

1 HONG KONG LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL -- 26 October 1988

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OFFICIAL REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

Wednesday, 26 October 1988

The Council met at half-past Two o'clock

PRESENT

HIS HONOUR THE DEPUTY TO THE GOVERNOR(PRESIDENT)
THE HONOURABLE THE CHIEF SECRETARY
SIR DAVID ROBERT FORD, K.B.E., L.V.O., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE THE FINANCIAL SECRETARY
MR. PIERS JACOBS, O.B.E., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
MR. JEREMY FELL MATHEWS, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE ALLEN LEE PENG-FEI, C.B.E., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE STEPHEN CHEONG KAM-CHUEN, O.B.E., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CHEUNG YAN-LUNG, O.B.E., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE MRS. SELINA CHOW LIANG SHUK-YEE, O.B.E., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE MARIA TAM WAI-CHU, C.B.E., J.P.

DR. THE HONOURABLE HENRIETTA IP MAN-HING, O.B.E., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CHAN YING-LUN, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE MRS. RITA FAN HSU LAI-TAI, O.B.E., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE PETER POON WING-CHEUNG, M.B.E., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CHENG HON-KWAN, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CHUNG PUI-LAM

THE HONOURABLE HO SAI-CHU, M.B.E., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE HUI YIN-FAT

THE HONOURABLE MARTIN LEE CHU-MING, Q.C., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE NGAI SHIU-KIT, O.B.E., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE PANG CHUN-HOI, M.B.E.

THE HONOURABLE POON CHI-FAI

PROF. THE HONOURABLE POON CHUNG-KWONG

THE HONOURABLE SZETO WAH

THE HONOURABLE TAI CHIN-WAH

THE HONOURABLE MRS. ROSANNA TAM WONG YICK-MING

THE HONOURABLE TAM YIU-CHUNG

DR. THE HONOURABLE DANIEL TSE, O.B.E., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE ANDREW WONG WANG-FAT

THE HONOURABLE LAU WONG-FAT, M.B.E., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE GRAHAM BARNES, C.B.E., J.P.
SECRETARY FOR LANDS AND WORKS

THE HONOURABLE RONALD GEORGE BLACKER BRIDGE, O.B.E., J.P.
SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION AND MANPOWER

THE HONOURABLE MICHAEL LEUNG MAN-KIN, J.P.
SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT

THE HONOURABLE EDWARD HO SING-TIN, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE GEOFFREY THOMAS BARNES, J.P.
SECRETARY FOR SECURITY

THE HONOURABLE PETER TSAO KWANG-YUNG, C.P.M., J.P.
SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES AND INFORMATION

THE HONOURABLE CHAU TAK-HAY, J.P.
SECRETARY FOR HEALTH AND WELFARE

THE HONOURABLE RONALD JOSEPH ARCULLI, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE MARTIN GILBERT BARROW, O.B.E.

THE HONOURABLE PAUL CHENG MING-FUN

THE HONOURABLE MICHAEL CHENG TAK-KIN, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE DAVID CHEUNG CHI-KONG, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE RONALD CHOW MEI-TAK

THE HONOURABLE MRS. NELLIE FONG WONG KUT-MAN, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE MRS. PEGGY LAM, M.B.E., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE DANIEL LAM WAI-KEUNG, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE MRS. MIRIAM LAU KIN-YEE

THE HONOURABLE LAU WAH-SUM, J.P.

DR. THE HONOURABLE LEONG CHE-HUNG

THE HONOURABLE LEUNG WAI-TUNG, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE JAMES DAVID McGREGOR, O.B.E., I.S.O., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE KINGSLEY SIT HO-YIN

THE HONOURABLE MRS. SO CHAU YIM-PING, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE JAMES TIEN PEI-CHUN, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE MRS. ELSIE TU, C.B.E.

THE HONOURABLE PETER WONG HONG-YUEN

THE HONOURABLE MICHAEL SUEN MING-YEUNG, J.P.
SECRETARY FOR DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION (ACTING)

ABSENT

THE HONOURABLE DAVID LI KWOK-PO, J.P.

IN ATTENDANCE

THE CLERK TO THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
MR. LAW KAM-SANG

Papers

The following papers were laid on the table pursuant to Standing Order 14(2):

Subject

L.N. No.

Subsidiary Legislation:

Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance
Public Health and Municipal Services
(Public Pleasure Grounds)
(Amendment of Fourth Schedule)(No.6)
Order 1988.....
277/88

Immigration Ordinance
Immigration (Vietnamese Refugee Centres)
(Closed Centre)(Amendment)
(No.5) Rules 1988.....
278/88

Oral answers to questions

Foreign workers

1. MR. TIEN asked: Will Government inform this Council whether, without changing existing policy, limited numbers of foreign workers could be imported on a short-term contractual basis to work for selected industries in Hong Kong?

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY: Sir, this is possible under the existing policy which stipulates that foreign workers may be admitted to Hong Kong provided:

- (a) that there is no security objection and they have no known records of serious crime;
- (b) that there is no likelihood of them becoming a burden on Hong Kong;

(c) that they possess a special skill, knowledge or experience of value to, and not readily available in Hong Kong; or

(d) that they are in a position to make a substantial contribution to the economy of Hong Kong.

Workers admitted under the existing policy are landed for six months initially. Their stay is subject to review periodically, and extensions will be granted if the circumstances prevailing at the time of the original approval still prevail. For workers admitted for specific contracts, extensions will be granted until expiry of their contracts.

Each case has to be assessed on its individual merits against the situation in the local labour market prevailing at the time of application. I am therefore unable to give more than this qualified affirmative answer. Nevertheless, many persons do in fact enter Hong Kong for employment under the existing policy. In 1987, some 4 800 middle management, professional and technical staff were admitted into Hong Kong, and another 2 800 were admitted in the first seven months of this year. They came from a wide range of countries including Japan, the United States, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, India, Korea, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Singapore, the Philippines and Switzerland.

In addition, although there is no general provision for workers from China to enter Hong Kong for employment purposes, more than 27 000 permanent residents of China enter Hong Kong each year legally through the one-way exit permit scheme. Inevitably many of these people join the local labour market.

MR. MCGREGOR: Will the Government concede that there has been for some years an increasing shortage of labour in the construction industry and that there is every sign that the shortage is likely to continue? The shortage is already delaying the completion of many major projects and increasing their costs. In the circumstances, will the Government also concede that there is a case for further detailed consideration of the proposal to permit contract labour to be brought into Hong Kong for at least this industry?

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY: On the first concession, I am afraid it falls rather outside my area of policy responsibility and I would perhaps ask the Secretary for Education

and Manpower if he wishes to say anything on this subject at the moment. As to the second point, any change in policy or the manner in which it will be applied would be a matter for further consideration by the Executive Council, and the Administration, as the Governor said in his Legislative Council annual address, is now reviewing the use of that policy.

HIS HONOUR THE PRESIDENT: Secretary for Education and Manpower, would you care to add?

SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION AND MANPOWER: Sir, I do not think I can add anything which is not well known. The subject has been discussed exhaustively and there are strong views and arguments on both sides. But the conclusion that we reached following a recent review was that the disadvantages of taking more drastic action outweighed the advantages. As explained in the Governor's speech on the opening of the Session and, for that reason, we prefer the solution of trying to make more use of the existing policy.

MR. TIEN: Sir, given the serious labour shortage problem presently faced by industries like garment manufacturing which, due to quota restrictions and country of origin rule, are unable to ship their production lines to China. Will Government consider relaxing criterion 3, as expressed by Secretary for Security, to allow importation of workers, not management staff, from China?

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY: Sir, applications on individual proposals to import labour will be considered by the Director of Immigration on their merits under existing policy. Other than that, the reply to the previous supplementary question which I gave, also applies in this case.

MR. TAM (in Cantonese): The Secretary for Security in his reply said that four conditions will have to be complied with in the application for labour importation and that each case will be considered on its individual merits. Will Government inform this Council what objective criterion is being used by the Administration to assess labour importation to ensure that labour imported meets all the four conditions to avoid wrong decision being made by Government as was the case with Korean workers?

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY: Sir, the interpretation and the application of the criteria

which I have referred to is carried out by the Director of Immigration on the basis of all the available information he has in relation to any particular proposal that might be put to him. He takes into account, for instance on the security side, the Special Branch checks on all applications for employment visas. He takes into account any security objections which might come to his attention and any information which he might be able to obtain from sponsors, but it is up to the Director of Immigration to apply these criteria.

MR. BARROW: Sir, as all sectors of the business community remain concerned about this issue, would Government consider forming a small working group with the private sector to look into specific actions to alleviate the problem?

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY: I do not think I am in a position to give an unequivocal answer to that this afternoon, Sir. I can say that it will be taken into consideration in the course of the present review which is being carried out.

MR. HO SAI-CHU: Sir, may I refer to the last sentence of the answer given by the Secretary, which I quote, "Inevitably many of these people join the local labour market". As we are well aware, most of these people coming into Hong Kong are for family reunion, that is to say, including mainly the aged as well as youth or children. Can the Secretary please enlighten the Council how many are there? If he has not got a figure, what is the percentage of these people coming to Hong Kong who would join the labour force?

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY: Statistics compiled by the Census and Statistics Department show that the 27 000 or so one-way permit holders who arrived in 1987 contained 43% who were economically active in China. I can give a small breakdown of this: 15% were formerly farmers, hunters or fishermen, 12% were technicians and production workers, 5% were professional, administrative and executive workers and 12% with unspecified occupations.

MR. ALLEN LEE: In the first part of the Secretary for Security's answer, he gave four conditions for importation of foreign workers. Are these conditions mutually exclusive? If not, may I ask the Secretary what kind of workers will qualify for condition (c): "that they possess a special skill, knowledge or experience of value to, and not readily available in Hong Kong"? If they are not mutually exclusive,

Sir, will the Secretary tell us what type of workers qualifies for (c): "that they possess a special skill, knowledge or experience of value to, and not readily available in Hong Kong"?

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY: I am sorry I did not make that clear. (a), (b) and (c) are not mutually exclusive. They are all qualifications which are necessary. Conditions (c) and (d), which is the fourth, are mutually exclusive. They are alternatives. As regards the second part of the question, I would have thought that was fairly self-explanatory, but it is a matter for the Director of Immigration to decide on the basis of the information that is supplied to him.

MR. CHEONG: Sir, part of my question has been answered by the Secretary for Security, but I wish simply to ask further. On the statistical information of about 43% being economically active, does the Census and Statistics Department have any age distribution at all and what is the meaning of "economically active"?

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY: 29% of the immigrants are below the age of 15, 18% between 15 and 24, 45% between 25 and 54, and the rest are over 55.

The Peak Cafe and its tenancy

2. MR. MCGREGOR asked: Given the importance of Government being seen to act fairly in exercising its powers in relation to the administration of Crown land use in Hong Kong, will it inform this Council why the present tenant of the Crown land area on which the Peak Cafe is situated, who has been operating that establishment on an annually renewed lease for 41 consecutive years, was not given the opportunity to meet Government's specifications for the future operation of the Peak Cafe service before the site was put out to public tender on 23 September 1988?

SECRETARY FOR LANDS AND WORKS: Sir, the Peak Cafe building is graded by the Antiquities Advisory Board as a grade 2 historical building (which means it should be preserved if possible) and in 1974 on the basis of this grading, the Town Planning Board recommended its retention. Since 1966 the land has been held on an annual tenancy terminable at three months' notice by its present proprietor, who up till then had held the land on Crown Land Permit.

The cafe needs a level of expenditure on repairs and renovation to preserve its structure and to improve its interior, which is not consistent with annual tenancy. It is therefore proposed to let out the tenancy for a period of five years with appropriate clauses in the tenancy to require the tenant to renovate the buildings. It is not normal government policy to grant five year tenancies on extensions of annual tenancies and besides the tendering system will allow Government to ensure that the tenderers' plans for renovation are acceptable and appropriate. The present tenant is of course free to bid.

MR. MCGREGOR: Sir, in respect of the second paragraph, will the Government therefore advise this Council whether the tender price offered by the successful tenderer for the Peak Cafe site is expected to represent the commercially viable proposition for the operation of a cafe and not a price which may be far above that figure?

SECRETARY FOR LANDS AND WORKS: Sir, the Government would expect that the price offered by a tenderer would, after expenditure on refurbishment, allow him to operate the restaurant as a commercially viable proposition.

Tragedy of a mentally handicapped child

3. MR. HUI asked: In view of the recent family tragedy in which a mother was reported to have hanged her 16-year-old mentally handicapped son and then herself because she was no longer able to look after the son, will Government inform this Council:

(a) what support services have been given by Government to the mentally handicapped son and the mother prior to the tragedy; and

(b) what Government can do to help prevent the occurrence of similar tragedies?

SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION AND MANPOWER: Sir, this was a particularly sad case. The child had suffered not only from a severe mental handicap but also from tuberculosis.

He began treatment in the Ruttonjee Sanatorium in 1976. In 1977 the social worker

there arranged for him to receive a disability allowance. She also tried to arrange for him to be admitted to the Wong Tai Sin Disabled Children's Centre, but the family turned down this offer, because they are used to a diet based on congee and they felt that the children's centre's rice based diet would not suit the child.

When the child's treatment for tuberculosis finished in 1982, the medical social worker referred him to Arran Street Child Assessment Centre for a comprehensive assessment of his disabilities. The centre recommended him for placement in a special school for severely mentally handicapped children. He was offered a day school place in 1984 and again in 1985 but his parents declined because of their preference for a boarding school. In September 1987, after some persuasion, the parents agreed to his receiving home-based resource teaching, provided by a special school for the severely mentally handicapped.

Counselling, physiotherapy and occupational therapy services were also provided through home visits. According to the school records, the boy's family was co-operative and the mother also took part in the home-based programme until last month when she began to suffer from severe headaches. The school recently told the parents that the boy would be admitted as a boarder as soon as its boarding section opened in April 1989. Earlier this month the school social worker approached the Social Welfare Department for charitable funds to purchase a more comfortable and adaptable seat for the boy. The family was invited to attend for an interview on 17 October, but unfortunately the tragedy had already occurred on 13 October without any indication that the family was in need of further support beyond that already being offered.

Sir, while it is not always possible to prevent such tragedies the Government, in co-operation with the voluntary sector, does try to provide systematically for the needs of mentally handicapped people of all ages. These services are set out in the Rehabilitation Programme Plan and are reviewed annually and improved as fast as resources can be made available. In all these services, especially those concerned with the early education, training and care of the mentally handicapped, the participation of parents and family members is emphasized and encouraged. Public education to reduce prejudice against the disabled and promote their integration into the community is organized on a regular basis by both the Government and the voluntary sector.

The family services centres and medical social service units of the Social Welfare

Department also provide counselling services to families to help them cope with the practical and psychological problems of looking after severely handicapped members. When required, supporting services such as home-helps, financial assistance, clinical psychological services and day or residential placements can also be arranged.

In parallel with these services, in April this year the Government began to introduce a higher disability allowance of \$1,120 a month to provide financial assistance to those disabled people who require constant attendance at home. The purpose is to help lessen the burden of the family in looking after a severely handicapped member and to promote care in the community. By April 1990 the scheme will cover all age groups.

MR. HUI: Sir, respite care or temporary residential care for the mentally handicapped is considered one of the ways to relieve heavy stress on family looking after mentally handicapped members. Policy approval to support this service was granted in 1982, but at present the service is run by voluntary agencies with only two beds being provided through the support of private funds. Could Government inform this Council why no financial support has been given to this service since policy approval was given six years ago, and what does Government plan to do to improve the situation?

SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION AND MANPOWER: Sir, it is true that the concept of providing temporary residential care for the mentally handicapped serves to provide some relief for their families and was supported by the Housing Sub-committee of the Rehabilitation Development Co-ordinating Committee (RDCC) in 1982. However, it was recognized even then that priority must be given to the provision of long-term residential places of which there was and still is a significant shortage. However, the Social Welfare Department did take up the idea with the voluntary sector, but I understand they could only find one voluntary agency prepared to provide this service. Since there was not much known about the demand for this type of service or the best way to provide it in 1985, the agency started a small scale pilot project. The Social Welfare Department does have some reservations about the methods at present being used in this pilot project, since they involve additional residential and manpower resources to give very short-term training of one or two weeks to the temporary residents. Instead, the department has reserved accommodation in a hostel for the mentally handicapped in an estate to provide temporary residential service using existing resources. Applications for this new service will be invited next month

and the service will be expanded if there is a sustained demand.

MRS. TAM: Sir, both education and welfare services for the mentally handicapped adults aged 16 or above have been known to be quite inadequate in Hong Kong. Can the Administration inform this Council how it would propose to improve such services?

SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION AND MANPOWER: Yes, I agree with Mrs. TAM that this is the area of main concern and there is a significant shortage of such places, particularly residential places for the mentally handicapped adults. This problem particularly came to light in last year's review of the programme plan and as a result, it was decided to hold a further in-depth review of this subject jointly between Government and the voluntary sector. That review has been held this year and the main conclusion arising from the review is that residential and other service requirements for mentally handicapped adults should be very carefully graded at five different levels according to the disability level, the care and training needs and the standard of self-care and daily living skills of each individual. The idea is that it is hoped that in this way, the training and support services can be fitted more exactly to the needs of each individual. And in this way, we can become more effective in helping people to improve their standards of skills and become more independent as quickly as possible. The Social Welfare Department is now following up the review and working out details of how to follow it up.

MR. EDWARD HO: Sir, the Secretary has confirmed that there is an acute shortage of boarding places for the mentally handicapped and he has cited a lot of problems. I would like the Secretary to inform us whether it boils down to the basic problem that not enough financial support is given by Government to improve the provision of these places?

SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION AND MANPOWER: Sir, I do not think it is as simple as that, and I would stress that the situation is fluid. The programme plan is reviewed every year. The shortfalls indicated in it in the future refer to existing known projects for which we already have an agreed sponsor. Apart from questions of funds, there is the question of shortage of trained manpower and there is also the question that it is sometimes difficult to find agencies willing to take on a particular task. But we hope to find means, apart from the measures which I have already mentioned, which we hope will reduce the demand by enabling people to build up their skills and become

less dependent. We also hope, from time to time, to develop new projects which will reduce the shortage in the future.

Member's Motion

EDUCATION COMMISSION REPORT NO. 3

MRS. SELINA CHOW moved the following motion:

" That this Council takes note of the recommendations in the Education Commission Report No. 3: the structure of tertiary education and the future of private schools".

MRS. CHOW: Sir, I move the motion standing in my name on the Order Paper. As convenor of the Legislative Council ad hoc group formed to prepare for this debate, I would like to report that Members are only too aware of the divergent and sometimes opposing views held by themselves and those they represent, and have therefore not attempted to arrive at any consensus, but rather to leave themselves free to express as wide a spectrum of views as possible here today, after taking into full account opinions expressed following the publication of the Education Commission Report No. 3. I thank the Administration for offering ample opportunity for questions to be posed to them by the group. In view of the rather contrasting views held by our members, it is only sensible for me not to attempt to summarize them, as I am sure all points will be adequately covered by my 31 colleagues who will be speaking. From this point onwards, what I have to say represents my thinking both as a product of the Hong Kong education system and as a frustrated parent. Although many parents like myself do not have the expertise and experience of the more vocal impressive and organized educationalists, we certainly have as much a right to be heard.

It is no secret that more and more parents, particularly young parents, find the present school system unsatisfactory. Many who emigrate do so in order that their children can be freed from the pressure of Hong Kong schooling. Public examinations, deterioration of the languages, the dwindling importance of English, lowering standard of moral education all aggravate the growing helplessness of parents.

The new Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) is a most imaginative solution to the problem.

For the last decade or so, because education had to be free and compulsory to all school children up to the age of 15, choice has been denied to parents. The present system is far too rigid to meet parents' aspirations for their children. Hong Kong's progress in the last two decades has brought with it a widening middle class whose affluence and sophistication demand more flexibility and variety of emphasis in our school system. The proposal contained in the report reflects a well-considered concept with the proper balance and control. I am aware that critics of the system are once again crying "elitism" to discredit it. But before we fall prey to such emotive name-calling, we must pause and ask ourselves what the word means. If it means social divisiveness, then of course it is not worthy of any support. But if it means achieving the peaks of excellence in a school system which is already offering an acceptable standard to all, then I would ask, what is wrong with it? After all, are all parents not pursuing the very best for their children? And should society not provide the very best educational opportunity for the very best? And let us not confuse the educational elite with the social elite. The two are quite separate and different and have absolutely nothing to do with the question of the haves and have-nots. It is only by offering freedom to the schools and the parents at affordable fee levels that we will be able to achieve a system that answers to the need and the demand of caring parents.

May I now move on to the more contentious recommendation in the report regarding the structure of tertiary education.

Once again speaking as a parent, I must voice a strong objection to any change to the existing 5+2 years of secondary schooling. We have just rid ourselves of the Junior Secondary Education Assessment, which means we have finally put some peace back into the first five years of secondary education. It is universally recognized that in spite of nine years' compulsory education, the accepted completion of secondary schooling is at Form V. The school leaving examination is meant to mark that completion. In order to get on to higher education it is only right that students have to be further prepared. Historically we have two years of matriculation. Over 90% of Hong Kong's schools have such a structure.

If we were to change the structure of secondary school to 5+1 or 3+3, it would involve a huge effort on everyone concerned -- the Government, the teachers and the principals. Such a change would also cause tremendous commotion and uncertainty in the community itself. It would certainly require very convincing justification before such a change can be contemplated.

From the arguments put forward by the various interest groups, it is clear that most people are not opposed to the merit of the common entry point into university. The question is, where should it take place?

The biggest bone of contention is of course whether a basic university course should be three or four years. In fact this issue so dominates the entire debate that the impression a layman gets is that this is what the report is all about.

Frankly, I find the Hong Kong University's argument for a foundation year not convincing. I cannot see the logic of the university taking over the work of the schools to resolve the problem of quality when it can be achieved by the setting of the entrance qualification, which is the prerogative of the university anyway. In spelling out its requirements, the university would be helping the schools to determine the breadth and depth of matriculation education.

But of course we are only too aware that Hong Kong's university problem is aggravated substantially, if not created, by the Provisional Acceptance Scheme introduced by the Chinese University a few years ago, whereby Secondary VI students are accepted on the strength of their Form V examination results. This explains why there are over 50% repeaters for this Form V examination. It is serving two purposes instead of one -- as a school leaving qualification, and as university entrance examination. This development defeats the purpose of school leaving as well as the preparatory function of Secondary VI and VII.

I therefore support whole-heartedly the recent policy decision to retain the 5+2 configuration. At the same time I agree with the recommendation in the report that the length of any individual course should be determined in accordance with educational requirements by the tertiary institutions themselves. However I do not think that the length of first degree courses at all institutions should in principle be the same for any given subject. The autonomy of institutions should be respected. Furthermore, the traditions of different institutions warrant special and sympathetic consideration.

Sir, I support the Education Commission Report No. 3. I believe it is based on a deep understanding of what is required to improve our education system, and it reflects tremendous hard work in consultation, deliberation and debate within the commission. It is an outward and forward looking document, aiming

to correct some wrongs, to retain and upgrade some rights, and to catch up with the times. Let us see it adopted and implemented.

Sir, I so move.

Question proposed.

MR. CHEONG: Sir, before I begin, I should declare my interest as deputy chairman of the Hong Kong Polytechnic Council as well as a member of the Council of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST). Allow me also to hail the efforts of all those who have deliberated for so long to produce the Education Commission Report No. 3. Whatever one's views about the recommendations, it cannot be denied that the commission members have addressed the thorny issues head on and have produced a worthwhile document by slicing through a maze of issues laden with sectoral interests that have bisected our higher education system for the past decade.

Sir, no one will disagree that education is the very foundation of our long-term future. This is particularly so in respect of tertiary education. As we are faced with the increasing threat of brain drain, we need to boost our capacity for offering more training facilities for our citizens who would then have the chance to take over the mantle. Hence it is timely for us to review deficiencies or otherwise of our tertiary sector and subsequently debate and make the necessary decision for improvement.

Unfortunately, views expressed over this report in the past few months have been rather emotional and in my humble view have strayed into issues that are quite irrelevant. For example, it is pointless to argue in general terms whether three-year degree courses or four-year degree courses would produce better university graduates. The usefulness of a course should be guided not solely by the views of academics but in fact by the end result of whether graduates from that course meet the requirement of the job market when they graduate. When I interview job applicants, whether they have spent three years or four years in a campus hardly ever comes into my equation of assessment. What is important is the graduates' basic knowledge, intellect and personal attributes. These qualities surely should be able to be developed within three years in any reasonably run tertiary institution. Therefore in my examination of the issues concerned, my analysis has been based largely on the

following considerations:

(1) What is the most cost-effective way for deploying any agreed amount of resources for tertiary education for the benefit of the community?

(2) Given the pressure in the coming years to increase the supply of university graduates to the community to fill vacancies created through emigration, what is the best system that would facilitate achieving this need?

Sir, it is of central and overriding importance that there should be a common entry point and a common selection point by the tertiary institutions. In this way, all candidates can choose, freely and fairly, from the full range of courses offered by all the institutions, and all the institutions can have equal opportunity to attract the best applicants.

The common entry point should be following Form VII, after the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE). The normal academic length of degree courses should be three years, unless proven to the satisfaction of University and Polytechnic Grants Committee (UPGC) that longer length is required. This is the model which would best serve the interests of Hong Kong and should be the criterion for decision -- alternative approaches should not be advocated on the grounds that they more closely conform to practices elsewhere.

In any event, the suggestion that to adopt a four-year post-Form VI degree structure would bring Hong Kong into line with international practice is a serious over-simplification. In practice there is a multiplicity of systems in other parts of the world. In the United States, for example, institutions range from community colleges to research universities, and there are a variety of courses at different levels rather than a monolithic single system. In parts of western Europe the drop-out rate at the end of the first year is often high, and thus the first year of a four-year structure effectively operates as part of a selection process. Neither does there seem to be any compelling reason for Hong Kong to align with the Chinese system simply for the sake of such an alignment. The concept of "one country two systems" surely provides scope for Hong Kong to adopt a system which best suits its need.

Under present arrangements, the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) is in an anomalous position in that it recruits students one year earlier than the other

institutions, and the standard length of its degree courses is four years. The original rationale for this arrangement was to cater for the need of students of Chinese middle schools but this is no longer applicable since such students only constitute a minority of CUHK intakes. Rather than allowing the problem to be compounded by other institutions adopting the CUHK model, the anomaly should therefore be rectified.

The case put forward by the University of Hong Kong (HKU) for moving to a "6+4" structure rests on quite different grounds and is based on alleged deficiencies in the candidates coming forward from Form VII, particularly with regard to language ability and a general intellectual maturity required of degree level studies. It should be noted that, strictly speaking, this is not an argument for four-year degree courses as such; it is an argument for some form of a foundation year designed to bring the students up to the level needed for entry to the three-year degree programmes. It is not a case that stands up to close scrutiny .

