

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1567/07-08
(The minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

Minutes of meeting
held on Wednesday, 26 March 2008, at 2:30 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 Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, SBS, JP
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
- Member absent** : Hon LI Kwok-ying, MH, JP
- Public Officers attending** : Agenda item IV
Mr Michael WONG
Deputy Secretary for Education (1)
Ms Amy WONG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education (Higher Education)

Mr Jack CHAN
Chief Executive Officer (Higher Education),
Education Bureau

Agenda item V

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

Mr Steve LEE Yuk-fai
Principal Assistant Secretary (Professional Development
and Training), Education Bureau

**Attendance by
invitation** : Agenda item IV

Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers

Mr WU Siu-wai
Vice-President

Ms WOO Man-yee
Chairman's Assistant

Former Kowloon Technical Government Evening
Secondary School

Mr LUI Siu-kwong
Student Representative

Mr KO Yuet-ming
Student Representative

Hong Kong College of Technology

Dr CHAN Cheuk-hay
President and Principal

Mr LEE Chi-chung
Head, HKCT Adult Education Centre

Concern Group for Former Government Evening Schools

Ms LEUNG Sau-ngor
Chairman

Mr LEUNG Wai-ho
Member

Hong Kong Young Women's Christian Association

Ms WOO Yuen-ling
Supervisor

Mr LEE Yiu-kwong
Ex-Principal, Tsuen Wan Government Evening
Secondary School

Former Yuen Long Government Evening Secondary School

Mr WONG Hing-chuen
Representative

Mr SHEK Chun-kwun
Representative

Former Yuen Long Government Evening Secondary School (English Course)

Mr NG Kam-wing
Ex-Principal, Tuen Mun Government Evening
Secondary School

Caritas Community & Higher Education Service

Mr KONG Kwong-hung
Deputy Principal Officer (Programme Development)

A Group of Adult Students from Government Evening Secondary Schools

Mr CHOI Kwong-fai
Alumnus

Hong Kong Association for Continuing Education

Mr CHEUNG Man-ping
Vice-Chairman

Mr KWAN Man-kwong
Hon Legal Adviser

Evening School's Student Union

Ms Wini TSANG Yuk-fun
Committee Member

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

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I. Confirmation of minutes
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1398/07-08]

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 February 2008 were confirmed.

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

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

III. Items for discussion at the next meeting
[Appendices I and II to LC Paper No. CB(2)1397/07-08]

3. Members agreed to discuss the following subjects at the next regular meeting scheduled for Monday, 14 April 2008, at 4:30 pm -

(a) Culture and arts in school curriculum; and

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(b) Review of Post-secondary Education Sector.

[*Post-meeting note* : As members considered it necessary to discuss the subject of "Review of the financial assistance scheme for designated evening adult education courses" again, on the advice of Chairman, this subject would be revisited at the next regular meeting and the subject of "Culture and arts in school curriculum" would be deferred to the meeting in May 2008 for discussion.]

IV. Review of the financial assistance scheme for designated evening adult education courses

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1204/07-08(01), CB(2)1397/07-08(01)-(03), CB(2)1449/07-08(01)-(04) and CB(2)1472/07-08(01)]

4. Members noted the background brief prepared by the Legislative Council (LegCo) Secretariat [LC Paper No. CB(2)1397/07-08(02)].

Views of deputations

Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1449/07-08(01)]

5. Mr WU Siu-wai presented the views and recommendations of Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers, as detailed in its submission. In gist, the Federation welcomed the Administration's proposal to extend the coverage of the financial assistance scheme for designated evening adult education courses (the Scheme) to include junior secondary levels and to introduce a 50% tuition fee reimbursement assistance level starting from the 2008-2009 school year. The Federation, however, considered that the Administration should assume a more proactive role in helping all working adults, particularly those who had not attended or completed secondary education during their early ages, to attain the basic academic qualification. As the Chief Executive (CE) had announced in his 2007-2008 Policy Address the plan to implement 12-year free education in public schools, this policy should apply to adult education as well. With the implementation of the New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum emphasizing on applied learning, the Administration should ensure that the approved course provider(s) operating evening adult education courses would adopt the NSS curriculum correspondingly, and provide subsidies to students undertaking applied learning courses (formerly known as career-oriented studies).

