Replies to supplementary questions raised by Finance Committee Members in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2011-12

Director of Bureau : Secretary for Education
Session No. : 15

Reply Serial No.	Question Serial No.	Name of Member	Head	Programme
S-EDB01	S087	HO Sau-lan, Cyd	156	Director of Bureau's Office Primary Education Secondary Education Special Education Other Educational Services and Subsidies Policy and Support
S-EDB02	S094	IP Wai-ming	156	Primary Education
S-EDB03	S095	IP Wai-ming	156	Primary Education
S-EDB04	S096	WONG Kwok-hing	156	Primary Education
S-EDB05	S097	WONG Kwok-hing	156	Primary Education
S-EDB06	SV023	LEE Cheuk-yan	156	Other Educational Services and Subsidies
S-EDB07	SV024	WONG Yuk-man	156	Other Educational Services and Subsidies
S-EDB08	S093	PAN Pey-chyou	173	Student Assistance Scheme
S-EDB09	S092	HO Chun-yan, Albert	190	University Grants Committee

Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2011-12

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY TO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

Reply Serial No.

S-EDB01

Question Serial No.

S087

Head : 156 Government Secretariat: Education Bureau

Subhead : 000 Operational expenses

Programme :
(1) Director of Bureau's Office
(2) Primary Education
(3) Secondary Education
(4) Special Education
(5) Other Educational Services and Subsidies
(7) Policy and Support

Controlling Officer : Permanent Secretary for Education

Director of Bureau : Secretary for Education

Question :

Regarding the items listed below, please specify, by department, the amount of resources actually used in 2009-10 and 2010-11, as well as that reserved for 2011-12, by the Education Bureau and the departments under its purview. Please also advise of the details and policy objectives of the activities concerned.

(a) Expenditure incurred by local officials in undertaking duty visits, participating in exchange activities and attending meetings on the Mainland, as well as the ranks and number of local officials involved (Please list by administrative regions at the provincial level and by cities for Guangdong Province)

(b) Expenditure on exchange activities, entertainment and meetings with Mainland officials and departments in Hong Kong, as well as the ranks and number of local and Mainland officials involved (Please list by administrative regions at the provincial level and by cities for Guangdong Province)

(c) Expenditure incurred by local officials in undertaking duty visits, participating in exchange activities and attending meetings overseas (including those in Taiwan and Macau), as well as the ranks and number of local officials involved (Please list by continents and countries/regions)

(d) Expenditure on exchange activities, entertainment and meetings with overseas officials and departments (including those of Taiwan and Macau) in Hong Kong, as well as the ranks and number of local and overseas officials involved (Please list by continents and countries/regions)

Asked by : Hon. HO Sau-lan, Cyd

Reply :

For Education Bureau

The actual expenditure in 2009-10 and 2010-11 and funds reserved in 2011-12 for the four categories of activities, with breakdown by the rank of officials involved and the place of activities, are at Annex A.

The major objectives of meeting Mainland or overseas officials through goodwill visits, exchange programmes or conferences are promoting the education initiatives of Hong Kong (e.g. New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education), planning student exchange and interflow activities (e.g. participation in Mathematics Olympiad activities, National education activities, etc), sharing experiences on education reforms, exploring co-operation on other educational fronts and attending international conferences on education issues.

For University Grants Committee Secretariat

The actual expenditure in 2009-10 and 2010-11 and funds reserved in 2011-12 for the four categories of activities, with breakdown by the rank of officials involved and the place of activities, are at Annex B.

The major objectives of meeting Mainland or overseas officials through goodwill visits, exchange programmes or conference are to share experience and exchange views on the implementation of Research Grants Management System, to explore the feasibility of future collaboration in research scheme, to share experience and exchange views on the management and development of higher education sector and on the issue of internationalisation in the higher education sector.

For Student Financial Assistance Agency

No duty visit or meeting with Mainland or overseas officials was undertaken in 2009-10 and 2010-11. As for 2011-12, the Agency has earmarked $58,000 for duty visits to be undertaken by senior officials to widen their exposure on the administration of student financial assistance through experience sharing, seminars or round-the-table discussions with overseas public and private bodies. The place of visit, the programme and the rank of officials to be involved have not yet been confirmed.

