

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)2693/11-12
(The minutes have been seen by the
Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 11 June 2012, at 4:30 pm
in Conference Room 3 of the Legislative Council Complex

- Members present** :
- Hon Starry LEE Wai-king, JP (Chairman)
 - Hon Tanya CHAN (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 Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
 - Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, GBS, JP
 - Prof Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
 - Hon KAM Nai-wai, MH
 - Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
 - Hon Paul CHAN Mo-po, MH, JP
 - Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG Mei-fun, JP
 - Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che
 - Dr Hon Samson TAM Wai-ho, JP
 - Hon WONG Yuk-man
- Members absent** :
- Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
 - Dr Hon LAM Tai-fai, BBS, JP
 - Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-ye, GBS, JP
- Member attending** :
- Hon LEE Wing-tat

Public Officers attending : Agenda item IV
Mr Kenneth CHEN, JP
Under Secretary for Education

Ms Michelle LI, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education (1), Education
Bureau

Ms Pecvin YONG
Principal Assistant Secretary (Further Education),
Education Bureau

The Vocational Training Council
Dr Carrie Willis, SBS, JP
Executive Director

Professor David LIM
President, Technological and Higher Education Institute
of Hong Kong

Mr Gary AU
Senior Assistant Executive Director (Corporate
Governance)

Caritas Institute of Higher Education
Professor Reggie KWAN
President

Mr Manhoe CHAN
Vice President (Resources and Finance)

Dr LI Pak-wan
Institute Secretary

Agenda item V
Mr Kenneth CHEN, JP
Under Secretary for Education

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

Ms Wendy CHUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary (Infrastructure & Research
Support), Education Bureau

Agenda item VI
Mr Kenneth CHEN, JP
Under Secretary for Education

Dr K K CHAN
Deputy Secretary for Education (5), Education
Bureau

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

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

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

Miss Meisy KWOK
Legislative Assistant (2)6

Action

I. Confirmation of minutes

[LC Paper No. CB(2)2263/11-12]

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 April 2012 were confirmed.

II. Information papers issued since the last meeting

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2189/11-12(01), CB(2)2327/11-12(01) and
CB(2)2332/11-12(01)]

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

- (a) submission from a member of the public concerning the appointment of the Secretary for Education for the fourth-term HKSAR Government [LC Paper No. CB(2)2189/11-12(01)];

Action

- (b) letter dated 31 May 2012 from English Schools Foundation ("ESF")'s Committee of Parents concerning the subvention arrangements for ESF [LC Paper No. CB(2)2327/11-12(01)]; and
- (c) letter from the Secretary for Education dated 8 June 2012 concerning the review on the subvention arrangements for ESF [LC Paper No. CB(2)2332/11-12(01)].

III. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[Appendices I and II to LC Paper No. CB(2)2265/11-12]

3. The Chairman said that as the Council meeting of 4 July 2012 was scheduled to continue on 9 July 2012, she suggested that the next regular meeting originally scheduled for 9 July 2012 at 4:30 pm be re-scheduled to 10 July 2012 at 10:45 am. Members agreed. Members also agreed to discuss the following items at the next regular meeting –

- (a) Progress of implementing integrated education in ordinary schools and the way forward; and
- (b) Final preparation in the run-up to the release of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education ("HKDSE") Examination results.

4. Ms Cyd HO said that members were very concerned about the level of fees for rechecking/remarking of HKDSE Examination results. She considered that the Administration should be requested to provide in its discussion paper for the item referred to in paragraph 3(b) above information on financial assistance to be provided to needy students in rechecking/remarking of HKDSE examination results, including its consideration of members' suggestions of reducing the rechecking/remarking fees and waiving the fees for students with financial difficulties for the 2012 HKDSE Examination. The Chairman requested the Clerk to relay Ms HO's request to the Administration.

IV. Start-up loan for post-secondary education providers

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2265(01) and CB(2)2265/11-12(02)]

5. 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 should not move any motion or amendment relating to a matter in

Action

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.

6. Members noted the background brief entitled "Start-up Loan Scheme for post-secondary education providers" [LC Paper No. CB(2)2265/11-12(02)] prepared by the Legislative Council ("LegCo") Secretariat.

