

**立法會**  
**Legislative Council**

LC Paper No. CB(2)1984/10-11  
(These minutes have been seen by  
the Administration.)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

**Panel on Education**

**Minutes of meeting**  
**held on Monday, 11 April 2011, at 4:30 pm**  
**in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

**Members present** : Hon Starry LEE Wai-king, JP (Chairman)  
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan (Deputy Chairman)  
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan  
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan  
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong  
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung  
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP  
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, SBS, JP  
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP  
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP  
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH  
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, GBS, JP  
Prof Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP  
Hon KAM Nai-wai, MH  
Dr Hon LAM Tai-fai, BBS, JP  
Hon Paul CHAN Mo-po, MH, JP  
Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG Mei-fun  
Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che  
Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-ye, GBS, JP  
Hon Tanya CHAN  
Hon WONG Yuk-man

**Member absent** : Dr Hon Samson TAM Wai-ho, JP

**Public Officers attending** : Agenda item IV

Mr Michael SUEN, GBS, JP  
Secretary for Education

Mr Kenneth CHEN, JP  
Under Secretary for Education

Mrs Betty IP, JP  
Deputy Secretary for Education (3)

Ms Mable CHAN, JP  
Deputy Secretary for Education (2)

Agenda item V

Mr Kenneth CHEN, JP  
Under Secretary for Education

Ms Esther LEUNG Yuet-yin, JP  
Deputy Secretary for Education (6)

Ms Cora HO  
Principal Assistant Secretary (Education Infrastructure),  
Education Bureau

Ms Nancy SO  
Controller, Student Financial Assistance Agency

Ms Teresa CHEUNG  
Deputy Controller, Student Financial Assistance  
Agency

Agenda item VI

Mr Kenneth CHEN, JP  
Under Secretary for Education

Dr CHEUNG Kwok-wah  
Principal Assistant Secretary (Curriculum  
Development), Education Bureau

**Attendance by invitation** : Agenda item VI

Subsidized Primary Schools Council

Mr CHEUNG Yung-pong  
Chairman

Ms LEE Lai-mui  
Secretary

Consumer Council

Ms Connie LAU  
Chief Executive

Ms Rosa WONG  
Head, Research & Trade Practices Division

Committee on Home-School Co-operation

Professor Paul YIP  
Vice-Chair

Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union

Mr IP Kin-yuen  
Director, Education Research Department

Hong Kong Educational Publishers Association

Mr WONG Wai-man  
President

Mr Rodney CHUI  
Vice-President

The Anglo-Chinese Textbook Publishers Organisation

Mr Edward WONG Sing  
Chairman

Mr MAK Ka-lung  
Representative

Hong Kong Subsidized Secondary Schools Council

Mr CHU Kai-wing  
Executive Committee Member

Mr LAU Chi-kuen  
Executive Committee Member, Area Representative

Coalition of Education-concerned Parents

Mrs Serenade CHAN  
Spokesman and Vice Chairman

Mr Clement LAM  
Vice Chairman

Ms Ann SO

Ex-Member of the Working Group on Textbooks and  
e-Learning Resources Development and  
Vice-chairman of Federation of Parent Teacher  
Association in Kwun Tong District

Family Affairs Committee of Democratic Alliance for  
the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong

Mr Vincent CHENG Wing-shun  
Vice-Chairman

Mr MA Siu-leung

Ex-Member of the Working Group on Textbooks and  
e-Learning Resources Development and Chief  
Executive Officer, Fung Kai Public School

The Hong Kong Institute of Family Education

Mr TIK Chi-yuen  
Chairman

Hong Kong Parents Association

Mr LAI Tsang-hing  
Chairman

Mr CHAN Sing-tat  
Secretary

**Clerk in attendance** : Ms Amy YU  
Chief Council Secretary (2)6

**Staff in attendance** : Ms Catherina YU  
Senior Council Secretary (2)6

Ms Judy TING  
Council Secretary (2)6

Ms Carmen HO  
Legislative Assistant (2)6

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**I. Confirmation of minutes**

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1424/10-11]

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 February 2011 were confirmed.

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

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1465/10-11(01)]

2. Members noted the letter dated 4 April 2011 from the Christian Zheng Sheng Association ("CZSA") concerning the relocation of its drug treatment and rehabilitation centres.

3. Ms Audrey EU said that the relocation of the drug treatment and rehabilitation centres of CZSA had been delayed for a long time. Members had been pressing the Administration to resolve the matter and to re-open the New Territories Heung Yee Kuk Southern District Secondary School as soon as possible but to no avail. She considered it necessary for the Panel to request the Administration to provide a concrete response by a certain deadline. The Panel should follow up the matters at a meeting if members were not satisfied with the Administration's response.

4. The Chairman said that upon receipt of CZSA's letter, she had instructed the Secretariat to request a written response from the Administration. The Administration would also be requested to provide in its response a concrete proposal and timetable for resolving the relocation of the drug treatment and

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rehabilitation centres of CZSA. The Panel could further discuss the way forward should members consider the Administration's response unsatisfactory. Members raised no objection to the Chairman's suggestion.

**III. Items for discussion at the next meeting**

[Appendices I and II to LC Paper No. CB(2)1444/10-11]

5. Members agreed to discuss the following items involving funding proposals proposed by the Administration at the next regular meeting scheduled for 9 May 2011 at 4:30 pm:

- (a) Enhancement of assistance provided by the Student Financial Assistance Agency to needy students;
- (b) Injection into HKSAR Government Scholarship Fund; and
- (c) Mainland Experience Scheme for Post-secondary Students.

Review of Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme ("PEVS")

6. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered it necessary to further discuss the Report of the Review of PEVS as soon as practicable given that the improvement measures to PEVS should be implemented in the 2011-2012 school year. The Chairman said that according to the Panel's list of outstanding items for discussion, the tentative timing for discussion of PEVS was June/July 2011. The Clerk was requested to relay to the Administration members' request for expediting the discussion of the subject matter.

*(Post-meeting note : The Review on PEVS had been scheduled for discussion at the regular meeting on 13 June 2011).*

Liberal Studies ("LS")

7. In response to Ms Cyd HO's enquiry on members' earlier request for information on how examination papers of LS were marked and some sample LS examination papers with good or bad grades, the Chairman said that the relevant information provided by the Administration had been circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1242/10-11(01) on 10 March 2011. The Chairman added that issues concerning the marking of LS examination papers would be discussed in the context of the progress report on the implementation of the new academic structure ("NAS") which had been scheduled for discussion within the current session.

### School net review

8. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung expressed concern about the school net arrangements, particularly the arrangements in the Islands District where many students had to travel a long distance to school. Noting that the Working Group on Review of School Nets ("Working Group") was conducting a review on the existing school nets, he suggested that the Administration be requested to provide a progress report on the review, particularly in respect of the Islands District. Members agreed. The Chairman said that members might further discuss the matter if necessary after considering the Administration's progress report.