Signature	
Name in block letters	Mrs Cherry Tse
Post Title	Permanent Secretary for Education
Date	30 March 2011

Annex A

Education Bureau

2009-10

(a) Duty Visits

Activities	Place of Activities	Rank of Officials involved	Actual Expenditure for 2009-10 ($'000)
(i) Duty visits to the Mainland	Beijing, Jiangsu, Liaoning, Shanghai, Zhejiang Guangdong: Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai	• Directorate officers : 24 • Non-directorate officers : 44	324
(ii) Duty visits to overseas	Asia (Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Macao, Malaysia, Singapore); Europe (Greece, Spain, UK); North America (USA).	• Directorate officers : 16 • Non-directorate officers : 25	1,072

(b) Meeting with Mainland or Overseas Officials in Hong Kong

Activities	Office of Visitors	Rank of Officials involved	Actual Expenditure for 2009-10 ($'000)
(i) Meeting Mainland officials	Officials from Shenzhen Government; Officials from the Shenzhen Municipal Education Bureau; Mainland teachers and education professionals.	• Directorate officers : 33 • Non-directorate officers : 20	48
(ii) Meeting overseas officials	Officials from Korea, Singapore, Thailand, UK, US Education Department and US Consulate.	Directorate and non-directorate officers (exact number not available).	0.3

2010-11

(a) Duty Visits

Activities	Place of Activities	Rank of Officials involved	Actual Expenditure for 2010-11 ($'000)
(i) Duty visits to the Mainland	Beijing, Jilin, Shandong, Shanghai, Zhejiang Guangdong: Guangzhou, Shaoguan, Shenzhen	• Directorate officers : 15 • Non-directorate officers : 49	375
(ii) Duty visits to overseas	Asia (India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Macao, Malaysia, Singapore); Australia; Europe (Belgium, Italy, UK); North America (Canada); South Africa.	• Directorate officers : 26 • Non-directorate officers : 53	3,018

(b) Meeting with Mainland or Overseas Officials in Hong Kong

Activities	Office of Visitors	Rank of Officials involved	Actual Expenditure for 2010-11 ($'000)
(i) Meeting Mainland officials	Officials from Ministry of Education; Representatives of Education Department of Henan Province; Representatives of Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Representatives of Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in HKSAR and Mainland officials.	• Directorate officers : 8 • Non-directorate officers : 11	22

Activities	Office of Visitors	Rank of Officials involved	Actual Expenditure for 2010-11 ($'000)
(ii) Meeting overseas officials	Officials from UK Ministry of Education; members of the Education Committee of the Legislative Yuen of Taiwan.	• Directorate officers :18 • Non-directorate officers : 10	6.5

2011-12

(a) Duty Visits

Activities	Place of Activities (Tentative)	Rank of Officials involved (Tentative)	Estimated Expenses for 2011-12 ($'000)
(i) Duty visits to the Mainland	Beijing, Hubei, Shanghai, Zhejiang Guangdong: Guangzhou, Shenzhen	• Directorate officers : 23 • Non-directorate officers : 83	925
(ii) Duty visits to overseas	Asia (Brunei, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam); Australia and New Zealand; Europe (Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, Turkey, UK); North America (Canada, USA)	• Directorate Officers : 20 • Non-directorate officers : 66	3,983

(b) For budget purpose, the Bureau has initially reserved about $14,500 for the purpose of meeting Mainland and overseas officials in Hong Kong. The exact programmes are not available at the moment.

Annex B

University Grants Committee Secretariat

2009-10

(a) Duty Visits

Activities	Place of Activities	Rank of Officials involved	Actual Expenditure for 2009-10 ($'000)
(i) Duty visits to the Mainland	Zhejiang; Guangdong : Guangzhou	• Directorate officers : 2 • Non-directorate officer : 1	10
(ii) Duty visits to overseas	Nil		

(b) Meeting with Mainland or Overseas Officials in Hong Kong

Activities	Office of Visitors	Rank of Officials involved	Actual Expenditure for 2009-10 ($'000)
(i) Meeting Mainland officials	Nil		
(ii) Meeting overseas officials	Spanish National Research Council	• Directorate officer :1 • Non-directorate officers : 2	Nil

2010-11

(a) Duty Visits

Activities	Place of Activities	Rank of Officials involved	Actual Expenditure for 2010-11 ($'000)
(i) Duty visits to the Mainland	Beijing	• Directorate officer : 1 • Non-directorate officers : 2	25
(ii) Duty visits to overseas	Asia (Japan and Korea); Europe (France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Poland and Russia); South America (Argentina, Brazil and Chile)	• Directorate officer : 1 • Non-directorate officers : 3	261