Briefing by the Administration

7. Under Secretary for Education ("US(Ed)") briefed members on the Administration's proposal to seek the approval of the Finance Committee ("FC") to provide the following loans under the Start-up Loan Scheme ("SLS") to cover the costs of constructing purpose-built campuses mainly for the operation of full-time locally accredited degree programmes –

- (a) \$300 million to Caritas-Hong Kong ("Caritas-HK") for the operation of Caritas Institute of Higher Education ("CIHE"); and
- (b) \$670 million to the Vocational Training Council ("VTC") for the operation of Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong ("THEi").

The impact of start-up loans on tuition fees

8. Mr Albert HO expressed concern that institutions might transfer the burden of loan repayment to students by increasing tuition fees. He enquired about the mechanism adopted by the Administration to monitor the tuition fees charged by institutions applying for start-up loans, in order to ensure that they would not charge high tuition fees and generate unreasonably high profits from the self-financing programmes. Mr TAM Yiu-chung also echoed the concern over the impact of start-up loans on tuition fees.

9. US(Ed) responded that SLS mainly sought to offer loans to institutions for building campuses to operate full-time locally accredited post-secondary programmes. Start-up loans for campus developments were long-term capital investments on the part of the institutions concerned. Construction costs and loan repayments were normally amortized over a long period of time. Therefore, loan repayment in a given year was not borne directly by tuition fee income from students in that year,

Action

and there was no direct relation between the setting of tuition fees and the repayment of loans by institutions. To address members' concern about the level of tuition fees of self-financing programmes, the newly-established Committee on Self-financing Post-secondary Education, which convened its first meeting in May 2012, would discuss issues relating to the financial management of institutions. The Administration hoped that the Committee would discuss the issues and draw up good practices to be adopted by the self-financing post-secondary sector as soon as practicable.

10. On the monitoring of tuition fees, US(Ed) said that self-financing post-secondary institutions enjoyed autonomy in setting tuition fees for their programmes. To facilitate public monitoring, the institutions concerned had been requested to make public financial information on the operation of their self-financing programmes, and the relevant issues had been discussed at the Panel meeting in April 2012. The introduction of a monitoring mechanism on the tuition fees of the self-financing sector involved complex issues and required careful consideration. The Administration considered it important, as a first step, to promote transparency and good practices in the sector. He assured members that the Administration would follow up on their concerns about tuition fees through the Committee on Self-financing Post-secondary Education.

11. Mr Albert HO pointed out that some institutions charged expensive tuition fees although they were granted low interest government loans and had made substantial profits. Members would closely monitor the situation and would request the Administration to step in should there be no improvement after the implementation of good practices in the self-financing post-secondary education sector.

12. Prof Reggie KWAN, President of CIHE, said that CIHE (formerly known as Caritas Francis Hsu College) was committed to helping needy students in pursuing post-secondary education. CIHE had recorded a deficit in the past 26 years and Caritas-HK had been providing financial assistance to support its operation. It had been CIHE's long standing practice to set tuition fees according to teaching needs. CIHE had been granted start-up loans in the past and there was no relation between the level of its tuition fees and loan repayment.

13. Dr Carrie Willis, Executive Director of VTC, explained that in setting tuition fees, member institutions of VTC would make reference to factors such as the costs required for operating the programmes, the fees of comparable programmes in the market, and most importantly, the affordability of students. She also pointed out that there was no direct relation between the level of tuition fees and loan repayment. VTC would

Action

be responsible for repaying the loans and would provide necessary support to THEi with a view to alleviating the financial pressure faced by THEi in loan repayments.

14. The Chairman shared the concern about the high tuition fees of self-financing post-secondary programmes charged by some non-profit making education providers, which had caused immense financial pressure on students. She called on CIHE and THEi to attach great importance to students' interest and avoid setting high tuition fees.

Vetting criteria for SLS

15. Referring to Annex B to the Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(2)2265(01)/11-12], Ms Audrey EU requested the Administration to elaborate on the vetting criteria for SLS. In her view, the Administration should provide more financial support to institutions in meeting the costs for building campuses, such as through granting land or offering interest-free loans, so that students would not have to shoulder part of the loan repayments of institutions concerned by paying high tuition fees. She suggested that there should be separate vetting criteria for start-up loans for the construction of campuses and programme development. She also sought information on the utilization of the proposed loans on the programmes to be operated by CIHE and THEi at the new campuses as set out in Annexes D2 and E2 respectively.

