

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(4)1173/20-21
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by the Administration)

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Panel on Education

Minutes of meeting
held on Friday, 5 February 2021 at 10:45 am
in Conference Room 1 of the Legislative Council Complex

- Members present** : Hon Alice MAK Mei-kuen, BBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, GBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, GBS, JP
Hon Starry LEE Wai-king, SBS, JP
Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon Michael TIEN Puk-sun, BBS, JP
Hon MA Fung-kwok, GBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Che-cheung, SBS, MH, JP
Hon KWOK Wai-keung, JP
Hon Elizabeth QUAT, BBS, JP
Dr Hon CHIANG Lai-wan, SBS, JP
Ir Dr Hon LO Wai-kwok, SBS, MH, JP
Hon Jimmy NG Wing-ka, BBS, JP
Dr Hon Junius HO Kwan-yiu, JP
Hon Holden CHOW Ho-ding
Hon YUNG Hoi-yan, JP
Hon CHEUNG Kwok-kwan, JP
Hon LAU Kwok-fan, MH
Dr Hon CHENG Chung-tai
Hon Vincent CHENG Wing-shun, MH, JP
- Members attending** : Hon WONG Ting-kwong, GBS, JP
Hon SHIU Ka-fai, JP

Member absent : Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG Mei-fun, SBS, JP (Chairman)

Public Officers attending : Agenda item III

Mr Kevin YEUNG, JP
Secretary for Education

Mrs HONG CHAN Tsui-wah
Deputy Secretary for Education (5)

Ms Wendy AU
Principal Assistant Secretary (Education Infrastructure)
Education Bureau

Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority

Dr SO Kwok-sang
Secretary General

Agenda item IV

Dr CHOI Yuk-lin, JP
Under Secretary for Education

Mr Philip HAR
Principal Assistant Secretary
(Infrastructure and Research Support)
Education Bureau

Clerk in attendance : Ms Angel WONG
Chief Council Secretary (4)4

Staff in attendance : Miss Wincy LO
Senior Council Secretary (4)4

Ms Rachel WONG
Council Secretary (4)4

Ms Sandy HAU
Legislative Assistant (4)4

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I. Information paper(s) issued since the last meeting

(LC Paper No. CB(4)375/20-21(01) -- Information paper entitled "Implementation of Various Initiatives of the Language Fund" provided by the Administration)

Members noted the above paper issued since the last meeting.

II. Items for discussion at the next meeting

(Appendix I to LC Paper No. CB(4)455/20-21 -- List of outstanding items for discussion

Appendix II to LC Paper No. CB(4)455/20-21 -- List of follow-up actions)

2. Members agreed that the following items would be discussed at the next regular meeting on 5 March 2021 at 10:45 am:

- (a) Review of the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap. 320);
- (b) Educational and boarding services for students provided by special schools; and
- (c) Retitling of The Open University of Hong Kong.

3. Mrs Regina IP suggested that the Panel or the Subcommittee to Study the Development of Textbooks and Teaching Materials for Kindergartens, Primary and Secondary Schools ("the Subcommittee") should discuss the recently announced guidelines and curriculum arrangements for safeguarding national security and national security education. The Deputy Chairman undertook to relay the suggestion to the Chairman for consideration.

4. The Deputy Chairman informed members that a special meeting had been scheduled for 25 February 2021 to discuss the policy and support strategies on preventing and handling school bullying. The meeting arrangements had been issued to members via LC Paper No. CB(4)476/20-21.

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III. The financial structure of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority and initial thoughts on its long-term funding options

(LC Paper No. CB(4)455/20-21(01) -- Paper provided by the Administration

LC Paper No. CB(4)475/20-21(01) -- Background brief on issues related to the financial structure of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat)

5. The Deputy Chairman reminded members that according to the Administration, the discussion item was not a financial proposal.

Briefing by the Administration

6. The Secretary for Education ("SED") briefed members on the current financial structure of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority ("HKEAA") and the initial thoughts on the long-term funding options, details of which were set out in the Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(4)455/20-21(01)].

Discussion

Cost containment and income generation proposals

7. Mrs Regina IP noted that the Finance Committee ("FC") had approved the provision of a non-recurrent funding of \$360.8 million to support HKEAA's effective operation from 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2022. Given the declining candidature for the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education ("HKDSE") Examination, she was concerned whether the funding was sufficient for sustaining HKEAA's operation, and whether cost-reduction measures, such as seeking Government's assistance in providing rent-free office premises, would be formulated to achieve long-term financial sustainability.

