

CHAPTER 3

Education Bureau The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education

Gifted education

**Audit Commission
Hong Kong
28 March 2024**

This audit review was carried out under a set of guidelines tabled in the Provisional Legislative Council by the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee on 11 February 1998. The guidelines were agreed between the Public Accounts Committee and the Director of Audit and accepted by the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

Report No. 82 of the Director of Audit contains 8 Chapters which are available on our website (<https://www.aud.gov.hk>).



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GIFTED EDUCATION

Contents

	Paragraph
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	
PART 1: INTRODUCTION	1.1 – 1.13
Audit review	1.14
General response from the Government and The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education	1.15
Acknowledgement	1.16
PART 2: IDENTIFYING AND DEVELOPING TALENTS OF GIFTED STUDENTS	2.1
Identifying gifted students for off-school support	2.2 – 2.26
Audit recommendations	2.27 – 2.28
Response from The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education	2.29
Response from the Government	2.30
Programmes for gifted students	2.31 – 2.38
Audit recommendations	2.39
Response from The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education	2.40

	Paragraph
Other programmes and services	2.41 – 2.51
Audit recommendations	2.52
Response from The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education	2.53
 PART 3: GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES OF THE HONG KONG ACADEMY FOR GIFTED EDUCATION	 3.1
Safeguarding national security	3.2 – 3.5
Audit recommendation	3.6
Response from The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education	3.7
Performance measurement	3.8 – 3.10
Audit recommendation	3.11
Response from The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education	3.12
Corporate governance	3.13 – 3.16
Audit recommendation	3.17
Response from The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education	3.18
Administrative issues	3.19 – 3.27
Audit recommendations	3.28
Response from The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education	3.29

	Paragraph
PART 4: EDUCATION BUREAU’S SUPPORT MEASURES FOR GIFTED EDUCATION	4.1 – 4.2
Professional Development Programmes	4.3 – 4.5
Audit recommendations	4.6
Response from the Government	4.7
Gifted Education School Network	4.8 – 4.11
Audit recommendations	4.12
Response from the Government	4.13
Education resources	4.14 – 4.20
Audit recommendations	4.21
Response from the Government	4.22
Off-school Advanced Learning Programmes	4.23 – 4.43
Audit recommendations	4.44
Response from the Government	4.45
 Appendices	 Page
A : The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education: Organisation chart (extract) (31 December 2023)	81
B : Education Bureau: Organisation chart (extract) (31 December 2023)	82
C : Acronyms and abbreviations	83

GIFTED EDUCATION

Executive Summary

1. Fostering gifted education is of pivotal importance to help nurture and enrich Hong Kong's pool of talent, thereby increasing our competitiveness. The Education Bureau (EDB), headed by the Secretary for Education, is responsible for the development and implementation of gifted education policy in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education (HKAGE) works together with EDB in the provision of gifted education. Established in 2008 as a private company limited by guarantee, HKAGE became a non-profit organisation subvented by EDB in 2017. In 2016, the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council approved the creation of a new commitment for the establishment of the Gifted Education Fund (GE Fund). GE Fund supports the operation of HKAGE and the provision of Off-school Advanced Learning Programmes (OSALPs) for gifted students in Hong Kong. The Permanent Secretary for Education Incorporated acts as the trustee of GE Fund. Since its establishment and up to 2023, the total funding approved for GE Fund amounted to \$2.2 billion. The Audit Commission (Audit) has recently conducted a review of the work of EDB and HKAGE in gifted education.

Identifying and developing talents of gifted students

2. *Membership applications were not enthusiastic.* HKAGE operates under a membership system. Gifted students aged from 10 to 18 studying in schools in Hong Kong can apply for membership to enjoy HKAGE's programmes and services. There are five channels for gifted students to become HKAGE members, i.e. School Nomination, Parent Nomination, Nurturing the Gifted Scheme, Web-based Learning Courses for Gifted/More Able Students and Principal's Nomination. Audit examined the membership applications received in the period from school year 2018/19 to school year 2022/23 (unless otherwise specified, all years (e.g. 2018/19) mentioned in this Audit Report refer to school years). Audit found that: (a) in the period, the overall percentage of schools without students nominated for HKAGE membership via School Nomination or Principal's Nomination was 51%, ranging from 48% to 53% each year. In the 5-year period, of the 1,103 schools, 347 (31%) did not nominate any students throughout the period; and (b) the majority of membership applications were received via School Nomination, ranging from 88% to 92% each

Executive Summary

year. The percentage of applications received via the other channels was on the low side (paras. 2.2, 2.3 and 2.6).

3. ***Need to enhance Online Screening Programme.*** Audit examined the Online Screening Programme held in the period from 2018/19 to 2022/23. Audit found that: (a) only about half of the nominated students had completed the Online Screening Programme, ranging from 45 % in 2019/20 to 62 % in 2021/22. The overall percentage for the period was 56 %; (b) according to HKAGE, some parents said that the online platform for the Online Screening Programme was unstable and as a result, the final assessment of the Programme could not be completed within the allowed time; and (c) up to 2022/23, the questions in the Online Screening Programme's final assessment had been used for more than six years. The possibility that the questions could have been leaked to the public rendering the assessment tool not reliable was discussed in a meeting of HKAGE's Senior Management Team in January 2023. However, up to January 2024, no action had been taken to revise the assessment questions. According to HKAGE, a development project on a new set of identification tools commenced in September 2023 and was scheduled for completion by December 2025. In Audit's view, HKAGE needs to review the existing assessment questions prior to the implementation of the new set of identification tools and closely monitor the progress of the development project on the new set of identification tools (paras. 2.9, 2.11 and 2.12).

4. ***Room for improvements in Student Profile Screening.*** Audit examined the records of Student Profile Screening conducted for the 3,315 student profiles in 2022/23. Audit found that: (a) while there were guidelines on marking the overall scores, the two Selection Committee members did not give any comments on the students based on the three assessment criteria. There was no documentation showing how the scores given by the members were arrived at; and (b) HKAGE's guidelines on Student Profile Screening had not always been complied with. There was no documentary evidence showing that re-examination had been conducted before the 579 marginal cases were accepted. Instead of rejecting the cases, all the 573 cases with aggregate score of 3 were accepted without documentation on the justifications of doing so. Moreover, 15 cases were accepted by the Senior Management Team despite Quality Control Team's recommendation to reject and there was no documentary evidence showing the justifications of doing so (para. 2.15).

5. ***Some students did not proceed after passing Online Screening Programme.*** Students who have passed the Online Screening Programme need to

Executive Summary

proceed to the Student Profile Screening before they could become HKAGE members. In the period from 2018/19 to 2022/23, 16,725 students passed the Online Screening Programme. However, 1,101 (7%) students did not proceed to the stage of Student Profile Screening (para. 2.18).

6. ***Lower success rates of membership applications from School Nomination.***

Audit examined the applications received via School Nomination and Parent Nomination in the period from 2018/19 to 2022/23. Audit found that: (a) the success rates of students nominated via School Nomination (i.e. ranging from 11% to 16% each year, averaging 13%) were lower than that of students nominated via Parent Nomination (i.e. ranging from 27% to 51% each year, averaging 33%); and (b) the passing rates in Online Screening Programme and Student Profile Screening of students from School Nomination were significantly lower than that of students from Parent Nomination (para. 2.20).

7. ***Target member-to-population ratio not achieved.*** HKAGE had set a target member-to-population ratio (i.e. number of members divided by the student population aged from 10 to 18). The target was set at 2% to 2.5% in the Three-year Business Plans from 2018/19-2020/21 to 2020/21-2022/23 and 2.5% in the Business Plans for 2021/22-2023/24 and 2022/23-2024/25. Audit examined the member-to-population ratios in the period from 2018/19 to 2022/23 and noted that the ratio was below the target each year, ranging from 1.6% to 1.9% (paras. 2.24 and 2.25).

8. ***Targets for completion rates not set for programmes for gifted students.***

According to the service agreement signed between the Government and HKAGE, programme completion rate is one of the performance indicators to measure the effectiveness of HKAGE's programmes. HKAGE is required to set out the annual performance targets on its performance indicators in each Business Plan. However, Audit found that starting from the 2021/22-2023/24 Business Plan, HKAGE had not set aimed completion rates for its programmes. There was no documentary evidence showing the justifications for not setting annual performance targets for completion rate (paras. 2.31 and 2.32).

9. ***Completion rates of some programmes for gifted students were low.*** Audit analysed the completion rates of the programmes organised by HKAGE in the period from 2020/21 to 2022/23. Audit found that the completion rates of some programmes

Executive Summary

were low: (a) of the 1,246 face-to-face programmes held, the completion rates of 26 (2%) programmes were lower than 50%; and (b) of the 108 online programmes held, the completion rates of 62 (57%) programmes were lower than 50% (para. 2.33).

10. *Need to improve enrolment rates and completion rates of parent programmes.* Audit examined the enrolment rates of parent programmes held in 2021/22 and 2022/23 and noted that: (a) the average enrolment rate for parent programmes decreased significantly from 81% (ranging from 10% to 104%) in 2021/22 to 57% (ranging from 8% to 105%) in 2022/23; and (b) the enrolment rates of 12 (32%) of the 38 parent programmes held in 2021/22 and 13 (42%) of the 31 parent programmes held in 2022/23 were below 50%. Audit also examined the completion rates of parent programmes held in 2021/22 and 2022/23 and noted that the completion rates of 6 (16%) of the 38 parent programmes held in 2021/22 and 5 (16%) of the 31 parent programmes held in 2022/23 were below 50% (paras. 2.42 and 2.43).

11. *Need to shorten waiting time for consultation and assessment sessions.* Of the 162 hotline service requests received in 2021/22 and 2022/23 that had been responded by HKAGE as at 31 December 2023, 118 (73%) required the arrangements of consultation or assessment sessions. Audit analysed the waiting time for the consultation or assessment sessions (i.e. duration between the date of service requests and the date of consultation or assessment sessions). Audit found that the waiting time for consultation and assessment sessions was relatively long, ranging from 0 to 362 days (averaging 85 days). For 17 (14%) of the 118 consultation and assessment sessions, the waiting time was over 180 days (para. 2.47).

