

**立法會**  
**Legislative Council**

LC Paper No. CB(4)1313/20-21  
(These minutes have been seen  
by the Administration)

Ref : CB4/PL/ED

**Panel on Education**

**Minutes of meeting**  
**held on Tuesday, 30 March 2021, at 4:30 pm**  
**in Conference Room 1 of the Legislative Council Complex**

**Members present** : Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG Mei-fun, SBS, JP (Chairman)  
Hon Alice MAK Mei-kuen, BBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)  
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, GBS, JP  
Hon Starry LEE Wai-king, SBS, JP  
Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-ye, 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  
Hon Holden CHOW Ho-ding  
Hon YUNG Hoi-yan, JP  
Hon CHEUNG Kwok-kwan, JP  
Hon LAU Kwok-fan, MH  
Hon Vincent CHENG Wing-shun, MH, JP

**Members absent** : Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, GBS, JP  
Hon Michael TIEN Puk-sun, BBS, JP  
Hon MA Fung-kwok, GBS, JP  
Dr Hon Junius HO Kwan-yiu, JP  
Dr Hon CHENG Chung-tai

**Public Officers attending** : Agenda item III  
  
Dr CHOI Yuk-lin, JP  
Under Secretary for Education

Mr Esmond LEE, JP  
Deputy Secretary for Education (1)

University Grants Committee Secretariat

Prof James TANG  
Secretary-General, University Grants Committee

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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Action

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

Members noted that no information paper had been issued since the last meeting.

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

(Appendix I to LC Paper No. CB(4)673/20-21 -- List of outstanding items for discussion

Appendix II to LC Paper No. CB(4)673/20-21 -- List of follow-up actions)

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2. Members agreed that the following items would be discussed at the next regular meeting on 7 May 2021 at 10:45 am:

- (a) Teachers' Professional Conduct;
- (b) 8031ED – Conversion to Shatin Public School; and
- (c) 3363EP – A 24-classroom primary school at Au Pui Wan Street, Fo Tan, Sha Tin.

*(Post-meeting note: The discussion of agenda item (c) above was deferred to a future meeting. Members were informed of the meeting agenda via LC Paper No. CB(4)882/20-21 on 23 April 2021.)*

**III. The Funding Mechanism of the University Grants Committee and the Research Grants Council**

(LC Paper No. CB(4)673/20-21(01) -- Paper provided by the Administration)

Briefing by the Administration

3. The Under Secretary for Education ("US(Ed)") briefed members on the funding mechanism of the University Grants Committee ("UGC") and the Research Grants Council ("RGC"), details of which were set out in the Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(4)673/20-21(01)].

Declaration of interest

4. The Chairman declared interest as an academic staff member of the School of Law, City University of Hong Kong, and a graduate of The Chinese University of Hong Kong and the University of Hong Kong.

Discussion

*Funding Mechanism of Research Grants Council*

5. Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok opined that UGC should give more support to applied research to meet the changing societal needs and sought further information on the arrangements on cross-boundary remittance of research funding from the Mainland to Hong Kong, such as the collaboration between the Mainland and Hong Kong under the National Natural Science Foundation of China/RGC Joint Research Scheme, and the numbers of Hong Kong scholars receiving research funding from the Mainland as well as being recognized as

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Academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences ("CAS") and the Chinese Academy of Engineering.

6. Secretary General ("SG"), UGC advised that UGC attached increasing importance to knowledge transfer and applied research. More emphasis was put on the outcomes of theme-based research and impactful and translational research which might help knowledge development and transfer. To support universities' knowledge transfer activities, UGC had earmarked an additional \$205.5 million of recurrent grants in the 2019-2022 triennium for the purpose. As regards cross-boundary remittance of research funding, allowing universities to bid for state funding to undertake research projects in the Mainland was an important initiative in supporting research in the higher education sector of Hong Kong. In return, UGC had provided funding to support research projects conducted by CAS's laboratory in Hong Kong. Hong Kong scholars were well recognized in the Mainland and a number of them had received awards from the Mainland authorities, such as the Ministry of Education. RGC did not have the number of Hong Kong scholars receiving research funding from the Mainland because they could bid for state funding directly.