*(Post-meeting note: The paper provided by the Administration on the progress of the school net review [LC Paper No. CB(2)1658/10-11(01)] was issued to members on 4 May 2011.)*

### Internet Learning Support Programme

9. The Chairman informed members that the Internet Learning Support Programme had been discussed at the meeting of the Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting on 14 March 2011 and members of the Panel on Education had been invited to join the discussion of the item. Members agreed to the Administration's proposal of deleting the item from the Panel's list of outstanding items for discussion.

## **IV. Progress of the Voluntary Optimization of Class Structure Scheme** [LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1444/10-11(01) and (02)]

10. Members noted the updated background brief entitled "Measures to address the declining secondary student population" [LC Paper No. CB(2)1444/10-11(02)] prepared by the Legislative Council ("LegCo") Secretariat.

### Briefing by the Administration

11. Secretary for Education ("SED") introduced the Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(2)1444/10-11(01)] setting out the progress of the Voluntary Optimization of Class Structure Scheme ("the Scheme") and the related issues.

### Netting arrangements

12. Mr TAM Yiu-chung noted from paragraph 5 of the Administration's

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paper that the Administration would address the concerns about "excessive reduction" of Secondary One ("S1") places arising from the implementation of the Scheme through netting arrangements, i.e. if there was a shortage of S1 places in a district, the deficit would be met by netting S1 places from nearby districts. He considered it undesirable for students to travel a long distance to school and sought information on the estimated number of students who had to study at schools in other districts in the 2011-2012 school year as a result of class reduction and the number of cross-net school places available for them.

13. SED responded that given the uneven distribution of student population and secondary schools among school nets, it had been a long established practice of making netting arrangements at the central allocation stage under the Secondary School Places Allocation ("SSPA") System to ensure a stable supply of school places in each district. The Administration would review the supply of school places every year and make appropriate netting arrangements taking into account factors such as the demand and supply of school places in each district and parents' choices. He would provide the requisite information after the meeting.

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14. Deputy Secretary for Education (2) ("DS(Ed)2") supplemented that netting arrangements, which was an established arrangement under the SSPA System, aimed at meeting the demand for school places in each district and more importantly, providing parents with more school choices. A few thousands of school places were available each year for cross-net allocation and such an arrangement was welcome by parents. The Education Bureau ("EDB") would continue to follow the general pattern of the present netting arrangements, in consultation with the SSPA Committee comprising representatives from primary and secondary schools as well as school councils and associations, for the coming school year. However, the number of schools participating in the netting arrangements might be different from the current school year following the implementation of the Scheme.

15. The Chairman said that notwithstanding the Administration's efforts to provide more school choices for parents, parents' choices were still limited under the existing SSPA system. Currently, Primary ("P") 6 students could only choose the secondary schools in the same school net as the primary schools they attended. She considered that the Administration should review the SSPA system with a view to increasing parents' choices, such as including residential address of students as one of the allocation criteria and relaxing the restriction on districts for students' first choice of school.

16. DS(Ed)2 explained the school choices available for students under the SSPA System. She elaborated that there were two stages in the SSPA, namely,



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the discretionary places stage and the central allocation stage. Applications for discretionary places were not subject to restriction on districts while in the central allocation stage, students could choose schools from unrestricted school nets and restricted school nets under two parts. On the Chairman's suggestion of increasing students' choices of schools, DS(Ed)2 said that there were requests from the education sector and the community for the re-demarcation of territory boundaries for school netting purposes and the merging of school nets from time to time and the Administration was open-minded in this regard. She added that in making netting arrangements, the Administration would take into account factors such as the demand and supply of school places in each district and the neighbouring districts, the locations of schools as well as the availability and accessibility of transportation means among school nets with a view to providing parents with more school choices. The Chairman pointed out that while students could apply for cross-net allocation of schools, they had a lower chance of being admitted.

17. In response to the Chairman's enquiry on the progress of the school net review, DS(Ed)2 said that the Working Group comprising representatives from school councils and associations was set up in 2006 to review the existing schools nets. The Administration had briefed the Panel on the progress of work of the Working Group when the subject of school net arrangements in the Islands District was discussed in February 2011. The Working Group would continue its work taking into account the demand and supply of school places as well as the planning and development of transportation facilities of the 18 districts.

Long-term measures to address the declining secondary student population

18. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong pointed out that according to the Administration's projection, the number of secondary school students would drop by about 15 000 students in the coming years and a slight rebound of student enrolment might appear only after the 2016-2017 school year. He was concerned that while the Scheme might be able to stabilize the overall situation of schools in the upcoming one to two years, it could not resolve the problem of declining secondary student population in the long run. Furthermore, for schools in districts where there would be a significant decline in the number of secondary school students such as Shatin, they might still face the threat of closure due to insufficient intake of students. He enquired whether the Administration would take any measures to help these schools sustain their operation.

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19. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong further said that small class teaching ("SCT") had commenced in P1 in the 2009-2010 school year and these P1 students would study S1 in the 2015-2016 school year. These students would find it difficult to adapt if SCT was not adopted when they proceeded to S1. In his view, the Administration should consider reducing the class size of S1 in a gradual and orderly manner so that by the 2015-2016 school year, SCT could be fully implemented in S1 to facilitate articulation of SCT between primary schools and secondary schools.

20. Noting from the Administration's paper that the Scheme could only address the problem of declining student population for the next two years, Mrs Regina IP sought information on the long-term measures to be taken by the Administration to address the problem.

21. SED responded that there were three ways to tackle the problem of declining secondary student population, namely, closure of under-enrolled schools, reduction of the number of classes and adjusting the number of students to be allocated to each class according to the changes in student population. The Administration had launched the Scheme as it could address the imminent problem of declining secondary student population by stabilizing the overall situation in the school sector in the upcoming one to two years and give the Administration more time to explore the long-term measures to address the problem.

22. SED further said that it was projected that a slight rebound of student enrolment might appear only after the 2016-2017 school year but further assessment was needed to ascertain the extent of the rebound. One of the significant factors determining the secondary student population was the number of children born to Mainland women in Hong Kong who would return to Hong Kong to study. The Administration would collect more information in this regard in the next two years to facilitate its assessment of the secondary student population. If a rapid increase in the secondary student population was expected after the 2016-2017 school year, one of the options the Administration might consider was to adjust slightly the S1 class size in accordance with the projected demand. The Administration would have a clearer picture on the pace and extent of the class size adjustments after collecting more data in the next two years.

23. In response to Mr Paul CHAN's enquiry on how the Administration would assess the number of children born to Mainland women in Hong Kong who would pursue secondary education in Hong Kong, SED said that a series of surveys would be conducted on the intention of these parents to send their children to study in Hong Kong. The Administration would compare the

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information collected with the actual number of such children returning to study in Hong Kong and adjust its projection accordingly. Mr CHAN considered such information vital for solving the problem in the long run and requested the Administration to follow up the matter. SED undertook to do so.

24. DS(Ed)2 supplemented that the Census and Statistics Department ("CSD") would conduct a population census in 2012. In order to make a better projection on the number of children born to Mainland women in Hong Kong returning to Hong Kong to study, CSD would conduct regular surveys on the intention of these parents. Since there was a six-year cycle for P1 students to progress to S1, the Administration would also monitor the trend in the number of P1 students in the next few years so as to have a more accurate projection on the secondary student population after the 2016-2017 school year.