Governance and administrative issues of The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education

12. *Need to strengthen measures for safeguarding national security.* According to the School Administration Guide issued by EDB to aided schools, all levels of school personnel should perform their respective functions and work in collaboration to facilitate the effective formulation and implementation of measures for safeguarding national security in schools. EDB has issued guidelines to the public sector schools offering full curriculum on procurement procedures to safeguard national security. According to the guidelines, schools should include specific clauses

Executive Summary

into the quotation/tender documents to allow disqualification of a supplier and to terminate the contract in the interest of national security. Although HKAGE is not covered by the guidelines issued by EDB, its responsibilities to safeguard national security are as important as those of the public sector schools. Audit noted that up to January 2024, HKAGE had not formulated or implemented specific measures for safeguarding national security (paras. 3.2 to 3.4).

13. ***Targets were not set for some performance indicators.*** According to EDB, HKAGE should set targets for the performance indicators listed in the service agreement and include the targets in the Three-year Business Plan. Audit reviewed HKAGE's Three-year Business Plan for 2023/24-2025/26. Audit found that in the Business Plan, of the 19 performance indicators listed in the service agreement: (a) for 15 (79%) indicators, there was no mentioning of the performance indicators in the Business Plan and no targets had been set; (b) for 1 (5%) indicator, a quantified target was set. However, the timeframe for achieving the target was not mentioned; and (c) for the remaining 3 (16%) indicators, quantified targets with timeframe for achieving them were set (paras. 3.8 and 3.9).

14. ***Delays in distributing meeting notice and documents to Board members.*** Audit reviewed HKAGE's 9 Board meetings held in the period from 2020/21 to 2022/23 and found that of the 9 Board meetings: (a) the requirement on serving meeting notice at least 10 business days before the date of the meeting was not complied with in 8 (89%) meetings, with delays ranging from 1 to 3 days (averaging 1.5 days); and (b) the requirement on serving meeting documents at least 5 business days before the date of the meeting was not complied with in 3 (33%) meetings, each with a delay of 1 day (para. 3.15).

15. ***Need to improve measures relating to Sexual Conviction Record Check (SCRC).*** HKAGE's Corporate Governance Manual stipulated that all new employees are required to undergo SCRC. The contracts signed between HKAGE and the service providers required that all prospective employees deployed to provide services for HKAGE are required to undergo SCRC and not to have conviction record against sexual offences. Audit examined SCRC records of 36 new employees in the period from 2019/20 to 2022/23. Audit found that of the 36 employees: (a) for 8 (22%) employees, the dates of SCRC results were long before the employment dates, exceeding 180 days (ranging from 204 to 360 days, averaging 238 days). There was no record showing that HKAGE had accessed the updated results before the employees started their employment; and (b) for 8 (22%) other employees, SCRC

Executive Summary

results were obtained after they had started their employment. For 3 (8%) employees, the results were obtained 49 to 55 days (averaging 51 days) after they had started their employment. Moreover, Audit examined the records of 20 programmes completed in 2021/22. Audit found that, for all the 20 (100%) programmes, HKAGE did not seek confirmations from the service providers on whether they had complied with the requirements on SCRC (paras. 3.20 to 3.22).

16. *Need to ensure employees comply with requirements on declaration of interest.* According to HKAGE's guidelines, new employees of HKAGE are required to submit declaration of interest at the time of reporting duties. Audit examined the records on declaration of interest submitted by 36 new employees in the period from 2019/20 to 2022/23. Audit found that for 9 (25%) new employees, the declarations of interests were submitted after the dates of reporting duty. The delays ranged from 1 to 85 days (averaging 19 days). For 2 (6%) new employees, the declarations of interests were submitted over 30 days after they reported duties (para. 3.24).

Education Bureau's support measures for gifted education

17. *Need to enhance attendance rates of some Professional Development Programmes (PDPs).* Audit reviewed the records of the 883 PDPs on gifted education (comprising 364 programmes for all schools and 519 programmes for targeted schools) organised by EDB in the 5-year period from 2018/19 to 2022/23. Audit found that: (a) the enrolment rates of individual programmes ranged from 5% to 290%, averaging 96%. Of the 364 programmes for all schools, 189 (52%) were oversubscribed; and (b) the completion rates of programmes for all schools (ranging from 49% to 100%, averaging 78%) were relatively lower than those for targeted schools (ranging from 89% to 100%, averaging 99.9%). Moreover, the completion rates of programmes for all schools were on a decreasing trend, from 84% in 2018/19 to 69% in 2022/23 (para. 4.4).

18. *Need to encourage schools to participate in Gifted Education School Network.* Audit reviewed the number of primary schools and secondary schools participating in the Gifted Education School Network in the period from 2019/20 to 2023/24. Audit found that among some 1,200 schools, the number of schools participating in the Network ranged from 29 (3%) to 87 (7%) each year (averaging 56 (5%)). The cumulative number of schools that have participated in the Network in the period was 151 (13%) (para. 4.9).

Executive Summary

19. ***Approved funding applications for OSALPs were predominantly from post-secondary institutions.*** Audit examined the funding applications for OSALPs received by EDB in the period from 2019/20 to 2022/23. Audit found that the percentages of funding applications from organisations other than post-secondary institutions were low: (a) of the 143 applications received, 69 (48%) were from post-secondary institutions, 37 (26%) were from non-governmental organisations and 19 (13%) were from technology enterprises. None were received from professional bodies; and (b) of the 42 approved applications, 34 (81%) were received from post-secondary institutions. The percentages of approved applications received from eligible organisations other than post-secondary institutions were low, ranging from 0% in 2019/20 to 27% in 2022/23 (averaging 16%). Furthermore, Audit examined the list of potential programme providers adopted for OSALPs application invitation exercises in the period from 2019/20 to 2022/23. Audit found that each year, the number of professional bodies, technology enterprises and non-governmental organisations being invited were few, ranging from 0 to 11 (paras. 4.25 and 4.26).

20. ***Delays in submission of financial statements and reports.*** Audit examined the records for submission of financial statements and reports by OSALP providers in the period from September 2019 to January 2024. Audit found that: (a) 18 (58%) of the 31 Final Financial Reports and 12 (39%) of the 31 Final Reports were submitted late. The delays ranged from 2 to 134 days (averaging 34 days) and from 2 to 134 days (averaging 34 days) respectively; and (b) 10 (16%) of the 62 Interim Financial Reports and 8 (13%) of the 60 Progress Reports were submitted late. The delays ranged from 1 to 43 days (averaging 12 days) and from 1 to 41 days (averaging 12 days) respectively (para. 4.31).

21. ***Need to improve lesson observations.*** Audit examined the 92 lesson observations carried out by EDB on the 31 OSALPs completed in the period from September 2019 to September 2023. Audit found that the frequency, mode of result documentation and follow-up actions taken for the lesson observations varied: (a) the number of lesson observations conducted on each of the OSALPs varied and ranged from 1 to 7, averaging 3; (b) for 61 (66%) lesson observations, only photos showing students attending lessons were kept as the records of lesson observations (i.e. no written records were available showing comments made by the officers conducting the lesson observations); for 1 (1%) lesson observation, a press release issued by the programme provider was used as the record (i.e. no written records were available showing comments made by the officers conducting the lesson observations); and for 1 (1%) lesson observation, the result was not available; and (c) for 74 (80%) lesson observations, there was no record showing that comments and/or views arising from

Executive Summary

the observations had been communicated to the programme providers; and for all the 92 lesson observations, there was no record showing that EDB had taken actions to ensure that the comments and/or views arising from the lesson observations had been followed up by the programme providers (para. 4.32).

22. *Need to ensure programme providers' compliance with requirements on SCRC.* Since 2022/23, EDB has required programme providers to submit a confirmation relating to SCRC prior to the first session of the programmes. Audit examined the records of the 11 OSALPs approved in 2022/23. Audit found that for 10 (91%) of 11 programmes, instead of submitting a confirmation prior to the first session of the programmes, the programme providers submitted the confirmations 17 to 144 days (averaging 65 days) after the first session (paras. 4.41 and 4.42).

Audit recommendations

23. **Audit recommendations are made in the respective sections of this Audit Report. Only the key ones are highlighted in this Executive Summary. Audit has recommended that:**

- (a) **the Executive Director, The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education, in collaboration with the Secretary for Education, should:**

Identifying and developing talents of gifted students

- (i) **step up efforts in identifying gifted students, including taking actions to address the issue of the lack of enthusiasm of some schools in nominating gifted students, and taking further measures to promote channels for identification of gifted students other than School Nomination (para. 2.27(a)); and**
- (ii) **encourage schools to facilitate their nominated students to prepare for the screening process and provide appropriate support to the schools to facilitate their identification of gifted students for nominations for HKAGE membership (para. 2.27(b) and (c));**

Executive Summary

- (b) **the Executive Director, The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education should:**

Identifying and developing talents of gifted students

- (i) **encourage schools to facilitate students to complete the Online Screening Programme and provide appropriate assistance to schools, parents and students (para. 2.28(a));**
- (ii) **monitor the technical issues of the final assessment of the Online Screening Programme and rectify the technical issues identified (para. 2.28(c));**
- (iii) **review the existing assessment questions in the Online Screening Programme’s final assessment prior to the implementation of the new set of identification tools and closely monitor the progress of the development project on the new set of identification tools (para. 2.28(d));**
- (iv) **require the Selection Committee members to give comments and justifications based on the three assessment criteria to support the scores given by them in the Student Profile Screening (para. 2.28(e));**
- (v) **ensure that HKAGE’s guidelines on Student Profile Screening are complied with, and any deviations from the guidelines should be well justified and documented (para. 2.28(f));**
- (vi) **ensure that due consideration is given to the recommendations of the Quality Control Team and document the justifications for accepting the students who have been recommended for rejection by the Team in the Student Profile Screening (para. 2.28(g));**
- (vii) **take a prudent approach when making adjustments to the assessments of student profiles in the Student Profile Screening and ensure consistency in the standard of screening for identifying suitable students with untapped talents for nurturing (para. 2.28(h));**

