

Your Ref : KH:FYC:C3816L0001

14 May 2007

Messrs Wilkinson & Gist  
6<sup>th</sup> Floor, Prince's Building  
10 Chater Road  
Hong Kong

Dear Sirs,

**Commission of Inquiry on Allegations  
relating to the Hong Kong Institute of Education**

I refer to your letter of 10 May 2007 seeking my comment on a note prepared by Ms Charmaine Wong regarding a meeting held on 20 May 2006. In this connection, paragraphs 42 to 46 of my first witness statement dated 23 March 2007 are relevant.

*Background and Purpose of the Meeting*

The background and purpose of the meeting are set out in detail in paragraphs 184 to 198 of my 4<sup>th</sup> Witness Statement.

My response to the specific questions raised is set out below.

*(1) Does Mrs Law agree that the note is an accurate record of the meeting?*

The note is incomplete and not entirely accurate. This may be explained by the fact that Ms Wong had not been fully briefed as to the background in early childhood education referred to above. Some of the comments recorded appear to lack the context that is necessary for accurate understanding. More specific comments and elaboration are as follows. (All references to HKIEd will be dealt with in subsequent sections.)

- (a) It was necessary to maintain strict confidentiality of the discussion because the professional upgrading initiatives would be announced in the Chief Executive's policy address in October 2006.

- (b) All the three existing early childhood education (ECE) providers, namely HKIEd, HK Baptist University (HKBU) and the Vocational Training Council (VTC)<sup>1</sup> were not invited because the main purpose of the meeting was to identify potential ECE training providers that can augment the existing training capacity, deliver programmes with a higher qualification (i.e. at graduate and post-graduate levels), and attract better quality students.
- (c) The three existing ECE training providers mainly operate Qualified Kindergarten Teachers (QKT) and C(ECE) programmes for serving principals and teachers. The student intake, in terms of academic attainment, is not satisfactory. This is inevitable given the entrenched pecking order in which secondary school leavers rank their choice of institutions, and career preferences.
- (d) It is recognized internationally through research on child psychology and brain development, that ECE has a long-term impact on the whole-person development of a child. The quality of ECE teachers is therefore important. To develop a high quality ECE teaching force, we cannot rely solely on upgrading serving teachers many of whom, for historical reasons, only have HKCEE qualification or below. We must attract better qualified persons to join the ECE sector. In particular, early childhood is the best time for learning languages. ECE teachers are models for their students who learn through listening and mimicking<sup>2</sup>. Hence, the language proficiency of ECE teachers is important.
- (e) In view of the anticipated significant increase in demand for ECE training, in particular at the graduate and post-graduate level (i.e. BEd, MEd and PGDE), the three universities were invited to indicate their interest in running or expanding their ECE programmes to meet part of the demand.
- (f) Dr Nirmala Rao is the Dean of the Education Faculty of HKU. She is highly experienced and respected in the ECE field. At the meeting, she cautioned that students admitted to the PGDE(ECE) programme must have prior knowledge of child development and related disciplines. It would not be appropriate, for example, to recruit a science graduate into the PGDE(ECE)

<sup>1</sup> Ms Wong did not mention VTC because it is not a UGC-funded institution.

<sup>2</sup> A pilot project on the teaching of English in KGs launched by the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) in 2006 has revealed gross inadequacies in the English language proficiency among existing KG teachers.

programme and expect the student to learn all about ECE within one year. Hence, she proposed that EMB should lay down guidelines on prior subject knowledge requirement and offered to run self-financed PGSK<sup>3</sup> programmes for prospective students in early childhood.

