

ARTICLE 10
EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

“States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:

a. The same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as well as in urban areas; this equality shall be ensured in pre-school, general, technical, professional and higher technical education, as well as in all types of vocational training;

b. Access to the same curricula, the same examinations, teaching staff with qualifications of the same standard and school premises and equipment of the same quality;

c. The elimination of any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education by encouraging co-education and other types of education which will help to achieve this aim and, in particular, by the revision of textbooks and school programmes and the adaptation of teaching methods;

d. The same opportunities to benefit from scholarships and other study grants;

e. The same opportunities for access to programmes of continuing education, including adult and functional literacy programmes, particularly those aimed at reducing, at the earliest possible time, any gap in education existing between men and women;

f. The reduction of female student drop-out rates and the organisation of programmes for girls and women who have left school prematurely;

g. The same opportunities to participate actively in sports and physical education;

h. Access to specific educational information to help to ensure the health and well-being of families, including information and advice on family planning.”

An Overview on Current Situation

129. The Government sees education as the most important long-term social investment and has been investing heavily in education and in cultivating talent for the future. In recent years, resources allocated to education have continued to rise significantly despite overall budgetary constraints. Approved public recurrent and total spending on education in 2001/02 financial year amounted to HK\$46.2 billion (US\$5.92 billion) and HK\$52.2 billion (US\$6.69 billion) respectively, representing 22.0% of the Government’s total recurrent expenditure and 19.4% of the total public expenditure. The Government adopts the principle of equality for both sexes and the equal rights and opportunities to education of females and males at all levels are safeguarded by the SDO⁶.

130. Hong Kong provides nine-year free and universal basic education. All children aged six to 15, regardless of their sex, are entitled to nine years of free and universal education. Measures⁷ are taken to enforce students’ attendance and the drop-out rate⁸ of male and female students decreased from 0.282% in 1997/98 school year to 0.173% in 2001/02 school year. The drop-out rates of female students remain consistently lower than male students in recent years.

131. The majority of schools in Hong Kong are co-educational. The number of single-sex schools for boys and girls is largely the same although there are more girls’ schools at primary level (Annex F). Entry to these schools is by parental choice and central allocation.

132. On the school curriculum, schools are encouraged to offer the same subjects to both female and male students. For example, physical education lessons are offered to both girls and boys in all primary and secondary schools.

⁶ Relevant information about SDO is covered by paragraph 62 of the Initial Report.

⁷ The measures were outlined in paragraph 64 of the Initial Report.

⁸ Figures on drop-out rate of male and female students are at Annex E.

In the past, some schools provided the subject Home Economics only to the girls which Design and Technology to the boys. With the introduction of Curriculum Reform in 2001, the subjects Home Economics and Design & Technology are grouped under Technology Education, one of the eight key learning areas (KLAs) in school curriculum. In the document “Technology Education Key Learning Areas Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 – Secondary 3)” issued to schools in July 2002, it is specified that “Technology Education is the entitlement of every student.” This key message clearly sets out the direction and framework for the development of the two subjects in schools.

133. Similarly, girls are offered the same opportunities as boys to take part in inter-school, inter-port and international school sports competitions. Relevant figures are set out at Annex G. Sex education programmes are offered at schools to teach students to respect the opposite sex; to have an awareness of the impact of sexual stereotyping and to rethink about the roles and responsibilities of the males and females at home and society from various perspectives. In school subjects like General Studies at primary level, Social Studies, Religious Studies and Liberal Studies at secondary level, students are guided to cultivate such values as “respect for others” and “the spirit of equality between sexes” which are conducive to eliminating discrimination against women.

