerned could approach EDB for assistance.

Professional upgrading

27. Mr Tommy CHEUNG considered that the provision of development subsidy should be the same for pre-primary teachers in NPM KGs and PI KGs. He requested the Administration to streamline the provision of financial assistance to all pre-primary teachers in support of their professional development.

28. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that pre-primary teachers were working under extreme pressure after the implementation of the Scheme. Under the Scheme, all serving KG teachers would be expected to obtain the Certificate in Early Childhood Education (C(ECE)) within five years by the 2011-2012 school year. To meet the upgrading requirement before the specified deadline, more pre-primary teachers in each KG were attending C(ECE) programmes. In the absence of a specified teacher-to-class ratio and free lessons, pre-primary

Action

teachers had to work continuously throughout the school hours, including the recess periods and the lunch hour. In addition, KGs joining the Scheme were required to meet the prescribed standards by the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year. They were required to conduct self-evaluations and undergo external quality review conducted by EDB. These requirements had created additional workload and pressure on the part of pre-primary teachers. Mr CHEUNG requested the Administration to review the manpower establishment in KGs and provide a suitable teacher-to-class ratio as in the case of primary and secondary schools to help relieving teachers' workload and facilitating their professional upgrading.

29. SED responded that one of the major purposes of the Scheme was to upgrade the pre-primary workforce and enhance the quality of pre-primary education. The Administration was aware of the problems that might arise when many serving KG teachers were attending professional upgrading courses during the transitional period. KGs could use the teacher development subsidy embedded in each voucher to employ supply teachers to relieve their teachers to attend upgrading courses. The Administration hoped that the temporary manpower problem would be mitigated after the transitional period.

30. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that the manpower problem in KGs was not transitional but structural. The greater number of serving KG teachers attending upgrading courses after the implementation of the Scheme only intensified the problem. The provision of short-term supply teachers could not resolve the structural problem in the pre-primary education sector. The problem could only be resolved by the establishment of a teacher-to-class ratio for KGs which should be agreed upon by the pre-primary sector. Ms Emily LAU and Mr LEE Cheuk-yan shared Mr CHEUNG's view.

31. SED pointed out that unlike the public sector schools, pre-primary institutions historically enjoyed a high degree of autonomy in resource management and staff administration. KGs joining the Scheme were already provided with additional resources for professional upgrading of their staff including the employment of supply teachers.

32. Ms Audrey EU echoed the concern of Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong about the increasing work pressure on the part of the pre-primary workforce. She pointed out that the teacher development subsidy of \$3,000 per voucher would be reduced to \$2,000 in 2009-2010 and to zero in 2011-2012. Serving KG teachers therefore had to complete the upgrading courses within these few years, aggravating the manpower shortage problem. She requested the Administration to maintain the teacher development subsidy at \$3,000 until the 2011-2012 school year.

Action

33. SED responded that the Administration hoped that the pre-primary workforce could complete the upgrading courses in the shortest possible time. The Administration would consider the merits for extending the teacher development subsidy, if necessary.

34. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that if public funds were used to subsidise KGs as in the case of primary and secondary schools and not in the form of vouchers, the Administration could then determine the manpower establishment and teacher-to-class ratio in KGs. To ensure sufficient manpower for each KG, free pre-primary education should be the way forward. Theoretically, parents were given the right to select KGs, but they often did not have equal access to KG information. Parental choice might not always reflect the quality of individual KGs.

35. SED responded that the Administration had considered the relevant factors including the resource available for KGs to provide quality education in deciding on the value of the voucher. The teacher development subsidy embedded in the voucher should be sufficient to support the target on quality education. The manpower establishment in individual KGs should be decided by the market instead of the Administration.