First, if there are such deficiencies in students coming forward from Form VII, then such deficiencies will surely be much more pronounced one year earlier at the end of Form VI.

Second, surely the right approach to remedying such deficiencies lies in developing and improving sixth form education, and not in lengthening courses in the tertiary institutions.

Nevertheless, Sir, if the two universities either retain (in the case of CUHK) or adopt (in the case of HKU) a post-Form VI entry point, and if the Executive Council listens to their argument and agrees to it, the two polytechnics and HKUST would have no choice but to follow suit because of the overriding importance of having common entry and selection points in the system. They, in particular the two polytechnics, would also be obliged to follow suit by increasing the length of their current degree courses by one year because it would not be realistic for them to seek to bring post-Form VI students to the degree level within three years. To attempt to do so would risk jeopardizing the system of external validation and professional recognition which underwrite the quality of their degree courses, especially in respect of the two polytechnics. Thus Hong Kong's present system of three-year degree courses (other than at CUHK), widely known and understood, and internationally accepted, would have been replaced, for no good reason, with a substantially more expensive four-year system.

The consequences of such a move for the secondary schools would be very serious indeed. Form VII would no longer be viable and would disappear along with the HKALE. It would be necessary to introduce a new major examination at the end of Form VI, both to provide a certificate for exit and to serve as an entry qualification for tertiary education. In this situation, the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) at the end of Form V could not be sustained and the result would almost inevitably be a straight six-year secondary course. This would in practice have the effect of raising the school leaving age for large numbers of pupils and would have enormous resource implications to the rest of the community.

Leaving aside, however, the question of the consequences on the schools, the fundamental fact is that to move to a four-year post-Form VI entry system for degree courses would very substantially raise the costs of educating each student enrolled in a degree course. Hong Kong would therefore be faced with the choice of educating fewer students for the same cost, or the same number of students for a greater cost.

To adopt the former option is hardly acceptable. Hong Kong is in need of more highly trained and educated manpower, not less, and the tertiary institutions are turning away many thousands of qualified applicants every year because there are no places for them. A recent study at the Hong Kong Polytechnic shows that, if funding does not increase, the consequence of running a four-year degree course would mean a potential loss of some 400 degree course places per year, and, if the number of degree courses is to be maintained, an overall loss of an equivalent of up to 1 500 places on full-time non-degree courses. The implications are very great indeed.

The second option of having the same number of students at greater costs is also open to serious objection. The same study at the Hong Kong Polytechnic reveals that if intakes to degree and non-degree courses are maintained, and four-year degree courses are introduced, there will be a need for approximately 135 additional academic staff and new accommodation of approximately 6 350 sq m, plus more administrative and support staff, equipment, library provisions and so on, on a pro rata basis.

Surely if such additional resources are available, the first priority, given the need and demand for tertiary education, should be to improve access, and hence increase the outflow of qualified graduates into the workforce. Such a development would be in the best interests of the students, the employers and the Hong Kong

community generally.

Sir, before leaving the subject of tertiary education, may I suggest a serious examination by all concerned of the adoption of a credit unit system for degree courses at our tertiary institutions. The Council of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology has deliberated its merits and has given support to its implementation. I firmly believe that this is the best way forward.

Turning to the issue of the future of private schools, the main consideration surely should centre on the question of which model will provide parents, be they rich or poor, with more choices. DSS must be the answer. The labeling of elitism against this scheme simply does not hold water. In this imperfect world, we must accept that no two individuals are equal in every aspect. The urge to reduce everyone to a common denominator is understandable and perhaps even emotionally appealing. Yet, it is an ideal that can never be achieved and in the Hong Kong context should not even be contemplated. Why should the rights of some be compromised or even sacrificed for the sake of the slogan of equality? There is nothing wrong to strive to be better than thy next-door neighbour. After all, in this competitive world of ours, is it not true that we try our best to out-perform one another and in so doing, is it not natural that some will fare better than the other? Is it right to pull someone down to a lower level simply because he or she is better? Should our system build in constraints to restrain progress? No, Sir. Hong Kong's future survival depends on our people retaining a competitive spirit. What can better promote the urge and desire to move forward than the recognition of excellence? Elitism should never be regarded, as a matter of fact, as taboo nor should it be equated invariably with wealth as if only the wealthy can become the elites of the society. In fact, in the context of Hong Kong, hardly anyone can claim that the elites of our society are people of very wealthy means.

Sir, I support the motion.

MR. CHAN (in Cantonese): Sir, education is an investment in the future, that is why we all hope that we can provide a better education for Hong Kong people. After the publication of the report by the Llewellyn Panel, I thought that significant improvement would be made to our educational system. But things are easier said than done! The present review of the structure of tertiary education is a good example.

Basically, Education Commission Report No. 3 has established a unified pattern of "five-year secondary education, two-year matriculation course and three-year university education" and discarded another pattern of "three-year junior secondary education, three-year senior secondary forms and four-year university education." Many secondary school headmasters have indicated that unless there were very strong grounds, they would not accept the proposal of replacing the "5+2" system with the "3+3" system. The reason is that should the "3+3" system be adopted, the Form IV to Form VI curricula would have to be split into two streams, namely grammar and vocation, otherwise competition among Form VI students for higher studies would become even keener. However, experience has proved that most parents prefer sending their children to grammar schools. Besides, these principals have also pointed out that should the "3+3" system be adopted, a large number of teachers would have to undergo retraining, school curricula would have to be revised and school premises modified in order to meet the new requirements. Thus, it can be said that the balance of the whole structure will be upset by a minor change.

Nevertheless, the Wan Chai District Board which I represent, unanimously supports the "3+3+4" system. The Eastern District Board has also discussed this matter and among the 15 members who have spoken on the issue, the majority are inclined to support the "3+3+4" structure.

I personally do not think the "5+2+3" system is better than the "3+3+4" pattern. However, the former is more practical and suitable for the actual situation in Hong Kong. Although the option of 3 years' junior secondary plus three-years' senior secondary education is worth considering, it cannot be accepted at this stage. In regard to the university structure, I am inclined to support a three-year degree course. Past experience cannot prove that a four-year degree course is any better than a three-year programme. The University of Hong Kong has indicated that the standards of its students are declining, but this is another matter which I shall dwell on later. We should try to provide more university places, this is far more important than lengthening the degree course. At present, there is a shortage of university places in Hong Kong, our tertiary institutions can only provide first degree courses for about 6.5% of young people in the relevant age group, and it will take 10 years to raise the ratio to 14.5%.

The shortage of university places has exerted considerable pressure on our students. The same pressure is also experienced by parents who have therefore become dissatisfied with the local educational system. Those who can afford the expenses

simply send their children abroad, for it is easier to enter universities in other countries than in Hong Kong. I believe this is also one of the main reasons behind the exodus of Hong Kong people. Providing more university places can help take some pressure off our students and parents and may also lead to the broadening of the secondary school curriculum.

The shortage of university places also affects the sixth form structure which is designed for the sole purpose of preparing students to study in universities. In order to meet matriculation requirements, the sixth form courses run by various schools have become increasingly demanding. As the subjects offered are also designed to meet matriculation requirements, the choices available to students are very limited. As a result, the full development of students is hindered and the design of the secondary school curriculum is also affected. On promotion to Form IV from Form III, even before the students are mentally and psychologically mature, they have to decide whether they should go into the science or arts stream. On the other hand, the university authorities criticized the newly admitted students as too narrow-minded both intellectually and academically, for they only know how to concentrate on some highly specialized subjects. I think the crux of the problem lies in the acute shortage of university places.

I am firmly opposed to the proposal of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the University of Hong Kong to admit students after Form VI. In my opinion, the two-year sixth form should be an integral course, for this structure is beneficial to the community as well as the students themselves. At present, about one-third of our students have completed the matriculation course before leaving school to work. And the performance of this group of students is generally found to be better than those who have only studied up to Form V. In view of this, it is advisable that the universities admit their students after Form VII when the students have become more mature mentally and psychologically. The setting of the admission point at Form VI will only lead to the disintegration of the sixth form structure.

The University of Hong Kong commented that its new students could not reach the standard required of them and were generally poor in their English standard. There was thus a need to introduce a one-year foundation course. I am also worried that the quality of our university education will decline because of the above reasons, but I do not think that the introduction of the foundation year is the only solution. Rather, I think we should try to strike at the root of the problem. Now that the University of Hong Kong has already raised the admission requirements in the English

subject, we might as well wait and see the result. On the other hand, our secondary schools are also making every endeavour to improve the students' declining English standard. As regards the broadening of the mentality and knowledge of the students, it is open to question whether the remedial work should be done by the university or be left to secondary schools.

I personally do not favour the idea of giving the job to the university. Although the university authorities hold that it is better to run remedial courses for 2 000 undergraduates than for some 35 000 Form VI students. However, the poor standard of our students in fact reflects the inadequacy of our secondary school education. It is imperative that we should improve the quality of the secondary education, and put more efforts in strengthening the nine-year compulsory education, so as to help our students build a sound foundation. We should also broaden the sixth form curriculum and include more subjects in the matriculation syllabus, so that the students will not put all their efforts in a few subjects and ignore all other matters. As for the universities, they should concentrate on studies and researches of a higher level and play a role different from that of the polytechnic. It is indeed a waste of resources for the universities to take up some work that can be done at the secondary level.

Sir, based on the above reasons, I tend to support the "5+2+3" system. But how do we tackle the problem of the present four-year degree course run by the Chinese University of Hong Kong? I think as the Chinese University of Hong Kong has a history of 25 years, and has developed a tradition of its own, it would be improper and unfair to require it to adopt a three-year programme through administrative measures. The proper approach should be to allow the institution to retain the traditional four-year degree course.

In the long term, it is necessary to establish a unified system of university education. I suggest that the Chinese University of Hong Kong should move towards a credit unit system. The institution may conduct courses during the summer break so that the undergraduates can complete their first degree course within a time span of three to four years. The system should of course be backed up by resources allocated by the Government, so that the Chinese University of Hong Kong may employ more lecturers to run the summer courses.

Sir, with these remarks, I support the motion.

MRS. FAN: Sir, as Members may already know I am a member of the Education Commission and an employee of the Hong Kong Polytechnic. However, the view that I express in this debate is not related to the stance of either bodies, but represents my personal thinking.

The structure of tertiary education has been the subject of controversial debate for the past decade, but the problem of mixed entry point to first degree courses which affected both the secondary sector and the tertiary sector deteriorated rather than improved with the passage of time. It had to be dealt with. Due to strong sectoral interests, no solution is about to win the support of all affected. But we must find solutions if the good of the students and the interest of the community means something to us. Nor should we delay the implementation of the solution any longer than is necessary. Our students deserve the freedom of choice by having all the possible options of degree courses in local institutions presented to them at one point - the common entry point. The tertiary institutions, which understandably like to attract the best students, should do so by fair and healthy competition.

Tertiary institutions in Hong Kong are very fortunate compared to their counterparts in other countries, because only 6.5% of our age group can gain admission to first degree courses while in developed countries the percentage ranges from 12% to 30% or even more. Given the fact that our secondary school students cannot be proven to be less intelligent than students in developed countries, and indeed, some might claim the reverse, the students in our tertiary institutions should be a joy to teach. There is, therefore, no valid reason for any institutions to use administrative measures to snatch the cream of the cream by offering places to them one or two years earlier. The sensible approach is to implement a common entry point, which incidentally also means a common selection point, for all first degree courses. However the Government may be accused of interfering with academic freedom. Indeed, the commission had already been accused of this offence. Selection of students is an area of institutional autonomy. The University and Polytechnic Grants Committee has this to say, "Whatever may be the procedures for setting or controlling entrance examinations, or for setting total student number targets, or for setting student intake targets, the institutions have unfettered rights in the selection or rejection of students presented as candidates for admission." Whether this in effect provides the institutions with the right to select students at whatever level they choose is open to serious questioning. But even granting that, should tertiary institutions' admission policies not be subject to scrutiny by the community, in particular the

secondary sector which stands to suffer from unilateral changes in these policies, and the taxpayers who are footing the bill?

The responsibility for today's state of affairs hardly rests solely on tertiary institutions. It is the combination of history, evolution and development, and procrastination on the part of the Government. What have served us well two decades ago is no longer appropriate. The secondary sector had evolved with 5+2 as its mainstream, with 91% of the student population studying under the 5+2 structure. The Government's acceptance of status quo to avoid confrontation some years ago has unwittingly resulted in more intensified emotional reactions today. A decision on the common entry point at Form VII can no longer be deferred. Although personally I would very much like to see a consensus, I have to admit that this is not realistic. If the issue is dragged on any longer, it would only serve to polarize and exacerbate the problem. In short, status quo is not a viable option.

Although the commission did not advocate a particular length for first degree courses, and wisely left this to the institutions and University and Polytechnic Grants Committee, thereby allowing greater flexibility and showing clear respect for academic freedom, some commentators had relentlessly attacked the commission for recommending a three-year degree course. It was sad to witness well respected academic figures making misleading comments. But sadder still, is the use of nationalistic, anti-colonial feelings to cast a cloud of conspiracy on the commission's recommendation by some people when they have no basis at all to support their allegations and insinuations. I must say that such comments have little relevance and has a tendency to mislead the public.

It was suggested that Hong Kong should follow the world trend and adopt the 3+3+4 model. I wish to offer two comments. First, the structure of education system must suit the particular requirements of our community. Transplantation of a well-tried model elsewhere is not necessarily a guarantee for success. Secondly, the assertion that four-year degree course is a world trend is an over-simplified version of the actual situation as the Honourable Stephen CHEONG has already pointed out. It fails to take into account the great variety in academic contents and standards of these courses in different countries, the very high wastage rate in the first year, and the fact that well established universities in developed countries aim to be "centre of excellence" and therefore tend to concentrate more on higher level work and research. If there is any trend in higher education, then the tendency is to move up-market and to shorten the length of the first degree course.

The virtues of the 3+3 system vis-a-vis the 5+2 system was exhaustively debated during the public consultation of Education Commission Report No. 2, and most of the arguments were repeated in this consultation exercise. I listened and considered most carefully the views of various representations received by OMELCO. Despite the eloquence of some presentations, I am yet to be convinced that the change to 3+3 system in secondary schools will bring to our students the acclaimed benefits.

It is difficult to overlook that the 5+2 system is already in place, the Certificate Examination and A-Level do receive wide recognition internationally, and improvements to sixth form are at this very moment being implemented. Can we be sure that the disruptive effect of changing to 3+3 is not going to lower the overall standard of the secondary sector in the short and medium term? What if the tertiary institutions are still dissatisfied with the output of secondary schools in the 3+3 system? Are we confident in obtaining international recognition of the Form VI school leaving examination in 3+3 system? And how long will this take? Should we resurrect the Junior Secondary Education Assessment at the end of Form III to get an objective assessment for students to be streamed? Sir, I do not wish to sidetrack this debate on structure of tertiary education. Suffice it to say that there are insufficient grounds to alter the structure of secondary education in order to enable tertiary institutions to take in students at Form VI.

Some commentators felt that the matriculation course is a waste of time and it should be abolished. Their views are based on the present state of the course. The fact that the two-year A-Level course suffers from problems of narrowness, too academic oriented, insufficient attention on languages and general education and so on is well recognized, and is indeed, dealt with in depth by Education Commission Report No. 2. Measures to overcome these problems were proposed, and representatives from tertiary institutions are already working together with secondary school people and Education Department officials to develop a more appropriate set of syllabus for sixth form. There is no doubt that sixth form needs improvement. We have identified what our students need. They have better language ability, broader general knowledge, ability to think analytically and independently. Students in secondary schools, especially those in upper forms and sixth form, should be given the opportunity to acquire these qualities. I believe the improved two-year integrated sixth form can achieve this. Abolition of sixth form is not the answer.

One of our universities proposes to admit students from Form VI and gives them

a foundation year to instil in them the qualities mentioned earlier. While the objective seems educationally sound, is the foundation year the only way to achieve it? One must not lose sight of the fact that the university in question enjoys substantial influence over the syllabus of A-Level, and is totally free to give emphasis to the above mentioned qualities by amending its admission requirements. Knowing our secondary school students, whatever the university requires, every possible effort within the realm of human limitations will be made to meet these requirements. Are there really sufficient justifications for the university to take over Form VII secondary schools?

The number of years a student spends in a degree course is only one of the factors contributing to the quality of education, and sometimes, bears no direct relevance to the benefit received by the students. Other more important factors are: teaching methods, which can stimulate the thinking process and motivation of the students; curriculum planning and review, which ensures that the course content is well-balanced, suitable and constantly updated; and of course staff- student contact hours, which gives an indication of the workload of the staff and students. To imply that the quality of education is lowered simply because the student spent one year less in the tertiary institution without reference to the one additional year of study at Form VII nor with reference to factors referred to earlier is naive. There is no proof that four years post-Form VI is better or worse off than three years post-Form VII. There is, however, objective evidence that the quality of three-year degree at post-Form VII level offered by the non-university institutions in Hong Kong does reach the international standard. Vigorous and thorough validation exercises were carried out by the Council of National Academic Award on each and every degree course proposed and implemented by non-university institutions. Quality and standards are jealously preserved. I hope I do not upset anyone by pointing out that students, by and large, still tend to choose degree courses offered by universities in preference to non-university institutions degree courses. The intake of the latter institutions is probably less well developed intellectually than their university counterparts at the entry point. Yet, in three years' time, these students are able to reach degree and honours degree standards. Are we to believe that the non-university institutions are exceptionally able in their educational role, or are the universities too modest about their own capability and achievements?

Sir, I believe the best way to extract ourselves from this meaningless argument on the length of degree course is to encourage tertiary institutions to move into a credit unit system with a common entry point at post-Form VII. Through continued

assessment and accumulation of credit units, students can enjoy the flexibility of taking longer or shorter time to finish their degree. Those who are eager to join the working world may prefer to work intensively and obtain their qualifications earlier. Those who enjoy the richness of campus life can devote more time to the library, the student common room, the sports centre and the students' union.

The commission, in making its recommendations, had worked through a web of sectoral interests, and tried to take on board all the reservations that can reasonably be met. In the final analysis, we need the universities, and in particular, we need their co-operation with secondary schools for the system to work. This is why universities have no need to be overtly concerned that their interest will be overlooked. However, priority consideration must be given to the large number of students in secondary schools and those of them who will have the opportunity to be offered a degree place. On average, there are four qualified applicants for one degree place. To provide more opportunities for qualified applicants to study on degree courses, to cater for the manpower needs of industry, commerce and the services, and to allow secondary schools the chance to do their job properly in a stable structure without unnecessary disruptions, Sir, I think the recommendations of the commission should be accepted.

On the issue of the future of private schools, there are two models that readily present themselves. In the first model, all the bought places in private schools are phased out and the private schools that survive will be totally independent of government assistance. These independent schools will have to charge very high fees to make ends meet, thereby they will not be accessible to children of lower and middle income groups. The latter group is of course guaranteed a place in the public sector -- government schools and aided schools, although parents have little choice on which schools their children will study in. The second model is the Direct Subsidy Scheme. Private schools can stay in the Bought Place Scheme until the year 2000, and can apply to join DSS if and when they reach the standard of aided schools. The level of subsidy to DSS schools is directly in reverse to the amount of school fees charged, thereby reducing the incentive of DSS schools to charge high fees. Parents can choose the DSS school they prefer and put in applications. The question is: "Which model is more preferable for the private schools and the community, in particular, the parents and their children?"

My response is: "which model will give the parents more choice, irrespective of their economic background?" DSS clearly has the edge. In the education of our next

generation, parental choice should play a significant role, because only with the full co-operation of the parents can the schools and the teachers assist the students to develop their real potential. The implementation of nine years free and compulsory education, and under the principle of equality and fairness, the choice by the parents has been reduced to minimal in our present system.

Even with DSS, the number of these schools is limited. Therefore only some parents can have a choice. But even this is immensely better than letting the computer decide your child's school for you. Parents who care about their children's education and are prepared to select a school whose curriculum suits their child's need should at least be given a chance to apply for that school. Surely equality and fairness does not mean depriving parents of a choice. To me, equality means every child should have the opportunity of education, and the quality of that education must at least be at the level of the public sector schools. But over and above that, children with different abilities and inclinations should also be allowed to further develop and strengthen these qualities in a conducive environment offered by a DSS school with the appropriate curriculum, provided that their parents are prepared to take the trouble. The weakness of our existing system is that even if the parents are prepared to take the trouble, and they do care, there is very little they could do. What is proposed in the DSS is not "elitism" nor "retrogression", but simply a little bit more say for the parents.

Most of the queries and criticisms on DSS are of a technical nature, these could be taken on board and sorted out at a later stage if the concept of DSS receives support in principle. There is, however, one major reservation on the fundamentals of DSS by 97 members from district boards and municipal councils and other representations. They envisaged that because the DSS schools can select their own students, these schools will take the best students and become "first class" schools, thus causing the schools in the public sector to be seen as "second class". The Caput Schools Council, on the other hand, thinks that if the DSS schools have to attract their own students rather than being allocated students by the Government, there is no chance of survival, and in view of this, they oppose the move to DSS. This seemingly contradictory stand of the two groups is because they are looking at DSS from two extremes. The first group assumed that DSS schools consist of all the best aided schools in the territory, and the second group assumed that only the existing private schools and caput schools will be in DSS. The real situation, I suspect, will evolve into somewhere in between. There will be a few aided schools (not necessarily the most well-known ones) and a number of private schools. These DSS schools would each

have their own characteristics and teaching methods, including different emphasis on curriculum and extra-curricular activities. The image of DSS schools, I envisage, is not necessarily one of academic excellence, but rather one with individual characteristics offering varieties and some "extras".

The DSS school is innovative and imaginative. I believe it is worth looking into further.

Sir, I support the motion.

MR. PETER POON: Sir, before I begin, I wish to declare my interest as the vice-chairman of the Council and Treasurer of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. What I am going to say, however, represent my own views after considering carefully the Education Commission Report No. 3 and representations received by Members of this Council. I would also make some observations on the divergent views expressed on the report.

Broadly speaking, the report attempts to rationalize the education system in Hong Kong. Whilst its objectives are laudable and much effort has been made to find the best solutions to many complicated problems, the recommendations have aroused a lot of controversy. At times, it even becomes an emotional issue. I hope that this debate will bring out the views and sentiments logically and constructively.

Since many colleagues will be speaking this afternoon, I shall be brief and shall confine my comments to Chapter Three -- The Structure of Tertiary Education .

Sir, I agree entirely that there is a tremendous shortage of places in our tertiary institutions. The Governor's policy speech has emphasized the need and his determination to increase such places substantially in the years to come. Nevertheless, I am sure few will disagree that quality should not be sacrificed for quantity especially at a time when Hong Kong has to make itself competitive in the international arena.

Two of the major recommendations in Chapter Three are that there should be a common university entry point after Form VII, and that the length of first degree courses of a similar nature at all tertiary institutions should be the same, basically three years.

There are merits in both the three-year system and four-year system in university education. The Government has decided to adopt the policy of developing a system with two years of sixth form education before this debate on tertiary education is open. It has virtually pre-determined the direction of the recommendations of the Education Commission. It is stated in paragraph 3.27 (page 29) of the report that "the perpetuation of the existing mixed system cannot be tolerated". Sir, I cannot see why flexibility must be completely ruled out. I fully sympathize with secondary schools regarding the loss of students after Form VI. It must be recognized that most of these students have left for further studies overseas. Many of them go to countries with four-year university courses. Since the total intake of the University of Hong Kong and the Chinese University of Hong Kong is fixed under the present system, I believe that a rigid unified matriculation point at Form VII will not solve the problem of the substantial outflow of students after Form VI. It may, on the contrary, worsen the situation if students are denied the opportunity of entering a local university after Form VI.

Sir, the suggestion that the basic length for most degree courses of a similar nature should be fixed at three years would, I am afraid, infringe the academic freedom of the tertiary educational institutions, especially the universities. Each of these institutions has its own fine traditions and complete standardization is undesirable. For instance, even in the United Kingdom which has a three-year system in the tertiary education sector, there are various courses of different lengths which may lead to a law degree.

Financial implications have been used as one of the justifications for the recommendations. The validity of the basis of the calculation has, however, been challenged by some. I do not propose to get involved in any such argument. But I feel that it may not be necessary for the UPGC to allocate funds to subsidize the full length of the post-Form VII four-year courses of all the tertiary institutions unless the need for the additional year is fully justified and finances permit. The tertiary institutions have their particular roles in higher education and I think that it is not desirable to attempt to stereotype them.

In a progressive society like ours, certain changes in our educational system are inevitable, but any change would need to be considered thoroughly for the good of Hong Kong. Sir, it would be a great pity for the Government to rush into major changes which would have far-reaching effects and repercussions without further

consideration and review of the many problems which may arise. Although there are certain advantages in uniformity, the lack of flexibility and the likely sacrifice of the fine traditions of the Chinese University's four-year basic system of bilingual and broad-based education, fostered so hard for over 25 years and with a successful record, may not be in the best interest of Hong Kong. It may not also achieve the objective of producing the wide range of talents that Hong Kong needs in the coming years to replace the experienced graduates and professionals emigrating from the territory.

Sir, I prefer option (c) of the report. Paragraph 3.43 of the report states that socially and financially, there would be no adverse consequences in comparison with the existing situation. There is no reason why the "freedom to choose" should be taken away from the students seeking to enter the universities in Hong Kong, especially when the two universities have agreed on a joint admission scheme in principle. The introduction of the scheme would greatly reduce the disruption of the Provisional Acceptance System of the Chinese University.

In the final analysis, we need more time and consultation to find the best solution to our educational problems in totality. In view of the divergent views expressed on the Education Commission Report No. 3, the hasty adoption of any option may not help in achieving the desired objectives. In the meantime, all tertiary institutions should co-operate in the identification of solutions that would improve our educational system and increase the number of graduates within the ambit of their educational ideals and constraints of resources available.

Sir, with these reservations, I support the motion.

MR. CHENG HON-KWAN: Sir, before I speak on the structure of tertiary education referred to in the Education Commission Report No. 3, I have to declare an interest as the chairman of the Council of the City Polytechnic, the vice-chairman of the Council of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, the Chairman of the Planning Committee for the Open Learning Institute and a member of the Board of Governors and Council of the Lingnan College. And I wish to make it clear that the views I am going to express may not necessarily represent those of these institutions.

I recall that at the adjournment debate on the Education Commission Report No. 2 on 18 February 1987, I said, "I agree that a centralized system of admissions to

tertiary education is a desirable objective, so long as it is based on a genuinely unified level of entry." I am pleased that the Education Commission has now recommended joint admission procedures to be introduced by all UPGC-funded institutions with a unified entry point.