Powers and remit of School Management Committees

25. Miss Tanya CHAN pointed out that according to the letter from the Chairman of the King's College Old Boys' Association dated 11 April 2011 to LegCo Members, section 22.2 of the constitution of the School Management Committee ("SMC") of King's College provided that "*...every question to be resolved during a meeting shall be determined by a majority of votes of the Members present and voting...*". However, the matter relating to class reduction in King's College had not been put to vote by its SMC. Miss CHAN queried whether it was legal for EDB to decide on the participation of King's College in the Scheme without its SMC voting on the matter. She also queried whether the Scheme was indeed "voluntary" if Government schools could not decide whether to participate in the Scheme.

26. Mr Tommy CHEUNG sought clarification on whether Government schools had the autonomy to decide whether to participate in the Scheme.

27. SED responded that schools should not be mandated to join the Scheme. In deciding whether to join the Scheme, individual schools should solicit the views of SMCs and other relevant stakeholders including school principals, teachers, students and parents, with a view to arriving at a decision best suited to their circumstances. He added that SMCs in Government schools did not have the remit to decide on class reduction. According to their constitution, SMCs of Government schools should adopt the Government's education aims and play a proactive role in implementing policies advocated by EDB.

28. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che was concerned that the Administration had failed to show due respect to the SMC of King's College in its handling of the matter. Referring to section 3.2 of the constitution of the SMC of King's

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College which stipulated that "*the SMC should adopt the Government's education aims, and play proactive role in piloting or implementing policies and initiatives advocated by the Education Bureau*", Mr CHEUNG opined that the word "*should*" did not mean that the school must follow Government policies. He enquired about the basis for the Administration's view that SMCs of Government schools did not have the power to decide on class reduction.

29. SED reiterated that SMCs of Government schools were not empowered to make decisions on class reduction. The purposes of having SMCs discussed the matter were to facilitate their understanding of the objectives and the impact of the Scheme, and channel the views of different stakeholders to the Administration for reference.

30. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che said that although the Administration had sought the views of the SMC of King's College on the matter, it had made the decision to cut class without regard to the SMC's views. The Administration had given the SMC a false expectation and the SMC might initiate a judicial review on the matter.

31. SED said that it would be up to the SMC of King's College to decide on the action to be taken in respect of EDB's decision on class reduction. He reiterated that it was stipulated clearly in section 3.2 of the constitution of the SMC of King's College that it had to follow EDB's directives and was accountable to the Permanent Secretary for Education.

32. Ms Audrey EU said that the incident of King's College concerned not only the powers and remit of SMCs but also the integrity and credibility of the Administration. She cited SED's remarks made at a media session on the Scheme held on 18 November 2010 that the Administration hoped that all secondary schools would decide whether they would participate in the Scheme according to school-based spirit and individual circumstances. In her view, SED had conveyed a clear message that participation in the Scheme was on a voluntary basis, which ran counter to his remarks made earlier at the meeting that Government schools did not have the remit to decide on class reduction. She sought an explanation for this discrepancy.

33. Ms Audrey EU criticized the Administration for having handled the matter poorly. EDB allowed the SMC of King's College to discuss the matter, but the Chairman of the SMC who was a representative of EDB refused to let the SMC vote on the matter notwithstanding that many SMC members objected to the school's participation in the Scheme. While the Scheme was "voluntary" in name, it was not the case for Government schools in fact. She opined that the Administration's poor handling of the matter had given the

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public a very bad impression of its integrity.

34. Referring to the letter from the Chairman of the King's College Old Boys' Association dated 11 April 2011 to LegCo Members, Ms Aubrey EU further said that during the discussions of the Bills Committee on the Education (Amendment) Bill 2002, the Administration had stated that all Government schools had their own SMCs to manage the schools and formulate school development plans. She requested the Administration to provide written information on the powers and remit of SMCs of Government Schools, setting out matters which were within and outside the purview of SMCs.

35. SED clarified that when he responded to the media's question on how the Administration would handle class reduction in Government schools, he had said that the Government, as the school sponsoring body of Government schools, had to actively consider the Scheme and should set a good example in the implementation of Government policies. He said that different stakeholders had expressed different views on the Scheme. The SMC of King's College was one with stakeholders having diverse views on the Scheme. Many Government schools were in a similar situation as King's College at the start but they managed to resolve the matter and come to an agreement in joining the Scheme after taking into consideration the interests of all parties concerned. He undertook to provide information on the powers and remit of SMCs of Government schools after the meeting.

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36. Miss Tanya CHAN said that King's College was the only Government secondary school in the Central and Western District and there had always been great demand for its school places. Parents and students would suffer from class reduction as the competition for admission to the school would be even more intense. She disagreed with SED's interpretation of section 3.2 of the constitution, pointing out that of the five sub-sections under section 3, four had used the word "shall", while the word "should" was used in section 3.2. In her view, the words "shall" and "should" bore different meanings and the word "should" did not impose an obligation. As such, it was not mandatory for SMCs to follow Government policies including class reduction. The alumni of King's College were disappointed that the Administration had not listened to their views and had failed to follow the requirement in section 22.2 of the constitution to put the matter of class reduction to vote. She urged the Administration to re-examine the constitution of the SMC for King's College.

37. SED said that the Administration had studied the constitution carefully and did not subscribe to Miss Tanya CHAN's view with respect to section 3.2 of the constitution.

### Class reduction in secondary schools

38. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that reducing classes in Government schools which were popular among parents would diminish the chance of students being admitted to them. However, parents who wanted their children to study in these popular secondary schools did not have the opportunity to express their views as they were not regarded as stakeholders. In his view, the Administration should strike a proper balance in implementing class reduction policy among Government schools having regard to their popularity as indicated in the number of students applying for admission to their S1 classes.

39. The Chairman said that while the community generally appreciated that the Scheme sought to address the issue of declining secondary student population, some parents were concerned that the reduction of classes in reputable Government schools would reduce the chance of their children being admitted to these schools. The Chairman shared Mr Tommy CHEUNG's concern that these parents who were not regarded as stakeholders had not been consulted and had no formal avenue to express their views.

40. SED explained that given the decline in the overall secondary student population, proportion-wise, the corresponding reduction in S1 school places would not have great impact on the chance of students being admitted to the schools of their choice. With the decrease in student population, students would generally face less competition for school admission. He stressed that the objective of the Scheme could not be achieved if only a small number of schools joined it.

41. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that the decline in student population did not necessarily mean a drop in the number of students applying for admission to reputable Government schools and the chance for admission to these schools would be lowered if they had fewer classes. He was concerned that reputable Government schools had to reduce the number of classes while schools which were not well run were allowed to continue to operate with only 61 students. In his view, schools which were not well run should cease operation while reputable ones should be allowed to maintain the existing number of classes. He stressed the need for the Administration to deal with different situations flexibly instead of adhering strictly to the policy.

