

REPORT ON REVIEW OF THE PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION VOUCHER SCHEME

SUBMITTED BY THE WORKING GROUP ON
REVIEW OF THE PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION
VOUCHER SCHEME

EDUCATION COMMISSION

DECEMBER 2010



Foreword

The Working Group started its review of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme in November 2009. We were deeply impressed by the openness of the key stakeholders in sharing their concerns with us throughout the process. We were particularly impressed by teachers and principals of kindergartens in their commitment to their work and their passion in pursuing quality pre-primary education. After the first round of consultation, it became clear to us that, on the strength of their dedication and professionalism, the sector as a whole had managed to take on the challenges arising from the introduction of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme and make significant gains in a few short years. As a result of this enhanced system capacity, a number of the earlier concerns associated with the Scheme no longer exist or are, by now, not as severe as they once were.

Still, many concerns persist. During our work, the Working Group was keenly aware of the complexity of the issues before us. There are diverse stakeholders' views, often resulting in competing interests and priorities. In addition, many views expressed and requests made to the Working Group are not directly related to the Scheme and, as such, not within our remit.

Conducting a holistic and forward-looking review of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme without straying from our terms of reference was, thus, a difficult balancing act. In the end, our deliberations were guided by a set of principles which we believed to be fundamental for the development of a quality, diversified and vibrant pre-primary education system in Hong Kong.

There are no easy solutions to complex problems. However, the Working Group is confident that our 12 recommendations will, collectively, take the sector forward along the right trajectory. These

recommendations focus on finding the right things to do and doing them well and, if nothing else, should sharpen the discussion among all stakeholders in identifying a way forward to support the learning and development of our children in the best way that we can. That, after all, is the one common goal we all share.

Professor Edmond KO, BBS, JP
Chairman, Working Group on Review of
the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme
Education Commission

* * * * *

Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the assistance and advice of a large number of people. We would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the major stakeholders, including teacher education institutions, school sponsoring bodies, principals, teachers and parents, who have given their views and suggestions on the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme at various focus group meetings. We would like to record our thanks to the Secretariat for its conscientious efforts on our behalf. We would also like to thank colleagues within the Education Bureau for their assistance in the consultation exercises.

Last, but not least, we wish to express our sincere appreciation of the wide range of views received from members of the Legislative Council, and of the written submissions from other stakeholders. Their views have been thoroughly considered and reflected, as far as possible, in the report.

* * * * *

Table of Contents

		Pages
Chapter 1	Background of the Review and Consultation Framework	5
Chapter 2	Early Childhood Education from an International Perspective and in the Local Context	8
Chapter 3	Key Features of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme and its Current State of Development	16
Chapter 4	Working Group’s Guiding Principles for the Review, Views and Concerns of Stakeholders, Working Group’s Deliberations and Recommendations	21
Chapter 5	Conclusion	41
 Annexes		
1	Membership of the Working Group on Review of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme	44
2	References	45
3	List of Activities of the Working Group	46
4	Summary of Consultation Questions	47
5	Early Childhood Education Systems of Western Countries	49
6	Early Childhood Education Systems in Asia	51
7	Summary of Views Collated by the Working Group	53
8	Summary of Recommendations	63

* * * * *

Chapter 1 Background of the Review and Consultation Framework

Introduction

1.1 In 2006, the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) announced a major financial commitment to further strengthen the quality of pre-primary education through the introduction of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS). The key objective of the PEVS is for all children of the relevant age¹ to receive affordable and quality pre-primary education. This is to be achieved through direct fee subsidy to parents, in the form of vouchers, to ease their financial burden and enhance their choice of kindergartens (KGs). The scheme also provides for financial assistance to KG teachers and principals for their professional upgrading as well as a quality assurance mechanism that combines KGs' self-evaluation with external review by the Education Bureau (EDB). A one-off grant was provided to all KGs in the 2006/07 school year (sy) for school development.

The Working Group on Review of the PEVS and its Terms of Reference

1.2 The Government originally planned to review the PEVS in the 2011/12 sy in the light of implementation experiences. In response to concerns expressed by stakeholders, it decided to set up a Working Group (WG) under the Education Commission (EC) in October 2009 to take forward the review, with the following terms of reference (ToR) -

- To gauge the views of stakeholders on the implementation of the PEVS; and
- To make recommendations to the Government on improvement

¹ Every child, aged at or above two years and eight months (before 1 September of the school year of admission to the nursery classes of kindergartens) with right of abode, right to land or valid permission to remain without any condition of stay in Hong Kong, may apply for the Certificate of Eligibility.

to the PEVS.

Membership of the WG is at **Annex 1**.

1.3 Having regard to the views and concerns expressed by the key stakeholders, including Legislative Council members, since the implementation of the PEVS, the WG drew upon an integrated series of focus group meetings to further gauge the views of the academics of local tertiary education institutions, KG teachers and principals, school sponsoring bodies and parents. The WG had also consulted relevant policy documents and related literatures, a list of which is at **Annex 2**. Written submissions were invited to further inform the WG in its deliberations. A list of the WG's activities is at **Annex 3**.

Consultation Questions

1.4 The key consultation questions that aim to prompt discussion and consideration of the issues relating to the PEVS include -

- What, internationally, are good practices in pre-primary education and how well does the system in Hong Kong compare in terms of provision, professional standards of teachers and principals, and quality assurance?
- What are the most important constituents of quality pre-primary education?
- To what extent do the EC's recommendations in its Report 2000 address the need for building up a new culture for pre-primary education in Hong Kong?
- What are the changes (for better or for worse) that have been observed after the introduction of the PEVS? What are the underlying reasons for these changes? What specific actions should be taken for improvement, not only of the PEVS but also in pre-primary education?
- What are parents' expectations of pre-primary education for

children and to what extent have these expectations been met?

- More specifically, from an operational point of view, what could be done for the sustainable development of quality pre-primary education in the areas of
 - stability of the system;
 - professional development of teachers and principals; and
 - quality assurance?
- Where are the gaps and what are the recommendations to fill the gaps, having regard to resource implications, existence of pre-conditions and readiness of the KG sector?

1.5 Other consultation questions within this overall framework are summarised at **Annex 4**.

Organisation of the Report

1.6 Chapter 1 provides the background of the PEVS, its objectives and the consultation questions for gauging the views of the stakeholders. Chapter 2 presents a summary of the key aspects of early childhood education from an international perspective and its development in the local context. Chapter 3 outlines the key features of the PEVS and its current state of development. Chapter 4 sets out the WG's guiding principles for the review, summarises the views and concerns expressed by the stakeholders and makes recommendations for improvement. Chapter 5 is the conclusion.

* * * * *

Chapter 2 Early Childhood Education from an International Perspective and in the Local Context

International Perspective

2.1 The WG set out to take a ‘helicopter view’ of early childhood education to inform its review and deliberations on the implementation of the PEVS. To this end, it referred to studies on the development of early childhood education overseas and reviewed policy documents on pre-primary education in Hong Kong. This allowed the WG’s deliberations to take into account both overseas experience and the local context when making recommendations for improvement to the implementation of the PEVS.

Approaches to Pre-primary Services

2.2 Internationally, governments are playing a growing role and have been making increasing investment in early childhood education and care over the last thirty years. In doing so they have focused attention on establishing early childhood education as the basis for further learning, supporting parents, encouraging women’s participation in the labour market, addressing falling fertility rates, reducing poverty and supporting disadvantaged families. Individual countries’ approaches to early childhood education however are quite different, varying from a universal² approach to a targeted approach for chosen groups of children. Cross-national and within-country variations are considerable and there is no universal model. Nevertheless, a key consideration commonly recognised for policy formulation is that it should attend to the needs of the local context and the vision set should be realistic.

Service Settings

2.3 Some countries have sought to put early childhood programmes under a single ministry. Others administer early childhood programmes according to age group, for example, with children aged below 3 under a social/welfare ministry and the 3 to 6 years old under an education ministry.

² Early childhood education is non-compulsory in most countries. In this context, universal access implies making access available to all children whose parents wish them to participate.

2.4 In the majority of the countries and places surveyed, compulsory education starts in primary school at the age of 6. The terminology used to describe settings for early learning prior to primary school education varies. It includes nursery education, pre-school education, early childhood education, early childhood care and education, early childhood education and care or educate to underline the opportunities to combine care, developmental and learning opportunities. In some countries, this may refer to programmes encompassing health, nutrition, cognitive, physical, social and emotional development, and integrating families with children. There are also diverse arrangements ranging from family day care homes to centre-based programmes delivered in half-day or whole-day blocks, following school term arrangements or opening all year round. There is also increasing recognition of the importance of involving parents in maintaining the effects of education in these settings. In some countries, other professionals may be enlisted to provide support for children's development.

2.5 Due to their diverse nature, the development of early childhood education programmes is country-specific in that it attends to individual countries' particular contexts and builds on their own experience. However, it is commonly recognised that -

- (a) early childhood educational experience lays the foundation for intelligence, emotional, health and moral development, in particular for children of needy families;
- (b) from the child development perspective, "Care", "Education" and "Development" are integral parts of the process of nurturing a child's holistic development;
- (c) the early childhood programmes should embody a developmentally appropriate pedagogy and provide support for transition to primary school;
- (d) parental partnership and involvement of parents in early childhood education is important; and

- (e) the quality of pre-primary education programme is essential, regardless of the institutional setting.

Funding and Quality Assurance

2.6 The mode of funding in some countries may include direct allocation of grant for specific programmes, resources given to parents to enable them to purchase services that meet their needs, or tax reduction. While most countries fund some form of early education programmes, pre-primary education is generally not free in the same way as it is in compulsory education and some form of parental contribution is usually expected.³ Some countries provide one-year free education prior to compulsory education, and in some cases free half-day education programmes are provided at an earlier age. Nevertheless, policies that encourage access to pre-primary education by children from needy families are found in most countries. Subsidy strategies may be accompanied by measures to monitor and improve quality through regulations on aspects such as group size, teacher to child ratio, staff members' professional qualifications and facilities, as well as by a quality assurance framework that supports the achievement of pedagogical goals.

Training of Teachers

2.7 There is recognition of the importance of training for early childhood teachers to prepare them to meet the demands of the profession. Many countries are also strengthening in-service professional development programmes to provide serving teachers with the up-to-date skills necessary for effective delivery of early childhood services, including the involvement of parents.

2.8 Summary tables on the early childhood education systems in 12 places are at **Annex 5** and **Annex 6**.

The Local Context

2.9 In Hong Kong, pre-primary education refers specifically to the 3-year KG programme for children before compulsory primary school education. It is recognised as an important stage “which lays the foundation for life-long learning and whole person development, and

³ *Starting Strong II : Early Childhood Education and Care*. OECD, Paris. (Page 110)

serves as the starting point of formal education.”⁴

Policy Direction Set Out in EC's Report 2000

2.10 Support for pre-primary education has been progressively increased since the publication of the White Paper on Pre-school Services and Primary Education in 1981. In the year 2000, the EC's report “Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong – Education Blueprint for the 21st Century” made further recommendations on improvement to pre-primary education in the following directions -

- (a) To enhance the professional standards of early childhood educators through training and raising their entry requirements;
- (b) To enhance the quality assurance mechanism and draw up a specific time-table for requiring all early childhood education providers to undergo external evaluations;
- (c) To enhance transparency by making public the results of their external and internal evaluation;
- (d) To study the feasibility of having one single body regulating all KGs and child care centres (CCCs) to raise the effectiveness of the regulatory work;
- (e) To enhance the interface between early childhood and primary education; and
- (f) To ensure that no children will be deprived of early childhood education due to lack of financial means and to accord priority in allocating new resources to improving direct assistance for parents.⁵

2.11 The emphasis in Hong Kong on provision of trained staff, quality assurance, transparency and accountability of KGs for quality education, support for children's transition to primary school, governance and

⁴ Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum, (Curriculum Development Council, 2006)

⁵ On the mode of subsidy, the EC did not recommend the Government to provide full subsidy for early childhood education, on the grounds that the provision of full subsidy does not necessarily ensure the quality of early childhood education.

support for needy families denotes that we have kept in pace with the international trends of development.