(b) Meeting with Mainland or Overseas Officials in Hong Kong

Activities	Office of Visitors	Rank of Officials involved	Actual Expenditure for 2010-11 ($'000)
(i) Meeting Mainland officials	National Natural Science Foundation of China; Courtesy visit by delegation of the Ministry of Education	• Directorate officers : 2 • Non-directorate officers : 8	4.8
(ii) Meeting overseas officials	Representatives of Taiwan Science Council; Consulate General of France; Netherlands Consulate General; Innovation Centre Denmark; US Consulate General; and Australian Education International.	• Directorate officers : 6 • Non-directorate officers : 14	Nil (hosted by overseas officials)

2011-12

The University Grants Committee Secretariat has reserved $200,000 for undertaking overseas duty visits. The place of visit, the programme and the rank of officials to be involved have not yet been confirmed. As meetings or goodwill visits with Mainland or overseas officials in Hong Kong are usually arranged on an ad hoc basis and the expenses to be incurred are relatively small which can be absorbed within office expenditure items, the University Grants Committee Secretariat has not earmarked specific budget for the purpose.

Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2011-12

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY TO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

Reply Serial No.

S-EDB02

Question Serial No.

S094

Head : 156 Government Secretariat: Education Bureau

Subhead (No. & title) :

Programme : (2) Primary Education

Controlling Officer : Permanent Secretary for Education

Director of Bureau : Secretary for Education

Question :

According to the reply under Special Finance Committee Meeting Reply Serial No. EDB 058 and Question Serial No. 0280, the Administration states that it will provide additional funding for schools to employ teaching assistants during the piloting period to enhance support services for students with autism spectrum disorders. What are the estimated expenditure and the details of the plan? Will all participating schools be provided with the funding unconditionally?

Asked by : Hon. IP Wai-ming

Reply :

The three-year pilot project on enhancement of support services for students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) will comprise two parts: (a) structured on-top group training for students with ASD; and (b) development of a comprehensive school support model for early intervention of students with ASD. For part (a), we will commission non-governmental organisations and/or tertiary institutions with the relevant expertise to provide small group training for students with ASD. The training cost will be borne by the Education Bureau. In other words, the participating schools in part (a) will get free professional support for the students, rather than additional funding.

We will provide additional funding only for those schools participating in part (b) of the project to employ teaching assistants during the piloting period, as these pilot schools will need to create room for their teachers to develop and try out the school support model, as well as consolidate their knowledge and experience in an operation manual for dissemination to all primary schools in Hong Kong at the completion of the project.

We expect that some schools will take part in part (a) only while some will take part in both. It is anticipated that around 50 public sector primary schools will participate in part (a) and about 30 primary schools in part (b) of the project. Assuming that each of the schools participating in part (b) is provided with a teaching assistant for the three-year piloting period, the estimated expenditure incurred for such purpose is about $13 million.

Signature _____

Name in block letters Mrs Cherry Tse

Post Title Permanent Secretary for Education

Date 29 March 2011

Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2011-12

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY TO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

Reply Serial No.

S-EDB03

Question Serial No.

S095

Head : 156 Government Secretariat: Subhead (No. & title) : Education Bureau

Programme : (2) Primary Education

Controlling Officer : Permanent Secretary for Education

Director of Bureau : Secretary for Education

Question :

According to the reply provided by the Administration under Special Finance Committee Meeting Reply Serial No. EDB 056 and Question Serial No. 0278, 300 time-limited teaching posts have been provided to public sector primary schools implementing small class teaching in the 2010/11 school year. How many public sector primary schools are involved? What is the time limit? When will the estimated expenditure of $100 million be used up? Does the Administration have any plan to continue the funding after the time limit for appointment of additional temporary or permanent teaching posts so as to support the full implementation of small class teaching?

Asked by : Hon. IP Wai-ming

Reply :

A total of 303 public sector primary schools implementing small class teaching (SCT) have each been provided with a time-limited teaching post in the 2010/11 school year to build on the pedagogical strategies and resources devised under a small class context for dissemination and compilation for future reference. These 303 time-limited teaching posts with a total estimated cost of about $100 million will lapse with effect from 1 September 2011.

