

REPORT OF
THE RECONSTITUTED WORKING PARTY
ON KINDERGARTEN EDUCATION

PARTY
ON KINDERGARTEN EDUCATION

Executive Summary

December 1995

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Introduction

1. The Education Commission Report No. 2(ECR2) (1986) recommended that unification of pre-primary services should be the goal. A Working Party on Kindergarten Education was subsequently established in 1989 to advise the Secretary for Education and Manpower on improvements to kindergarten education and the practicalities of unifying all pre-primary services. Up to the end of 1994, priority of its work was given to improvements to kindergarten education.

2. In January 1995, the Working Party on Kindergarten Education was reconstituted with expanded membership to include representatives from both the kindergarten and child care sectors, the Education and Manpower Branch, the Health and Welfare Branch, the Education Department and the Social Welfare Department under the Co-chairmanship of the Deputy Director of Education and the Deputy Director of Social Welfare to examine the practicalities of unification of pre-primary services.

3. The Working Party held ten meetings between February and December 1995. Major issues discussed and its recommendations are summarised below.

Unification of Pre-primary Services in Hong Kong

4. In Hong Kong, pre-primary services are offered in kindergartens registered with the Education Department under the Education and Manpower Branch, and in child care centres registered with the Social Welfare Department under the Health and Welfare Branch.

5. Historically, child care centres were set up as a welfare service for poor children. With social changes, child care centres are no longer restricted to children from low-income families. As at September 1994, about 10% of children in the age range of 3-5 were enrolled in child care centres. On the other hand, kindergartens are increasingly regarded by parents as an intrinsic part of their children's educational development. As at September 1994, about 85% of children in the age range of 3-5 are enrolled in kindergartens.

6. Kindergartens and child care centres in Hong Kong serve children of a similar age-group with the same developmental needs. Kindergartens place more emphasis on the education element with relatively shorter hours of service.

Child care centres, in addition to meeting the educational needs of the children, emphasize more the care element with longer hours of service, and are an essential service to meet families' social needs for child care assistance. Kindergartens and child care centres thus have some fundamentally different functions.

7. The Working Party took a pragmatic approach and recommended that:-

- (a) unification of pre-primary services in Hong Kong should be pursued within a practicable administrative and resource availability context and on the understanding that not all aspects of operation for kindergartens and child care centres should necessarily be identical; and
- (b) harmonization of various aspects of kindergarten and child care centre operation, where appropriate and practicable, should be pursued as a viable alternative to unification.

Combined Curriculum Guide for Kindergartens and Child Care Centres

8. The Guide to the Kindergarten Curriculum (1993) and the Activity Guidelines for Day Nursery (1990) are issued to kindergartens and child care centres respectively for reference. After comparing the two guidelines, the Working Party concluded that despite the differences in the age group being covered, the two guidelines share a common view that balanced and all-round development of children should be achieved through child-centred and developmentally appropriate programmes with emphasis on learning through play, activities and experiences.

9. The Working Party recommended that the Guide to the Kindergarten Curriculum and the Activity Guidelines for Day Nursery should be amalgamated into one curriculum guide covering both education and care for children the age range of 2 to 6.

10. The combined guidelines ~~the~~ 'Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum' was accepted by the Working Party in November 1995 and endorsed by the Curriculum Development Council in December 1995.

Staff Qualifications and Pay Scales

11. For kindergarten teachers, the minimum academic entry qualification was Secondary 3 prior to September 1995. In the Governor's 1994 Policy Address, a commitment was made to improve the quality of kindergarten education by raising, with effect from September 1995, the minimum academic entry qualification of kindergarten teachers from Secondary 3 to two subjects at grade E in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination. For child care workers, the minimum academic entry qualification is Secondary 3. Before September 1995 the recommended salary scales for kindergarten teachers and for child care workers were different.

12. Between February and April 1995, the Government conducted an internal review of the qualifications and pay scales for kindergarten teachers and child care workers and recommended introducing the same minimum academic entry qualification and a set of harmonised salary scales for them.

13. The Working Party considered that the package of harmonised salary scales had the advantages of providing a new training pay scale for untrained kindergarten teachers, a new kindergarten principal scale and improved salary scales for child care workers and child care supervisors.

14. The Working Party recommended that :

- (a) the minimum academic entry qualification for kindergarten teachers and child care workers should be raised to two subjects at grade E in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education;
- (b) one harmonised pay scale should be introduced for both kindergarten teachers and child care workers. The recommended scales comprise a training rank at the Training Pay Scale of 4-5/6, leading to a Child Care Worker/Qualified Kindergarten Teacher (QKT) rank with a pay scale of Master Pay Scale Points 7-17/18;
- (c) Child Care Supervisors and Kindergarten Principals (a new rank) should be paid on an overlapping scale of Master Pay Scale Points 14-22/24; and
- (d) for conversion and subsidy purposes, no serving kindergarten teachers or child care workers should receive less than their existing pay.