Executive Summary

- (viii) **ascertain the reasons for not proceeding to the stage of Student Profile Screening by students who have passed the Online Screening Programme and in light of the reasons, take appropriate actions to follow up with these cases (para. 2.28(j));**
- (ix) **step up efforts to achieve the target member-to-population ratio (para. 2.28(m));**
- (x) **set targets on the overall completion rates for HKAGE's programmes for gifted students and monitor their completion rates (para. 2.39(a) and (b));**
- (xi) **monitor and improve the enrolment rates and completion rates of parent programmes (para. 2.52(a));**
- (xii) **explore measures to shorten the waiting time for consultation and assessment sessions (para. 2.52(d));**

Governance and administrative issues of HKAGE

- (xiii) **strengthen HKAGE's guidelines and regulations relating to the safeguarding of national security, including measures pertinent to school administration and procurement procedures (para. 3.6);**
- (xiv) **set targets for the performance indicators listed in the service agreement (para. 3.11);**
- (xv) **ensure that meeting notice and documents are served to HKAGE's Board members within the required timeframe (para. 3.17);**
- (xvi) **for SCRC on new employees that were conducted long before they reported duty, obtain the updated SCRC results prior to their employment date and document the results accordingly (para. 3.28(a));**

Executive Summary

- (xvii) ensure that SCRC is conducted before the new employees start their employment and seek confirmations from the service providers on whether they have complied with SCRC requirements stipulated in the service contracts (para. 3.28(b) and (c)); and
 - (xviii) ensure that the interest declaration requirements stipulated in HKAGE's guidelines are complied with by new employees (para. 3.28(d)); and
- (c) the Secretary for Education should:

EDB's support measures for gifted education

- (i) consider conducting adequate re-runs for PDPs that have been oversubscribed to meet the demand for them and encourage teachers who have enrolled in PDPs to complete the programmes as far as possible (para. 4.6(a) and (b));
- (ii) encourage schools to participate in the Gifted Education School Network (para. 4.12(a));
- (iii) step up efforts in encouraging eligible organisations to apply for OSALPs (para. 4.44(a));
- (iv) review the list of potential programme providers with a view to identifying more potential programme providers for OSALPs application invitations (para. 4.44(b));
- (v) ensure that financial statements and reports are submitted by programme providers of OSALPs in a timely manner (para. 4.44(c));
- (vi) improve the lesson observations for OSALPs (para. 4.44(d)); and

Executive Summary

- (vii) ensure that programme providers submit the required confirmation relating to SCRC before the first session of OSALPs (para. 4.44(f)).

Response from the Government and The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education

24. The Secretary for Education and the Executive Director, The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education agree with the audit recommendations.

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 This PART describes the background to the audit and outlines the audit objectives and scope.

Background

1.2 ***Gifted education provision.*** In Hong Kong, human capital is considered the most important asset. Fostering gifted education is of pivotal importance to help nurture and enrich Hong Kong's pool of talent, thereby increasing our competitiveness. The Education Bureau (EDB), headed by the Secretary for Education, is responsible for the development and implementation of gifted education policy in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education (HKAGE — see para. 1.9) works together with EDB in the provision of gifted education. According to EDB, all children have multiple intelligences that can be fully developed when given the learning opportunities. The mission of gifted education is to fully explore and develop the potentials of gifted students systematically and strategically by providing them with opportunities to receive education at appropriate levels in a flexible teaching and learning environment.

1.3 ***Definition of giftedness.*** Gifted students are those who show exceptional achievement or potential in one or more of the following areas:

- (a) a high level of measured intelligence;
- (b) specific academic aptitude in a subject area;
- (c) creative thinking (high ability to invent novel and elaborate ideas);
- (d) superior talent in visual and performing arts (e.g. painting, drama, dance and music);
- (e) natural leadership of peers; and
- (f) psychomotor ability (outstanding performance in athletics, mechanical skills or other areas requiring gross or fine motor coordination).

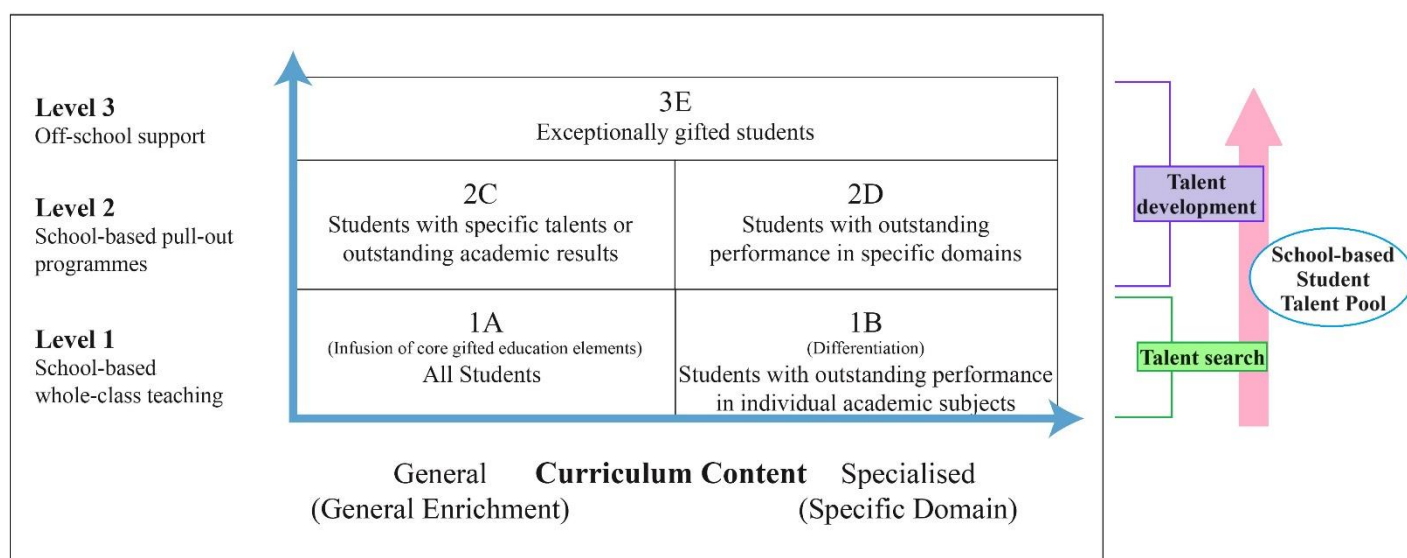
Introduction

1.4 **Importance of identifying and developing talents of gifted students.** According to EDB, if not given proper attention and nurturing, talents of gifted students may go unnoticed and the related potential untapped. A community that identifies and develops such talents in a systematic and invigorating manner will unleash the true potential of its human capital.

1.5 **School-based and off-school gifted education.** According to EDB, nurturing multiple intelligences is a fundamental goal of quality basic education and should be the mission of all schools. Gifted education should be part of quality education. The needs of gifted students, like their less able counterparts, should basically be met in their own school. Schools should provide sequential and multiple educational activities to gifted students at different levels. Gifted education in Hong Kong adopts an inclusive approach seeking to cater for learner diversity. The three-tier implementation model for gifted education comprises school-based (Levels 1 and 2) and off-school (Level 3) gifted education, and follows the sequence from “talent search” in Level 1 to “talent development” in Levels 2 and 3 (see Figure 1):

Figure 1

School-based and off-school gifted education under the three-tier implementation model



Source: EDB records

- (a) ***School-based gifted education.*** School-based gifted education consists of Levels 1 and 2:
 - (i) ***Level 1 (school-based whole-class teaching).*** Level 1 uses pedagogies that could tap the potential of students in creativity, critical thinking, problem solving or leadership in the regular classrooms; and
 - (ii) ***Level 2 (school-based pull-out programmes).*** Level 2 offers pull-out programmes in disciplinary or interdisciplinary areas for the more able students within the school setting; and
- (b) ***Off-school gifted education.*** Off-school gifted education is provided as Level 3, which provides learning opportunities for the exceptionally gifted students in the form of specialist training outside the school setting.

According to EDB, starting from 2023/24 (Note 1), it has stepped up the promotion of school-based student talent pool for schools to identify and nurture gifted students, and to nominate gifted students for pursuing off-school gifted education at Level 3.

1.6 ***Implementation of gifted education in Hong Kong.*** In accordance with the three-tier implementation model, EDB and HKAGE provide support to various parties, including schools, teachers, students and parents. The support measures of EDB and HKAGE include:

- (a) ***Support measures for schools and teachers.*** Gifted education support is provided by EDB via measures including:
 - (i) Professional Development Programmes (PDPs);
 - (ii) production of education resources; and
 - (iii) networking of teachers for professional exchanges; and

Note 1: *Unless otherwise specified, all years (e.g. 2023/24) mentioned in this Audit Report refer to school years, which start on 1 September and end on 31 August of the following year.*

- (b) *Support measures for students and parents.* Gifted education support is provided by EDB via the Off-school Advanced Learning Programmes (OSALPs) for students, and by HKAGE via various programmes and services for students and parents.

Gifted Education Fund (GE Fund)

1.7 *Establishment and funding injection.* In the 2016 Policy Address, the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region announced the setting up of GE Fund to nurture more gifted students in an effort to enrich the talent pool and enhance the competitiveness of Hong Kong. In June 2016, the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council approved the creation of a new commitment of \$800 million for the establishment of GE Fund as an endowment fund for generating investment income for the development of gifted education. In October 2018, the Finance Committee approved an additional injection of \$800 million into GE Fund to enhance gifted education development. For stepping up the promotion of gifted education, particularly in STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics) related areas, an additional injection of \$600 million into GE Fund was approved by the Legislative Council in the context of the Appropriation Ordinance 2023 enacted in May 2023. The total funding approved thus amounted to \$2.2 billion.