As revealed in the Study on Small Class Teaching in Primary Schools in Hong Kong, a small class setting alone would not necessarily bring about improvement in learning and teaching. It is crucial for schools and teachers to consider how to better utilise a small class setting and this involves a paradigm shift in pedagogy. To maximise the benefits of SCT, we have set aside a total of $218 million for six years starting from 2009-10 to support schools and teachers in the form of professional development activities. These include in-service training courses for teachers with provision of supply teachers for schools as appropriate as well as other experience-sharing activities such as learning circles, study tours, workshops, seminars, etc. We have not included any provision for time-limited or additional regular teaching posts in the 2011/12 school year as of now.

Signature _____

Name in block letters Mrs Cherry Tse

Post Title Permanent Secretary for Education

Date 28 March 2011

Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2011-12

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY TO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

Reply Serial No.

S-EDB04

Question Serial No.

S096

Head : 156 Government Secretariat: Education Bureau Subhead : 000 Operational expenses

Programme : (2) Primary Education

Controlling Officer : Permanent Secretary for Education

Director of Bureau : Secretary for Education

Question :

Regarding the reply numbered EDB096 to the question numbered 2214 for the special meetings of the Finance Committee, what are the respective percentages of contracted out and non-contracted out janitor services? What are the reasons and justification for contracting out janitor services in government schools? Are schools provided with guidelines specifically designed for contracting out janitor services?

Asked by : Hon. WONG Kwok-hing

Reply :

About 80% of janitor services in government primary schools have been contracted out and the remaining 20% are currently provided by civil service Workmen II.

Aided schools have all along been provided with an Administrative Grant or Revised Administrative Grant for employing administrative and janitor staff, or contracting out clerical or janitor staff to meet their specific needs. In Education Commission Report No. 7 which was published in September 1997, it was stated that as a matter of principle, government schools should enjoy the same degree of funding and management flexibility as aided schools and should eventually be on a par with aided schools. Adopting this recommendation, janitor services of government schools have gradually been contracted out since the 1997/98 school year taking into account the natural wastage situation.

Janitor services are provided by non-skilled workers. The Education Bureau has issued internal circulars to government schools urging them to follow the measures laid down by the Government on service contracts which involve the employment of mainly non-skilled workers. These include, among others, the provision that the tenderer is required to submit a declaration stating that there has not been any conviction against him under the Employment Ordinance and other relevant ordinances for the five-year period immediately preceding the tender closing date, and that he has not been given three or more demerit points under the Government's demerit point system over a rolling period of three years for breaching contractual obligations in respect of wages.

Signature	
Name in block letters	Mrs Cherry Tse
Post Title	Permanent Secretary for Education
Date	30 March 2011

Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2011-12

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY TO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

Reply Serial No.

S-EDB05

Question Serial No.

S097

Head : 156 Government Secretariat: Education Bureau

Subhead (No. & title) :

Programme : (2) Primary Education

Controlling Officer : Permanent Secretary for Education

Director of Bureau : Secretary for Education

Question :

Regarding Reply Serial No. EDB095 and Question Serial No. 2213 for the Special Finance Committee Meetings, will the Administration implement new measures to reduce the number of schools which cease operation due to class reduction, and provide assistance to contract teachers who lose teaching posts due to school closure? If so, what are the details and the estimated expenditure? If not, what are the reasons?

Asked by : Hon. WONG Kwok-hing

Reply :

To stabilise the schools and teaching force of primary education, we have adjusted downwards by stages the minimum number of students required for operating Primary 1 classes from 23 in the 2003/04 school year to 16 in the 2009/10 school year. Besides, we have put forward various development options to facilitate schools not allocated Primary 1 class to continue their operation.

As the primary school student population is anticipated to become more stable in the coming years and the under-enrolled situation in schools has been mitigated, it is not considered necessary to introduce new measures to reduce the number of schools which cease operation due to insufficient enrolment.

The Education Bureau has all along been providing support to redundant teachers arising from reduction of classes or cessation of school operation to facilitate their seeking of jobs.

Signature _____

Name in block letters Mrs Cherry Tse

Post Title Permanent Secretary for Education

Date 29 March 2011

Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2011-12

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY TO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

Reply Serial No.

S-EDB06

Question Serial No.