7. The Chairman expressed concern that RGC gave preference to research projects in science disciplines over arts disciplines when considering grant applications, and seldom approved grant applications concerning research projects on issues in the Mainland and those on local issues (in particular those under the disciplines of humanities and social sciences). Also, conflicts of interest arose in the prevailing peer review process for assessing, say legal research proposals. However, there was no channel to appeal the funding decision. Besides, as there would be more and more research projects studying the Mainland, she suggested that mainland scholars should be appointed as Committees/Panels members of RGC for assessing research applications.

8. SG, UGC advised that RGC gave equal support to different types of research across all disciplines. All research proposals received were subject to a rigorous peer review process supported by RGC's international network of external reviewers. Committees/Panels comprising local and non-local experts (including mainland scholars or overseas Chinese scholars) examined the applications for research funding upon the assessment by the external reviewers based on the academic quality of the proposals to avoid perceived conflicts of interest. In fact, research projects in science and arts disciplines required different facilities and equipment, which in turn led to different funding amount approved. Nevertheless, RGC had adopted an array of support measures for humanities and social sciences projects, such as ring-fencing 18% of the competitive component in the research portion of the block grant for humanities and social sciences projects, providing resources for employment of relief teacher, and establishing Humanities and Social Sciences Prestigious Fellowship Scheme, etc. RGC had introduced under the Theme-based Research Scheme and the Areas of Excellence

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Scheme a "right of reply" arrangement of which comments of the external reviewers would be released to the project coordinators who were requested to respond in one week. The responses from the project coordinators together with the assessments from the external reviewers would be submitted to the readers for evaluation. RGC would continue to explore measures in improving the assessment mechanism.

9. Mr Holden CHOW opined that there was yet a remarkable progress in diversified development of industries despite the Administration's active promotion. Sharing the successful experience of Israel, Singapore and Austria in re-industrialization, he urged the Administration to collaborate with the industry, academia and research institutes to develop re-industrialization. In this connection, RGC might consider adding funding allocation criteria to incentivize universities to develop research projects and establish production lines in Hong Kong to commercialise research outcomes.

10. SG, UGC advised that UGC was aware of the growing importance of research and development ("R&D"), and hence had provided financial support to encourage universities to establish knowledge transfer offices and support R&D projects. Applied R&D activities were encouraged to apply the Innovation and Technology Fund for setting up production lines locally.

*Block grant*

11. Noting that student number was one of the determinants of the amount of teaching element of the block grant for UGC-funded universities, Dr CHIANG Lai-wan enquired whether the proportion/amount of teaching element would be decreased in the face of the declining student population. Moreover, to her understanding, the block grant accounted for almost 90% of the total income of some universities and the remaining 10% of income came from tuition fees. She suggested that UGC might consider increasing the amount of the block grant to cover the remaining 10% of income so that students did not need to pay tuition fees.

12. SG, UGC advised that according to the established mechanism, about 75% of the block grant was for teaching purposes. UGC's role was to advise the Government on the allocation of funding for the publicly-funded universities according to the Government's policy guidance. On the other hand, the level of tuition fees would involve wider policy issues. US(Ed) added that the Government subsidized about 90% of university students' tuition fees and launched various financial assistance schemes to support students with financial difficulties. Taking into account the Government's overall financial condition and societal demands, the Administration had from time to time launched different funding schemes for university students, such as the provision of a tuition waiver for all local research postgraduate students.

