

Chapter 7

Education

The importance of education is greater than ever in today's competitive, knowledge-based world. To help students cope with changing trends, the Government will implement a new academic structure that will enable students to develop their potential fully to meet the new challenges. The Government continues to provide additional resources for initiatives such as free senior secondary education and the new academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education.

Key Achievements in 2008

The New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education

The Government will introduce the New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education, or simply named '3-3-4' in September 2009. It covers three years of junior secondary education, three in senior secondary, and four at university. To help schools to prepare for the new academic structure, a new textbook list was provided to schools in August for their reference. The Education Bureau (EDB) has also published a curriculum and assessment guide on its 334 web bulletin. The Heads of Universities Committee issued a joint statement in October 2008 to give broad support to testimonials of students' other learning experiences and recognised learning profiles as documents of good reference value in their admission process. Meanwhile, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) is making good progress in securing international recognition of the new Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education.

Small Class Teaching

The Government has announced that schools implementing small class teaching will be allocated Primary 1 students on the basis of 25 students per class. The initiative takes effect in the 2009-10 school year for Primary 1 classes and will be extended to Primary 6 classes in the 2014-15 school year.

12-year Free Education

The Government extended free education in public sector schools from nine years to 12 years in the 2008-09 school year. This enables senior secondary students to benefit from the initiative which previously applied only to primary and junior secondary students. In addition, the Government subsidises fully the full-time courses

run by the Vocational Training Council (VTC) for Secondary 3 school leavers, giving senior secondary students an alternative free avenue to mainstream education.

Development of Post-secondary Education

Phase Two of the Review of the Post-secondary Education Sector has been completed. Arising from this, a package of recommendations on promoting the long-term, sustainable development of post-secondary education has been introduced. Good progress has been made in implementing these recommendations, which include strengthening the quality assurance mechanisms, enhancement of the transparency of the sector, improving opportunities for higher studies, promotion on recognition and employability, modification of government support measures to steer them towards quality enhancement, and improvement of Financial Assistance Scheme for Post-secondary Students.

Further Developing Hong Kong as a Regional Education Hub

Following the Chief Executive's announcement in his 2007-08 Policy Address of plans to further Hong Kong's development as a regional education hub, the Government has implemented measures to internationalise the tertiary sector, and to assist talented non-local graduates to live and work in Hong Kong to enhance the city's talent pool.

These measures include increasing non-local student quotas for local institutions, establishing a \$1 billion scholarship fund for awarding Government scholarships to outstanding local and non-local students, exploring alternative student hostel solutions such as construction of 'joint-hostels', relaxing employment restrictions for non-local students during their studies, relaxing immigration restrictions for non-local graduates to stay or return to work in Hong Kong, and granting fresh non-local graduates 12 months' stay without restrictions.

Progress of Upgrading Teacher Status and Professionalism

To raise the status and professional standards of teachers, the EDB has increased the ratios of graduate teacher posts in public sector primary and secondary schools to 45 per cent and 80 per cent in the 2008-09 school year, and will further increase the ratios to 50 per cent and 85 per cent as from the 2009-10 school year. A deputy head rank in public sector primary schools has been created in the 2008-09 school year to enhance the quality of primary education.

The EDB has continued to organise the Chief Executive's Award for Teaching Excellence (CEATE) to give recognition to accomplished teachers and to foster a culture of excellence in the teaching profession. A total of 66 teachers received the Award or the Certificate of Merit in the CEATE 2008.

Student Achievements

In the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study 2007, the performance of Hong Kong students was remarkable. In mathematics, Primary 4 (P4) students rose to the world's top and Secondary 2 (S2) students ranked fourth. In science, P4 students came third and S2 students were in the ninth place.

As in previous years, Hong Kong students continued to shine in international competitions. Hong Kong teams garnered one gold, six silver and twelve bronze medals in the International Mathematical Olympiad and International Physics Olympiad, the International Junior Science Olympiad and the International Olympiad in Informatics.