16. US(Ed) responded that the land sites at Tseung Kwan O and Chai Wan East were allocated under the Land Grant Scheme at a nominal premium to CIHE and THEi respectively. The purpose of the proposed loans was mainly for the building of new campuses at these two sites. Deputy Secretary for Education (1) ("DS(Ed)1") supplemented that SLS aimed to provide loans to institutions in meeting the costs of purchasing, renting or building campuses for operating self-financed programmes, as well as enhancing teaching and other ancillary facilities. The vetting criteria for SLS included the proposed use of the loan, the estimated start-up costs and the financial viability of the applicant. When considering land applications, the Selection Committee would also consider whether the programmes to be operated by the institutions would meet the manpower needs of the community. The programmes proposed by CIHE and THEi, which covered the six new priority industries as well as the four traditional pillar industries, would complement the economic development of Hong Kong. DS(Ed)1 further said that aside from SLS, other support measures were in place to support the development of the self-financing post-secondary education sector. For instance, the Self-financing Post-secondary Education Fund with a financial

Action

commitment of \$2.5 billion had been set up to enhance the quality of self-financing post-secondary education.

Planning, design and quality assurance of programmes

17. Mr Paul CHAN declared that he was a former Council Member of Caritas-HK and was currently the Vice Chairman of the Executive Committee of Friends of Caritas. Expressing support in principle for the Administration's proposal, he enquired how CIHE and THEi would ensure that the programmes they offered were of good quality and met market needs.

18. Dr Carrie Willis responded that VTC had tapped views from the industries concerned and conducted market surveys in planning and designing the programmes to be operated by THEi. VTC had also looked into the qualifications of teaching staff and facilities required for the operation of the programmes. On quality assurance, all programmes operated by THEi would be assessed by HKCAAVQ. For professional programmes, THEi would also obtain recognition from the relevant professional bodies. THEi hoped that through the provision of quality programmes, its graduates would be able to secure employment in the trades concerned and contribute to the community.

19. Prof Reggie KWAN said that in designing the programmes, CIHE would take into consideration its capacity, relevant Government policies, the manpower needs of the community as well as the support to be provided by Caritas-HK. Market surveys would also be conducted. CIHE had proposed to operate hotel and tourism management programmes as well as podiatry and nursing programmes as students would be able to receive the respective practical training at the hotels or hospitals operated by Caritas-HK. As regards quality assurance, in addition to obtaining accreditation from HKCAAVQ, assessment by the relevant professional bodies, such as assessment by the Nursing Council of Hong Kong on its nursing programmes, would also be conducted.

20. The Chairman also expressed concern about the Administration's role in monitoring the quality of self-financing programmes. She enquired whether institutions concerned were required to submit reports to the Administration on a regular basis to facilitate the Administration to monitor the quality of the programmes and ensure that they met the needs of the community.

21. US(Ed) responded that HKCAAVQ was extensively involved in the accreditation of the programmes offered by self-financing institutions such

Action

as CIHE and THEi. As mentioned earlier by Prof Reggie KWAN and Dr Carrie Willis, CIHE and THEi had close liaison with the relevant trades and the proposed programmes were offered to meet market needs. He considered it not appropriate for the Administration to involve in deciding the programmes to be offered by individual institutions.

22. DS(Ed)1 supplemented that these self-financing post-secondary institutions wishing to operate degree programmes had to successfully undergo a comprehensive institutional review conducted by HKCAAVQ which covered, amongst others, the governance structure and internal quality assurance mechanism of the institutions. Each degree programme was also subject to accreditation by HKCAAVQ. In addition, the award of degree of individual programmes by the institutions concerned required the prior approval of the Chief Executive in Council. The programmes would be assessed by HKCAAVQ again once every few years to ensure that the quality was maintained at a high standard. She added that VTC had established a number of training boards under statutory requirements, and these boards comprised leaders from different trades who would give advice on the trend and manpower requirements of the industry to ensure that the programmes would meet the changing needs of the industry.

23. In response to the Chairman's enquiry on the accreditation criteria for self-financing programmes offered by University Grants Committee ("UGC")-funded and non-UGC funded institutions, US(Ed) said that UGC-funded institutions conducted accreditation of their own programmes within the ambit of their self-accrediting powers, subject to the external audit by the Quality Assurance Council, while self-financing institutions were subject to institutional review and programme accreditation by HKCAAVQ. The Report on the Higher Education Review 2010 had extensive coverage on enhancing the quality assurance system in the higher education sector. He assured members that the Administration would closely monitor the quality of self-financing post-secondary programmes.