42. Mr Albert HO shared the view that the Administration should adopt flexible arrangements to cater for different situations in different schools. Given the great demand for admission to popular secondary schools, the Administration should exercise discretion to exempt these schools from class reduction. As for under-enrolled schools, the Administration should consider

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implementing SCT to improve the teacher-to-student ratio to cater to the needs of students requiring more teachers' attention.

43. SED said that the Administration had indeed adopted flexible arrangements to help schools which did not have a high student intake by allowing them to operate three classes with at least 61 students in S1 (i.e. an average of about 21 students in each class). Under the new senior secondary school ("NSS") curriculum framework, a broad and balanced curriculum should be provided. A secondary school should be of considerable size for providing students with a broad and balanced curriculum to cater for the diverse needs of students. He stressed the importance for the Administration to put in place holistic and integrated education policies instead of implementing piece-meal measures. He added that the current policies had already taken into account the needs of all parties concerned.

44. Noting that the Scheme could only address the short-term problems faced by the school sector, Mr WONG Kwok-hing considered it more important for the Administration to come up with measures to enhance the quality of teaching in secondary schools and boost the teachers' morale.

45. SED said that major changes had been made to the local education system to enhance the quality of education. In 2000, the Administration had accepted the recommendation of the Education Commission to adopt NAS which was launched in the 2009-2010 school year. Following the implementation of NAS, teachers were provided with additional training and development opportunities. Significant improvements had also been made to the teacher-to-student ratio. The current teacher-to-student ratio in secondary schools was about 1:15 which was comparable with some developed countries/areas. The Administration would explore the feasibility of further improving the teacher-to-student ratio for schools which admitted students with special educational needs or with a large enrolment of low academic achievers.

46. Noting that a total of 200 schools would join the Scheme in the 2011-2012 school year, Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung sought information on the overall situation in schools and whether schools would no longer face the threat of closure. He further opined that in face of declining student population, the Administration should take the opportunity to reduce class size with a view to enhancing teaching quality.

47. In response, SED said that if the Scheme was not implemented, it was expected that quite some schools would not be able to operate three S1 classes in the 2011-2012 school year and such schools would have difficulty in

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sustaining development. The implementation of the Scheme would significantly reduce the number of such schools. While the Administration could not undertake that there would not be any school closure following the implementation of the Scheme, it would strive to keep school closure to the minimum.

48. SED further said that the Scheme had also helped enhance teaching quality. He elaborated that under the NSS curriculum, students could choose different combinations of elective subjects and hence more classrooms were required for split-class teaching. The reduction in classes would free up more classrooms or teaching space for the purpose, hence improving the teaching and learning environment under the NAS structure.

**V. Review of Examination Fee Remission Scheme**

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1444/10-11(03) and (04)]

49. Members noted the background brief entitled "Public examination fees" [LC Paper No. CB(2) 1444/10-11(04)] prepared by the LegCo Secretariat.

50. The Chairman drew members attention to Rule 83A of the Rules of Procedure concerning personal pecuniary interest to be disclosed which provided that, in the Council or in any committee or subcommittee, a Member shall not move any motion or amendment relating to a matter in which he had a pecuniary interest, whether direct or indirect, or speak on any such matter, except where he disclosed the nature of that interest. She reminded members to declare interests in the matter under discussion, if any.

Briefing by the Administration

51. Under Secretary for Education ("US(Ed)") briefed members on the proposed improvements to the Examination Fee Remission Scheme ("EFRS") administered by the Student Financial Assistance Agency ("SFAA") as detailed in the Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(2)1444/10-11(03)].

International recognition of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education qualification

52. Mrs Regina IP said that according to the information provided by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority ("HKEAA"), so far a total of 36 overseas universities had indicated their recognition of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education ("HKDSE") qualification for admission purpose. She noted that many of these universities had a low



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ranking and one of them was even unranked. She was gravely concerned that the HKDSE qualification was not recognized by many of the renowned universities in the United Kingdom ("UK"), Canada and the United States ("US") such as the University of Toronto, Queen's University and University of British Columbia.

53. US(Ed) responded that the HKDSE standard had been included in the Tariff System of the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service ("UCAS") of UK and could be compared with points awarded to different types of accredited qualifications in UK and other international systems for university admission purpose. As announced earlier by HKEAA, the Australian Government had already recognized HKDSE as being equivalent to the Australian Senior Secondary Certificate of Education. He further pointed out that the university admission system in US was different from that in UK and Australia. Universities in US enjoyed greater autonomy in admission and there were also many private universities in US. He stressed that the Administration had done a lot of work to promote the HKDSE qualification in many countries including US and Canada and assured members that there was no doubt about the recognition of the HKDSE qualification.

54. Mrs Regina IP said that according to a report in the Ming Pao Daily on 6 April 2011, the University of Cambridge and the University of Dundee, Scotland did not recognize the Combined Science and Integrated Science subjects under the new senior secondary ("NSS") curriculum for admission purpose. Pointing out that some 10 000 students had chosen these subjects, she was concerned about the adverse impact on their articulation to overseas universities.

55. Mrs Regina IP further said that parents, students and teachers had expressed concern about the introduction of new subjects, including Liberal Studies ("LS"); Combined Science and Integrated Science subjects; and Business, Accounting and Financial Studies ("BAFS"), to the NSS curriculum. Parents and students were worried about how examination questions would be set and how students' performance in these new subjects would be assessed. Some teachers found it difficult to teach BAFS which comprised three different areas of studies. She further pointed out that as the curriculum of BAFS was only at elementary level, she doubted its usefulness for students who wished to specialise in the relevant disciplines during their undergraduate studies.

56. In response, US(Ed) said that the introduction of Combined Science and Integrated Science subjects had become a trend in the education sector which attached increasing importance to the integration of subjects. In promoting the

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HKDSE qualification, the Administration noted that most overseas universities had expressed a positive attitude to the recognition of the qualification including the Combined Science and Integrated Science subjects. He undertook to provide for members' reference information on the local and international recognition of HKDSE.

57. Ms Cyd HO said that as HKDSE was a new qualification, it was incumbent upon the Administration to expedite its promotion to obtain international recognition of the qualification. As the recognition of individual NSS subjects by overseas universities would affect students' choice of electives under the NSS curriculum as well as their choice of disciplines in applying for admission to overseas universities, she urged the Administration to publicize such information as early as practicable to facilitate students to plan ahead.

58. Ms Cyd HO noted that the results of the first HKDSE Examination would be released in the end of July 2012. Given that many overseas universities required students to register before end of July, she requested the Administration to advance the release of the HKDSE Examination results to better align with the timetables for admission to local and overseas universities.

59. US(Ed) said that the results of the first HKDSE examination would be released on 20 July 2012. The date was fixed having regard to the need to ensure the smooth administration of both HKDSE and the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination ("HKALE") in the double cohort year of 2012. HKEAA had discussed the date of release of results of the first HKDSE Examination with the local universities which considered 20 July 2012 acceptable. As regards overseas universities, the deadline for admission of non-local students varied among universities. It was his understanding that some UK universities granted conditional offers to students subject to the results they obtained in public examinations. The Administration would continue to promote HKDSE to overseas universities and communicate with parents on the timetables for student admission to local and overseas universities.