Two Hong Kong teams were the champions respectively in the International Category of the National Danish Science Contest and the CFA Institute Global Investment Research Challenge.

Hong Kong students also won top prizes in other world contests in visual and performance arts including the International Postage Stamp Design Contest, International Children's Drawing and Painting Contest, Gina Bachauer International Junior Piano Competition, Small Montmartre of Bitola, Macedonia, and Grand Awards in the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair.

In sports, Hong Kong students were the overall champions in the 7th World Rope Skipping Championships and the 3rd Asian School Swimming Championships, and they won the 'Young Player of the Year Award 2008' of the Women's International Squash Players Association.

Major Challenges Ahead

Implementation of New Senior Secondary Curriculum

The Government is working with stakeholders to prepare for the new academic structure to be launched in September 2009. Professional development programmes will continue to be provided to teachers, middle managers and school leaders to help them prepare for the New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum.

Funding resources have been reserved to enable schools to offer a diversified senior secondary curriculum catering for the diverse needs of students. Communication will be strengthened with various stakeholders including teachers, parents, students and employers to enhance their understanding and support of the NSS system.

The EDB will also enhance inter-sector communication with universities and post-secondary institutions to ensure a smooth interface between the NSS education and higher education.

Medium of Instruction

Hong Kong is an international business, financial and trading centre, and English is the language of business worldwide. English proficiency of students is crucial to Hong Kong's economic competitiveness, and developing Hong Kong students to be biliterate and trilingual is the Government's aim.

To increase the opportunities for students to be exposed to English in schools, the Government is exploring ways to allow schools greater autonomy and room for making professional judgments on adopting the appropriate medium of instruction at junior secondary levels according to students' learning progress, interests and school circumstances, including the capability of the teachers involved and the

support they receive. This will facilitate learning in English in senior secondary and higher education. At the same time, the Government will enhance English teaching and learning in primary schools to help students build a solid foundation. The EDB is committed to stepping up its efforts in attracting talented people to the teaching profession, helping serving teachers to enhance their professionalism and enriching the English language environment in schools.

Small Class Teaching

The Government will help schools to implement small class teaching as far as possible by making available the necessary infrastructure and ensuring adequate provision of teachers. Schools are encouraged to review their teaching methods and strategies in a changed classroom setting to maximise the benefit of small class teaching to the provision of quality education.

Promotion of National Education

The EDB will launch a series of activities to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China and to enhance students' understanding of the country. These activities will include thematic competitions, a project learning competition, expert and scholar talks, interflow activities on the Mainland, a national day extravaganza, and the production of relevant learning and teaching materials.

The EDB will devote additional resources to promote national education. 37 000 secondary and primary students will be sponsored to join Mainland study trips and exchange programmes, and professional training for teachers will be enhanced to enable both teachers and students to see for themselves the rapid development of the country.

To promote national education in a more strategic and systematic manner, the EDB will create a national education platform entitled 'Passing on the Torch' to bring together the efforts of various non-governmental organisations in this area of work.

Development of International Schools

Following up the new initiative of the 2007-08 Policy Address, an Expressions of Interest exercise was launched in March to gauge interest in greenfield sites and vacant school premises for the development and expansion of international schools.

To meet the expansion needs of existing international schools, two suitable vacant premises were allocated in mid-2008. The Government has also launched another allocation exercise for four greenfield sites including a site earmarked for the development of an international boarding school. The result is expected to be available in mid-2009.

Establishing a Research Endowment Fund

In the Budget 2008, the Government announced the intention to establish an \$18 billion Research Endowment Fund. The investment income of the fund will replace the annual research funding allocated to University Grants Committee (UGC) funded institutions through the UGC. It will also finance research proposals on

themes of a more long-term nature and strategically beneficial to the development of Hong Kong. The Government intends to establish the fund within the first quarter of 2009.