Governance

2.12 Prior to 2005, KGs and Day Nurseries provided similar services to a similar target group with KGs admitting children aged 3 to 6 and registered under the Education Ordinance (EO), and CCCs, comprising day nurseries admitting children aged 2 to 6 and day creches for infants and toddlers up to the age of 2, being registered under the Child Care Services Ordinance (CCSO). Over the years, many aspects of KGs and CCCs have been harmonised, including staff qualifications, facilities and staff to child ratio. The harmonisation policy on pre-primary services introduced in 2005 recognises that children's development at various stages is a continuum. It maintains that pre-primary education in Hong Kong should not start until the age of 3. Since the introduction of the harmonisation policy in the 2005/06 sy, the education-oriented programmes for children aged 3 to 6 have been regulated by EO and provided in KGs, while the care-oriented and more welfare-related services for children under the age of 3 are regulated by CCSO and provided in CCCs. Kindergarten-cum-child care centres (KG-cum-CCCs) serving children aged 0 to 6, although governed by different ordinances, can be co-located and dual-registered under EO and CCSO. A joint office, namely the 'Joint Office for Pre-primary Services', comprising Education Bureau (EDB) and Social Welfare Department (SWD) staff, has been set up since 2005 to provide one-stop services for KG-cum-CCCs.⁶

2.13 CCCs continue providing care services for children aged under 3 for families with such a need. Extended Hours Service and Occasional Child Care Service are also provided in some CCCs and KG-cum-CCCs to meet the different needs of parents.

2.14 Special Child Service Centres, providing special training for moderately and severely disabled children aged 2 to 6 and preparing them for primary education, are licensed under the CCSO and regulated by

⁶ As of the 2009/10 sy, there are some 460 KG-cum-CCCs, where KGs are operating with a child care centre co-located on the same premises. With KG-cum-CCC registrations under the respective EO and CCSO, KG-cum-CCCs provide both education programmes for children aged 3 to 6 and child care services for children aged under 3.

SWD. These centres are Government subsidised and a standard monthly fee is charged to the parents. The Integrated Programme funded by SWD provides training for mildly disabled pre-schoolers in ordinary KG-cum-CCCs to support their future integration into mainstream education and society. Parents of children admitted to the Integrated Programme pay the normal KG tuition fee and are entitled to voucher subsidy.

Structural Standards

2.15 Regulations and an Operation Manual for Pre-primary Institutions, specifying requirements covering premises design, furniture and equipment, minimum floor space per child, safety measures, health, sanitation, nutrition and diet, curriculum and activities, teacher to child ratio and opening hours, are issued by EDB for operators as a guide to ensuring structural and process quality.

Curriculum Guide

2.16 A Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum was issued by the Curriculum Development Council in 2006 for pre-primary institutions. It places emphasis on the basic principles of “children’s development” and “children’s learning”, and advocates a child-centred approach to meeting children’s development needs. According to the Guide, the learning experience of children in KGs should primarily aim to develop their interest and acquisition of the basic learning abilities which are the foundation for formal education. While it is desirable for teachers of upper KG classes to make reference to the primary school curriculum, they should not teach the primary curriculum in KGs, in order to avoid exerting undue pressure on pre-school children.

Quality Assurance

2.17 In consultation with the pre-primary education sector and SWD, EDB formulated a set of Performance Indicators for Pre-primary Education in 2000 (revised in 2003) to provide a common platform to monitor service standards. To support continuous improvement, pre-primary institutions are encouraged to conduct self-evaluation, complemented by external review.

Training for Teachers

2.18 Professional capability of teachers is the key to quality education. Prior to the PEVS, the upgrading of professional standards of teachers had been implemented progressively, with the entry requirement raised to a Qualified Kindergarten Teacher qualification in September 2003, and the percentage of Qualified Kindergarten Teachers employed by a KG rising from 40% in the 1997/98 sy to 100% in the 2004/05 sy. Since September 2002, all newly appointed KG principals have been required to possess a Certificate in Early Childhood Education (C(ECE)) qualification. All KG principals were required to possess the qualification before the end of the 2005/06 sy.

School Support Services

2.19 In addition to the curriculum guide, professional development programmes on a variety of themes are conducted on a regular basis to meet the professional development needs of teachers and principals. Curriculum resources and exemplars on learning and teaching activities are developed and collected for dissemination to KGs.

Financial Assistance for Pre-primary Education

2.20 KGs are private schools and fee charging. According to the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines, the current planning standard is 760 half-day and 210 whole-day places for every 1,000 children in the age group of 3 to under 6. The need for such establishment is taken into account in housing estates and large-scale private development projects where space is allocated for such uses. KG premises in housing estates will be allocated to operators through open bidding, processed by EDB's school allocation mechanism. KG operators may operate KGs in adapted non-purpose built premises, subject to compliance with the requirements as stipulated under the EO. The Government may consider rental reimbursement to non-profit-making KGs in districts with a shortfall of KG places. Prior to the PEVS, a means-tested scheme of fee assistance has been administered since 1982 for children from low income families so that children would not be denied access to KGs because of lack of means.

Admission Age to Pre-primary Education

2.21 The lowest age for admission to KGs is 2 years and 8 months. Parents need to apply for admission directly to the KGs concerned. KGs should not start the admission exercise for the new school year earlier than November of the preceding year.

Types of Kindergarten

2.22 Most of the KGs are non-profit-making and some are private independent. In the 2006/07 sy, prior to the introduction of the PEVS, 96.3% of children in the 3 to 6 age group attended KGs. Most children attend half-day sessions, although whole-day programmes⁷ are operated to cater for parental choice. Some KGs may offer a non-local curriculum. They are providing a diversity of choice for parents and catering for the varied needs of families.

2.23 The WG notes that the Government has basically achieved the recommendations which the EC proposed in its Report 2000, prior to the introduction of the PEVS. In this context, the WG considers that the review of the implementation of the PEVS and the recommendations for improvement should give due consideration to the conditions of the local context, placing the quality of pre-primary education at the centre, targeting support for needy families and strengthening the capacity of the system to deliver quality pre-primary education.

* * * * *

⁷ As of the 2009/10 sy, about 28% of KG children attended whole-day programmes. Their daily operating hours vary from 7.5 hours to 10 hours and some KGs will provide extended hours services or occasional hours services, funded by SWD, to provide a continuum of services for children.

Chapter 3 Key Features of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme and Its Current State of Development

Key Features of the PEVS

3.1 The PEVS, introduced with effect from the 2007/08 sy, is a funding arrangement operating within existing KG policy.⁸ Prior to the implementation of the PEVS, KG education in Hong Kong had been provided by the private sector and characterised by adaptability, diversity and vitality. Parents were already free to choose KGs, and a fee remission scheme had also been operated for children from needy families. There had been a high enrolment rate of children for pre-primary education and keen competition among KGs for students.

Policy objectives

3.2 While increasing the financial investment in pre-primary education through the PEVS, the Government wishes to preserve the responsiveness of the sector and further enhance its quality. The vision is for all relevant-aged children to receive affordable and quality pre-primary education. This is to be achieved through -

- (a) parental choice, facilitated by direct fee subsidy for parents in the form of a voucher, coupled with transparency of KG operations;
- (b) well-qualified teaching staff, facilitated by financial support for professional upgrading and ongoing professional development; and
- (c) accountability, facilitated by a quality assurance mechanism that combines self-evaluation with external review.

The eligibility criteria

3.3 The PEVS operates on the basis of the following principles –

⁸ Chapter 8 of “Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong – Education Blueprint for the 21st Century”, (Education Commission, 2000)

- (a) subject to the transitional period⁹, only children attending local non-profit-making (NPM) KGs or relevant classes in local NPM KG-cum-CCCs are eligible to join the PEVS;
- (b) the voucher should only be redeemed by local NPM KGs charging a school fee not exceeding \$24,000 per student per annum (pspa) for a half-day place or not exceeding \$48,000 pspa for a whole-day place;
- (c) the KGs should, at the same time, meet all stipulated disclosure and transparency requirements;
- (d) all KGs are subject to a quality assurance mechanism so that, starting from the 2012/13 sy, only KGs meeting the prescribed standards may redeem the voucher; and
- (e) all KGs should enjoy full discretion in determining teacher salaries.

Non means-tested voucher subsidy and fee remission

3.4 To ensure wide eligibility, subsidy for parents under the PEVS is non means-tested. Needy families may apply for fee remission in addition to the voucher subsidy to facilitate access to pre-primary education. It was estimated that 80% of the KGs would join the PEVS, covering 90% of eligible KG children.

Requirements for professional upgrading

3.5 Under the PEVS, all serving principals are encouraged to obtain a Bachelor in Education (Early Childhood Education) (BEd(ECE)) qualification. Working towards this goal, all new principals must have a degree in early childhood education from the 2009/10 sy and one-year post-qualification experience. To enhance their leadership role, also from the 2009/10 sy, all new principals are required to complete a certification course before or, exceptionally, within the first year of their

⁹ A transitional period of three years until the end of the 2009/10 sy was provided for private independent (PI) KGs satisfying all prescribed requirements of eligible NPM KGs, save for the NPM status, to redeem the vouchers from parents whose children were enrolled at various study levels in such PI KGs in the 2007/08 sy throughout these children's education in the same PI KGs.

appointment. Serving principals are expected to complete the course by the end of the 2011/12 sy while serving teachers are expected to obtain C(ECE) qualification by the end of the 2011/12 sy.

Quality assurance

3.6 With the introduction of the PEVS in the 2007/08 sy, all KGs taking part in the Scheme are required to conduct self-evaluation and undergo external review by EDB. After the 2011/12 sy, only those meeting the standards of the Quality Review (QR) by EDB will be allowed to participate in the PEVS. The QR reports, together with other transparency requirements, are uploaded to EDB's website for parents' reference and to support their choice of KGs for their children.

Implementation of the PEVS

Number of KGs and children under the PEVS

3.7 As of the 2009/10 sy, 800 or about 84% of the KGs joined the PEVS. Among them, 114 were former private independent KGs converted to NPM operation since the 2007/08 sy. In the 2009/10 sy, approximately 119,000, i.e. 85% of the 140,500 KG children received fee subsidy under the PEVS.¹⁰ A schedule of voucher value is set out below -

School Year	Voucher value (\$)	Amount of the voucher dedicated to fee subsidy (\$)	Amount of the voucher dedicated to teacher development (\$)
2007/08	13,000	10,000	3,000
2008/09	14,000	11,000	3,000
2009/10	14,000	12,000	2,000
2010/11	16,000	14,000	2,000
2011/12	16,000	16,000	--

Professional upgrading of teachers and principals

3.8 With effect from the 2009/10 sy, all newly appointed principals are required to hold a BEd(ECE) degree and to have completed the certification course for KG principals. As of September 2009, about

¹⁰ Prior to the PEVS, 52% of KGs and about 50% KG children benefited in the 2006/07 sy from the former Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Subsidy Scheme (KCSS).

