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Panel on Education

Meeting on 11 May 2018

Background brief on Gifted Education Fund

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the Gifted Education Fund ("GE Fund") and summarizes the views and concerns expressed by Members when related issues were discussed by the relevant committees of the Legislative Council.

Background

2. In 1990, the Education Commission Report No. 4 initiated the development of gifted education in Hong Kong. In 2000, the current gifted education policy was formulated. It operates under a three-tier framework¹ in which on-site and off-school support is provided to schools in facilitating them to cater for the educational needs of gifted students and foster their multiple potentials. In 2008, the Administration established the Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education² ("HKAGE") to provide more structured, articulated and challenging off-site programmes³ for students with exceptional talents, and to promote the concepts and practices of gifted education to support teachers and parents.

¹ Level 1 refers to using pedagogies that could tap the potential of students in creativity, critical thinking, problem solving or leadership in the classroom. Level 2 refers to offering pull-out programmes in disciplinary or interdisciplinary areas for the more able students within the school. Level 3 refers to the provision of leaning opportunities for the exceptionally gifted students in the form of specialist training outside the school setting.

² HKAGE was established as a private company limited by guarantee with a start-up funding of \$200 million which comprised a donation of \$100 million from Sir Joseph Hotung and a one-off grant of \$100 million approved by the Finance Committee in January 2007.

³ At present, almost all courses provided by HKAGE are free of charge. Only second line programmes and services for parents and teachers are subject to a modest fee.

3. In the 2016 Policy Address, the then Chief Executive announced the establishment of an \$800-million GE Fund to generate investment income to provide a regular revenue source to support HKAGE's operation and the development of gifted education. The relevant funding proposal was approved by the Finance Committee ("FC") in June 2016. The GE Fund was established as a trust fund under the Permanent Secretary for Education Incorporated as its trustee. It is managed in accordance with a trust deed which stipulates the framework and the salient features necessary for its proper management and administration. An Advisory Committee on Gifted Education⁴ was set up to advise the Secretary for Education on the use of the GE fund and the development of gifted education. The Education Bureau ("EDB") provides secretariat support to the Advisory Committee and absorb the relevant administrative expenses.

4. In the 2018-2019 Budget, the Financial Secretary proposed to inject \$800 million into GE Fund to enhance gifted student development.

Major views and concerns

5. The proposal for establishing GE Fund was discussed by the Panel on Education ("the Panel") on 11 April 2016, and considered by FC on 24 and 28 June 2016. The major views and concerns raised by Members are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

Funding arrangements

6. Members sought justifications for establishing the GE Fund, instead of providing recurrent funding to support HKAGE's operation. The Administration advised that the GE Fund, together with its expected investment return based on 3% to 4% per annum, would provide a stable source of funding to support the operation of HKAGE and new school-based gifted education-related initiatives.

7. Some Members expressed concern that EDB might make use of a small portion of the principal if the cumulative income from investment returns of the GE Fund was insufficient to meet the funding shortfall of HKAGE in a particular year. It was suggested that the amount of the GE Fund should be increased to generate more investment returns so as to

⁴ Chaired by Dr PANG Yiu-kai, Deputy Managing Director of Jardine Matheson Limited, the Advisory Committee comprises representatives from tertiary institutions, schools, the public sector, parents, experts with knowledge on local and overseas gifted education practices, professional/youth bodies, and ex-officio members from EDB.

reduce the need to use the principal. The Administration pointed out that HKAGE's estimated expenditure in 2015-2016 was \$34.3 million. Under the principle of fiscal prudence, the Administration considered that \$800 million would be an appropriate amount for the GE Fund. In addition to the investment returns of the GE Fund, HKAGE would continue to explore other sources of funding, such as seeking donations and sponsorship from the business sector.

8. There was a concern that HKAGE's acceptance of sponsorship from the business sector would affect its operation or development direction. The Administration advised that HKAGE's start-up funding of \$200 million had been a major source of income for its operation. HKAGE's initial plan was to seek sponsorship from the business sector for the disadvantaged students to participate in local and overseas courses on Gifted Education and for HKAGE to train and organise a Hong Kong Delegation to participate in international competitions around the world.