Keeping Learning and Teaching Resources Up-to-date

To enhance students' opportunities for self-learning and interactive learning, the Government is looking into the development of electronic 'learning and teaching' resources. To address public concern on the use and prices of school textbooks, the Government established in October a Working Group on Textbooks and E-learning Resources Development. Information technology experts, parents, school principals, teachers, publishers and others have been invited to look into the issues in detail. The Working Group will draw on international experiences in formulating long-term measures to alleviate the financial burden on parents and to facilitate learning. The Working Group intends to submit its recommendations to the EDB in late 2009.

Overall Education Landscape

Expenditure on Education

For the 2008-09 financial year, the approved estimate for recurrent government expenditure on education was \$51.1 billion, equivalent to 23.8 per cent of all recurrent government expenditure, while the total estimate for government spending on education amounted to \$77.3 billion, or 24.7 per cent of total government expenditure.

Education Commission

The Education Commission is responsible for advising the Government on education objectives and policies. It co-ordinates the work of all major education-related advisory bodies in the planning and development of education at all levels. The commission also advises the Government on important implementation issues to ensure better co-ordination between policy formulation and implementation.

The commission has a chairman, a vice-chairman who is the Permanent Secretary for Education, seven ex-officio members and a number of non-official members. The seven ex-officio members comprise the chairmen of the Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications, the Curriculum Development Council, the HKEAA Council, the Quality Education Fund Steering Committee, the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research, UGC and the VTC. The non-official members come from both education and non-education fields.

Early Childhood Education

All kindergartens and kindergarten-cum-child care centres are required to register under the Education Ordinance. Since 2004, all kindergartens have been required to employ qualified kindergarten teachers. The intention is to upgrade the professional qualifications of all kindergarten teachers and principals to certificate and bachelor's degree levels respectively by the end of the 2011-12 school year. Meanwhile, the Government has steadily improved the teacher-pupil ratio in kindergartens to 1:15.

The revised 'Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum', implemented since September 2007, provides the basic principles and direction for pre-school educators to develop school-based curriculum. Quality assurance for kindergartens is enhanced through a self-evaluation system, supported by an external review process.

The Government enables all school-aged children have access to kindergarten education within a non-compulsory private-sector system by providing financial support for parents towards school fees, assisting with rents and rates for non-profit-making kindergartens; and reserving premises for them in public housing estates.

The Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme, introduced in the 2007-08 school year, provides direct fee subsidy for parents and financial support for kindergarten teachers' professional upgrading. About 85 per cent of students and 80 per cent of kindergartens benefit under the scheme. Eligible children aged two years and eight months attending local non-profit-making kindergartens can receive an annual fee subsidy of \$11,000 in the 2008-09 school year and this will be increased to \$16,000 by the 2011-12 school year.

School Education

Nine-year free and universal basic education is provided for children aged 6 to 15 — six years of primary education plus three years of junior secondary education. With effect from the 2008-09 school year, free senior secondary education is also provided in all public sector schools. Admissions to Primary 1 and Secondary 1 in public sector schools are administered through centralised systems. Under the NSS academic structure, Secondary 3 students will normally continue their studies in the same school to receive three-year free senior secondary education or vocational training fully subvented by the Government.

In September 2008, a total of 310 400 children were enrolled in public sector primary schools and 405 100 children in public sector secondary schools. Public sector school places made up about 85 per cent of school places. In addition, there were 71 Direct Subsidy Scheme schools, offering about 7.4 per cent of the school places.

As at September, there were 51 international schools, including 15 schools operated by the English Schools Foundation. These schools form an important part of Hong Kong's status as an international business centre and a vibrant cosmopolitan city. They offer different non-local curricula, including the national curriculum of the United Kingdom, America, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Korea, Singapore and others such as the International Baccalaureate programmes, providing about 34 600 school places.

Special Education

Students with severe learning difficulties and multiple disabilities are given places in special schools for more intensive support. Other students with special educational needs are enrolled in ordinary schools. Schools are requested to adopt a Whole School Approach to supporting these students. In the 2008-09 school year,

some 18 000 students with special educational needs were studying in public sector primary and secondary schools. There were 60 special schools, nineteen of which have boarding facilities. Together, they provided around 8 400 school places and 1 000 boarding places for students with severe special educational needs or multiple disabilities.