303 i.e. 35% of the 872 KG principals¹¹ had either completed or were attending the certification course for KG principals. About 90% of KG teachers were either holding or pursuing C(ECE) as of September 2009, as compared to 56% of KG teachers in the 2006/07 sy.

School self evaluation and QR

3.9 All KGs joining the PEVS have put in place a school self-evaluation mechanism to review their performance, with reference to the Performance Indicators for pre-primary institutions published by EDB. As of end of the 2009/10 sy, EDB had completed quality reviews for about 81% of the NPM KGs joining the PEVS. The QR reports have been uploaded to EDB's website for reference of parents and members of the public. The Profile of KGs and KG-cum-CCCs has been updated annually to facilitate parents in their choice of KGs for their children. The PEVS KGs have been required to disclose information on application of funding to various expenditure areas, in addition to other essential operational and curriculum details. Booklets on child development and KG learning have been prepared and distributed to parents through KGs.

School-based support services

3.10 School-based support services for KGs, in the areas of language learning, cognitive development, socio-emotional development, physical development and curriculum leadership, have been made available. Workshops on school self-evaluation and school development planning have also been conducted for middle managers and principals.

Additional support for needy families

3.11 The PEVS originally fixed the fee remission ceilings¹² at \$16,000 pspa for half-day KGs and \$25,400 pspa for whole-day KGs for a period of five years from the 2007/08 to 2011/12 sy. To address the concern of needy families regarding choice of affordable KGs under the PEVS, the Government has, from the 2009/10 sy onwards, reinstated an annual adjustment mechanism to the fee remission ceilings on the basis of the half-day and whole-day weighted average fees (WAF) of NPM KGs in the PEVS. The fee remission ceilings for the 2009/10 sy have been increased to \$18,000 per half-day student per annum and \$29,300 per

¹¹ 152 KG teachers had also attended or are attending the certification course for KG principals.

¹² Families with financial difficulties may apply for fee remission through the means-tested Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme (KCFRS) for additional financial support.

whole-day student per annum. This has significantly enhanced the level of financial support for needy families and their accessibility to more choices of KGs.

Remuneration for teachers

3.12 KGs have full discretion in determining teachers' remuneration. According to the data collected from KGs in a questionnaire survey conducted by EDB, the average monthly salaries of teachers (excluding principals) teaching half-day and whole-day classes in KGs offering local curriculum were \$9,800 and \$16,300 respectively in the 2009/10 sy. A survey conducted with the major school sponsoring bodies indicated that most of them continued to follow the former normative salary scale¹³ for KG teachers, with modifications to meet individual needs.

3.13 Further to the views and concerns expressed earlier by the key stakeholders, including Legislative Council Members, the WG explored with various focus groups such issues as pre-primary education outside Hong Kong, changes since the introduction of the PEVS, reasons underlying these changes, constituent elements of quality pre-primary education, and views on improvement to the operational aspects of the PEVS. Building on this basis, the WG further focused on the specific concerns raised, having regard to the development of pre-primary education in Hong Kong, the pre-primary education landscape before and after the PEVS, and the necessary conditions for provision of quality pre-primary education. Details of the outcomes of consultations and the WG's deliberations are discussed in the next Chapter.

* * * * *

¹³ To encourage KGs to employ and retain trained teachers, the Government provided financial subsidy to KGs to partly meet the salary cost of teachers by way of the Kindergarten Subsidy Scheme since 1995 so as to reduce the pressure on fee increase, which in turn would lessen parents' financial burden. KGs under the Scheme were required to pay their teachers according to a recommended salary scale. The pay scale for Qualified KG Teachers was from MPS Point 7 to 18, and that for KG Principals was from MPS Points 14 to 22/24. Principals of KGs with enrolment of 560 or more may be remunerated up to MPS Pt 24. Such a normative salary scale was abolished since introduction of the PEVS in the 2007/08 sy.

Chapter 4 Working Group's Guiding Principles for the Review, Views and Concerns of Stakeholders, Working Group's Deliberations and Recommendations

Defining Issues and Concerns

4.1 This chapter identifies the defining issues in the implementation of the PEVS and examines the feedback and emerging concerns as expressed and gathered from the key stakeholders of the Scheme. While the consultation questions helped to focus discussion with the stakeholders, some of the views expressed were not directly related to the PEVS. Consequently, even though the WG has undertaken to take a broad view of the PEVS, it is mindful not to stray beyond its ToR which is to review the implementation of the PEVS, rather than to conduct a comprehensive review on pre-primary education. Therefore, the WG wishes to make clear where views offered to the WG by the stakeholders cannot be addressed in this report.

Analysis of the Problem

4.2 In its review, the WG considered whether the PEVS was a feasible funding mode, how far it had been directed towards achieving its designated objectives, and what the major problems of the Scheme had been. The WG noted that, notwithstanding the various concerns expressed, there was in general no prevailing view that the PEVS should be discontinued. Since the introduction of the PEVS starting from the 2007/08 sy, about 85% of KG children have received direct financial subsidy on tuition fee through the voucher, compared with some 50% under the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Subsidy Scheme (KCSS). The professional qualifications of KG teachers and principals have been improving and the self improvement capacity of KGs has also undergone continual enhancement.

4.3 Nevertheless, it appeared in our consultation that, in terms of the professional capacity of the KG sector, the system was not yet totally ready when the PEVS was introduced. The relationship between the Government, KGs and parents had changed upon the implementation of

the PEVS as a result of the replacement of the KCSS by the PEVS. In particular, KGs perceived that their position had been undermined when parental choice influenced KGs' source of financial income. The PEVS was also seen as having placed KGs under a multi-lateral demand system by parents on the one hand and by the Government on the other, in terms of requirements for professional upgrading, quality review, increased transparency and administrative accountability. Some expressed doubt as to the effectiveness of the promotion of quality through a market-driven pre-primary education.

4.4 The changes associated with the PEVS, and the readiness then of the professional capacity within the KG sector to respond to such changes, might have been the sources of concerns and pressure. In other words, there was a mismatch between the system's capacity and the challenge suddenly imposed on it. In making recommendations for improvement, the WG would consider options to enhance the system capacity, or reduce the level of challenge, or a combination of the two. The WG also reminded itself to take note of the growth in system capacity since 2007 which had alleviated many of the original concerns, and that the proposed improvement measures should not lead to new problems.

WG's Guiding Principles

4.5 The WG made reference to the following principles to guide its deliberations on improvement options -

- (a) Government's existing policy is that pre-primary education is non-compulsory and is to be provided by the private sector;
- (b) The pre-primary education services should have diversity and provide choices that will meet the varied needs of parents;
- (c) While pre-primary education is voluntary, support should be given to children to have access to quality services and no children will be deprived of pre-primary education due to lack of financial means;

- (d) Government funding should be accompanied by good governance, leading to consistent improvement in quality;
- (e) The quality of the pre-primary education programme is of utmost importance, regardless of whether it is provided through a half-day or whole-day programme or operating on a school term or full year basis;
- (f) Development options should be realistic, sustainable and conducive to the maintenance and development of the vision of a diversified and vibrant system; and
- (g) The pre-primary education sector should be empowered to take ownership in achieving quality goals.

4.6 In the ensuing paragraphs, the WG identifies the key issues relating to the PEVS. For each issue, a summary of views collected from stakeholders, of both support and concern, is presented. There then follows an account of how the WG analysed the issues in the light of the views collected and the WG's guiding principles, and finally the resulting recommendations. A summary of views collated by the WG is at **Annex 7**.

The Voucher

(A) Investment in pre-primary education through the PEVS

Support

4.7 Investment in pre-primary education through the PEVS was well received and many remarked that the injection of new resources represented the Government's financial commitment to quality early childhood education and family support. Since the PEVS was non means-tested, the Scheme had extended financial subsidy to most children of the relevant age group. Some considered that the Government's financial investment would provide children with a good start in formal education and lay the foundation for whole person development and life-long learning.

Concern

4.8 While the PEVS was recognised as a positive step forward, some queried whether, by providing direct subsidy to parents instead of directly subsidising KGs, resources had been put into areas that would have the biggest impact on the quality of pre-primary education. Many indicated concerns that market-driven pre-primary education was not conducive to quality. Some expressed their worries that, in order to meet parents' expectations, KGs might not continue with practices which they believed to be pedagogically sound. They, therefore, queried whether the PEVS was the most desirable subsidy mode and argued that direct subsidy to KGs could help them regain and retain professional pedagogical autonomy. Many considered that KG education should be compulsory and free, and recognised as part of basic education. Hence, pre-primary education should be fully subvented by the Government. Some suggested that K3 should be fully subvented while K1 and K2 could be partially subvented. There was also a view that the Government should formulate a clear blueprint for the PEVS beyond the 2011/12 sy so that KGs would be able to devise short-term and long-term plans on school development accordingly.

WG's deliberation

4.9 In the local context, the WG observes that KGs operate in a "quasi-market" environment and are regulated under the Government's governance framework, which accommodates flexibility and diversity on the one hand and aims to ensure quality on the other. The diversity and vibrancy of pre-primary education services also attend to the varied needs of parents for a pre-primary education system, with the flexibility to respond to external demands and changes. The PEVS, which provides direct subsidy to a majority of families to ensure wide eligibility, is complemented by additional financial support for needy families so as to widen their choice of KGs.

4.10 The WG recognises that the diversity and vibrancy of our pre-primary education system are the strengths that we should maintain and build on. It is also a matter of fact that the KGs in Hong Kong are providing different types of services to meet the varied demands of the families. KGs also charge a wide range of tuition fees that reflect the variety of service types. Such a diversity of services might not be

possible if KGs are subject to the regulations of the subvention sector.

4.11 While there is a demand for Government to fully subsidise pre-primary education, the WG considers that this would require a thorough review of the pre-primary education which is beyond its remit. However, the WG believes that with increasing experience gained from the PEVS, the suggestion of full subvention will need to be carefully deliberated in consultation with the wider community.

4.12 Hence, the WG considers that, since the majority of views are in support of the PEVS, its next phase of development beyond the 2011/12 sy should further facilitate access by parents to affordable and quality pre-primary education. It should also enhance the capacity of the sector in providing quality pre-primary education for continuous and sustainable development. Enhancement of the PEVS should take into account how the Scheme can be further facilitated in a practical way. Access to the appropriate types of pre-primary services, including provision of half-day or whole-day KG places, service hours, duration of school terms and extended hours services that will meet the needs of parents, should be made available for parental choice. The WG, however, does not consider it desirable to create a dual funding mode by introducing a school-based provision of funding alongside the voucher on a per student basis, but considers that enhanced support should be given to needy families.

4.13 There are a number of issues raised by the pre-primary education sector which fall outside the WG's ToR. These include compulsory kindergarten education, full subvention for kindergartens and the long-term vision of pre-primary education, including the professional qualifications of KG teachers. There was also a view that all types of early childhood services should be co-ordinated by a single bureau and the PEVS should be extended to children below the age of 3 in CCCs. The WG considers that while it is beyond its ToR to address these concerns, the consultation process has generated discussions for future reference. The WG considers that, in the light of changes in the macro environment, the Government might further consider these issues in due course.