On 12 October, Sir, in his speech to the first sitting of this Council, the Governor referred to the Government's early acceptance, in May this year, of the Education Commission's recommendation in its Report No. 2 for strengthening the standard two-year sixth form course. The Governor said, "This will allow for a more varied and broadened curriculum, giving students a greater choice and providing the possibility of a common entry point to tertiary education". As I understand it, the great majority of the secondary schools supported this concept of five years of secondary education followed by two years' sixth form. I am convinced that the proposed unified entry system after Secondary VII will enable a worthwhile sixth form education to be developed with broadened curriculum. I agree that by doing so the unreasonable pressure on students which arises from the need to take part in a number of examinations to maximize their chances of entry to higher education will be largely relieved and the fierce competition between tertiary institutions will be eased accordingly.

Whilst much of this debate will revolve around the question of the length of first degree courses, I would stress the importance of adopting a credit unit system in our tertiary institutions whereby the students are permitted to make the best use of their accumulated credit units as well as a more flexible timing. It is the responsibility of the tertiary institutions to plan their own courses or programmes to provide the students with the best options that would meet their ultimate aim. It is encouraging that the City Polytechnic has already organized courses on a modular basis to enable the students to make the wider applications of their studies with a broad outlook in their education. The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology has also decided to adopt the credit system which would make varied length of instruction and enhanced studies possible. I shall be delighted if a system of credit unit accumulation and transfer may be widely applied to all other tertiary institutions.

Sir, any modification to our education system will no doubt have, to some extent, financial implications which could be the concern of the community. I am conscious of the fact that given finite resources, lengthening degree courses will invariably reduce the number of degree places and the output of graduates. In the case of

non-university institutions, either degree places or sub-degree places or indeed both will suffer. Any available resources that would otherwise be used for extending the years of degree courses could well be effectively used for further development of our tertiary education. We are fully aware of our need for more places at tertiary level and Government has made great efforts to develop our higher education in recent years. Although we have now provided first degree courses for about 6.5% of young people in the relevant age group and will increase these places to some 14% by the year 2000, I must say these percentages are much lower than international standards and should be regarded as far from satisfactory. It is therefore essential for us at this stage and in the medium term to make the best use of our available resources to provide more opportunities for our young people to benefit from higher education and this is especially important at a time when we all suffer from the problem of brain drain. In the circumstances, I should congratulate the Education Commission on their broad vision and sensible recommendation for first priority to be given to increasing the number of students entering tertiary institutions each year.

Some of our educationists are concerned about the quality of our higher education if we try to improve it quantitatively. I appreciate their worry but in the light of my own experience I can assure them that it is always our aim to plan our tertiary institutions to a very high international standard with the best available resources.

Sir, I support the recommendations of the Education Commission in respect of the structure of tertiary education. I firmly believe the improvement that will emerge from the implementation of these recommendations, if accepted, will bring about a unified system of tertiary education best suited to the needs of Hong Kong under the present circumstances. Today, I am not speaking in favour of nor against any tertiary institution. But I am speaking for the interest of Hong Kong as a whole.

With these remarks, Sir, I support the motion.

MR. CHUNG (in Cantonese): Sir, as a member of the Council of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, I hope I can adopt a reasonable and objective outlook in assessing the Education Commission Report No. 3.

It is noteworthy that Report No. 3 mainly plans ahead for us a major, comprehensive and long-term programme in education. It carries the same spirit as the many other large-scale capital projects recently announced, reflecting in full that Hong Kong Government is ever willing to be responsible and efficient in the "transitional

period".

Since the publication of Report No. 3 on 16 June 1988, two of its proposals have attracted the greatest concern: (1) with the establishment of a two-year structure for matriculation courses, all tertiary institutions would standardize their admission point at Secondary VII, and (2) with the introduction of a Direct Subsidy Scheme, the Bought Place Scheme and other subvention schemes would gradually be phased out.

These two proposals have attracted extensive and strong reactions with opposing and supporting views. For a responsible government, it is only natural that consultation will encourage all kinds of dissenting or identical views. I hope the Administration will pay close attention to all public opinion, especially those from the education sector, and give serious consideration to them.

It has been pointed out that the reason behind the Education Commission's emphasis on the setting up of a two-year sixth form is to build up a basic, unified and permanent "5+2+3" structure in our education system with five-year secondary education, two-year matriculation course and three-year university study. In other words, students complete Form VII before they are admitted to the tertiary institutions. This is a means to force the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) to shorten its courses from four years to three years and debar the University of Hong Kong (HKU) from changing its three-year system to a four-year system.

In my opinion, there are inherent advantages in a two-year matriculation course. Firstly, a two-year course can help to alleviate the "confusion" now existing in Form VI and Form VII. Secondly, a unified entrance point can be set for the tertiary institutions and it will be technically viable for all tertiary institutions to have a joint admission procedure. Thirdly, the academic qualifications awarded after Form VI and Form VII can be helpful to students in job-seeking or for furtherance of studies at university level.

Nevertheless, we must admit that the two-year matriculation course is not without its shortcomings.

Firstly, the greatest problem of the proposal is that the entrance point for any three-year first degree courses seems to have been set at Form VII level while at the same time the tertiary institutions are allowed a free hand in determining the

length of their courses. This discrepancy not only reveals the dubious nature of the proposal for an independent matriculation course, it also interferes with the structure and operation of all institutions involved.

Secondary, the Education Commission admits that the nine-year free and compulsory education has lowered the average English standard of Form III students. The report, however, seems to entrust the two-year sixth form with the responsibility to make up for this decline. The teaching time of the three-year first degree courses is also intended to increase by one third so that students can improve their language ability. If the Education Commission uses this as a reason for proposing the "5+2+3" system, it will be most inappropriate in the development of our education system.

Thirdly, in order to prove the cost-effectiveness of the option for the two-year sixth form and three-year degree courses, the Education Commission, most strangely, presented a \$700 million option for the two-year sixth form and four-year degree courses and then had it vetoed. Why and how can it be possible that an extra year is added on top of the Education Commission's self-devised "5+2+3" system in preparing budgetary forecast?

Fourthly, the Education Commission has made it clear it will not adopt any foreign education system, yet on the other hand, the report stresses that "it will be necessary to bear in mind the requirements of professional bodies in the United Kingdom to which Hong Kong graduates require admission." It is just shamming refusal. The British model is to be retained in Hong Kong after all. The British three-year degree course system is not without merits, but the proposal has overlooked the international trend towards four-year degree courses and has not taken into account the situation after 1997 in respect of opportunities for tertiary education and employment.

Fifthly, the fact shows that local students' demand for recognized university places far exceeds supply. Every year, the number of Hong Kong students leaving for Britain for tertiary education is only one-seventh of the total number of students studying abroad at tertiary level. We must bear in mind that after completing Form VI in Hong Kong, students can now start their first year degree courses in America and China; or right after the completion of Form VII as required, they can start the second year of the honours degree courses in Britain. Thus when Form VII students are not guaranteed a place in the universities in Hong Kong, the two-year sixth form would be a kind of wastage for it would only train students for other countries and

aggravate the outflow of students.

I agree that the two-year sixth form has its intrinsic value, but I think that this proposal should not constitute a restraint on university education. In fact, the Education Commission has considered the two-year sixth form within the context of tertiary education. It would be unreasonable and unnecessary to shorten the length of degree courses in order to extend matriculation courses.

If the Education Commission Report No. 3 really believes that the five subvented tertiary institutions at present can decide for themselves the length of various degree courses, it will be unnecessary to impose hard and fast rules on the length of first degree courses. Under the present system, science courses last five years, arts subjects three to four years and technical courses two to three years. The difference in course length has caused no problem in the development of these subjects. Furthermore, Hong Kong is advancing towards a high degree of specialized division of labour. As far as our tertiary education is concerned, the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology as well as the Open Learning Institute will soon be established. Students have to put what they have learnt into application. Thus the differences in the length of different degree courses will become less significant.

At present, while the two-year sixth form can solve the problems of the matriculation structure, it apparently gives rise to the problem of the length of the first degree courses. The authorities concerned and the tertiary institutions should actively seek a compromise on this issue. Before a better solution can be reached, I would like to put forth the following suggestions:

1. If both CUHK and HKU advocate a four-year programme for their first degree courses, consideration may be given, on basis of the autonomy and actual needs of the two universities, to devise flexible arrangement for admissions to the various faculties, including making the results attained at Form VI as one of the entrance requirements with reference to students' academic performance. Students who are qualified to be promoted to a higher level may be allowed to study in the first year (that is, the pre-university study or foundation year) of the course they choose. This proposal aims at finding a solution which would resolve satisfactorily the contradiction between the two-year sixth form and four-year degree course. It is understandable that universities, prompted by their sense of responsibility, will form their opinion about government policies and make proper arrangements to cater for their actual needs. If change is inevitable, ample time should be allowed for

the universities to make adjustment academically and administratively. For those institutions offering three-year degree courses, the admission point can also be set at Form VI. Reference can then be made to the results of the students who are suitable for promotion as a basis for admission to first year of the courses offered by the institutions or for application to degree courses of the two universities.

2. The Government should guarantee that for any proposals to extend the three-year basic degree course put up by the subvented institutions or in scrutinizing subsidy applications, consideration will be given to the actual needs of the students and the academic grounds for such proposals. The Government should not impose restrictions on such proposals merely on financial or administrative grounds.

3. The question of the duration of the matriculation course and the basic degree courses is not as important as the question of prompt expansion of more faculties and further increase in the number of places of the first degree courses. The Government should therefore follow the existing university building policy to increase, as far as possible, the allocation of fund for tertiary education.

4. If it is considered that the academic standard of tertiary students is lower than before, in order to maintain our degree and professional qualification at internationally recognized standard, the education authorities should set up an ad hoc group with representatives from the tertiary education and secondary school sectors. The ad hoc group should discuss and devise the curricula and teaching methods for matriculation classes. Particular attention should be given to language teaching which aims at improving the students' standard from the start.

5. The Education Commission should review the report or other related problems and make amendment or put forth better proposals if necessary in order to formulate a better and long-term education policy which can cater for the needs of our social development and the demands of the matriculants.

Sir, I believe that the spirit of the report and its proposal for an independent matriculation course deserve our applause and support. However, I hope the Administration will give serious consideration to the aforesaid five suggestions in order to avoid any unnecessary constraints on the development of degree courses by the two-year sixth form system.

On the proposal of Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS), I think its greatest merit lies

in the accentuation of the principle of freedom in education. If more people or organizations are encouraged to run schools, I believe, apart from the provision of education service by the public sector, it will be most conducive to the aggregation of private resources and the introduction of the market force into the expansion and development of Hong Kong's education.

Nevertheless, we must give further thoughts to the scheme because the report has offered no precise or substantive plans or requirements to enable the private schools to decide whether they will join the Direct Subsidy Scheme. For example, what are the terms of the "five-year contract" to be signed between the Government and private schools? What are the consequences for the breaching of the conditions? No judgement can be made from an option which merely contains principles.

In order to save discussion time, my preliminary views on the DSS can be boiled down to the following three points:

1. The Government should devise appropriate methods so that all the existing 67 private secondary school can be on the same footing when they start this free competition to join the DSS or else unfair situation will emerge at secondary school level in which the scheme will be dominated by "prestigious schools."

2. A private education fund should be set up within the DSS so as to provide scholarships and bursaries to those brilliant students in need of financial support. Each participating school should set up a number of scholarships and bursaries on a pro rata basis in relation to the total number of students in the school. This will help to remove all the restraints which may prevent students from schooling.

3. After the implementation of the DSS, newly established schools are welcomed to join if they can meet all the requirements. However, in the first few years of operation, it would be best not to accept subsidized schools. Such exclusion is intended to achieve a balance in the development of the "school privatization" process under the DSS. In fact, subsidized schools which least need direct subsidy can easily meet the standard required by the scheme. Those which find it difficult to meet the requirements, like schools in the Bought Place Scheme and private schools in general, are badly in need of direct subsidy. I believe if the Government makes proper arrangement for each individual case the DSS will be a success before long.

Sir, after expounding my views and putting forth my suggestions, I agree, in

principle, to the proposal of the report that matriculation course should be independent. But I object to any restraint imposed either on the system or basic structure of university education. Thus I think flexibility should be given to tertiary institutions with regard to the issue of entrance points and let them decide according to their own needs. Secondly, I support the DSS but there should be a balanced development between Government and private schools. At the same time, the DSS should provide fair chances of schooling to all Hong Kong students.

Sir with these remarks, I support the motion.

MR. HO SAI-CHU (in Cantonese): Sir, the Education Commission Report No. 3 has caused concern and reaction from the education profession and interested parties since its publication. Views are divided but backed by their respective arguments. The authorities concerned should give careful consideration and weigh the pros and cons before making a final decision.

Being a representative of the commercial sector and also a person involved in the building and construction as well as various other industries, I would like to make some comments from the point of view of the industrial and commercial sectors. What we need, apart from the graduates of tertiary institutions, are a substantial number of secondary school leavers as field workers in various trades. There is a serious shortage of graduates at the tertiary level at present. The number of graduates from our tertiary institutions cannot meet the demand of the labour market, bearing in mind that the brain drain problem has become more serious recently. There is hence an urgent need to speed up training in order to fill the gap. I therefore think that the solutions to the problem are, firstly, to increase the intake level of tertiary institutions and, secondly, to raise the educational standard of our secondary school students.

With this in mind, I support that all matriculation courses run by secondary schools should adopt a two-year course structure just like our present system of Form VI and Form VII classes. All tertiary institutions in the territory should admit students at a common entry point (that is, upon completion of Form VII) through a joint admission procedure on the basis of the preferences and academic results of the candidates. The merit of such a system is that the present discrepancies arising from the admission systems operated by the two universities can be avoided. An added

advantage of such two-year matriculation course is that secondary school leavers can benefit by equipping themselves with one more year of schooling even if they cannot enter university. They then enjoy a better chance of meeting the demand for graduates at that level. Students can also build up a more concrete foundation for themselves if they wish to pursue studies at the Open Learning Institute in future.

As for the question of the length of first degree courses -- whether they should be three-year or four-year courses -- it is obvious that a shorter course length will help expedite the training of qualified personnel and reduce government expenditure on university education. But what really counts is the quality of the students admitted which, in turn, depends upon the education at the secondary or even primary levels. On the other hand, the autonomy of the universities should be respected. Therefore, in my opinion, the length of first degree courses for certain subjects can be handled with flexibility as recommended in the report. A credit unit system may perhaps be introduced to supplement the said recommendation.

Sir, with these remarks, I support the motion.

MR. HUI: Sir, the section of the Education Commission Report No. 3 which deals with the long-standing problem of private secondary schools in Hong Kong, has triggered off much controversy. Criticisms centre upon the proposed Direct Subsidy Scheme, which despite its good intentions, carries with it practical difficulties that negate its advantages. I personally welcome the attempt by the commission to answer the need for improving standards in our secondary schools. However, the question: "How to go about it?" remains.

The introduction of the nine-year compulsory education with its attendant evils, highlighting slow progress and lowering of standards in secondary schools, has given rise to the increasing demand by parents for better education for their children. The proposed Direct Subsidy Scheme, in allowing parents to purchase higher quality schooling not only fulfils a growing social need, but also provides incentive to educational development through more freedom given to the secondary schools in respect of fee charging, students recruitment and curriculum setting. Indeed, the Direct Subsidy Scheme offers opportunities for schools, which all along came under government control, to exercise self-discipline, pursue inspired dynamism and develop creative potentials, altogether conducive to the overall improvement of secondary education in Hong Kong.

As for the private schools, the promise for those qualified to be put on par with aided schools serves as a stimulus to reforms. The much needed financial assistance from Government will instil private schools with confidence and enthusiasm to actively upgrade their standards, thus achieving healthy competition between the public and private sectors. For the more enterprising private schools, the scheme offers a chance to turn over a new leaf. Furthermore, the scheme also falls in line with the present trend of decentralization of social services.

Sir, but there are problems. By allowing schools to charge their own fees, the Direct Subsidy Scheme gives rise to criticisms directed towards some aided schools, in particular the well-known, prestigious schools. Their freedom to charge higher fees, critics claim, would not only bring about discrimination against students from low-income families, but would also violate the principle that government aid is only given to non-profit-making schools. Another criticism is launched at schools' freedom to choose their own students which could upset the Secondary School Place Allocation system, resulting in a return of elitism in our secondary education. The discretion given to schools to decide on their curriculum also poses a threat to a balanced education aimed at the total development of students, while decreased government control would undermine the public accountability of our secondary schools.

On the other hand, our private schools, for many years despised, undernourished and ailing, have been languishing in a way perhaps unknown in other parts of the world. Crippled by the vicious cycle of poor reputation -- undesirable students -- declining performance, it is difficult to envisage how private schools could emulate their counterparts in the public sector and efficiently upgrade their standards within the fixed time limit using limited private resources. Given that only 10 non-profit-making private schools have been accepted for the Bought Place Scheme, it is estimated that only one third of the existing 67 private schools will qualify for the standards of school premises set by the Direct Subsidy Scheme. Indeed, there is some truth in the allegation that the Direct Subsidy Scheme is an "immigration policy" designed for the better-off private schools at the expense of the low quality ones which will eventually be phased out. For the role they had played when the nine-year compulsory education was introduced back in 1978, Sir, private schools deserve a better deal.

Sir, the privatization of secondary schools is a significant issue with ominous

implications that must be handled with extreme care. As such, I have much reservation for the Administration to proceed with the Direct Subsidy Scheme. Here, I would urge the Administration to provide more detailed information on the proposed scheme, spelling out the exact degree of autonomy in fee charging, student selection and curriculum design to be allowed for secondary schools. The scheme, as it now stands is subject to abuse that may jeopardize our secondary schools system.

I shall now turn to talk briefly on the subject of tertiary education and university admission system. I personally support a six-year secondary schools system followed by a four-year university education for the simple reason that this will relieve examination pressures that are doing insidious harm to our students. Furthermore, a four-year university degree course will bring Hong Kong's tertiary education in line with systems in most overseas countries. While I fully appreciate the arguments for retaining the existing sixth form system, I tend to believe that a broad education tailored to the all round development of secondary school graduates should begin with the university.

Thus, it remains for the education authorities to review and design the secondary schools curriculum in accordance with the A-level syllabus and the practical requirements of school leavers. Indeed, an overall review of Hong Kong's secondary schools system is deemed most timely. As for the Chinese University which is getting 80 percent out of its intake from the Anglo-Chinese schools, the proposed 6+6+4 system fits in nicely, requiring only minimum administrative changes in its admission requirements. On the other hand, the foundation year proposed by University of Hong Kong which I accept with reservations carries with it technical difficulties. As such, it is necessary for the two universities to abandon their Provisional Acceptance Scheme to make way for a unified entrance system. With due respect to both higher learning institutes, and in light of their historical, academic and political background, I would suggest that the universities continue with their present systems minus the Provisional Acceptance Scheme for an interim period of a few years before a unified admission system and tertiary education programme are implemented.

Sir, with these remarks, I support the motion.

4.28 pm

HIS HONOUR THE PRESIDENT: Members may care at this time to take a short break.

4.47 pm

HIS HONOUR THE PRESIDENT: Council will resume the debate on Mrs. Selina CHOW's motion.

MR. MARTIN LEE: Sir, I rise to speak on this motion with a high degree of diffidence because education is not an area in which I possess any expertise.

The only experience my wife and I have is many years ago when she had taught for four years in a government secondary school and I had taught for three years in a private secondary school.

But today I believe that I have the right and duty to speak as a consumer, or rather as a father of a young consumer of not quite seven years of age. And in this limited way, I hope I can make some contributions to this debate.

Let me start by saying that it is a thankless task to have to write a report of this kind for no matter how it is written, it will probably attract just as many criticisms. Indeed, I do not think that there is any person in Hong Kong who is so bold as to think that he or she can come up with a different report covering the same issues which will be accepted by everybody in Hong Kong. And this can be demonstrated by the fact that some interested and concerned groups have taken diametrically opposite views on some key issues. And after hearing them, I cannot in all honesty say that anyone is wrong. For they all seem to be so reasonable. But each group only speaks for a sector of the community, and there is bound to be much conflict of interest.

Sir, what I propose to do therefore is to make some general observations, and leave the specifics to my honourable colleagues who are much more knowledgeable than I in this field.

Sir, the Administration has assured the OMELCO ad hoc group that it will not dictate to any tertiary institution to have a three-year or a four-year degree course, but that each institution is free to decide on the length of their courses. This is indeed consistent with paragraph 3.30 of the report. But funding is a totally separate matter, for paragraph 3.50 clearly states: "The University and Polytechnic Grants Committee (UPGC) would continue to use its own academic and financial criteria to judge individual cases in the light of Government policy

prevailing at the time." And so, if the University of Hong Kong (HKU) were to approach the UPGC for funds for a four-year degree course, but if the prevailing government policy was that it should be a three-year course, then the UPGC would only grant funds for three years. Thus, our tertiary institutions do not enjoy real freedom in deciding on the length of their courses. Or put in another way: the Government gives the academic freedom to the tertiary institutions with one hand, and takes it back with the other.

Sir, I cannot help but feel that the great debate on this issue can best be described as quality versus quantity. In paragraph 160 of the Governor's policy speech, he made the point that we need to produce more university graduates "to fill professional and managerial positions" and "to replace those who emigrate". And in paragraph 163 of his speech he referred to "the clear recommendation" of the Education Commission that "where more resources for tertiary institutions are available, the first priority should be to increase the number of students entering tertiary education each year". In other words, quantity before quality.

But we know that because of the "brain drain", we are losing many experienced people occupying professional and managerial ranks. We therefore need to replace them with suitable young people of a high calibre. And we need both quantity and quality; and if necessary, we must be prepared to spend more money.

Sir, we have been warned by the University of Hong Kong in no uncertain terms that unless it be allowed to extend its undergraduate course to a four-year one, it fears that it will not be able to produce graduates of the right standard. Likewise, we have been warned by the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) in equally strong terms that the quality of its graduates will suffer if the length of its undergraduate course be reduced to three years after a two-year matriculation course. Sir, to adopt a policy of churning out a greater number of university graduates of a lower calibre is simply not the right way to solve the problem.

Sir, the present system of education in Hong Kong is too much linked to the British system. There is good reason for this so long as Hong Kong remains a British territory. But our colonial days are numbered. And it is time for us to attach much more weight to the fact that many more of our students are studying in universities in Canada and the United States than in British universities.

Sir, I agree with the main recommendation in the report that there should be a

common point of admission into all tertiary institutions, and I expect to see a consensus on this. Indeed both the HKU and the CUHK agree that there should be a common point of admission for their entrants.

Sir, as to the controversial issue of whether the best model is 3+3+4, or 5+1+4, or 4+2+4, or 5+2+3, I have heard various interested and concerned groups argue for different models, all with logic and reason. Each model has its advantages and disadvantages, and there can be no perfect model which pleases everyone. But in coming to a decision on this matter, I believe that we should attach great weight to the wishes of the tertiary institutions themselves. But the trouble is that there is no consensus among them. For instance, the HKU and CUHK favour 5+1+4 (the CUHK and possibly also the HKU ultimately wishing to have 3+3+4) while the Hong Kong Polytechnic and City Polytechnic of Hong Kong favour 5+2+3. In trying to reconcile their differences, we must acknowledge that their roles are not necessarily the same. For a university student is expected to be trained to be independent and analytical and to acquire a broader spectrum of knowledge; whereas a student in a polytechnic is expected to amass the necessary "know-how" in a relatively shorter training programme. In accepting a common point of admission for all our existing tertiary institutions, I support the system favoured by the two universities, namely, 5+1+4. As to the two polytechnics, they can adjust the lengths of their courses in the light of the proposed one-year matriculation course.

Sir, I appreciate that the proposed system of 5+1+4 may cost the tax-payer more money. But we must remember that we are talking here about an investment in the future of Hong Kong -- not for the short term -- but for 20 years and more from now. For we are losing people of good quality now; and we must replace them with people of good quality. Or in the language of head-hunters: "a head for a head". After all, it has been said repeatedly that our biggest asset is our people and we have always prided ourselves in the services that we are able to provide. How, then, can we afford to see the quality of our university graduates go down?

Sir, our students are "spoon-fed" at school and they learn by rote. Further, too many of our students have private tutors to coach them at home. Surely this is wrong. And there seem to be a number of reasons for it: an unsatisfactorily high students to teacher ratio, a too narrow and rigid curriculum, unimaginative teaching methods, and low standard of our teachers partly due to insufficient refresher courses. To rectify all these defects will cost a lot of money; but I suggest that we should make a start soon.

Sir, there is a very major problem in education faced by many countries in the world caused by the television. For with the advent of television dawns a new era and a new culture. People read much less than before, particularly students. Hence, the drop in the standard of the written language, not just in Hong Kong, but also in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia and many other countries. But the problem is much more acute here in Hong Kong than elsewhere. For a large proportion of our people live in very small flats; and practically every home is equipped with a coloured television set, which is switched on in the morning and will only be switched off by the last person before going to bed. And while the television is on, everybody at home watches it, from grandma to little Tommy. We are told that our children spend an average of four to five hours a day watching television; and when they reach the age of 18 years they will have watched about 300 000 television commercials. Thus, the effect of television on our children is tremendous. And yet we do not have any well co-ordinated body looking into this most important aspect of the life of our students. We have the Broadcasting Authority which controls television programmes, and it seeks to protect our young from too much sex or violence. We have the Educational Television Section of the Education Department responsible for the provision of educational television programmes for our schools. But there is no government authority or department charged with the overall responsibility of studying the impact of television on our young and of making the requisite recommendations. What we need is a high-powered commission consisting of high-ranking officials from all relevant government departments and experts in education, child psychology, social work, and in the television field, as well as parents and other concerned persons, to look into these unknown areas which affect the lives of all our children.

Sir, in conclusion, we must realize that our future depends on our young people; and that we must not allow monetary considerations to hamper our desire to improve our education system. For we need a new breed of young people to face the uncertainties of the future -- young people who have confidence in themselves and who are wholly committed to the future of Hong Kong. Sir, it is our duty to equip them adequately with a good and meaningful education before setting them out on their journey and say "Godspeed!"

MR. NGAI (in Cantonese): Sir, over these years, the education system in Hong Kong has been a subject of widespread public criticism, and there are often more adverse

comments than applause. What then are the inadequacies of our education system? Where does the real problem lie? What are the effective solutions to these problems? In my capacity as a member from the industrial and commercial sector, I wish to express my views on some proposals made in the Education Commission Report No. 3.

As I see it, I believe the gravest weakness of our education system lies in its being too "nationalized". The Government has exclusive control over the provision of education service and directly involved or intervened in the school administration of most schools. Besides, financial resources are also under government control, thus restraining schools from having a free hand in their development. As far as the school administration, admission of students, teaching methods and examinations are concerned, they are subject to a standardized system. Under such circumstances, schools are denied of any chances to implement creative teaching methods nor new concepts in education. As a result, a system which aimed at culturing high calibre personnel has deteriorated into a system that nips talents in the bud. Hence, I believe that in order to improve the quality of our education system, the first step is to introduce privatization in schools by stages. Only by means of privatization and by offering choices to parents can schools be improved in their teaching methods, teaching aids as well as school administration through healthy competitions. Moreover, the Direct Subsidy Scheme will encourage those schools which are not yet eligible to join to make greater efforts in improving their academic standard. In the long term the DSS will serve to bring about better academic quality to our education system as a whole. I therefore consider that the DSS proposed by Education Commission is an appropriate step forward.