SV023

Head : 156 Government Secretariat: Education Bureau

Subhead (No. & title) :

Programme : (5) Other Educational Services and Subsidies

Controlling Officer : Permanent Secretary for Education

Director of Bureau : Secretary for Education

Question :

The Administration is requested to provide the following information:
The total financial provision for organising Mainland learning and exchange activities for local tertiary, secondary and primary students as well as student-teachers under existing national education programmes and those to be introduced in the 2011-12 financial year and the respective numbers of places offered.

Asked by : Hon. LEE Cheuk-yan

Reply :

In 2010-11, the total financial provision for organising Mainland learning and exchange activities for secondary and primary students is $48.4 million. About 38 500 places are offered. No local tertiary students or student-teachers are involved in these programmes.

In 2011-12, the estimated expenditure is $58 million and 42 700 places will be offered for secondary and primary students. In addition, an estimated amount of $3.3 million has been set aside to provide 560 places for student-teachers. The 2011-12 Budget also proposes allocating $100 million to launch a 5-year pilot scheme to subsidise local post-secondary students to participate in short-term internship or learning programmes in the Mainland, including visits, exchanges or voluntary services. The Administration is working out the details of the pilot scheme and will consult institutions concerned and the Legislative Council in due course.

Signature _____

Name in block letters Mrs Cherry Tse

Post Title Permanent Secretary for Education

Date 29 March 2011

Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2011-12

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY TO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

Reply Serial No.

S-EDB07

Question Serial No.

SV024

Head : 156 Government Secretariat: Education Bureau

Subhead (No. & title)

Programme : (5) Other Educational Services and Subsidies

Controlling Officer : Permanent Secretary for Education

Director of Bureau : Secretary for Education

Question :

The Administration is requested to provide the following information:
The criteria for the selection of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to organise the Mainland learning and exchange activities and programmes funded by EDB as well as the amounts of funding allocations received by these NGOs and their administrative costs for organising such activities and programmes.

Asked by : Hon. WONG Yuk-man

Reply :

The Education Bureau (EDB) invited through open quotation those non-profit making non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with relevant experience in organising educational trips to the Mainland to operate the projects. The quotations were assessed in accordance with the standard store and procurement regulations which are applicable to all government purchases. Funds would be disbursed to the NGOs selected when they had paired up with schools and information on the visit programme indicating adherence to the endorsed proposals had been duly submitted to EDB. For those proposals from NGOs seeking sponsorship from the Government, they were assessed mainly on their relevancy to the school curriculum and cost-effectiveness.

In 2010-11, the total amount of funding paid to the NGOs is $24 million, including the administrative cost of $2.57 million.

Signature _____

Name in block letters Mrs Cherry Tse

Post Title Permanent Secretary for Education

Date 31 March 2011

Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2011-12

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY TO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

Reply Serial No.

S-EDB08

Question Serial No.

S093

Head : 173 Student Financial Assistance Agency

Subhead (No. & title) : 000 Operational expenses

Programme : Student Assistance Scheme

Controlling Officer : Controller, Student Financial Assistance Agency

Director of Bureau : Secretary for Education

Question :

According to Reply Serial No. EDB323, which is a reply to Question Serial No. 2086 at the special meetings of the Finance Committee, the Administration has estimated that a total of 38 posts of various ranks will be deleted upon the implementation of the Integrated Student Financial Assistance System due to re-engineered business processes. In this connection, are there enough vacancies within the Agency to cater for the re-deployment of the affected staff? If no, how will the Administration make suitable job arrangements for those not re-deployed? Besides, is there a way to ensure that the re-deployment will not result in lower ranks and salaries for the staff?

Asked by : Hon. PAN Pey-chyou

Reply :

It is estimated that a total of 38 posts of various ranks would be deleted in the run-up to the implementation of the Integrated Student Financial Assistance System in 2016. We plan to re-deploy the affected staff as far as practicable to fill vacancies of comparable ranks which may arise from natural wastage or creation of posts. Such re-deployment arrangements will be made in the course of re-engineering business processes or towards the completion of the project in the 2015/16 academic year as appropriate.

Signature _____

Name in block letters Ms Nancy SO

Post Title Controller, Student Financial Assistance Agency

Date 29 March 2011

Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2011-12

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY TO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

Reply Serial No.

S-EDB09

Question Serial No.