Recommendation 1

The WG considers the PEVS to be an appropriate mechanism for funding pre-primary education as it can attend to the characteristics of the local context and, hence, recommends its continuation beyond the 2011/12 sy, subject to periodic review. A further review of early childhood education in response to developments in the macro environment should be conducted at an opportune time.

(B) The eligibility criteria for KGs

Concern

4.14 Under the PEVS, only KGs which are non-profit-making, charge a tuition fee not exceeding \$24,000 pspa for a half-day place or not exceeding \$48,000 pspa for a whole-day place, and offer local curriculum, may join the Scheme. While some agreed that the thresholds of \$24,000 and \$48,000 were necessary to deter exorbitant increases in school fees, others opined that the three eligibility criteria limited parental choice and subjected KGs to more regulatory control rather than promoting competition in a real market environment. There was also a view that the conversion of private independent KGs into non-profit-making operations, so as to be eligible to join the PEVS, had reduced the diversity of services and parental choice.

4.15 Some expressed concern that the fee caps had created difficulties for some KGs charging tuition fees at the threshold levels. The difficulties were seen to be in their ability to improve teachers' remuneration and in planning for school improvement, since exceeding the cap would render these KGs ineligible for the PEVS. While there was concern about the increase in tuition fees if the fee thresholds were to be removed, there was a view that the vetting of tuition fee increase by EDB should be relaxed.

WG's deliberation

4.16 The WG notes that education voucher programmes take many forms in actual implementation. The typical objective of education vouchers is to improve efficiency through increased parental choice, competition among public and private schools and support for low-income families in gaining access to private schools.

4.17 The WG is of the view that the PEVS in Hong Kong has made tremendous progress in terms of making available more KGs for parental choice and extending government subsidy to more KG students.¹⁴ Since the introduction of the PEVS, 114 private independent KGs have converted to non-profit-making status and joined the Scheme. The remaining KGs, not joining the PEVS, are mainly those which offer a non-local curriculum or charge tuition fees above the thresholds. Parents sending their children to KGs with fees above the thresholds are exercising a choice not to take advantage of the voucher subsidies.

4.18 The WG considers that concerns about the eligibility criteria, restricted choice, affordability and reasonable safeguards for government funding to be spent on students have to be carefully balanced. The WG is of the view that the PEVS has maintained wide eligibility, even though choice for parents under the Scheme is not unfettered. Having carefully balanced the consideration of enhancing parental choice of KGs and their affordability for KG education, enabling the voucher subsidies to be invested directly in the students and achieving consistency with EDB's prevailing subvention policy, the WG does not recommend removal of the eligibility criteria. Adjustment of the fee thresholds, however, should be considered. Such adjustment should be designed to encourage KGs to operate cost-effectively and also to maintain wide eligibility and accessibility for parents of a broad range of pre-primary education programmes.

Recommendation 2

The WG recommends that, while keeping the three eligibility criteria for KG admission to the PEVS, the fee thresholds should be subject to an annual review with reference to inflation.

(C) The level of voucher subsidy and fee remission

Support

4.19 The increase of per student subsidy from an average of \$2,300 per annum under the former KCSS to \$10,000 under the PEVS in the

¹⁴ Prior to the PEVS, about 52% of all KGs or 72% of the non-profit-making KGs in Hong Kong participated in EDB's KCSS which provided a subsidy rate of \$2,300 pspa. KGs charging a tuition fee of 1.5 times above the weighted average school fee of half-day classes were not eligible for the KCSS (the fee threshold of whole-day classes is twice the fee threshold of half-day classes). As of the 2009/10 sy, about 84% of KGs and 85% of KG students participated in the PEVS.

2007/08 sy, and progressively to \$16,000 in the 2011/12 sy per annum was welcomed. The majority considered that the restoration of an adjustment mechanism on fee remission ceilings from the 2009/10 sy onward had, to a large extent, addressed the concerns of needy families in making a choice of schools.

Concern

Half-day programme vis-à-vis whole-day programme

4.20 Many commented that setting the rate of voucher subsidy with reference to half-day KG programme was unfair to whole-day KGs and parents in need of whole-day services. Hence, some suggested that children who needed to attend whole-day KGs should receive a higher rate of subsidy under the PEVS than those attending half-day KGs. Some remarked that the Government should provide a school grant to KGs that provide whole-day and year-round services, supporting in particular the working parents in child care and children's development.

Additional financial assistance for needy families

4.21 Some expressed the view that, while the PEVS extended financial support to all children, needy families and their children, in particular new immigrants and minority ethnic groups, were not given additional financial assistance and, thus, were disadvantaged.

Widening the gap

4.22 There was a concern that the Scheme might widen the gap between rich and poor families, as those who enjoyed the greatest benefits from the subsidy might not be the most needy group. Having received fee subsidy on tuition fees, some parents had used the money thus saved to enroll their children in other off-school hour programmes during the rest of the day.

WG's deliberation

4.23 The WG considers that, given the diversity of KG programmes and wide variation in the level of tuition fee, it would be unrealistic to expect the PEVS to cover 100% of the school fee across all KGs. It is of the view that the non means-tested PEVS subsidy, complemented by the fee remission scheme, has taken into consideration wide eligibility on the one hand and focused support for low-income families on the other.

4.24 The WG notes that, taken as a whole, research findings concerning whole-day versus half-day KG programmes appear to be inconclusive on their relative effectiveness. Studies vary in their findings as to significant differences between the respective benefits of whole-day and half-day KGs. The WG also notes that there are many mediating factors through which whole-day KG attendance, as compared to half-day attendance, can influence learning and development outcomes at children's subsequent stages of learning. The length of the school day is only one dimension of the KG experience.

4.25 Noting that family has the primary responsibility in meeting children's development, the WG does not consider it appropriate to mandate whole-day pre-primary education programme. It agrees that the quality of the KG programme is essential, regardless of whole-day or half-day mode of operation. Thus, the WG is of the view that the Government should maintain the diversity of services and flexibility for the service providers to cater for the various needs of parents, and the choice of half-day and whole-day programme should be left to parents.

4.26 Regarding the suggestion of a special grant to whole-day KGs in recognition of their function in child care and development, the WG notes that whole-day KGs in Hong Kong have different operation modes. These range from full year or school term service, 7.5 hours to 10 hours a day, 5 days to 5.5 days a week, and with or without extended hours/occasional hour services. The costs of operating this range of services should have been fully reflected in their existing level of tuition fee, the income from tuition fee comprising the voucher subsidy and the fee remission by government. In other cases, this is augmented by the part to be met by parents in addition to the voucher subsidy. These costs should already reflect the budget these institutions need in order to maintain the service provided. While the WG considers it inappropriate to introduce a school-based grant alongside the PEVS, it recognises that families and children are receiving a range of services being provided by the KG-cum-CCCs with service hours intending to match the working hours of parents and acknowledges the challenges these KG-cum-CCCs readily take up to target support for the needy families. The WG considers that enhanced support for these families that will in turn create

more latitude for the service providers should be pursued.

4.27 To achieve the intended target of providing support to parents to reduce their financial pressure, the value of the voucher should be subject to review. In resource allocation, the Government should accord priority to further improving the financial assistance for families with the most needs.

Recommendation 3

The WG recommends that the value of the voucher should be subject to an annual review with reference to inflation.

Recommendation 4

The WG recommends that while the current Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme should continue to provide additional support to children from needy families attending half-day or whole-day KGs in parallel with the PEVS, the percentage of fee remission should be calculated after first deducting the voucher subsidy. The WG also recommends the removal of social need assessment for needy children whose parents are applying for fee remission for attending whole-day KGs.

Standards and Quality Assurance

(D) The governance structure, Quality Review, transparency requirements and parental involvement

Support

4.28 The objective of internal evaluation, validated by external quality review, to enhance the self-reflective culture and internal accountability of KGs was well supported. Most of the stakeholders agreed that this could facilitate enhancement of the quality of education and school development.

Concern

4.29 However, some considered that linking the outcomes of the QR to eligibility for the PEVS, and the uploading of the QR reports on EDB's website, had imposed immense pressure on KGs and teachers. The KG workforce found it stressful to fulfill the quality standards. Most KGs

complained that they were not given additional resources to support their administrative workload. Some KGs commented that it was difficult to cope with the external review standards, especially when some of these standards run counter to parental expectations. Some commented that KGs were frustrated as they perceived that the standards used in the QR were not consistent among KGs.

4.30 Others suggested that, to enhance the quality assurance mechanism, the QR after the 2011/12 sy should place more emphasis on internal evaluation. On this basis, external reviews would only need to be conducted on a random basis. School-based support should be stepped up after quality review. Performance indicators should also be reviewed to keep abreast of changes. The composition of external school review teams should be expanded to include academics and representatives of the KG sector. There was also a view that the role of EDB in the QR should be phased out in the long-run and replaced by self-evaluation conducted by the sector itself.

4.31 Some considered that parents' preference for the nature of pre-primary education may not be consistent with pedagogically sound practice. Others considered that parents made wise choices and this could be further facilitated by providing parents with easy access to KGs' information and by promoting parent education.

WG's deliberation

Governance and quality assurance

4.32 The WG considers that monitoring and evaluation are necessary parts of good governance to complement active policy steer, policy documents (e.g. curriculum and performance indicators), staff training, school-based support and research on early childhood development. It notes that quality assurance may focus on structure (including KG premises and facilities, staffing, teacher qualifications), process (including quality of teacher-children interaction, and pedagogies) and achievement of curriculum goals.

4.33 In Hong Kong, all KGs under the PEVS are already subject to a regulatory framework governed by the EO (structural standards), the Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum (curriculum requirements) and the QR mechanism (quality assurance procedures).

4.34 It has been a significant achievement of the PEVS to require all KGs to practise self evaluation, complemented by EDB's QR. The WG considers that, with this governance structure in place, it is important for KGs to develop strong capacity through self-evaluation and external review for sustainable development. The challenge ahead, perhaps, is to carefully balance the support and pressure under the QR, and to further empower KGs with enhanced capacity to respond to the demand for quality services. As KGs which have undergone and satisfied the QR would be allowed to join the PEVS after the 2011/12 sy, the QR beyond the 2011/12 sy should focus on empowering schools to deliver quality pre-primary education under a sound governance framework. EDB should also review the QR mechanism periodically with a view to further streamlining the process and forging partnership with KGs in promoting quality pre-primary education.

Under-performing kindergartens

4.35 With respect to those KGs identified through the QR as under-performing, EDB should consider conducting follow-up reviews and incorporating external members in the review team. A mechanism should be put in place to give attention to the consistently under-performing KGs.

Transparency

4.36 The WG considers that transparency of KG operation and uploading of the QR reports to EDB's website would provide parents with information to make an informed choice of schools for their children. Noting KGs' concerns that the QR Reports might not be able to reflect their latest developments, the WG considers that KGs should upload their annual plans and school reports to their websites to provide parents with updated information about the school. Improvement measures can be featured in their annual plans and school reports to show how the KGs responded in those areas requiring improvement. To support parents to have access to KG information, the QR reports should be written in such a way that parents will find them easy to read. EDB should also publish good practices of KGs for dissemination and as part of parent education. The WG also notes the suggestions for the establishment of a Parent Education Fund and provision of professional support to KGs to enhance

partnership with parents.