Former Kowloon Technical Government Evening Secondary School

6. Mr LUI Siu-kwong noted from paragraph 19 of the Administration's paper that the proposed amendments to the existing Scheme were made having

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considered the views of the Concern Group for Former Government Evening Schools. He expressed dissatisfaction that the Administration had not consulted the general public and the relevant bodies, such as the majority of the deputations present at the meeting, in planning the proposed improvements.

7. Mr KO Yuet-ming considered that the Administration had failed to monitor the performance and operation of course providers. He was dissatisfied that evening school students were compelled to pay student union fees. He suggested that subsidies be provided to students direct in the form of education voucher so that students could choose the types of courses and service providers best suited their needs. This would help enhance the operation of the course providers and the quality of education.

Hong Kong Young Women's Christian Association

8. Ms WOO Yuen-ling said that the Association supported the introduction of the improved Scheme. She pointed out that adults without the requisite qualification could pursue the basic education courses under the Adult Education Subvention Scheme (AESS). AESS was introduced in 1980 to subsidize non-governmental organizations to organize short and informal adult education programmes under particular purviews such as courses for improving basic literacy in Chinese, general education courses, retirement education courses, and special education courses for the physically or mentally handicapped adults, etc. The Association hoped that subsidies could be provided for learners enrolled in AESS.

Hong Kong College of Technology
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1449/07-08(02)]

9. Dr CHAN Cheuk-hay presented the views of the Hong Kong College of Technology, as detailed in its submission. Dr CHAN said that the College supported the introduction of the improved Scheme but considered that -

- (a) the Administration should conduct an overall review of its policy and aims on the provision of adult education, and formulate a long-term development plan to facilitate working adults in pursuing life-long development. The provision allocated to subsidize adult education should be converted into recurrent funding;
- (b) the Scheme should be further extended to cover the English Course at both primary and secondary levels;
- (c) the Administration should make reference to the practices adopted by the Tertiary Student Finance Scheme to provide adult learners with financial assistance under the improved Scheme before the commencement of the school year;

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- (d) the Administration should take into account the latest development in the new town and arrange for the opening of education and training centres in Tin Shui Wai and Tseung Kwan O;
- (e) with the implementation of the NSS curriculum, the Administration should ensure that the approved course providers would adopt the new curriculum correspondingly. Additional resources should be provided to the course providers to assist their smooth transition to the new academic structure; and
- (f) the Administration should finalize the implementation plan and details, and promulgate the revised arrangements as early as possible.

Mr LEE Yiu-kwong

10. Mr LEE Yiu-kwong said that he was the ex-Principal of Tsuen Wan Government Evening Secondary School. The majority of students attending evening adult education courses were working adults, middle-aged women and retired persons who, for various reasons, had not attended or completed secondary education during their early ages. These people should be provided with a second learning opportunity which could facilitate their pursuit of higher education. As most adult learners attending these courses came from low-income families, he requested the Administration to review the mode of subsidy under the Scheme. In his view, the mode of assistance should follow that for the previous Government Evening Secondary School Courses (GESSC) in that junior secondary education should be provided free of charge, with the Administration subsidizing all the senior secondary courses and students given full or partial remission of the course fees. As at 2003-2004, the course fees were \$1,220 for Secondary 4 (S4) and S5, and \$1,620 for S6 per annum.

*Former Yuen Long Government Evening Secondary School
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1449/07-08(03)]*

11. Mr WONG Hing-chuen said that the substantial increase in tuition fees after the outsourcing of GESSC to non-profit-making service providers in September 2003 had caused great difficulties to many adult learners who wished to pursue evening secondary courses, resulting in a significant decline in student enrolment and closure of adult education centres. He considered that in a knowledge-based economy, working adults (particularly those with low academic qualifications) should be provided with another opportunity to complete their secondary studies so that they could pursue higher education for future career advancement. He requested the Administration to resume the responsibility for operating evening adult education courses at Government-run evening schools.