24. DS(Ed)1 supplemented that HKCAAVQ would engage both local and overseas experts to take part in the accreditation of degree programmes. Reference would be made to local and overseas degree programmes and visits would be paid to the institutions concerned during the accreditation process. The accreditation criteria and process were in line with international practices to ensure that the standards of local degree programmes were comparable to that of overseas programmes.

Action
Admin

25. At the request of the Chairman, the Administration undertook to provide written response on the following –

- i. the accreditation criteria adopted by HKCAAVQ for programmes offered by non-UGC funded post-secondary institutions;
- ii. the time required by HKCAAVQ to complete the accreditation process; and
- iii. a comparison between the accreditation criteria adopted for programmes offered by UGC-funded institutions and non-UGC funded institutions.

(Post-meeting note: The supplementary information provided by the Administration was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2) on 2476/11-12 on 29 June 2012.)

26. Mr TAM Yiu-chung was concerned that should CIHE and THEi launch their proposed programmes only after the new campuses were put into operation a few years later, the programmes might no longer keep up with the manpower needs of the industries concerned.

27. Dr Carrie Willis responded that THEi's first intake of its degree programmes with a total of about 210 places would begin in September 2012. Most of the new degree programmes would be conducted in VTC's self-financed academic building in its Tsing Yi campus until the new campus of THEi came into operation in the 2016-2017 academic year. THEi would also use other VTC's facilities to conduct the programmes requiring practical and thematic training and a rental would be paid to VTC for the use of such facilities.

28. Prof Reggie KWAN said that CIHE would capitalize on the facilities of Caritas-HK and Caritas Bianchi College of Career to launch the new degree programmes and would not wait until the completion of the proposed new campus before offering the new degree programmes.

Financial arrangements for construction of new campuses by CIHE and THEi

29. Noting that the respective amount of loans to be provided to CIHE and THEi did not cover the full construction costs of the campus buildings concerned, Mr TAM Yiu-chung sought information on how the two institutions would secure funds to meet the remaining construction costs. He also enquired about the Administration's policy for determining the amount of loans to be granted to individual applicants under SLS.

Action

30. Dr Carrie Willis said that VTC operated both publicly-funded and self-financed programmes, and separate financial accounts were kept for its publicly-funded and self-financing operations. VTC had carefully assessed its financial capability before applying for the start-up loan of \$670 million from the Government. The balance of the construction costs would be funded by the self-financed operations of VTC.

31. Prof Reggie KWAN responded that CIHE planned to raise funds and might sell some of its assets to pay for the construction costs (i.e. about \$400 million) not covered by the loan.

32. Mr Andrew LEUNG declared that he was the former Chairman of VTC and currently a member of THEi's Board of Governors. He said that VTC had all along held a serious attitude towards the quality of its programmes. Notwithstanding that VTC could run degree programmes under the VTC Ordinance (Cap. 1130), it had voluntarily applied for accreditation for its programmes from HKCAAVQ. In his view, compared to self-accreditation, it would be more difficult for institutions to obtain external accreditation for their programmes. Given that the programmes of CIHE and THEi were externally accredited, there was assurance for the quality of these programmes.

33. The Chairman said that there was a great disparity in the financial support provided by the Administration to the publicly-funded and self-financing post-secondary sectors. She called upon the new-term Government to review the policy on the financial support to the higher education sector.

34. Concluding the discussion, the Chairman said that the Panel raised no objection to the submission of the funding proposal to FC for consideration.

V. Use and disposal of vacant school premises

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2265/11-12(03) and (04)]

35. Members noted the background brief entitled "Use and disposal of vacant school premises" [LC Paper No. CB(2)2265/11-12(04)] prepared by the LegCo Secretariat.

Briefing by the Administration

36. US(ED) briefed members on the latest position on the use and disposal of vacant school premises, including the planned allocation of vacant school premises for international school development.

Action

Number and use of vacant school premises

37. Referring to Annex 1 to the Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(2)2265/11-12(03)] providing a breakdown of the 20 premises which had ceased operation between the 2009-2010 and 2011-2012 school years, Ms Audrey EU sought information on the use and disposal of vacant premises of schools which had ceased operation before the 2009-2010 school year. She pointed out that some school premises had been left vacant for many years, which was a waste of resources. She further sought information on the average lead time required to put vacant school premises into use and actions taken by the Administration to expedite the process.

38. The Chairman also noted that although some vacant school premises had already been earmarked for school use, they remained idle for a long time due to various reasons such as delay in submitting proposals by the school sponsoring bodies ("SSBs") concerned. She enquired about the Administration's measures to avoid school premises being left vacant for a long time.

