For discussion on 11 May 2009

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Prices of School Textbooks and Development of E-Learning Resources

Purpose

This paper is to report on the progress of the Working Group on Textbooks and E-learning Resources Development, particularly regarding school textbook prices and the development of e-learning resources in schools. Recent development on the prices of textbooks written for the new senior secondary (NSS) curricula will also be briefly reported in this paper.

Background

2.   The Working Group on Textbooks and E-learning Resources Development (WG) was set up in October 2008 to study the use and development of textbooks and electronic learning resources. The WG is chaired by the Under-Secretary for Education. Members include information technology experts, school principals, teachers as well as representatives from the Curriculum Development Council Committee, tertiary institutions, the textbook publishing industry, the Consumer Council and the parent sector. The WG will prepare a report summarizing the issues of discussion and make recommendations to the Secretary for Education (SED) by September 2009.

3.   The **terms of reference** of the WG are as follows :

(a)   to advise SED on the future development of textbooks and electronic learning resources;

(b)   to introduce e-textbooks and other alternatives; and

(c)   to examine the role of textbooks in supporting student learning and other related practices such as textbook provision, quality assurance and textbook prices, in the context of the Curriculum Reform.

4.   The WG is responsible for examining the provision and development of textbooks and learning resources in other countries/regions, studying the success factors contributing to the widespread use of e-learning materials (including e-textbooks), and formulating a strategic plan and implementation measures through collecting views from stakeholders, including practitioners from relevant fields and sectors. The work plan of the WG is attached as per *Appendix 1.*

5.   The WG has been collecting views from stakeholders through public forums, student forums, focus group discussions and questionnaire surveys. In February and March 2009, the WG organised three public forums and two student forums to collect stakeholders' views and comments. In total, about 500 people (including parents, students and practitioners from the Information Technology sector) participated in these forums and contributed valuable opinions to the WG.   In addition, an online questionnaire survey for principals and teachers was conducted in March 2009. Approximately 3,100 principals and teachers from 537 schools participated in the survey.

6.   While the WG is working out the long-term strategy to tackle the ever-increasing textbook prices, EDB has recently adopted prompt measures to address the issue of NSS textbooks. First of all, information of all NSS textbooks prices has been uploaded to the EDB website *earlier* than usual so that teachers have knowledge of the prices in the course of textbook selection. At the same time, a circular memorandum has also been issued in April to remind teachers of the importance of choosing textbooks taking into consideration their prices so as to relieve parents' financial burden. Furthermore, the Curriculum Development Institute (CDI) is collaborating with other educational organisations to develop both printed and web-based resources for those subjects that do not have textbooks (e.g. Liberal Studies) for uploading onto the website of the Hong Kong Education City (HKEdCity) for teachers' reference and adaptation when necessary.

Progress / Issues Discussed

7.   Broadly speaking, the issues discussed at the WG meetings so far could be grouped into two categories – (1) prices of school textbooks; and (2) development of e-learning resources.

Prices of School Textbooks

8.   Three aspects of textbook prices are being deliberated by the WG –
(a) textbook pricing; (b) textbook publication; and (c) textbook recycling.

9.   Regarding *textbook pricing*, the WG has explored some possible
measures to address the public's concern on textbook price increase in recent
years, especially in the face of the recent economic downturn. Overseas
practices have also been studied for reference in the WG meetings. There
have also been deliberations on different ways to closely monitor textbook
prices in the market, and they are briefly summarised as follows :

(a)   enforcing the 3-year rule in textbook revision strictly;
(b)   compiling guidelines on textbook publication for publishers'
      reference;
(c)   monitoring publishers' and schools' compliance with the
      requirements for textbook sale as trading operations in schools;
(d)   de-bundling textbooks from other so-called complimentary resources;
(e)   enhancing the transparency of information related to textbook prices;
      and
(f)   encouraging teachers to develop school-based resources so as to
      become less textbook-reliant.

10.   It is also worth mentioning that some WG members have strong
views on lowering the textbook prices through 'de-bundling' textbooks from
those 'complimentary bundles', including teachers' guides, audio-visual aids,
CD-ROMs, web-based resources, etc.   They strongly advocated that
publishers should 'de-bundle' textbooks from the complimentary resources
so that parents could be given the option of purchasing textbooks and
learning resources separately, and schools could have the freedom to select
these resources alongside other resources available in the market.