As for the argument that elitism will emerge through the scheme, I hold the view that there are good reasons to support the proposed scheme, if it really proves to be effective in culturing more outstanding elite. In the first place, people with different kinds of talents are required to assume various responsibilities in the community; such phenomenon is only natural in the course of social development. The so-called "elite" are honoured with such title because our community recognizes their achievement. They are still part of our society. Assuming that everyone in our society are mediocre in their mentality, who would take a leading role in our social development? Who is going to introduce new concepts or inventions to enhance the general living standard? Besides, we are living in a free society, under the principles of free market and freedom of choices, for what reason should we deprive the freedom of choices from those parents who can afford to give their children a better education? If someone chooses to order steak, why should they be forced to

have hamburgers everyday? Some people refute that the less affluent may be denied the kind of education provided by the prestigious schools. In my opinion, it is not necessarily true, other than charging higher tuition fees, the so-called "prestigious" schools will give equal weight to the overall academic performance of their students. Thus, besides selecting students from well-off families, these schools will provide scholarships or free places so as to attract talented or academically outstanding students from poor families to keep up the reputation of their schools. If the DSS can be further promoted and the Government is prepared to introduce privatization in our education system, more and more schools will be motivated to strive for improvement and development. In other words, more schools will be able to offer places that provide quality education. The prestigious schools will not be the only schools to provide such places. All students, irrespective of their family background, may have access to these schools. Talents and the poor are not mutually exclusive and the rich are not necessarily talented for many talents do come from poor families.

Sir, as I come from the industrial and commercial sector, I wish to see that those students who are not prepared to enter university may leave school with a better developed education standard. I support the proposal of a unified entry point which should be adopted after two years of sixth form education. I think that the matriculation curriculum should not only be geared towards preparing students for tertiary education; it should also aim at preparing our matriculants for their future career if their attempt to enter university become unsuccessful. The two-year sixth form course is more preferable. During these two years, whilst students may have more time to acquire knowledge through studying as well as developing their power to think independently and analytically, they can also acquire training in their organizational abilities when participating in extra-curricula activities. All these experiences will be useful in their future careers.

On the contrary, the syllabus for the one-year sixth form course is only designed for the needs of university entrance examination. The course is so tightly scheduled that hardly can the real potentials of students be explored. Should they fail to be admitted by the university, this year of schooling will be in vain, because most of the employers and tertiary institutions refuse to recognize the results attained in the Hong Kong Higher Level Examination; only the results obtained in the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination after the two-year Form VI course are recognized. Thus, even if these graduates of the two-year Form VI course fail to enter university, their results in the examination will also be recognized by professional bodies, thereby

matriculants may still have a chance to further their study to acquire a higher qualification.

Sir, as a member of the industrial and commercial sector, surely it is my hope that our education system will be able to provide us with a class of outstanding personnel who, apart from their fundamental knowledge, are also equipped with discerning power and an analytical mind, adaptable to changing circumstances and competent in problem solving, thereby they are well-prepared to work in this ever changing society. I therefore hold the view that our education system should not stick to conventions; instead, adjustments ought to be made to cope with the demands of our society. I am pleased to find that Education Commission Report No. 3 has offered relevant suggestions in the light of the weaknesses of our education system, so as to allow more freedom in the progress of our education system to cope with the long-term development of our free economy.

Sir, with these remarks, I support the motion.

MR. SZETO (in Cantonese): Sir, the Education Commission Report No. 3 is supposed to be a consultative document, but judging from the course of action described below, it appears that the Administration is already prepared to implement the recommendations of the report arbitrarily. There is not much sincerity in conducting the consultation exercise.

Firstly, just two weeks before the publication of the report on 30 May this year, a decision was made by the Executive Council that a "5+2" system would be adopted in secondary and matriculation education. The systems of tertiary, matriculation and secondary education are closely related. A prior decision on the systems of secondary and matriculation education would produce a directive and restraining effect on any later discussions on the system of tertiary education, thus making the recommendations in the report the only way out. Why did the Executive Council have to make such a decision so hastily? Why did the Administration not wait till the completion of this consultation exercise before making a decision on secondary and matriculation education, and consider the issue together with the system of tertiary education before arriving at an overall decision?

Secondly, the consultation period was initially limited to only two months and it just happened to fall on the summer vacation. It appears that there has never been

a consultation exercise that would last so short on such an important issue. Therefore, one cannot help but wonder if it was an intended surprise attack on the education sector.

Thirdly, even before the termination of the consultation period, the Administration has already set up two working groups and they have commenced their work. One of the working groups is to study and work out the syllabus for the Intermediate Level Examination, while the other one is to consider and draw up substantive plans for the implementation of the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS). With particular regard to the DSS, is it true that the Administration has already decided to accept the recommendations on this scheme? If not, why is the Administration so eager to study and draw up substantive implementation plans in such a hurry?

Fourthly, contrary to the usual practice that government officials would not make comments during the consultation period, they went everywhere to promote the recommendations in the report, making defence and persuasion wherever necessary.

Is it true that the Administration is already prepared to implement the recommendations in the report arbitrarily and therefore lacks sincerity in the consultation exercise? So long as the final decision has yet to be made, I will not draw any hasty conclusion either. All fellow citizens of Hong Kong, let us wait and see.

The critical part in the recommendations of the report is that a three-year British tertiary education system would be implemented arbitrarily, resulting in a "5+2+3" structure in our education system.

Tertiary education is the foremost part of the whole education system, just like the head of a human being. There is a Chinese saying that the whole body would be affected just by pulling one filament of one's hair not to say surgical operations on the head. We have to carry out medical examination of the whole body beforehand. Likewise the system of tertiary education should be examined on account of the findings of an overall review of our education system. Such a review would generally bring into light the following problems:

On tertiary education

Firstly, very keen competition has resulted because of inadequate places.

Secondly, the lack of a common admission point has given rise to confusion and disruption in secondary education.

Thirdly, the decline of learning ability and linguistic proficiency among students have created difficulties in teaching.

Fourthly, owing to developments in academic studies, the results of specialization of subjects as well as the emergence of many "marginal subjects," liberal education needs to be strengthened.

On matriculation education

Firstly, there are too many examinations during the two years of matriculation course, including the Higher Level Examination, Advanced Level Examination and London University General Certificate of Education Examination. The pressure is too great and teaching time is insufficient.

Secondly, the curriculum is too narrow. Students who fail to enter the universities will find little benefit from what they have learned in matriculation course when they take up employment.

Thirdly, it would be difficult to attain the five objectives in education owing to the pressure from examinations and the curriculum.

Fourthly, the dual purposes of matriculation education, one being "to prepare for entrance to universities" and the other "to prepare for employment in the community", contradict each other and are mutually disruptive.

Fifthly, there has been a great outflow of Form VII students and this is a wastage of resources.

On secondary education

Firstly, most schools are grammar schools. The curricula for the senior classes in these schools are not appropriate in developing the academic ability and inclination of many students who have completed a nine-year free education. Thus

difficulties arise between the teachers and the students.

Secondly, the curricula of senior classes in grammar schools are not in line with the demand for large number of lower and middle level technicians to cope with economic development in the community.

Thirdly, a two-year structure for senior secondary school is inadequate because in practice the teaching time is only limited to one and a half years. There is no way to give effect to civic or moral education. In addition, the demand for new subjects (such as computer science) has made it difficult to strike a balance between the teaching programme and the curricula.

Fourthly, the use of English as the major medium of instruction has become a hindrance to the students in acquiring knowledge. Bilingualism has caused disruption. The standard of both languages has been lowered as a result.

The recommendations for a "5+2+3" system as put forward in the report have not been made with the above problems in mind, thus they fail to provide solutions to most of the problems.

On account of a thorough review of our education system as well as with a view to tackling the above problems, the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union has proposed the following approach in formulating reforms for our education system: a common admission point for enrollment to tertiary institutions in the short run so as to relieve the pressure of examinations at matriculation level; and in the long run, a unified system for secondary education with diversification in the curriculum to cater for differences in academic abilities and inclinations among students so as to meet the changing demands of the community resulting from economic development and a joint admission procedure for all tertiary institutions to remove confusion at matriculation level and eliminate disruption to secondary education.

On this approach, we would like to put forth the following suggestions which should be introduced by two stages, that is, the transitional plan to be carried out during the first stage and the final plan to be implemented during the second stage.

The details of the transitional plan for the first stage are as follows: The existing two systems of secondary education can remain as they are at this stage, that is, the "5+2" system and the "5+1" system co-exist. A joint admission procedure

for tertiary education as proposed by HKU and CUHK should be introduced to enroll students at Form VI level, while the post-secondary colleges can take account of the applicants' results in Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination, school results in Form VI, participation in extracurricular activities, comments by the school as well as performance in the interview in selecting students.

During the transitional period, the following steps should be taken in order to facilitate the final plan: a three-year junior secondary curriculum as well as a three-year senior secondary curriculum should be designed. Appropriate textbooks should be published. A school leaving examination recognized both by the Government and overseas authorities should be set up for senior secondary students. In order to promote diversification in secondary schools, preparation should be made regarding school facilities, teaching staff and so on. When all these conditions are in place, we can move from the transitional period to the final stage.

The details of the final plan for the second stage are as follows: A six-year secondary education and four-year tertiary education system should be introduced. To be concise, there should be three years for junior secondary education. After nine years of free education, students should be allocated to classes of different streams (such as arts, science, engineering and commerce) in grammar schools or to other types of schools according to their abilities and inclinations through the process of counseling. Details of specific measures for the allocation system could be worked out after careful deliberation. But there is one point that we have to pay special attention. Students allocated to non-grammar schools, just like their counterparts in grammar schools, should also sit for the same examination recognized by the Government and the overseas authorities after studying three years in the senior secondary classes. The results of this examination will help students in making decisions on further education, vocational training or employment. All tertiary institutions should adopt a joint admission procedure to enroll students according to their results in the said examination. All degree courses should be four years. Professional disciplines and different departments or faculties can decide the duration of their courses separately according to their actual circumstances.

Many problems of the existing education system are in fact handed from history, our education system has never undergone thorough treatment. All the past solutions were but expedient measures. The problems re-activate soon after piecemeal treatments. We know that we cannot solve all the problems in one battle because more haste would mean less speed. We must first set our final targets and achieve them step by step.

Our plans should be far-sighted and they have to be carried out steadily.

Next, I would like to talk about the future of private schools in Hong Kong.

In the report, the crucial part of the proposals on the future of private schools in Hong Kong lies in the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS). The essence of this scheme is privatization of subsidized schools, using public money to set up and lend support to aristocratic schools under the name of private schools, reducing our policy of universal education to class-oriented elitism.

It has been the usual practice of the Government to discriminate and eliminate private schools. Why does the Administration suddenly show concern for the future of private schools and stress the building up of a sound private school system? Annex H of the report -- "Conclusions of the Board of Education in 1980 discussion of private schools" -- carries a number of comments which were once outcries from many people. Previously, the Administration turned a deaf ear to these outcries. These suggestions have been ignored and shelved for eight years. What is the rationale for digging them up now as cultural relics?

The report proposes implementation of the Direct Subsidy Scheme next year. What a hurry! Is time running short? May I ask how many private schools do we have now? How long will they take to acquire the necessary standard for joining the scheme? Actually, the scheme only opens its door to the existing prestigious subsidized schools. Even if the existing private schools struggle to acquire the necessary standard, there may not be any more places for them by then or they may be eliminated in the course of competition as some other prestigious subsidized schools may have got help and risen to a more advantageous position under the privatization scheme. What is the logic behind the proposal that the Direct Subsidy Scheme is not restricted to the existing private schools? Why can the implementation of the scheme not be deferred till the year 2000 when the Administration will have ceased to buy places from private schools?

The so-called "the future of private schools in Hong Kong" and the so-called "Direct Subsidy Scheme", similar to blankets used by conjurers to shield off the vision of the audience, aim at converting our policy of universal education to that of class-oriented elitism and turning existing prestigious subsidized schools into aristocratic schools at the expense of public money.

The Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union firmly opposes such a Direct Subsidy Scheme since it violates the principle of social equality, hinders educational development and jeopardizes the interests of teachers.

Under the Direct Subsidy Scheme, our policy of universal education will be reduced to class-oriented elitism, a version much worse than that of mere elitism in the 1950s and 1960s. At that time since elitism might be excused, conditions then were not ripe for universal education. Ambitious and diligent students from grass-root level might still be admitted to better secondary schools through outstanding academic results. Yet from now on, they will be debarred from these schools or even tertiary education because of their financial position, family background and social connections. Children after completing their primary schooling will be on a wild goose chase together with their parents in looking for schools. Their efforts are usually futile, leaving them frustrated. Education carries its social function of enabling social mobility. Students from the lower middle strata may climb up the social ladder to become members of the middle class or the professional class. Class-oriented elitism will destroy this social function. Class polarization will become increasingly acute. It will bring about more social injustice and class contradiction, and thus hamper the stability and harmony in our community.

It is also proposed in the report that the DSS may be extended to cover private primary schools a few years later. The situation will be further aggravated by then. Not only will the existing Secondary School Place Allocation System (SSPA) be affected, the present Primary One Allocation System will also suffer. The ghost of the Secondary School Entrance Examination and Primary One Entrance Examination will once again haunt the mind of our children. The examination-oriented curriculum or the "spoon-fed" education will come into being again.

Nine-year free education has been implemented for ten years. Its quality ought to be improved. But instead of carrying out a thorough and serious review for introducing measures to improve its quality, the Government is now shirking its responsibilities by putting the blame on universal education, saying that they are just the logical results of universal education, in a bid to restore its elitist policy. With the privatization of the existing prestigious schools, a new category of aristocratic schools will come into being. The needs of children from the affluent families will be sufficiently taken care of. Under such circumstances, will the Government still make effort to improve the general quality of nine-year free

education? The nine-year free education system will only deteriorate as time goes by. Students from lower or middle income groups are bound to receive second class education. More than 100 district board members, who have close affiliations with the grass-root level, have already signed up in protest to the DSS.

Moreover, the interests of the teachers will be at stake under the DSS. Any aided school which joins the DSS will become a private school though it is subvented by the Government. Teachers of the DSS schools will become employees of the private sector. Their rights and interests will no longer be safeguarded by the subsidy code. For instance, with one month's notice, teachers may be dismissed at the employers' will without giving any explanation or in accordance with any procedures. In the event of reduction of classes, no arrangement of transfer will be made for teachers. There will be no hard and fast rules in deciding the salary scales and promotion criteria. Everything will have to be decided at the employers' pleasure. Leave entitlements, such as sick leave and maternity leave will be provisions in Employment Ordinance -- one will receive no pay for sick leave lasting three days or less and receive only two-thirds of the salary for sick leave and maternity leave in excess of three days. The accumulation of sick leave will be reduced from 168 days to 120 days. The establishment of a provident fund scheme will be at the discretion of the employers. Salary scales of the teachers will no longer peg with the Master Pay Scale of the civil servants and annual salary adjustment will become something dispensable. All in all, teachers will be treated as common employees without any safeguard for their rights and benefits. As for those teachers whose monthly salary exceeds \$11,500, they will not even be entitled to the minimum safeguards provided under the Employment Ordinance.

The interests of those teachers employed in aided school or Government schools not joining the DSS will also be affected. As most brilliant students will be taken by the subvented aristocratic schools after privatization, most students left for other schools are of low standard. Teaching will become a hard task, let alone the improvement of education quality. Should the number of children at school age decreases in a certain district, the schools concerned will bear the brunt for the number of classes will be reduced. Besides, as the prestigious schools will look after the needs of students from the upper class and the class-oriented policy of elitism will be in practice, will the Administration bother to care for those schools which only take in inferior students? By that time, the aided and Government schools will be in the same predicament of the present private schools. Will the Administration concerned care to improve the conditions of service of the teachers in those schools?

They will become the forgotten lot.

Some may condemn us as being selfish for opposing the DSS out of personal interests. We are just upholding our reasonable interests. Is it wrong for us to do that? Not only are our interests justifiable, they are compatible with the principle of social equity and are beneficial to the development of our education. Indirectly speaking, these interests are relevant to the interests of the general public. We have no fear for we have strong justifications and are of clear conscience.

If no subsidy and no public funds are involved, no one would object to the establishment of aristocratic private schools. For example, everyone would welcome the spending of public funds in building public housing units to ease the housing problem of the middle and lower strata, but it will be absolutely absurd if public funds are allocated to subsidize the construction of luxurious villas for millionaires. The Government will have strong justifications though only plain and inexpensive meals are provided to relieve the victims of calamities, yet if this kind of relief which ought to be in the form of plain meals is offered in cash as subsidies to the millionaires to buy shark's fin soup to go with their rice as part of their lavish meals, there will definitely be outbreaks of anger.

By combining the proposals regarding tertiary education system and the future of private schools, another scene is readily visible. All brilliant students will be entirely embraced by these subvented aristocratic schools after the implementation of the class-oriented policy of elitism. Furthermore, these students will occupy most of the places in the tertiary institutions and in the long run, fill various key positions in the community. All in all, the elite are products of an education system modeled on the British. Under such circumstances, what political implications will there be upon the future of Hong Kong? What kind of scene will it be?

This report was prepared by the Education Commission behind closed doors. We have no knowledge as to how this report was written. I am only relating the facts to the best of my knowledge.

The Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union, since its inauguration in 1973, has been the largest organization among educational groups. Since 1981 it has also been the largest union in Hong Kong. It has more than 38 000 members now, representing over 80% of total numbers of teachers in the territory. I have been the president as well as the representative of the union all along. In 1985, I was elected as a

member of the Legislative Council by an overwhelming majority vote in the functional constituency for the teaching profession. This year my office was returned uncontested. Why have I all the time been excluded from the Education Commission and the Board of Education over the past 10 odd years, and particularly when I was re-elected as Legislative Council member for the teaching profession constituency and my office was returned uncontested this year? Is this reasonable? Is this fair? Is there any functional constituency being treated likewise? Or whether the process of decision-making of the Education Commission and the Board of Education is something that cannot be divulged to over 80% of the teachers and thus we have been denied of representation in that commission? Is there anything which cannot be made known? Though I am a small potato and relatively insignificant, this is not merely a personal matter. Therefore it has been decided in the meeting of the executive committee of the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union that we have to strive for a seat so that either a representative of the union or I myself may join the Education Commission and the Board of Education.

Is this very controversial report not a product of the Education Commission's closed door policy? I strongly demand that the recommendations on the structure of tertiary education and the future of private schools be shelved and a round table meeting be held among Government officials, members from the educational sector with real representation and people from various sectors of the community, so as to allow a more detailed study on these two issues and to collate views from various sides, in a bid to identify the best solutions to these problems.

The motion today is for this Council to take note of the report's recommendations in respect of these two issues. It is the obligation of all educational workers in Hong Kong to give due regard to these problems.

Sir, I therefore support the motion.

MRS. TAM (in Cantonese): Sir, before I start, may I declare that I am a member of both the Court and the Council of the University of Hong Kong. But what I am going to say is only my personal opinion.

The Education Commission Report No. 3 which is being debated in this Council today has far-reaching effects on the future development of our education system. The primary object of the report is to review two very important areas in the education

of Hong Kong, namely, the present structure of tertiary education and the future development of private schools. Today, I shall give my opinions on these two issues.

I would deal firstly with the structure of tertiary education. This issue has been the subject of public concern and discussions since the publication of the Education Commission Report No. 3. And these discussions have gradually evolved into heated debates over the question of whether the degree course should last for three or four years and whether the matriculation course should be of one or two years' duration. I think in deciding the structure of our first degree and matriculation courses, we must first of all look at the whole issue of tertiary education in its right perspective and identify the problems which we have to resolve. In my opinion, there are at least two problems that we should tackle without delay. They are: (1) how to broaden the curriculum of the matriculation courses to cater for the need of the great majority of students who are unable to enter tertiary institutions; and (2) how to make better arrangements concerning the timing of matriculation so that the students concerned will not have to suffer tremendous pressure from their studies and examinations caused by the present chaotic system.

In examining these issues, we must bear in mind the following factors:

1. An education structure cannot be established overnight. A long time is needed for the system to take shape, and be recognized locally as well as internationally. Therefore, when considering any changes to our education system, we must adopt measures which will achieve the desired effect with the least disruption to the existing system.

2. Admittedly, the primary objective of educationalists is to enable the greatest number of people to receive as much education as possible. However, with limited resources, we need to ensure an effective distribution and use of funds.

3. In view of the fact that the majority of students taking matriculation courses do not have the opportunity to enter tertiary institution, we must, when designing the structure of tertiary education, take into account the implications on these students.

Based on the above factors, I am of the view that the reform of our tertiary structure should begin with the introduction of a unified admissions system. This will bring an end to the confusions our students are facing as a result of the mixed

system. The common entry point should be set at the end of Form VII so as to retain the two-year matriculation programme with a view to providing better training to the majority of matriculation students who cannot enter tertiary institutions. After all, it is not the spirit of matriculation education to merely prepare students to receive tertiary education, nor is it introduced just for a small minority of students who have a chance to pursue higher studies. Matriculation education should have its own intrinsic value. As for the length of our first degree course, I do not think that a two-year matriculation course must go with a three-year university programme. Similarly, I do not see the need of linking a one-year sixth form with a four-year first degree course. There is in fact no need to standardize the length of university courses. The course duration should rather be made flexible, depending on the requirement of individual subjects. I suggest the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee should carry out a study as soon as possible to assess the course offered by all the tertiary institutions in order to fix the length of different courses. In future, students of tertiary institutions should be allowed to adopt a credit unit system to complete their courses within a flexible time span.

The second important subject of the report is the future development of private schools. I fully agree with the view of the commission report that the Government has all along failed to develop an overall policy towards private schools, and that the educational benefits of a strong and independent private sector has not been fully recognized. I agree that the faulty Bought Place Scheme should be abolished, and I accept in principle the introduction of the Direct Subsidy Scheme. However, I am also aware of the effects on the overall secondary education of Hong Kong if both private and aided schools are allowed to apply to join the DSS of their own accord.

Under the effect of market forces, the most obvious consequence is that our secondary schools will be even more polarized. We shall find at one end of the scale the so-called "prestigious schools". Being well-established, these schools will benefit immensely from the DSS and will recruit the cream of the students. At other end of the scale are those schools which are excluded from the DSS because of their poor qualifications. These schools will only be able to admit students of an inferior calibre through the allocation scheme administered by the Government. The polarization will be far more serious than that existing under the present allocation system. And such a situation will probably intensify as time goes on.

I am worried that if the market forces are allowed to play such a predominant role, the economic factor will assume a status that is far too important. As a result,

a talented student with outstanding academic achievements may be deprived of the opportunity of entering a good school just because he cannot afford to pay the high school fee. I believe those who are concerned about the development of our young people would not like to see such a state of affairs.

Thus, while I support in principle the spirit of the Direct Subsidy Scheme, I hope that the authorities concerned will take some balancing measures when introducing it. On the one hand, the Government should set a ceiling for the school fee that can be charged by schools participating in the scheme, to ensure that the fees will not be increased to an exorbitantly high level; on the other hand, the authorities concerned should consider asking all secondary schools participating in the scheme to reserve a certain percentage of its places to accommodate those students admitted through the Government allocation system.

I am convinced that education is a long-term task. The authorities concerned should take up this job with immense courage and perseverance. As our private school system and tertiary education structure have long been riddled with faults, we should pluck up courage and introduce appropriate changes at an early date.

Sir, with these remarks, I support the motion.

MR. TAM (in Cantonese): Sir, consultation with the public on Education Commission Report No. 3 has just come to an end. The said report mainly touches on two aspects of the education system in Hong Kong, that is, the length of tertiary and secondary education as well as the development of private schools. I wish to put forward my views on the above-mentioned two issues.

The length of tertiary and secondary education is a controversial issue. Different educational parties tend to speak highly of the education programme they propose in a bid to win the support of other people. In the deadlock of such discussion I cannot help doubting the direction our current discussion is heading.

Education is a means of imparting knowledge and ideology from generation to generation. The setting up of schools is for imparting knowledge and ideology to our next generation. We must first have something in mind to impart before deciding on the appropriate form of teaching and the length of courses. From discussion held by various sectors of the community so far, we can come to the conclusion that members

of the public have reservation about the education structure in Hong Kong especially the courses at matriculation level. If we rush to debate on the length of courses before we know for sure what is needed for our next generation, is this tantamount to putting the incidental before the fundamental? Although importance should be attached to the duration of tertiary and secondary education, the length of education at respective levels should be set in such a manner to enable students to complete the related courses so that students may live up to our society's expectation. Therefore, the discussion on the length of tertiary and secondary education should not be confined to the point at issue, but consideration should also be given to the compatibility between the curricula and the duration of the courses, or even the duration of courses with reference to the kind of curricula the community wants.

In response to the current discussion hereunder are my views on the above points.

Regarding the duration of tertiary education as viewed from the actual situation of our two universities, it is noticed that apart from those courses such as medical science, dental science and architecture which require longer course programmes, the requirements for other disciplines of study vary from one discipline to another in the two universities. The pressure upon students also varies. If we take a mandatory move to unify the length of the degree courses, this will either put students under greater stress or result in a waste of time. Therefore, I believe the best approach in solving the problem of the length of tertiary education is for the relevant departments or faculties of various tertiary institutions to take account of their individual needs and to consult the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee through the authorities of their respective institution before reaching any agreement on the length of their courses. It is not necessary for us to set a guideline of a three-year period (to be lengthened if necessary) to be the basic duration of courses for the universities as mentioned in Report No. 3; nor do we need to require the length of courses for the same discipline offered by different institutions to be the same. Since there are different educational requirements for students taking different courses in different institutions, to set a general guideline arbitrarily for the period of training in individual institutions or for the length of the courses carries no realistic meaning. Some people may think that the differences in the length of courses among different tertiary institutions may lead to a waste of resources. In my opinion, to standardize the length of training for different tertiary institutions cannot guarantee that the resources will not be wasted. The basic approach to the problem is to monitor the design and the running of the courses.

Basically I have the same attitude towards the issue of the length of secondary education. The public generally feel that there are a lot of inadequacies in the existing secondary school curriculum, especially the curriculum at matriculation level, and therefore it is proposed that the curriculum be diversified. It is unwise for us to arbitrarily fix the length of secondary education before we have considered in depth the implication of diversification of subjects to be learned. Of course, the design of secondary school curriculum is affected by other factors, but the main consideration is the criteria of admissions laid down by the tertiary institutions. If the criteria of admissions of the tertiary institutions still emphasize outstanding academic results, then the chance of successfully implementing the diversification of secondary school curriculum will be greatly reduced. Bearing in mind our aspirations for secondary school education through the introduction of diversified subjects in the curriculum, if we wish to effectively revamp the secondary education structure, the design of the curriculum should be geared to the requirements set for students, especially new students, by various tertiary institutions through consultation. The secondary school curriculum can then be identified, upon which the secondary school structure will be determined and even the entry point of various tertiary institution may be set.