Parental involvement

4.37 Parents play an important part in quality pre-primary education in partnership with KGs. Although not a direct outcome of the PEVS, there is a continuing need for parent education and this is being addressed positively through various channels and programmes.

4.38 The WG considers that more publicity on child development and parental involvement in supporting the growth of children should be available for parents through seminars and home-school cooperation activities. Social bodies and academic institutions should be encouraged to develop multi-disciplinary training programmes on parent education. The Quality Education Fund might consider setting parent education and parental involvement in pre-primary education as a desirable theme, when inviting proposals for its funding support.

Recommendation 5

Building on the existing governance structure, the WG recommends the continuation of QR, and the following steps to be taken: (i) identify information that would contribute to transparency and dissemination of good practices to the public, especially parents; (ii) involve professionals in the sector to fine-tune the review process so that the QR is improvement-oriented; and (iii) put in place a mechanism to give attention to the under-performing KGs.

Recommendation 6

The WG recommends that parent education should be enhanced to support parents in making informed choices of KGs for their children. EDB should also encourage parental partnership with KGs in promoting the learning and development of children.

Recommendation 7

The WG recommends that local studies and research on the latest development of pre-primary education should be encouraged to inform good practices for future development.

Professional Development

(E) Professional upgrading of kindergarten teachers and principals

Support

4.39 The majority agreed that professional upgrading of KG educators is important for quality pre-primary education. Under the PEVS, KG teachers and principals have benefited from the financial assistance provided for their professional upgrading. Improvement in the professional capacity of the KG sector is evident (see paragraph 3.8).

Concern

Completion of training by 2011/12

4.40 There were strong opinions that the requirements for serving KG teachers to acquire the C(ECE) qualification before the end of the 2011/12 sy had imposed a lot of pressure on KG teachers, as some would not be able to undergo training within the prescribed period for various reasons, including family commitment. Those who had completed the training were frustrated when there was no salary increment awarded upon acquisition of higher qualifications.

4.41 Many expressed grave concern that teachers without C(ECE) would not be allowed to continue their service after the 2011/12 sy. This would happen regardless of their having been trained as QKT and of their being considered by KGs to be experienced and competent.

Bundling Teachers Development Subsidy with voucher

4.42 Many expressed strong views against bundling the voucher with the provision for teachers' professional development, since the disbursement of subsidy on this basis was seen to be unfair to whole-day KGs. This arrangement had created more difficulties for them in retaining and recruiting teachers. Some expressed the view that it was also unfair that teachers and principals of KGs not joining the PEVS were not given the same level of financial support for professional development as those joining the PEVS.

Support for continuous professional development

4.43 Some KG teachers considered that the current training subsidy was too restrictive and had limited their training options. They

requested that the PEVS KGs should be allowed to keep the unspent provision of the Teacher Development Subsidy beyond the 2011/12 sy. Some suggested that a Professional Development Fund should be set up to encourage continuing professional development of KG teachers after the 2011/12 sy.

4.44 There was a view that Government should set out the professional development path for KG teachers and principals beyond the 2011/12 sy and provide the necessary support for achievement of the targets. Training places for early childhood education should be increased and full time Bachelor of Education programme should be expanded. To create space for teachers' professional development and to improve teachers' working conditions, Government should continue to provide subsidies for KGs to employ supply teachers. There was a view that financial support for professional upgrading should be extended to those serving children aged 2 to 3 in the child care centre sections of the KG-cum-CCCs.

Salary scale for KG teachers and principals

4.45 Many expressed the view that the Government's decision to stop issuing a recommended salary scale pursuant to the PEVS had been perceived by KG teachers as giving no recognition and due respect to the teaching force. The stability and morale of the workforce were seen to be negatively affected. Some claimed that the lack of job security had also resulted in higher wastage of teachers which would, in turn, adversely affect the quality of pre-primary education. A salary scale commensurate with teachers' qualifications and experience should be provided by EDB.

Sustainable development

4.46 Some commented that in view of the lack of long term planning, there was a need for the setting up of a formal mechanism to formulate a blueprint for the development of early childhood education, including continuous professional development of teachers, subsidy mode for pre-primary education, governance on the quality of education services, cross-disciplinary collaboration, local research and parent education.

WG's deliberation

Professional qualification requirements

4.47 The professional competence of teachers is an essential element of quality pre-primary education. The WG notes that the KG teaching force has, over the last ten years, made respectable efforts in responding to Government policies on professional upgrading and continuous professional development. As a result, children are benefiting from a better learning environment and a higher quality pre-primary education. The WG, having considered and carefully balanced the various views regarding the requirements for professional upgrading of teachers, EDB's current requirements on minimum teacher to child ratio, system stability and space for more school-level discretion, comes to the following recommendation.

Recommendation 8

The WG recommends that PEVS KGs with sufficient number of teachers holding the C(ECE) qualifications based on the teacher to child ratio of 1:15 may continue to employ teachers with Qualified Kindergarten Teacher qualifications, or a qualification acceptable to the Permanent Secretary for Education, to meet their individual needs. In-service training opportunities should continue to be provided for serving teachers without C(ECE) for professional upgrading in the 2012/13 sy and beyond. In the interim of two years, and under special circumstances, EDB may consider counting those teachers pursuing the C(ECE) qualifications as C(ECE) teachers for the purpose of meeting the 1:15 teacher to child ratio requirement.

4.48 The WG considers that the above arrangements will help smoothen the transition towards the position where all teachers have C(ECE) qualifications in a progressive manner. The arrangements will also allow flexibility for KGs to recruit the manpower they need to deliver the varied range of services they offer and to create space for teachers.

Support for continuous professional development of teachers

4.49 The WG notes that the Teacher Development Subsidy is a one-off arrangement and that the unspent provision should be clawed back by the

Government by the end of the 2011/12 sy. As the disbursement of the Teacher Development Subsidy and its bundling with the voucher was considered to be problematic, EDB should take note of the comments and the concerns of the KG sector in its future planning. In view of the positive impact of professional development on the quality of pre-primary education, EDB should explore the proposal by the KG sector to set up a sustainable Professional Development Fund to meet the development needs of KG teachers and principals and to support school-based initiatives. EDB should also facilitate teachers and principals working in non-PEVS KGs to have adequate access to professional development opportunities.

Recommendation 9

The WG recommends that EDB should continue to provide support for the professional development of KG teachers and principals. The WG also encourages KGs to apply for the support of the Quality Education Fund for school-based initiatives.

Salary of KG teachers

4.50 The request for the Government to provide a salary scale for KG teachers is strong. The WG believes that, since it is the policy intent of the PEVS to promote the development of pre-primary education in the private sector through direct subsidy to parents, it is consistent for the Government to avoid over-regulation and not prescribe the salary scale for KG staff. The WG does not recommend providing direct subsidy for teachers' salary under the PEVS, in order to avoid a dual funding structure. KGs have full discretion in determining teachers' remuneration and have been positively exercising the flexibility in offering competitive pay and awarding increments to teachers. The KG sector may share information and collaborate in making its own arrangements with regard to teachers' salary structure.

Recommendation 10

The WG recommends that an advisory body should be set up to take a professional view on various issues relating to the long-term development and quality of pre-primary education, such as a reference salary scale for teachers and principals and their continuous professional development.

Operation procedures of the PEVS

(F) Further improvement for an enabling environment and client-focused services

Concern

4.51 There were concerns that the PEVS had imposed a heavy workload on KGs and teachers. Many considered that the Government should provide funding for clerical support to alleviate teachers' workload in handling administrative work. A non-contact period for KG teachers should also be provided. Administrative procedures for application of voucher and fee remission should be streamlined and the process of voucher redemption could be simplified to alleviate the workload burden of KGs. In this regard, collaboration among the Joint Office for Pre-primary Services, school support services and inspection teams should be enhanced so as to provide comprehensive support to KGs.

4.52 The sector indicated grave concern about the suggestion to subsume rents, rates and government rents into the voucher. They worried that it would, in turn, reduce the amount of existing subsidies available for school operation. There were views that school-based subsidy should continue to be given to KGs for upgrading of equipment and facilities.

4.53 Some commented that the requirement for families receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) to apply to the Student Financial Assistance Agency (SFAA) for the voucher and SWD for the top-up fee subsidy was not user-friendly.

WG's deliberation

4.54 The WG notes that KGs have the discretion to justify their manpower needs and budget for the related expenditures in their fee revision proposals. The WG recognises that good governance, facilities of KG premises, professional qualifications of staff and parental involvement, among others, are the enabling conditions for quality pre-primary education. It also notes that EDB has responded to

concerns about workload by simplifying the PEVS operational procedures for KGs and parents. The WG considers that EDB may further explore opportunities to create space for KGs and teachers by re-visiting the current voucher payment schedule. The WG also considers that electronic means for collecting student attendance information in the redemption process could be adopted to streamline the workflow and that the SFAA should further explore simplification of the fee remission application procedures for its clientele.

4.55 Noting the wide variation of expenditure on rents, rates and government rents among KGs located in different types of accommodation in different geographical areas, the WG considers that the administrative complications outweigh the advantage of subsuming these elements in the PEVS. Therefore, the reimbursement scheme should continue to operate in accordance with the prevailing policy which should be reviewed from time to time.

4.56 The WG also notes that EDB, in consultation with SWD, had explored the feasibility of unifying the mechanism of providing financial assistance for pre-primary education in 2007 by making referral of the CSSA families with such a need to the SFAA. After a trial run, and having considered the feedback from KGs and operational experiences, the current arrangements of requiring all parents, including those from the CSSA families, to apply for the voucher, are adopted. Under this arrangement, the CSSA families will receive additional financial assistance for KG fees through SWD, starting from the 2009/10 sy.

Recommendation 11

The WG recommends that the schedule for disbursing voucher subsidy to KGs should be revised to follow the tuition fee payment schedule of KGs so as to reduce their difficulties in handling administrative and accounting work.

Recommendation 12

The WG recommends that the existing policy and arrangements for rents, rates and government rent reimbursement for KGs should continue rather than subsuming these elements under the voucher subsidy.

A summary of recommendations made by the WG is at **Annex 8**.

4.57 Parental choice and accessibility to quality and appropriate pre-primary education by children, together with targeted support for those from needy families, is one of the main themes raised by the stakeholders during the consultation. To further build on the strength of the governance structure of pre-primary education, more attention should be given to empowering KG teachers and principals to enhancing the capacity of KGs and the system as a whole in the delivery of quality services.

4.58 Forging partnership with the stakeholders and staging strategic implementation would provide space for the sector and the system to address the various challenges. These include improving quality, professional upgrading of teachers, affordability and accessibility to appropriate pre-primary education services and further enhancing the governance structure.

* * * * *

Chapter 5 Conclusion

5.1 The WG was set up with the terms of reference to gauge the views of stakeholders on the implementation of the PEVS; and to make recommendations to the Government on its improvement. With this remit, it set out to take a holistic view of early childhood education to inform its review and deliberations.