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Caritas Community & Higher Education Service
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1472/07-08(01)]

12. Mr KONG Kwong-hung welcomed the Administration's proposal to continue the Scheme with proposed improvements. He noted that in determining the subsidy levels under the Scheme, the Administration had taken into account the tuition fee reimbursement assistance levels under Project Yi Jin (PYJ). He pointed out that in the 2007-2008 academic year, full-time and part-time students enrolled in PYJ might be eligible for financial assistance, with 30% or 100% reimbursement of the tuition fees paid, subject to the students' meeting the prescribed criteria. He considered that, on the grounds of fairness and consistency, the Administration should align the tuition fee reimbursement levels under PYJ with those under the improved Scheme.

A Group of Adult Students from Government Evening Secondary Schools
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1397/07-08(03)]

13. Mr CHOI Kwong-fai presented the views of the Group, as outlined in its submission. The Group specifically requested the Administration to consider -

- (a) extending the scope of the Scheme to cover primary education;
- (b) adding a 75% tuition fee reimbursement assistance level; and
- (c) providing school textbook assistance to adult learners with financial difficulties.

Hong Kong Association for Continuing Education
[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1449/07-08(04) and CB(2)1483/07-08(01)]

14. Mr KWAN Man-kwong presented the views of the Hong Kong Association for Continuing Education, as detailed in its submission. In general, the Association supported the Administration's proposal to continue the Scheme with proposed improvements from the 2008-2009 school year onwards. The Association considered that given the huge fiscal surplus, the Administration should increase the overall investment in education. There was also a need to assist those relatively less educated and the more vulnerable groups (including youths, the middle-aged and the new immigrants) in adjusting to the changing needs and challenges of the economy. The Association suggested that -

- (a) the Administration should increase the subvention to the approved course operators, so as to make their tuition fees at levels affordable to adult learners; and

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- (b) the Administration should take into account the demand for education and training centres in new towns, e.g. Tin Shui Wai and Tseung Kwan O, and make arrangements to open more education centres in these areas.

Evening School's Student Union

15. Ms Wini TSANG said that as a beneficiary of the Scheme, she managed to complete mainstream senior secondary education by attending evening courses and find a clerical job after graduation. She considered that there were rooms for further improvement and requested the Administration to review the Scheme to provide greater assistance to those in need.

*Concern Group for Former Government Evening Schools
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1204/07-08(01)]*

16. Mr LEUNG Wai-ho and Ms LEUNG Sau-ngor took members through the submission of the Concern Group for Former Government Evening Schools, and highlighted the following suggestions of the Concern Group -

- (a) the Concern Group welcomed the proposed improvements to the Scheme and hoped that they could be implemented as soon as possible; and
- (b) the Administration should review whether the provision allocated for adult education under the Scheme should be converted into recurrent funding.

The Administration's response

17. Deputy Secretary for Education (1) (DS(Ed)1) took members through the Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(2)1397/07-08(01)] which set out the proposal to continue the existing Scheme with proposed improvements from the 2008-2009 school year onwards. DS(Ed)1 then responded to the views and concerns expressed by the deputations as follows -

- (a) under the improved Scheme, students meeting the eligibility criteria, including the minimum attendance requirements, would be eligible for reimbursement of 30% of the tuition fees, regardless of their financial position. Full reimbursement (i.e. 100% of the tuition fees) or half reimbursement (i.e. 50% of the tuition fees) would be provided for those who met the criteria and had passed the means test administered by the Student Financial Assistance Agency (SFAA) for full grant or half grant respectively. The Administration had drawn reference to different subsidy schemes, e.g. PYJ, in determining the subsidy levels of the Scheme, and

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considered the introduction of an additional subsidy level (i.e. 50% fee reimbursement) appropriate. Students with financial hardship for making upfront payment of the initial tuition fees might apply for loans under the Non-means Tested Loan Scheme administered by SFAA;