#### Examination fee and fee for rechecking of examination results

60. While supporting the proposed improvements to EFRS, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed concern about the high examination fee for HKDSE. Based on the fee schedule for HKDSE, the total examination fee for a typical Secondary 6 ("S6") student taking six subjects was \$2,520, which was much higher than the average fee of \$1,000 for the Hong Kong Certificate of

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Education Examination ("HKCEE"). In his view, the examination fee for HKDSE was too high, considering that all S6 students would be taking the Examination and HKEAA should be able to achieve economies of scale.

61. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong further said that the fee for rechecking the examination results in Chinese Language and English Language was as high as \$1,085. Given the concern about the marking and grading of LS examination papers, it was expected that there would be many applications for rechecking of results of this subject. In his view, it would be unfair to those students who could not afford to apply for rechecking of examination results because of the high rechecking fee. He considered it necessary for the Administration to monitor the level of the fees, including that for the rechecking of examination results, charged by HKEAA. He sought clarification on whether there would be remission of rechecking fees for needy students.

62. US(Ed) said that the existing EFRS did not cover the fee for remarking of examination results. He clarified that the fee for remarking the HKALE results in Chinese Language and English Language was \$910 (excluding oral examination component) in 2011 and that for the HKALE results in Chinese Language and English Language in 2010 was \$890. On the setting of examination fees, he said that HKEAA was an independent statutory body which operated on a self-financing basis. To enhance the quality and reliability of the examinations, HKEAA had invested resources in extending the implementation of onscreen marking and double marking. The introduction of school based assessment also incurred additional costs. The fee schedule for the HKDSE Examination was set having regard to the recurrent costs of administering the examination.

63. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong reiterated his concern that the high rechecking fee and the lack of a fee remission mechanism were unfair to needy students who would be deprived of the opportunity for rechecking their results owing to a lack of means. He urged the Administration to review the level of rechecking fees charged by HKEAA.

64. The Chairman said that in considering the provision of fee subsidy for rechecking examination results, the Administration should strike a balance between ensuring fair access to the rechecking mechanism and preventing abuse of the subsidy.

65. US(Ed) noted members' views. He added that if rechecking examination results led to an upgrading of the results, the fee would be refunded to the candidates concerned.

### Eligibility for financial assistance

66. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that EFRS was one of the financial assistance schemes administered by SFAA which was subject to the means test. With the implementation of the statutory minimum wage on 1 May 2011, he considered it necessary for the Administration to review the income thresholds of the financial assistance schemes administered by SFAA to ensure that students who were currently eligible for financial assistance would not become ineligible due to an increase in household income arising from the implementation of the statutory minimum wage. The Chairman requested the Administration to provide a written response in this regard before submitting the funding proposal to the Finance Committee ("FC").

67. US(Ed) responded that the Administration had announced a series of measures in the 2011-2012 Budget to enhance support to students from low income families, including the proposal to relax the income threshold for full level of assistance under the existing means test mechanism of SFAA so that more students passing the means test could receive full assistance. The Administration would brief members on the details of these measures at the meeting on 9 May 2011.

### Reporting method for HKDSE Examination

68. The Chairman said that unlike HKCEE and HKALE which used norm referencing, HKDSE would adopt Standards-referenced Reporting ("SRR") to report candidates' examination results. There were concerns that the use of SRR might result in wide fluctuations in marks and increase in disputes over examination results. She enquired about the rationale for adopting SRR.

69. US(Ed) explained that the use of SRR was not new; it had been used for the HKCEE English Language and Chinese Language examinations starting from 2007. It was a global trend to use SRR which was an internationally recognized method for reporting examination results. SRR enabled employers and universities to understand the candidates' levels of performance with reference to a set of standards rather than their relative ability among candidates taking part in the same public examination. It also provided a good basis for comparing the standards and performance of students who took the examination in different years. More importantly, SRR could facilitate teachers to adjust the pedagogy according to the ability of students. He added that the downside of norm referencing was that it made learning a highly competitive activity, which was unhealthy. The long-term goal should be for students to adopt a mode of learning which suited their interests and ability.

70. The Chairman remained doubtful about the adoption of SRR for reporting the results of HKDSE Examination. She was concerned that candidates' results would be affected by the different levels of difficulty of the examination papers. She considered that the issue should be further discussed when the Administration reported the progress on the implementation of the new academic structure to the Panel.

The funding proposal

71. The Chairman invited members' views on the submission of the funding proposal to FC on 13 May 2011.

72. Ms Cyd HO said that she had no objection to the funding proposal but reiterated her request for the Administration to provide information on the recognition of individual NSS subjects by overseas universities.

73. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong also had no objection to the funding proposal but considered it necessary for the Administration to monitor the level of fees charged by HKEAA and put in place a mechanism for providing financial assistance to needy students on the rechecking of examination results.

74. Mr Paul CHAN shared the concern expressed by Mr WONG Kwok-hing on the eligibility criteria for receiving full and half level of assistance under EFRS. He considered it necessary for the Administration to provide information in this regard before submission of the funding proposal to FC.

75. Noting that the funding proposal sought to extend EFRS to cover needy students sitting for HKDSE Examination, needy students eligible for half level of assistance and needy non-Chinese-speaking students sitting for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (Chinese) Examination, Mr Tommy CHEUNG expressed support for the financial proposal which would enable more needy students to benefit from EFRS.

76. Concluding the discussions, the Chairman said that the Panel supported the submission of the funding proposal to FC for consideration on 13 May 2011. She requested the Administration to provide the following information to the Panel in writing before submitting the proposal to FC -

- (a) Information on the local and international recognition of HKDSE;
- (b) how the Administration monitored the level of fees set by HKEAA and whether consideration would be given to providing

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remission to needy students in respect of the fee for rechecking of examination results; and

- (c) the eligibility criteria for receiving full and half level of assistance under EFRS and whether any review would be conducted on the eligibility criteria for the financial assistance schemes administered by SFAA in the light of the implementation of the statutory minimum wage.

**VI. Debundling of textbooks and teaching and learning resources for pricing**

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1444/10-11(05) and (06)]

77. Members noted the background brief entitled "Debundling of textbooks and teaching and learning resources for pricing" [LC Paper No. CB(2)1444/10-11(06)] prepared by the LegCo Secretariat.

78. The Chairman drew members' attention to the submissions from the Committee on Home-School Co-operation and Mr Ma Siu-leung, Ex-Member of the Working Group on Textbook and e-Learning Resources Development and Chief Executive Officer of Fung Kai Public School, and the supplementary materials from Hong Kong Educational Publishers Association and The Anglo-Chinese Textbook Publishers Organisation on the subject, which were tabled at the meeting.

Oral presentation by deputations

*Subsidized Primary Schools Council*  
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1534/10-11(01)]

79. Mr CHEUNG Yung-pong presented the views of Subsidized Primary Schools Council as detailed in its submission.

*Consumer Council*  
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1478/10-11(01)]

80. Ms Connie LAU presented the views of Consumer Council as detailed in its submission.

*Committee on Home-School Co-operation*  
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1515/10-11(01)]

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81. Prof Paul YIP presented the views of Committee on Home-School Co-operation as detailed in its submission.

*Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union*  
*[LC Paper No. CB(2)1534/10-11(02)]*

82. Mr IP Kin-yuen presented the views of Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union as detailed in its submission.

*Hong Kong Educational Publishers Association*  
*The Anglo-Chinese Textbook Publishers Organisation*  
*[LC Paper No. CB(2)1478/10-11(02)]*

83. Mr MAK Ka-lung presented the views of Hong Kong Educational Publishers Association and The Anglo-Chinese Textbook Publishers Organisation as detailed in their joint submission.

*Hong Kong Subsidized Secondary Schools Council*  
*[LC Paper No. CB(2)1534/10-11(03)]*

84. Mr CHU Kai-wing presented the views of Hong Kong Subsidized Secondary Schools Council as detailed in its submission.

*Coalition of Education-concerned Parents*  
*[LC Paper No. CB(2)1561/10-11(01)]*

85. Mrs Serenade CHAN presented the views of Coalition of Education-concerned Parents with the aid of a video presentation.

*Ms Ann SO, Ex-Member of the Working Group on Textbooks and e-Learning Resources Development and Vice-chairman of Federation of Parent Teacher Association in Kwun Tong District*  
*[LC Paper No. CB(2)1478/10-11(03)]*

86. Ms Ann SO presented her views as detailed in the submission.

*Family Affairs Committee of Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong ("DAB")*

87. Mr Vincent CHENG said that DAB was disappointed that EDB and the textbook publishers had yet to reach a consensus on the details of the implementation of the policy of debundling of textbooks and teaching/learning resources for pricing ("debundling policy"), which had already been delayed

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for one year. DAB was concerned that textbook publishers had failed to take into consideration the financial burden on parents and had announced a 3% to 5% rise in textbook prices for the 2011-2012 school year. He urged EDB and the textbook publishers to continue their discussion and strive to reach consensus on the matter.

88. Mr Vincent CHENG then highlighted the four proposals put forward by DAB for curbing the increasing textbook prices in the long run. First, EDB should incorporate textbook price as one of the criteria for approving the inclusion of textbooks in the Recommended Textbook List ("RTL"). Second, EDB should issue guidelines to schools urging them to select textbooks with prices no higher than the textbooks of the previous school year, and to have regard to the affordability of parents in choosing textbooks. Third, EDB should consider publishing simplified textbooks and offered them at low prices. Fourth, textbook publishers should set prices for teachers' handbooks, teaching materials for teachers and learning materials for students and make available these materials for sale in the market.

*Mr MA Siu-leung, Ex-Member of the Working Group on Textbooks and e-Learning Resources Development and Chief Executive Officer, Fung Kai Public School*

*[LC Paper No. CB(2)1515/10-11(02)]*

89. Mr MA Siu-leung presented his views as detailed in the submission.

*The Hong Kong Institute of Family Education*

*[LC Paper No. CB(2)1689/10-11(01)]*

90. Mr TIK Chi-yuen presented the views of The Hong Kong Institute of Family Education as detailed in its submission.

*Hong Kong Parents Association*

*[LC Paper No. CB(2)1568/10-11(01)]*

91. Mr LAI Tsang-hing presented the views of Hong Kong Parents Association as detailed in its submission.

The Administration's response

92. US(Ed) thanked the deputations for their views on the debundling policy. He said that the Administration recognized the importance and value of teaching materials to schools and teachers. However, teaching materials that came with textbooks were not the only source of teaching resources and the



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costs of developing such materials should not be borne by parents through the bundled sale of textbooks and teaching materials. Teaching materials were also being developed by EDB and educational organizations. The Administration was of the view that the implementation of the debundling policy would help activate the market of teaching resources, including e-Learning resources. In support of the development of e-Learning resources in schools, EDB provided all subsidized schools with a one-off grant in the 2010-2011 school year, amounting to some \$30,000 to \$70,000 per school, for the purchase of teaching materials as required over a three-year period.

93. US(Ed) further said that over the past two years, the Administration had discussed with the relevant stakeholders, including schools, teachers, parents and textbook publishers, on the debundling policy. However, textbook publishers had yet to provide the prices of teaching materials. In the absence of such information, schools could not decide the teaching materials they need to purchase and whether they had sufficient resources to do so. He called on textbook publishers to provide the prices of teaching materials as soon as possible.

94. US(Ed) reiterated that if a school found that it had insufficient resources to purchase the debundled teaching materials, the Administration would assess the actual situation of the school and allocate additional resources through the existing funding mechanism for the purchase of necessary teaching materials. However, the Administration would not commit to allocating a specific amount of fund to schools for the purchase of the debundled teaching materials before textbook publishers released the pricing of such materials. Neither would the Administration agree to provide a special funding to make up for the shortfall in publishers' revenue arising from the implementation of the debundling policy.

95. US(Ed) further said that the debundling policy, coupled with the "five-year no revision rule", would be able to address the public concern about rising textbook prices. He also called on schools and parents to support textbook recycling programmes. He added that in order to reduce textbook prices in the long run, it was important to open up the textbook market for competition.

Textbook market and vetting and approval of textbooks

96. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong opined that the textbook market was not a free market because while schools decided what textbooks to use, parents had to pay for their high prices resulting from the excessive bundling of textbooks with teaching/learning resources. He considered it most unfair that parents had

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to shoulder the high textbook prices, which covered not only the costs of textbooks, but also the costs of complimentary teaching materials as well as gifts and donations provided by textbook publishers to schools. He further opined that in reviewing textbooks, the Administration should take into account not only their content, but also their price, recyclability and weight. He stressed that with the development of e-Learning resources, children should no longer be burdened with heavy schoolbags.

97. The Chairman said that the textbook market was distorted in two ways. First, parents had to pay high prices for textbooks not chosen by them. Second, the market was monopolized by a small number of textbook publishers and the lack of competition allowed publishers to raise prices without hampering demand. The dwindling student population also acted as a disincentive for new players to enter the market. In her view, the debundling policy was only a short-term measure which could at best help stabilize, and not lower, textbook prices. In order to curb increasing textbook prices, the long-term solution lay in introducing fundamental changes to the textbook market. The Administration should consider publishing textbooks itself, or commissioning textbook publishers with credibility and universities to publish them. Textbooks should be plain with little illustrations to reduce the costs of production. EDB should also simplify its vetting and approval procedure for inclusion of textbooks in its RTL with a view to bringing in more competition to the market.

98. US(Ed) responded that the debundling policy would create conditions for the reduction of textbook prices as it would help lower the cost of textbooks, thereby opening up the textbook market to small and medium publishers. US(Ed) further said that the Administration had been adopting a multi-pronged approach in reducing textbook prices, including implementation of the "five-year no revision rule", promoting the recycling of textbooks, taking into account the reusability of textbooks in vetting and approving textbooks and introducing more competition into the market.