1.8 *Use and management of GE Fund.* GE Fund supports the operation of HKAGE and the provision of OSALPs for gifted students in Hong Kong. GE Fund is managed in accordance with its Trust Deed, which stipulates the framework and the salient features necessary for its proper management and administration. The Permanent Secretary for Education Incorporated acts as the trustee of GE Fund. The Advisory Committee on Gifted Education (ACGE — see para. 1.13(b)) advises the Secretary for Education on the use and management of GE Fund. The annual audited accounts of GE Fund are tabled before the Legislative Council. As the Controlling Officer, the Permanent Secretary for Education is responsible for ensuring the prudent management of the resources under GE Fund. Table 1 shows the income and expenditure of GE Fund in the period from financial years 2018-19 to 2022-23 (Note 2).

Note 2: *GE Fund's financial year starts on 1 September and ends on 31 August of the following year.*

Table 1

**Income and expenditure of GE Fund
(Financial years 2018-19 to 2022-23)**

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
	(\$'000)				
<i>Income</i>					
Government grant	800,000	—	—	—	600,000
Interest income from placement with the Exchange Fund	38,486	55,381	70,571	86,217	70,983
Other interest income	—	15	8	48	7,755
Total	838,486	55,396	70,579	86,265	678,738
<i>Expenditure</i>					
Award of grants	40,133	41,653	59,258	62,307	69,864
Total	40,133	41,653	59,258	62,307	69,864

Source: Audit Commission analysis of EDB records

HKAGE

1.9 ***Background.*** In 2008, HKAGE was established as a private company limited by guarantee with a start-up funding of \$200 million, which comprised a one-off government grant of \$100 million and a private donation of \$100 million. In 2017, HKAGE became a non-profit organisation subvented by EDB. HKAGE's campus is located in Sha Tin (see Photograph 1). It works closely with EDB in the provision of gifted education, particularly in planning and implementing off-school gifted education services for exceptionally gifted students at primary and secondary schools. HKAGE provides enrichment and advanced as well as

Introduction

specialised and personalised learning programmes for its members (Note 3). As at 31 December 2023, HKAGE had about 8,000 members.

Photograph 1

HKAGE's campus



Source: HKAGE records

1.10 **Corporate governance.** HKAGE's Board of Directors (Board) is the governing body of HKAGE. The Board is responsible for determining HKAGE's business directions, affairs and business policies. It is accountable for the safeguarding of and proper and effective use of Government subvention, and the proper stewardship of assets and resources of HKAGE. As at 31 December 2023, the Board consisted of 12 members, including at least one member from each of five categories (namely tertiary institution, school sector, business sector, parent representative and psychologist), and two ex-officio members from EDB. The Board members were nominated by the Permanent Secretary for Education. Four functional committees were set up under the Board, namely the Finance and General Affairs Committee, the Talent Development Committee, the School and Student Services Committee and the Research Committee. HKAGE's Executive Director is appointed by the Board and is responsible for implementing the decisions of the Board and its functional committees. According to the service agreement it signed with the Government, HKAGE is required to submit business plan, budget, annual report and

Note 3: *HKAGE provides gifted education to gifted students as its members.*

staff remuneration report to EDB on an annual basis. An extract of the organisation chart of HKAGE as at 31 December 2023 is shown in Appendix A.

1.11 ***Income and expenditure.*** In financial year 2022-23 (Note 4), HKAGE's total income was \$51.4 million, which mainly comprised Government subvention of \$50.6 million (98%). In the same year, the total expenditure incurred by HKAGE was \$52.1 million. As at 31 December 2023, HKAGE had 57 staff. In the period from financial years 2018-19 to 2022-23, the staff costs incurred by HKAGE increased by \$4.6 million (15%) from \$30.3 million to \$34.9 million. Table 2 shows the income and expenditure of HKAGE in the period from financial years 2018-19 to 2022-23.

Note 4: *HKAGE's financial year starts on 1 September and ends on 31 August of the following year.*

Table 2

**Income and expenditure of HKAGE
(Financial years 2018-19 to 2022-23)**

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
	(\$'000)				
<i>Income</i>					
Programme income	343	15	376	136	226
Government subvention	36,369	38,821	41,903	46,251	50,557
Donation (Note)	4,874	3,982	6,432	—	—
Other income	643	37	59	230	627
Total	42,229	42,855	48,770	46,617	51,410
<i>Expenditure</i>					
Programme costs	8,390	6,608	10,474	8,383	9,282
Staff costs	30,251	31,888	32,342	32,515	34,947
Administrative expenses	7,067	5,392	7,147	6,695	7,840
Total	45,708	43,888	49,963	47,593	52,069

Source: Audit Commission analysis of HKAGE records

Note: In the period from financial years 2018-19 to 2020-21, HKAGE received donations from a charitable trust for conducting a programme held during the period.

EDB's Gifted Education Section

1.12 The Gifted Education Section under EDB's Curriculum Support Division is responsible for supporting schools in implementing school-based gifted education initiatives, organising gifted education programmes for students, managing GE Fund,

and collaborating with HKAGE to ensure the quality of gifted education programmes. The Gifted Education Section is headed by the Chief Curriculum Development Officer (Gifted Education) and reports to the Principal Assistant Secretary (Curriculum Support). As at 31 December 2023, the Gifted Education Section had an establishment of 23 full-time staff (comprising 12 civil servants, 9 non-civil service contract staff and 2 T-contract staff) and 1 part-time non-civil service contract staff. The strength of Gifted Education Section was 20 full-time staff (comprising 11 civil servants, 7 non-civil service contract staff and 2 T-contract staff) and 1 part-time non-civil service contract staff. An extract of the organisation chart of EDB as at 31 December 2023 is shown in Appendix B.

Advisory bodies on gifted education

1.13 To engage relevant stakeholders and solicit support from experts of different sectors for enhancing the development of gifted education in Hong Kong, two advisory bodies, namely the Curriculum Development Council Committee on Gifted Education and ACGE, were set up in 2003 and 2017 respectively:

- (a) ***Curriculum Development Council Committee on Gifted Education.*** The Curriculum Development Council Committee on Gifted Education is set up under the Curriculum Development Council (Note 5). It gives advice on gifted education policies and strategies, in particular support measures on grooming of talent at the school level and teacher training, to meet the needs of gifted students and to realise their potential to the fullest. As at 31 December 2023, the members of the committee comprised the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and 16 members; and
- (b) ***ACGE.*** ACGE advises the Secretary for Education on the use and management of GE Fund, strategic development of gifted education in Hong Kong as well as new measures and initiatives for promoting gifted education. As at 31 December 2023, the members of ACGE comprised the Chairman, 10 non-official members, 4 ex-officio members and the

Note 5: *The Curriculum Development Council is a free-standing advisory body appointed by the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region to give advice to the Government on matters relating to curriculum development for the local school system. It was formerly known as the Curriculum Development Committee and was first established in 1972.*

Introduction

Secretary. EDB's Gifted Education Section serves as the Secretariat of ACGE.

Audit review

1.14 In October 2023, the Audit Commission (Audit) commenced a review of the work of EDB and HKAGE in gifted education. This audit has focused on the following areas:

- (a) identifying and developing talents of gifted students (PART 2);
- (b) governance and administrative issues of HKAGE (PART 3); and
- (c) EDB's support measures for gifted education (PART 4).

Audit has found room for improvement in the above areas and has made a number of recommendations to address the issues.

General response from the Government and The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education

1.15 The Secretary for Education and the Executive Director, The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education welcome the audit review and on the whole agree with the audit recommendations. They have said that:

- (a) they appreciate Audit's efforts in examining the implementation of gifted education in Hong Kong;
- (b) EDB will continue to collaborate with HKAGE to provide high quality gifted education for students, thereby enriching Hong Kong's pool of talent and increasing our competitiveness; and
- (c) in light of the audit recommendations, EDB and HKAGE will make refinements as necessary.

Acknowledgement

1.16 Audit would like to acknowledge with gratitude the full cooperation of the staff of EDB and HKAGE during the course of the audit review.

PART 2: IDENTIFYING AND DEVELOPING TALENTS OF GIFTED STUDENTS

2.1 This PART examines the work of HKAGE in identifying and developing the talents of gifted students, focusing on the following areas:

- (a) identifying gifted students for off-school support (paras. 2.2 to 2.30);
- (b) programmes for gifted students (paras. 2.31 to 2.40); and
- (c) other programmes and services (paras. 2.41 to 2.53).

Identifying gifted students for off-school support

2.2 *Membership system.* HKAGE provides off-school gifted education services for exceptionally gifted students. It operates under a membership system. Gifted students aged from 10 to 18 studying in schools in Hong Kong can apply for membership. HKAGE members can enjoy HKAGE's programmes and services free of charge except for some specified items (e.g. study programmes outside Hong Kong). Each year, HKAGE admits about 2,000 new members. As at 31 December 2023, HKAGE had about 8,000 members.