36. PSED supplemented that pre-primary education was not compulsory. The purpose of the Scheme was to increase investment in pre-primary education, in order to reduce parents' financial burden and improve the quality of pre-primary education without the elaborate regulatory controls embodied in the traditional subvention model, so as to preserve the flexibility and adaptability of KGs. To facilitate parents to make informed choice, more transparency was required of KGs to disclose information on application of funds to various expenditure areas in addition to other essential operational and curriculum details. Specifically, the KG profiles on the Internet contained information on their eligibility for voucher redemption and approved fee levels.

37. Ms Emily LAU considered it important to provide KGs with sufficient resources and support to arrange their teachers to attend approved C(ECE) courses. Since quality pre-primary education was vital to the development of children in learning, KG teachers should preferably be degree holders in early childhood education. She asked whether the Administration had any plans for further professional upgrading of the pre-primary workforce.

38. SED responded that all serving principals were encouraged to obtain a Bachelor in Education in Early Childhood Education (BEd(ECE)) qualification. In the 2007-2008 school year, around 240 KG principals were pursuing a BEd(ECE) qualification. New KG principals appointed from the 2009-2010 school year would be required to possess a BEd(ECE) plus one year post-qualification experience and completion of the certification course for principals. Professional upgrading of the pre-primary workforce had to be

Action

implemented on a progressive basis, having regard to the qualifications of the existing workforce and the availability of places in BEd(ECE) programmes in local universities. The Administration might consider further professional upgrading of pre-primary teachers to degree level when all teachers had a C(ECE) and all KG principals had attained a BEd(ECE) qualification.

39. Dr Fernando CHEUNG expressed support for members' views and suggestions concerning the Scheme. He pointed out that teachers of the 31 Special Child Care Centres (SCCCs) funded by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) were not eligible for the teacher development subsidy under the Scheme. The operators of these SCCC were concerned about staff wastage as their teachers would change job to work for KGs joining the Scheme in order to benefit from the teacher development subsidy. Dr CHEUNG requested the Administration to extend the coverage of the teacher development subsidy to include SCCC

40. In response, SED said that as SCCC were funded by SWD and did not fall within the policy portfolio of EDB, they were not covered by the Scheme. PSED supplemented that it had been discussed on whether the Scheme should cover child care centres. As child care centres provided care and not education, they were therefore not covered by the Scheme.

41. Dr Fernando CHEUNG expressed disappointment about the Administration's response. He suggested that the issue be followed up by the Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to the Provision of Boarding Places, Senior Secondary Education and Employment Opportunities for Children with Special Education Needs. Members agreed.

Quality review

42. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung noted with concern that only local NPM KGs meeting the prescribed standards might redeem the voucher starting from the 2012-2013 school year. He said that KGs not meeting the prescribed standards by then as a result of the quality review might face possible closure. According to EDB, the quality review was primarily improvement-oriented and conducted on the basis of document reviews, observation and discussion with KG stakeholders, and KGs were required to submit annual school plans and school reports. Mr LEUNG pointed out that on the one hand, EDB claimed it would discourage over-preparation and over-documentation. On the other hand, it required schools to submit annual plans and reports for the quality review. Since pre-primary teachers were given a five-year period to obtain a C(ECE) by the 2011-2012 school year, the quality review might be conducted before the teachers obtained the qualification. He urged the Administration to consider extending the deadline for KGs to meet the prescribed standards in order not to create excessive pressure on the part of KG teachers.

Action

43. SED responded that the quality assurance framework was essential for ensuring effective resource utilisation and enhancing the quality of pre-primary education as the Scheme was supported by public funds. The Administration understood the workload and pressure on the part of the pre-primary teachers and would continue to provide support to KGs in this regard.

44. PSED supplemented that the quality review was built on the performance indicators already established in consultation with the pre-primary education sector since 2000, and had been implemented for the KG sector in the past few years. EDB had conducted some 40 workshops on the quality review for pre-primary principals and teachers and given advice on how the annual school plans and reports for the review should be prepared. The quality assurance mechanism was an integral part of the Scheme. At this stage, the Administration had no plan to extend the deadline for KGs to meet the prescribed standards for joining the Scheme.