It is regrettable that some of the comments made during the current discussion are based on the conclusion of the Education Commission Report No. 2, thus giving favourable consideration to the 5+2 system, whereas those with pre-emptive views about the merits of a four-year tertiary education system think that secondary schools should adopt the 3+3 system. There are few who keep their heads in examining the requirements of tertiary and secondary education in order to ensure co-ordination. I believe that the best approach in solving the problem lies in that direction.

In short, rational and thorough discussions on the educational development in Hong Kong are greatly conducive to ironing out the problems of an "entry point" and admission criteria and even the issue of secondary school structure. Regrettably, the Education Commission has failed to achieve this, nor have the related discussions. Furthermore, no matter who wins in the current discussion on the lengths of courses in our education structure, I really do not want to see that under the constraint of fixed lengths of courses in the education structure in future, we shall have to discuss what our next generation need. I think that this is a very peculiar way to consider our education policy.

Apart from tertiary and secondary education, the Education Commission Report No.

3 also deals with the private school issue. But if the report is written to tackle the existing problems of the private schools as said, we need not take all the troubles to scrutinize the Direct Subsidy Scheme. The private school system has made its presence felt in overseas countries, but this does not mean that we should follow suit. We may also be proud of our subsidized school system. There is no absolute logical relationship between "privatisation" and "diversification". If the Bought Place Scheme is in doubt, we can phase out the scheme and convert the private schools into subsidized schools, or build more subsidized schools. Education Commission's proposal for market-oriented education services seems to carry an implicit negation of the schools in the public sector, and further implies a disapproval of the quality of secondary education as a whole. Could the Education Commission's proposal for introducing the market mechanism in the field of education solve the problems of the above-mentioned negations? Apparently the Education Commission does not give a definite answer.

Actually, many people have already noticed that the quality of education varies greatly among different secondary schools. They believe it is the result of undue emphasis on administrative and financial control by Government in the past so much so that the need of public monitoring has been neglected. Since educational staff in schools, those who play a decisive role in classrooms and school activities, are always bound by government directions, they fail to meet the demand of society and students. This impedes improvement to the quality of education. Students and parents who are directly affected by the kind of educational services they get should therefore be entrusted with greater monitoring powers to promote the quality of education. However, whether the proposed Direct Subsidy Scheme can achieve this goal remains a matter to be examined.

Apart from this, the scheme touches on the issue of social equality. In implementing our social policies, we should bear in mind the way and means to offer assistance to the lower strata of society. If Government introduces the Direct Subsidy Scheme students from families of the lower strata may have to pay very expensive fees if they want to receive quality education. The defect of this scheme is that Government will reduce its subsidy in view of schools increasing their tuition fees, instead of a means-tested approach in which families which become more affluent will receive less subsidies. This no doubt will create an anomaly in that students from poor families will be less accessible to subsidies than their counterparts from wealthy families.

Once a new policy is introduced, there will be a re-distribution of social resources among different social sectors. The Government has provided subsidized schools with considerable subsidies. If the Direct Subsidy Scheme is really implemented, subsidized schools may opt for private schools status. These schools may then make use of the capital investment provided by the Government to their schools in the past to make profits. It will certainly be contrary to the principle of social equality if profits thus generated all go to the pocket of the school councils.

Besides, the report has always emphasized on improvement to the conditions of the private schools. However, due to past intervention from the Government, private schools only manage to survive on very poor resources. They will have to close down in the long run if they have to face competition immediately. Although the report states that assistance should be provided for private schools to help them reach a certain level, it is regrettable the measures concerned have not been clearly explained.

In conclusion, the Direct Subsidy Scheme is far from adequate in many aspects. Even if the scheme really aims at improving the quality of education, it has not considered the role of the government schools. The commission has to work out some other approaches to solve the problem; otherwise, an overall solution is still pending. I, therefore, hope that the commission will conduct an overall review to examine the quality aspect of education in Hong Kong so as to come up with some more effective measures.

Sir, the report is obviously inadequate in a number of issues, especially the depth and scope of the analyses it offers. I believe if the commission will further discuss and examine the points raised in the report, it will contribute more to the promotion of educational developments.

Sir, with these remarks, I support the motion.

DR. TSE: Sir, I would like to confine my remarks today to the issue of the sixth form education and the length of degree courses. But before I begin, I would like to remind my honourable colleagues Mr. Stephen CHEONG and Mr. Martin LEE that besides the three universities and the two polytechnics, there is a Baptist College in Hong Kong which is doing mostly degree work, and I would like to declare my interest as the President

of the Baptist College.

I am not a trained educational theorist. My views are therefore based primarily on the empirical findings at Hong Kong Baptist College.

Without going into historical details, I can categorically say that we have tried just about every combination of course lengths between the sixth form and the tertiary courses at Baptist College in the last twenty years. We have offered a one-year course specifically designed to prepare school leavers for a four-year post-secondary education. We have tried a five-year continuous programme, and allowed students to complete it in four years time by making use of summer studies. We have given A-Level students credit for some appropriate subjects so that they could complete a four-year course in three years' time. We have experimented with alternatives to the conventional A-Level course, including the International Baccalaureate. In 1979, we even chopped up the five-year programme into 2+2+1 year segments as a requirement of the Government, in return for financial subsidy for the 2+2 years portions.

Happily, since we became a publicly funded tertiary institution in 1984, we have returned to "a life of simplicity" by running mostly three-year courses on a credit unit basis at the post A-Level, and have by now succeeded in converting about 88% of them into degree courses at the United Kingdom university honours degree standard through the system of external validation by the United Kingdom Council for National Academic Awards.

After having gone through all these experiments, I can honestly say that every system we have tried has its strengths and weaknesses, even the infamous 2+2+1. Therefore the choice of options listed in the Education Commission Report No. 3 is not really the choice between right and wrong or good and evil. For example, I can readily identify myself with the philosophy of education inherent in a four-year degree course, but at the same time treasure the rigour of the British three-year degree. However, from a system's point of view, I do find it difficult to graft a four-year degree onto a five-year secondary school system on account of the one-year gap in between. Indeed, it is most difficult to design a one-year course which is educationally satisfactory to fill that gap. Therefore, if the secondary school system is to remain unchanged, I would prefer a two-year sixth form which should then be modified to fit into the present trend in degree education.

By "present trend in degree education", I have in mind the broadened curriculum

which both the University of Hong Kong and the Chinese University of Hong Kong have advocated, and to which the Hong Kong Baptist College has subscribed. Our experience has shown that given the bilingual nature of our tertiary system, if we want to keep the rigour and depth of the British honours degree in a broader curriculum design, more teaching time would be required than a conventional three-year schedule can provide. This view has been time and again confirmed by the United Kingdom's Council of National Academic Awards teams which have come to validate our degree courses. They agreed that our proposed course contents were necessary to provide for proper depth and breadth, but pointed out that our teaching schedule was too tight to bring about the full benefits of degree education. Partly prompted by the CNAA comments, the Baptist College proposed to the UPGC more than two years ago that additional resources be provided to allow the institution to introduce a summer teaching programme. It has been estimated that two summer terms of eight weeks duration each should give sufficient added teaching time to a three-year course, yet with plenty of summer holidays left over for other activities. The No. 3 report has suggested a similar idea. But I would propose that the additional resources be given to the institutions as part of the regular budget provision, and not something to be contended for and justified by the institutions as special needs arise.

If this proposal is accepted, institutions would gain the equivalent of one half of an academic year's teaching time within the time span of a three-year course. There would be no need for campus capital expansion to accommodate the proposal. Only the existing very costly facilities of the tertiary institutions would be more efficiently utilized during the long summers. Most importantly, the properly resourced additional teaching time would go a long way towards preserving the ideal of liberal education without sacrificing the rigour and strength of the honours degree. It is true that with this arrangement all institutions would have to change some of their traditional ways of doing things. This may seem to be a hardship, but we must acknowledge that there are indeed many constraints in real life which we all must adjust to. To me, when all is said and done, it is far more important to preserve the spirit and substance of our educational goals than to cling to traditions and forms.

Our educational system has been plagued for far too long a time by the confusion and undue pressures caused by the different entry levels to degree education. Every year tens of thousands of our young people waste their valuable time and energy trying to manoeuvre their way through our complicated admissions systems, when they are at the peak of their learning potentials and should be spending their time in more

meaningful learning experiences. For the sake of these young people, let us not prolong this anomaly by arguing endlessly and emotively. We are not going to have winner and loser on this issue. If we win, we win as a community; if we loss, the loss is also to the community to which all of us belong. Therefore we should take this opportunity to unite together to overcome this anomaly, so that together we can turn our attention and energy to the quality improvement of our total educational network in a systematic way, from kindergarten right through degree level education.

With these remarks, Sir, I support the motion.

6.02 pm

HIS HONOUR THE PRESIDENT: It is now past six o'clock and under Standing Order 8(2) this Council should now adjourn.

ATTORNEY GENERAL: Sir, with your consent, I move that Standing Order 8(2) should be suspended so as to allow the Council's business this afternoon to be concluded.

Question proposed, put and agreed to.

MR. PAUL CHENG: Sir, thank you for allowing me to jump the queue to catch a flight this evening. Since some of my colleagues are making declaration of interest, I would like just to first declare that I am only a partial product of the Hong Kong education system, having left Hong Kong right after Form V school leaving and went straight into a four-year university curriculum in the United States. The now highly controversial Education Commission Report No. 3 has prompted intense and emotional debate throughout a wide spectrum of the Hong Kong community. This is because we all realize Hong Kong's future depends largely on the only real resource it has, that is, people of skill. Therefore, focus must be on developing quality leaders rather than on quantity. Whilst no one will disagree with increasing the number of places at tertiary institutions, we must not sacrifice the standards just to increase the throughput. This is a matter of cost consideration and the Government should treat education as a priority by allocating more funds to education. In fact, measured as a percentage of GDP or GNP, we have apparently been spending at levels well below other countries.

I have talked to many sources over the past few weeks. Among them are administrators, educators, parents and students. My views have, therefore, been derived from listening to all the various arguments on the report's recommendations -- both for and against. Regardless of all the different points of view, one thing is for certain and that is we must revamp our entire education system. It is totally out of step with most of other nations in the world.

So much has been written on this highly complex subject and with so many of us speaking today, I do not believe it proper for me to re-visit all the details and arguments. I would simply state my views in summary form as follows:

(1) We live in a world of change. If we are afraid to change, because it is always easier to keep the status quo, then we are not living up to Hong Kong's reputation as a thriving and highly adaptable community. Our education system needs to be revamped and if it means short-term disruption we must be bold enough to take a longer view if we believe a new system is better over the long term. I am specifically referring here to reducing the secondary system from seven to six years.

(2) The 6+4 system is almost universal. Are we saying that all academic experts around the world are wrong? The 5+2+3 system is not only antiquated but unnecessarily complicated. In fact I understand this system is being reviewed in the United Kingdom. It is high time we streamlined the system to keep things simple and take some pressure off parents and students alike. I agree to the need to have a common entry point to tertiary education, but I do not agree that this point should be set Form VII.

(3) Many secondary school teachers have admitted privately that most lower sixth students can handle the A-Level examinations. In that case, upper sixth or Form VII would seem to be redundant.

(4) As we move increasingly towards a global economy, our university graduates need to be more rounded as individuals to cope with the changing role of community leaders. Special circumstances such as nature of the subject or exceptionally bright students aside, most tertiary level educators feel that a four-year programme is required to produce quality graduates.

(5) As for the DSS scheme, I would support in principle the commission's recommendations.

I would like to close with this one thought. The Hong Kong Government and many private sector organizations often use consultants because they want to have expert advice before making an important decision. Well, should we not be listening more seriously to experts such as the two vice chancellors of two of our leading universities? These people are professionals who have devoted their life and their career to education. It would be extremely unwise if the Government should dismiss out of hand their views. They are the experts who are in the "front lines" and we must assume they have the best interest of our young people and future leaders at heart.

I would, therefore, like to strongly urge the Government to carefully reconsider the recommendations relating to the structure of our education system in the light of the considerable misgivings expressed by so many people before making its final decision on implementation.

Sir, with my above stated reservations, I support the motion which merely calls the Council to take note of the report. Thank you.

MR. ANDREW WONG (in Cantonese): Sir, I now speak in support of Mrs. Selina CHOW's motion. It is very appropriate for this Council to pay attention to the recommendations in the Education Commission Report No. 3 concerning the structure of education and the future of private schools because of their enormous and far-reaching effect on the existing education system of Hong Kong.

Let me first declare my interest in relation to this report. Although I am teaching at the Chinese University which has adopted the so-called four-year system with a Secondary VI entrance point, I graduated from the University of Hong Kong, where the so-called three-year system with the entrance point set after Secondary VII is in force and where I am a member of the Court. I am also, to a certain extent, related to the two polytechnics. I am an external examiner of the diploma course in Public Administration of the Hong Kong Polytechnic and an external assessor of the course in Public and Social Administration of the City Polytechnic. Both institutions set their entrance points after Secondary VII, although for certificate courses, the point of entry is after Secondary V. At the same time, I am the father of three primary and secondary students in whom I repose high hopes.

Sir, if you consider that I am not in the position to speak on this motion, then

I think none of the Councillors are. I believe you would not think so because this motion should be considered as one involving public, not individual, interests. I hope all Members of this Council would put aside their self-interests. I for one would try my best to fulfil this.

Sir, I personally hold the Education Commission in high esteem for having carried out the task and I also fully support the spirit behind the recommendations the commission made in its Report No.3, but I do not quite agree with the main recommendations put forward in the report and the timing of their implementation. As the saying goes, "It works when the timing is right but fails when the timing is wrong."

In short, my views on the structure of tertiary education are similar to those of Mr. Peter POON and the arguments of Mr. Martin LEE. To be specific, I consider that between the two universities, CUHK should retain its existing system while Hong Kong University should change to a system of entry after Secondary VI. As for the two polytechnics, the two entry points set after Secondary VII and V should remain unchanged. Basically I consider that the whole question needs another more thorough and comprehensive review. In setting a unified point of entry for tertiary education, we need to ask ourselves what problem we are faced with. If the problem is to unify all the entrance points, then I have to ask, "Should this so-called unification or standardization be achieved rationally or indiscriminately?" It might result in a system of unified entry level for all graduates of secondary education. However, I consider that further review is necessary. What should be done is to have some aspects rationalized. By this I mean that similar questions should be treated alike while dissimilar questions differently. This is the proper way.

As early as 1975, the Government expressed its hope that the Chinese University would adopt a three-year curriculum and set the entry point at Secondary VII, not for the sake of unification but because of the possible emergence of another problem. Since 1956 a two-year matriculation course had been implemented and it seemed illogical for the Chinese University to keep its entry point at Secondary VI. Starting from 1975, the Government has been trying to tackle the problem. As Dr. TSE just said, the Baptist College adopted the 2+2+1 system in 1979 because the Government did not favour a four-year curriculum. The Lingnan College followed suit but not the Shue Yan College. I believe that the question of entry point at that time was one related to public policy as the two different entry points had caused a certain degree of confusion. I think that the problem could have been settled more

easily at that time because the Hong Kong Polytechnic had not yet offered any degree courses, the City Polytechnic had not been set up and both the Baptist College and the Lingnan College had not been accorded recognition as a degree-conferring institution. Under such circumstances, it could have been possible for the Government either to unify the entry point at Secondary VI or to urge the Chinese University to set the entry point at Secondary VII. By now, the golden opportunity has gone and the entire problem has become very complicated.

In the course of development, the Chinese University solved its part of the problem by establishing the Provisional Acceptance Scheme (PAS). Just now, some Members said that basically the scheme is not a proper measure, and its introduction has worsened the situation. However, I consider that the scheme helps identify potential CU undergraduates for whom separate courses could be devised by the schools they are attending so that disruption to the continuity of the two-year sixth form curriculum is lessened. Moreover, the scheme was designed to reduce the pressure of examinations, thereby enabling sixth form education to be more comprehensive rather than specialized. Selection under the PAS, which is based on the results of the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination, is only a conditional offer and those selected will be required to reach a certain standard in some assessments. By not taking into account the results of the Higher-level examination, the Chinese University hopes to alleviate the examination pressure on the candidates. All these were cited as grounds for the Chinese University to change to a system of entry after Secondary VII. But the opportunity was lost. It is high time that we reviewed the entire education system.

As regards the Direct Subsidy Scheme proposed in the Education Commission Report No. 3, my opinions are more or less the same as those of Mr. NGAI Shiu-kit but far different from those of Mr SZETO Wah. I believe that the essence of the DSS is not to promote privatization or elitism, that is, the kind of elitism referred to by Mr. SZETO.

What we should aim to achieve is genuine competition among students as well as among schools. If all the government and aided schools were placed under the control of a bureaucratic structure, their competitiveness would be completely lost, and if allocation of places was entirely determined at random by computers, teachers would find the additional effort they put into their work and education as a whole absolutely meaningless. However, if DSS must be implemented to restore competitiveness, we should start from lower down, that is, from the primary level. The provision of

nine-year free compulsory education was proposed in the Green Paper and White Paper on Secondary Education in Hong Kong published in 1974 and 1975 respectively. At that time, I put forward a counter-proposal of an eight-year free compulsory education, which would provide eight years' basic schooling, with four years at the elementary level to be followed by four years at the higher level. An open examination would be held thereafter. The Secondary School Entrance Examination (SSEE) would thus be deferred by two years. Students would then be allocated to different schools in different areas according to their aspirations, academic performance and the wishes of individual schools. There would be no need therefore for secondary schools to be regionalized, although schools providing the basic education should. In this way, there would be real competition among the schools. At that time, I did not mention whether Secondary III, IV and V should be followed by Secondary VI. This issue could be addressed at the same time. If both reviews are carried out simultaneously, then the system of 4+4+4 plus another 4 could be considered. I proposed this at that time in the hope that the SSEE could be deferred by two years because I thought that it was unfair for an 11-year-old Primary VI student to have his future determined solely by his academic performance. However, I made the proposal because of the need to allocate places according to students' aspirations, interests and abilities. Under the present primary and secondary education systems, turning secondary schools to directly subsidized private schools would give rise to many problems. I therefore think that it is inopportune to implement this system.

In an allegory in LU's "Spring and Autumn Annals", a native of the State of Chu dropped his sword into the water while crossing the river by boat. He made a mark on the side of the boat to indicate the place where his sword was dropped. After the boat had reached the shore, he traced the mark and searched for his sword which by then was lying on the bottom of the river, a long way from the boat. What a muddled way to recover one's lost property!

While we should not disregard the changing circumstances, we should avoid politicalizing the issue. In his policy address on 12 October, the Governor Sir David Wilson put forward a new idea -- the formation of a policy reviewing unit. I am by no means being impolite to the Education Commission, especially after Mr. SZETO said just now that he regretted for not having been appointed to the commission. Nevertheless, appointed or not, the job nature of the commission was to make political judgements. As far as education system is concerned, rational judgements are more important. The experts should take a rational and overall view at the issues. Therefore, I fully agree with Mr Paul CHENG that the most important task for the future

Central Policy Unit is to conduct a comprehensive review on the education system of Hong Kong. Under the present circumstances, it is unwise to implement the proposals of Report No. 3 in haste. Sir, with this, I support the motion.

6.20 pm

HIS HONOUR THE PRESIDENT: Members may like at this moment to take a short break.

6.56 pm

HIS HONOUR THE PRESIDENT: Council will resume.

MR. LAU WONG-FAT (in Cantonese): Sir, despite it being a place lacking in resources, Hong Kong is able to win the admiration of the world by its rapid economic development and remarkable achievements. Our human resources are the main force that keeps Hong Kong on the move. As a matter of fact, the quick-minded, enterprising and hard-working people of Hong Kong are the most crucial factor of our success.

The Hong Kong Government has always been placing great importance on training to provide the necessary manpower. Great efforts have been made to raise the quality of our work force by promoting education opportunities. Public spending on education constitutes a large portion of government expenditure. This basic policy is widely supported by the general public. Since education expenses are a major public expenditure item, it is natural for us to show concern on the rational and efficient use of the financial resources available for this purpose. However, in demanding for rational and efficient use of our financial resources, we should be aware of the need to attach special weight to the development of education, in particular, the necessity to enhance the provision of education and raise the standard of education. It is only through the approach of improving our manpower in both quality and quantity that we can hope to survive in a keenly competitive world with ever-increasing demands on skills and technology. In this connection, I think we must take a more positive attitude towards the development of education by conducting regular reviews on the existing policies and systems and making recommendations where and when necessary.

The Education Commission Report No. 3 proposes to replace the present three subsidy schemes for private schools with a Direct Subsidy Scheme. The purpose is to help private schools raise their teaching standard through the introduction of a

market mechanism, that is, by means of competitions and give them greater autonomy to manage their business. They are free to design their own curriculum and use their grant for educational purpose. This recommendation has certain advantages; but its shortcomings are also obvious. During the consultation period for the report, the education sector has expressed its objections to this scheme. They are of the view that the Direct Subsidy Scheme would render support to an "elitist" system and disrupt the Secondary School Places Allocation System, thus exerting more pressure on the students. The proposed Direct Subsidy Scheme is a very controversial issue. I hope that the Government can work out a better subsidy scheme after giving careful consideration to the views put forward by various sectors.

In addition, I think that the report has missed out some important aspects. For example, there is no mention of any specific and feasible proposals on how to improve the standard of education, reduce the examination pressure inherent in the present education system and clear up the chaotic situation arising therefrom. The report seems to be too persistent in a two-year matriculation course and use it as the basis for its other recommendations. This would become, on one hand, an obstacle to any reasonable reforms in the structure of secondary education and an excuse for compelling the universities to adopt a generalized system of three-year courses on the other.

In order to achieve the objectives I have earlier mentioned and to provide better training for our human resources, I suggest that the Administration should consider:

- (1) adopting a unified system of a six-year secondary education;
- (2) abolishing the matriculation course; and
- (3) converting first degree courses into four-year courses.

If the University of Hong Kong converts the length of its courses from three years to four years, it will provide a favourable condition for setting a common entry point and for making changes in the structure of university education. There is no reason for us to hold back any improvement in the standard of university education and give up the opportunity of improving secondary education just for the mere sake of maintaining a two-year matriculation system.

Sir, with these remarks, I support the motion.

MR. BARROW: Sir, I would like to comment very briefly on only one aspect of the Education Commission Report, related to the support for international schools.

I frequently find that in talking to Hong Kong people who are leaving -- and I also hear from those already overseas -- that the availability of the appropriate type of education for their children will weigh heavily on their minds in deciding whether or not to return.

I believe it is right that we should do everything possible to encourage as many professional people as possible to rejoin this community. These people, with overseas working experience, can play a vital role in maintaining Hong Kong as a vigorous international business centre to the benefit of Hong Kong as a whole. An increase in the availability of bilingual education should help achieve this aim.

English may have become the first language of such children, but the parents will wish them to resume Chinese language studies as well. In addition, there is more to this than just language. Many parents will also be looking for a bicultural education, as is being admirably provided by the Chinese International School founded in 1983. I believe it is that school's emphasis on Chinese culture which makes it attractive, as a distinctive feature lacking in schools overseas. Perhaps I too should declare an interest at this point as my eight-year-old son had four years of happy and successful education at that school.

Bilingualism in English and Chinese is also desirable for any child growing up in Hong Kong regardless of origin; many members of the international community are equally committed to Hong Kong on a long-term basis and this must be the only place in the world where less than 2% of the foreign population can speak the language.

I endorse therefore the recommendation that there should be continued backing through land grants and other forms of support for non-profit-making international schools, particularly those offering bicultural education based on a Chinese heritage.

With these words, Sir, I support the motion.

MR. MICHAEL CHENG (in Cantonese): Sir, It is due to the hard work of everyone in our society and the special attention we have paid to education that Hong Kong is able to enjoy stability and prosperity today. Our education system has been effective in producing an admirable number of talents to keep Hong Kong on the move. However, there is still room for improvement. The structure of tertiary education and the development of private schools are issues of our utmost concern because they have far-reaching effects on our standard of education.

The structure of tertiary education

It has long been the wish of the public to see the introduction of a joint university entrance examination. Under the present system, a secondary school student is required to sit for the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination and the Hong Kong Higher Level Examination or the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination within a short span of two years in order to go up to the university. They have to sit for various examinations mainly because the two universities in Hong Kong have adopted different course structures and set their entry point at different stages of the matriculation education. In order to gain admission to the University of Hong Kong, a secondary school student has to pass the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination with flying colours. Access to the Chinese University of Hong Kong can, however, be gained through the Provisional Acceptance Scheme for those who have obtained outstanding results in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination or on the basis of their good results in the Hong Kong Higher Level Examination. Our secondary school students are under great stress because of these examinations which take a heavy toll on their mental growth. Hence, both the parents and the public at large are anxious that students may be relieved of examination pressure by means of an integrated matriculation course structure, a common entry point to be adopted by the universities and the introduction of joint admission procedures for all tertiary institutions. Students will then be required to sit for a single examination for placement in one of our tertiary institutions.

The problem at issue is the question of the entry point. Should it be set at Form VI or Form VII?

If the entry point is set at Form VI, students will spend only one year in the matriculation class. This will make it necessary for them to sit for a university entrance examination in less than a year after their taking the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination. They will spend all their time preparing for the

examination in order to strive for the best possible results in the university entrance examination. In consequence, the pressure of examination will be extremely heavy for this group of students, leaving them little time for extra-curricular activities. The promotion of extra-curricular activities and leadership training will be seriously jeopardized and the major objective of secondary education to provide a general and balanced education can hardly be achieved. At present, most extra-curricular activities in secondary schools are promoted with the help of the relatively more mature students from Form VI and they are looked upon as leaders by the junior form participants. It is through this kind of participation that opportunities are provided for students to develop their spirit of co-operation, self-rule, self-discipline and leadership.

Given the aforesaid objectives, I believe that it is more desirable to set the entry point to universities at the end of a two-year matriculation course. On the other hand, we could introduce a much broadened and more diversified curriculum for the matriculation classes. This will help to eliminate the existing drawbacks of laying too much emphasis on a few examination subjects. Under such an arrangement, students will be given the chance of receiving one more year of general education with a balanced curriculum in secondary schools, which will be very useful to their future careers even if they could not enter the universities and have to take up employment or pursue other technical courses. The number of young people who will benefit from this kind of arrangement far exceeds those who will benefit from education in the few tertiary institutions.