2.3 *Channels for identifying gifted students as HKAGE members.* There are five channels for gifted students to become HKAGE members (see Figure 2):

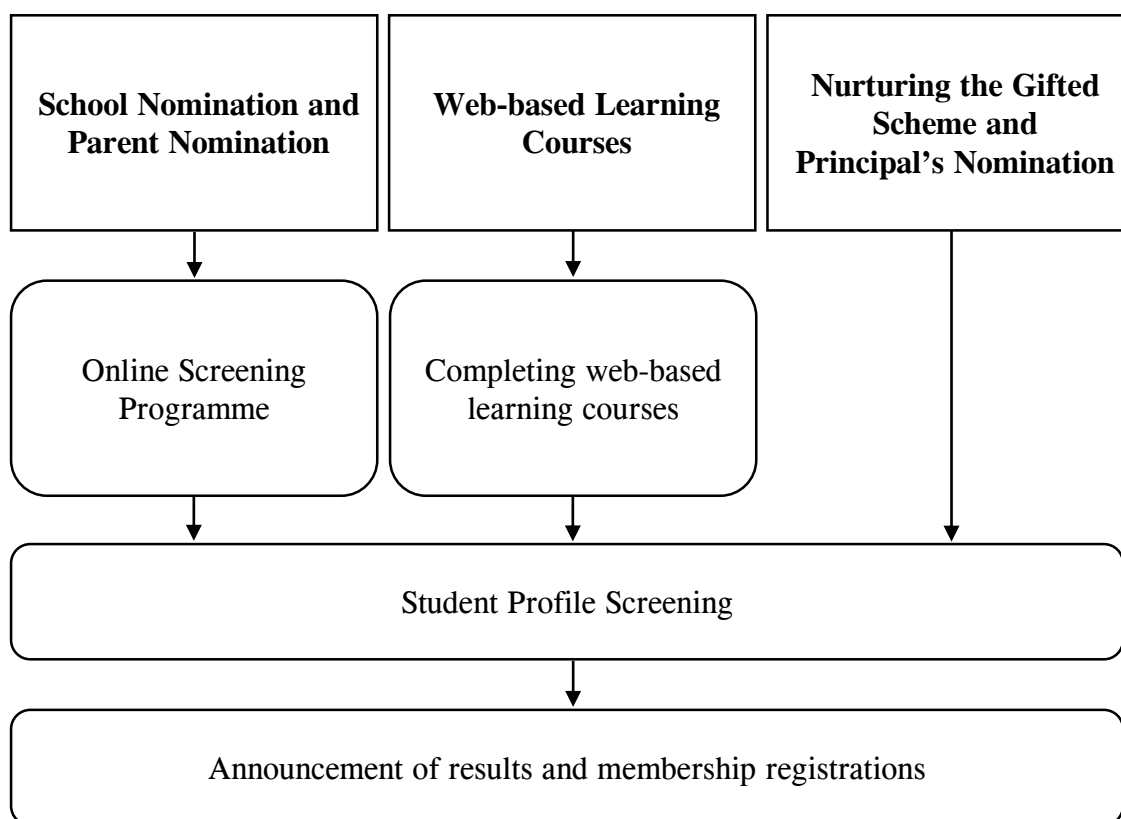
- (a) *School Nomination.* Each year, HKAGE invites all primary and secondary schools to nominate their students for HKAGE membership. Each school can submit nomination for up to 50 students each year (not including the student nominated via Principal's Nomination — see (e)). The nominated students apply for HKAGE membership by undergoing screening by the Online Screening Programme and then the Student Profile Screening;
- (b) *Parent Nomination.* Each year, parents can apply for HKAGE membership for their children. The nominated students apply for HKAGE

membership by undergoing screening by the Online Screening Programme and then the Student Profile Screening;

- (c) ***Nurturing the Gifted Scheme.*** Under the Nurturing the Gifted Scheme, HKAGE invites students of appropriate age with outstanding performance in significant competitions and scholarships to apply for HKAGE membership. The invited students do not need to undergo the Online Screening Programme but proceed to the screening by the Student Profile Screening directly;
- (d) ***Web-based Learning Courses for Gifted/More Able Students (Web-based Learning Courses).*** HKAGE and EDB jointly organise web-based learning courses in five domains (i.e. astronomy, earth science, mathematics, palaeontology, and the changing Hong Kong Economy) for gifted/more able students from Primary 4 to Secondary 6. HKAGE invites students of appropriate age who have completed any one of the courses and passed the level 3 test in the course to apply for HKAGE membership. The invited students do not need to undergo the Online Screening Programme but proceed to the screening by the Student Profile Screening directly; and
- (e) ***Principal's Nomination.*** In 2022/23, Principal's Nomination was introduced for students who are gifted in leadership. The principal of each secondary school can nominate one student from Secondary 2 to 4 each year (in addition to School Nomination — see (a)). The nominated students do not need to undergo the Online Screening Programme but proceed to the screening by the Student Profile Screening directly.

Figure 2

**Five channels for identifying gifted students as HKAGE members
(31 December 2023)**



Source: Audit analysis of HKAGE records

2.4 In the period from 2018/19 to 2022/23, the number of membership applications received ranged from 9,590 in 2019/20 to 12,538 in 2021/22. The number of members admitted ranged from 1,520 in 2020/21 to 2,145 in 2022/23 (see Table 3).

Identifying and developing talents of gifted students

Table 3

Applications for HKAGE membership (2018/19 to 2022/23)

Application channel	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
<i>Number of applications received</i>					
School Nomination	10,806 (92%)	8,648 (90%)	8,684 (89%)	11,027 (88%)	10,483 (89%)
Parent Nomination	702 (6%)	777 (8%)	827 (8%)	1,272 (10%)	922 (8%)
Nurturing the Gifted Scheme	39 (1%)	47 (1%)	79 (1%)	67 (1%)	114 (1%)
Web-based Learning Courses	205 (1%)	118 (1%)	163 (2%)	172 (1%)	183 (1%)
Principal's Nomination	Not applicable (Principal's Nomination was introduced in 2022/23)				120 (1%)
Total	11,752(100%)	9,590(100%)	9,753(100%)	12,538(100%)	11,822(100%)
<i>Number of members admitted</i>					
School Nomination	1,438 (70%)	1,345 (75%)	1,038 (68%)	1,246 (67%)	1,487 (69%)
Parent Nomination	361 (18%)	276 (15%)	243 (16%)	365 (20%)	252 (12%)
Nurturing the Gifted Scheme	39 (2%)	47 (3%)	78 (5%)	65 (4%)	112 (5%)
Web-based Learning Courses	201 (10%)	118 (7%)	161 (11%)	170 (9%)	180 (9%)
Principal's Nomination	Not applicable (Principal's Nomination was introduced in 2022/23)				114 (5%)
Total	2,039(100%)	1,786(100%)	1,520(100%)	1,846(100%)	2,145(100%)

Source: Audit analysis of HKAGE records

Identifying and developing talents of gifted students

2.5 ***Assessments of membership applications.*** The assessments of membership applications involve two stages, namely Online Screening Programme and Student Profile Screening. Students applying under School Nomination and Parent Nomination are required to undergo both stages whereas students applying through the other three channels are required to undergo Student Profile Screening only (see Figure 2 in para. 2.3):

- (a) ***Online Screening Programme.*** Online Screening Programme, which includes a self-learning programme and a final assessment, aims to verify students' ability and test students' task commitment and self-discipline. Each student is required to study the self-learning programme (with suggested study hours of 20 to 25) and then complete the final assessment in the period from October to January of the following year. The time allowed for the final assessment is 60 minutes. Students are required to pass the final assessment before they proceed to the Student Profile Screening; and
- (b) ***Student Profile Screening.*** Students are required to submit their student profiles, which include information such as school reports, significant achievements and creative work. Based on the student profiles, HKAGE assesses the students' abilities, creativity and task commitment.

Membership applications were not enthusiastic

2.6 Audit examined the membership applications received in the period from 2018/19 to 2022/23. Audit found that applications were not enthusiastic:

- (a) ***Some schools did not nominate any gifted students for membership via School Nomination or Principal's Nomination.*** Audit found that some schools did not nominate any gifted students to apply for HKAGE membership via School Nomination or Principal's Nomination:
 - (i) ***Each year, about half of the schools did not nominate any gifted students for membership.*** In the period, the overall percentage of schools without students nominated for HKAGE membership via School Nomination or Principal's Nomination was 51%, ranging from 48% in 2021/22 to 53% in 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21.

Identifying and developing talents of gifted students

The figures for secondary schools were slightly higher than those for the primary schools, as follows:

- **Primary schools.** The 5-year average percentage for primary schools in the period was 49%, ranging from 46% in 2022/23 to 52% in 2019/20 and 2020/21; and
- **Secondary schools.** The 5-year average percentage for secondary schools in the period was 53%, ranging from 50% in 2021/22 to 55% in 2018/19; and

(ii) ***Some schools did not nominate any students throughout the period.*** In the 5-year period from 2018/19 to 2022/23, of the 1,103 schools (comprising 593 primary schools and 510 secondary schools), 347 (31%) did not nominate any students for HKAGE membership throughout the period; and

(b) ***Percentage of applications received via channels other than School Nomination was on the low side.*** In the period, the majority of membership applications were received via School Nomination, ranging from 88% to 92% each year. The percentage of applications received via the other channels was on the low side (see Table 3 in para. 2.4):

- (i) ***Parent Nomination.*** The percentages of applications received ranged from 6% to 10% each year;
- (ii) ***Nurturing the Gifted Scheme.*** The percentage of applications received was 1% each year; and
- (iii) ***Web-based Learning Courses.*** The percentages of applications ranged from 1% to 2% each year.

2.7 In response to Audit's enquiry, HKAGE informed Audit in February 2024 that:

Identifying and developing talents of gifted students

- (a) some schools may have concerns for nominating gifted students due to numerous reasons, including perception of a scarcity of gifted students, concerns about the manpower arrangement of teachers for following up student cases if they nominate a substantial number of students;
- (b) instead of nominating their students via School Nomination, some schools encouraged parents to nominate their children for HKAGE membership via Parent Nomination. Taking into account School Nomination, Parent Nomination and Principal's Nomination in the period from 2018/19 to 2022/23, the overall percentage of schools without students nominated for HKAGE membership was 37% for primary schools (ranging from 33% to 42% each year) and 46% for secondary schools (ranging from 42% to 53% each year);
- (c) due to the rigorous screening process, when their nominated students were not successful in becoming HKAGE members, some schools might reassess their suitability for School Nomination taking into account the expected standards and decide not to nominate their students in the following year; and
- (d) while the number of applications received via channels other than School Nomination and Principal's Nomination was lower, in the period from 2018/19 to 2022/23, about 30% of members were admitted via channels other than School Nomination and Principal's Nomination each year.