- (b) in drawing up the proposed improvements to the existing Scheme, the Administration had considered the views of the Concern Group for Former Government Evening Schools, adult learners and the existing course operator. The Administration was ready to listen and consider the views of other organizations; and
- (c) the Finance Committee (FC) had approved in 2005 a commitment of \$36 million under Head 173 Student Financial Assistance Agency for the Scheme. It was estimated that there would be an unspent balance of about \$29 million by the end of the 2007-2008 school year. Subject to members' views on the proposal, the Administration planned to seek the approval of FC on 25 April 2008 to expand the ambit of the existing Scheme to implement the proposed improvements starting from the 2008-2009 school year.

Discussion

Subsidy level

18. Dr YEUNG Sum was pleased to note that the Administration planned to extend the scope of the Scheme to cover junior secondary levels and to introduce an additional subsidy level. He, however, commented that the proposed improvements were far from adequate to meet the changing needs and demands of the society, particularly following CE's announcement of the provision of 12-year free education in public schools and for vocational training starting from the 2008-2009 school year. Dr YEUNG said that to support and sustain Hong Kong's development as a knowledge-based economy and world-class city, the Administration should uphold the principle of life-long learning and take full responsibility for providing favourable conditions for upward mobility. While education was widely recognised as an effective means to achieve career advancement and sustainable development, the provision of equal opportunity in pursuit of higher education was crucial, in particular for working adults and new immigrants who did not have the opportunity to receive basic education in Hong Kong in the past. As most adult learners attending evening secondary courses came from low-income families, he urged the Administration to increase the overall investment in evening adult education by providing all students with full remission of course fees.

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19. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong shared Dr YEUNG Sum's view that with the implementation of 12-year free education, the Administration should adjust its policy to fully subsidize adult learners in their pursuit of secondary education. Given a huge fiscal surplus in the 2007-2008 financial year and anticipated surplus in the next few years, there was scope for strengthening the financial assistance for adult learners attending evening secondary education. He said that should the Scheme be further enhanced, a large number of new immigrants from the Mainland, particularly those who had educational attainment beyond junior secondary level, could benefit from the Scheme. Citing the subsidized retraining courses of the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) which provided retrainees with retraining allowance, Mr CHEUNG criticized that it was too mean on the part of the Administration not to make substantial improvement to the Scheme. According to the Administration, with the proposed extension of coverage to include junior secondary levels and introduction of a 50% tuition fee reimbursement assistance level, the estimated expenditure on the provision of financial assistance to the adult learners would be about \$3.1 million per year starting from 2009-2010. With an unspent balance of about \$29 million by the end of the 2007-2008 school year, he saw no reason for not increasing the subsidy level to 100%. He suggested that financial assistance could be provided to eligible adult learners in the form of vouchers.

20. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung held the view that the significant decline in student enrolment after the outsourcing of evening adult education courses to non-profit-making service providers in September 2003 was due to two main reasons. First, there had been a substantial increase in tuition fees of evening secondary courses. Second, there were far too few centres offering these courses, causing great inconvenience to most adult learners as they might have to travel a long way to the designated centres. He was disappointed at the proposal, and urged the Administration to consider improving the Scheme further, before submitting the funding proposal to FC.

21. In response, DS(Ed)1 said that the Administration shared members' wish to help adults who were most in need of upgrading themselves. In working out the improved Scheme, the Administration had carefully considered all relevant factors, including the needs of adult learners and cost-effectiveness. In the Administration's view, the broad direction was to maintain the provision of direct financial subsidies to adult learners by reimbursing the tuition fees up to a certain percentage as such an arrangement could enhance the dedication and determination on the part of students to complete the courses. DS(Ed)1 further said that since the service agreement with the existing approved course provider would expire in August 2008, the Administration needed to commission the new service provider(s) before July 2008 should the enhanced Scheme be implemented with effect from the 2008-2009 school year. In view of the lead time required for tender/contract arrangement, it had to seek the approval of FC on 25 April 2008. It would therefore be very difficult to make substantial changes to the Scheme at this stage, without adversely affecting the

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implementation schedule. The Administration would consider members' views and suggestions in future. DS(Ed)1 stressed that a mechanism was already in place under the Scheme to assist students with exceptional financial hardship, as full tuition fee reimbursement would be provided for those who met the eligibility criteria and passed the means test for full grant administered by SFAA.