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13. The Chairman opined that student number should not be the major determinant of how grant was allocated to each university. Equal emphasis should be put on student number, student quality and student needs. In addition, UGC should give appropriate consideration to university governance in determining funding allocation. SG, UGC advised that student number for specific programmes was only one of the considerations in the allocation of block grants across the universities. Universities would also be required to meet the student number targets for certain programmes that were subject to specific manpower requirements, and they had the autonomy to decide their programmes offering with the number of student places allocated by UGC as well as the selection of students.

*Planning exercise*

14. The Deputy Chairman noted that there were seven major criteria for assessing the Planning Exercise Proposals ("PEPs") submitted by UGC-funded universities. She was particularly concerned how UGC would assess PEPs against the two criteria, viz. "institutional mission and strategy" and "meeting the needs of society over the next decade", such as whether UGC would require universities to include in PEPs the implementation of national security education to meet the latest societal needs. She further suggested that UGC should review the seven major criteria with a view to enhancing the quality of university education to meet public expectations. For instance, apart from research and teaching performance, PEPs should include how universities would nurture students' moral qualities.

15. SG, UGC explained that Planning Exercise was conducted on a triennial basis which serves as an opportunity for universities to review recent developments and explore new initiatives for meeting the evolving societal needs. The actual assessment would be conducted by the Sub-group on Planning Exercise under UGC which would comprehensively assess PEPs submitted by the universities against the seven assessment criteria, including academic development, whether the development strategies of universities were consistent with their institutional mission, whether the universities were able to meet the needs and demands of society. He undertook to relay member's suggestion to UGC for reference.

16. The Chairman shared a similar view with the Deputy Chairman that the progress of implementing national security education should be added as a consideration factor for grant allocation. She also relayed the requests from some universities that official guidelines on national security education should be provided to facilitate their implementation.

17. SG, UGC advised that the Sub-group on Planning Exercise was fully aware of the public expectations on universities and their students regarding the

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latest societal needs and would take into account relevant factors in the assessment. On provision of guidelines on national security education, US(Ed) advised that schools and universities should endeavor to abide by the national security education and enhance students' law-abiding awareness. The Education Bureau ("EDB") and UGC had maintained close communication with the management of universities concerning the implementation of national security education. To safeguard institutional autonomy, universities should be allowed certain flexibility in implementing national security education. It might not be appropriate to provide guidelines to universities.

18. The Chairman opined that as the funding mechanism put much more weight on research than on teaching, most of the university academic staff overemphasized research achievements and neglected teaching quality. As a matter of fact, academic staff in universities should not only focus on research work. They should make an effort in fostering students' all-rounded development and cultivating students' moral qualities. UGC should consider putting equal emphasis on teaching and research performance in allocating grants.

19. SG, UGC advised that UGC attached equal importance to teaching and research. To enhance quality teaching in UGC-funded universities, the majority of the block grant (75%) was allocated for teaching purpose. Various measures were also in place, such as introduction of UGC Teaching Award, establishment of Hong Kong Teaching Excellence Alliance, etc., to recognize outstanding academic staff's contribution to teaching and learning in the universities. UGC would continue to explore measures to assist universities in improving teaching quality. The Chairman suggested that UGC should officially inform universities that teaching quality was an important consideration factor for funding allocation.

*University programmes*

20. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan expressed concern that some programmes offered by universities were duplicated and did not meet the manpower needs of society, leading to an oversupply of graduates in certain disciplines, such as social work programmes.

21. SG, UGC explained that UGC-funded universities had the autonomy to decide the programmes to be offered. However, taking into account manpower demand and societal needs, the Government and UGC would offer the overall strategic directions and advice for individual universities to take into account in their planning process. US(Ed) added that in the course of planning student places, UGC-funded universities should consider whether the programmes would be able to fulfill the specific manpower requirements. For general manpower demand, EDB would consolidate the bureaux/departments' requirements on particular sectors and relay to universities for their planning purpose. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan suggested the Panel on Education to discuss issues related

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to the programmes offered in UGC-funded universities.

