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Panel on Education

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 26 March 2008**

**Provision of financial assistance
for evening senior secondary education**

Purpose

This paper summarizes Members' concerns on the provision of financial assistance for adult learners attending evening senior secondary education.

Background

2. Before September 2003, evening adult education courses were operated by the former Education and Manpower Bureau (reorganized as the Education Bureau (EDB) on 1 July 2007). They included the Adult Education Course (General Background) at primary level, the Government Evening Secondary School Courses (GESSC) at secondary level, and the English Course at both primary and secondary levels. These courses adopted the traditional school curriculum and followed a rigid schedule. As they were not flexible enough to meet the changing social needs and the demands of a knowledge-based economy, the enrolment rates had been declining and the drop-out rates were increasing. The Administration therefore decided to cease operation of these courses with effect from September 2003.

3. To minimize the disruption to those students who had already been enrolled on these courses, the Administration commissioned non-profit-making operators to run the courses for two years from September 2003 with subvention so that the students could continue to pay the course fees at the level of the 2002-2003 school year until their completion of the relevant key stages of study. For example, a learner in Secondary 3 (S3) in the 2002-2003 school year would have completed S5 by the end of the 2004-2005 school year.

Financial Assistance Scheme for Designated Evening Adult Education Courses

4. Before the expiry of the service contract, the Administration proposed in April 2005 the introduction of a financial assistance scheme for evening senior secondary education (the Scheme) for three years from 2005-2006. The purpose of the Scheme was to provide an affordable pathway to facilitate adult learners to complete mainstream senior secondary education at designated centres. The course providers were non-profit-making and selected by EDB to ensure quality. Students aged 17 or above who attended these courses and fulfilled the following minimum attendance requirements were eligible for a basic subsidy of 30% of the course fees, regardless of their financial position -

- (i) at least 80% attendance; or
- (ii) at least 60% attendance plus an overall pass in the final examination; or
- (iii) at least 60% attendance plus inclusion of an exemption for the remaining 20% attendance to be proved by prescribed means including medical certificates or employers' certification of work commitment.

5. Adults fulfilling the above attendance requirements and passing the standard means test administered by the Student Financial Assistance Agency were eligible for full reimbursement of the course fees.

Members' concerns

6. The Panel on Education discussed the Scheme at its meeting on 6 April 2005 before the Administration submitted its funding proposal to the Finance Committee. Members supported the Scheme but raised concern on a number of issues. Questions on the subject matter had also been raised at Council meetings and during the scrutiny of the Estimates of Expenditure of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) in the past two years. The concerns of members are summarized below.

Mode of subsidy

7. Members noted with concern the substantial increase in tuition fees after the outsourcing of GESSC to non-profit-making service providers in September 2003, resulting in a significant decline in student enrolment. Members considered that in a knowledge-based economy, working adults who, for various reasons, had not attended or completed secondary education during their early ages should be provided with a second learning opportunity to enable their pursuit of higher education. As most adult learners attending evening courses came from low-income families, members requested the Administration to review the mode of

subsidy under the Scheme. There was a suggestion that the mode of assistance should follow that for the previous GESSC, i.e. with the Administration subsidizing all the courses, and students being offered full or partial remission of the course fees. As at 2003-2004, the course fees were \$1,220 for S4 and S5, and \$1,620 for S6 per annum.

8. The Administration acknowledged a steady decline in the student enrolment of evening adult education courses from about 6 800 in the 2002-2003 school year to about 3 200 and 1 500 in the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years respectively. However, the Administration pointed out that whether the continuing decline was merely a result of the outsourcing could not be ascertained. The merits and demerits of the outsourcing had to be assessed together with other education initiatives from a more comprehensive perspective. Contrary to the declining enrolment on evening adult education courses, the number of students taking other subvented courses, e.g. Project Yi Jin (PYJ), had increased in the 2004-2005 school year.