22. Professor Patrick LAU and Ms Emily LAU shared the view that the Administration should increase the subsidy level per eligible student under the Scheme. Ms Emily LAU strongly supported full remission of the course fees for adult learners attending evening secondary courses. She said that even if the proposal could not be implemented in 2008-2009, the Administration should strive to achieve this starting from the 2009-2010 school year.

23. DS(Ed)1 responded that while he could not make a commitment or provide a timetable on full remission of tuition fees for evening education, the Administration would consider the views and suggestions put forward by members. The Administration would need to study the financial implications involved. It would be practically difficult to make substantial changes to the Scheme at this stage.

Mode of operation

24. Mr TAM Yiu-chung declared interest as the Chairman of the Management Board of the Hong Kong College of Technology which was the approved course provider to offer evening secondary courses. He welcomed the Administration's proposal to continue the Scheme with proposed improvements from the 2008-2009 school year onwards. Referring to the enrolment figures for evening mainstream secondary courses (including approved courses under the Scheme and courses offered by private evening schools) over the past three years as shown in the Administration's paper, Mr TAM said that he would expect a continuous demand for these courses. According to a survey conducted by the Hong Kong College of Technology, most of the adult learners attending evening senior secondary courses came from low-income families. As many of them had difficulty in making upfront payment of the initial tuition fees, he asked whether the financial assistance could be granted before the commencement of the school year.

25. DS(Ed)1 responded that under the Scheme, students were required to attain the minimum attendance requirements. There would be practical difficulties in adopting the disbursement method suggested by Mr TAM as a student's eligibility for receiving assistance could only be ascertained at the end of the school year. Besides, if a student eventually failed to meet the attendance requirements, there was a possibility of non-recovery of the financial assistance granted. DS(Ed)1 reiterated that students with financial hardship for making upfront payment of the initial tuition fees could apply for loans under the Non-means Tested Loan Scheme administered by SFAA.

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26. Despite the Administration's explanation, Mr TAM Yiu-chung maintained the view that disbursement of tuition fees before the commencement of a school year was a better arrangement. He said that the Administration could identify ways to prevent abuse of the system, such as by cancelling the registration of students concerned with the courses. DS(Ed)1 responded that the Administration had to balance the interest of students and the need for prudent use of public resources. He undertook to consider Mr TAM's suggestions in future.

Government's policy on adult education

27. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that there would be a continuous demand from adult learners to attend evening mainstream secondary courses, as many employers nowadays generally regarded completion of secondary education as the basic academic qualification for employment. In his view, the Administration should have a clear and well defined policy on adult education. It should expand the scope of 12-year free education to include adult learners, irrespective of the types of courses they enrolled (including full-time, part-time evening or distant learning), such that no one would be deprived of the opportunities to benefit from this policy. With improved economy and financial conditions, the Administration should continue its commitment to increase the overall investment in education so as to develop Hong Kong's human capital. Dr Fernando CHEUNG echoed his view and reiterated that all adult learners should be eligible for full reimbursement of tuition fees. He said that at present, only those adult learners earning very meagre income were eligible for full reimbursement of tuition fees. He called on the Administration to review the niche of adult education to provide a pathway to facilitate adult learners to complete basic education. He also suggested that the Administration should consider providing more incentive to encourage adult learners to pursue education.

28. DS(Ed)1 responded that the Administration was proactive towards adult education as shown in its introduction of a wide range of courses/programmes that provided an alternative path for adult learners who wished to further their education. These included PYJ, the Skills Upgrading Programme (SUS), the Continuing Education Fund, the Workplace English Campaign, the part-time training courses provided by ERB and the financial assistance for students enrolled in self-financed sub-degree programmes. DS(Ed)1 recapitulated the background of the Scheme and stressed the need for prudent and effective use of public money. He added that to strengthen the financial support for students of low-income families, the Administration had proposed to add a 50% subsidy level to the Scheme. Under this new arrangement, students from a four-member family meeting the attendance requirements and whose family income fell between \$8,291 and \$22,140 per month would be eligible for a 50% tuition fee reimbursement.