The Government also helps gifted students to develop their capabilities through different programmes. The Government has set up a thematic support network on gifted education consisting of 52 schools to facilitate sharing of experiences and resources.

Much progress was made on the setting up of the Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education in 2008. By September, the key components of corporate governance, strategic and operational planning, identification of delivery functions and staff recruitment had been completed. The Academy has begun delivering services to its main stakeholders: students, parents, teachers and researchers.

Project Yi Jin

Some 10 000 full-time and part-time students joined the Government's Yi Jin programme in the 2008-09 academic year. The programme was launched in 2000 to provide an alternative route to continuing education for secondary school leavers and adult learners. Successful completion of the programme earns the student a qualification comparable to five passes in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination for employment and continuing education purposes. The programme is run by member institutions of the Federation for Continuing Education in Tertiary Institutions and has both full-time and part-time modules.

Drawing on the success of the project, the Yi Jin/Secondary Schools Collaboration Project was introduced to 10 secondary schools in 2004. As at September 2008, 520 students in 13 secondary schools were taking part in the project.

Vocational Education and Training

The Vocational Training Council (VTC) is a statutory body established in 1982 to provide a comprehensive system of vocational education and training for school leavers and adult learners. It helps them acquire the values, skills and knowledge for lifelong learning and enhanced employment.

The VTC provides a range of quality, internationally recognised full-time and part-time courses varying from those designed for craftsmen to those for students seeking higher diplomas. They are offered through the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education, the School of Business and Information Systems, the Hong Kong Design Institute, the Institute of Professional Education and Knowledge, the Youth College, training and development centres and skills centres for people with disabilities. It also provides services such as the administration of the apprenticeship scheme, trade testing and certification.

The VTC provided some 180 000 full-time and part-time places during the 2008-09 academic year.

Post-secondary Education

During the 2008-09 academic year, some 350 full-time accredited self-financing programmes and more than 50 top-up degree programmes were offered by 21 post-secondary institutions, providing about 26 600, 3 200 and 2 000 full-time places for students taking sub-degree, degree and top-up degree courses respectively. These were in addition to some 8 300 publicly-funded places for sub-degree level courses offered by the City University of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the Hong Kong Institute of Education, the VTC and the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts.

Higher Education

Hong Kong has 12 degree-awarding higher education institutions, eight of which are funded by the public through the University Grants Committee (UGC). The other four are the publicly-funded Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts and the self-financing Open University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Shue Yan University and Chu Hai College of Higher Education.

The UGC is a non-statutory advisory body appointed by the Chief Executive to advise the Government on the development and funding of higher education and to administer public grants to the eight higher education institutions. It also plays a major role in quality assurance and in promoting research. The committee comprises local and non-local academics, professionals and community leaders.

Each of the eight higher education institutions funded through the UGC is an autonomous statutory body with its own ordinance and governing body. They enjoy a high degree of academic and institutional autonomy, and are free to manage their own affairs within the parameters of the law.

The eight UGC-funded institutions have distinctive and complementary roles that reflect their different origins, missions and the way they have responded to Hong Kong's complex and evolving needs. The UGC is committed to taking a more strategic approach by developing an interlocking yet individually different higher education system, with each institution fulfilling a unique role based on its strengths.

The administration has launched four rounds of Matching Grant Scheme, each costing \$1 billion, since 2003 to broaden the funding sources of the eight UGC-funded institutions and to strengthen their fund-raising capabilities. The fourth round commenced in January 2008, and for the first time, two self-financed universities were also participating with the eight UGC-funded institutions.

At present, 14 500 first-year-first-degree places are available in institutions funded by the UGC, or about 18 per cent of people aged between 17 and 20 in Hong Kong. For the 2008-09 academic year, the UGC-funded institutions provided a total of 1 927 senior year undergraduate places for graduates of sub-degree programmes and students with other qualifications. A further 46 per cent in the same age group enjoyed access to post-secondary education through self-financing sub-degree and degree programmes and overseas university programmes. The overall post-secondary participation rate for the 17 to 20 age group increased from 33 per

cent in the 2000-01 academic year to over 60 per cent in the 2007-08 academic year.