2.8 Audit considers that HKAGE, in collaboration with EDB, needs to step up efforts in identifying gifted students, including:

- (a) in view of the lack of enthusiasm of some schools in nominating gifted students, taking actions to address the issue, for example, by strengthening publicity among the schools and encouraging them to identify gifted students for nomination; and
- (b) taking further measures to promote channels for identification of gifted students other than School Nomination.

Need to enhance Online Screening Programme

2.9 ***Only about half of the nominated students had completed Online Screening Programme.*** Audit examined the Online Screening Programme held in the period from 2018/19 to 2022/23. Audit found that only about half of the nominated students had completed the Online Screening Programme, ranging from 45% in 2019/20 to 62% in 2021/22. The overall percentage for the period was 56% (see Table 4).

Table 4

**Percentages of students completing the Online Screening Programme
(2018/19 to 2022/23)**

Year	School Nomination	Parent Nomination	Overall
2018/19	56%	79%	58%
2019/20	44%	62%	45%
2020/21	60%	73%	61%
2021/22	61%	68%	62%
2022/23	53%	58%	54%
Average	55%	68%	56%

Source: Audit analysis of HKAGE records

2.10 ***Passing rate in Online Screening Programme was lower for students from School Nomination.*** In the period from 2018/19 to 2022/23, 30,437 students had completed the Online Screening Programme. Audit analysed the passing rates of students in the Online Screening Programme in the period from 2018/19 to 2022/23. Audit found that:

- (a) the overall passing rate for the period was 55% (ranging from 52% in 2018/19 to 56% in 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2022/23); and

Identifying and developing talents of gifted students

- (b) the passing rate of students from School Nomination was lower than that of students from Parent Nomination:
- (i) the average passing rate of students from School Nomination was 53% in the period (ranging from 50% in 2018/19 to 55% in 2019/20); and
 - (ii) the average passing rate of students from Parent Nomination was 73% in the same period (ranging from 71% in 2019/20 to 76% in 2018/19) (see Table 5).

Table 5

**Passing rates in Online Screening Programme
(2018/19 to 2022/23)**

Year	School Nomination	Parent Nomination	Overall
2018/19	50%	76%	52%
2019/20	55%	71%	56%
2020/21	54%	73%	56%
2021/22	53%	73%	55%
2022/23	54%	74%	56%
Average	53%	73%	55%

Source: Audit analysis of HKAGE records

2.11 **Technical problems of online final assessments.** Students of the Online Screening Programme have to complete the final assessment online by answering a set of multiple choice questions within an allowed time of 60 minutes. According to HKAGE, some parents said that the online platform was unstable and it took a long time to move through the pages of the assessment. As a result, the assessment could not be completed within the allowed time and the students did not submit their answers. In response to Audit's enquiry, HKAGE informed Audit in February 2024 that:

Identifying and developing talents of gifted students

- (a) in 2021/22, HKAGE had taken improvement measures on the online platform;
- (b) the technical instability of the online platform was due to the use of non-recommended devices by the students; and
- (c) HKAGE had clearly outlined the system requirements on the programme flyer that it was not recommended for students to use tablets and smartphones for attempting the Online Screening Programme to minimise technical problems.

In Audit's view, HKAGE needs to monitor the technical issues of the final assessment of the Online Screening Programme and take measures to rectify the technical issues identified.

2.12 *Need to enhance fairness and reliability of the final assessment.* Up to 2022/23, the questions in the Online Screening Programme's final assessment had been used for more than six years since the launch of the programme in 2015/16 for secondary school students and 2016/17 for primary school students. The possibility that the assessment questions could have been leaked to the public rendering the assessment tool not reliable was discussed in a meeting of HKAGE's Senior Management Team in January 2023. However, up to January 2024, no action had been taken to revise the assessment questions. In response to Audit's enquiry, HKAGE informed Audit in February 2024 that:

- (a) regarding the prolonged use of the Online Screening Programme, a comprehensive assessment was initiated in December 2022 and it was decided that a new set of identification tools was necessary; and
- (b) after approval by the Board in July 2023, a development project on a new set of identification tools commenced in September 2023 and was scheduled for completion by December 2025.

In Audit's view, HKAGE needs to review the existing assessment questions prior to the implementation of the new set of identification tools with a view to enhancing the fairness and reliability of the final assessment of the Online Screening Programme, and closely monitor the progress of the development project on the new set of identification tools.

Identifying and developing talents of gifted students

2.13 Audit considers that HKAGE needs to:

- (a) take measures to encourage schools to facilitate students to complete the Online Screening Programme and provide appropriate assistance to schools, parents and students;
- (b) ascertain the reasons for the lower passing rate in the Online Screening Programme for students from School Nomination and provide appropriate assistance to schools, parents and students;
- (c) monitor the technical issues of the final assessment of the Online Screening Programme and take measures to rectify the technical issues identified; and
- (d) review the existing assessment questions prior to the implementation of the new set of identification tools with a view to enhancing the fairness and reliability of the final assessment of the Online Screening Programme, and closely monitor the progress of the development project on the new set of identification tools.

Room for improvements in Student Profile Screening

2.14 According to HKAGE's guidelines on Student Profile Screening, the Student Profile Screening involves the following procedures:

- (a) ***Preliminary screening.*** Each student profile is examined by two Selection Committee members (Note 6), who will each give a score, ranging from 1 (lowest score) to 3 (highest score). The score is given based on the evaluation of the three assessment criteria, namely academic achievements, achievements in specific areas (such as extra-curricular activities, awards and scholarships) and the quality of creative work submitted. Students who have shown outstanding academic achievements, prominent and substantial achievement in specific area, and submitted highly creative work will be

Note 6: *For School Nomination and Parent Nomination, the Selection Committee members are Programme Officers and Trainees from Talent Development Division, School and Student Services Division, and Research Division. For Principal's Nomination, the Selection Committee members are members from Senior Management Team (i.e. Associate Director, and Heads of Talent Development Division, School and Student Services Division, and Research Division).*

given a score of 3. The aggregate score of the two Selection Committee members is used to determine whether the students are accepted (i.e. aggregate score higher than 4), rejected (i.e. aggregate score less than 4), or regarded as marginal cases (i.e. aggregate score equal to 4);

- (b) ***Re-examination of marginal cases.*** All marginal cases are re-examined by an experienced Programme Officer (for School Nomination and Parent Nomination) or by the Executive Director (for Principal's Nomination);
- (c) ***Quality control checking.*** The Quality Control Team, comprising Educational Psychologist, Clinical Psychologist, and Programme Branch Managers, examines the profiles for randomly selected accepted cases and rejected cases. In 2022/23, 500 cases were selected for quality control checking; and
- (d) ***Endorsement of results.*** The admission results are endorsed by the Senior Management Team, comprising the Executive Director, Associate Director and Heads of Divisions.

2.15 Audit examined the records of Student Profile Screening conducted for the 3,315 student profiles in 2022/23. Audit found that:

- (a) ***Need to improve documentation for Student Profile Screening.*** Only the overall scores given by each of the two Selection Committee members were recorded. While there were guidelines on marking the overall scores, the two Selection Committee members did not give any comments on the students based on the three assessment criteria. There was no documentation showing how the scores given by the members were arrived at; and
- (b) ***Non-compliances with Guidelines on Student Profile Screening.*** Audit found that HKAGE's guidelines on Student Profile Screening had not always been complied with:
 - (i) ***Results on re-examination of marginal cases were not documented.*** In the period, there were 607 marginal cases (579 cases under School Nomination and Parent Nomination, and 28 cases under Principal's Nomination). All the 607 marginal cases

were accepted in the end. For the 28 marginal cases under Principal's Nomination, re-examination had been conducted before the applications were accepted. However, for the 579 marginal cases under School Nomination and Parent Nomination, there was no documentary evidence showing that re-examination had been conducted before the applications were accepted;

- (ii) ***Cases with aggregate score of 3 were not rejected.*** According to HKAGE's guidelines, cases with aggregate score less than 4 would be rejected. In the period, there were 573 cases with a score of 3. Audit found that instead of rejecting, HKAGE re-examined all the 573 cases. According to the results of the re-examination, it was recommended that 286 (50%) cases should be rejected and 287 (50%) cases should be accepted. However, in the end, all the 573 cases were accepted. There was no documentation on the justifications of doing so; and
- (iii) ***Cases were accepted despite Quality Control Team's recommendation to reject.*** In 2022/23, 500 cases (comprising 200 accepted cases and 300 rejected cases) were selected for quality control checking (see para. 2.14(c)). Of the 200 accepted cases, the Quality Control Team recommended that 15 (8%) should be rejected because the information provided in the student profiles was insufficient, the academic achievements and specific achievements were not particularly good, or the students' profile did not include information other than academic results and achievements in schools. However, in the end, these 15 cases were not rejected as recommended by the Quality Control Team. In response to Audit's enquiry, HKAGE informed Audit in February 2024 that the final decision of these 15 cases was based on the consolidated judgment of the Senior Management Team. However, there was no documentary evidence showing the justifications for accepting these 15 cases by the Senior Management Team.

According to HKAGE, taking into account that there was spare capacity for membership in the period and the merits of admitting more members, HKAGE had adjusted the assessments of the marginal cases, where appropriate, without compromising the standard of screening. In Audit's view, making adjustments to the standard of screening to accept the marginal cases (see para. 2.15(b)(i)) and the cases with aggregate score of 3 (see para. 2.15(b)(ii)) without documenting the justifications

may not be conducive to the identification of suitable students with untapped talents for nurturing. HKAGE needs to take a prudent approach when making adjustments to the assessments and ensure consistency in the standard of screening for identifying suitable students with untapped talents for nurturing.