45. Mr TAM Yiu-chung said that EDB had conducted some 40 workshops on quality review between March and July 2007 for KG principals and teachers and five briefings on the Handbook for Quality Review Framework for pre-primary personnel. KGs were concerned that only one representative from each KG could attend these workshops and briefings, and the representative had the responsibility to debrief their colleagues. He enquired whether EDB would conduct similar workshops and briefings in the near future and provide more places for KGs so that they could send more representatives to attend these workshops and briefings.

46. PAS(QA) responded that the quality review conducted by EDB was built on the performance indicators established in consultation with the pre-primary education sector since 2000. The workshops on quality review were attended by principals and teachers, and on average, each KG had four to five representatives attending these workshops. EDB would conduct additional workshops and briefings on quality review should the pre-primary sector consider it necessary. KGs could send more representatives to attend these workshops and briefings should they wish to.

47. Professor Patrick LAU considered that the adoption of a smaller class size would enhance the quality of pre-primary education. He asked whether EDB would consider class size in its quality review and evaluate the benefits of small class in the provision of pre-primary education.

48. PSED responded that the teacher to pupil ratio for kindergartens was currently set at 1: 15. Under the quality review, EDB would consider a number of performance indicators including the quality of teaching and the learning environment in individual KGs. Class size per se was not a factor for consideration.

Action

V. Scholarship Endowment Fund

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)766/07-08(03) and (04)]

49. Members noted the background brief prepared by the LegCo Secretariat [LC Paper No. CB(2)766/07-08(04)].

Briefing by the Administration

50. SED briefed members on the Administration's proposal to establish a \$1 billion Scholarship Endowment Fund (the Fund) for providing Government scholarships to outstanding local and non-local students studying in full-time publicly-funded degree or above level programmes in Hong Kong, as detailed in its paper [LC Paper No. CB(2)766/07-08(03)].

Implementation details

51. Mrs Selina CHOW welcomed the establishment of the Fund which would be conducive to retaining and attracting outstanding local and non-local students to study in Hong Kong. Noting that the proposed amounts of scholarships for local and non-local students were \$40,000 and \$80,000 per year respectively, she asked whether institutions participating in the scheme could adjust the amounts of scholarship awarded to students in order to increase the number of awardees.

52. In response, PSED said that given the purpose of the scheme to reward outstanding students, the amounts of scholarships had to be set at reasonably attractive levels. The Administration had considered the views of eligible institutions and the amounts awarded under the prevailing scholarship schemes in determining the proposed amounts. Individual institutions could provide additional scholarships using private donations, if considered necessary.

53. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong supported the proposal. He hoped that the scholarship scheme could be expanded to cover private universities, such as the Hong Kong Shue Yan University, as they could enrol outstanding students like the eight University Grants Committee-funded institutions and the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. He considered that the Administration should adopt a holistic and student-oriented approach in awarding outstanding students, irrespective of which universities they attended. SED agreed to consider Mr CHEUNG's suggestion.

Quota for non-local students

54. Ms Emily LAU referred members to paragraphs 14 and 15 of the background brief, and highlighted that members had all along been concerned about the impact of offering scholarships to meritorious non-local students on local students. She asked for the reason for not setting a quota of scholarships

Action

for non-local students under the scheme and whether overseas countries adopted a quota for non-local students in this regard. Ms LAU also queried the huge difference in the amount of scholarships between local and non-local students.

55. PSED explained that the autonomy of institutions in selecting recipients for scholarships should be respected. The Administration considered it inappropriate to interfere by setting a quota for non-local students under the scheme. The Administration had made reference to practices in other countries and noted that the amounts of scholarships awarded to non-local students were generally higher than local students in consideration of the higher tuition fees and accommodation and living expenses shouldered by non-local students. Based on the information provided by the local universities, a similar arrangement was adopted for local scholarships funded by private donations; and the average amounts of scholarships awarded to local and non-local students were about \$13,000 and \$50,000 per year respectively.