5.2 The WG is pleased to note that the development of pre-primary education in Hong Kong has kept pace with the international trend, with suitable adaptation to attend to the needs of the local context. Through the concerted efforts of the KG sector, impressive achievements have been made in particular over the last ten years to add diversity and vibrancy to the pre-primary education system. The PEVS introduced since the 2007/08 sy has capitalised on existing strengths to add impetus for continuous improvement by enhancing parental choice and the professional capacity of KGs and teachers to better respond to the demand for high quality services.

5.3 Significant improvement has been made since the introduction of the PEVS in promoting wide eligibility for Government subsidy on kindergarten education, enhancing the professional qualifications of kindergarten teachers and principals, as well as accountability for the quality of education through a quality assurance mechanism and enhanced transparency of KG operation. The PEVS, operating within existing policies, has enhanced affordability and parental choice, while maintaining flexibility for kindergartens.

5.4 While this report has examined key aspects of the PEVS such as whether it is a feasible funding mode, the extent to which it has been directed towards achieving its designated objectives, and what the major problems of the Scheme have been, it is forward looking in its recommendations.

5.5 Immediately beyond the 2011/12 sy, the recommendations for an annual review of voucher values and enhancement of the fee remission scheme will further improve parents' affordability for and accessibility to

kindergarten education, with enhanced and targeted support to the needy families. The recommendation for an improvement-oriented quality assurance mechanism, supported by smoothened transition towards professional upgrading and continuous professional development of teachers, will empower teachers in the delivery of kindergarten education programmes embodying a developmentally appropriate pedagogy. The annual review of the fee thresholds and streamlined administrative arrangements for the PEVS will further strengthen KGs' capacity to provide quality education in partnership with parents and other stakeholders. Developments along this trajectory are conducive to the maintenance and development of the vision of a diversified and vibrant pre-primary education system that stakeholders share.

5.6 Other issues emerged during the focus group meetings as reported in Chapter 4 are no less pivotal to future discussion on pre-primary education. However, the WG in synthesising issues with a view to charting the way forward considers it essential to ensure that improvement options are not only practical and realistic but should at the same time be appropriate to the conditions of the local context at the current stage of development. The WG fully acknowledges the aspirations and concerns of the stakeholders but considers that improvement options should capitalise on existing strengths and should not lead to new problems in the light of the existing system capacity. While recommending improvement for the operation of the PEVS, the WG highlights in tandem the needs to draw on local evidence-based research findings to inform future development that will attend to the demands of the local context.

5.7 Conversion of the private sector KGs into the subvention sector, among others, is advocated by some stakeholders. The WG considers that its impact on the current ecosystem of pre-primary education and the readiness of the system for such changes should be carefully considered. Hence, the WG recommends that further review of early childhood education be undertaken in response to developments in the macro environment at an opportune time.

5.8 The WG recognises the constraints under which some of the KG-cum-CCCs are operating to provide a continuum of services ranging

from education, child care to family support. There is a need for more thorough discussion for provision of more holistic and integrated services that support children learning and development. An advisory body to follow up on various issues relating to the long-term development and quality enhancement of early childhood education, such as a reference salary scale for teachers and principals and their continuous professional development is thus recommended.

5.9 The WG is confident that the 12 realistic and forward-looking recommendations in this report collectively will move the system positively forward, while recognising that many issues put forward to it by the stakeholders cannot be fully addressed within the scope of this review.

5.10 Last but not least, the WG wishes to express once again its gratitude to the openness of the key stakeholders in sharing their views and concerns throughout the review process. Notwithstanding the different perspectives on certain issues, we stand together in our common quest for quality pre-primary education for the children in Hong Kong.

* * * * *

Membership of the Working Group
on Review of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme

Chairman	Professor Edmond KO Inq-ming, BBS, JP
Members	Professor LEE Wing-on, MH
	Miss Gloria LEUNG Chi-kin
	Ms Shirley Marie Therese LOO, MH, JP
	Professor WONG Po-choi, MH
	Mr TANG Kwai-tai (until 31 December 2009)
	Mr Langton CHEUNG Yung-pong (from 1 January 2010)
Secretary	Principal Assistant Secretary for Education (Quality Assurance) Education Bureau Mr Tony TANG

* * * * *

References

1. Bennett, John and Tayler, Collette P. (2006). *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care*. OECD, Paris.
2. Elliott, Alison (2006). *Early Childhood Education—Pathways to quality and equity for all children*. ACER Press: Australian Council for Educational Research.
3. Fung, C. K. H. (2009). The complexities in promoting play-based kindergarten curriculum in Hong Kong: One teacher's story. *Canadian Children*, 34(2), 16-24.
4. Fung, C. K. H., & Lam, C. C. (2009). The Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme of Hong Kong: A promise of quality education provision? *Education Journal*, 36(1-2), 153-170.
5. Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum, (Curriculum Development Council, 2006)
6. Harmonisation of Pre-primary Service – Consultation Document (Education Department & Social Welfare Department, 2002).
7. Li, H., et al. Affordability, accessibility, and accountability: Perceived impacts of the Pre-primary Education Vouchers in Hong Kong, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* (2009), doi : 10.1016/j.ecresq.2009.09.004.
8. New, Rebecca S. & Cochran, Moncrieff (2006). *Early childhood education (volumes 4): an international encyclopedia*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers.
9. “Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong – Education Blueprint for the 21st Century”, (Education Commission, 2000).
10. Spodek, Bernard & Saracho, Olivia N. (2005). *International perspectives on research in early childhood education*. Greenwich: Information Age Publishing.
11. The 1981 White Paper on Pre-school Services and Primary Education, Hong Kong Education Department.
12. The Work of Early Childhood Teachers After the Implementation of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme, *Education Planning Digest*, November 2010, Issue 2.
13. UNESCO International Bureau of Education (2006). *Country profile prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2007 Strong Foundations: Early Childhood Care and Education: Singapore Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes*. Author: Geneva.
14. 馮潔皓、林智中(2008)。《香港幼稚園老師的課程決策:專業自主與市場導向》。文章發表於「課程決策:第十屆兩岸三地課程理論研討會」, 香港。

* * * * *

List of Activities of the Working Group

Meetings with key stakeholders (no. of participants)

- 15 Dec 2009 Teacher Education Institutions (7)
- 18 Jan 2010 School Sponsoring Bodies (20)
- 18 Jan 2010 Parent representatives (6)
- 25 Jan 2010 KG Principals (16)
- 25 Jan 2010 KG Teachers (13)
- 3 Mar 2010 Education Bureau staff (6)
- 19 Apr 2010 Council of Non-profit Making Organisations for
Pre-primary Education (22)
- 6 Jul 2010 Kindergarten Education Consultation Committee (12)
- 27 Oct 2010 Second round consultation session (95)

School visits

- Visits to four schools, including a private independent non-PEVS KG, a NPM PEVS KG, a NPM PEVS KG-cum-CCC and a private independent KG joining the PEVS under the transitional arrangement were arranged in March and April, 2010

Invitations for submissions

- 39 written submissions received
 - Teacher Education Institutions 8
 - School Sponsoring Bodies 3
 - Parent 1
 - KG Principals 2
 - KG Teachers 2
 - Early Childhood Education Bodies 23

* * * * *

Summary of Consultation Questions

1. Principles

- What is the long-term vision of having a quality ECE sector in Hong Kong?
- In what ways do existing policies (Education Commission report of 2000) and principles (accessibility, affordability, and accountability) contribute towards realising this vision?

2. Funding

- Should the Government subvent the ECE sector? What are the pros and cons of doing so?
- If the answer is no, then is the PEVS the way to move forward? What are the key improvements that would make it better?
- What are the problems that need to be addressed irrespective of the funding mode? In what ways has the introduction of the PEVS made these problems better or worse?

3. Whole-day vs. half-day

- What does research tell us about the educational effectiveness of whole-day vs. half-day ECE?
- Are provisions to the two really unfair? Unfair in what sense, perceived by whom? What would a “fair” system look like? What are the resource implications in fine-tuning the existing PEVS in order to address this issue?

4. Professional development of teachers and principals

- What are the key developmental needs and how best to provide for them?
- What are the pros and cons in making the deadline for professional upgrading more flexible? If it would be desirable to change, how?

5. Quality review

- What does the current process look like and in what ways could it be improved?

- How to balance public accountability and developmental feedback?

6. Parent education

- What types of information would be most useful to parents and how best to provide them?
- What are the educational needs of parents and how best to provide them?

7. Salary scale

- What are the major perceived problems in not having a salary scale?
- What are potential alternatives? Could the Government conduct an annual salary survey and publish the data?

8. Workload

- What administrative processes that principals, teachers, and parents have to go through now that are burdensome and can be streamlined?

9. Needy families

- Why do the needy families perceive themselves to be worse off under the PEVS?

* * * * *

Early Childhood Education Systems of the Western Countries

	Australia	Finland	Italy	Sweden	UK	USA
Major auspices	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations	Ministry of Social Affair and Health Ministry of Education has responsibility for pre-school education for 6 years old	The Ministry of Education for the 3-6 years old Regions and municipalities for the 3 month – 3 years old,	Ministry of Education and Science	Department for Children, Schools and Families	Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Education
Age for compulsory education	Age 6	Age 7	Age 6	Age 7	Age 5	Age 6
Major types of children services prior to compulsory education	➢ Family day care, long-day child care centres, pre-schools or kindergartens (3 to 6 hrs daily). ➢ A one-year public kindergarten services are generally for the 5 years old prior to compulsory education.	➢ Family day care homes and Day-care centres open full-day and all year round. . ➢ Pre-school classes for the 6-7 years old are half-day, and are wrapped around by day care.	➢ Kindergartens for the 3 to 6 years old, with flexible timetable and in most cases 8 hours a day. ➢ Integrated services, such as play areas, centres for children and in-home services that supplement Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).	➢ Pre-school offers full time care for children aged 1 to 6, with daily hours adjusted to meet the need of working parents.	➢ Private Childcare centres for the 0-3 years by local Social Service Department ➢ State maintained nursery schools provide educational programme for the 3-4 years, flexibly delivered in half-day or full-day block.	➢ A wide range of half-day and full-day programmes for children aged 0-6. ➢ One-year publicly funded kindergarten programme (mainly for 5 years old) and Head Start programmes for the low-income families (mainly for 3-4 years old).
Funding	➢ Financial support available to parents through Child Care Benefit. ➢ Government financial support for the year prior to Year One of primary school.	➢ Subsidised by state and local authority tax. ➢ Parent contributions required. No fee is charged for low-income families.	➢ Attendance at state and municipal kindergartens is free, except for meal. ➢ Private providers may charge higher fee but many are non-profit.	➢ Most pre-school provision is provided by municipalities in day care centres. ➢ Parental fee required but will be waived for families in economic difficulties.	➢ Public subsidy at provider (start-up costs) and user levels (tax credits). ➢ Fees largely are set by the market. To improve equity of access, a proposal has been made to cap charges in services in receipt of public funding.	➢ Private market-based services provide the greatest part of child care and education. In recent times, States increasingly take a leadership role in pre-kindergarten and intervention programmes for children at risk.
Teacher training (requirements)	➢ Long day care centres (55% trained) can have a mix of trained (often two-year vocational) and untrained staff. ➢ Teachers of school-linked pre-schools are fully trained. Required qualification is an education degree.	➢ Kindergarten teacher will complete a Bachelor degree in ECE. ➢ Present policy seeks to maintain multi-professional, team-working in centres, with staff playing different professional tasks and roles.	➢ Moving towards a university degree for child care centre co-ordinator, and other staff with a 3-year tertiary diploma. ➢ Teachers of kindergartens will have in the future a university degree.	➢ Centre director must have a university teaching or pedagogue qualification. ➢ Most child assistants have completed a post-secondary professional diploma of three years.	➢ Teachers of state-funded nursery schools should be trained and reception classes teachers should have a bachelor's degree. ➢ Child minders should complete a Local Authority approved pre-registration course.	➢ Varies from state to state, and no national system to set the qualifications of early childhood workers. ➢ With requirement more stringent in the public school settings than in non-public settings.

