

## **Culture and Heritage Commission Consultation Paper 2002**

### **The HKSEA's Response**

Established in 1992, the HKSEA is a non-governmental organisation dedicated to the development of arts education in Hong Kong. We are delighted to learn from the Culture and Heritage Commission Consultation Paper 2002 that the Culture and Heritage Commission (CHC) identifies cultural and arts education as the 'key' to and 'core driving force' of the bright prospects of cultural development in Hong Kong. As a matter of fact, in the last ten years, the HKSEA has been endeavouring to work along the lines of the suggested strategies, including '[c]oherence and continuity in the arts curriculum', '[d]iversified and comprehensive curriculum', '[q]uality support' and '[p]artnerships and community involvement'.

We are pleased to know that, as a high-level advisory body of the government's cultural policy, the CHC acknowledges and praises the importance and essential functions of arts education to Hong Kong people, in particular the younger generation, and spells out its mission of raising the quality of people through education as its core suggestion on the overall cultural policy of Hong Kong. This undeniably provides tremendous encouragement to the dedicated arts education professionals who have been working strenuously and against all odds in their profession. As an organisation representing more than a thousand arts teachers and arts education professionals, we would like to make the following points in response to the Consultation Paper:

#### **1. Pluralism**

It is noted that the Consultation Paper's Preface is entitled 'Diversity with Identity – Evolution through Innovation' and is concluded by pointing out the notion that '[o]ur vision to turn Hong Kong into an international cultural metropolis will not be an unrealistic goal', coherently highlighting the uniqueness and advantage of Hong Kong as a melting pot for Chinese and Western cultures. With regard to 'cultural facilities', the Consultation Paper acclaims that 'Hong Kong has the potential to be developed into an exhibition, trading and authentication centre for Chinese heritage and arts' and suggests 'to convert the Hong Kong Museum of Art into a Museum of Chinese Heritage and Antiquities, and convert the Heritage Museum into a Museum of Lingnan Culture or Ethnic Culture'. However, there appears to be no mention of how to foster assimilation of the best of western culture and arts and its integration with Chinese culture and arts. Apparently the Consultation Paper has failed to address one of the concerns of the respondents in the previous consultation, namely 'putting too much emphasis on Chinese culture would jeopardise Hong Kong's favourable position as an open and culturally pluralistic city'. Moreover, as one of the findings of the previous consultation shows, the young people in Hong Kong identify themselves as 'Hong Kong people' rather than 'Chinese'. As this finding is accepted by the Consultation Paper, it appears that caution should be taken in balancing this factor with the 'people-oriented' principle.

Moreover, it is suggested in the Consultation Paper that parents should be made the driving force by strengthening their input into the resources for promoting culture and arts education for the young people. One of its strategies is '[e]xpanding the functions and mode of operation of the Music Office to facilitate the development of school-based music training course'. However, we would like to point out that music is not the only arts form, which is suitable for school-based training courses. In line with the principle of 'Pluralism', we recommend that the Music Office should be reformed to the effect of being an 'Arts Education Office', having its functions extended to include developing comprehensive school-based training courses for various art forms.

## **2. Community-driven**

We whole-heartedly support the CHC's adoption of the 'community-driven' approach as one of the six major strategies in formulating cultural policy. As one of the major non-governmental organisations dedicated to the promotion of arts education in the territory, the HKSEA is committed to raising the professional standard and status of arts education and promoting cultural and arts development in Hong Kong. From our experience in the last ten years, we have come to a thorough understanding of the importance of the participation of non-governmental organisations in the promotion of cultural and arts. But on the other hand, we have also realised the limitations and difficulties encountered by non-governmental organisations in the aforesaid process. Therefore, we have high expectations of the Consultation Paper's suggestion that 'non-government organisations should take the lead in cultural development'. However, in respect with the proposals on the relevant institutional framework, we have reservations about the proposal that '[t]he "Culture Foundation" should be a statutory body [and] [t]he government should appoint the majority of the members from the private sector'.

As the CHC acknowledges the importance of the notion of 'community-driven', we doubt about the suggestion of the Consultation Paper that the government should appoint the majority of the members of the 'Cultural Foundation'. We accept that some of the members of the 'Cultural Foundation' should be from the community as these people can play a bridging role between the government and the community. However, as culture can be defined as 'the common values and aesthetic inclinations of a community', we believe that it is of paramount importance that the real voices from the community should be heard within the 'Cultural Foundation' which are essential to engineering the strategies and policies on culture and arts in Hong Kong. We therefore urge that at least half of the members of proposed 'Cultural Foundation', which would have far-reaching influence on the policies on culture and arts in Hong Kong, should be elected, in line with the notions of 'community-driven' and 'diversified development'.

Besides, we believe that the Chinese name of 'Culture Foundation' (文化基金會) is likely to mislead people into thinking that the remit of the Foundation is limited to funding. As mentioned in the Consultation Paper, 'culture' can be defined at various levels. To avoid leading the public into believing that the proposed organisation's remit is limitless, it should be named 'Culture and Arts Board' (文化藝術議會). Apart from providing funding, the organisation should conduct various kinds of research to formulate long-term suggestions for the Hong Kong Government, in particular the Home Affairs Bureau, to lay a good foundation for Hong Kong's policies on culture and arts.

### **3. Resource Deployment**

Resource deployment is undoubtedly an important aspect of the overall cultural and arts policy. Taking the HKSEA as an example, we have been receiving 'One Year Grand' from the Hong Kong Arts Development Council. However, there is no funding mechanism in the Arts Education Committee of the Council. We therefore need to turn to the Visual Arts Committee of the Council to apply for funding. But from the perspective of some of the members of the Funding Committee, visual arts education is effectively education rather than visual arts. We therefore have encountered significant difficulty in securing funding. We are proud to say that our work in promotion of arts education has proved to be rather successful. With the 'One Year Grant' in the past few years, we managed to implement the various arts education promotion projects successfully. But as a consequence of our 'obscure identity' under the aforementioned funding mechanism, we have all along been wrongly perceived to be using up the resource under the account of the Visual Arts Committee.

Similar problem also occurs in funding mechanism for educational establishments. Since priority is given to the subject matter prescribed in the curriculum and raising the teaching quality of 'major subjects' in education funding in Hong Kong, applications by non-educational establishments always prove to be much less likely to be successful. We therefore hope that the future funding mechanism can eradicate the aforesaid 'blind spot' and help promote diversified development of culture and arts by including the participation of representatives of different arts and education sectors in the decision-making process of the funding committee, which would prevent the recurrence of the situation of 'artists not knowing education and education professionals not knowing arts'.

Moreover, we believe that the 'One Year Grant Scheme' greatly handicaps well-established and recognised organisations in formulating their long-term strategies. As indicated above, organisations like the HKSEA encounter big hurdles in applying for funding under the current funding mechanism for educational establishments because 'arts' has always been considered a 'minor subject' in the curriculum and we are further hindered by our 'obscure identity'. Therefore we sincerely hope that the proposed 'Culture Foundation' (we suggest the organisation be named 'Culture and Arts Board') should set up a long-term funding mechanism for arts education. The introduction of such a funding mechanism would put into practice the philosophy of promotion of cultural development through arts education. In line with the 'community-driven' approach, such a funding mechanism would provide stronger impetus for the future cultural development of Hong Kong.