56. Dr Fernando CHEUNG supported the proposal to increase Government's investment in education. He, however, considered it necessary to put in place a quota system to ensure that all participating institutions would distribute evenly the scholarships between local and non-local students.

57. Mr Albert CHAN shared Dr CHEUNG's view and pointed out that at present, about 90% of the non-local student population in the higher education sector and some 60% to 70% of post-graduate students were Mainland students. He was concerned about the adverse impact, if any, of such an unbalanced mix of nationalities on local education. He suggested that to protect the interests of local students, a mechanism should be set up to ensure the award of scholarships to a good mix of nationalities.

58. SED responded that the Administration would review the scheme in one to two years' time after its implementation. The need for a quota system would then be considered with regard to the operational experience of the scheme including the distribution of scholarships to local and non-local students by individual institutions.

59. Mr Albert CHAN said that he would object to the funding proposal should the Administration refuse to set a quota on scholarships for non-local students. He suggested that the number of scholarships for non-local students should constitute no more than 50% of the total number of scholarships awarded under the scheme each year. He also suggested the conduct of a study by the Research and Library Services Division (RLSD) of the LegCo Secretariat on whether a quota system on scholarships for non-local students was adopted by overseas countries.

Action

60. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong opined that flexibility must be allowed for individual institutions to make adjustment in the light of their development plans/needs if a quota system was put in place. Institutions had to consider their own circumstances and capacity in deciding the number of non-local students to be admitted to their programmes. As the imposition of a quota system on scholarships for non-local students could affect the institutions' autonomy on academic matters, he considered it a better approach to require the institutions to provide information on the distribution of scholarships on a regular basis.

61. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung held the view that the Administration should put in place a quota system from the outset, instead of reviewing the need for it after certain years of implementation. The huge difference in the amount of scholarships for local and non-local students would convey a wrong message to the public that the Administration had higher regard for non-local students than local students. He urged the Administration to review and adjust the proposed amounts of scholarships for outstanding non-local and local students, to make them broadly in line with each other.

62. SED responded that the primary aim of establishing the Fund was to attract outstanding students to pursue their studies in Hong Kong. As selection of recipients would be based on students' performance in various aspects, the Administration considered it inappropriate to put in place a quota system which would limit institutions' freedom in distribution of scholarships. SED further said that the award of scholarships to outstanding non-local students could help bring in the most talented students from all over the world, achieving the policy intent of promoting internationalism.

Measures to retain outstanding students

63. Dr Fernando CHEUNG enquired about how the scheme could achieve the objective of retaining outstanding non-local students in Hong Kong after graduation.

64. Deputy Secretary for Education (1) (DS(Ed)1) explained that the establishment of the Fund was part of a basket of measures introduced to further developing Hong Kong as a regional education hub. The award of scholarships would convey a positive message to outstanding local and non-local students who chose to pursue their studies in Hong Kong that their achievements were recognized. This would enhance their chances of staying in Hong Kong after graduation.

65. Mr TAM Yiu-chung asked whether the Administration would consider making it a requirement for the scholarship recipients to stay for a certain period of time after completing their studies in Hong Kong. While supporting the proposal to attract talented students from other places in general, he considered that to enhance Hong Kong's competitiveness in the long run, the Administration

Action

should identify those trades and industries with shortage in talents and focus on attracting talented students in those disciplines through the scholarship scheme.

66. DS(Ed)1 responded that the scheme would become less attractive to talented students if too many conditions were imposed, in particular when Hong Kong was facing competition from other countries and cities in attracting talents. Moreover, there would be difficulties in enforcing a requirement of mandatory stay after graduation as scholarship recipients might apply for its waiver. The Administration hoped that the scholarship recipients would choose to stay and settle down for employment in Hong Kong after getting familiar with the local environment and finding the opportunities provided. The Administration considered it appropriate to provide institutions with as much flexibility as possible in the selection of scholarship recipients, and would not set any requirement on the subjects/disciplines to be taken.