Demand for the Scheme

29. Ms Audrey EU noted with concern that there would be an unspent

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balance of about \$29 million by the end of 2007-2008 school year. She enquired about the reason for the under-spending, in particular whether it was due to the Administration's wrong estimation of the demand. She also asked about the estimated demand for the Scheme in the next few years.

30. In response, DS(Ed)1 said that when the Administration first proposed the Scheme in 2005, it was estimated that the annual expenditure for the Scheme was in the region of \$12 million and it might benefit up to about 3 600 learners. Although the actual demand for the Scheme was only one-third of the demand originally projected, the Administration believed that with the introduction of the new improvement measures, its demand would increase. The proposed extension of coverage to include junior secondary levels would increase about 300 to 400 beneficiaries per year. Coupled with the introduction of a 50% tuition fee reimbursement assistance level with effect from the 2008-2009 school year onwards, it was estimated that the expenditure to provide financial assistance to the adult learners would be about \$3.1 million per year starting from 2009-2010, with about 1 500 learners benefitting from the improved Scheme.

31. Mr CHEUNG Man-ping of Hong Kong Association for Continuing Education expressed reservation about the accuracy of the revised estimate on the anticipated demand for the Scheme. He recalled that when evening secondary school courses were operated by the Administration, the student enrolment rates were high and stable, and there were about 7 000 students attending these courses in the 2002-2003 school year. In his view, the substantial increase of tuition fees after the outsourcing of evening adult education courses to non-profit-making service providers in September 2003 had resulted in the significant decline in student enrolment. He said that adult learners would only enrol in those courses most suited their needs and which would help enhance their competitiveness in the employment market. Mainstream evening secondary courses could not be dispensed with or replaced by other programmes, e.g. PYJ, as the latter could only be considered as an alternative path.

32. Mrs Selina CHOW was concerned whether the Administration was well aware of the demand for the Scheme. She said that the Administration should step up its efforts in promoting the Scheme to adult learners who preferred taking the mainstream secondary courses and sitting for the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination, particularly the new immigrants. It should work out the projected demand based on student enrolment in these courses. Noting the difference in the number of students attending mainstream evening secondary courses and other Government-subsidized training programmes, e.g. courses under ERB and SUS, she urged the Administration to review whether the Scheme had provided sufficient incentive for adult learners. She also requested the Education Bureau (EDB) to work more closely with the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) to come up with a comprehensive and co-ordinated policy on continuing education and vocational training.

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33. In response, DS(Ed)1 made the following points -
- (a) with the provision of nine-year free basic education commencing from 1978, a considerable portion of Hong Kong's working population should have attained junior secondary education. To cater for the needs of working adults who, for various reasons, had not attended or completed secondary education during their early ages, the Administration operated evening adult education courses before 2003 and introduced the Scheme in 2005 to provide an affordable pathway to facilitate adult learners to complete mainstream senior secondary education at designated centres;
 - (b) it was worth noting that the Administration had not set any limit on the number of classes to be operated at each designated centre, and the approved course providers had endeavoured to promote the Scheme through various means. However, as more and more adult learners had chosen to enrol in other Government-subsidized training programmes, there had been a decreasing demand for evening adult education courses, resulting in a significant decline in student enrolment. Since the implementation of the Scheme in the 2005-2006 school year, the enrolment figures for mainstream evening secondary schools (including approved courses under the Scheme and courses offered by private evening schools) had hovered around 5 000 each year. However, the number of students taking other Government-subsidized courses had increased. Taking PYJ as an example, its total student intake in 2007-2008 was over 7 000; and
 - (c) as far as financial assistance was concerned, there was no such arrangement for reimbursement of half grant for students under PYJ. The Administration believed that the improvement measure to add a 50% tuition fee reimbursement level could help boost the student enrolment on evening secondary education courses and increase the utilization of the Scheme. EDB and LWB would continue to work together to explore the possibility of enhancing other forms of support for adult learners.