134. As regards university education, recent statistics on the total enrolment of all programmes funded by University Grants Committee (UGC) at Annex H indicate that there are slightly more female than male students. In 2001/02 academic year, 54.4% of the students are female. During the hearing on the Initial Report, the CEDAW Committee showed concern over the degree of segregation in education specialisation of women and men. It should be noted that HKSAR's tertiary education institutions have adopted a policy of equality for students of both sexes. The admission criteria are based mainly on academic achievements and the qualifications for admission are the same for women and men. While there are more male first degree graduates and post-graduates in the fields of physical sciences, and engineering and technology, statistics show that the trend has been less dominating in the past few years. In 1997/98, 63% of the degree graduates from physical sciences and 83% from the engineering and technology are male, and the figures had decreased to 60% and 77% respectively in 2000/01. A similar trend is also found in these two programme categories at post-graduate level. On the other hand, female students have a stronger presence in the fields of social sciences,

arts and humanities, and education. There is also slightly more female students in the field of medicine, dentistry and health, which is a reverse of the past pattern in the field. Detailed statistics are at Annex I. Indeed, at the postgraduate level, the trend of female students representing an increasing proportion is seen in the fields of physical sciences, and engineering and technology. On the whole, more female students are now taking part in the post-graduate study programmes, and the percentage of female graduates from post-graduate programmes increased from 39% in 1997/98 to 47% in 2000/01.

135. On study programmes, government-funded gender studies are offered at the postgraduate level. Course electives on areas like family and gender studies, gender and society, sexuality and cultural politics, etc, are available for undergraduate students. Also, all tertiary institutions have their own established mechanisms or procedures for handling sexual harassment cases, including setting up committees / working groups which will consider sexual harassment cases and promote equal opportunities within the campus, designating an Equal Opportunities Officer; and publishing policy documents, guidelines and codes for their students and staff on sexual harassment and equal opportunities in general.

136. For sub-degree level education, which refers to study at associate degree or higher diploma level, students are admitted on the merit of their academic attainment and prior learning experiences. Students of both sexes are considered equal. In the 2001/02 academic year, female students account for 54% and 66% of the student population undertaking self-financing and publicly-funded sub-degree programmes respectively.

137. Women also enjoy equal access to vocational training as men. Such information has been covered in paragraphs 70 – 72 of the Initial Report. There are more female trainees enrolled in the vocational training courses offered by the Vocational Training Council. In 1996/97, only 33% of the students enrolled were female and the figure in 2001/02 has risen to 36.1%. The detailed figures on vocational training in the HKSAR are at Annex J.

138. For girls with disabilities, they can receive education as boys at special schools. Currently, 55 out of the 62 special schools under the subvention of the EMB are co-educational (the other seven schools are either boys schools or girls schools for children with behavioural and emotional difficulties), providing girls and boys with equal rights to free and universal

basic education up to junior secondary level. As at 15 November 2002, there were 2,780 girls studying in the special schools representing 36% of the total enrolment. Girls and boys of special schools have equal opportunities to take the same curriculum and examinations and progress to senior secondary classes or post-school placement. The principle of equal opportunity is being, and will continue to be, upheld in special education in Hong Kong.

139. Comments have been made on the need to reduce gender stereotyping by paying more attention to the content of textbooks. To avoid prejudices and gender stereotyping in the content of the textbooks, the EMB issues guidelines to publishers of Hong Kong to remind them to look into this aspect. In developing school curriculum or support materials (such as teaching packages, educational television programmes and teaching exemplars) and in reviewing textbooks, the Bureau gives due emphasis to equality of sexes and makes every attempt to avoid sexual stereotyping.

140. On equipping teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to teach students themes like sexual harassment, sexual abuse, as well as the values of responsibility and respect for others, EMB regularly organizes training courses for teachers on sex education, and sponsors similar courses run by the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong. Since 1996, there have been 1,170 secondary school teachers and 1,030 primary school teachers taking such courses. The Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd) has taken various measures to ensure that teachers / teacher trainers are sensitive towards their own values, attitudes and beliefs on gender. An institutional policy on ethics in research had been formulated in November 2001 which requests teacher educators to instil in their professional practice the values of equity, equality and professional integrity and make reference to such ordinances as SDO and FSDO which highlight the significance of elimination of gender stereotyping and prejudices. Among all other topics on teacher education and education in general, academic staff in HKIEd have also undertaken research projects and produced publications on topics relating to gender issue. A Working Group on Gender and Cultural Diversity has also been set up in the Institute to arouse the gender awareness among the students and lecturers. Seminars and workshops on topics relating to gender issues have been held and they include:

- (a) a workshop on Gender and Sex Role in February 2002 for HKIEd students;

- (b) a sharing session on “Women Hold Up Half the Sky” in March 2002 to celebrate the International Women’s Day; and
- (c) a seminar on gender study in China delivered by an academic from the Mainland in January 2003.