	Australia	Finland	Italy	Sweden	UK	USA
Monitoring and Evaluation	➤ Inspection normally every 2-5 years under the National Quality Assurance system	➤ A Project on Quality and Steering in ECEC aims at strengthening local, regional and national systems of steering and assessment.	➤ Kindergartens enjoy a high degree of autonomy in pedagogical approach.	➤ Annual review by the National Agency of Education.	➤ Inspection by Inspectors of Ofsted and moving towards a common inspection frequency of a 3-year cycle.	➤ National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), National Early Childhood Programme Accreditation (NECPA) and National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) develop voluntary guidelines. ➤ The federal government sets challenging operating standards for Head Start.
Recent development	➤ To implement a teacher to staff ratio of 1:11 for the 3-6 years old in 2016. ➤ By 2014, 50% of staff needs to have a diploma in ECE and the remaining staff a Certificate III in ECE. ➤ A national rating system is introduced. All services will need to display their approval and rating information. Ratings are also available on the internet.	➤ ECEC in Finland is well established and stable. Universal access to day care services has been a subjective right since 1990.	➤ There are more diversifications of ECEC providers catering for the 3-6 years olds, with the growing development of private services.	➤ Sweden is consolidating the transfer of ECEC into the sphere of education, and the system has significantly expanded and reformed.	➤ The UK Government established a 10-Year Strategy for Child Care since 2004 to reinforce policy co-ordination, expansion of access, staff recruitment, training, quality assurance and inspection, work-family support and funding in early childhood services.	➤ ECEC is developing rapidly, with increased States investment, a move towards higher enrolment of 4-5 years in public programmes, improving programme quality and consolidating governance structure.

References:

1. Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care, 2006, OECD.
2. National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Care, December 2009, Council of Australian Governments.

* * * * *

Early Childhood Education Systems in Asia

	China	Japan	Korea	Hong Kong	Singapore	Taiwan
Major auspices	Ministry of Education	Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology	Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, and Ministry of Gender Equality and Family	Education Bureau	Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS)	Ministry of Education Ministry of Social Welfare
Age for compulsory education	Age 6	Age 6	Age 6	Age 6	Age 6	Age 6
Major types of children services prior to compulsory education	➢ Kindergartens (幼稚園) and child care centres (託児所) provide education and care services.	➢ Children may attend either kindergartens (3-5 years old) for four hours a day or day-care centers (hoikuen 保育園) for children from 0-5 years old for more than 8 hours a day.	➢ Kindergartens for the 3-6 year olds are operated traditionally on a half-day basis. Full-day or extended services are provided in some kindergartens.	➢ Kindergarten for the 3-6 year olds and Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centre for the children below 6.	➢ Kindergartens function daily, five days a week, with schooling hours ranging from 3 hours to 4 hours each day. Most kindergartens function at least two sessions a day.	➢ Kindergartens for children reaching 4 to 6 years old under the administration of the education authority. There are both publicly-run and privately-run kindergartens.
Funding	➢ Kindergartens are run by provincial and local governments, communities and individual bodies. ➢ Tuition fees vary in different provinces.	➢ Kindergarten education is fee charging. Government may subsidise private KGs. ➢ Financial assistance to parents is available.	➢ Parents may claim taxation deductions for KG child care fees. ➢ Fee support is given to families under assessment criteria such as monthly income, number of members, total assets.	➢ Direct fee subsidy to parents through the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS). ➢ Additional fee remissions to the needy families.	➢ A recurrent grant to kindergartens based on the number of trained teachers a KG employs. ➢ Financial assistance is given to needy families which meet a means test.	➢ Subvention to 5 years old pre-school children prior to admission to primary education. ➢ Amount of subsidies to each family varies and depends on financial income and number of children of the family.
Teacher training (requirements)	➢ Kindergarten principals should graduate from ECE institutions or with qualification above, having sufficient ECE working experience and a certificate in principalship. ➢ Kindergarten teachers' qualifications are prescribed under Teacher Qualifications Regulation.	➢ Kindergarten teachers are required to possess a certificate for kindergarten.	➢ In public kindergartens, 66% of teachers hold a university degree. In private kindergartens, 88% hold a 2-year diploma.	➢ Teachers of PEVS KGs should have a Qualified Kindergarten Teacher qualification and Principals should have a Certificate in Early Children Education. ➢ Newly appointed principals starting from the 2009/10 school year should have a BEd(ECE) and a principal certificate.	➢ Since 2008, all pre-school teachers are to be trained to at least the Certificate in Pre-school Training level, and 1 in 4 teachers are to be trained to the Diploma in Pre-school Education Teaching Level.	➢ A teacher certificate issued by the Ministry of Education.

	China	Japan	Korea	Hong Kong	Singapore	Taiwan
Monitoring and Evaluation	➢ A quality framework is set by central government, with programme regulation and curriculum guidelines for quality delivery of ECE.	➢ KGs have to conduct self-evaluation and third party evaluation involving stakeholder according to guidelines from MEXT.	➢ No system level evaluation of the quality of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programme.	➢ KGs' self-evaluation, complemented by Quality Review conducted by Education Bureau	➢ A voluntary quality assurance and accreditation framework for pre-schools will be introduced from 2011.	➢ Regular inspection every 3-6 years on the operation standards of ECEC providers.
Recent development	➢ The 10-year Education Reform and Development Planning Brief, among other things, outlines that - ○ by 2020 pre-school education will be universally available for all children for one year; generally available for two years in some places, and for three years in places with sufficient conditions; ○ focused development of pre-school education in rural areas and in poor areas; and ○ enhance qualifications of kindergarten teachers through professional development.	➢ MEXT will further endeavour to strengthen and expand educational functions of kindergartens etc., restore and improve educational functions of homes and local communities, and strengthen the foundations supporting pre-school education.	➢ Kindergartens and child care centres are governed by two different Acts. ➢ Since 1997, there had been pressure on rapid expansion of ECEC, and licensing has become a simple process of reporting rather than registration.	➢ PEVS provides financial support for professional upgrading by KG principals and teachers. ➢ All KGs are required to put in place a school self evaluation mechanism.	➢ From January 2009, MOE will raise the minimum academic qualifications of pre-school teachers.	➢ Taiwan is working towards integration between education and care services for children below the age of compulsory education. ➢ New evaluation measures upon reform of inspection system is promulgated in Autumn 2010 ➢ national-wide. New inspection system will be divided into two phases: basic evaluation each year and advanced evaluation every 2-3 years. All inspection results will be published and reported to public.

References:

1. 中華人民共和國規劃綱要工作小組辦公室《國家中長期教育改革與發展規劃綱要（2010—2020年）》2010年2月23日。
2. Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers – Japan Country Background Report, 2005, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan.
3. Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers – Final Report: Teachers Matter, 2005, OECD.
4. Fact Sheet – Current Provision and Organization of Services for Early Years Care and Education for Young Children in Japan, 2009, The Japanese National Committee of OMEP.
5. Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care, 2006, OECD.
6. Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Republic of Korea, 2004, OECD.
7. Pre-school Education, Website of Ministry of Education, 2010, Singapore.
8. Pei-jung Lin, Policy and Practices to Raise the Quality of Early Childhood Education a.d Care in Taiwan, Presentation at OECD 2010 Conference.

* * * * *

Summary of Views Collated by the Working Group

A. Views of Teacher Education Institutes

1. Resources allocation

- (a) The PEVS was well-received as it had injected new resources to the pre-primary education sector.
- (b) It was praiseworthy that the Government provided KGs with a one-off grant to upgrade teaching facilities, and financial assistance for teachers' and principals' professional upgrading. Some fundamental issues however needed to be revisited, including whether the PEVS was the most desirable subsidy mode.
- (c) Under the PEVS, major part of the additional funding was to support parents in paying school fees, which was more of a reallocation of wealth than enhancing the development of quality ECE. Parental choice might not conform to the educational principles on quality ECE.
- (d) Promoting quality pre-primary education through the PEVS was not a good match when the consumers were not fully informed. Full subvention of pre-primary education would be an alternative.
- (e) Some considered that in view of the diversity of the sector, full subvention on pre-primary education was not desirable at the moment but might be considered, say 10 to 20 years after the implementation of the PEVS, taking into account the sector's development by then.

2. Governance for better system capacity

- (a) A key for further improvement to pre-primary education in Hong Kong would be a sound governance structure. Linking eligibility for the PEVS to the QR standards was an issue to be tackled. The KG sector seemed to be caught between the Government standards (i.e. QR requirements) and the market (i.e. parental choice). The latter would render it difficult for KGs to practise what they believed to be professionally sound. Parents were assumed to be wise consumers in their choice of KGs, but they

were also pragmatic in getting into prestigious primary schools. This might have led to instability and pressure in the system for service providers and teachers.

- (b) The tension between parents and KGs, between the high-stake QR and workload/pressure on KGs were difficult issues. To KGs and teachers, QR, professional upgrading, workload arising from the PEVS and the new curriculum guides coming at the same time were too fast and too much.
 - (c) Not only should KGs' and teachers' readiness for the QR be enhanced, the Government should ensure sufficient capacity for providing support for quality improvement, including EDB's professional capacity to cope with the demand.
3. Pre-primary Education
- (a) Some suggested that quality whole-day pre-primary education programmes were found to be effective and helpful for children's long-term growth and development.
4. Development of Pre-primary Education
- (a) In view that many parents in Hong Kong usually work for long hours, whole-day programmes would be a more favourable choice of parents. Together with decreasing birth rates, whole-day programmes should be encouraged to replace half-day programmes to stabilise the development of the KG sector.

B. Views of School Sponsoring Bodies

1. Development of Pre-primary Education
- (a) Recognised that the Government had injected a lot of resources to the sector through the PEVS. Teacher Development Subsidy for professional upgrading was conducive to quality pre-primary education.
 - (b) It was considered that the PEVS was not the most appropriate mechanism for funding pre-primary education. Children aged 3 to 6 should be provided with free education as part of 15-year basic education. The Government should fully subvent pre-primary education.

- (c) Some expressed worries that in order to meet parents' expectations, some KGs might have to adopt practices which were not pedagogically sound.
- (d) Upon the implementation of the PEVS, KGs' position had been undermined and they became passive when parental choice became KGs' source of financial income. This was not conducive to quality pre-primary education.
- (e) Subsidies should not follow individual children. The Government should provide school-based subsidies to KGs for their operation.
- (f) Rents, rates and government rents should not be subsumed under the voucher. All KGs should receive subvention irrespective of whether they were operating in private premises or housing estates.