Harmonised Training for Kindergarten Teachers and Child Care Workers

15. As a pre-requisite for registration as a qualified kindergarten teacher with the Education Department or a child care worker with the Social Welfare Department, a person has to successfully complete a training course approved by the Director of Education or the Director of Social Welfare as appropriate.

16. The basic training courses for kindergarten teachers and child care workers are principally organised by the Hong Kong Institute of Education and the Vocational Training Council's Lee Wai Lee Technical Institute respectively. The courses are not mutually recognized by the concerned Departments. The only course mutually recognized by both Departments is the Certificate Course in Pre-primary Education (distance learning mode) organized by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

17. The Working Party found the training requirements and core contents of the basic training courses for kindergarten teachers and child care workers very similar. It thus recommended harmonizing these two types of training by drawing up a framework of common core applicable to the basic training courses. Based on the framework, training institutions may develop their own basic training courses and seek recognition from the Departments concerned.

18. The Working Party formed an Expert Group on Harmonized Training which drew up a framework for the basic programme comprising Professional Studies and Curriculum Studies, Special Studies, and Practicum. The basic programme, of a duration of not less than 360 hours, is considered to have covered all major topics essential for the training of kindergarten teachers and child care workers, and the knowledge and skills acquired in the basic programme would be applicable to both the kindergarten and child care centre sectors.

19. The Working Party recommended that mutual recognition should be given by the Education Department and Social Welfare Department to graduates of basic training courses developed according to the basic programme so that they may work in either kindergartens or child care centres.

Requirements and Standards of Provision for Kindergartens and Child Care Centres

20. Kindergartens registered with the Education Department have to comply with the Education Ordinance and Education Regulations while child care centres registered with the Social Welfare Department have to comply with the Child Care Centres Ordinance and Child Care Centres Regulations. While kindergartens and child care centres both serve children aged 3-5 years and have full-day and half-day programmes, they have different standards for the services provided.

21. With a view to bringing the standards of the two sectors closer together, the Working Party recommended that :

Floor Space Requirements

- (a) the existing floor space requirement for child care centres be maintained as follows :
 - (i) 1.8 m² required per child with the area of any passageway, storeroom, kitchen, office, toilet facility or staff-room excluded; or
 - (ii) 2.3 m² required per child with the area of any passageway, storeroom, kitchen, office, toilet facility or staff-room included.

- (b) a set of improved floor space requirements for kindergartens be implemented from the 1999/2000 school year as follows :

For pupils

	<u>Half-day</u>	<u>Full-day</u>
Upper Kindergarten Class pupil	1.2 m ² per pupil	1.8 m ² per
Lower Kindergarten Class pupil	1.2 m ² per pupil	1.8 m ² per
Nursery Class	1.8 m ² per pupil	

For the teacher

2.4 m²

- (c) the improved floor space requirements for kindergartens would only apply to new accommodation and should not affect the permitted accommodation of existing kindergartens;
- (d) the existing methods of calculations of space respectively adopted by child care centres and kindergartens be maintained;

Provision of Kitchen

- (e) the existing practice whereby the provision of kitchens for kindergartens is optional and that kindergartens with no kitchen are required to buy meals from licensed caterers be maintained;
- (f) a common kitchen shared by a kindergarten and a child care centre in the same premises should be registered with both the Education Department and the Social Welfare Department;

Staff to Children Ratio

- (g) the existing staff to children ratio of 1:14 in child care

centres be maintained;

- (h) a set of improved teacher to pupil ratios for kindergartens be implemented as follows :

	<u>Half-day</u>	<u>Full-day</u>
Upper Kindergarten Class	1:20	1:15
Lower Kindergarten Class	1:20	1:15
Nursery Class	1:15	

- (i) the date of the implementation of the improved ratios for kindergartens would be reviewed after the 40% QKTs requirement has been implemented in the 1997/98 school year;

Proportion of Trained Staff

- (j) the current requirement that 2/3 of the staff in child care centres should be trained is to be maintained while the proportion of trained staff for kindergartens will be reviewed after the 40% QKTs requirement has been implemented in the 1997/98 school year;

Registration and Inspection

- (k) the current registration and inspection responsibilities of the Education Department and the Social Welfare Department in respect of kindergartens and child care centres respectively be maintained; and
- (l) where there is shared use of common facilities, dual registration with the Education Department and the Social Welfare Department be required.