67. While supporting the proposal, Ms Audrey EU was also concerned about the retention of talents, and asked whether the Administration had made reference to measures adopted by overseas countries in this regard. She called on the Administration to formulate a policy on the retention of outstanding students in Hong Kong.

68. PSED responded that the Administration had extended the period for non-local students to stay in Hong Kong after graduation from three months to one year, with a view to facilitating their finding of employment.

Conclusion

69. The Chairman requested the Administration to relay the concern of members about fair distribution of Government scholarships between local and non-local students to institutions participating in the scheme. PSED agreed.

70. Concluding the discussion, the Chairman said that with the exception of Mr Albert CHAN who would support the proposal only if a quota was set for scholarships for non-local students, members present at the meeting supported the submission of the proposal to FC in February 2008. Members agreed that RLSD should prepare an information note concerning the adoption or otherwise of a quota system on scholarships for non-local students by overseas countries.

LegCo
Secretariat

VI. Upgrading of the Web-based School Administration and Management System

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)766/07-08(05) and (06)]

71. Members noted the background brief prepared by the LegCo Secretariat [LC Paper No. CB(2)766/07-08(06)].

Action

72. Deputy Secretary for Education (6) (DS(Ed)6) briefed members on the Administration's proposal to create a new commitment of \$67 million to upgrade the computer server and related system software of the Web-based School Administration and Management System (WebSAMS) in government, aided and caput schools as well as local schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme, as detailed in its paper [LC Paper No. CB(2)766/07-08(05)].

73. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong supported the proposal but expressed concern about the impact of the enhanced WebSAMS on the workload of teaching and supporting staff in schools. He considered that additional manpower resources should be provided for schools to implement the WebSAMS.

74. In response, DS(Ed)6 said that the proposed system upgrading would not affect the existing system functions of WebSAMS, and would not create additional workload to teachers and supporting staff in the day-to-day use of the system. The proposed upgrading project sought to maintain a reasonable performance level of WebSAMS required by schools. With an upgraded WebSAMS, the Administration expected that all tasks currently performed by the system would be handled more efficiently and in a more secure manner. Although the benefits could not be quantified in terms of staff savings scattered among schools, the time and efforts of school staff thus saved could be diverted to other work conducive to the teaching and learning in schools. Overall speaking, the Administration expected that the system upgrading would bring about enhanced productivity and better customer services.

75. Responding to Mr Albert CHAN's concern about the possible pressure of the rapid development in information technology (IT) on school administration and management, DS(Ed)6 said that WebSAMS sought to assist schools in their administration and management processes. It was designed to support teaching and supporting staff, and not to support IT in teaching and learning.

76. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that Members of the Liberal Party were supportive of the proposal.

77. Mr TAM Yiu-chung expressed support for the proposal. He noted that many schools were making use of the Octopus cards to track and record the attendance of students, by transferring the attendance data captured by students' Octopus cards to WebSAMS. He was concerned whether this could continue to be done with the upgraded WebSAMS application programs.

78. DS(Ed)6 responded that the proposed system upgrading would not affect the existing functions of WebSAMS. Data exchange between WebSAMS and the Octopus cards system/other smart card system could continue to be carried out in future. She stressed that the proposed upgrading project sought to serve the users better through making improvement to the system processing power and the storage capacity.

Action

79. Members supported the submission of the funding proposal to FC for approval in February 2008.

VII. The Third Strategy on Information Technology in Education

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)847/07-08(01), CB(2)766/07-08(07), CB(2)502/07-08, CB(2)244/07-08(02) & (03), and CB(2)159/07-08(01)]