2. Whole-day KGs

- (a) Voucher subsidy on the basis of half-day KG programmes was considered unfair to whole-day KGs. KGs were over-burdened with administrative and publicity workload in order to attract more students.
- (b) Teacher Development Subsidy based on enrolment was biased towards half-day KGs and thus inequitable. This had created difficulties for whole-day KGs in retaining staff.
- (c) Teachers of WD KGs worked longer hours and with heavier workload as compared to those working in half-day KGs. But they received less training subsidies. Many of them preferred to work as supply teacher or to leave the sector.
- (d) Government should provide additional school-based grant to WD KGs as they offer longer service hours, year-round services, extended hours services etc. to support working parents and needy families.
- (e) Subsidies should be provided directly to whole-day KGs to ensure the provision of a safety net for needy families.

3. Professional development
 - (a) The deadline for professional upgrading of teachers to C(ECE) qualifications should be extended.
 - (b) Teacher Development Subsidy should be provided on a recurrent basis since professional training should be continuous.
4. Administrative procedures
 - (a) Needy parents having children studying in eligible KGs should be allowed to submit just one application for voucher and fee remission subsidies.
5. Quality Review
 - (a) The QR promoted self-evaluation culture and enhanced professional development of KGs.
 - (b) Uploading of the QR report and linking the QR to eligibility for the PEVS had imposed immense pressure on KGs and teachers.
 - (c) The QR should aim at supporting KGs to make improvement and follow-up actions on the under-performed KGs should be stepped up.
6. Parent education
 - (a) Parents over-emphasised reading, writing and numeracy and KGs tended to deviate from sound pedagogical practices to suit parents' expectations.
 - (b) Parent education on children development should be strengthened.
7. Salary scale
 - (a) Government should restore a salary scale commensurate with teachers' qualifications and experience for reference by the sector.
8. Workload and pressure
 - (a) Other than teaching and professional upgrading, KG teachers were facing immense administrative workload generated from the PEVS. Administrative procedures on the PEVS should be streamlined. Computer system should be developed for KGs so as to reduce the workload of KGs and teachers.

- (b) Although part of the Teacher Development Subsidy could be used for recruiting supply teacher to alleviate workload of existing KG teachers, the amount of subsidies received by whole-day KGs was far less than that of half-day KGs with same student enrolment.
9. Needy families
- (a) Upon implementation of the PEVS, low-income families received fewer subsidies than before. Application procedures of the PEVS and fee remission were complicated.
 - (b) Fee threshold had limited the choice for these families.

C. Views of KG teachers and principals

1. Development of Pre-primary Education
- (a) The PEVS had given additional resources to the sector. It helped improve manpower as well as school facilities.
 - (b) The Government should have long-term policy for pre-primary education and promote diversity.
 - (c) Direct subsidies to the sector instead.
 - (d) Pre-primary education should be part of basic education. The scope of the PEVS should include children down to age 2.
 - (e) Parents' choices had been limited as some KGs were not eligible to join the PEVS. All KGs should be included in the PEVS.
2. Whole-day KGs
- (a) Voucher value on a half-day basis was unfair to whole-day KGs which provide educare, long-hour services, extended hours services etc. Additional subsidies should be given to these KGs.
 - (b) Teachers working in these KGs were susceptible to high dropout rate due to long working hours.
 - (c) Some proposed that the subsidies for children attending whole-day KGs should be doubled.

3. Professional development
 - (a) Teacher Development Subsidy should not be time limited but should be recurrent.
 - (b) The 5-year training deadline had imposed pressure on KG professions. The deadline should be extended.
 - (c) A Professional Development Fund should be set up for sustainable enhancement of the KG professions.
 - (d) Some experienced and qualified kindergarten teachers did not wish to upgrade their qualification to C(ECE) for various reasons. The Government should allow them to stay in the sector beyond the 2011/12 school year.
 - (e) All KG teachers, irrespective of whether from the PEVS KGs or not, should enjoy same amount of training subsidies.
4. Quality review
 - (a) The QR had been the source of pressure on kindergartens and teachers.
 - (b) EDB should provide post-QR support to KGs.
 - (c) Some KGs were frustrated as they perceived that the standards used in the QR were not uniform among KGs.
5. Salary scale
 - (a) The abolition of salary scale had adversely affected the morale of KG teachers. Teachers expressed that they were not respected as salary increments were not awarded to them upon acquisition of higher qualifications.
 - (b) A salary scale commensurate with teachers' qualifications and experience should be reinstated as recognition of KG profession for enhancement of stability and quality of the sector.
6. Workload and Pressure
 - (a) The PEVS had imposed a lot of administrative workload on KGs and teachers.
 - (b) The Government should state clearly the duties of supply teachers

so that they could relieve the workload of teachers undergoing training.

- (c) The Government should provide funding for clerical support to alleviate teacher's workload in handling administrative work.

7. Needy families

- (a) Fee thresholds had limited parental choices and the thresholds should be adjusted annually.
- (b) Upon implementation of the PEVS, low-income families received fewer subsidies than before. Application procedures of the PEVS and fee remission were complicated and had to be streamlined.

D. Views of Parents

1. Support on Parents

- (a) The PEVS as a subsidy to parents had reduced their financial burden.
- (b) The Government should provide full subsidy to pre-primary education commencing from children aged 2.
- (c) Parents had difficulty in retrieving information of KGs when making choice for their children. The Government could organise district-based exhibitions to facilitate their access to information.

2. Whole-day KGs

- (a) The fact that parents with children studying in whole-day KGs received same amount of subsidies as those in half-day KGs was unfair as whole-day KGs were more expensive.
- (b) Whole-day KGs offering longer service hours and other services, e.g. extended hours service, had been very supportive for single-parent families and for families with parents both working. The Government should provide additional subsidies to whole-day KGs and to parents with children studying in these KGs.

3. Professional development

- (a) Parents appreciated the pressure faced by the sector and did not object to extending the deadline for professional upgrading.

4. Needy families
 - (a) Low-income families did not receive additional support under the PEVS and their expenditure on tuition fee had increased instead due to fee rise. They also found the application procedure for the PEVS subsidy and fee remission complicated.

E. Views of Other Stakeholders

1. Development of PEVS
 - (a) The Government should provide a clear blueprint of the PEVS beyond the 2011/12 sy so that KGs could devise short-term and long-term plans on school development.
 - (b) The Government should fully subvent pre-primary education and offer 15-year free education to children.
 - (c) Whole-day programmes and half-day programmes served the needs of different parents. There was no point in arguing whether whole-day programmes were preferable to half-day programmes.
 - (d) The voucher, which was valid for three years, should be allowed to extend for an additional year to cater for children with special education needs.
2. Professional development
 - (a) KG teachers should be upgraded to degree qualifications in the long-run.
 - (b) A Professional Development Fund should be established for sustainable enhancement of KG teachers and also serve as resources for support of research projects on local pre-primary education. Unspent provision of Teacher Development Subsidy should be transferred to an independent fund for professional development of KG teachers beyond the 2011/12 school year.
 - (c) The Government should continue to provide subsidies for KGs to employ supply teachers so as to stabilise the KG workforce.
3. School-based Subsidy
 - (a) School-based subsidy should continue to be given to KGs for

upgrading of equipment and facilities.

- (b) Government should provide school-based grant to WD KG equivalent to 15% of their yearly operation cost as they offer longer service hours, year-round services, extended hours services etc. to support working parents and needy families.

4. Parent education

- (a) Parent education, as a perennial problem, was not generated from the PEVS and it had to be strengthened. The Government should promote parent education to help parents make informed and quality choices of kindergartens for their children.
- (b) ECE institutions should be provided with additional subsidy for recruiting teachers specifically responsible for parent education and family support service.

5. Quality Review

- (a) School-based support should be stepped up after the Quality Review.
- (b) KGs should be encouraged to continue the good culture of internal evaluation and external review.
- (c) The composition of external review team should be expanded to include the academic profession and representatives of the sector.

6. Whole-day KGs

- (a) The voucher value for half-day vs whole-day KGs should be in the proportion of 1:1.65 with reference to the fee thresholds set out for half-day and whole-day KGs.

7. Salary Scale

- (a) With enhancement of qualifications of KG teachers and principals, the KG sector should adopt the salary scale used in aided primary and secondary schools.
- (b) A salary scale should be set up with mutual agreement of the Government, the sector and the parents.

8. Others

- (a) An advisory body should be set up to advise the Government on issues related to pre-primary education for its quality development.
- (b) The criteria for increase of tuition fee should be relaxed and KGs be allowed to retain proceeds as school reserve for maintenance and development use.
- (c) Collaboration among JOPS, school support services and inspection teams should be enhanced so as to provide comprehensive support to KGs.

* * * * *

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The WG considers the PEVS to be an appropriate mechanism for funding pre-primary education as it can attend to the characteristics of the local context and, hence, recommends its continuation beyond the 2011/12 sy, subject to periodic review. A further review of early childhood education in response to developments in the macro environment should be conducted at an opportune time.

Recommendation 2

The WG recommends that, while keeping the three eligibility criteria for KG admission to the PEVS, the fee thresholds should be subject to an annual review with reference to inflation.

Recommendation 3

The WG recommends that the value of the voucher should be subject to an annual review with reference to inflation.

Recommendation 4

The WG recommends that while the current Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme should continue to provide additional support to children from needy families attending half-day or whole-day KGs in parallel with the PEVS, the percentage of fee remission should be calculated after first deducting the voucher subsidy. The WG also recommends the removal of social need assessment for needy children whose parents are applying for fee remission for attending whole-day KGs.

Recommendation 5

Building on the existing governance structure, the WG recommends the continuation of QR, and the following steps to be taken: (i) identify information that would contribute to transparency and dissemination of good practices to the public, especially parents; (ii) involve professionals in the sector to fine-tune the review process so that the QR is improvement-oriented; and (iii) put in place a mechanism to give attention to the under-performing KGs.

Recommendation 6

The WG recommends that parent education should be enhanced to support parents in making informed choices of KGs for their children. EDB should also encourage parental partnership with KGs in promoting the learning and development of children.

Recommendation 7

The WG recommends that local studies and research on the latest development of pre-primary education should be encouraged to inform good practices for future development.

Recommendation 8

The WG recommends that PEVS KGs with sufficient number of teachers holding the C(ECE) qualifications based on the teacher to child ratio of 1:15 may continue to employ teachers with Qualified Kindergarten Teacher qualifications, or a qualification acceptable to the Permanent Secretary for Education, to meet their individual needs. In-service training opportunities should continue to be provided for serving teachers without C(ECE) for professional upgrading in the 2012/13 sy and beyond. In the interim of two years, and under special circumstances, EDB may consider counting those teachers pursuing the C(ECE) qualifications as C(ECE) teachers for the purpose of meeting the 1:15 teacher to child ratio requirement.

Recommendation 9

The WG recommends that EDB should continue to provide support for the professional development of KG teachers and principals. The WG also encourages KGs to apply for the support of the Quality Education Fund for school-based initiatives.

Recommendation 10

The WG recommends that an advisory body should be set up to take a professional view on various issues relating to the long-term development and quality of pre-primary education, such as a reference salary scale for teachers and principals and their continuous professional development.

Recommendation 11

The WG recommends that the schedule for disbursing voucher subsidy to KGs should be revised to follow the tuition fee payment schedule of KGs so as to reduce their difficulties in handling administrative and accounting work.

Recommendation 12

The WG recommends that the existing policy and arrangements for rents, rates and government rent reimbursement for KGs should continue rather than subsuming these elements under the voucher subsidy.

* * * * *