Degrees, up to doctoral level, awarded locally are widely recognised by institutions of higher learning around the world. All UGC-funded institutions have self-accrediting status and well-established quality assurance mechanisms. The UGC set up in April 2007 a semi-autonomous Quality Assurance Council under its aegis to provide third party assurance of quality. The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) validates courses and programmes offered by higher education institutions that are not self-accrediting.

Hong Kong is well positioned to provide quality higher education in the region because of its cosmopolitan outlook, strong links with the Mainland, world-class universities and diversified system of education. It is Hong Kong's stated intention to become a regional education centre. Measures have been implemented to attract quality non-local students to study in Hong Kong, and this process will further internationalise the city's higher education sector and increase local students' exposure to the world. It is also the Government's aim to persuade non-local students to live and work in Hong Kong after they have graduated. This addresses Hong Kong's immediate manpower needs and enhances its competitiveness in the long run.

Qualifications Framework

A Qualifications Framework (QF) was officially implemented on May 5. Its primary objective is to foster lifelong learning to upgrade continuously the quality and competitiveness of Hong Kong's workforce. Underpinned by a quality assurance mechanism, the QF provides a seven-level hierarchy against which different qualifications can be benchmarked. The Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance, which went into effect on the same day, provides a legal footing for the implementation of the QF. The HKCAAVQ is appointed under the ordinance as the Accreditation Authority to develop and implement the QF's quality assurance mechanism and the accreditation of learning programmes.

Qualifications, learning programmes and details of course providers recognised under the QF can be uploaded to a free web-based database, Qualifications Registry (QR). The HKCAAVQ is also appointed as the authority to maintain the QR.

To recognise the experience, knowledge and skills of experienced workers, a two-year pilot scheme called 'Recognition of Prior Learning' was introduced in June to three industries to facilitate workers' continuing education: 'Printing and Publishing', 'Watch and Clock' and 'Hairdressing'.

The Government has been assisting various industries to set up Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITAC) consisting of major stakeholders from those industries. So far, 12 ITACs have been set up and their first task was to draft a Specification of Competency Standards (SCS) for their respective industries, which maps out the industry's competency requirements and performance standards under different functional areas. Training providers may refer to the SCS when designing training programmes.

Adult Education

The Financial Assistance Scheme for Designated Evening Adult Education Courses, provided for adult learners attending evening secondary courses at designated centres, saw a total of 1 530 students enrolled in the 2008-09 school year.

A total of 75 students enrolled in the 2008 cohort of the pilot Certificate in Foundation Studies programme which was tailor-made for adult learners with low education standards (below Secondary 3).

Quality Education Fund

Up to the end of the 2007-08 school year, the Quality Education Fund (QEF) had provided \$3.62 billion for the execution of 7 434 projects. The fund was established in 1998 with an allocation of \$5 billion to support initiatives that promote quality education and schemes that recognise excellence in schools and teachers. The QEF also identifies good practices that other schools may adopt.

School-based Support Services

The Education Development Fund (EDF) was set up in 2004 with an allocation of \$550 million to support educational reforms. The EDB provided support services, including those financed by EDF, to 306 secondary schools, 435 primary schools, 17 special schools and 60 kindergartens/kindergarten-cum-child care centres through the School-based Support Services Office in the 2007-08 school year.

The Regional Education Offices also offer support services to individual schools. Professionals from these offices work with school heads and teachers on new learning and teaching methods.

Support Measures for Non-Chinese Speaking Students

The EDB has in place different support measures to help non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students in the education system integrate with the wider community. The measures include the provision of intensive on-site support and special grant to 16 designated primary and six secondary schools in the 2008-09 school year. A supplementary guide has been developed for teaching Chinese Language to NCS students. Tertiary institutions have been commissioned to provide on-site support programmes and to run Chinese Language Learning Support Centres offering further support to NCS students and to train Chinese Language teachers in schools with NCS students.