8. SED advised that to help HKEAA become financially sustainable in the long-term, the Government would consider subsidizing candidates with special educational needs ("SEN") in taking HKDSE Examination and identifying suitable vacant school premises ("VSP") for relocating HKEAA's operations in premises under commercial leases and for developing an examination and assessment centre. Secretary General, HKEAA ("SG/HKEAA") added that the rental cost and operating cost for leasing premises for office and storage purposes

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was about \$8-\$10 million per year. Relocation of offices to rent-free premises would substantially reduce the expenditure of HKEAA.

9. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan considered there was a need for HKEAA to explore ways to generate income and contain operating cost to ensure its long-term financial sustainability, such as ceasing the conduct of HKDSE examinations for subjects only attended by a few candidates, seeking Government's assistance in identifying rent-free examination venues, running more fee-charging examination and assessment services, including those for the Qualifications Framework. Increasing HKDSE examination fees or laying off employees should be avoided.

10. SG/HKEAA advised that it was not the intention of HKEAA to lay off employees. Instead, HKEAA would make use of computer-based testing ("CBT") for certain HKDSE examinations and international and professional examinations ("IPEs"), with a view to streamlining the operational procedures, saving manpower cost and generating new streams of income. Moreover, HKEAA was developing an Integrated Corporate Services System ("ICSS") on general office administration. With its full implementation, ICSS could reduce redundant manual works and save manpower cost. Besides, the Education Bureau ("EDB") had accepted the review report of the Task Force on Review of School Curriculum in December 2020. Following the changes in the curriculum and assessment, HKEAA would review and streamline the examination contents and format, which would have impact on the cost structure of the examinations and possible reduction of manpower cost.

11. Ms YUNG Hoi-yan considered that HKEAA should not increase the fees for HKDSE Examination in order to generate more income. To facilitate members in helping HKEAA identify potential areas for cost saving, there was a need for HKEAA to provide a detailed breakdown of its expenditure. She further enquired whether grade A office had to be hired for conducting IPEs, thereby increasing the operation cost.

12. SG/HKEAA advised that HKEAA's annual reports containing the financial statements with detailed breakdown of income and expenditure were available on HKEAA's website. IPEs would be conducted in HKEAA's own assessment centres and schools as far as possible. Some schools, however, were reluctant to lend venues to HKEAA due to the COVID-19 situation. HKEAA therefore had to hire venues from the commercial sector at a higher cost to conduct IPEs.

13. Dr Junius HO opined that as HKEAA was operated on a self-financing basis, students should bear HKDSE examination fees based on the "user pays" principle. Given the rising cost of HKDSE examination, an increase in examination fees was inevitable. On cost-reduction measures, he suggested that

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HKEAA would greatly reduce cost if schools could provide examination venues. Also, HKEAA might consider installing technological gadgets and closed-circuit television systems at examination venues, with a view to saving the cost of recruiting a large amount of invigilators in administering HKDSE examination.

14. SED advised that when considering the need for adjusting HKDSE examination fees, HKEAA would take into account candidates' affordability of examination fees. Significant increase of examination fees was not appropriate as the increase would impose heavy burden on many grass-roots families. On examination venues, SED explained that schools were not required to provide venues for IPEs.

15. Ms YUNG Hoi-yan suggested that HKEAA should not offer competitive service charges for IPEs, given Hong Kong's success in fighting against the COVID-19 epidemic. On the other hand, Mr CHEUNG Kwok-kwan relayed some professional organizations' concern that HKEAA's service charges for IPEs were much higher than other service providers. As such, many professional organizations would not entrust HKEAA to administer their qualification examinations.

16. SG/HKEAA advised that HKEAA administered more than 200 examinations in collaboration with over 100 examination boards, colleges, universities, professional bodies and government departments over the world. Other than offering competitive service charges, the development of CBT facilities and upgrade of its infrastructures to catch up with the international trends in conducting examinations would be essential for HKEAA to maintain its competitiveness as a service provider of IPE services. SED advised that the provision of a non-recurrent funding of \$360.8 million approved by FC could last until August 2022 and the Government had no plan to seek extra funding for HKEAA.

17. Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok opined that HKDSE examination was a fundamental element of the basic education. When the recurrent expenditure on education kept on increasing, it was impossible for HKEAA which was responsible for administering HKDSE Examination to operate on a self-financing basis. The Administration should review HKEAA's operation mode and cost structure, and consider providing recurrent subsidy to HKEAA on substantial expenditure items.