9. The Administration further pointed out that there were different subsidy schemes for adult learners of different backgrounds to pursue academic studies and vocational training. With the provision of nine-year free basic education as well as other training opportunities for adult learners, the Administration did not consider it appropriate to follow the previous subsidy model adopted for Government evening secondary schools. In the Administration's view, providing subsidy to adult learners direct would be more appropriate.

Scope of the Scheme

10. Members considered it necessary to expand the scope of the Scheme to cover evening junior secondary courses. They were concerned that working adults and new immigrants aged 16 or above who did not have the opportunity to receive nine-year free basic education would not be eligible for enrolment on senior secondary courses, and could not benefit from the Scheme.

11. The Administration responded that with the provision of nine-year free education commencing from 1978, most adults were qualified for enrolment on senior secondary courses. Adults without the requisite qualification could pursue the basic education courses under the Adult Education Subvention Scheme (AESS) first. 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. For newly-arrived adults from the Mainland, they might go back to school if they were under 21 years of age, or attend PYJ or other self-financing or publicly-funded adult education programmes if they were over 21. In the Administration's view, adults over 21 would be better served by focusing on specific areas of competence that would prepare them for employment, rather than taking a traditional academic programme of studies. As

the junior secondary curriculum and textbooks were designed for adolescents, they did not match with the needs and maturity of adult learners. The Administration considered it inappropriate to expand the Scheme to cover evening junior secondary courses.

12. Nevertheless, the Administration undertook to conduct a review in the 2007-2008 school year to assess the demand for and effectiveness of the Scheme, including its coverage and subsidy levels, with due regard to the potential impact of the proposed reform of the academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education, as well as the prevailing situation on continuing education.

Beneficiaries of the Scheme

13. During the scrutiny of the 2007-2008 Estimates of Expenditure of the HKSAR Government, members sought information on the details of the Scheme including the number of students enrolled on the courses covered by the Scheme, the number of adult learners receiving assistance, and the average amount of assistance provided per successful applicant. The information provided by the Administration is in **Appendix I**.

Relevant papers

14. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in **Appendix II**.

Council Business Division 2
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**Subsidy provided under the
Financial Assistance Scheme for Designated
Evening Adult Education Courses and student enrolment
(as at 24 October 2007)**

	Year 2005-2006	Year 2006-2007
Number of students enrolled on the courses covered by the Scheme	1 202	1 119
Number of adult learners receiving assistance	608	569
Average amount of subsidy per successful applicant	\$3,433	#

Tuition fees are disbursed to eligible students on a reimbursement basis upon their completion of the courses. The average amount of financial assistance disbursed to each student in the 2006-2007 academic year was not yet available at the time of compilation of the information.

**Relevant papers on
provision of financial assistance for evening senior secondary education**

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Education	17.2.2003 (Item VI)	Minutes Agenda
Finance Committee	26.3.2003	Administration's replies to Members initial written questions (Reply Serial Nos. EMB012, EMB017, EMB038, EMB062 and EMB076) Administration's replies to Members' supplementary written questions (Reply Serial No. S-EMB004)
Panel on Education	7.4.2003 (Item I)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	28.4.2003 (Item V)	Minutes Agenda
Finance Committee	1.4.2004	Administration's replies to Members initial written questions (Reply Serial Nos. EMB052 and EMB054)
Legislative Council	2.2.2005	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 31 - 41 (Question)
Panel on Education	6.4.2005 (Item III)	Minutes Agenda CB(2)1344/04-05(01)
Finance Committee	12.4.2005	Administration's replies to Members initial written questions (Reply Serial No. EMB043)
Finance Committee	6.5.2005	Minutes FCR(2005-06)7
Finance Committee	14.3.2006	Administration's replies to Members initial written questions (Reply Serial Nos. EMB058, EMB076, EMB078 and EMB139)

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Finance Committee	20.3.2007	<u>Administration's replies to Members initial written questions (Reply Serial Nos. EMB073, EMB191 and EMB198)</u>
Legislative Council	24.10.2007	<u>Official Record of Proceedings Pages 39 - 40 (Question)</u>

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