- (g) For many years, Dr Rao has served on the validation committee of HKIEd's ECE programmes. She pointed out at the meeting that HKIEd did not require students admitted to their PGDE (ECE) programmes to have prior subject knowledge. I only became aware of this practice at the meeting, and agreed that this was unsatisfactory. This is the background to Ms Wong's assertion on page 3 of her email that "PSEM was not happy that HKIEd did not require students to have adequate subject knowledge in early childhood". Without this background, Ms Wong's note is subject to mis-interpretation.
- (h) Dr Rao also said that HKU had excellent students taking the PGDE (ECE) and MEd (ECE). However, to attract and retain them in KGs, the salaries must be commensurate with their qualifications. This is reality. EMB took this on board by de-regulating the salaries for KG teachers upon introduction of the voucher scheme. In other words, KGs are free to determine teacher salaries with effect from the 2007/08 school year. KGs are also free to charge parents for better qualified teachers, if the voucher is not sufficient to cover the entire salary costs.
- (i) Ms Angelina Yuen and Mrs Sylvia (not Sophia) Cheung represented PolyU at the meeting. Both of them were keen to continue their self-financed ECE programmes which are highly regarded and very popular among ECE teachers. Located within the Social Sciences Faculty, students not only learn the basic knowledge about ECE. They are also exposed to other social sciences disciplines, such as psychology, child health, social work, guidance and counselling, which enable them to see a child's development in the broader social context, e.g. family and society, public policy on child development and parent education. For young children, their development is closely linked to family support and environment, hence a social science approach has much to be recommended. In addition, PolyU provides a range of practicum, including attachment to a day crèche/nursery for children from ages 0 to 3 to give students more complete understanding of child development from birth to

<sup>3</sup> A post-graduate diploma on subject knowledge (PGSK) aims to equip a student in the basic knowledge on early childhood education.

the age of 6.

- (j) PolyU was required to phase out its ECE programmes, including both a Degree and Associate Degree<sup>4</sup> programmes in pre-primary education, due to UGC's policy on role differentiation. However, from the point of view of ECE teacher education, I reckon the closure of the ECE programme at PolyU as a loss. Hence, I was keen to retain and, if possible, transfer PolyU's academic staff with expertise in ECE to another institution so that these would not be lost by the time the PolyU programmes were phased out. At the meeting, CUHK showed interest in a joint programme with PolyU.

- (k) An aide memoir of the meeting prepared by EMB is in Annex A.

- (2) *If it be accepted that Mrs Law had expressed doubts on the quality of pre-primary education programmes provided by the HKIED, please explain what those doubts were, and the basis for such doubts.*

Ms Wong reported that I had "doubts on the quality of pre-primary education programmes currently provided by HKIED". What I said at the meeting was that to raise the quality of ECE, we must attract better students to become ECE teachers. HKIED had been the major provider of ECE training, and most of its C(ECE) students were serving teachers. HKIED also admitted graduates of its Yi Jin programme<sup>5</sup> to the C(ECE) programme. This was unsatisfactory, and caused concern about the exit standards of its C(ECE) graduates. The discussion on "quality" at the meeting focused on student intake and exit standards, rather than the programmes themselves. By inviting HKU and CUHK to run degree courses on ECE, we hoped to attract better students.

In March 2004, when EMB decided to invite tenders for C(ECE) courses, there was some debate as to whether quality would be sacrificed. However feedback from the ECE sector showed that KG operators looked for a diversity of training programmes to suit the operational needs of the KGs and the aptitude of their

<sup>4</sup> My concern about the terminology of "Associate Degrees" is that it raises expectation among AD holders that they will continue to do a degree. In fact, a Higher Diploma more accurately reflects the practice-oriented nature of sub-degree programmes, which is equivalent to C(ECE). At the time, the PolyU had a row with AD students of social work who protested because they said they had been misled by the admission publicity that they could move onto a social work degree programme at the PolyU upon completion.

<sup>5</sup> The Yi Jin programme mainly caters for students who failed in the HKCEE and could not secure an S6 place.

teachers. For example, one principal of a major school sponsoring body that runs a large number of KGs rated by EMB to be outstanding expressed a preference for VTC's C(ECE) courses, even though she had to pay for the course. A copy of her email to me is in Annex B. This was one view among many, but served to show that there should be diversity in ECE training programmes, which was the purpose of the meeting.

As stated in my 4<sup>th</sup> Witness Statement, we did not involve the three existing ECE training providers, namely HKIEd, VTC and HKBU (and not just HKIEd), as we already know the expertise and capacity available in these institutions, and their limitations. As regards HKIEd, I also recognized that it would be sensitive to criticisms, and any suggestion that there should be more competition in the market for ECE training would be resisted. Since the meeting was exploratory in nature and I was by no means certain that the three universities would be interested, the presence of the three existing training providers might have given rise to a situation of conflict of interests which would not have been conducive to achieving the purpose of the meeting referred to above.