Operation of Full-day Nursery Class in Kindergartens

22. At present, operation of half-day and full-day Lower Kindergarten Class and Upper Kindergarten Class is permitted in kindergartens. However, operation of Nursery Class for the 3-year olds in kindergartens is permitted only on a half-day basis.

23. To meet the emerging need for provision of full-day Nursery Class for the 3-year olds, the Working Party recommended that the operation of full-day Nursery Class should be permitted with the requirement of one teacher to 15 pupils and a floor space requirement of 1.8m² per pupil.

Mode of Subsidy to Child Care Centres and Kindergartens

24. Aided child care centres receive a subsidy equivalent to 5% of the approved fee based on the approved capacity, as financial assistance to cover cash flow problems arising from fluctuations in enrolment and to meet unexpected increase in the cost of recognized expenditure items. Child care centres may also apply for a package of assistance from the Social Welfare Department including allocation of premises, reimbursement of rent and rates, and grants for furnishing and repairing the centres.

25. Non-profit-making kindergartens fulfilling certain requirements may apply to the Education Department for reimbursement of rent and rates, land grant, or purpose-built premises at concessionary rent. In September 1995, the Education Department introduced a Kindergarten Subsidy Scheme. Its aim is to improve the quality of kindergarten education and to minimize the impact of fee increases on parents as a result of implementing new regulatory requirements comprising raising the minimum academic qualifications of kindergarten teachers to the level of HKCEE with 2 subjects at grade E and having at least 40% of trained teachers. The subsidy for the 1995/96 school year is \$695 per pupil per year, roughly 10% of the weighted average fee for half-day non-profit-making kindergartens for the 1994/95 school year. Kindergartens applying for the subsidy must be charging fees below a cut-off point and fulfill certain conditions including meeting the 40% trained teacher requirement, paying teachers according to the recommended salary scales and accepting a degree of government control.

26. The Working Party noted the differences in the historical background, aims and functions of the two subsidy schemes with child care centres being provided as a family support service by the subvented welfare sector and kindergartens operated by the private sector. The two schemes are also different in terms of their operation, eligibility criteria, basis of calculation and rate of subsidy. The Kindergarten Subsidy Scheme has been introduced only

recently and more time should be allowed for the Education Department to assess its effectiveness. The Working Party considered that it would be very difficult to harmonise the two modes of subsidy at the present stage. The Working Party therefore recommended that the two subsidy schemes should remain unchanged at present while recognizing the desirability of harmonising the schemes in the longer run as they serve largely similar age groups.

The Fee Assistance Scheme and the Kindergarten Fee Remission Scheme

27. Since 1982, children from low-income families attending kindergartens or child care centres can apply for fee assistance. The Education Department introduced and administered a new Kindergarten Fee Remission Scheme in 1990. The administration of the Scheme was transferred to the Student Financial Assistance Agency since April 1992.

28. Eligibility for the Kindergarten Fee Remission Scheme is assessed on a point system which takes into account the applicant's household income and the number of dependants in the family. The levels of fee remission are 50% and 100% of the actual fee charged or the weighted average fee of non-profit-making kindergartens, whichever is the lower. In the 1994/95 school year, there were 30,120 successful applications for the Kindergarten Fee Remission Scheme, representing a take-up rate of about 17% of all pupils enrolled in kindergartens.

29. The Fee Assistance Scheme for child care centres is means-tested. The level of assistance is based on a sliding scale which takes into consideration the applicant's household size and income after deduction of rent. For income above the level for maximum fee assistance, parents have to contribute at a rate of \$15 for each additional \$100 earned. To be eligible for fee assistance, the family must have a social need for full day care, such as both parents working, or a single parent family or a broken family, or the child is mentally retarded or is a victim of child abuse. In the 1994/95 school year, there were 10,659 successful applications for fee assistance, representing a take-up rate of 43% of all children enrolled in full-day child care centres.

30. The Working Party found that it is neither viable nor advisable to harmonize the two Schemes which cater for different parental needs, and have different eligibility criteria, methods of means-testing and different levels of assistance. With a relatively lower average kindergarten fee, there is no apparent need for a more elaborate scale on fee remission for kindergarten parents. Moreover, the Kindergarten Fee Remission Scheme has just been brought to parity with the fee remission scheme for the senior secondary level while the Fee Assistance Scheme has been extended to the day creche sector. Any change to these two schemes is bound to have repercussions on other financial assistance schemes for education or social welfare services.

31. The Working Party therefore recommended that the two Schemes should not be changed solely for the purpose of harmonizing them.