S092

Head: 190 University Grants Committee Subhead (No. & title):

Programme: University Grants Committee

Controlling Officer: Secretary-General, University Grants Committee

Director of Bureau : Secretary for Education

Question:

The Government will provide an estimated provision of $14.53 million to the University Grants Committee (UGC) in 2011-12 to cover meeting expenses of UGC, Research Grants Council (RGC) and Quality Assurance Council (QAC). It is mentioned in reply no. EDB355 that the expenses mainly comprise "air passages, hotel accommodation and subsistence allowances for overseas members and out-of-pocket expenses for local members". In 2010-11, the expenses of 41 meetings held by the UGC and its sub-committees alone amounted to $2.1 million, with an average expense of over $50,000 per meeting; and the expenses of the two meetings held by the Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Selection Panel to select suitable candidates for the Fellowship Scheme were as high as $1.4 million. In this connection, will the Government:

(a) define the scope of the "out-of-pocket expenses" and immediately make public the list of expenditure of the meetings, such as the venue, the rent and items covered by the out-of-pocket expenses, so as to account for the huge meeting expenses;

(b) explain the necessity of making huge expenses on meetings and conduct a review on it; and

(c) ask the UGC to adopt video conferencing to save huge meeting expenses in light of the increasing shift from conventional to video conferencing by business organizations to cut cost?

Asked by: Hon. HO Chun-yan, Albert

Reply:

(a) The "out-of-pocket expenses" are to cover traveling costs and other miscellaneous expenses for the local non-official University Grants Committee (UGC)/Research Grants Council (RGC)/Quality Assurance Council (QAC) Members and QAC Auditors in relation to performing public service in Hong Kong. The current rate is HK$200 per meeting/duty day.

A list of expenditure of the meetings in 2010-11 is provided in Annex for reference.

(b) The UGC/RGC/QAC and their committees, groups and panels conduct regular meetings in Hong Kong to discuss issues in relation to the funding for higher education, research policy, allocation of research grants and quality assurance, *etc*. It is necessary to meet the expenses for overseas members' air passages and hotel accommodation when they visit Hong Kong for UGC/RGC/QAC business. These overseas Members bring with them invaluable advice on global trends and international perspectives, as well as objective and independent advice on the development of the UGC-funded institutions and Hong Kong higher education sector in general. In respect of the RGC in particular, their objectiveness and independence give reassurance to local institutions that the RGC processes are fair.

Where possible and appropriate, we have made use of video-conferencing facilities, including the QAC Meeting in September 2009, Higher Education Group Meeting in December 2009 and UGC Meeting in April 2010. However, our experience demonstrated that video-conferencing was not conducive to Members' active participation in the discussion of highly complicated and intellectual issues. The feasibility of conducting video-conferencing has also been restricted by the availability of such facilities to the overseas Members in their home towns/countries and the difficulty of identifying a time convenient to all since overseas Members come from different parts of the world with different time zones. Simultaneous video-conferencing with as many as 10 overseas participants is also a very expensive proposition.

(c) To make video-conferencing a possibly viable alternative for certain meetings, we would need to invest in state-of-the-art video-conferencing facilities, and to identify and finance the use of such facilities for overseas Members, both of which imply extra capital and recurrent costs. We will explore the feasibility of investing in such video-conferencing facilities, having regard to their financial implications and cost-effectiveness, as well as the quality of these facilities. However, it should be noted that even with the best video-conferencing facilities, there will be meetings where Members' physical presence will be essential, and occasions when overseas Members would need to travel to Hong Kong for the purpose of visiting and getting to know the UGC-funded institutions and to have face-to-face discussion/consultation with the staff and students of the institutions.

Signature	
Name in block letters	Michael V Stone
Post Title	Secretary-General, University Grants Committee
Date	30 March 2011

Annex

Committee/ Council/ Scheme	Title	Date	Venue at (Note 1)	2010-11 Revised Estimate Meeting Expenses ($ million)			
				Air Passages	Hotel Accommodation	Subsistence Allowance / Out-of- pocket Expenses	Total (Note 2)
University Grants Committee (UGC)	UGC Meeting	22.4.2010	University Grants Committee Secretariat	1.69	0.26	0.16	2.11
		23.4.2010					
		8.9.2010					
		9.9.2010					
		9.11.2010					
		14.1.2011					
	Meeting of UGC Local Members	11.5.2010					
		12.5.2010					
	Higher Education Review Group Meeting	19.5.2010					
		13.7.2010					
		6.9.2010					
	Research Group Meeting	21.4.2010					
		23.4.2010					
		8.9.2010					
		13.1.2011					
	Strategy Sub-Committee Meeting	7.9.2010					
		12.1.2011					
	Investment Group Meeting	14.4.2010					