The tertiary institutions in Hong Kong have adopted either a three-year or a four-year course structure. Both course structures have worked well for many years. They are equally effective in producing good-quality professionals, why then should we insist on a generalized system of a four-year course structure for the universities? For the general interest of Hong Kong, I think it would be more advantageous to the overall social development of the community if the projected subsidy of more than \$700 million required for the implementation of a generalized system of a four-year course structure can be used to subsidize other areas of our education system where there is a more pressing need for funds. For instance, the increase of places in tertiary education, training in technology, extension of our free and compulsory education to the level of Form V, provision of subsidized pre-primary services, widening the basis of education service to benefit more people and raising the literacy level of the general public. At the same time, we should be aware of the inevitable consequence of a decline in the number of available places in the tertiary

institutions if all three-year courses are re-structured into four-year courses and if the existing level of resources remain unchanged. There is very keen competition for post-secondary school places. First degree courses of the tertiary institutions in Hong Kong can only manage to take in about 6% of young people in the relevant age group every year. This, coupled with the prevailing brain-drain problem, has made it imperative to raise the number of entrants each year to meet the need of a higher output of graduates from our tertiary institutions. If the generalized system of a four-year course structure is to be adopted by our two universities, the number of successful applicants to our tertiary institutions will in no way increase, but decline. This would, of course, be against our social demand.

Sir, I am in favour of a generalized system of three-year degree courses for all tertiary institutions and share the view that in the allocation of government funds, priority should be accorded to the objective of expanding tertiary education.

The future of private schools in Hong Kong

At present, places are bought from some private schools to make good the shortfall of places in government and aided schools. Such places are, in most cases, allocated to those primary VI leavers who are not doing so well in their academic studies. Those bought places in private schools are, however, given far less government subsidies than places in government and aided schools. With students who are academically inferior to their counterparts in fully subsidized schools, meager subsidies from the Government, financial constraints that lead to poorly-equipped school premises and employment of less qualified teachers than those in the government and aided schools, private schools have been caught in a vicious circle. They are in no way capable of improving the performance of their students or the standard of education in their schools. Members of the public are thus led to forming an unfavourable impression of private schools in general. Parents are most reluctant to send their children to these private schools. Under such circumstances, the future of private schools is gloomy. In fact, good-quality private schools surely have their role to play in our education system and they are of definite value to our society. Private schools can offer a more diversified curriculum as compared with the standard curriculum of the government, aided and subsidized schools, thus providing the parents and students with a wider variety of options. Efforts should therefore be made to improve the education standard of private schools so as to strengthen parents' confidence in them. To this end, we must plan to phase out the existing Bought Place Scheme by a more comprehensive subsidy scheme which would allow private schools to

play a more positive role in Hong Kong's secondary education.

Direct Subsidy Scheme is recommended by the Education Commission. Under this scheme, the Government will subsidize those private schools which provide education of a reasonable standard. Some poorly run private schools will, however, be phased out as they will not be qualified to obtain government subsidies through the scheme. In fact, the purpose of introducing this scheme is to guarantee the proper use of tax-payers' money by ensuring that no subsidies will be wasted on private schools not up to the basic educational standard and non-bona fide school operators. It also serves to assure our tax-payers of a fair chance for their children to receive good education. I think this is a correct move.

It is regrettable that the Direct Subsidy Scheme for private schools is viewed by some people as a means to advocate elitist education aiming at attracting some well-established and prestigious subsidized and aided schools to opt for private schools status. Such accusation is groundless. I believe that only a few aided and subsidized schools are in a position to join the Direct Subsidy Scheme because an aided or subsidized school has to take into account many factors before making such an option. For example, offering protection to salaries for staff is one of the factors for consideration. Once a school has opted for a private school status, the salaries of the staff will be met mainly by revenue from school fees. Whether a school can maintain a proper and guaranteed salary and benefits scheme is a matter of great concern for the staff. Therefore, aided or subsidized schools will certainly not make any hasty decision on this matter. In addition, similar schemes have already been practised in some other democratic and advanced countries for years and have proved successful. Their experience would be useful reference for Hong Kong.

We can perhaps look at this issue from a different angle. If a small number of aided or subsidized schools opt for private school status, thus reducing some of the government expenditure on these schools, and if there are parents who prefer to send their children to these schools at higher school fees, then why should we stop them? After all, Hong Kong is a liberal and democratic society. There is no reason for us to deprive the parents of their right and freedom to choose schools for their children.

With regard to the scheme, I, however, regret to note one drawback, namely the absence of assurance that the salaries, benefits and job security of the staff in the DSS schools will be safeguarded. In order to set their hearts at ease, the

Government should work out details on how the scheme should be implemented as soon as possible and assure them that full protection will be given to their interest in respect of salaries, benefits and job security.

Sir, I am in support of the spirit and the recommendations of the report on the structure of tertiary education and Direct Subsidy Scheme for private schools.

The Wong Tai Sin District Board held a discussion session on the report in July this year. Most of the district board members who spoke at the meeting had expressed their support to the recommendations of the report.

Sir, with these remarks, I support the motion.

MR. DAVID CHEUNG: Sir, I must first declare that I am a member of the Hong Kong University Court, a member of the Board of Governors and Council of the Hong Kong Baptist College, a member of the Board of Education. But what I am going to say this evening is only my personal opinion.

It is with much regret that I address the motion. I regret because the degree of controversy has been blown far out of proportion. It has also been emotionally politicized. The report has been over-zealously and unreservedly attacked. Such gestures are, in my view, highly unnecessary and uncalled for. Sadly, it results in the citizenry being misled on the issue in a very distorted manner.

When we look at the proposals in Education Commission Report No. 3, we should bear in mind the following: (1) the overall picture of education in Hong Kong, (2) the overall well-being of all the students of all the levels, (3) least disruption to the system, (4) the uniqueness of Hong Kong as a densely-populated place, and (5) the cost-effective use of limited resources.

First and foremost, a common entry point to all tertiary institutions must be established without further undue delay. For years, secondary schools are literally at the mercy of the tertiary institutions, the two universities in particular. The different entry points have caused so much pain and agony to the school teachers, the students and the parents that the psychological pressure is tremendous let alone the administrative difficulties, the wastage, and the confusion.

Having agreed that there must be a common entry point, the question is when. In my view, five years of general education for all should be sufficient. In recent years, the curriculum for the general education programme has been broadened to include practical subjects. When tertiary education is still the privilege of a small minority, two more years of further training after the completion of general education is not only necessary but vital. The Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination, which has always been a qualifying examination at the end of Form V, should never have been used or allowed to be used to select students for entry to tertiary institutions as it is not a selection examination. Because one tertiary institution did that, others sooner or later will have no choice but to follow suit. No single tertiary institutions should be allowed to "cream off" the crop by adopting such "foul tactics". All publicly-funded tertiary institutions should compete for and attract students on their own merits. If we think in terms of manipulating the psychology of the parents and the students by the notion that one bird in hand is always better than two in the bush, I must say that the Provisional Acceptance Scheme is most successful and the designer of such a scheme deserves a crown of laurels in the history of that institution.

Those who oppose the 5+2 system tear the two-year sixth form course to pieces. No one can deny that the matriculation examination has served Hong Kong very well for many years. Now it appears that there are imperfections. Yes, I agree. But why? The "cut-throat" competition to get a place in a tertiary institution has made the examination unrealistically difficult. Students have to devote highly concentrated efforts to study in such a way as to satisfy the entrance requirements prescribed by the tertiary institutions. The "narrowness" cannot be avoided unless the tertiary institutions prescribe otherwise and unless the number of places in tertiary institutions can be increased. The imperfections are not the result of the 5+2 system itself and we certainly cannot blame the system.

Furthermore, the two-year matriculation course is also a very much needed qualification for entry to other professional disciplines -- accountancy, chartered surveyor and so on. According to the representatives of the Hong Kong Federation of Students who came to OMELCO the other day to make representations, two-thirds of those who go through the sixth form end up in tertiary or post-secondary institutions one way or another. To destroy Form VII means debarring our young people from entering other professional disciplines requiring the A-Level qualification. If their statistics are correct, who can say that the two-year sixth form education is useless to those who do not enter the universities? Besides, with general

education provision reaching 100% soon, selection of about 6% of students to study in tertiary institutions must be done at the end of Form VII when students, I believe, are much better prepared. Common entry point should therefore be at the end of Form VII.

The proposal to change to the 3+3 secondary school system to suit a four-year tertiary programme will not remove the shortcomings of the two-year sixth form system as long as intense competition for places in tertiary institutions remain. Such a change will be too drastic for the entire secondary education system and will entail too many practical difficulties which will have to be overcome. I try to list a few. First, it will require streaming at Form III which, I believe from experience, will be highly unpopular with the parents. How streaming will be determined is already an insurmountable problem. Second, are there enough non-grammar streams leading to similar prospects at the end as in grammar streams? Create them. Yes, but how. Do we ask the schools to phase out the grammar streams and phase in the non-grammar streams? Will the sponsoring bodies of schools be willing to do that? Third, even if there are enough non-grammar streams, where are we going to get enough non-grammar stream teachers, teachers who will teach these non-grammar streams? Other difficulties include the rewriting of the entire secondary school curriculum, maybe even the primary school curriculum too, the re-designing of a public examination which will win international recognition, and the painstaking readjustment of half a million students and their parents to the system let alone that of the teachers.

It is argued that an extra year at the tertiary level is to address the problem of the falling standard of language. The Education Commission Report No. 3 has made recommendations to tackle the problem of language and tertiary institutions can even request additional staff for remedial language courses if they can justify that there is such a need. With regard to the question of overall falling standard it is really a matter of opinion. How many universities in the world are fortunate enough to have the privilege of admitting the top 5% of the students of a certain place.

Incidentally I do not think that the quality of our students is so bad. As I talked with different lecturers from different institutions, some of the lecturers expressed that it was really a joy to teach our tertiary students. And for our so-called second-rate students who do not have the opportunity to be selected to enter the local tertiary institution, quite a number of them have gone abroad and successfully completed their studies and returned to Hong Kong with flying colours and even higher degree like the PhD.

If all tertiary institutions go for courses lasting for four years, many more tertiary places will be lost. The directors of the Hong Kong Polytechnic and the City Polytechnic have said that if that happens, not only has the number of degree places in the two polytechnics to be reduced but also the number of non-degree places as well. If that happens, I am afraid, our young people will be further deprived of the opportunities for higher education. We certainly do not want to see that happen. Course duration of tertiary programme can and should be made flexible nowadays; campus facilities should be fully utilized throughout the year so as to cater to the flexibility and to create more tertiary places. Rigidity serves no significant purpose. On the other hand, it is only logical, in my view, to expect the course duration for similar disciplines to be the same in all tertiary institutions.

In a place like Hong Kong, and I repeat, in a place like Hong Kong where tertiary education is such a cherished goal, where tertiary education is so vital to our existence especially at a time when we feel the pinching effect of the brain drain, as many places as possible in tertiary institutions should be provided for our young people. Everyone concerned -- Government, civic leaders, educators, those in the tertiary institutions in particular -- should leave no stone unturned, no avenue unexplored, no formula untried, no resources untapped, to increase as many tertiary places as possible. This is really the crux of the whole matter. Fierce competition to get a place in a tertiary institution has become so detrimental to the overall well-being of our students. We can ill afford not to increase these places let alone reducing them. I therefore find it totally meaningless and highly irrelevant to harp on the theme "change four to three and three to four". This is exactly what I meant when I said at the beginning that the citizenry is being misled on the issue in a very distorted manner.

Turning to the DSS, while it is enthusiastically welcomed by some it is equally enthusiastically opposed by many. It is indeed, in my view, very controversial. It is perfectly acceptable to have a private sector, a strong private sector. But I am of the opinion that if a system wishes to accommodate two sectors -- public and private, the private sector, as the name suggests, should be strictly private. As a taxpayer and an educator, I am proud of the achievements of the public sector of Hong Kong though it is by no means perfect. Government has come to the stage where every eligible child will have a place in the public sector soon. The Government, having achieved that, if parents still choose to send their children to private

schools, I think they should foot their own bill. I do not support the proposal of allowing aided schools to join the DSS because I fail to see any merits in a public-yet-private and private-yet-public category of schools. It is unacceptable for some schools to draw government money and yet become independent in student recruitment and in charging their own level of fees. I do not support the scheme because it is not a matter of elitism but a matter of great confusion because it will destroy the central allocation system. The proposal to allow schools to draw government subsidy but at the same time given autonomy in the student recruitment will result, I am afraid, in a mad scramble for Form I places. Schools will be further polarized because of the difference in the system of admission to Form I. On the question of helping the eligible private independent schools, I think Government has the moral obligation to do so in view of the immense contributions they have made to the education of Hong Kong in the past years. Having said that, I think a target date should be set when these private schools, after having improved their standards with financial assistance from Government, will have to decide to either join the public sector or become strictly private. In the meantime, every effort should be made by these schools to build up their own favourable image with the members of the public.

To summarize, I wish to recapitulate the following points:

First, for the overall benefits of our students, a common entry point to tertiary institutions at the end of Form VII must be established at the earliest possible date;

Second, top priority must be given by all concerned to increasing as many tertiary places as possible;

Third, the duration of tertiary programme must be flexible and campus facilities must be put to maximum use;

Fourth, disruption to the secondary and primary schools must be kept to the very minimum;

Finally, assistance to private schools for a designated period of time for them to improve their standard is obligatory on the part of Government.

I urge everyone concerned to bear the overall benefits of all our students in mind. Sir, with these remarks, I support the motion.

MR. CHOW (in Cantonese): Sir, since the release of the Education Commission Report No. 3, in-depth discussions rarely seen in recent years have been held by educational bodies, tertiary institutions including their teaching staff and students, and the general public. I hope the Government, would, before making any decision, take into full account the views expressed by all these quarters, as well as the reaction of certain organizations such as those which are now staging a sit-in protest outside the Legislative Council Building.

The education reforms of the Government has all along been criticized as piecemeal and fragmented, short of an overall consideration. We should indeed take this opportunity to set our mind firmly on some long-term reforms. We should not worry that the reforms would have wide implications or far-reaching effects that would push us down the river of no return. We have no objection to taking a few steps at a time, since a "gradual and progressive approach" has already become the consensus of the people of Hong Kong on many issues. The only question is whether the move is made towards the right direction.

The above problem is exactly what we encounter when we discuss the structure of tertiary education. I would not like to hear, in the discussion on the education of Hong Kong, arguments like "this will cause disruption to more than 1 000 secondary school and 1 million students". This kind of thoughts would dampen any rational discussion on a desirable education system. Undoubtedly, this is one of the consideration in the course of devising a desirable education structure, yet absolutely not a point of argument to be employed.

Basically, I am in support of the "3+3" system. Unfortunately, in May this year, the Executive Council agreed in principle that the course beyond Form V should be standardized as a two-year sixth form. As such, the recommendations in Report No. 2 have in fact been distorted, since it was suggested in Report No. 2 that a new Intermediate Level examination should be introduced, to be taken on completion of one year's studies, so that the students could be provided with a recognized exit qualification on leaving school after Form VI. In reflecting public response, when summing up Report No. 2, Report No. 3 pointed out that "there was opposition to anything which might weaken the integrity of the two-year sixth Form". I think the writer of the report should now get outside and expose himself for a while to the heated argument of the masses. I do hope that the Executive Council's agreement is

only in principle and would allow room for further suggestions. It is because the so-called "integrity of the two-year sixth form" is exactly the core of the problem being debated today.

In Report No. 3 the two-year sixth form was regarded as an inviolable "axiom", upon which all arguments and recommendations were based. But is it true? The report pointed out that "educationally speaking, the sixth form not only can, but must be treated independently, as its educational aims and student population are different from either those of senior secondary or tertiary education." I wonder what kind of educational viewpoint it is. Why must there be a level of "sixth form"? Why must a level be inserted between the levels of universal education and specialized education to allow a handful of students to receive semi-universal and semi-specialized education, and then sigh with regret that we should not increase the chance of university entry for an even smaller number of students out of that handful as it would waste other students' time? As a result, apart from the purposes of preparing students for entry to tertiary institutions, it is only natural that the sixth form should broaden its curriculum in order to let others benefit as well. Such being the case, one year would not be sufficient and let us make it two years instead. But why not make it three, or four years? To those who make trouble for themselves, I suggest an "eighth form" after the sixth form!

I think the arguments of "preparation for tertiary education" and "broadening of curriculum" as put forth in the report are in conflict with each other. Are students aiming at entering a university willing to take other "non-essential subjects"? Are principals and teachers who are concerned about the rate of their students entering university willing to introduce "non-essential subjects"?

I have devoted a large part of my speech to expound the irrationality of the "sixth form" logic and concept, and I am convinced that by so doing, the foundation on which Report No. 3 was compiled has been shaken. This being the case, it is clear that all other issues need to be reconsidered. In fact, one of the arguments used in the attack against the "3+3" system in Report No.2 is more appropriate for attacking the sixth form curriculum. It was pointed out in the report that "the problem here would be the great difficulty of devising a satisfactory curriculum and examination which could select the best students for specialized studies allowing the more average students to gain respectable academic qualifications in a suitably broad field of studies".

After hitting at the crucial weakness of the report, which is the part on sixth form, all other issues appear to be insignificant. All we have to consider now is the structure of secondary and university education, bearing in mind that it would not be too meaningful to talk about the length of courses without touching upon their curriculum. Otherwise, we would just be addressing the framework but not the ingredients of a system. It is not sensible to separate water from the container, unless in a vacuum state. Under the present circumstances, with regard to our tertiary education as well as secondary and primary education, we more or less have something to expect. So, let us start from this point.

When determining the length of the tertiary courses, we should of course respect the views of the educators in the tertiary institutions. The two universities strongly stated that their degree courses needed to be four years in order to measure up to a certain standard and social development. It goes without saying that the most ideal way is for the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee to examine with their expertise whether the requests for grants are reasonable and whether there is the possibility that quality may be at stake. Nevertheless, I basically believe in what the two universities said, that the quality of their undergraduates has worsened in recent years, and thus they favour a four-year degree course. Naturally, the best way to solve the problem is to introduce a credit system based on a four-year programme, with flexibility provided to allow some courses to span four years and to allow an individual talented student to complete the degree course earlier than stipulated.

As regards secondary school education the discussion on the length of course seems an even more difficult task. Basically, I accept the advantages of the "3+3" system and favour the abolition of the matriculation course. In Report No. 2, the criticism leveled at the "3+3" system was too brief and should be elaborated. Report No. 3 carries similar arguments against the "6+4" system. Apart from some technical problems (such as the recognition of academic qualification and the re-programming of curriculum) which can be overcome, what the government worries most is the situation whereby a slight move in one part of the system affects the whole entity. They are not aware that if they do not limber up their muscles and joints now, their limbs would become paralysed later and the whole body would be stiffened in the end. As regards the saying that inconvenience would be caused by the "6+4" system to those planning for further studies in the United Kingdom, I would request the one who said this to ask himself conscientiously what is in the best interest of Hong Kong. According to Report No. 2, in 1986-87, 1 600 students were studying the first year of degree courses in England, while 3 900 went to the United States or Canada to study

a four-year degree course. Moreover, the academic standard of Britain is now dropping. With the exception of English Literature there are not many subjects that Britain is still leading the world.

I think it is logical to introduce streaming after the junior three years of the six-year secondary system. The Director of Education said that the review in 1978 indicated that the "streaming" policy was unsuccessful, and thus the "3+3" system was not effective. In reaching such a conclusion, the Government seems to have overlooked a major cause for the failure, that is, students switching to technical or commercial courses might not have as good a prospect as expected. The acute demand for technical and commercial courses by the post-secondary students reflects one point, and that is, the "3+3" system will certainly be welcomed if there is a link between those technical and commercial subjects in senior secondary education and similar courses in the universities.

As regards another essential part of the report, the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS), I must respond to what a government representative said that people were presently discussing mostly technical problems and seldom went deep into the principles. What the DSS attempts to solve is the problem of enhancing the quality of private schools besides providing more choices for the students and their parents in the field of education. It is definitely agreeable to me that the Government would take measures to enhance the quality of the private schools. However, if by so doing, the principle of fairness is contradicted then more thoughts must be spent on the subject.

In principle, I object to the DSS since it would inevitably lead to the emergence of "elite" schools which is against the principle of universal education. What is more, it is doubtful whether the system can enhance the quality of private schools. In fact, there are other practicable means to solve this problem which can at the same time avoid the adverse effects of the DSS.

To advocate a free market is the way of life in Hong Kong. But should we allow all our problems to be solved by the market itself? Can the market solve every problem? The machinery of success for the higher bidder will definitely lead to contradiction against the principle of fairness. We are not advocating that all men have to be absolutely equal and uniform, but at least we have to be provided with equal chances. Of course, to a certain extent chances could not be absolutely equal. The question is: which direction shall we take?

When we say that parents should be provided with more opportunities to select, have we considered simultaneously how they justify their claims to beat other competition in order to realize their own choices? We cannot, and have no intention either, to tackle the problem of students receiving a different type of education because of the intelligence gap, but we are most unwilling to see that someone's children can study in schools of better quality just because they are financially superior. I have to point out in particular that by providing students of similar intelligence with greatly different education opportunities, it would result in a wide gap between the students' academic achievement. In other words, an outstanding student in a prestigious school does not necessarily possess higher intelligence quotient. What we now call a choice is only an opportunity with limited choices, or a choice confined to those with certain economic status. Basically there is no difference from the fact that only the rich and the celebrated could receive education in the Medieval Age!

What deserves our attention more is: will the DSS really enhance the quality of the existing private schools? To build a market of private schools will not be sufficient to enhance their quality, because the costs of information and transaction are too high. Even with syllabuses provided, parents in general may not be able to assess the quality of the private schools. Eventually the performance of private schools would very likely be judged by open examination results. This again adds to the pressure of examinations. On the other hand, because of regional distribution, monopoly by one or several private schools may occur in certain regions. Besides, the tangible and intangible expenses of transferring from one school to another is not at all cheap; actual laissez-faire cannot exist. Especially when supply lags far behind demand, private schools of inferior quality which charge exorbitant fees can still survive. There are now in Hong Kong some private schools which only run Form V and matriculation classes. A great demand of such school places provides them with a chance to survive. Under the circumstances of imperfect market machinery and a gap between supply and demand, it would be over-optimistic to expect the establishment of a private school market in order to enhance the quality of private schools.

On the other hand, the ones that welcome the DSS most are not private schools but the prestigious schools now receiving subsidies. These schools would very likely join the DSS. The reason is that they have already possessed a superior quality and are well-equipped with sufficient facilities, an outstanding teaching staff and long standing prestige. By joining the scheme, they can further enhance their prestige

and autonomy. In fact, only these prestigious schools can afford to join the DSS. Just as what the report estimates, it would be more economical for the Government to operate the DSS than to set up public or subsidized schools, since the building costs have already been borne by the schools. Nevertheless, building costs are a sum the private schools would try hard to get back, together with profits on top. Consequently, the tuition fees of DSS schools would definitely be higher than those of subsidized schools. If a DSS secondary school does not possess a higher quality than an ordinary subsidized school, it simply cannot survive. In the near future, the prestigious schools are the only ones that can charge higher fees and will still be able to compete with the subsidized secondary schools.

As to whether those private schools originally planning to join the DSS would still be joining, the position is very complicated. These private schools would definitely know that no matter how much more they invest to meet the Government's requirement, they still would not be able to compete with subsidized secondary schools and other prestigious DSS schools. Yet, they would also worry that if they do not join the DSS, the number of students enrolled in the coming years will not be guaranteed. As a result, the matter has to be decided by careful calculation to see if a certain amount of project can be maintained. In fact, if a private school is not confident in competing with the elite and subsidized schools, but knowing quite well that there will be a shortage in subsidized places (which depends on the speed of growth in building new subsidized schools), the motive force for the school to turn directly subsidized is not that great.

Whether it is a matter of principle or specific assessment, this has served to reveal that the DSS is irrational and impracticable. The Government should formulate other feasible means to enhance the quality of private schools.

The main cause for the low quality of private schools at present lies in the fact that the subsidy for bought places is too minimal. It was learnt that the subsidy for a government subsidized school was \$20,000 per annum per head, and that for a private school it was only \$800 per month. Accordingly, the standard of a "bought place" school is naturally inferior to that of subsidized schools. If the Government really wants to raise the quality of the "bought place" private schools, the only thing it has to do is to offer them a similar subsidy as that for subsidized schools, and to lay down similar specifications and allow them to net a profit now permitted, as compensation for the building costs paid together with a reasonable profit. This is an interim plan recommended by the report prior to the implementation of the DSS.

Obviously, this arrangement is much better than the DSS.

To conclude, Sir, education is a social investment. We need the kind of education with emphasis on both quality and quantity to face the challenge in the future. Therefore, I do not agree to the report's recommendations on tertiary education structure and Direct Subsidy Scheme.

With these remarks, Sir, I support the motion.

MRS. LAM (in Cantonese): Sir, after the promulgation of the Education Commission Report No. 3, people from all walks of life have made different responses, yet there is a point of consensus, and that is, we should have a unified admission point, so as to eliminate the confusion caused by the existing system.

As regards the education structure, the report has put forth five options, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. While the public and the educationists are divided in their views, I am in favour of the "3+3" system. Being a product of the "3+3+4" system, I just would love to have it adopted. And also in principle, it is more appropriate for the secondary education structure to revert to the pre-1956 "3+3" system in the long run. However, the reform of education structure is an exceedingly complicated task which cannot be completed within a short span of time. Before embarking on the task, we need a thorough research, sophisticated planning, procurement of the appropriate teaching materials, ample funds, excellent teachers, the setting up of a uniform standard for various institutions, international recognition, good timing and the consent of parents. With all these matters well coped with, we can then revise the "5+2" system. The system, at present well-received by many principals, parents and the Secondary School Council, has been existing for 30 odd years. Hence, given an objective environment, I opine that at the present moment we should stick to the "5+2" system, whereas in the university curriculum, the more flexible credit system should be adopted.

I would now turn to the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS). The prospects of private schools and the education system they adopt have always been a contentious issue in Hong Kong. At present, the education standard of private schools is, in general, polarized into two extremes. Some schools are ill-equipped both in facilities and qualified teachers. They will be forced to close down once the Government decides to abandon the Bought Place Scheme. This leads to the illusion that Government does

not want private schools to exist. But the DSS proposed in Report No. 3 can clear this point. The scheme allows some private schools to continue operation even if the Government decides to scrap the Bought Place Scheme. In fact, several friends of mine who had run private schools for decades were forced to close down their schools in the past few years when Government stopped buying places from them. They are devoted educationists, but in the end have to give up their lifelong vocations. I therefore consider that DSS can lend a hand to sub-standard private schools to allow them to develop gradually into schools of higher standard.

On the other hand, my friends told me that they had not enough funds for better teachers and improved facilities because of a ceiling imposed by the Government on private school fees.

I believe that the government policy on limiting tuition fees has indirectly led to the close-down of some private schools. A good school requires not only the determination and efforts of its runner, but also a considerable amount of fund for development. Private schools cannot demand high school fees in the past. The subsidy from DSS is therefore reasonable. In the past decades, the contribution of private schools to our education system is undeniable and cannot be neglected. The Direct Subsidy Scheme grants private schools sufficient freedom in determining tuition fees, admission requirements and devising curricula to meet the basic standard of education. The scheme not only provides a chance of survival for some private schools facing imminent closures but also enables them to develop into an education system on their own.