Textbook prices

99. While appreciating that there were many factors affecting the costs of textbooks, such as the declining student population and changes of education policies, Ms Cyd HO said that these factors could not explain the 103% increase in textbook prices of the primary sector from the 1997-1998 school year to the 2009-2010 school year. She understood that due to heavy workload and shortage of manpower, many teachers had no choice but to rely on the teaching resources provided by textbook publishers. However, schools should tackle the problem of manpower shortage with the Administration and parents

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should not be made to pay for the costs incurred by textbook publishers in developing teaching materials for teachers. She noted that textbook publishers spent a lot of money on publicity activities, such as promotion of new books at five-star hotels, cross-border study tour, and providing gifts and donations to schools. She criticized that these unnecessary expenditures did not contribute in any way to enhancing the quality of textbooks but would only add to their costs. In her view, should these unnecessary expenditures be cut, textbook prices would be lowered by some 20%. She added that while it was the responsibility of the Administration to provide adequate resources to schools for the purchase of necessary teaching materials, the shortfall in publishers' revenue as a result of the implementation of the debundling policy should not be borne by taxpayers.

100. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that both the Administration and textbook publishers had the responsibility to reduce textbook prices. He considered that the debundling policy should be implemented expeditiously with a view to alleviating the financial burden of parents.

101. Dr Priscilla LEUNG said that the Administration should explore the feasibility of imposing a cap on textbook prices as suggested by some parents. She shared the view of Mrs Serenade CHAN that the promotion of e-Learning should be greatly supported. She was however concerned that teachers were not equipped with the necessary skills to meet the challenges of e-Learning.

102. In response to Ms Audrey EU's enquiry, Ms Connie LAU said that the Consumer Council had yet to conduct an in-depth study on the causes for the huge difference in textbook prices between Hong Kong and other places. Citing the information collected by the Consumer Council on teaching materials in Guangdong, Ms LAU said that teaching materials and textbooks were debundled in Guangdong. Textbooks in Guangdong cost about \$7.90 each while those in Hong Kong cost about \$80 each. Their teaching materials for the subjects of Chinese, English and Mathematics for Secondary one were priced respectively at about \$20, in the range of \$19 to \$36 and in the range of \$23 to \$25.9 per teaching material.

103. Mr MAK Ka-lung said that salary, rental, textbook content and student population were the four major factors contributing to the high textbook prices in Hong Kong. He pointed out that while operational cost such as salary and rental in Hong Kong was among the highest in the world, its student population was among the lowest worldwide. He also pointed out that the student population in Guangdong could be as large as about 1 million per level, while that of Hong Kong was only around 40 000 per level. He added that the

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frequent changes of curriculum had also contributed to the high textbook prices.

Textbook recycling

104. Ms Audrey EU said that many overseas schools and international schools had adopted the arrangement to provide textbooks to their students on one-year loan. Students were required to return the books to schools by the end of the school year and the textbooks would then be used by others students in the next school year. She invited views from the representatives of Subsidized Primary Schools Council on the feasibility of implementing textbook recycling.

105. Mr CHEUNG Yung-pong responded that there were differences in academic structure and learning culture between local and international schools. As local students were accustomed to making notes and doing exercises on their textbooks, most parents preferred buying new textbooks. Textbook hygiene was also a concern for many parents.

Teaching materials

106. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong pointed out that many schools had been provided with an excessive stock of teaching materials, many of which had not been used. He stressed that the situation of bundled sale of textbooks and teaching/learning materials was not desirable and must be rationalized. Schools should exercise judgment and select the teaching materials that were suitable for them, while the Administration should undertake to provide resources to schools for the purchase of teaching materials they needed. The Administration and schools should work out the resources needed for the purchase of teaching materials and textbook publishers should not be involved in the process.

107. Mr WONG kwok-hing considered that the crux of the matter lay in the timing of disclosure of prices of teaching materials by textbook publishers. In his view, the prices of teaching materials should not be set with reference to the amount of money to be provided by the Administration to schools for the purchase of teaching materials. He asked representatives of textbook publishers when they would provide information on the prices of teaching materials.

108. In response, Mr MAK Ka-lung said that textbook publishers had been urging the Administration to establish a mechanism for the provision of funding to schools for the purchase of teaching materials. Schools needed to

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know the relevant arrangements such as when to submit their applications for funding and whether an appeal procedure for unsuccessful applications would be in place. In his view, it was important for textbook publishers to dovetail the provision of pricing information with the implementation of such a mechanism. He stressed that the proposed establishment of such a mechanism had nothing to do with the amount of monetary resources to be allocated by the Administration for the purchase of teaching resources.

109. Mr MAK Ka-lung further said that textbook publishers were facing great difficulties in clearing the copyright of a large number of teaching materials which they had provided to schools free of charge. He pointed out that for the 500 sets of existing textbooks, there was a need to clear the copyright of some 900,000 items. In view of such difficulties, textbook publishers had proposed to the Administration in March 2011 to debundle the prices of textbooks and teaching materials only for new textbooks first. Should the Administration agree to the proposal, textbook publishers would provide the prices of the teaching materials as soon as possible.

110. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that with the implementation of the new academic structure, teachers were facing difficulties in preparing teaching materials. He shared the view that the Administration should allocate additional resources to schools for the purchase of teaching materials. It should also provide clear guidelines to ensure that schools knew how to access those resources. He further opined that in developing teaching materials, publishers should explore environmental friendly means such as using CD-ROMs rather than printed copies.

111. Ms Audrey EU shared the view that textbook publishers should provide information on pricing of teaching materials as soon as possible. In her view, the mechanism for allocation of funding to schools for the purchase of teaching materials was a separate matter. She considered that textbook publishers should first provide the prices of teaching materials, and it would then be for the schools to seek the necessary resources from the Administration.

112. Miss Tanya CHAN enquired about the deadline for the provision of information on pricing of teaching materials by textbook publishers if the debundling policy was to be implemented in the 2011-2012 school year.

113. Mr MAK Ka-lung responded that textbook publishers and the Administration would further discuss the matter on 14 April 2011. Should the Administration accede to the request of textbook publishers to debundle the textbooks and teaching materials only for the new textbooks, textbook publishers would provide information on the prices of the relevant teaching

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materials. He reiterated that owing to the copyright issue, textbook publishers were not able to debundle teaching materials from the existing textbooks. He further commented that the Administration had not offered any assistance to textbook publishers and had not consulted them on the debundling policy.

114. US(Ed) stressed that the mechanism for the provision of resources to schools for the purchase of teaching materials was a matter to be worked out by the Administration and schools. In the absence of information on pricing of teaching materials, whether schools had sufficient resources to purchase teaching materials could not be ascertained. Nevertheless, the Administration would ensure that schools were equipped with necessary teaching materials. Textbook publishers were not the only source of supply of teaching materials. As a matter of fact, EDB had worked with educational organizations and tertiary institutions to develop teaching materials for subjects for which textbook publishers had no interest in developing textbooks. Educational organizations and tertiary institutions had expressed interest in participating in the development of teaching resources, and the Administration would promote further development in this regard. He added that the Administration planned to hold a seminar in May 2011 on the support to be provided by the Administration to organizations interested in participating in the development of teaching resources.

115. The Chairman invited representatives from schools to further express their views on the provision of resources by the Administration for schools to purchase teaching materials.