141. The Government ensures that no student is denied access to education because of a lack of means. The Government Student Financial Assistance Agency provides financial assistance to students from kindergarten to tertiary levels. Eligibility is based on financial needs of the applicants and, in the case of scholarships, on merit regardless gender. Apart from the major financial assistance schemes mentioned in paragraph 75 of the Initial Report, the Government also extends its financial assistance to needy tertiary and post-secondary students to meet their tuition fees and academic and living expenses in form of grants and / or low interest loans, primarily from the Local Student Finance Scheme and the Financial Assistance Scheme for Post-secondary Students. In addition to the means-tested financial assistance schemes, non-means tested loans are also provided by the Agency to both men and women pursuing approved programmes of study, including continuing education and training courses.

142. Scholarships to students are normally based on merit and are provided by private donors and organisations. Most scholarships are open to students of both sexes although some are made available only to female students. Other than the scholarship especially for women mentioned in paragraph 76 of the Initial Report, the Elizabeth Gardner Scholarship is offered to a female undergraduate and the Hong Kong Webgirls Scholarship is also available for female undergraduates studying Computer Science, Computer Engineering or Information Systems Management.

Women in the Teaching Profession

143. The CEDAW Committee expressed concern over the low percentage of women in the higher levels of the teaching profession and academia during the last hearing of Hong Kong’s report held in 1999. The Government has issued guidelines to schools to ensure that the recruitment of teachers are conducted in an open, transparent and fair manner. Schools are required to consider the candidates’ qualifications, working experience, capability,

potential during the selection process, regardless of their gender.

144. In the teaching profession of both primary schools and secondary schools, there are more female teaching staff than male and the statistics on the teaching profession in the school sector as at October 2001 is at Annex K. In local ordinary primary schools, 77.6% of the teachers are female and 22.4% are male. In local ordinary secondary schools, 54.0% teachers are female and 46.0% are male. However, there are more male school principals in both primary and secondary schools. Females make up 46.9% of the total number of principals of primary schools, which represents an increase of three percentage points from 1999; and make up 29.2% of secondary school heads, representing a slight decrease from 31.1% from 1999 respectively.

145. In the higher education sector, there has been a slight increase in females taking up professor and reader grades in recent years. The figures rise from 6% and 8% respectively in 1997/98 to 8% and 10% in 2001/02. A staff profile by grade and by sex of the higher education sector in recent years is set out in Annex L.

Highlights of Major Developments

Secondary School Places Allocation System

146. It is mentioned in Article 2 of the report (paragraph 5 and Annex C) that a judicial review was conducted on the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) System in June 2001. Before 2002, girls and boys were processed separately in the SSPA System. This means that boys' and girls' internal assessment results were scaled separately by the Academic Aptitude Test, girls and boys were banded separately for determining the order of allocation and fixed gender quotas (the broad principle was that quotas were allocated in accordance with the sex profiles of the respective school nets) were pre-determined in co-educational secondary schools for allocation. Pursuant to the judicial review, EMB has removed its gender-based features. With effect from the 2002 allocation exercise, there has been no different, nor separate, treatment for either sex in scaling the results of students internal assessments and determining the allocation bands. There is also no pre-determined quota for girls and boys in co-educational secondary schools.

147. In the debate over the past gender-based features, one of the concerns is the different potentials and pace of developments between boys and girls. It has been argued that “equal” treatment to girls might lead to “indirect discrimination” against boys, as the existing assessments give more weight to students’ abilities in the languages in which boys are said to be in a less advantageous position. To improve the internal assessment as promoted under education reform, the EMB issued Guidelines on Internal Assessment to primary schools in June 2002, with a purpose to cultivating a new culture of assessment so that girls’ and boys’ academic potentials could be more fully and equally reflected in the internal assessment. EMB had also arranged seminars to brief the primary school teachers on the guidelines.