Hong Kong is a free society. Parents should have the right to choose for themselves the types of schools they want their children to enter -- government, subsidized or private.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to set a time limit to the DSS. We cannot subsidize the private schools forever. Nor shall the private schools be allowed to profiteer on receiving subsidies. In my opinion, when the education standard of a private school has reached a high level, the Government should cease subsidizing it. The same applies to a subsidized school when it cannot reach a standardized high level at the end of subsidizing period.

I have reservations, however, as to the recommendation that international schools be included in the scheme. The point is most students of international schools are,

generally speaking, from affluent families, and can afford higher fees. As to the children of overseas employees, education allowances are usually provided by the employers. On the other hand, the granting of land to non-profit-making international schools for the building of premises deserves my support.

There is one point I wish to raise in particular, and that is before the implementation of the DSS, the Government should consider thoroughly solutions to the problems of teachers' contracts, salaries and fringe benefits. A working group should be set up to study the scheme and to devise what should be done during the transition period. It is hoped that DSS can really help those private schools in need of subsidies, not just makes prestigious schools more perfect. I therefore fully support the spirit of the Direct Subsidy Scheme.

Sir, with these remarks, I support the motion.

MR. LAU WAH-SUM: Sir, I should like to begin by declaring my interest as a member of the Education Commission, a member of the Council of the Baptist College and honorary treasurer, and a member of the Council and honorary treasurer of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

Any change in a well established system will certainly result in additional costs and losses in efficiency at least for a period when the society adjusts itself to the new system.

So unless it can be justified by very real benefits in the long term, we should not change our existing education system.

One such benefit can be claimed by the replacement of the Bought Place Scheme (BPS) by direct subsidy to private schools.

Under the scheme, any schools attaining the prescribed standards will be eligible for government subsidy, but they will receive no definitive restrictions on school fees and curricula.

Schools will thus be allowed more freedom to decide their own policies. They will have a much freer hand to improve their quality in order to attract more students and thereby more government subsidy. Ultimately our school children will benefit

from this. I believe this scheme will encourage fair competition and, eventually, it will raise the standard of our private schools. I therefore fully support this recommendation.

I agree with the proposal that there should be no fundamental change to our existing 5+2+3 system which has well served the community and has produced qualified graduates who have effectively met our needs in the social and economic spheres.

In May this year, the Executive Council agreed to improve the two-year sixth form course. A working group is now working on the broadening of the sixth form curriculum which will include practical and technical courses. It will serve to improve the foundation for students entering tertiary education, and for students not admitted to universities, the enriched two-year sixth form course will broaden their knowledge and will allow them time to mature before taking up employment and become productive members of the society.

They will have additional qualification which make them eligible for enrolment with professional institutions and ultimately giving better chance for their advancement in their career. It will also be possible for them to pursue degree courses on a part-time basis with the polytechnics, the future Open Learning Institute, or at the universities.

I am sure most of us agree to the recommendation for a common entry point to the tertiary education. Most importantly, the selection point for all students and all institutions occur at the end of the two-year sixth form. If they make their decision at the same point all parties stand on an equal chance: nobody gets a first move. This is very fair.

Hong Kong's economic growth depends on a highly efficient Civil Service and a strongly adaptable industrial and commercial sector. At the management level, these sectors are largely manned by locally produced graduates. Most of them were educated in this three-year system. Sir, the remarkable growth of our economy in the past is a valid proof that the students from the three-year system suits our needs.

Therefore even when you have more resources we should make them available for higher education and should first increase the number of places and then expand our post-graduate programmes for talented students.

My reasons for supporting the commission's recommendation for the retention of the three-year system are, firstly, by maintaining the same quality as at present and keeping it to three years rather than four, our resources should be put to better use in providing more places to meet our needs; secondly, it will cause the least disruption to our existing education system.

While I personally respect the ideals of members of the Chinese University, I do not consider it appropriate to sacrifice a unified educational policy for the benefit of a minority group.

In this connection, I would just quote a few figures. By 1990 to 1991 our total number of first-year first degree places will be 6 600. Out of these only 1 500, less than 25%, is produced by the Chinese University and in fact about half of this number is provided by the two polytechnics and Baptist College.

When the Education Commission compares the pros and cons of many options available to us, my greatest concern was to find the best solution that would benefit the society as a whole. I was not influenced in any way by any interest group.

I have heard arguments that we should adopt the 6+4 system which has proved successful in the United States and which is a system in China. Again I must stress that a system that works well in other countries may not be the one most suitable for us.

Sir, in less than 10 years we shall have our own constitution -- which will in effect put the "one country, two systems" principle into practice. If two political systems can co-exist within one country, why can't two different education systems?

Sir, with these remarks, I support the motion.

DR. LEONG: Sir, I was always under the impression that if one knows the intricacy of the human body, and the complexity of the medical and health system in Hong Kong, one can master all. Having read the Education Commission Report No. 3, having made reference to Reports No. 1 and 2, and having heard the discussion of honourable Members here tonight, I have come to realize I have met my Waterloo. In the education system, problems abound and conflicts between institutes, institutes and schools, and amongst various schools are plenty, giving a mammoth task to tackle.

I would like to start by voicing my disappointments in the Education Commission reports in that they have only looked at sections of the education system without considering the system as a whole. This, perhaps, is the attitude of the Administration. For similarly, in the context of the medical and health system, the hospital service has been taken out for consideration of changes, whilst the rest of the medical and health system remains untouched.

Not being an educationist, I do not propose to discuss the details of the Education Commission Report No. 3, but would like to bring forth a few comments as a taxpayer, a parent and perhaps as a professional person.

I have always, Sir, believed in complete autonomy of the tertiary educational body to decide on its degree courses. Whether they should be three or four-year courses (or five-year or six-year in the case of medicine) should be left entirely to the discretion of that tertiary body itself. In other words, the tertiary institutions must be allowed to exercise their autonomous judgement in relation to the appropriate duration and curriculum of their degree courses.

Be that as it may, I also believe in flexibility. On this basis, I hail the suggestion of Credit Units System whereby any degree course can be considered in terms of the number of credit units. The resultant is that a student can finish his or her course in three or four years, or even less, depending on the ingenuity and motivation of the student concerned.

Whilst on the subject of tertiary education, I have to disagree with a statement that my honourable colleague, Mr. David LI, who is not here tonight, made in his article in the South China Morning Post on Monday (24 October 1988). I quote: "The answer lies in conducting a non-academic curriculum which produces the skills and qualifications employers actually want". Whilst education should be geared, to a certain extent, to the actual practical needs of the society, one must not lose sight of the fact that education must serve to train the brain for independent thinking, and it is here that I think a complete academic curriculum would be essential. Flexibility, thus, must be the issue and the word of the day.

Sir, I have always taken with a grain of salt the idea that Form VI and Form VII are considered as preparatory years for entering tertiary institutes. I feel that this is a wrong concept. The needs of the tertiary institutes should not be the only target when we plan the curricula for our secondary schools. Whether there should

be just a Form VI or Form VII should depend on the objectives of the Education Commission as regards the level of education they feel the majority of our secondary school students should have after completing the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination to better equip them to enter into the society. This should be the point that they leave secondary schools, and this should be the common point where the tertiary institutes should be choosing them from.

At this juncture, Sir, I cannot but express my disappointments and my concerns, as a professional, for the lack of a wide base education, the failure of the education system to train independent thinking, and the appalling lack of the grasp of the English language that my colleagues and I often experience among students entering medical schools in the last few years. This problem requires urgent attention and solution from the commission. It is imperative for Hong Kong's existence in the future to be internationalized, for which a good command of the English language would be most essential. This applies especially to the field of medicine and allied sciences.

I hope, Sir, the Government would take these points into consideration and have them fully assessed in the light of all the controversy before coming to a decision.

I would like now to turn to the problem of the future of private secondary schools in Hong Kong. And here I will be very brief.

Sir, I firmly believe that in a free enterprising society as ours, competition is a necessity as it will bring progress, and furthermore there might be a right to choose. On this score, I am for maintaining private secondary schools in Hong Kong and therefore see no ill in the direct subsidy scheme system provided that the direct subsidy is based on a pro-rata basis not exceeding the cost of an aided place, and that it is Government's responsibility to ensure that there will be adequate available spaces of equally high standard in non-private schools for the poor and the unfortunate.

With these remarks and reservations, I support the motion.

MISS LEUNG (in Cantonese): Sir, I would like to declare that I am teaching at the University of Hong Kong and the recommendations in Education Commission Report No. 3 may involve the interests of the university. Though I am a registered voter of the teaching functional constituency which Mr. SZETO Wah represents, what he said earlier

has not adequately reflected my views.

Sir, I believe that higher education must converge with secondary education. Therefore, if the structure of higher education is brought under discussion, its relationship with that of secondary education must be taken into account at the same time. At present, there are mainly two schools of views on the duration and the convergence of higher and secondary education. One school prefers the 3+3+4 structure, that is, three years of junior secondary education, three years of senior secondary education and four years of university education; another school favours the 5+2+3 structure, that is, five years of secondary education, two years of matriculation and three years of university education. To be fair, both structures are quite good and it is difficult to tell which one is better. Both have been well developed in various countries and regions, and have won acclaim. It would be an emotive and subjective view to hold that one is necessarily better than the other.

Sir, the Executive Council had already approved Education Commission Report No. 2 and decided on a 5+2 structure, that is, five years of secondary education and two years of matriculation. The present position is that most of the secondary schools in the territory are adopting this structure. The 5+2 structure as proposed does no more than confirm an existing fact in the hope that further overall uniformity of the system may be achieved. Therefore, we must take the secondary education system as it exists at the present moment and the approval of the recommendations in Education Commission Report No. 2 as the basis for discussion of the recommendations on higher education in Education Commission Report No. 3.

Sir, basically, the general public are very eager to see that all tertiary institutions adopt unified admission procedures, thereby saving time and effort on the part of students. But whether we should take the completion of Form VI or the completion of Form VII as the admission requirement is a matter on which views are divided. However, I maintain that since the present structure of secondary education is 5+2, students should first complete Form VII and obtain A-Level passes in certain subjects before they are admitted to university.

Sir, in view of the fact that higher and secondary education must be convergent, and the structure of secondary education is 5+2, the duration of tertiary education should therefore remain at three years. It is inappropriate for the University of Hong Kong to seek to change from three to four year by proposing to add the so-called "foundation year". As regards the length of individual courses in tertiary

institutions, Education Commission Report No. 3 rationally points out that each institution be allowed to make its own decision in light of educational needs. In fact, whether it is a three-year or four-year system, graduates of excellent quality can still be cultivated in tertiary institutions. As the limited number of tertiary places at present can satisfy no more than 6.5% of young people of appropriate age, priority should be given to increasing tertiary places once additional resources are available.

Sir, recently, many of those showing concern to the issue have remarked that the standards of local university graduates are deteriorating. As an educationist engaged in tertiary education work for years, I am of course concerned about these remarks. But I am also surprised to hear them. Patently, many of the remarks are one-sided. In the case of the University of Hong Kong, I would like to point out that each faculty invites expatriate examiners to help assess the standards of candidates in degree examinations. They are famous scholars from different parts of the world, mainly from the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, and Canada. I have perused the annual reports written by the expatriate examiners for the Arts Faculty and the Faculty of Social Sciences. On the whole, the reports gave due recognition to the course contents of each subject or discipline and commended the students' performance. The examiners also maintained that the standard of the University of Hong Kong was comparable to that of their own universities. Thus students of the University of Hong Kong are up to standard as far as learning is concerned. I am sure this can also apply to the students of other tertiary institutions in Hong Kong.

Undeniably, some students' language ability, particularly English, is weaker than before. Their sense of social involvement and concern may also be less keen. This is, perhaps, a reflection of society today! This problem must be faced squarely, tackled and remedied.

If the recommendations of Education Commission Report No. 3 are found to be well-grounded, Government should consider giving additional resources to remedial English teaching in tertiary institutions. Therefore we may consider letting students, before the three-year tertiary course actually commences, take a three-month intensive basic course which will comprise language training, familiarization with campus life and learning to use the library, in order to broaden their horizon and have themselves psychologically prepared. The recommendations above will definitely not incur much expenditure and I hope they will be given careful consideration.

Sir, basically, I support the options in respect of tertiary education set out in part G of Report No. 3. Nevertheless, should Government approve the completion of Form VII as the admission requirement for first degree courses, the students of the Chinese University of Hong Kong who are now taking a four-year degree course are bound to be affected in a significant way. Government should therefore study this with caution.

Sir, I believe that in the context of the education system good course contents, teaching methods and examination modes can do a lot in motivating students to learn and in strengthening their absorption power. We should study this further.

Sir, with these remarks, I support the motion.

MR. SIT (in Cantonese): Sir, as the Chinese saying goes, "It takes a decade to grow a tree, but a century to establish a sound education system". It is a tradition for a Chinese society to attach great importance to education and have heartfelt respect for the educated people. Expenses on education always constitute an important item of expenditure for a Chinese family.

Lord MacLehose, a former Governor of Hong Kong, was intensely respected by the people of Hong Kong for initiating the nine-year free education system, whereas the late Governor Sir Edward Youde was highly acclaimed by the public for formulating the establishment of the third university -- the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. It is thus evident that the people of Hong Kong, like their counterparts in other Chinese communities, give full support to the provision of education.

The Hong Kong Government's persistent efforts in the promotion of education is obvious to all. Its efforts in this respect also contributes significantly to the success of the territory. In the absence of other natural resources, manpower is the only kind of resources in our possession. To enhance the quality of manpower is an essential means to maintain local prosperity and stability and to secure our economic foothold in the international arena.

Nevertheless, promotion of education involves not only increases in "quantity", to be brought about by nine-year free education or the establishment of new institutions and so on. At the same time, emphasis should also be put on the improvement of "quality". To attain this object, we may work towards the improvement

of curriculum, teacher training and the education system. There is plenty of room for Hong Kong to effect improvements in these three areas. The Education Commission Report No. 3 being discussed in this Council has put forward an important policy report on the tertiary education system. I would like to make some comments in this regard.

The report highlights the need for a two-year matriculation system and, on this basis, asks the two universities to adopt the three-year first degree course system. May I ask whether this proposal is tantamount to putting the cart before the horse? The inconsistency in the systems practised by the two universities as well as in the admission point is indeed undesirable and would give rise to confusion in respect of the convergence with the matriculation system. Yet this confusion originated from the lack of autonomy of the University of Hong Kong in 1953 when it had to follow most of the United Kingdom and British Commonwealth universities to change from the four-year to the three-year system. On the establishment of the Chinese University, the opportunity was not taken to standardize the systems of the two universities. At present, it appears that both universities have, to a certain extent, reached mutual understanding and a consensus, particularly when the University of Hong Kong offers to change to the four-year system through the introduction of a "foundation year". The two universities' decision on a desirable system should be respected. With the standardization of their education systems, the matriculation curricula will naturally become consistent, and hence the problem concerning the point of admission can be correspondingly solved. At a time when the two universities have worked out a reasonable solution regarding the structure to be followed, shall we pay no heed to their specific situation and insist on linking the matriculation system with the university entrance point outside the university education structure, thereby compelling them to change their own system to tie in with the other one?

Apart from the structure of tertiary education, I would also like to take this opportunity to express some views on the work carried out by the Education Commission. It seems that the commission has not made a review on our primary school education system. Does it mean that there is no room for improvement in our primary school education? As parents, we have undergone much bitter personal experience in that respect. For example, the Education Department has adopted a laissez-faire policy regarding textbooks used in primary schools, and the textbooks have not been examined in depth. Neither has any approved textbook list been provided (such is not the case for secondary schools). On the choice of textbooks, some local schools are blindly in pursuit of "foreign" books with "difficult" contents. To our surprise, a primary school has used a Geography textbook for its Primary IV students, which is in fact

meant for Form I students in the United Kingdom. The textbook is not only difficult to understand, its geographical names, concepts and examples are all relevant to the United Kingdom and Europe only. It is an average school and all its students are Chinese. Such a textbook may be comprehensible to Form III students in Hong Kong, but how can we expect Primary IV students to understand it? There are instances that some schools require Primary II students to use textbooks meant for Primary III or Primary IV students. As a result, parents have to give private coaching to their children after school or engage private tutors to do the job. Is there any negligence on the part of the Government regarding the foundation of our education system?

As indicated by some of my honourable colleagues, the problems arising from and not addressed by the Education Commission Report No. 3 are indeed too many and are of vital importance. I therefore suggest that an immediate review on all these issues be made and the report be kept in abeyance.

Sir, while discussing the structure of tertiary and university education, we must bear in mind that the majority of Hong Kong students are in primary schools. They are forced to learn too much at early age that many of them are scared stiff at the sight of textbooks. Hence, no matter how well the structure of tertiary education is designed, the inevitable fact that the whole thing is built on sand still exists. Moreover, the interest of primary school students in receiving higher education is dampened. The essence of education is to teach all people, not just those with potential. Today's heated debate turns out to be something completely out of context. It has nothing to do with our motion which states that the Council "takes note" of the recommendations in Education Commission Report No. 3. The motion itself is very neutral. It will surely gain the support of the majority. None the less, instead of having a dubious shift of emphasis, I think this Council should attempt to arrive at some sort of consensus when discussing the report. An appropriate approach, I think, is to solicit Members' opinions on separate topics raised in the report. For instance, Members can indicate whether they support, partially support, object, partially object to the proposals in the report, or conclude that the recommendations be shelved and so on.

Sir, with these remarks, I support the motion.

MRS. SO (in Cantonese): Sir, I would like to express my views on the two major parts of the Education Commission Report No. 3. They are the structure of tertiary and

matriculation education and the Direct Subsidy Scheme for private secondary schools.

Firstly, I believe that in formulating an education policy that may bring long-term benefits and cater to the actual needs of our community, the following principles should be upheld:

(1) Reforms should be directed against the existing shortfalls in our education structure;

(2) All reforms should be geared to the ideal and objective of attaining the highest standard of education;

(3) The education structure in Hong Kong should be compatible with the main trend of education development all over the world instead of developing into an isolated system.

It is only recently that we are beset by a general and gradual decline in the academic standard of our tertiary education. The problem involved are multifarious. The gap between senior secondary and tertiary education keeps on widening in terms of curriculum and standard. This is indeed a factor that calls for serious consideration. The report has also picked on this area as a major subject for study. Nevertheless, it has failed to make special reference to other equally important and more fundamental problems. It is apparent that the report has taken its views in a very restricted perspective.

For instance, Government's expenditure on tertiary education and on the overall provision for education are significantly lower than that of many advanced countries. Our pressing problem is to check the general decline of our education standard which is the outcome of insufficient resources for education, excessive working pressure on teachers and over-emphasis on an examination-oriented curriculum. The blame should not be put entirely on the existing gap between tertiary and secondary education.

Instead of asking the Government to make greater commitment to Hong Kong's education in future, the report suggests a trim-down on education expenditure in many respects. This attitude, I believe, is the result of short-sightedness and a lack of vision in education.

After expounding my principles and approach, I want to proceed to certain details of the report.

Firstly, how can tertiary education be properly grafted on "sixth form" or "matriculation" education?

We must acknowledge that the absence of a common entrance point at present has caused much confusion and unnecessary wastage in our senior secondary school sector. I therefore give my full support to the introduction of a common entrance point for all tertiary courses except those requested by individual tertiary institutions for special arrangements.

The logic of setting the common entrance point at Form VII as suggested by the report has been repeatedly challenged by many people from the academic, education sector and the general public. We must address the issue seriously. What puzzles us is that the report has given no clear definition for "intermediate level". Instead, it has made too many impractical assumptions on this proposal.

The report has made repeated emphasis on the need to expand the role of the matriculation course and tries to rationalize a two-year matriculation course by stressing the benefit of a more diversified sixth-form curriculum. But to our surprise, the report gives no specific recommendations on how this "diversification" scheme is to be carried out. It only vaguely suggests the inclusion of some vocational training and "marginal" courses. It is almost like asking the existing secondary schools to provide, notwithstanding their already stringent resources, additional facilities and teaching staff to the level and scale of a junior college or even pre-vocational school.

As a matter of fact, I am in favour of a diversified secondary education developed on the basis of students' aptitude, interest and inclination, which would provide a greater variety of courses for choice and thus capable of training up different talents for the economic development of Hong Kong. But that should be the subject of another review. It should be considered and developed independent of the "matriculation" education issue.

I maintain that the purpose of sixth form courses should be wholly for preparing students for university education. Hence, the idea of one-year matriculation course is to reduce the wastage of time of the unsuccessful students to the minimum.

A resolution to uphold the system of four-year courses has recently been passed by the Council of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The University of Hong Kong has also initiated a request for conversion to a system of four-year courses. All these are indicative of their insistence on maintaining the quality of university education. Some may hold the view that for the sake of increasing university places, "quality" may perhaps be compromised. I, however, find it a most misleading opinion -- "quality" and "quantity" do not necessarily contradict each other. As I have earlier mentioned, we can surely afford the cost of more university places only if our Government is more generous and agrees to make greater funding commitment to our tertiary education instead of setting its mind on cutting expenditure.

All in all, to achieve cost-effectiveness and administrative convenience at the expense of the ideals and quality of education is something a forward-looking and healthy education policy should never tolerate.

Secondly, regarding the Direct Subsidy Scheme for secondary schools proposed by the report, I think there are many areas that cause our concern.

First of all, I agree to the Government's objective of improving the standard of secondary education. But the introduction of an "elitist" system is not a desirable means to this end. I think the set-back in secondary school students' academic ability and language proficiency should not entirely be attributed to the fact that the Place Allocation System has lowered education standard of our schools. We should consider the fact that secondary schools have all along been putting too much emphasis on academic subjects. Sufficient opportunities and choices have not been provided to cater for the educational needs students with different interests and aptitudes may demand. To our regret, the report has failed to make a comprehensive review in this aspect.

It is highly possible that the DSS would introduce the operation of market mechanism into schools, with the consequence that competitions among schools and students themselves will become more acute. Schools will concentrate their efforts on absorbing students with better learning power while students will have to compete hard with one another for a place in a good school. This would only result in an endless cycle of competitions. And more importantly, the pressure of competition on pupils, and likewise on their parents, might begin as early as children entering Primary I. The "elitist" system may, in the short term, help raise the standard of

some schools. Nevertheless, in the longer term there will be many or even more students falling victim to this system

It is my belief that in subsidizing education with public money, the Government should assume the primary responsibility of ensuring a fair chance of subsidized schooling for all youths.

Lastly, if education is treated as a valuable but time-consuming undertaking in training a social being instead of simply an administrative problem which calls for the most convenient and economical solution, then we shall have to make greater commitment, show a little more patience and re-consider in great detail those recommendations of the report which we have doubts.

Sir with these remarks, I support the motion.

MR. TIEN: Sir, like several of my honourable colleagues who spoke before me, my perspective in looking at this motion is also that of a parent and of an employer. On both scores I must say that I am dissatisfied, and welcome this opportunity to say why.

Hong Kong is a great and vital international city. We who live here have a right to be esteemed as much for our brains as for our commercial energy. To speak bluntly I believe we are operating an inadequate educational system. In this I am repeating the sentiments of the report, which states that our university graduates are, "too specialized, and as a result know little of the world beyond their own field and lack maturity, initiative and imagination".

Sir, this is a strong indictment. An educational system at tertiary level which produces graduates without maturity, without initiative and without imagination is surely deficient.

Also, last Friday at a meeting with the Secretary for Education and Manpower and the Director of Education, I asked a question about the findings of this report. Were, I asked, parents and employers consulted? I received the worrying answer that they were not. Plenty of input from those operating the system, but none from the consumers -- that is, parents and employers.

As far as I know neither of the two universities for example, has ever suggested that parents and employers, might sit in from time to time on, say, the University Senate. Sir, a business that operated on that principle -- the principle of disregarding the needs of the customer -- would quickly go under.

I suggest we ask several questions which have struck me on reading through this valuable report.

Firstly, why do so many of our young people go abroad for study?

The obvious answer is that only a fraction of our young people have had any hope of gaining higher education in Hong Kong -- somewhere between 5% to 6 % -- very low by the standards of any developed country.

The report points out that thousands of them go to Britain, Canada, Australia and the United States. The University of East Asia takes almost 90% of its students from Hong Kong.

Let us assume taking the report's figures that there are, roughly speaking, 10 000 students in all seeking higher education overseas. Let us further assume that each spends \$100,000 a year overseas on the full costs of a year's tuition, living expenses, and air fares. The drain on our territory's resources would be therefore something in the region of \$1 billion every year. I would very much hope that this 10 000 students and \$1 billion could be brought back into our own educational system.

Secondly, what should we do about the question of language?

I can see a distinction between English as the language of instruction and English as an international language. Obviously I should leave those better equipped than myself to discuss the former question. My remarks apply to English -- the language of international use.

Hong Kong is ambivalent about English. Very naturally the mother tongue is preferred to the foreign tongue. (English is seen by many young people as a necessary evil but it has to be seen as a valuable commercial asset.)

The report states that more resources should be urgently devoted to better English teaching. I agree. But we must also learn from our mistakes too, as some recent

ventures have apparently been unsuccessful. I feel that both English and Chinese, must be strengthened and improved by the best methods available.

Thirdly, what is the best length for a degree course?

It is axiomatic, the report points out, that all our publicly funded tertiary institutions should have a common entry point. I fully agree with this recommendation.

The length of the degree course is not treated dogmatically in the report, but I regret to say that (as we have seen in the submissions from the two universities) it is often treated dogmatically. Let us just be a little bit more pragmatic instead.

Sir, a recent article in the Economist, (15 October issue) discussed the length of degree courses in western Europe. It concurred with my belief that there is no magic figure three or four or anything. The Economist indicated that in Denmark, the Danes favour eight years for an arts degree. In West Germany, businessmen are not considered to be serious unless there are four and a half years plus a doctorate! Such an idea would be nonsense in Hong Kong. The rule is that there are no rules. Comparative education is a very inexact science. Nevertheless, I believe that the three-year system would allow a greater number of students to benefit from higher tertiary education. I therefore also favour the principle of a two-year sixth form.

But education goes on for life afterwards -- as a matter of quality and of personal enrichment. It is not the number of years, but what you can achieve in the classroom in this year that counts. Furthermore, I also strongly believe that the American unit credit system, which allows very flexible periods for students to complete their studies, should be seriously considered.

Finally, let us ask: "Is there any connection between education and emigration?"

Like many people, I perceive a connection between the so-called brain drain and the lack of educational opportunities here. I also see the Direct Subsidy Scheme as a possible way to stem the outflow of young professionals and their families abroad. I support the scheme despite the criticisms made about it in some quarters. Elitism is not necessarily a bad idea if it ensures excellence. This scheme is not for the wealthy, but rather for those who can benefit, intellectually, from it. The Director of Education last Friday informed this ad hoc committee that the nominal cost to Government of one aided place is about \$12,000 a year and the cost to the student

is about \$2,500 a year respectively. Sir, \$12,000 a year in aid to help educate our future generation could hardly be criticized as subsidizing the rich with shark's fin and the cost of \$200 a month to the student could hardly be excused as affordable to our general public.

By 1997, much of the middle management sector will be drawn from the local population. Indeed those persons now entering university will become those very same people. They are the vital future leaders and managers of our society.