Support Programmes for Needy Students

Under the School-based After-school Learning and Support Programmes, 901 schools and 138 non-governmental organisations received subsidies in the 2008-09 school year for organising after-school activities to help some 172 500 needy students improve their learning effectiveness, broaden their learning experience outside the classroom and raise their understanding of the community and sense of belonging.

Funding is also available to some 5 100 needy student members of the Uniformed Groups and the Hong Kong Award for Young People to help them buy uniforms or join training courses.

Regulatory Framework and Governance Structure

The Government's Role and Organisation

The Secretary for Education, who heads the EDB, formulates, develops and reviews educational policies, secures funds from the government budget, and oversees the implementation of educational programmes with the assistance of the Permanent Secretary for Education.

Education Ordinance

School education services are regulated by the Education Ordinance. School operators must comply with its provisions and its subsidiary legislations relating to areas such as registration of schools, teachers and managers, health and safety requirements, fees and charges, and teacher qualifications.

Vocational Training Council Ordinance

The Vocational Training Council Ordinance provides for the establishment, functions and management of the council, which is the main body responsible for vocational education and technical training. Its members comprise representatives of industry, commerce, service sectors, employees and government.

Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance

The Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance governs institutions offering post-secondary courses. At present, there are three approved post-secondary institutions registered under the ordinance, Hong Kong Shue Yan University, Caritas Francis Hsu College, and Chu Hai College of Higher Education.

Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance

The Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance regulates non-local courses conducted in Hong Kong through a system of registration. It protects Hong Kong consumers by guarding against the marketing of substandard courses.

Management of Schools and Tertiary Institutions

School-based Management

School-based management (SBM) is a management framework to ensure the quality of teaching and learning. This framework of governance is school-based, student-centred and quality-focused and involves the participation of all key stakeholders in school decision making. SBM seeks to enhance the transparency and accountability of school operation. It also provides schools with enhanced flexibility and autonomy in managing their operation and resources. All schools are required to practise SBM.

External School Review

The School Development and Accountability Framework, introduced in May 2003, seeks to ensure sustained school development through school self-evaluation, complemented by an external school review (ESR) to give schools the benefit of feedback and suggestions for improvement from a team of reviewers with perspectives across schools. The next phase of the ESR, starting from the 2008-09 school year, will continue to be improvement-oriented, and is expected to cover all schools in the public sector in about six years.

Governance of Tertiary Institutions

Each tertiary institution has its own structure of governance, set out in its ordinance. The structure includes a governing body, called the council or the court, and a body to regulate academic affairs, called the senate or the academic board. All eight University Grant Committee-funded institutions have conducted reviews of their governance structures to ensure that they stay effective.

Curriculum Development

Curriculum Development Council

The Curriculum Development Council is an advisory body that makes recommendations to the Government on all matters relating to school curriculum development — from kindergarten to senior secondary levels. Its members include heads of schools, practising teachers, parents, employers, academics from tertiary institutions, professionals from related fields or related bodies, representatives from the HKEAA and the VTC, as well as EDB officers.

The Curriculum

The school curriculum provides five essential learning experiences: moral and civic education, intellectual development, community service, physical and aesthetic development, career-related experiences for lifelong learning and the whole-person development of students. Curriculum reform progresses with schools adapting to the central curriculum to meet the needs of their students, and building on the experiences developed to raise the quality of learning and teaching. There have been improvements in students' generic capabilities, values and attitudes, and students are becoming independent learners.

Applied Learning

Applied Learning (ApL) courses are offered in six areas of studies — 'Creative Studies', 'Media and Communication', 'Business, Management and Law', 'Services', 'Applied Science', and 'Engineering and Production'. Through the development of foundation skills, thinking skills, people skills, values and attitudes, and career-related competencies, ApL prepares students for further studies, work and lifelong learning. The assessment results of students in ApL courses under the '3-3-4' new academic structure will be recorded in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education transcript.

