

Statement

1. Background

1.1 I first joined the Education Department as an Assistant Education Officer in a government secondary school on 1 December 1972. I was regarded as an Education Officer (Administration) of the Department in April 1984. Since then, I have worked in a number of positions in the Education Department before it merged with the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) on 1 January 2003.

1.2 I served as the Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower (Quality Assurance) [PAS (QA)] from 1 January 2003 to the commencement of my pre-retirement leave in October 2006. As head of the Quality Assurance Division (QAD), I was responsible for a range of educational services, including quality assurance inspection and school review, school registration, policy issues of the Hong Kong Examination and Assessment Authority and pre-primary education.

1.3 As well as maintaining and reviewing policy relating to pre-primary education services, I worked with other Divisions of EMB on matters relating to kindergarten education such as kindergarten subsidy scheme, projection on training demand for kindergarten principals and teachers etc.

2. My involvement with the process of planning for the allocation of student numbers

2.1 The Professional Development and Training Division (PDT) was responsible for the preparation for the triennium of 2005-2008 and the roll-over year of 2008-2009 of the Hong Kong Institute of Education (the Institute), including the Certificate course on Early Childhood Education C (ECE) and training course for Qualified Kindergarten Teacher.

2.2 It came to my knowledge in February 2004 that QAD had been involved in the process of planning for the triennium of 2005-2008. QAD was consulted on the manpower projection for kindergarten (KG) teacher

training.

3. Meetings for teacher education providers in the field of Early Childhood Education (ECE).

Organization of meetings

3.1 In the process of conducting a comprehensive review of early childhood education, the Kindergartens and Support Section (K&S) of QAD organized a number of meetings with the early childhood education sector, including the teacher training providers. QAD organized two meetings in May 2006 and June 2006 with three teacher education providers – the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University - to explore different training modes to support ECE teachers and principals. The two meetings were chaired by the then Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower (PSEM), Mrs. Fanny Law.

3.2 The other three teacher education providers – the Hong Kong Institute of Education, the Hong Kong Baptist University and the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education - were excluded from the meetings because they were running various training courses on ECE including C (ECE) and Bachelor courses in ECE.

Temporary suspension of role differentiation exercise

3.3 In the course of discussion, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University expressed interest in running a Bachelor course in Child Psychology and Development for ECE personnel, adopting a multi-disciplinary approach. To facilitate the planning of the said bachelor course, the then PSEM, Mrs. Fanny Law, wrote to the Secretary-General of the University Grant Committee (UGC) in consideration of a temporary suspension of the role differentiation of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. This is known to me as QAD prepared the initial draft letter to the then PSEM in this regard.

3.4 There was no indication that such a request had any connection with the allocation of student places in ECE and primary teacher training which would otherwise have been allocated to the Hong Kong Institute of Education.

4. "0" places for C (ECE) in the start Letter of 21 January 2004

An error or a result of miscommunication

4.1 I believe that the subject officer - Chief Professional Development Officer [CPDO] (PDT) 1 - of the PDT Division might not have been fully apprised of the information provided by my staff - Senior Education Officer (K&S) - on the demand for the in-service C (ECE) places. Hence the "0" in the first Start Letter of 21 January 2004 for the C (ECE) sub-degree programme would be a result of miscommunication.

The correction of C (ECE) places

4.2 When the "0" allocation was made known to QAD and myself, via the Sing Tao Daily on 29 January 2004, we sought to find what had happened. From the information forwarded to us by CPDO (PDT) 1 in early February 2004, we realized that the subject officer of PDT had misunderstood our position. I also met Professor Lorna Chan of the School of ECE of Hong Kong Institute of Education on 27 February 2004 to understand the situation.

4.3 I put up minutes on 1 March and 3 March 2004 to the then PSEM to redress the situation.

4.4 As I was not the subject PAS for the allocation of student places, I could not identify the subject officers for the initial stipulation and the later change.

"Incomplete projection"

4.5 The manpower projection for KG teacher training given to UGC was incomplete at the time because it reflected only the prevailing policy target of requiring every principal to have a C (ECE) and it had not

included the projected demand to cater for wastage and teacher enhancement.

“Implication of the request”

4.6 The implication was that it would affect the final allocation of training places to the Institute in the Start Letter.

“Potential Crisis”

4.7 After the “0” allocation of the ECE courses to HKIEd was first reported by the Sing Tao daily on 29 January 2004, we received enquiries from LegCo members, Education Commission members, and members from local ECE bodies such as the OMEP as well as from members of the Kindergarten Education Consultative Committee. Apparently, the various stakeholders in the ECE sector were very concerned about the matter. I thought that they might exert pressure on the Bureau to make available more C (ECE) places. Hence, I considered the issue a potential crisis if it was not addressed immediately.

5. Reinstatement of 200 places for C (ECE)

5.1 I understood that EMB would make the projection on training demand for C(ECE) in line with the prevailing policy targets and with reference to the demand for replenishment and teacher enhancement. As the policy target of requiring principals of KG to acquire a C(ECE) qualification would have been achieved by 2005/2006, the number of UGC-funded C(ECE) places would be reviewed. Subject officers in QAD, PDT and Higher Education Division would be involved in putting up recommendations for the senior officers of EMB for a decision before forwarding it to UGC for consideration.

5.2 I do not know the intended use of “the funds saved from the reduction in the number of places of C (ECE)” and therefore am unable to give any explanation in this regard.

6. General comments

In general, I am unaware of any negative sentiment on the part of the then Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower, Mrs. Fanny Law, or the SEM, Professor Arthur Li, towards the Institute. I am unaware of any evidence that Mrs. Fanny Law or Professor Arthur Li had used their power over student numbers to disadvantage the Institute.

The above statement is true to the best of my knowledge, information and belief.



(Andrew Poon)
2 May 2007