22. Mrs Regina IP opined that a diversified range of programmes was of high importance for the comprehensive development of universities. However, in order to compete for international rankings and maximize revenue, some universities cancelled subjects with low student enrolment, such as Physics, Astronomy, etc, which would in turn affect the development of basic research.

23. SG, UGC advised that international ranking was not a consideration of UGC in determining grant allocation. As part of their institutional strategies, some universities did consolidate several programmes (such as Religion Study and Philosophy) into inter-disciplinary degree programmes in line with the global trend on promoting interdisciplinarity in higher education. UGC would pay attention to subjects with low enrolment.

*Oath-taking arrangement*

24. Mrs Regina IP opined that the Administration should strengthen its monitoring over the operations of UGC-funded universities and consider requiring the vice-chancellors and Council members of universities to take oath when assuming office under the Public Offices (Candidacy and Taking Up Offices) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill 2021. US(Ed) advised that the Administration was aware of the proposed oath-taking arrangements for public officers under the Bill, and would make necessary arrangement subject to the statutory requirements and operations of universities.

**IV. 8097EB – In-situ redevelopment of Wa Ying College at 8 Sheung Wo Street, Kowloon**

(LC Paper No. CB(4)673/20-21(02) -- Paper provided by the Administration)

Briefing by the Administration

25. US(Ed) briefed members on the scope and timeline for the implementation of the proposed in-situ redevelopment of Wa Ying College ("WYC"), details of which were set out in the Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(4)673/20-21(02)].

Declaration of interest

26. The 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

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nature of that interest. She reminded members to declare interests, if any, in the matter under discussion.

Discussion

*Estimated cost of the proposed project*

27. The Deputy Chairman expressed grave concern over the high estimated cost of about \$473.3 million for the proposed redevelopment of WYC. She asked whether the cost was comparable to similar school projects, whether the school sponsoring body concerned would have to bear part of the cost, whether the cost could be reduced if the design of the new school building was not so innovative, and whether there was an alternative to redevelopment.

28. US(Ed) advised that the estimated cost, which covered the demolition of the existing buildings of WYC and construction of a 30-classroom school premises on the cleared site, was similar to other in-situ redevelopment school projects. Since WYC was an aided school and the proposed 30-classroom school premises would be adopting the standard schedule of accommodation, the Government would bear the full cost of redevelopment. No above-standard facilities would be provided at the new school premises. In accordance with the established mechanism, the design of the new school premises was prepared in close consultation with WYC so as to utilize the floor area and fulfill WYC's teaching and learning needs. Principal Assistant Secretary (Infrastructure and Research Support) ("PAS(IRS)") made reference to the partial redevelopment and conversion of the Hong Kong Chinese Women's Club College at Sai Wan Ho and advised that the average cost per square meter of the two projects were comparable.

29. Noting that WYC's number of classrooms would be increased from 24 to 30 after redevelopment, Mr Holden CHOW was concerned about the high cost incurred in providing a new school building with only six additional classrooms. He asked about the criteria for determining the number of operating classes in the new school.

30. US(Ed) advised that optimization of land use was the prime consideration when determining the number of classrooms in a new school premises. Normally, a 30-classroom school premises required a site area of around 6 000 square meters. WYC with a site area of about 4 533 square meters had already been fully utilized to provide a premises with 30 classrooms. Moreover, a 30-classroom school premises was considered appropriate for WYC after taking into account the anticipated stable to slight increase in the demand for secondary school places in Kowloon City. Nevertheless, the actual number of classes to be operated by WYC after redevelopment would be subject to the actual enrolment and operational needs.

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*School reprovisioning and redevelopment*

31. Noting those schools undergoing redevelopment could take part in designing the new school premises, the Deputy Chairman considered that such arrangement would cause unfairness to schools applying for reprovisioning through the School Allocation Exercise ("SAE") under which the design of the school premises was determined by the Architectural Services Department. Besides, as many schools were still operating in matchbox-style school premises, she enquired about the selection criteria for school redevelopment and whether it was EDB policy to redevelop all aged schools in Hong Kong.