Information Technology in Education

The Government is committed to promoting the use of information technology (IT) to improve learning and to equip students with necessary IT skills to meet the challenges of the information age and to become lifelong learners. All schools are connected to the Internet. The student-to-computer ratios are 4:1 in secondary schools and 6:1 in primary schools.

Language Education

The Standing Committee on Language Education and Research was set up in 1996 on the recommendation of the Education Commission to advise the Government on language education matters. It also advises the trustee of the Language Fund on the policy and procedures governing the fund's operation. The fund was set up in 1994 to provide financial support for initiatives to improve Hong Kong people's proficiency in Chinese, including Putonghua and English.

Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme

The Native-speaking English Teacher (NET) Scheme celebrated its 10th Anniversary this year. Through the introduction of literacy programmes and language arts, NETs working with local English teachers enhance teaching practices and make learning English more interesting for students. At present, there are some 420 NETs in secondary schools and around 490 in primary schools.

Professional Development at Schools

Teachers' Professional Development

The Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications has launched the Teacher Induction Scheme and will provide further recommendations on teachers' continuing professional development in 2009 after reviewing the policy concerned.

Principals' Professional Development

The Government offers a wide-range of activities to enhance the leadership of school principals. Aspiring principals must attain a Certification for Principalship in order to be qualified for appointment to principalship.

Hong Kong Teachers' Centre

The Hong Kong Teachers' Centre endeavours to promote continuous professional development for teachers through organising conferences, seminars, workshops and experience-sharing sessions. Physical and mental health activities are also arranged to help teachers maintain a work-life balance.

Council on Professional Conduct in Education

The Council on Professional Conduct in Education draws up operational criteria defining the professional conduct expected of an educator and advises the Government on ways to promote professional conduct and on cases of alleged professional misconduct involving educators.

Student Finance

To ensure that no student is deprived of education due to lack of means, the Student Financial Assistance Agency (SFAA) provides means-tested and non-means-tested financial assistance to students at various study levels. The SFAA also administers a number of privately funded scholarships schemes.

Financial Assistance for Pre-primary Education

Eligible children at pre-primary level may apply for non-means-tested fee subsidy under the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme, and means-tested fee remission under the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme. In the 2007-08 school year, fee subsidies and remissions totalling \$1,071 million and \$275.4 million were granted to 109 300 and 37 859 students respectively.

Financial Assistance for Primary and Secondary Education

At the primary and secondary school levels, means-tested assistance covers textbook grants, travel subsidies and tuition fees remission¹ for senior secondary students in public sector schools. In the 2007-08 school year, \$446.9 million was disbursed to 308 015 students for purchasing textbooks, \$273.9 million to 204 589 students as travel subsidies, and 89 371 senior secondary students were granted tuition fees remission. In addition, examination fees totalling \$15.5 million were waived for 12 455 students taking public examinations.

Financial Assistance for Post-secondary Education

Means-tested grants and low-interest loans are offered to full-time students pursuing eligible courses at UGC-funded or publicly-funded institutions. In the 2007-08 academic year, 28 431 students received \$795.7 million of grants and \$341.2 million of loans.

Eligible students pursuing locally-accredited, self-financing full-time post-secondary programmes are provided with grants covering tuition fees and academic expenses. In the 2007-08 academic year, \$505.6 million in grants were provided to 15 745 students.

Non-means-tested loans on a no-gain-no-loss basis are available to students pursuing eligible publicly-funded or self-financing programmes, and eligible professional or continuing education courses. In the 2007-08 academic year, 23 051 people received loans amounting to \$951 million.

Travel subsidies totalling \$103.9 million were provided to 38 792 students of post-secondary institutions.

Tuition Fee Reimbursement for Project Yi Jin Students and Adult Education

All eligible students under the Project Yi Jin and designated evening adult education courses may receive a 30 per cent tuition fee reimbursement. Those who passed the means tests may receive further fee reimbursement.