80. Members noted a submission from I.T. People Association of Hong Kong which was tabled at the meeting.

Briefing by the Administration

81. DS(Ed)5 introduced the Administration's paper on the outcome of the consultation on the Third Strategy on Information Technology (IT) in Education (the Third Strategy), highlighting that the majority of respondents supported the theme of the Third Strategy, i.e., the right technology at the right time for the right task, and the general direction of focusing on the human factor rather than the technical factor in further integrating IT into learning and teaching. Principal Assistant Secretary (Education Infrastructure) (PAS(EI)) showed the contents of www.starfall.com to demonstrate the availability of quality on-line open educational resources and the contents of www.free-reading.net, which was a wiki project where all materials and lesson plans for teaching English on the website were contributed by teachers for sharing, to demonstrate how Web 2.0 applications assisted learning and teaching. He explained that the availability of quality on-line open source materials and the popularity of Web 2.0 applications created room for resources redeployment by schools. It was also important to raise parents' information literacy and awareness of the role of IT in education to enable parents to provide effective guidance on e-learning at home for their children. He then explained the adjustments to the actions to be included in the Third Strategy in the light of the outcome of the consultation as set out in the Administration's paper.

IT Coordinator

82. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that he had received views from many principals who strongly requested for a permanent post of IT Coordinator (ITC) in schools for the development of school-based IT to enhance the teaching and learning outcomes. These principals pointed out that the Operating Expenses Block Grant (OEBG) and the Composite IT Grant (CITG) were for upgrading and replacing IT facilities in schools. Each school could only afford \$10,000 a month for the employment of an ITC. Such an amount was grossly insufficient for recruiting and retaining an experienced and competent ITC, resulting in a high turnover rate as stated in paragraph 21 of the Administration's paper. He

Action

asked for the reasons for not including a permanent post of ITC in schools in the proposals for implementing the Third Strategy.

83. DS(Ed)5 responded that the Administration was aware of the request from the school sector for a permanent post of IT technician. However, the Administration considered it more appropriate to provide schools with the flexibility in the deployment of resources for acquisition of technical support in the light of their needs and priorities. Through cost-effective deployment of the provisions under CITG and other funds including OEBG, schools currently adopted various models for providing technical support services in accordance with their needs and priorities in the use of IT in education. The Administration aimed to ensure that good planning advice was given in this regard.

84. Mr SIN Chung-kai said that the Administration had to understand the needs of and the problems encountered by school principals and teachers in the use of IT in education. Their need was to have a dedicated person in schools who was capable of taking care of matters relating to the use of IT, hence their request for a permanent post of ITC. In the commercial sector, such a problem could easily be resolved by way of outsourcing. He asked whether the Administration had considered such an option to address the concern of schools.

85. PAS(EI) responded that the Administration had held nine fora, which were attended by over 900 principals, teachers, parents and IT industry representatives, to collect the stakeholders' views on the proposals in the Third Strategy and had adjusted some of the plans and actions in the light of the views received. The school sector in general welcomed the establishment of the on-line depository of teaching modules which would lessen teachers' workload in integrating IT into learning and teaching. He pointed out that schools currently used the allocations under CITG and OEBG for procuring technical support services according to their needs. Some schools had used the savings from other IT related areas to employ IT technicians above the indicative salary level of \$10,000 per month.

86. Chief Curriculum Development Officer (Information Technology in Education) supplemented that with the increasing availability of free learning and teaching resources and software on the Internet and the decreasing need for computer consumables, schools should spend less in these areas and more provisions under CITG and OEBG could be used for the employment of IT technicians. For instance, the Administration was given to know that a school had offered a monthly salary of \$16,000 to retain a very competent IT technician.

87. While agreeing that schools should be provided with flexibility in the deployment of IT resources, Ms Emily LAU was concerned whether sufficient resources had been made available to them to enable the recruitment and retention of competent ITCs or IT technicians under the prevailing market conditions. She considered that the Panel should consult the school sector on the

Action

matter. Referring to paragraph 18 of the Administration's paper, Ms LAU also enquired whether the Administration would consider following the practice of some advanced jurisdictions to require schools to formulate annual resources and strategic plans for integrating IT into teaching and learning on a mandatory basis and set a timetable in this regard.