18. Mr MA Fung-kwok suggested that the Administration, being the provider of basic education, should consider subsidizing the operation cost of HKDSE examination. Moreover, noting that technology would be adopted to streamline operational procedures and save manpower cost, he sought information on the financial implications of upgrading HKEAA's infrastructure and technologies for that purpose.

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19. Mr Tommy CHEUNG shared a similar view that the Administration should consider financing HKEAA to administer HKDSE examination and strengthening the monitoring of HKEAA. In addition, he urged the Administration to draw up measures to assist HKEAA in achieving financial sustainability as the candidature for HKDSE examination would be decreasing and HKEAA would continue to record a deficit.

20. SED responded that HKEAA was an independent, self-financing statutory body established under the HKEAA Ordinance (Cap. 261). Apart from HKDSE examination, HKEAA ran a number of fee-charging examination and assessment services. Except the first two cohorts from 2011-2012 to 2013-2014, HKDSE had been running at a deficit due to the declining candidature. However, the Government had no plan to alter the nature of HKEAA. Provision of recurrent subsidy implied Government's direct involvement in HKEAA's daily operation and financial management, which would have significant impact on HKEAA's operation. SG/HKEAA supplemented that HKEAA should be able to restore fiscal balance with HKEAA's implementation of measures to streamline operational procedures and the Government's assistance in subsidizing SEN candidates and provisioning of VSP to meet operational and development needs.

21. Dr CHENG Chung-tai enquired about the timetable for identifying suitable VSP for HKEAA. SED advised that the Government was working to identify suitable VSP with a view to relieving HKEAA's burden on rental expenditure as soon as possible.

22. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-kwan sought reasons for the increasing annual expenditure for administering HKDSE examination in recent years despite the declining candidature. SG/HKEAA explained that a majority of HKEAA's expenditure in administering HKDSE examination involved fixed costs (including staff members) that were not correlated with the number of candidates.

23. As there was a substantial growth in the IPE business and related income, Mr MA Fung-kwok suggested that HKEAA should consider expanding and enhancing the services to generate more income. For instance, allowing residents at the Greater Bay Area to attend IPEs undertaken by HKEAA in Hong Kong by conducting IPEs at a time best suit them or setting up an examination centre at the Greater Bay Area. The Deputy Chairman suggested that HKEAA should consider setting up an examination centre at the Greater Bay Area so that cross-boundary students could take HKDSE examination there. Dr CHENG Chung-tai enquired about HKEAA's plan to develop itself as a regional provider of examination services, including the Greater Bay Area.

24. SG/HKEAA agreed that the Greater Bay Area was a new market with business opportunities and HKEAA would have to explore the demand of examination services of that area and study the legal requirements of setting up an

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examination centre before considering such arrangement. Since the secondary education curriculum of Hong Kong and Mainland cities were different, SED advised that EDB had been exploring the possibilities to set up Hong Kong curriculum schools in the Greater Bay Area and the setting up of HKDSE examination centres would be taken into consideration.

Quality assurance

25. Given the problematic question in the History paper I in the 2020 HKDSE Examination which had aroused great controversies in society, Mr SHIU Ka-fai and Ms Elizabeth QUAT expressed grave concern about the question setting mechanism of HKDSE Examination, the composition and appointment of moderation committees ("MCs") setup by HKEAA, and the accountability of staff members involved in setting the problematic question.

26. SG/HKEAA advised that a MC was set up for each of the 24 Category A subjects of HKDSE. Each MC had five to seven members, comprising the Chief Examiner, setters and moderators, who were nominated by the education sector and EDB and finally appointed by HKEAA. MCs comprised academics from tertiary institutions, secondary school teachers, curriculum officers and subject experts and an appropriate mix would be maintained based on the members' academic knowledge, teaching experience, and expertise and experience in question setting or moderation. HKEAA had laid down guidelines to ensure a healthy turnover of MC members and to provide opportunities for new examination personnel to take up assessment development work.

27. Mr Holden CHOW enquired whether HKEAA had reviewed the question-setting mechanism of HKDSE and the way forward of EDB in monitoring HKEAA to prevent similar incidents from arising again. Mr Tommy CHEUNG urged EDB to comprehensively review the operation of HKEAA to ease members' concerns.