39. US(Ed) responded that the Administration would make its best effort to speed up the recycling of vacant school premises. For vacant school premises owned by the Government, the SSBs concerned had to return the sites to the Administration after the schools had ceased operation according to the established procedure. The Education Bureau ("EDB") would evaluate whether these premises were suitable for school or other educational needs. If not, the premises would be returned to the relevant Government departments as soon as possible for their consideration of alternative uses. For vacant school premises the site or premises of which were not owned by the Government, the Administration would need more time to liaise with the SSBs concerned on their use and disposal.

40. Deputy Secretary for Education (2) ("DS(Ed)2") supplemented that in the last few years, the Administration had stepped up the existing mechanism with a view to shortening the lead time required to recycle vacant school premises to within three years. Regarding the number of vacant school premises, DS(Ed)2 said that a total of 86 primary schools had ceased operation since the implementation of the policy on "Consolidation of Under-utilized Primary Schools" in the 2003-2004 school year. Of these 86 vacant school premises, 39 had been allocated/earmarked for school or other educational uses and 47 had mainly been returned to the Lands Department or Housing Department ("HD") for disposal to meet other community needs. At the request of Ms Audrey EU, the Administration undertook to provide a breakdown with

Admin

Action

the names, locations and the current/proposed use of all the vacant premises of primary and secondary schools which had ceased operation since 2003.

(Post-meeting note: The information provided by the Administration was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2) on 2522/11-12 on 4 July 2012.)

41. Noting that some vacant school premises had been earmarked for other educational uses, Ms Audrey EU requested the Administration to elaborate on such educational uses.

42. Referring to Annex 3 to the Administration's paper showing the details of eight vacant schools premises which had been earmarked for other educational uses, DS(Ed)2 responded that aside from school use, vacant school premises would also be used as decanting premises for schools undergoing in-situ redevelopment; reserved for future expansion of primary schools to meet the anticipated demand for school places through an open and fair allocation system; or special school use.

43. In response to Ms Audrey EU's enquiry on the current status of the four vacant school premises which had been returned to the Planning Department for consideration of alternative uses as listed in Annex 4 to the Administration's paper, DS(Ed)2 said that the Cheung Chau Fisheries Joint Association Public School was built on private land and the future use of the premises had to be further liaised with the land owner. Sir Ellis Kadoorie Secondary School in Shatin was used by VTC for vocational training. As for the Church of Christ in China Kei Ching Primary School in Tai Po and Sheng Kung Hui Kei Sum Primary School in Wong Tai Sin, they had been handed over to HD. The Social Welfare Department ("SWD") had expressed interest in using the former for welfare purpose and the latter was being considered by HD for housing development.

Supply of primary school places

44. Mr TAM Yiu-chung noted that over 100 students residing in the North District had to go to primary schools in Taipo because of insufficient supply of school places in the North District. The parents were dissatisfied with the arrangement and considered that the Administration should give priority to allocating school places in the North District to these students. Given that children born in Hong Kong to Mainland women and who were residing in the Mainland might return to Hong Kong for education, there might be an increasing demand for school places in the North District. He suggested that the Administration should consider re-opening the vacant

Action

school premises in the North District which had been earmarked for welfare purposes for school use. He also considered it necessary for the Administration to formulate a long-term plan to meet the future demand for primary school places in the North District.

45. US(Ed) responded that apart from using vacant school premises for provision of additional school places, the Administration was studying different measures to tackle the shortage of primary school places in the North District, which included re-provisioning of existing primary schools to provide additional classrooms and building new school premises subject to availability of resources. The Administration would also explore ways to reduce the pressure on the demand for school places in the North District from cross-boundary students by bringing home the message to parents in Shenzhen that it would be in the interest of young children to attend schools locating near their home and diverting cross-boundary students to study in other districts. Most of the vacant school premises in the North District were small in size and had only a limited number of classrooms. The Administration would strive to locate suitable premises to increase the supply of school places in the North District. As regards the vacant school premises in the North District mentioned by Mr TAM Yiu-chung, the Administration would explore the feasibility of arranging it for school use.

46. Mr Albert HO said that it was anticipated that there would be a significant increase in the demand for school places arising from the educational needs of children born in Hong Kong to Mainland women whose spouses were not permanent residents of Hong Kong. The Administration should plan ahead and reserve vacant school premises to meet such demand particularly in the North District, Shatin, Taipo and Yuen Long.

47. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung shared the view that it was important for the Administration to take into account future demand for school premises arising from possible increase in student population in determining the use of vacant school premises. He pointed out that it was not easy to identify sites for construction of new schools which would take years to complete.

Vacant school premises for international school use

48. Noting that the Administration had launched the Expression of Interest ("EoI") exercise for vacant school premises earmarked for international school use and would invite respondents to EoI to submit detailed school proposals at a later stage, Mr Albert HO was concerned that requiring the bidders to submit detailed proposals might complicate and prolong the assessment process. Given the pressing need for increasing the

Action

supply of international school places, he considered it necessary for the Administration to expedite the allocation of vacant school premises for the use of the international school sector.

49. US(Ed) responded that the Administration had made its best endeavour to allocate suitable vacant school premises for international school use as soon as practicable. In recent years, the Administration had adopted a three-pronged approach to facilitate the development of the international school sector, i.e. through allocation of greenfield sites, in-situ expansion of international schools and use of vacant school premises. In 2009, the Administration had allocated four greenfield sites to international schools and approval from FC had already been obtained to provide interest-free loans for meeting part of the costs for building international schools on three of these sites. In addition, suitable vacant school premises had been allocated to international schools undergoing in-situ expansion as temporary decanting campuses. Some vacant school premises had been successfully revitalized for international school use and the French International School in Chai Wan was a case in point. The Administration had recently identified four vacant school premises which were suitable for long-term international school use. Two of these premises were situated on the Hong Kong Island, where the demand for international school places was most acute. The other two premises in Kowloon were conveniently located and easily accessible by students living on the Hong Kong Island as well as Sai Kung where there was a growing expatriate community. The School Allocation Committee would study carefully the proposals and recommend the most suitable applicants for allocation of the vacant school premises through an open and competitive bidding mechanism.

50. DS(Ed)2 supplemented that EoI exercise was not a new arrangement. A similar exercise was launched in 2008 to invite international schools to express their interests in the use of vacant school premises. It was the Administration's policy to grant greenfield sites for a period of 10 years at a nominal premium and provide interest-free loans for construction of campuses to successful applicants of greenfield sites. For vacant school premises, successful applicants would be offered a ten-year tenancy at nominal rent. The same requirements as those in the 2008 exercise would be adopted for the upcoming EoI exercise. The Administration would enter into a service agreement with international school operators granted with greenfield sites or vacant school premises. The service agreement set out the standard of operation and performance targets of the school concerned as agreed with the Administration. She added that the level of tuition fees of all international schools was subject to the approval of EDB according to the Education Ordinance (Cap. 279).

Action

51. Regarding Ms Audrey EU's enquiry on the progress of allocating school premises to Harbour School, DS(Ed)2 said that the Administration was following up the case. The Administration would inform Harbour School and other interested school operators of the upcoming EoI exercise. Ms Audrey EU requested the Administration to provide assistance and guidance to Harbour School in its application to become an international school and in identifying suitable school premises.

52. In response to the Chairman's enquiry on the timetable for the school allocation exercise for the four vacant school premises for international school use, DS(Ed)2 said that the Administration had completed the consultation and discussion with the District Councils concerned on its proposals for deploying the vacant school premises for international school use. The Administration aimed to launch the EoI exercise by the end of June 2012. It was the Administration's plan to complete the school allocation exercise by around the end of 2012.

Vacant school premises for special educational uses

53. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that there was demand for places in special schools and some SSBs had expressed interests in running schools for students with specific learning difficulties. He enquired whether the Administration would consider using the vacant school premises to operate special schools and sought information on the eligibility for applying for the use of vacant school premises.

54. Ms Cyd HO pointed out that some special schools and schools for social development ("SSD") did not have sufficient boarding places for their students. In her view, the Administration should consider deploying vacant school premises located in remote areas or with non-standard provisions for the use of these schools. EDB should enhance its co-ordination role and proactively disseminate information on vacant school premises on a regular basis so that interested non-governmental organizations ("NGOs") could be kept abreast of the premises available for allocation. She was of the view that apart from allocating vacant school premises, the Administration should also provide funding to the special schools and SSD concerned for the refurbishment of the premises and construction of the required facilities.