148. The Education Commission will conduct a comprehensive review of the SSPA mechanism in 2003. Comments from various stakeholders will be taken into consideration, while the principle of equality in rights and opportunities for girls and boys will be closely observed.

Continuing Education

149. To prepare people for the advent of the knowledge-based economy, the Government has been promoting life-long learning and encouraging Hong Kong people to actively enhance their own knowledge and skills. EMB has been offering a wide range of adult education courses. They include courses on mainstream curriculum as well as non-formal and language courses. They are all co-educational, but according to statistics, about 80% and 60% of the learners of the adult education courses subvented and operated by the Bureau respectively are female. The Bureau is reviewing the mode of provision of adult education, taking into account modern trends in continuing education, while the principles of equal opportunity will continue to be upheld.

150. Offering higher education to all adults, the Open University of Hong Kong adopts a policy of open access and equality for both sexes. Any adult over the age of 17 can apply for admission. As at October 2001, there are 12,971 female students enrolled in programmes of various levels, constituting 48% of the total student population.

151. In promoting continuing education among women and men, some new measures have been adopted in recent years. They include:

(a) *Continuing Education Fund*

The HKSAR Government established in June 2002 a Continuing Education Fund to subsidize adults to pursue continuing education and training courses in specified fields of study considered to be of benefit to Hong Kong. This Fund reimburses tuition fees up to HK\$10,000 (US\$1,282) to each successful applicant and is open to applicants of both sexes, provided they have not received any university degree. The aim is to target at those women and men who may be less adaptable in the new knowledge-based economy and who wish to upgrade their knowledge and skills to meet the shift in Hong Kong's human resources needs. So far, about 22,600 persons have applied for subsidy from the Fund and 62% are women.

(b) *Project Yi Jin*⁹

Project Yi Jin is a programme launched in 2000 to provide an alternative route for further studies. It is open to all secondary school leavers and adult learners, irrespective of their sex. It is skill-based with an emphasis on biliteracy, trilingualism, information technology (IT) application and practical subjects. The programme is offered in full-time or part-time mode to accommodate the needs of different people. There are a total of 3,755 students taking part in the project Yi Jin in 2002/03 of which 39% are female. About one-third of the students are studying part-time. Except for more male students are taking courses related to information technology and more female students are taking specific courses like Child Studies, gender differences in other subjects are not obvious.

A tracking survey on full-time Yi Jin graduates for 2000/01 was conducted. The results show that the passing rates of the female and male students were very similar and were around 70%. Also, the patterns of job type, job nature and monthly salary of the graduates did not suggest any gender differences.

⁹ Project Yi Jin, with Chinese meaning of “determination to advance”, is a bridging programme to provide an alternative route and to expand the continuing education opportunities for secondary schools learners and adult learners.

(c) *Manpower Development Committee*

To promote the provision of vocational training and continuing education for different people, a Manpower Development Committee (MDC) was set up in 2002 to advise the Government on key issues in this area. Through active participation of employers, employees and training providers in the MDC, we will be able to provide more diverse and recognised training courses and continuing education opportunities to meet the needs of different people who would like to upgrade their skills and knowledge through lifelong learning.

(d) *Qualifications Framework*

To promote continuing education opportunities, the HKSAR Government proposes to set up a cross-sectoral qualifications framework which provides clear progression pathways to facilitate the pursuit of lifelong learning. The framework will cover qualifications in the mainstream, vocational and continuing education sectors, thus providing a common platform for articulation between sectors. It would help learners with different educational backgrounds, whether they are female or male, to draw up their own progression roadmap to upgrade their skills and knowledge. Course providers will also be encouraged to provide more diverse courses to meet the needs of different people.

(e) *IT capacity building initiatives for women*

The Government has been closely monitoring the level of digital utilisation by different sectors of the community and is determined to build a digitally inclusive society. The annual household survey in 2002 on IT penetration and usage revealed that there was no significant difference between men and women in the use of PC (male: 55.9%; female: 52.3%) and Internet (male: 50.3%; female: 46.2%). Nevertheless, as shown in Annex M, the gap in IT usage between men and women is wider for the age groups above 35. Hence, women, in particular female homecarers, have been one of the target groups in the IT promotion initiatives under the Digital 21 Strategy.