Committee/ Council/ Scheme	Title	Date	Venue at (Note 1)	2010-11 Revised Estimate Meeting Expenses ($ million)			
				Air Passages	Hotel Accommodation	Subsistence Allowance / Out-of- pocket Expenses	Total (Note 2)
University Grants Committee (UGC)	Communications Group Meeting	4.6.2010	University Grants Committee Secretariat				
		10.1.2011					
		7.3.2011					
	"3+3+4" Group Meeting	11.11.2010					
	Academic Development Proposals Group Meeting	7.9.2010					
		12.1.2011					
	Financial Affairs Working Group Meeting	15.2.2011					
	Meeting of the Ad Hoc Group on UGC Teaching Award	4.6.2010					
		16.11.2010					
	Chairman, UGC meeting with Deans and Department Heads of Institutions	13.9.2010	Hong Kong Baptist University				
		14.9.2010	Hong Kong University of Science and Technology				
		5.10.2010	The Hong Kong Institute of Education				

Committee/ Council/ Scheme	Title	Date	Venue at (Note 1)	2010-11 Revised Estimate Meeting Expenses ($ million)			
				Air Passages	Hotel Accommodation	Subsistence Allowance / Out-of- pocket Expenses	Total (Note 2)
University Grants Committee (UGC)	Chairman, UGC meeting with Deans and Department Heads of Institutions	6.10.2010	The Chinese University of Hong Kong				
		12.10.2010	The University of Hong Kong				
		13.10.2010	City University of Hong Kong				
		2.11.2010	The Hong Kong Polytechnic University				
		4.11.2010	Lingnan University				
	Consultation Forums on Higher Education Review 2010	24.4.2010	The University of Hong Kong & The Hong Kong Polytechnic University				
	Meeting with the media and hold briefings on Higher Education Review 2010	1.12.2010	China Club				
		2.12.2010	University Grants Committee Secretariat				

Committee/ Council/ Scheme	Title	Date	Venue at (Note 1)	2010-11 Revised Estimate Meeting Expenses ($ million)			
				Air Passages	Hotel Accommodation	Subsistence Allowance / Out-of- pocket Expenses	Total (Note 2)
University Grants Committee (UGC)	UGC Visit to Institutions	21.4.2010	The Chinese University of Hong Kong & The Hong Kong Institute of Education				
		12.1.2011	The University of Hong Kong				
		13.1.2011	Lingnan University				
Research Grants Council (RGC)	General Research Fund Panel Meetings	14.6.2010 to 16.6.2010	University Grants Committee Secretariat	5.04	0.91	0.49	6.44
	RGC Visit to the Chinese University of Hong Kong	17.6.2010	The Chinese University of Hong Kong				
	RGC Meeting	18.6.2010	University Grants Committee Secretariat				
	Collaborative Research Fund Sub-Committee Meeting cum interview	7.12.2010 & 8.12.2010	University Grants Committee Secretariat				

Committee/ Council/ Scheme	Title	Date	Venue at (Note 1)	2010-11 Revised Estimate Meeting Expenses ($ million)			
				Air Passages	Hotel Accommodation	Subsistence Allowance / Out-of- pocket Expenses	Total (Note 2)
Research Grants Council (RGC)	Collaborative Research Fund Symposium	9.12.2010	The Chinese University of Hong Kong				
	State Natural Science Award Selection Committee Meeting	8.12.2010	University Grants Committee Secretariat				
	RGC Meeting	10.12.2010					
	National Natural Science Foundation of China / Research Grant Council Joint Research Scheme Local Selection Committee Meeting	3.9.2010					
	National Natural Science Foundation of China / Research Grant Council Joint Research Scheme Joint Selection Committee Meeting (Hong Kong)	24.9.2010	University Grants Committee Secretariat				