¹ Tuition fees remission will no longer be necessary when free education is extended to senior secondary students in public sector schools in the 2008-09 school year.

Scholarships

Privately funded scholarships administered by SFAA are provided for local and overseas studies mainly on merit basis. The \$1 billion Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's Government Scholarship Fund was established to award Government scholarships on the basis of merit to outstanding local and non-local students studying in full-time publicly-funded degree or above level programmes in the eight UGC-funded institutions and the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts.

Community Participation in Education

Home-school Co-operation

The Committee on Home-school Co-operation was set up in 1993 to promote positive attitudes towards home-school co-operation and to encourage the establishment of Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs). Up to 2008, more than 1 300 PTAs had been established to foster sustained home-school co-operation. In 2008, the EDB funded the PTAs' organisation of about 2 750 school-based and district-based parent education activities.

School Business Partnership

In 2005, the EDB launched the Business-School Partnership Programme to lead students out of the classroom to gain a wider perspective of society through hands-on business learning experience. In 2008, about 160 business firms participated in the programme, organising more than 250 activities, including workplace visits, workshops on entrepreneurship, trade fairs, job shadowing and work attachment, benefiting more than 30 000 students.

Committee on the Promotion of Civic Education

The Committee on the Promotion of Civic Education was set up to advise on civic education and to implement activities in conjunction with the Government and parties concerned to promote civic education outside schools. In 2008, the committee concentrated its efforts on good citizenship, civic responsibilities, building an integrated and harmonious society, family cohesiveness, respect for human rights and the rule of law, and enhancing understanding of the Basic Law, Hong Kong's constitution, and a sense of national identity.

The committee ran a website to promote various civic education themes. To promote national education, bi-weekly articles entitled 'Knowing China' are published on the committee's website. Other promotional activities included an exhibition of literature and other civic education and publicity materials on the theme of 'Living in Harmony', organising interactive family game booths and publishing booklets on Olympism to promote an 'Olympic spirit' during the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

A working group, comprising members of the committee and the Commission on Youth, produced a new series of TV APIs (Announcements in the Public Interest) entitled 'Accomplishments of Our Country' which used the national anthem as the theme music. In addition, the committee co-produced with the Radio Television

Hong Kong a 13-episode national education television programme entitled 'Our Motherland through Young Eyes' to enhance young people's understanding of China. Each episode lasts five minutes.

During the year, the committee completed a study on civic awareness, to obtain information related to social harmony in the contexts of family, school, workplace and community with respect to civility in particular; and national identity and sense of belonging.

The committee also continued to run the 'Community Participation Scheme' to encourage community organisations to carry out civic education activities at the district level. To create a stronger impact, the scheme adopts a new topical theme each year. The theme for 2008 was 'Olympic Spirit in a Harmonious Society'.

Commission on Youth

The main task of the Commission on Youth is to give advice on matters concerning young people. It initiates studies about them, helps improve services provided for young people and serves as a point of contact for exchange programmes with international youth organisations. The Government works closely with the commission to achieve these objectives.

To follow up on the findings of the benchmarking survey of the civic engagements and social networks of Hong Kong's young people, a further study was conducted to track Hong Kong young people's accumulation and development of social capital.

The commission continued to implement youth programmes to bring out and cultivate young people's potential. These included the International Youth Exchange Programme to broaden young people's outlook and world perspective. During the year, four groups comprising 69 youth delegates visited Britain, Ireland, Japan and Singapore under the programme. The commission played host to 64 young people from Britain, Ireland, Japan and Singapore who made reciprocal visits to Hong Kong.

The commission continued to run the Community Participation Scheme for Organising Study Tours to the Mainland to enhance young people's awareness and understanding of their home country, foster exchange with Mainland people and strengthen their sense of national identity. In 2008, the commission sponsored 214 study tours to the Mainland.

Website

Education Bureau: www.edb.gov.hk

Home Affairs Bureau: www.hab.gov.hk