116. Mr CHEUNG Yung-pong of Subsidized Primary Schools Council expressed the view that since purchase of teaching materials was a new expenditure item for schools, the Administration should provide additional resources to schools to meet this expenditure.

117. Mr CHU Kai-wing of the Hong Kong Subsidized Secondary Schools Council said that in addition to the existing provision under the Operating Expenses Block Grant ("OEBG") and Expanded Operating Expenses Block Grant ("EOEBG"), the Administration should provide additional resources to schools to meet the expenditure of purchasing teaching materials

118. While agreeing that the actual amount of resources needed by schools could not be ascertained before information on pricing of teaching materials was available, the Chairman asked whether the Administration would undertake to provide additional resources to schools for the purchase of teaching materials following the implementation of the debundling policy.

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119. US(Ed) responded that in support of the development of e-Learning resources in schools, EDB had provided all subsidized schools with a one-off grant in the 2010-2011 school year for the purchase of teaching materials as required over a three-year period. He further advised that the existing OEBG and EOEBG could be deployed by schools for the purchase of teaching materials. He reiterated that in the absence of pricing information, whether schools had sufficient resources to purchase teaching materials could not be ascertained. Nevertheless, he assured members that the EDB would assess the actual situation of schools and allocate additional resources for the purchase of necessary teaching materials if necessary.

120. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong pointed out that OEBG and EOEBG were not purported for the purchase of teaching materials. He considered it incumbent upon the Administration to provide additional resources to schools for the purchase of necessary teaching materials. On the amount of resources to be allocated to schools, Mr CHEUNG proposed that the Administration should reimburse the median value of the amount spent by schools on teaching materials. He elaborated that after textbook publishers had disclosed the pricing information on teaching materials, schools would purchase the teaching materials which suited their needs. Based on the actual amount spent by schools, the Administration would work out the median expenditure and reimburse it to schools accordingly. For those schools that had spent in excess of the median expenditure, they had to top up the difference with their own resources; for those schools that had spent less than the median expenditure, they could save up the resources for the purchase of teaching materials in the future. In his view, such a mechanism could prevent schools from purchasing excessive teaching materials on the one hand and help allay the concern of schools as to whether they had sufficient resources for the purchase of teaching materials on the other hand.

121. US(Ed) said that the Administration could only provide a response to Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong's proposal after it had ascertained the actual needs of schools. For the time being, EDB was not in the position to make any commitment on the proposed reimbursement of the median value to schools. He assured members that the Administration would continue to discuss with the various school councils on the matter.

122. Ms Cyd HO expressed concern that EDB and the textbook publishers had yet to agree on the implementation details of the debundling policy. She called on both parties to continue their discussion with a view to resolving their differences expeditiously for the implementation of the debundling policy in the 2011-2012 school year.

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123. The Chairman shared the view that the debundling policy should be implemented in the 2011-2012 school year. She urged the textbook publishers to continue discussion with the Administration on the matter.

124. Mr MAK Ka-lung clarified that textbook publishers had never declined to continue its discussion with EDB on the debundling policy. He expressed dissatisfaction that EDB had distorted the views of textbook publishers. He reiterated his view that textbook publishers could only work out the copyright issues of the teaching materials of the existing textbooks after a mechanism was in place for allocation of resources to schools for the purchase of teaching materials.

125. The Chairman pointed out that the Administration had already undertaken to sort out the funding arrangements for the purchase of teaching materials with schools.

126. Mr IP Kin-yuen of Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union said that it was inappropriate to compare directly the local textbook market with that of other places. He pointed out that unlike Hong Kong which adopted the user-pays principle in respect of the purchase of textbooks, it was the case in many places (such as the Mainland, Japan and the United States) that the government provided textbooks to students free of charge as part and parcel of free education. He considered that the Administration should review its role in the provision of textbooks, including its commitment in terms of financial resources and development of teaching materials.

127. Mr Rodney CHUI of Hong Kong Educational Publishers Association pointed out that the problems of the current textbook market were the results of the changes in educational policies over the past few decades and systemic issues were involved. He said that textbook publishers were prepared to debundle the teaching/learning materials from the new textbooks starting from the 2011-2012 school year. While new textbooks accounted for only about 5% of all the textbooks, he stressed that the debundling of new textbooks already represented a significant first step taken by textbook publishers.

128. While welcoming the commitment made by the Administration in ensuring the provision of sufficient resources to schools for the purchase teaching materials, Mr TIK Chi-yuen of The Hong Kong Institute of Family Education expressed disappointment that the interests of parents remained unaddressed. If textbook publishers would only debundle the teaching and learning materials from about 5% of the textbooks in the market, it would mean that parents still had to shoulder the high prices of the remaining 95% of the textbooks. He considered this unreasonable. He agreed that the



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debundling policy should be implemented for the textbooks for the 2011-2012 school year.

129. Mr Vincent CHENG Wing-shun of the Family Affairs Committee of DAB said that textbook publishers had been evasive about the pricing of teaching materials, an issue which had been discussed over the past two years. He shared the view that the funding arrangements for purchase of teaching materials was a matter between the Administration and schools and textbook publishers should not be involved. He also expressed disapproval that textbook publishers would only debundle the teaching and learning materials from about 5% of the textbooks in the market. He urged the Administration to make every effort to ensure that there would not be any delay in the implementation of the debundling policy.

130. Prof Paul YIP of Committee on Home-School Co-operation said that schools did not necessarily have to purchase teaching materials from textbook publishers. In his view, the education system should allow more time for teachers to develop teaching materials in accordance with their school-based circumstances.

Conclusion

131. Concluding the discussions, the Chairman urged the Administration to continue discussion with schools on the funding mechanism and with the textbook publishers on details of the debundling policy with a view to implementing the policy before the start of the next school year. She requested the Administration to provide a timetable for reporting to the Panel on the outcome of its discussion with the textbook publishers. She further asked whether, in the event that the Administration and textbook publishers could not reach agreement on the debundling policy, the Administration would consider incorporating textbook price as one of the criteria for approving the inclusion of textbooks in RTL.

132. US(Ed) responded that the relevant working group would further discuss the matter on 14 April 2011. The Administration would soon issue to schools a circular memorandum entitled "Notes on Selection of Textbooks and Learning Materials for Use in Schools" for the 2011-2012 school year, clearly specifying that schools were not allowed to accept any free teaching materials, any donations, or any form of benefits from textbook publishers. On whether the Administration would consider incorporating textbook price as one of the criteria for approving textbooks, he said that the Administration was open-minded on the suggestion but stressed the need to consult the relevant

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stakeholders. He added that the Administration would continue to provide assistance to schools in launching textbook recycling programmes.

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133. The Chairman requested the Administration to report to the Panel as soon as practicable on the progress of its discussion with the textbook publishers with a view to implementing the debundling policy before the end of the current school year. Members might further discuss the matter if they considered the progress unsatisfactory. She stressed that both the Administration and textbook publishers should work together to lower textbook prices to a reasonable level.

**VII. Any other business**

134. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 7:45 pm.

Council Business Division 2  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
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