Gifted education in Hong Kong

9. Members noted that only about 1% to 2% of the student population in neighbouring countries would be identified as gifted for receiving special gifted programmes. However, HKAGE expected that the total number of its student members would reach 5% of the total primary and secondary school student population in Hong Kong in the 2024-2025 school year. Some Members sought reasons for the relatively high percentage in Hong Kong. The Administration explained that Hong Kong's neighbouring countries and regions had attached great importance to gifted education and each of them had a different mode of training. Hence, the percentage of gifted students receiving gifted education services in various places could serve as general reference, but direct comparison of such figures might be inappropriate.

10. Some Members were worried that HKAGE's selection mechanism for gifted students and focus on encouraging students to participate in competitions might lead to continuous drilling exercise from schools and parents, and bring about a sense of failure to those who could not win in the competitions. They were also concerned that gifted education would only benefit students from prestigious schools, leading to possible partiality in the use of the GE Fund. There was a view that HKAGE should make public the details of its selection criteria to enhance transparency.

11. The Administration and HKAGE advised that HKAGE's gifted education programmes were designed to provide gifted students with

challenging learning experiences and stretch student potential to the full. These programmes should not be compared with those which emphasized meaningless, mechanical drilling exercises. In fact, students could develop positive attitudes and values, such as learning from failure, through taking part in competitions. Information on students' achievements in competitions could also serve as quantifiable indicators for the implementation of gifted education. As regards Members' concern on the use of the GE Fund, the Administration and HKAGE stressed that students of HKAGE were recruited from schools in different districts of Hong Kong and there was a limit on the number of nominations that each school could make. Nonetheless, HKAGE would take on board the suggestion of making public the details of its selection criteria for gifted students.

12. According to HKAGE, it had not set any specific quantitative targets for its initiatives nor conducted tracking surveys to keep track of the performance of its student members. However, its questionnaire surveys had indicated that students who had enrolled in HKAGE's programmes performed better than those who had not. Members considered it useful for HKAGE to conduct tracking surveys on the performance of gifted students in their higher education and careers.

Support measures for teachers, gifted students and their parents

13. Members enquired whether there was sufficient training to enable teachers and parents to identify gifted students at an early stage. The Administration advised that EDB and HKAGE had all along been providing Professional Development Programmes to teachers to facilitate the effective identification of gifted students, implementation and development of gifted education programmes in school context. The Education University of Hong Kong also offered electives on gifted education to its students. HKAGE would also step up its promotional efforts to enhance public understanding of gifted education.

14. Some Members considered that HKAGE should help gifted students improve their competency in other academic subjects in which their performance was weaker. HKAGE advised that apart from the courses of their gifted domains, its student members could also take elective courses in other different domains of their choice. New programmes including advanced career development courses, mentorship programmes and international elite student activities for exceptionally gifted students would be provided. The provision of programmes to cater for the affective needs of these students would also be scaled up.

15. Members noted that HKAGE's programmes were mainly organized in the campus of the University of Hong Kong or the Chinese University of Hong Kong. They were concerned that this would impose heavy burden of transport expenses on grassroot students living in the New Territories, thereby discouraging them from joining the programmes. HKAGE advised that courses were also offered in some schools in districts such as Tai Po and Tin Shui Wai. The Administration added that with the establishment of the GE Fund, HKAGE could consider offering transport subsidies to its members in need in the future.

16. As parents of gifted students often held over-high expectations of their gifted children and some of these students had poor social skills, some Members considered it necessary to provide support for parents of gifted students so that these students could grow up normally. HKAGE advised that different types of courses were offered to its members' parents so as to enhance their understanding of gifted education, strengthen their parenting approach and create a more suitable environment for the growth of gifted students. HKAGE had also provided an interactive platform for mutual learning and sharing of experience among its members' parents.

Latest position

17. At the Panel meeting on 11 May 2018, the Administration will brief members on the purpose of and justification for the proposed further injection of \$800 million to GE Fund.

Relevant papers

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

List of relevant papers

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Education	11.4.2016 (Item VI)	Agenda Minutes
Finance Committee	24.6.2016	Agenda Minutes FC281/15-16(01)
Finance Committee	28.6.2016	Agenda Minutes

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