28. SG/HKEAA advised that an internal review team was set up within HKEAA to examine, among others, the mechanism of setting and quality assuring questions for the 2020 HKDSE History Examination and how far the process was in compliance with the established guidelines. The Internal Review Report was submitted to the Task Force established by EDB in June 2020, which had made recommendations for improvement to HKEAA Council in November 2020. HKEAA had rolled out some of the Task Force's recommendations in the 2021 HKDSE Examination and all recommendations were expected to be implemented in the 2022 HKDSE Examination. The HKEAA Council would review the effectiveness of the enhancement measures in due course. SED supplemented that among the causes of the incident, the Task Force observed that an HKEAA officer did not comply with some of the HKEAA rules and regulations, and did not adhere to the quality assurance measures in the development of the question

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papers. As such, the Task Force had recommended HKEAA to enhance the monitoring of compliance with quality assurance measures through strengthening the involvement of senior staff members of HKEAA.

29. The Deputy Chairman requested the Administration to provide supplementary information regarding the Task Force's findings, recommended follow-up actions and improvement measures. She also informed members that the Subcommittee would discuss issues relating to the question-setting mechanism of HKDSE Examination at its meeting on 9 February 2021.

(Post-meeting note: The Administration's response was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)549/20-21(01) on 23 February 2021.)

30. The Deputy Chairman sought clarification on whether EDB would include any funding proposal for HKEAA in the Estimates of Expenditure 2021-2022. SED responded in the negative and advised that for future initiatives that required non-recurrent funding, the Administration would first seek views from Panel members.

IV. 3356EP - A 30-classroom primary school in Tsuen Wan West Station (TW7) Development, Tsuen Wan

(LC Paper No. CB(4)455/20-21(02) -- Paper provided by the Administration)

31. The Deputy Chairman drew members' attention to Rule 83A of the Rules of Procedure which provided that 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, if any, in the matter under discussion.

32. At the invitation of the Deputy Chairman, the Under Secretary for Education ("US(Ed)") briefed members on the construction of a primary school in Tsuen Wan West Station (TW7) Development, Tsuen Wan (i.e. Wing Shun Street, Tsuen Wan) for the reprovisioning of The Church of Christ in China Chuen Yuen First Primary School ("CYFPS"), details of which were set out in the Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(4)455/20-21(02)].

33. Noting that CYFPS which currently operated nine classes might operate up to 30 classes in the new school premises, Mr Holden CHOW enquired about the manpower planning of CYFPS to cope with the expansion. US(Ed) explained that the number of classes to be operated by CYFPS upon reprovisioning would be subject to the actual enrolment and operational needs. EDB would inform CYFPS of the number of approved classes in advance for manpower planning.

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34. Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok was concerned whether CYFPS could recruit sufficient students for operating 30 classes and asked about the demand for primary school places in the school net concerned. He also enquired how the to-be-vacant school premises of CYFPS would be handled. US(Ed) explained that according to the school-age population projections for the Tuseen Wan District, the demand for Primary One school places would be slightly increased and then maintained at a stable level. Against this background, the Administration decided to reprovise rather than redevelop CYFPS. For the existing premises of CYFPS, US(Ed) advised that it would be returned to the Government upon reprovise. EDB would, in accordance with the prevailing mechanism, consider whether the premises would need to be retained for school use. If it was confirmed that the premises was not required for school use as it was quite small, EDB would refer it to relevant departments for their consideration of alternative uses as soon as possible.

35. Dr Junius HO said that he would not support the proposed reprovise project. Taking into account the current birth rate and school-age student population, he considered reprovise or redevelopment not a cost-effective way to upgrade the facilities of CYFPS. Given the large number of VSP available, the Administration should gainfully use VSP to relocate CYFPS. US(Ed) explained that it was the Administration's policy objective to improve the physical conditions and facilities of school premises not built according to the prevailing standards. As CYFPS lacked proper space and facilities essential for students' development, there was a need to reprovise the school premises to improve the teaching and learning environment. The project would also help address the long-term demand for school places in the concerned school net. Dr HO maintained his view and opined that it was not necessary for all schools to be accommodated with basketball court, running tracks, etc. Schools lacking facilities could consider using public facilities or hiring facilities available for rent.

36. The Deputy Chairman concluded that the majority of members present supported the Administration's submission of the proposal to the Public Works Subcommittee ("PWSC"), and one member objected. To facilitate PWSC members' consideration and approval, the Deputy Chairman asked the Administration to include in its paper to PWSC the justifications for the need to reprovise CYFPS and the number of schools that required reprovise or redevelopment.

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V. Any other business

37. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:15 pm.

Council Business Division 4
Legislative Council Secretariat
25 June 2021