88. DS(Ed)5 explained that the Administration recognised the issues encountered by schools in integrating IT into learning and teaching, but did not consider the establishment of a permanent post of ITC could help resolve these issues. The Administration believed that the best approach was to allow schools to determine the best models for developing their school-based IT plan including the procurement of technical support services. Under the Third Strategy, the Administration aimed to support schools in drawing up the cost-effective models most suited their needs and facilitate the dissemination of good models among schools for reference.

89. DS(Ed)5 further pointed out that there was an emerging consensus among some advanced countries on the importance of annual resources and strategic planning in enhancing resources utilisation as they had made substantial investment in the use of IT in education. As for Hong Kong, the Administration did not consider it necessary to make it mandatory for schools to formulate annual resources and strategic plans for integrating IT into learning and teaching. Schools could make reference to overseas experiences in enhancing resources utilisation in the use of IT in education. The Administration would provide various supports for schools to formulate their own plans in the light of their priorities and current stages of development. PAS(EI) supplemented that the school sector supported the proposal of making school-based IT in education development plans for more effective resources utilization but had indicated that this should not add burden on the school management and teachers. The Administration understood the reservation of the school sector about the introduction of a mandatory requirement for annual school resources and strategic planning, and hence did not have any timetable in this regard.

90. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong pointed out that as quoted by the Administration, a monthly salary of \$16,000 was already the highest amount that could be offered by schools for the employment of an experienced ITC. Given that the IT personnel were currently sought after by all industries, it was unrealistic to expect schools to be able to recruit or retain them with such a salary level. He urged the Administration to provide either a permanent post of ITC for each school, or sufficient financial resources for each school to recruit an ITC.

91. DS(Ed)5 responded that the Administration noted the call of the school sector and members for a permanent post of ITC in schools. However, the Administration genuinely believed that as far as the procurement of technical support was concerned, providing schools with the flexibility in the deployment of resources was a better approach. Schools could work out the models which

Action

most suited their needs. As mentioned in the proposals under the Third Strategy, the Administration would investigate and remove any impediments that would affect the flexible deployment of resources at the school level.

92. Responding to the Chairman's enquiry about the adequacy of funding for schools to employ an ITC, DS(Ed)5 said that how schools would use the resources would be important. As schools could flexibly use their resources, they could enjoy add-on benefits through effective utilisation.

93. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that the Administration should not shift its responsibility for resolving the problem to schools under the pretext of providing them with flexibility in the use of resources.

94. PAS(EI) said that the roles of an ITC and an IT technician should not be confused. According to overseas experiences, principals were the leader in the formulation of school-based IT in education development plans for their schools. The Administration would provide on-site support to help the school management develop and implement their plans.

95. The Chairman sought clarification on whether the Administration considered it necessary for schools to employ ITC. PAS(EI) responded that the Administration would leave it to schools to decide the need or otherwise for an ITC. CITG provided resources for the employment of an IT technician or procurement of technical services from technical service providers.

96. The Chairman remarked that if schools were only given the resources sufficient for employing an IT technician, it made no sense to leave it to them to decide the need for an ITC. He further said that the Administration had invested substantially in the use of IT in education. The concern of schools was how the resources could be used effectively, and human factor instead of technical factor should be the focus. Although schools could decide how to use their resources, from the perspective of school administration, they were inclined to use their IT resources on the procurement of hardware and software than to employ a dedicated person to manage IT as the benefits brought by the former could readily be seen.

97. Ms Audrey EU shared the view that the focus in the use of IT in education should be on human factor. It was therefore necessary to consider the importance of and the need for an ITC in schools. However, she questioned if it was necessary to employ a permanent ITC in each school in the long run. Other alternatives such as the feasibility of sharing an ITC among a number of schools could be considered.

Action

Computer Recycling Scheme

98. Ms Emily LAU noted with concern that about 4% of primary and secondary school students did not have access to computers at home. She asked for the estimated number of these students, and whether the Administration had plans and measures to bridge the digital divide among students.