Committee/ Council/ Scheme	Title	Date	Venue at (Note 1)	2010-11 Revised Estimate Meeting Expenses ($ million)			
				Air Passages	Hotel Accommodation	Subsistence Allowance / Out-of- pocket Expenses	Total (Note 2)
Research Grants Council (RGC)	RGC – Fulbright Hong Kong Scholar Programme Interview	23.11.2010 & 24.11.2010	University Grants Committee Secretariat				
Quality Assurance Council (QAC)	QAC Meeting	24.5.2010 6.9.2010	University Grants Committee Secretariat	2.14	0.32	0.17	2.63
	Audit on City University of Hong Kong - Audit Visit	23.5.2010 to 27.5.2010	University Grants Committee Secretariat & City University of Hong Kong				
	Audit on The Hong Kong Polytechnic University - Initial Meeting and Preliminary Visit - Audit Visit	11.8.2010 to 13.8.2010 10.10.2010 to 14.10.2010	University Grants Committee Secretariat & The Hong Kong Polytechnic University				

Committee/ Council/ Scheme	Title	Date	Venue at (Note 1)	2010-11 Revised Estimate Meeting Expenses ($ million)			
				Air Passages	Hotel Accommodation	Subsistence Allowance / Out-of- pocket Expenses	Total (Note 2)
Quality Assurance Council (QAC)	Audit on The Hong Kong Institute of Education - Auditor Workshop - Initial Meeting and Preliminary Visit - Audit Visit	8.10.2010 20.1.2011 to 24.1.2011 20.3.2011 to 24.3.2011	University Grants Committee Secretariat & The Hong Kong Institute of Education				
Areas of Excellence (AoE)	Site visit of project (Control of Pandemic and Inter-Pandemic Influenza)	27.4.2010	The University of Hong Kong	0.38	0.03	0.01	0.42
Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme	Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme Selection Panel Meetings	28.2.2011 to 1.3.2011	University Grants Committee Secretariat	1.06	0.17	0.10	1.33
Theme–based Research Scheme	June 2010 Shortlisting Committee Meeting	18.6.2010	University Grants Committee Secretariat	0.53	0.06	0.03	0.62
	Pre-workshop Meeting	16.8.2010					
		18.8.2010					
		30.8.2010					

Committee/ Council/ Scheme	Title	Date	Venue at (Note 1)	2010-11 Revised Estimate Meeting Expenses ($ million)			
				Air Passages	Hotel Accommodation	Subsistence Allowance / Out-of- pocket Expenses	Total (Note 2)
Theme–based Research Scheme	Workshop	17.8.2010	City University of Hong Kong				
		19.8.2010					
		31.8.2010					
	Post-workshop Meeting	18.8.2010	University Grants Committee Secretariat				
		20.8.2010					
		1.9.2010					
	Ad Hoc Committee Meeting	10.12.2010					
						2010-11 Revised Estimate	13.55

Notes:

(1) All meetings have not entailed rental charges.

(2) We would like to give more details to explain the quantum of meeting expenses specifically raised in the introductory part of the question: -

(a) Meeting expenses mainly comprise air passages, hotel accommodation and subsistence allowances for non-local members, and out-of-pocket expenses for local members. Therefore, the number of meetings partly explains the quantum of meeting expenses. The amount of the meeting expenses also depends on the number of non-local members (requiring air passages and hotel accommodation) and the duration of each of the meetings covered (requiring subsistence allowances/out-of-pocket expenses). In 2010-11, the expenses of 41 meetings held by the UGC and its Sub-Committees amounted to $2.11 million, whereas the expenses of the two meetings held by the Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Selection Panel to select suitable candidates for the Fellowship Scheme amounted to $1.33 million. This was because the former mainly comprised expenses for arranging 9 non-local members plus 15 local members to convene UGC (and Sub-Committees) meetings scheduled three times in the year and some other meetings as listed in the above table, and the latter mainly comprised expenses for arranging 21 non-local members to convene the Selection Panel Meetings.

(b) In respect of the Selection Panel Meetings, local academic staff employed by UGC-funded institutions are considered to have conflict of interest in deciding candidates to be selected for award of the fellowship. We therefore need to involve overseas panel members, both in making initial assessments and in making final recommendation on the awardees to be selected. Such overseas academics have valuable and relevant experience in recruiting PhD candidates for top-notch universities around the world. Given that the scheme is not limited to any academic discipline/field nor to a limited number of countries, it is necessary to enlist the help of a representative number of overseas panel members to provide all round perspective in selecting the candidates. Collective deliberation through a meeting is needed to calibrate the standard, to reconcile diverging assessments by different panel members and to deliberate on doubtful cases before formulating final recommendations on candidates to be selected. We will review from time to time on ways to reduce expenses without compromising the objectives of the scheme.