2.16 ***Lower passing rate in Student Profile Screening for students from School Nomination.*** Students who have passed the Online Screening Programme are invited to submit student profiles for screening. In the period from 2018/19 to 2022/23, 15,624 students (i.e. 93% of students who have passed the Online Screening Programme) had submitted their student profiles for screening. Audit analysed the passing rates in the Student Profile Screening in the period from 2018/19 to 2022/23. Audit found that:

- (a) the overall passing rate for the period was 52% (ranging from 42% in 2020/21 and 2021/22 to 72% in 2019/20); and
- (b) the passing rate of students from School Nomination was lower than that of students from Parent Nomination:
 - (i) the average passing rate of students from School Nomination was 49% in the period (ranging from 38% in 2021/22 to 69% in 2019/20); and
 - (ii) the average passing rate of students from Parent Nomination was 70% in the period (ranging from 60% in 2020/21 to 86% in 2019/20) (see Table 6).

Table 6

**Passing rates in Student Profile Screening
(2018/19 to 2022/23)**

Year	School Nomination (Note)	Parent Nomination	Overall
2018/19	53%	80%	57%
2019/20	69%	86%	72%
2020/21	39%	60%	42%
2021/22	38%	63%	42%
2022/23	53%	68%	55%
Average	49%	70%	52%

Source: Audit analysis of HKAGE records

Note: The passing rates of students from School Nomination did not include students from Principal's Nomination.

2.17 Audit considers that HKAGE needs to:

- (a) for accountability and transparency, require the Selection Committee members to give comments and justifications based on the three assessment criteria to support the scores given by them in the Student Profile Screening;
- (b) take measures to ensure that HKAGE's guidelines on Student Profile Screening are complied with, and any deviations from the guidelines should be well justified and documented;
- (c) take measures to ensure that due consideration is given to the recommendations of the Quality Control Team and document the justifications for accepting the students who have been recommended for rejection by the Team in the Student Profile Screening;

- (d) take a prudent approach when making adjustments to the assessments of student profiles in the Student Profile Screening and ensure consistency in the standard of screening for identifying suitable students with untapped talents for nurturing; and
- (e) ascertain the reasons for the lower passing rate in the Student Profile Screening for students from School Nomination and provide appropriate assistance to schools, parents and students.

Some students did not proceed after passing Online Screening Programme

2.18 Students who have passed the Online Screening Programme need to proceed to the Student Profile Screening before they could become HKAGE members (see Figure 2 in para. 2.3). In the period from 2018/19 to 2022/23, 16,725 students passed the Online Screening Programme. However, 1,101 (7% — Note 7) of the 16,725 students did not proceed to the stage of Student Profile Screening. In response to Audit's enquiry, HKAGE informed Audit in February 2024 that it had sent reminders to school coordinators and parents at various stages in the membership application process.

2.19 Audit considers that HKAGE needs to ascertain the reasons for not proceeding to the stage of Student Profile Screening by students who have passed the Online Screening Programme and in light of the reasons, take appropriate actions to follow up with these cases.

Lower success rates of membership applications from School Nomination

2.20 In the period from 2018/19 to 2022/23, 88% to 92% applications were received via School Nomination each year (see Table 3 in para. 2.4). Audit examined

Note 7: *For 38 of the 1,101 students, they did not proceed to the stage of Student Profile Screening under School Nomination or Parent Nomination because they were also nominated via the Nurturing the Gifted Scheme or the Web-based Learning Courses.*

Identifying and developing talents of gifted students

the applications received via School Nomination and Parent Nomination in the period from 2018/19 to 2022/23. Audit found that:

- (a) the success rates of students nominated via School Nomination in the period (i.e. ranging from 11% in 2021/22 to 16% in 2019/20, averaging 13%) were lower than that of students nominated via Parent Nomination (i.e. ranging from 27% in 2022/23 to 51% in 2018/19, averaging 33%); and
- (b) the passing rates in Online Screening Programme and Student Profile Screening of students from School Nomination were significantly lower than that of students from Parent Nomination (see paras. 2.10(b) and 2.16(b)).

In response to Audit's enquiry, HKAGE informed Audit in February 2024 that the difference in passing rates in Online Screening Programme and Student Profile Screening of students from School Nomination and that from Parent Nomination was attributed to the proactive involvement of parents who initiated the nominations for their children.

2.21 Audit considers that HKAGE, in collaboration with EDB, needs to:

- (a) in view of the lower success rates of becoming HKAGE members for applications received via School Nomination, encourage schools to facilitate their nominated students to prepare for the screening process; and
- (b) provide appropriate support to the schools to facilitate their identification of gifted students for nominations for HKAGE membership.

Opinion surveys on application assessments

2.22 Opinion survey is an important tool to collect feedback and to identify areas for improvements. HKAGE conducts opinion surveys to collect feedback from schools and parents with students/children having undergone screening. After the Online Screening Programme and after the Student Profile Screening, HKAGE invites schools and parents to complete an opinion survey questionnaire. Audit examined the surveys for the years 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 and found that:

Identifying and developing talents of gifted students

- (a) ***Low response rates.*** The response rates for the opinion surveys after Online Screening Programme ranged from 1% to 4% and those for the opinion surveys after Student Profile Screening ranged from 3% to 10% (see Table 7); and

Table 7

**Response rates of opinion surveys on nomination exercises
(2020/21 to 2022/23)**

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
After Online Screening Programme			
<i>School Nomination</i>			
School response rate	2%	1%	2%
Parents response rate	3%	2%	1%
<i>Parent Nomination</i>			
Parents response rate	3%	3%	4%
After Student Profile Screening			
<i>School Nomination</i>			
School response rate	7%	10%	8%
Parents response rate	3%	3%	6%
<i>Parent Nomination</i>			
Parents response rate	6%	8%	9%

Source: Audit analysis of HKAGE records

- (b) ***Areas for improvement not identified.*** Audit found that there was no documentary evidence showing that the results of the surveys were submitted to HKAGE's senior management or the School and Student Services Committee for review to identify areas for improvements in the nomination exercise and to ascertain the follow-up actions required.

Identifying and developing talents of gifted students

2.23 Audit considers that HKAGE needs to:

- (a) take measures to improve the response rate of the opinion surveys on nomination exercise; and
- (b) review the results of the opinion surveys to identify areas for improvements in the nomination exercise and to ascertain the follow-up actions required.

Target member-to-population ratio not achieved

2.24 HKAGE had set a target member-to-population ratio (i.e. number of members divided by the student population aged 10 to 18). According to the five Three-year Business Plans from 2018/19-2020/21 to 2022/23-2024/25, the targets were:

- (a) ***2018/19-2020/21 to 2020/21-2022/23.*** The target member-to-population ratio was 2% to 2.5%; and
- (b) ***2021/22-2023/24 and 2022/23-2024/25.*** The target member-to-population ratio was 2.5%.

2.25 Audit examined the member-to-population ratios in the period from 2018/19 to 2022/23 and noted that the ratio was below the target each year, ranging from 1.6% in 2018/19 and 2019/20 to 1.9% in 2021/22 and 2022/23 (see Table 8).

Table 8

**Member-to-population ratios
(2018/19 to 2022/23)**

Year	Number of members (a)	Student population aged 10 to 18 (b)	Member-to-population ratio (c) = (a) ÷ (b) × 100%
2018/19	6,717	427,146	1.6%
2019/20	6,915	430,568	1.6%
2020/21	7,996	434,422	1.8%
2021/22	8,018	425,079	1.9%
2022/23	8,197	422,459	1.9%

Source: Audit analysis of HKAGE and EDB records

2.26 Audit considers that HKAGE needs to step up efforts to achieve the target member-to-population ratio.

Audit recommendations

2.27 Audit has *recommended* that the Executive Director, The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education, in collaboration with the Secretary for Education, should:

- (a) **step up efforts in identifying gifted students, including:**
 - (i) **in view of the lack of enthusiasm of some schools in nominating gifted students, taking actions to address the issue, for example, by strengthening publicity among the schools and encouraging them to identify gifted students for nomination; and**
 - (ii) **taking further measures to promote channels for identification of gifted students other than School Nomination;**

Identifying and developing talents of gifted students

- (b) in view of the lower success rates of becoming HKAGE members for applications received via School Nomination, encourage schools to facilitate their nominated students to prepare for the screening process; and
- (c) provide appropriate support to the schools to facilitate their identification of gifted students for nominations for HKAGE membership.

2.28 Audit has *recommended* that the Executive Director, The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education should:

- (a) take measures to encourage schools to facilitate students to complete the Online Screening Programme and provide appropriate assistance to schools, parents and students;
- (b) ascertain the reasons for the lower passing rate in the Online Screening Programme for students from School Nomination and provide appropriate assistance to schools, parents and students;
- (c) monitor the technical issues of the final assessment of the Online Screening Programme and take measures to rectify the technical issues identified;
- (d) review the existing assessment questions prior to the implementation of the new set of identification tools with a view to enhancing the fairness and reliability of the final assessment of the Online Screening Programme, and closely monitor the progress of the development project on the new set of identification tools;
- (e) for accountability and transparency, require the Selection Committee members to give comments and justifications based on the three assessment criteria to support the scores given by them in the Student Profile Screening;
- (f) take measures to ensure that HKAGE's guidelines on Student Profile Screening are complied with, and any deviations from the guidelines should be well justified and documented;

- (g) take measures to ensure that due consideration is given to the recommendations of the Quality Control Team and document the justifications for accepting the students who have been recommended for rejection by the Team in the Student Profile Screening;
- (h) take a prudent approach when making adjustments to the assessments of student profiles in the Student Profile Screening and ensure consistency in the standard of screening for identifying suitable students with untapped talents for nurturing;
- (i) ascertain the reasons for the lower passing rate in the Student Profile Screening for students from School Nomination and provide appropriate assistance to schools, parents and students;
- (j) ascertain the reasons for not proceeding to the stage of Student Profile Screening by students who have passed the Online Screening Programme and in light of the reasons, take appropriate actions to follow up with these cases;
- (k) take measures to improve the response rate of the opinion surveys on nomination exercise;
- (l) review the results of the opinion surveys to identify areas for improvements in the nomination exercise and to ascertain the follow-up actions required; and
- (m) step up efforts to achieve the target member-to-population ratio.