99. PAS(EI) responded that the Administration estimated that about 20 000 students did not have access to computers at home when the Second Strategy was launched. So far, around 10 000 recycled computers had been distributed under the Computer Recycling Scheme (the Scheme). There could be still around 10 000 students without access to computers at home. The Administration was confident that sufficient recycled computers were available to meet their needs. According to some school principals, some families, such as ethnic minority families, newly arrived families from the Mainland, or those residing in partitioned cubicles, might not wish to have a computer at home. EDB would continue to collaborate with schools and non-governmental organisations to raise parents' awareness of the role of IT in the emerging learning environment and of the availability of recycled computers under the Scheme.

100. Ms Emily LAU enquired whether the Administration could identify the students who had no access to computers at home and about concrete measures taken to assist these students.

101. PAS(EI) responded that schools were in the best position to know whether their students had access to computers at home. Starting from the 2001-2002 school year, all public sector primary and secondary schools had been provided with an incentive grant for making their IT facilities available for students' access after school hours. The Administration would continue to collaborate with schools to raise parents' awareness of the Scheme.

Consultation

102. Ms Emily LAU considered it necessary for the Panel to consult the school sector on the Third Strategy before FC considered the Administration's funding proposal given the views expressed by members concerning the issue of ITC.

103. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong also considered it necessary for the Panel to receive views from the school sector on the Third Strategy. The issue of ITC had been of grave concern to the school sector for a long time. Indeed, the Administration acknowledged in paragraph 6 of its paper that the school sector believed that the establishment of a permanent post of school IT technician would help address the problem of higher turnover of IT technicians in schools.

Action

104. DS(Ed)5 stressed that the Administration had conducted an extensive consultation on the proposed actions for implementing the Third Strategy, and there were strong support from the school sector. The Administration did not consider it appropriate to address under the current proposal, which focused on non-recurrent financial support, the issue of ITC which would entail recurrent financial implications and should be carefully examined. In the course of implementing the Third Strategy, the Administration would be able to consider other issues which might arise in a fast-changing context and might not have been resolved to the satisfaction of all in the sector at this point in time.

105. PAS(EI) supplemented that the Administration had uploaded the 45 submissions received during the consultation period onto the EDB's website. The respondents included those from the school sector such as the Hong Kong Subsidized Secondary Schools Council had expressed support for the proposed plans and measures for implementing the Strategy.

106. In response to the Chairman on the urgency of and timetable for the submission of the funding proposal, PAS(EI) said that schools hoped to receive the funding for upgrading and replacing their IT facilities as early as practicable. The Administration therefore intended to submit the funding proposal to FC for approval on 1 February 2008. If the proposal was approved, the funding could be released to schools within the current financial year.

107. The Chairman enquired about the possibility of deferring the submission of the funding proposal to FC to allow time for the Panel to receive views from the school sector. PAS(EI) replied that the school sector was looking forward to the early allocation of the funding for upgrading and replacing IT facilities in schools, and would be disappointed if the proposal could not be submitted to FC for consideration on 1 February 2008.

108. Mr TAM Yiu-chung informed members that FC had scheduled a meeting on 22 February 2008. The Chairman said that in view of members' concerns, the Panel would schedule a special meeting to receive the views of the school sector. He hoped that the Administration would take this into account in deciding the date for submission of the funding proposal to FC. Should the Administration decide to submit its proposal to FC for consideration at its meeting on 1 February 2008, the Panel would report its deliberations and members' views expressed at the current meeting to FC.

109. DS(Ed)5 responded that although the Administration would prefer to submit the proposal to FC for consideration on 1 February 2008, it would respect members' views and consider deferring the submission to FC to 22 February 2008.

[*Post-meeting note* : the special meeting was scheduled for 31 January 2008 at 2:30 pm.]

Action

VIII. Any other business

110. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 7:22 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
26 February 2008