I support the Direct Subsidy Scheme because it will encourage students of quality to benefit from financial help. Ultimately I believe that quality and merit should be rewarded and encouraged.

Hong Kong will survive and prosper if we ignore this report in spite of, rather than because of, its higher educational system. In all of this the report has made a good start.

Sir, I beg to support the motion.

MRS. TU: Sir, before I begin I should declare my interest as supervisor of a catholic secondary school, a subsidized primary school, and several kindergartens, but today I will say only what I believe to be in the interest of the younger generation and not in the interest of any particular education group.

Forty years ago, education from kindergarten to university was almost entirely the domain of the rich and influential. Only in the past 10 years has free education become the right of every child up to 15 years of age. I must congratulate the Government on this progress, slow though it has been.

But inequalities still exist, and now is the time to get rid of those inequalities. Inequalities begin at kindergarten, which is still dominated by the elite. This is most unfortunate as kindergarten education still to some extent maps out the future of the child at that level, right through primary and secondary school and up to tertiary education. If education is recognized as a human right in our society, then it must mean equal opportunity for each according to his ability.

Before we rush into accepting all or any of the preferred options of this No.

3 report, I think we need to make sure that we have laid the foundation correctly, and the foundation lies at kindergarten. No one would attempt to begin building a house from the top to the foundation. We need to do with education what we have done with our old housing estates: demolish and reconstruct. Of course it will not be so easy or so quick as rebuilding a house, but unless we have a proper plan, we should continue to put on patches and never achieve a sound and compatible structure.

How can a child be given equal opportunity if his first two years depend upon what they can afford to pay? How can he have an equal opportunity if he gets only half-day education in primary school, and in some cases with less than well-qualified teachers? How can he reach a good standard in secondary school if he is placed in a sub-standard school which has been deprived of financial resources, necessary equipment, additional teachers, and all the extra perks that the Government lavishes on those schools which least need assistance? Report No. 3 admits these faults, but it fails to arrive at a clear-cut plan because it has not identified the causes throughout the whole system.

I have consulted the educationists of my own constituency and a number of other groups. They all agree on two points in the report : (1) they agree on the common entry point to tertiary education; and (2) they agree that increased assistance must be given to sub-standard schools that are willing to raise their standards to acceptable levels.

Unanimously rejected by the people I have consulted was the Direct Subsidy Scheme for profit-making private secondary schools. If parents or school operators wish to choose their own curriculum and run their schools for an elite clientele, they should not be given public money to do so. This proposal would be a backward step towards individual secondary school entrance examinations and an additional burden on the children. Moreover, this proposal has already caused a feeling of insecurity among subsidized school teachers, who might lose their present status if their schools decided to privatize.

Turning to the recommendations for Form VI and Form VII, I have consulted many educationists, and I have come to the conclusion that these proposals and the No. 3 report would only further muddy the waters. We should not fool ourselves into believing that students enter Form VI to further their general education. They enter with the hope that they will reach matriculation level and at some time, now or in the future, they will be able to go to a tertiary institution either here or abroad.

After a great deal of thought and consultation, I have come to the firm conclusion that the best way to follow is the system known as 3+3+4. Students would be able to leave school at Form III with a certificate from their own schools, and either go to work or enter vocational training. Those who wished to continue with their education could take their final government examination in Form VI with three years instead of two to prepare for it. This would provide a better opportunity to diversify the curriculum to include practical as well as academic subjects. By the time of their graduation students would be 18 years old, the correct age for adult education to begin if they intend to enter tertiary institutions.

It is difficult for those who have long been tied into the British system to accept anything new. I passed through the British system myself, but after nearly 40 years of educational involvement in Hong Kong, I am convinced that the 3+3+4 system is the correct one. What the Education Commission seems to have failed to do is to draw a line between tertiary and secondary education. At Forms VI and VII the lines become crossed and everything becomes confused. But secondary school should make sure that the vast majority of students get the best possible education, and this could well end at Form VI, the adult age under the 3+3+4 system.

Tertiary education is a different kind of animal, and is only available to a minority. Tertiary institutions should be left to choose their students according to examination results at Form VI, and according to what courses they offer as well as their assessment of each individual student. I mentioned that I agreed with a four-year university course, but I should like to add that I think this should be flexible. Students enter university with different standards, especially in language. The foundation year at the university could deal with this problem, though hopefully it would provide the right courses and well-qualified tutors to achieve this end. If a credit unit system were to be introduced, there would be nothing to deter a student of ability graduating in three years instead of four.

The 3+3+4 system (with a credit unit provision at tertiary level) is a neat, logical, and in my estimation, necessary way to go, in order to clear up the present confusion as to what is secondary and what is tertiary education. Though it is not in the options, may I add that to complete the system we need a free seven-year full-day primary school course to replace the present primary and kindergarten system.

Finally, on education in general, I would like to add that Hong Kong knows how to invest in business, commerce, trade and industry, but we have failed to see the

importance of investing in our young people upon whom our economic success will depend in the next decades. The shortage of technicians, skilled workers, professionals and upper and middle management are undoubtedly due to the failure to provide education to many of those people in Hong Kong who have now reached their thirties and forties. Some may ask: "Can we afford to carry out this total education scheme?" My question is: "Can our economy, labour intensive as it is, afford not to?"

Sir, with these remarks, and without supporting all the recommendations of the report, I support the motion.

MR. PETER WONG: Sir, as the representative of the Accountancy Functional Constituency, I am naturally interested in how the proposed changes will effect the production of accountants for Hong Kong.

Entry into the Society of Accountants is primarily by examination held jointly with the Chartered Institute of Certified Accountants of the United Kingdom. This gives the local qualification international recognition. Candidates can elect to sit for either the United Kingdom stream or the Hong Kong stream - the other difference being the tax and company law papers.

Some two-thirds of the society's registered students have tertiary or post-secondary education with the balance from secondary schools. The society has a long-term goal of entry only for graduate of degree courses but that is a long way off because we are still desperately short of accountants in Hong Kong.

We have one of the most portable professional qualifications and our skills are applicable uniformly everywhere in the world. We have probably been hurt by brain drain more than any other profession. Firstly we had to fill in the accountancy void in the People's Republic of China and recently the emigration to Canada and Australia and other countries has depleted our numbers even further.

Membership by examination alone does not permit one to practise public accountancy in Hong Kong where we have the monopoly of auditing limited liability companies. One must have approved experience in auditing, that is, four years of which one year must be post-qualification experience in Hong Kong, before being registered as a certified public accountant in Hong Kong.

As the supply of trainee accountants from tertiary establishments is inelastic, we have to take up the slack by admission from the secondary schools or by importation of qualified accountants from overseas.

Some from overseas come for short-term contracts but many others like myself trained abroad and chose to return after qualification. It is true to say that most of the larger certified public accountant firms have overseas qualifications but the bulk of the society's new membership is from the local stream.

In the long term and with 1997 in mind, it will be unrealistic for us to continue to rely on the overseas stream to lead the profession. We must put more emphasis on production of future professionals through the tertiary establishments of Hong Kong. I appreciate that we are but one of the many competing demands in Hong Kong for places and I am sure that this Council will in due course make the right decision based on the merits of the various claims.

When our students first register, some 75% have only two A-Level and three O-Level passes at the matriculation level. However, Hong Kong being Hong Kong, many will also have enrolled to take tertiary or post-secondary courses at the same time as the Society's examinations. When we look at the results of the last two final examinations, only 12% to 13% of the successful candidates still had only matriculation standards.

The present systems caters both for degree course graduate entry as well as matriculation entry. Those who do not have a tertiary education may obtain the qualification without any sacrifice to standard because they must pass all the examinations set by the society. A university graduate, depending on the course they have taken, may obtain exemption from certain papers.

I would here like to make a plea for a higher standard of English. I am not at all impressed by the way English is taught in our tertiary or secondary educational establishments judging from the results which we see.

I can but repeat that a great deal of our success in the financial and commercial world is attributed to our use of English. We cannot rely on English to be taught by only a few in a super sixth form or in a foundation university year -- that in itself has problems in drawing away high calibre staff from the secondary schools and thereby depressing standards. It must be taught and used at the lowest levels, even at the kindergarten stage, so that English becomes a natural second language

and we become bilingual. Only then, can we be sure of our place in the world during the 50 years after 1997. If we sacrifice our English, we stand a very good chance of being just another region of the People's Republic.

We must remember that there will be an increasing pressure for Hong Kong people to be proficient in Putonghua and in written Chinese. This will put great pressure on the teaching of linguistic skills. However, let us ensure that we are fully bilingual before embarking on trilingualism.

We have had very good graduates from both the three-year and four-year systems, but it is obvious that the three-year system produces graduates more quickly. I suggest that in the years to come, having sufficient graduates of an acceptable quality will be the crucial factor in the continuation of the accountancy and other professions.

However, we would not find it acceptable for the secondary school system to finish anywhere below the present matriculation level since this is the minimum possible for entry into the profession. The combination of these factors means a continuation of the matriculation year, a joint admission procedure to tertiary education and a three-year degree course system are the most practical in my opinion.

PROF. POON: Sir, before I begin, I must declare my interest as Dean of the Science Faculty of University of Hong Kong.

The Education Commission Report No. 3 has made significant and far-reaching recommendations on the future of tertiary education in Hong Kong. That these recommendations have evoked different responses from various educational institutions and sectors of the community comes as no surprise. In debating the motion before us, I feel that as Members of the Legislative Council, we should attempt to comment on the recommendations from a perspective wider than that which represents any one point of view. In other words, the educationists' view of tertiary education structure, for example, must be balanced by the realities of parental concern, students' expectations, social needs through the eyes of potential employers and overall availability of resources. These are basic factors that need to be considered.

On the structure of secondary and tertiary education, I must say at the outset

that it would be all too easy to merely support the theoretical structure of 5+1+4, 3+3+4 or 5+2+optional length of the first degree course and so on. But much more than a number game, we are talking about training leaders for the future. What is more, we must not forget that at present the first year intake capability of the universities can cater for only 6% of the total number of young people within the relevant age group. What about the 94% of our young people who could not, for various reasons, be able to pursue university education? These tens of thousands of young people are also important pillars of our complex society. The sort of education some of these young people get in the sixth form as a terminal course is just as important as the ideal package we want to put together for our undergraduates.

The proposed conversion to or maintenance of four-year first degree courses is, to my mind, clearly supportable in principle in upholding and improving the quality of our honours degrees. But an even more urgent task at hand is to sort out, to the satisfaction of all parties concerned, the structure and content of the sixth form curriculum. The working group set up to do this job has a difficult task ahead. I am confident that all parties concerned will pool together their respective experience and wisdom in mapping out a curriculum that not only caters for the needs of the majority of students and our society, but is also flexible enough to allow certain high flyers in the sixth form to enter university after one year.

While I also support in principle the recommendations in the No. 3 report that common admission procedures should be introduced by all UPGC-funded institutions as a long-term goal, I have some sympathy with those who argue against it. The advantages to be achieved through common admission procedures are obvious, but I do urge the Administration to seriously consider the appropriateness of approving common admission after Secondary VII as a matter of policy at this early stage. Although there is some public support today for a common admission after Secondary VII, the situation could change tomorrow. I urge the Administration therefore to bear in mind the need for flexibility in this important area as well as to take heed of the experience of certain tertiary institutions which have successfully coped with intake after the first year of the matriculation course. It could be that, with an improved sixth form curriculum some years from now, it may not be necessary to insist that entrance to degree programmes at all tertiary institutions should be after Secondary VII.

In any case, recently gathered statistics on sixth formers reveal that some 40% of the students enrolling in the matriculation course leave the course after one year.

Of the 40%, the majority have either gone abroad to study, or entered into employment. These statistics seem to suggest that the crux of the problem could lie in the attractiveness, or lack of it, of the current matriculation course curriculum and possibly other external factors more than the alleged disruption caused by the existing system. Rigid insistence on a joint admission scheme only after a two-year curriculum course could end up camouflaging the real reasons for our students leaving after one year, but not solve the underlying problems. I urge the Administration to carefully consider all the arguments put forward before a final commitment is made.

Finally, I have noticed that among the subjects now under study by the Education Commission, "education for high technology" is on the list. This is encouraging and I hope that the commission will complete its monograph on this subject as soon as possible. Much needs to be done on this subject, and quickly.

With these remarks, Sir, I support the motion.

SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION AND MANPOWER: Sir, I should, perhaps, explain that my appearance in this exalted position on the front bench is not, alas, due to a sudden promotion, but only because I am the guinea pig for a new scheme, which makes it easier for me to consult my colleague in the box behind me.

Sir, I am very glad to have the opportunity to reply to Members' frank and constructive comments on Education Commission Report No. 3. This debate is a vital part of the consultation process and will help us to assess public reaction to the commission's recommendations.

I would like to speak briefly on the two major subjects covered by the report, namely the structure of tertiary education and the future of private schools. I shall try to answer some of the main criticisms. But I must emphasize that the Government has not yet taken a view on the recommendations. I can assure Mr. SZETO Wah that all comments, whether supportive or critical, will be fully taken into account.

On the structure of tertiary education the commission made a total of 12 recommendations. Of these three are particularly important and have attracted the most attention both during the period of public consultation and during this debate.

The first of these recommendations is that there should be a unified point of

entry to all tertiary institutions after Secondary VII. Although we have not yet finished the analysis of public comment on the report, it is fair to say that this recommendation has, in general, been favourably received. Among others, Mr. Stephen CHEONG, Mr. CHAN Ying-lun and Mr. NGAI Shiu-kit, and speaking from the specific perspective of the accounting profession, Mr. Peter WONG have added their support today. If implemented, this recommendation would bring Hong Kong into line with most developed countries where publicly funded tertiary institutions must accept their students from the final year of the standard length of secondary education, whatever that may be. As Mr. David CHEUNG has eloquently shown, the lack of a unified entry point in Hong Kong has caused disruption to the sixth form curriculum and has increased the pressure on students who are competing fiercely to obtain tertiary places. Despite Mr. Andrew WONG's brave attempt to justify the present situation, I agree with Mrs. Selina CHOW and Mrs. Rita FAN that it is vital for the Government to act quickly to end this situation.

The second key recommendation relates to the so-called "three year - four year question". The commission carefully considered the arguments in favour of a system of all three year or all four year first degrees. Pace Mr. SZETO Wah, Mr. Peter POON and Mr. TAM Yiu-chung, it rejected both these extremes. The commission believes that the length of courses should not be arbitrarily fixed by the Administration. As noted by Miss LEUNG Wai-tung it believes that the tertiary institutions should continue to have the freedom to approach the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee with proposals for courses of whatever length they consider, on educational grounds, to be appropriate. I would like to emphasize the commission's expression "on educational grounds". The commission has noted that "educational" in this context should be interpreted to cover both academic and general educational needs. The commission's proposals do not pose any threat to any particular four-year degree course, unless it can be shown that four years is not educationally necessary. The proposals seem to me a reasonable compromise between the more rigid extremes.

The third major recommendation is that the length of first degree courses at all institutions should in principle be the same for any given subject. In response to Mr. TAM Yiu-chung, I should emphasize that the commission intends that this recommendation should be interpreted carefully, taking into account the course content of programmes offered at different institutions, as well as the existence of for example "sandwich" courses at some institutions.

I am pleased that many speakers have today supported these key proposals. Mr.

Kingsley SIT and Mr. CHUNG Pui-lam have, however, implied that they may interfere with the academic freedom of the tertiary institutions, in particular the Chinese University of Hong Kong. I do not share this view. I believe very strongly in academic freedom. This means the right to offer whatever curricula an institution may consider appropriate without interference by the Government in the content of courses or the method of teaching. But, as Mrs. Rita FAN has explained, this freedom has important limitations, which are accepted by tertiary institutions in most developed countries. The first is that the freedom of tertiary institutions should not be exercised at the expense of the secondary sector. Courses at tertiary institutions may vary in length, but they should all begin at the end of the standard secondary school education period. Second, freedom does not include the right to dispose of public funds without any form of supervision. Like other places, we have an independent body of international standing, the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee, to monitor the use of taxpayers' money by the tertiary institutions. This is a normal and proper safeguard and in no way infringes academic freedom.

Mr. SZETO Wah and Mr. Martin LEE have suggested that the report is in some way an attempt to maintain a link between the education systems of Hong Kong and of England. Mrs. Elsie TU also referred to "those who have long been tied into the British system". Similarly, Mrs. SO CHAU Yim-ping and Mr. Paul CHENG have suggested that the report is at variance with a world-wide trend. Neither of these claims are fair. The commission has looked at systems in many different countries, but has not imitated any of them. It is true that our secondary school structure is, for historical reasons, similar to that in England. It is none the worse for that. Comparable systems exist in other places, such as New Zealand and Singapore. As Mrs. Rita FAN, Mr. Stephen CHEONG, Mr. James TIEN and others have pointed out, countries which have different systems differ from each other as much as they differ from us. And as Mrs. Rosanna TAM has said, we have achieved international recognition for our own, local qualifications. But in any case the commission's third report is not concerned with the structure of secondary education. The Government has already decided to maintain and strengthen our existing 5+2 secondary school structure. With respect to the remarks of Mr. Ronald CHOW and Mrs. Elsie TU about public support for an alternative 3+3 structure, this decision was taken with the support of the majority of public opinion expressed in response to the commission's Report No. 2. As far as tertiary education is concerned, the commission's present proposal for variable degree course lengths has been tailored specifically for the needs of Hong Kong.

Another criticism, made by Mrs. SO CHAU Yim-ping, is that the real problems faced

by the universities in maintaining standards have not been addressed. This is not so. As noted by Miss LEUNG Wai-tung the commission's proposal for additional resources for remedial teaching in English should help to improve the low standard of English referred to by Dr. LEONG Chi-hung and Mr. Peter WONG. In the longer term, the measures now in hand to improve the quality of sixth form education will help to ensure that students enter tertiary education better prepared than before. Mr. CHUNG Pui-lam may be interested to know that the working group recommended by the commission to oversee these measures has been set up and is operating well, with both schools and tertiary institutions taking part.

Thus the commission has proposed sensible measures to help the universities maintain their high standards. But as Mr. David CHEUNG has pointed out, their present problems are partly of their own making. Their admission policies have always favoured those students who did well in a narrow range of subjects. There has thus been no incentive for students to study more broadly or to improve their language skills. If the universities were to require a wider range of subject and higher language skills, I am sure that our students would respond. I also agree with Dr. Daniel TSE that extending teaching time into the summer vacation should be carefully considered by the tertiary institutions as a logical, cost-effective measure. It has already been tried with conspicuous success at the Baptist College.

Sir, I would like to refer briefly to two of the commission's other recommendations on tertiary education. I share the views of Mrs. Elsie TU, Mrs. Peggy LAM, and other speakers that the introduction of a credit unit system, as proposed by the commission, would, in the longer term, give us the solutions to many of the problems affecting our tertiary institutions. It would give greater flexibility to students in the selection of courses and to institutions in the design and teaching of curricula. At present, neither university operates a genuine system of credit units. I also welcome the support from Mr. CHAN Ying-lun, and several other Members, for the commission's recommendation that priority should be given to increasing the number of students entering tertiary education each year. As the Governor said, Sir, in his address to this Council on 12 October, it is important that the Government should continue to accord a very high priority to the expansion of higher education. In reply to Mr. Martin LEE and Mr. Paul CHENG, I do not think that this need imply a sacrifice of quality for quantity. Neither the commission nor the Government has suggested that expenditure on other educational projects is unnecessary or should be cut back. In fact the commission has recommended that the Government should consider providing additional resources for the remedial teaching of English at

tertiary institutions.

Sir, the debate on these recommendations has now lasted for many months. It has been an interesting debate and has produced many ideas which we will take into account when assessing the commission's proposals. It has also, occasionally, been an emotional debate. I share the hope of Mr. David CHEUNG that when the final decisions have been made, those concerned will put aside their own sectoral interests and work towards a solution which will benefit all students in Hong Kong: not only the 34 000 students at our tertiary institutions, but also the 980 000 students at our schools. In doing so we should be prepared, where necessary, to accept change. Sir, if I may be forgiven a less serious note for a moment, we should, perhaps, also bear in mind the saying of Confucius: " ". The learned commentaries give different interpretations of this saying but they all boil down to something like: "To study for three years without getting anywhere is not easy".

Sir, I will not discuss the commission's recommendations on the future of private schools at length. I will simply outline the problems which the commission aims to solve and try to answer some of the criticisms.

Unlike most developed countries, Hong Kong's private schools are not prestigious bodies catering to elites of wealth or of talent. They are reception centres for students who are unable to secure places in one of our highly esteemed aided schools. Those from which the Government buys places under the Bought Place Scheme (BPS) serve as a buffer against fluctuations in the demand for secondary places. Historically, their fees have been controlled, making it difficult for them to raise their standards to a level comparable to that available in Government and aided schools. Children placed in these schools receive, at public expense, an inferior education, at a lower rate of subsidy, than that provided to children in the public sector. Clearly this must change.

Potentially, a strong private educational sector, operating alongside the public sector, offers an element of enrichment which would be lost if the private schools were to disappear. They can provide choice, variety and specialization. They can cater to children with special learning needs, whether they are fast learners, slow learners, or simply different. The commission shares the view of Mr. NGAI Shiu-kit that, educationally, this can only be for the good. I am pleased that Mr. Andrew WONG, Mr. Michael CHENG, Mr. James TIEN and several other Members, have also supported this philosophy in their speeches.

The commission hopes that its proposals for a Direct Subsidy Scheme, or DSS, will make these advantages available to the people of Hong Kong. To enter the DSS, schools would be required to reach the standards of aided schools. Private schools in the BPS would be helped to meet these standards through a system of fixed contracts over the next decade. This would give them the time they need to make the transition.

Schools in the DSS would be free to set their own curricula: to teach what they like as they like. They would be controlled by the discipline of parental choice. There is no reason to believe, as Mr. Ronald CHOW apparently does, that parents are less skilled than civil servants in choosing the best education for their children. DSS schools would also be required to publish details of their curricula, fees and examination results in annual prospectuses. These would be endorsed by a new Private Schools Review Committee which would advise on admission to the DSS and on maintaining standards.

Mr. HUI Yin-fat and Mrs. Peggy LAM have drawn attention to the practical problems which the review committee will face in improving the standards of our private schools and in deciding how and when to admit schools to the DSS. I agree that there are practical problems in any new scheme. I do not under-estimate them. Nor do I have the answers to all of them. We must consider the question of capital subsidy to schools in the scheme, the policy on fee remission, the conditions on which land has been granted to schools before they join the scheme, the arrangements for feeder primary schools, the need to ensure provident fund benefits are maintained, and the way in which the seniority and salary increments of teachers may be affected. If the commission's proposals are accepted in principle, these problems will need to be considered carefully by the Private Schools Review Committee, which will include representatives of the school sector, the Government and the general public. I can assure Mr. SZETO Wah that no formal committee will be established to implement the DSS unless and until it is approved by the Executive Council. The question of aided schools' participation in the DSS has also aroused comment. Mr. SZETO Wah, Mr. TAM Yiu-chung, Mr. Ronald CHOW and others may fear that the popular aided schools might choose to join the new scheme and charge fees beyond the means of poorer families. They may be concerned that this would deprive all but the wealthy of the chance to attend the best schools. Similarly, Mr. SZETO Wah and Mrs. Elsie TU have raised the spectre of a return to "elitist" education. The fear is that aided schools could lose their best students to DSS schools catering to an intellectual "elite" and that the status of the public sector would suffer as a result. Mrs. Peggy LAM has also

questioned the need for international schools to be included in the scheme, perhaps on the grounds that they cater for a privileged minority of expatriates.

I believe these fears may be unfounded. They have been well addressed by Mrs. Selina CHOW and Mr. NGAI Shiu-kit. A few schools may of course, decide to charge high fees in exchange for a very high standard of provision. However experience elsewhere suggests that the older, better established schools are likely to continue charging low fees. Indeed many of them are religious institutions and may well feel that they should keep their fees low so as to go on attracting children of all backgrounds. As for the fears of a "brain drain" from the aided schools, it is arguable that competition from the DSS would spur the aided schools to raise their already high standards. Finally, I share the view of Mr. Martin BARROW that we must question whether there is any logical reason to exclude international schools from the DSS if the parents who send their children to these schools are Hong Kong residents making an important contribution to our society and our economy.

Nevertheless, I agree with Mr. CHUNG Pui-lam and Mrs. Rosanna TAM that the terms on which aided and international schools should be admitted to the DSS must be given detailed consideration by the Private Schools Review Committee if and when the scheme is implemented. The question of primary school participation, raised by Mr. SZETO Wah, requires even more careful consideration.

Whether or not aided and international schools form part of the scheme, the commission believes that the DSS would be a fairer system than the present one. Now, some 63 000 children receive, at public expense, an education that is inferior to the general standard. When the DSS is operational, every child would receive, at the least, the high standard of education offered by the aided schools. If some parents want to seek a different or more specialized education for their children, the commission holds the view that they should be allowed to do so.

Sir, in conclusion I would like to emphasize yet again that the Government has not yet taken a view on the commission's recommendations. We will take all comments into account before taking firm decisions.

MRS. CHOW: Sir. I concur with a lot of the thinking presented so ably by the Secretary for Education and Manpower. However, I would just like to respond with brevity to a few of the points voiced by my colleagues. Mr. Martin LEE supported the 5+1+4

structure on the basis that both universities support it. Let me remind him that the recommendation from the University of Hong Kong is by no means unanimous. In fact, its Faculty of Education is totally opposed to the concept of the foundation year and supports two years of matriculation. In gauging the views of the tertiary institutions we must not overlook the representations of the polytechnics and the Baptist College. Besides there is also no conclusive evidence to prove that a 1+4 structure guarantees superior quality over 2+3. To Mr. SZETO Wah I must say I am totally sympathetic with his call that, being the elected representative of his constituency, he should be represented in the official advisory structure. I support it and urge the Administration to give it serious consideration. I also agree that there is absolutely nothing wrong in fighting for reasonable terms and conditions of employment. But if quality is the issue, will not the DSS schools be forced to offer competitive terms to teachers in order to persuade them to leave the public sector for the DSS sector. In any case if the teachers' objections to the DSS is based on the consideration of a possible erosion of their own interests, then it should be assessed in that light. Just one final protest against the little weight given to parents' wishes. Just because they are not organized, the only choice they have to show discontent is to vote with their feet. If they cannot afford to do that, how can they make their wishes known? Whoever think of asking them? Sir, the time has come to make some very important decisions. I hope the Executive Council will deliberate on the merits of the many arguments vented here today, consider the short-term and long-term effects of various options on the community as a whole, not to be intimidated by the volume but rather be guided by the substance of the interested voices.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjournment and next sitting

HIS HONOUR THE PRESIDENT: In accordance with Standing Orders I now adjourn the Council until 2.30 pm on Wednesday, 2 November 1988.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes to Ten o'clock.

Note: The motion listed in the Hansard has been translated into Chinese for

information and guidance only; it does not have authoritative effect in Chinese.