Conclusion

34. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong was concerned whether the Administration would take into account members' views and review its policy with a view to fully subsidising adult learners in their pursuit of secondary education in the near future. He strongly requested the Administration to make a commitment to work towards this goal in its funding proposal to be submitted for consideration by FC on 25 April 2008. Dr YEUNG Sum expressed support for Mr CHEUNG's suggestion, and said that Members belonging to the Democratic Party might not support the Scheme if the Administration did not make such a commitment.

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35. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan considered that the Administration should provide the Panel with a concrete answer as whether 12-year free education would be extended to adult learners attending evening secondary courses, and if the answer was positive, the timetable for it. He requested the Administration to revert to the Panel before the end of the current LegCo session.

36. Given the views expressed by members, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan, Ms Audrey EU and Ms Emily LAU considered it necessary to hold a special meeting to discuss the subject again before consideration of the funding proposal by FC on 25 April 2008. The Chairman suggested that he would discuss with the Clerk and the Administration on the date of the meeting and inform members accordingly.

[Post-meeting note: After discussion with the Administration, the Chairman directed that the Panel should revisit the subject at the next regular meeting to be held on 14 April 2008. Panel members were informed of the arrangement vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1454/07-08 issued on 28 March 2008.]

V. Creation of a deputy head rank in public sector primary schools
[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1397/07-08(04) and (05)]

37. Members noted the background brief prepared by the LegCo Secretariat on the subject.

Briefing by the Administration

38. DS(Ed)3 briefed members on the proposal for the creation of a new Senior Primary School Master/Mistress (SPSM) rank in the Primary School Master/Mistress (PSM) grade for deputy heads in public sector primary schools with effect from the 2008-2009 school year as detailed in the Administration's paper.

The Proposal

39. Dr YEUNG Sum said that Members belonging to the Democratic Party supported the creation of the new SPSM rank in the PSM grade for deputy heads in public sector primary schools. He considered the present arrangement of providing merely a responsibility allowance for senior teacher at the PSM rank (of the graduate PSM grade) or Assistant Master/Mistress rank (of the non-graduate Certificate Master/Mistress grade) to take up the duties of a deputy head in primary schools inadequate. He hoped that the creation of the new rank would attract and retain quality teachers and improve the quality of primary education in the long term. He asked for the reasons for the belated introduction of the proposal.

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40. DS(Ed)3 responded that the Administration had been reviewing the teaching grade structure including the creation of a deputy head rank for primary schools since 2003. However, it was inappropriate to propose the creation of the new rank during a period of economic downturn. With the announcement of the creation of the new rank in the 2007 Policy Address, the Administration had been expeditiously working out the details of the proposal with an aim to introducing the new rank from the 2008-2009 school year. Subject to members' support, the Administration would submit the proposal to the Establishment Subcommittee for consideration in April 2008 and the Finance Committee for funding approval in May 2008.

41. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union supported the creation of the new deputy head rank for public sector primary schools. He appreciated the Administration for the proposed arrangements for implementing the proposal. As the proposal would entail a series of promotion exercises, he reminded the Administration to provide guidelines for school sponsors and the school management committees to select deputy heads in schools in an open, fair and transparent manner.

42. DS(Ed)3 responded that most of the public sector primary schools had already assigned qualified and competent senior teachers to take up the duties of a deputy head. The Administration would issue a circular to advise schools on the arrangements for the implementation of the proposal in due course. With the establishment and implementation of a participative governing framework in the school sector, there were sufficient checks and balances on staff administration matters in schools. Teachers might report malpractices on staff promotion matters through the existing channels if there were any.

Conclusion

43. Responding to the Chairman, members present at the meeting all expressed support for the submission of the proposal to the Establishment Subcommittee and the Finance Committee for consideration.

VI. Any other business

44. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 4:18 pm.