55. US(Ed) said that in allocating vacant school premises, the Administration would accord priority to meeting educational needs, especially special education. The Administration had implemented improvement measures to provide additional places in special schools to accommodate students who needed to extend their years of study. The improvement measures were first implemented in schools for children with

Action

intellectual disability ("ID schools") where objective circumstances so permitted. For special schools the facilities of which could not meet the prevailing standards, the Administration would explore the feasibility of re-provisioning the schools. He assured members that the Administration would strive to seek the required resources for taking forward school building projects in accordance with the established procedures for capital works in order to cater for the needs of special education and would strike a proper balance in meeting different educational needs. US(Ed) further said that the Administration recognized the expansion needs of SSD, and EDB and SWD were working together on the matter.

Vacant school premises for non-educational uses

56. Mr Paul CHAN suggested that the Administration should consider leasing the vacant school premises which had yet to be earmarked for any use to NGOs or religious bodies for provision of community services. Flexibility should be allowed for leasing part of the school premises such as school halls depending on the needs of the organizations concerned.

57. US(Ed) responded that vacant school premises which were not suitable for school and educational uses would be returned to the relevant bureaux for alternative uses, e.g community uses. DS(Ed)2 supplemented that to maximize the use of vacant school premises, EDB would consider providing to the Home Affairs Department on a regular basis a list of the school premises which had been earmarked for long-term educational uses but were temporarily available for other community uses. She further said that under the existing arrangements, community organizations could apply for using the campuses or facilities of schools after school hours and during weekends to meet local community needs by paying a nominal rent.

58. The Chairman opined that the Administration had done little to encourage schools to open their campuses or facilities for community use. She noted that few schools were willing to do so and urged the Administration to step up its coordination role in this regard.

59. US(Ed) said that more and more schools were willing to open their campuses and facilities for community use such as activities for elderly learners after school hours. The Administration could not mandate schools to open their campuses or facilities for community use. Nevertheless, the Administration was optimistic about growing support by schools in this regard and would continue to encourage them to do so. DS(Ed)2 supplemented that some schools were not able to open their campuses for other community uses as they had organized tutorial classes or school activities for their students after school hours.

Action

60. The Chairman said that the Administration should collect information on the number of schools which were willing to open their campuses or facilities for community use and the opening hours. She considered it important to put in place a mechanism for interested organizations to apply for the use of the campuses and facilities of schools after school hours.

VI. Applied Learning in new senior secondary curriculum

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2265/11-12(05) and (06)]

61. Members noted the background brief entitled "Applied Learning in new senior secondary curriculum" [LC Paper No. CB(2)2265/11-12(06)] prepared by the LegCo Secretariat.

Briefing by the Administration

62. US(Ed) briefed members on the progress on the development and implementation of Applied Learning ("ApL") in the new senior secondary ("NSS") curriculum.

Review on the NSS curriculum

63. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that school-based assessment ("SBA"), which applied to almost all subjects for the HKDSE Examination, had created heavy workload on students. He asked whether the Administration would consider making adjustments to the SBA arrangements. He further said that students had grave concern about Liberal Studies ("LS") and Mathematics being core subjects. He called on the Administration to take into account students' concern and review whether LS and Mathematics should continue to be core subjects.

64. US(Ed) responded that in the light of the feedback from the education sector and teachers about SBA, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority had reviewed and adopted arrangements for streamlining SBA in the HKDSE Examination. The four core subjects, namely Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics and LS, were an integral part of the design of the NSS curriculum. Apart from the core subjects, a wide range of elective subjects were offered to cater for students' different interests and abilities.

65. Deputy Secretary for Education (5) ("DS(Ed) 5") supplemented that the Administration would conduct a comprehensive review on the NSS curriculum including whether Mathematics and LS should continue to be core subjects. The Administration would take into account the

Action

performance of students and whether the knowledge and analytical skills they had acquired from Mathematics and LS were helpful for their articulation to post-secondary programmes.

66. On the workload of ApL and LS, DS(Ed)5 said that there was no public examination for ApL. Students' performance was assessed by way of ongoing assessment tasks. Students were required to complete eight to 10 assignment tasks of different modes which reflected the nature of ApL (e.g. practical tasks, projects, written tasks). The Administration would conduct a survey to collect feedback from various stakeholders including teachers and students on the workload of the LS subject after the release of the results of the first HKDSE Examination and would report the outcome of the survey to members.