- (3) *If it be accepted that Mrs Law had expressed the view that the 35 FYFD to be deployed for early childhood education for 2008/09 should be allocated for a collaborative programme between CUHK and PolyU, please explain the reasons as to why Mrs Law took this view.*

The Administration's manpower requirements on teacher education showed a reduction in FYFD places from 726 in 2007/08 to 690 in the 2008/09 rollover year. With UGC's agreement, 36 FYFD places would be deployed for BEd (ECE). The allocation of these 36 places is a decision for UGC. At present, HKIEd is the only UGC-funded institution with publicly-funded ECE programmes<sup>6</sup>. As the demand for ECE teacher education increases, UGC should consider supporting more than one institution to inject competition and variety. Given the small number of FYFD places available for allocation, UGC would have to consider whether to split this between two providers or give it to one provider to create a critical mass.

<sup>6</sup> The QKT and C(ECE) programmes are fully funded by UGC. The BEd (ECE) programmes, which are converted from C(ECE) places, have a mixed mode of funding with the last year being self-financed.

The post-meeting discussion was exploratory in nature. The reason for proposing that the 36 FYFD places be allocated to a collaborative programme between CUHK and PolyU was to show support for the inter-disciplinary approach to ECE programme. However, I recognized UGC's difficulty in allocating FYFD places to PolyU due to its policy on role differentiation. The alternative of allocating the FYFD places to HKU was meant to attract good students into the ECE sector. There is no question that the student intake at HKU is much better than that at HKIED. Dr Rao had confirmed this at the meeting.

*(4) If it be accepted that Mrs Law had been "very negative" on HKIED, please explain the reasons why Mrs Law took this view.*

I am not sure what led Ms Wong to say that "She was very negative on HKIED. Thus, collaboration between CUHK and HKIED was not on her mind". I did not support collaboration between CUHK and HKIED not because I was negative towards HKIED, but for a different reason. As explained under Questions (1) and (2) above, the discussion on HKIED's quality focused on its student intake and admission requirement, rather than the programmes themselves.

As I said in my 4<sup>th</sup> Witness Statement, PolyU had started phasing out its ECE programmes from 2005, although its programmes were highly regarded and popular among ECE teachers. I had sounded out PolyU whether its staff would be willing to join the HKIED, for example, so as to retain the ECE expertise to meet the anticipated increase in demand for professional upgrading. However, PolyU's feedback at the time was not favourable. In these circumstances, and having regard to the attractiveness of an inter-disciplinary model of ECE, it was considered desirable that PolyU's experience and academic staff with expertise in ECE should nevertheless be retained (if possible) by collaborating with or being transferred to another institution. Being a comprehensive university, CUHK would have the potential to organize an inter-disciplinary ECE programme but it lacks experience in ECE. I hoped CUHK would benefit from collaborating with PolyU for three years and run a good inter-disciplinary ECE programme at the graduate and post-graduate levels.

It was difficult for PolyU to collaborate with HKIED, as they had different approaches to educating ECE teachers and were, in a way, competitors. (For the same reason, HKIED would not collaborate with any university with an education faculty, prior to signing the deep collaboration agreement with CUHK.

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The earlier collaboration programmes were with CityU and HKUST.) CUHK was an appropriate partner, which is likely to be able to attract better quality student intake into its ECE programmes.

Feedback from consultation with the ECE sectors showed that teachers looked for diversity of programmes, in terms of duration, content and modality. I was keen to preserve the inter-disciplinary approach which PolyU has successfully demonstrated to be effective and popular.

*(5) Insofar as Mrs Law had expressed any other views as to any aspect of HKIEd at this meeting, please set out what those views were and explain the basis for those views.*

The purpose of the meeting was not to review the performance of existing ECE teacher education providers. I did not express any other views on the HKIEd at the meeting or during the post-meeting discussion.

*(6) Please indicate whether you wish to cross examine Ms Wong.*

I do not think this is necessary.

*(7) Paragraph 43 of the first witness statement of Mrs Law indicates that there was an overall review of pre-primary education which commenced in mid-2005. Please provide copies of all documents relating to this review insofar as they relate to the training of teachers in the field of pre-primary education.*

I attach in Annex C an extract from an internal discussion paper on "Pre-primary Education Review" concerning professional upgrading. The extract gives an overview of the policy targets and training provision. This is the only paper that is available to me in the shortness of time available for preparing this response. Please approach EMB if you require additional documents.

Suffice to say that the meeting on 20 May 2006 had nothing to do with the future development of HKIED, or any form of merger with CUHK. The focus of the discussion was to develop more ECE training programmes with a higher qualification and attract better quality students.

Yours faithfully,



(LAW FAN Chiu-fun, Fanny)

Encls.