32. US(Ed) advised that among the 900 public sector schools in Hong Kong, some 200 of them were already built under the prevailing standards, which improved over time. While most school premises were built in early years, EDB had implemented various measures over the years to enhance the facilities of schools which were built according to past planning standards. In cases of in-situ redevelopment, factors to be considered included the age and physical condition of the existing school sites, technical feasibility, availability of suitable decanting premises, quality of education, etc. While WYC was built in 1971, its site was technically feasible for in-situ redevelopment and decanting premises was available, in-situ redevelopment was considered the most suitable way to enhance the facilities of WYC.

33. Mr Holden CHOW recalled that according to the Administration in 2016, about 100 school premises needed to be enhanced because they were aged over 30 years and with site area less than 3 000 square metres. He asked about the enhancement progress. Mrs Regina IP expressed support to the proposed redevelopment project and enquired about the number of schools awaiting redevelopment.

34. US(Ed) advised that in Kowloon City, there were currently 18 public sector primary schools and 26 public sector secondary schools aged over 30 years. As most of the schools built according to past planning standards were located in densely populated areas, they were unsuitable for in-situ redevelopment owing to space constraints. Nevertheless, EDB had improved the teaching and learning environment of aged schools through other measures such as the annual major repairs exercise and emergency repairs mechanism, extension or reprovisioning programme. In the past five years, over 20 sites/premises were allocated under SAE for extension/reprovisioning.

35. Noting the slow progress of school redevelopment, Mrs Regina IP asked about the annual expenditure earmarked for school redevelopment, whether the slow progress of school redevelopment was attributed to insufficient financial resources, and whether the special school facilities would also be enhanced.

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36. US(Ed) advised that there was no financial ceiling for school redevelopment projects and EDB had been actively enhancing the teaching and learning environment of schools built to previous planning standards and designs including special schools. Indeed, redevelopment of existing schools built to previous planning standards and designs might be infeasible due to the lack of space and other physical constraints. Also, it was difficult to identify suitable sites for re-provisioning use. PAS(IRS) supplemented that several schools were undergoing extension/improvement works, including the Hong Chi Morninghill School, which was a special school.

37. While expressing support to school development, the Deputy Chairman expressed reservation about the proposed redevelopment project owing to its high cost. She urged the Administration to explain clearly the criteria for determining whether an existing school would be redeveloped or whether a new school premises would be constructed for re-provisioning use.

38. US(Ed) and PAS(IRS) advised that under the prevailing mechanism, sites would be reserved for school development when preparing town plans and planning large-scale residential developments. Allocation of the school premises would be conducted through SAE. In determining whether a premises should be used for operating a new school or re-provisioning an existing school, EDB would make reference to the conditions of existing schools, school-age population projections and take into account the actual number of existing students at various levels, the latest demographic changes as well as relevant policy issues, such as the possibility of introducing small class teaching. As the construction of new school premises involved immense resources, EDB would consider with prudence if the addition of a new operating school would commensurate with the long term sustainable development of the district concerned.

39. The Chairman suggested that other than the physical features of school premises, more information should be provided when capital works projects were submitted to the Panel for consideration. The Administration should also conduct due diligence in assessing redevelopment proposals submitted by schools and report to the Panel on the progress of the projects approved by the Legislative Council.

Summing up

40. The Chairman concluded that the majority of members present supported the Administration's submission of the proposed project to the Public Works Subcommittee ("PWSC"), and one member abstained. To facilitate PWSC members' deliberations, Mr Holden CHOW requested the Administration to provide in its papers to PWSC information about similar school projects, for instance the works period for construction, total cost incurred, floor area and school facilities before and after redevelopment/re-provisioning.

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**V. Any other business**

41. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:27 pm.

Council Business Division 4  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
3 August 2021