Recognition of ApL

67. The Chairman said that an educational organization had recently conducted a survey on 110 secondary schools to collect their views on ApL. According to the survey, of the 88 schools which provided ApL courses, three had decided to stop offering them. The respondents indicated that recognition of ApL was the major factor in determining whether to offer ApL courses. 59% of the respondents considered that ApL was not well recognized by students and 35% of the respondents were of the view that ApL was not well recognized by universities. The Chairman further said that although the Administration had provided grants to encourage schools to offer ApL courses to around 7 000 students, only around 5 400 candidates had taken the ApL courses. The number of students taking ApL courses reflected that schools and students were in general not receptive of ApL.

68. US(Ed) responded that there was growing receptiveness of schools to ApL generally, as evidenced by the increase in the percentage of schools which traditionally took in students of better academic achievement offering ApL courses. The concept underpinning the design of ApL and the recognition of ApL by the education sector could not be neglected. DS(Ed)5 supplemented that as ApL courses comprised elements of various professional and vocational fields, they prepared students not only for further studies but also for future employment. The Administration would keep in view the recognition of ApL by tertiary institutions for admission to different programmes after the release of the 2012 HKDSE Examination results. The Administration would also enhance publicity for ApL to promote better understanding of ApL and sustain its development.

Action

69. DS(Ed)5 further said that the Administration had conducted a survey on stakeholders and collected feedback on the impact of ApL on students. Most of the students who had taken ApL agreed that ApL had broadened their knowledge in the fields in which they intended to pursue future employment and had enhanced their understanding of their career aspiration. ApL had also aroused students' interest in learning and helped them acquire the skills for learning independently. DS(Ed)5 added that some schools might have difficulties in allocating resources for the operation of ApL courses. To facilitate schools to offer ApL courses, the requirement for schools to bear 25% of the tuition fees for students taking ApL courses would be waived for the first 10 student enrolments in ApL courses for each school starting from the 2012-2014 cohort. Furthermore, a safety net mechanism was in place to assist schools with financial difficulties in offering ApL courses.

70. Ms Audrey EU sought information on the pathways to further studies and employment for students who had taken ApL courses and the course provider of Legal Studies under ApL.

71. US(Ed) responded that as the first cohort of senior secondary students taken APL courses had just graduated in 2012, information on their pathways to further education and employment was not yet available. On course providers, DS(Ed)5 supplemented that the majority of the ApL courses were provided by tertiary institutions and Legal Studies was offered by the School of Professional and Continuing Education of the University of Hong Kong.

72. Noting from Appendix I to the background brief prepared by the LegCo Secretariat [LC Paper CB(2)2265/11-12(06)] the significant disparity between the number of students applying for certain ApL courses such as Legal Studies in the 2010-2012 and 2011-2013 cohorts, Ms Audrey EU enquired about the reasons for such disparity.

73. DS(Ed)5 said that the number of student applications for ApL courses depended, among others, on the number of participating schools as well as the number of course providers offering the courses. The courses offered by individual course providers might vary from year to year. She added that ApL courses might be conducted by the course providers at their own venues or, for schools with adequate number of student enrolments, at the premises of the schools concerned.

74. Ms Cyd HO said that most parents would prefer their children pursuing higher education to entering the workforce upon completion of their secondary studies. She was of the view that ApL courses should be

Action

less vocational-oriented. Instead of focusing on practical vocational skills, the courses should aim to broaden students' knowledge base to facilitate their future career development in different fields.

75. Ms Cyd HO further said that the low number of student applications for ApL courses might be attributable to the high course fees. Economically disadvantaged students might not choose the courses because they could hardly afford the fees. They might also not be able to afford the transportation expenses if the courses were conducted outside their schools. She suggested that the Administration should conduct a survey on students who did not take ApL courses to find out their reasons for not choosing the courses and formulate appropriate strategies to promote ApL.

76. US(Ed) said that it was the Administration's aim to strike a proper balance between academic knowledge and practical vocational skills in ApL courses. The design of ApL courses strived to cater for students' different needs, and the knowledge and skills acquired by students from ApL courses were well recognized by tertiary institutions and employers.

77. DS(Ed)5 supplemented that apart from imparting practical skills, ApL courses also aimed to develop students' inter-personal, generic and thinking skills, as well as innovation and entrepreneurship. She further pointed out that there would be possible synergies between ApL courses and other elective subjects under the NSS curriculum. Through a sound combination of ApL courses and other elective subjects, students would be able to grasp the development of the professions of their interests at an early opportunity. She undertook to consider Ms Cyd Ho's suggestion of conducting a survey on students who did not take ApL courses.

VII. Any other business

78. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:28 pm.