11.   On *textbook publication*, there have been preliminary discussions at
the WG meetings covering the following aspects:

(a)   government-led production of textbooks; and

(b) government to delegate or outsource the publication of textbooks to tertiary institutions and/or approved publishers.

This issue had also been raised by the public at the public forums. At this stage, there are not yet any firm stance or views established on this issue. In view of its far-reaching implications, the WG will further deliberate this issue at its forthcoming meetings.

12.   Regarding *textbook recycling*, there have been discussions on the feasibility of 'textbook recycling' where textbooks will be purchased centrally by the schools and then loaned to students usually for a certain number of years or key stages. When these textbooks are returned to the schools, they will be re-distributed to another cohort of students, so on and so forth.

Development of E-Learning Resources

13.   E-learning resources refer not only to e-textbooks or e-books. It embraces a wide variety of learning and teaching resources, ranging from simple materials (e.g. text in e-version, or multi-media objects on CD-ROM), to learning/teaching packages (e.g. self-contained on-line packages on a single topic with sound instructional design), to structured online courses encouraging interactivity among learners and learning facilitators.

14.   The use of e-learning resources in the classroom is a growing trend in the world.   WG members and stakeholders all recognise that the use of e-learning resources in the classroom is increasingly inevitable.   The crux of the matter is how e-learning resources can be used appropriately by teachers to provide a more flexible, interactive and student-centered learning environment so as to suit the purpose of learning, pedagogies and needs of students; as well as how textbooks can constitute one form of quality e-resources.

15.   The importance of building teachers' capacity in making use of e-learning resources effectively is repeatedly emphasised in both public forums and WG meetings. There are also several concerns raised in the forums, such as :

(a) adverse effects on students' eye health;

(b) copyright issues; and

(c) fewer opportunities to have 'face-to-face' interactions among peers.

16.   After in-depth discussion, WG members have arrived at a consensus that a *gradual* and *diversified* approach should be adopted to deploy e-learning resources in schools. Where appropriate, the WG may consider recommending a number of pilot projects as short-term measures so as to further study the impact in greater depth.

17.   To provide support to teachers for deploying e-resources to enhance students' learning, EDB is developing a depository of learning and teaching resources (the depository), initially for Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics and General Studies at the primary level. The depository hosts resources that are_categorized in line with the curriculum, and will be well structured with suggested IT-enhanced pedagogy and user guides. It is intended to provide comprehensive support to teachers to plan their lessons while at the same time allowing sufficient space for teachers to use the resources to tailor their own teaching.

Way Forward

18.   Relieving parents' financial burden of textbooks is always the concern of EDB. Many options and strategies have been suggested throughout the consultative process. These include government-led textbook production, government-approved publishers scheme, 'textbook recycling' options, 'de-bundling' textbooks from other complimentary resources, and enhanced transparency of information on textbook prices for teachers and parents. The WG will further focus on the feasibility of these different options in the next few months, making reference to the findings of the survey as well as the collected views from stakeholders in forums.

19.   All along, EDB is striving to enhance teachers' professionalism and empower them to produce appropriate learning and teaching materials to cater for the specific needs of their students. This has been done through well-structured professional development programmes, provision of

supportive resource/reference materials and school-based support services. EDB will strive to strengthen this aspect of work.

20.   The WG will continue to collect views from the public. Another online questionnaire was launched in late April 2009 to collect parents' views through the website of the Hong Kong Education City. The views collected and findings derived from the school survey and parent survey will be further analysed to help the WG consolidate the views on both textbook pricing and e-learning resources.

21.   A report of the WG with recommendations will be submitted to SED by the end of September 2009.

Advice Sought

22.   Members are requested to note the above progress of the Working Group on Textbooks and E-learning Resources Development.

Education Bureau
May 2009

Work Plan of the Working Group

● Making reference to the experience of other countries and regions ● Studying possible approaches to the development of textbooks and e-learning resources in Hong Kong	November 2008 to January 2009
● Collecting views from key stakeholders through public and student forums on the development of textbooks and e-learning resources ● Conducting online questionnaire surveys from March to April 2009 to collect views from teachers and parents	February 2009 to April 2009
● Analysing and examining the views collected from various channels ● Formulating strategies, measures and recommendations	April 2009 to August 2009
● Submitting recommendations to the Secretary for Education	September 2009