The Commerce, Industry and Technology Bureau, Information Technology Services Department, Home Affairs Department, Social Welfare Department, as well as Leisure and Cultural Services Department have been making concerted efforts to raise grassroots women, elders and other marginalized social groups' awareness of and confidence and capability in using IT. To ensure that members of our community have access to computer facilities and the Internet, the Government has provided over 5,000 public computers with Internet connections at convenient locations such as community centres / halls, public libraries, district offices and post offices for free use by the community. The Super Cyber Centre, the largest facility of this kind with 121 computer workstations, was opened in June 2001. Operating with a membership scheme, 53% of the members in the Super Cyber Centre are female and the Centre has been visited by more than 128,000 female citizens by end December 2002 since its opening. It organizes IT promotion activities as well as basic IT training regularly for women. Women have been active participants in these training courses. Since its opening, a total of 1,584 IT training courses offering 29,787 IT training places to the general public have been organised at the Centre. 18% of the courses offered were tailored for women. Of the 29,787 participants, 19,287 were women.

Under the community-wide IT Hong Kong Campaign, the Government offers free of charge basic IT awareness courses conducted in all 18 districts for women, parents, elders, new arrivals, people with disabilities and the general public. The structure and delivery model of these courses are tailor-made to cater to the distinct needs of different sectors of the community. Over 65,000 citizens have participated in the IT awareness courses under the Campaign. Of the some 26,000 participants in the awareness courses for the general public, 72% were women.

The Government also works closely with non-governmental organisations to raise women's awareness of and confidence and capacity in using IT. For example, relevant non-governmental organisations and IT professional bodies have been invited to participate in the Central Coordinating Committee on the Promotion of IT Usage among Women chaired by the Director of Home Affairs.

Also, District IT Promotion Committees have been set up in the 18 districts with an aim to co-ordinate efforts and resources at district levels and to work with local organisations to enhance the effectiveness of training and services provided to grassroots women. The Government also sponsored the Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centres to organise a Symposium on Gender Equality and Information Communication Technology Development in Hong Kong in April 2002. Furthermore, the Internet Professionals Association, with Government's sponsorship, organizes the WebCare Campaign to promote a barrier-free online environment. The Campaign consists of a basic IT training scheme which adopts a "train-the-trainer" approach, so that enthusiastic female volunteers could be trained to provide IT training to others.

Research on Stereotyping

152. In the past few years, the EOC has been undertaking several researches to foster knowledge, establish benchmarks, and to generate an understanding of the community's perceptions in respect of gender stereotypes. Researches conducted include:

- (a) "A Baseline Survey of Students' Attitudes toward Gender Stereotypes and Family Roles" in 2000-02 which looked at current levels of acceptance and recognition among primary and secondary school students of gender stereotypes and family roles for future comparison. The study explored students' perceptions of gender issues such as sex traits, occupation orientation, preference of school subjects and extracurricular activities, family roles and dress codes. It was found that both male and female students were markedly gender stereotyped in their thinking on career and subject preferences. These findings served as valuable references to the EOC, education professionals and youth workers in formulating effective strategies to remove stereotyping.
- (b) "Research on Content Analysis of Textbooks and Teaching Materials in Respect of Stereotypes" in 1999-2002 investigated the nature and extent of stereotyping in printed educational materials, textbooks and examination papers and looked into aspects such as family role,

occupation, economic status, interests, public participation, achievements, social status and emotions as well as the perceptions of various stakeholders responsible for the production of educational materials. The findings were useful in developing recommendation and guidelines for publishers and teachers in providing alternative presentations in textbooks and teaching materials.

- (c) “Survey on Design & Technology and Home Economics in Secondary Schools in Hong Kong” in 1999 found that 85% of co-educational schools in Hong Kong did not allow students to choose freely between the subjects of Design & Technology and Home Economics, while most single sex schools only offered one of the two subjects. In October 1999, more than 150 concerned individuals including principals, teachers and members of concern groups, participated in a workshop to share best practices in ensuring that students were given the choice of studying Design & Technology and Home Economics.