Response from The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education

2.29 The Executive Director, The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education agrees with the audit recommendations. He has said that:

- (a) HKAGE has been strengthening publicity on gifted education and the work of HKAGE in recent years;

Identifying and developing talents of gifted students

- (b) HKAGE will continue the publicity efforts, step up targeted publicity in schools by conducting more school visits and organising briefing sessions, and explore more channels for the identification of exceptional talent;
- (c) the Online Screening Programme is an assessment tool that aims to verify the students' ability and test students' task commitment and self-discipline based on an agreed standard, with a view to ascertaining whether the students are exceptionally gifted and possess the ability and readiness to pursue off-school gifted education programmes offered by HKAGE. To uphold a consistent and high standard, there is no pre-determined passing rate;
- (d) HKAGE will continue to conduct briefing sessions and provide advice to encourage schools to facilitate their students to complete the Online Screening Programme;
- (e) HKAGE will continue to safeguard the integrity, credibility, validity and reliability of the Online Screening Programme by monitoring the technical issues of the final assessment, reviewing and updating the assessment questions as appropriate, and monitoring closely the progress of the development project on the new set of identification tools;
- (f) to enhance accountability and transparency, HKAGE will introduce measures on proper documentation of justifications for assessments, adjustments to assessments, and handling of exceptional cases in the Student Profile Screening. HKAGE will ensure consistency in standard of screening for identifying exceptionally gifted students for nurturing;
- (g) as regards the opinion surveys, HKAGE will continue to explore measures to enhance the response rate, consolidate the feedback and identify room for improvement; and
- (h) HKAGE will keep the target member-to-population ratio under review and explore means to achieve the target.

Response from the Government

2.30 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendations. She has said that:

- (a) EDB has stepped up efforts in supporting schools to set up school-based student talent pool starting from 2023/24 with a view to strengthening the identification and grooming of students with potential. With a wider school-based student talent pool, schools are in a better position to nominate exceptionally gifted students to HKAGE to undergo off-school gifted education programmes;
- (b) EDB has also provided more PDPs and resource materials to enhance teachers' awareness, and equip them with the knowledge and skills for identifying gifted students; and
- (c) since exceptionally gifted students normally account for a relatively small ratio of the student population, it is understandable that not all schools will nominate students to HKAGE every year.

Programmes for gifted students

Completion rates of programmes

2.31 HKAGE organises two types of programmes for gifted students, namely face-to-face programmes and online programmes. According to the service agreement signed between the Government and HKAGE:

- (a) programme completion rate is one of the performance indicators to measure the effectiveness of HKAGE's programmes; and
- (b) HKAGE is required to set out the annual performance targets on its performance indicators in each Business Plan.

2.32 ***Targets for completion rates not set.*** In the past, HKAGE set out aimed completion rates for the face-to-face programmes and online programmes in its Three-year Business Plans. According to the Business Plan for 2020/21-2022/23:

- (a) ***Face-to-face programmes.*** The aimed average completion rates were 75 % for 2020/21, 80 % for 2021/22, and 85 % for 2022/23; and
- (b) ***Online programmes.*** The aimed average completion rates were 35 % for 2020/21, 38 % for 2021/22 and 40 % for 2022/23.

However, Audit found that starting from the 2021/22-2023/24 Business Plan, HKAGE had not set aimed completion rates for its programmes. There was no documentary evidence showing the justifications for not setting annual performance targets for completion rate.

2.33 ***Completion rates of some programmes were low.*** Audit analysed the completion rates of the programmes organised in the period from 2020/21 to 2022/23. The average completion rates were higher than the aimed completion rates set in the Business Plan 2020/21-2022/23. However, Audit found that the completion rates of some programmes were low:

- (a) ***Face-to-face programmes.*** The completion rates of individual programmes ranged from 0 % to 100 %, averaging 84.9 %. Of the 1,246 programmes held, the completion rates of 26 (2 %) programmes were lower than 50 % (see Table 9); and

Table 9

**Completion rates of face-to-face programmes
(2020/21 to 2022/23)**

Completion rate	Number of programmes			
	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Overall
0% to <30%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (1%)	2 (1%)
30% to <50%	6 (1%)	4 (1%)	14 (3%)	24 (1%)
50% to <70%	45 (11%)	39 (10%)	34 (7%)	118 (9%)
70% to <90%	136 (33%)	133 (36%)	149 (32%)	418 (34%)
90% to 100%	225 (55%)	199 (53%)	260 (57%)	684 (55%)
Total	412 (100%)	375 (100%)	459 (100%)	1,246 (100%)
Average	84.8%	85.0%	85.0%	84.9%

Source: Audit analysis of HKAGE records

Remarks: The aimed average completion rates for 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 were 75%, 80% and 85% respectively (see para. 2.32(a)).

- (b) **Online programmes.** The completion rates of individual programmes ranged from 0% to 100%, averaging 39.7%. Of the 108 programmes held, the completion rates of 62 (57%) programmes were lower than 50% (see Table 10).

Identifying and developing talents of gifted students

Table 10

**Completion rates of online programmes
(2020/21 to 2022/23)**

Completion rate	Number of programmes			
	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Overall
0% to <30%	19 (35%)	2 (7%)	3 (12%)	24 (22%)
30% to <50%	20 (36%)	11 (38%)	7 (29%)	38 (35%)
50% to <70%	8 (14%)	11 (38%)	10 (42%)	29 (27%)
70% to <90%	7 (13%)	5 (17%)	4 (17%)	16 (15%)
90% to 100%	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
Total	55 (100%)	29 (100%)	24 (100%)	108 (100%)
Average	36.6%	41.5%	41.8%	39.7%

Source: Audit analysis of HKAGE records

Remarks: The aimed average completion rates for 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 were 35%, 38% and 40% respectively (see para. 2.32(b)).

2.34 In response to Audit's enquiry, HKAGE informed Audit in February 2024 that:

- (a) target completion rates for programmes had not been set out in the current Business Plan;
- (b) the previously set target completion rates were used as reference points; and
- (c) the actual overall completion rates were reported and reviewed in the Board meetings and the meetings of the relevant functional committees, and were disclosed in HKAGE's web page.

2.35 Audit considers that HKAGE needs to:

- (a) set targets on the overall completion rates for its programmes for gifted students and include them in the Three-year Business Plans; and
- (b) monitor the completion rates of its programmes for gifted students and take measures to boost the completion rates and ensure that the target completion rates are achieved.

Need to enhance alumni surveys

2.36 According to the service agreement signed between the Government and HKAGE, HKAGE is required to commission longitudinal study to track feedback from alumni. Every year, HKAGE conducts an alumni survey to obtain alumni's feedback on:

- (a) opinions on HKAGE's programmes and services;
- (b) achievements, performance and life satisfaction;
- (c) current situation and development;
- (d) future expectations on further study and career aspiration; and
- (e) factors of success and sources of help.

2.37 *Need to review the methodology of conducting alumni surveys.* Audit reviewed HKAGE's methodology in conducting the alumni surveys. Audit found that:

- (a) *Same questionnaire was used regardless of when the alumni graduated.* The same set of questionnaire was sent to the alumni every year. For alumni who have graduated for some time (e.g. 5 years or more), some questions in the questionnaire may be obsolete or do not collect new information from the alumni (e.g. salaries for the first jobs). Audit noted that in some local universities, a different set of questionnaire is used for

Identifying and developing talents of gifted students

alumni who have graduated for different periods of time. For instance, two different questionnaires were used for fresh graduates and for those who have graduated for 5 years or more. In Audit's view, the effectiveness of alumni surveys in tracking alumni's development over long period of time can be enhanced if questionnaires are tailored for alumni with different periods of time after graduation; and

- (b) ***Information collected on respondents' achievements cannot be correlated with gifted education services provided by HKAGE.*** The objective for conducting alumni surveys is to ascertain the impact of gifted education on a student's development (e.g. career development, life satisfaction). Audit noted that the survey was conducted on an anonymous basis. The information on the types and duration of HKAGE's programmes taken and services received by the alumni was not collected. As a result, there was no way to correlate the information on the achievements of the respondents to the gifted education services provided by HKAGE.

2.38 Audit considers that HKAGE needs to review the methodology of conducting the alumni survey, including:

- (a) reviewing the questions in the alumni surveys for alumni with different periods of time after graduation; and
- (b) correlating information on the respondents' achievements with information on the gifted education services received by the respondents, with a view to enhancing its effectiveness in ascertaining the impact of HKAGE's services on students' development.

Audit recommendations

2.39 Audit has ***recommended*** that the Executive Director, The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education should:

- (a) **set targets on the overall completion rates for HKAGE's programmes for gifted students and include them in the Three-year Business Plans;**

- (b) monitor the completion rates of HKAGE's programmes for gifted students and take measures to boost the completion rates and ensure that the target completion rates are achieved; and
- (c) review the methodology of conducting the alumni survey, including:
 - (i) reviewing the questions in the alumni surveys for alumni with different periods of time after graduation; and
 - (ii) correlating information on the respondents' achievements with information on the gifted education services received by the respondents, with a view to enhancing its effectiveness in ascertaining the impact of HKAGE's services on students' development.

Response from The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education

2.40 The Executive Director, The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education agrees with the audit recommendations. He has said that HKAGE will:

- (a) review and monitor the completion rates for its programmes and set appropriate targets in its Business Plan; and
- (b) critically review the methodology, questions and findings of the alumni survey to facilitate HKAGE's planning and operation.

Other programmes and services

Parent programmes

2.41 According to the service agreement signed between the Government and HKAGE, HKAGE is required to mobilise and steer the interest and effort of parents with a view to creating a conducive and enriching learning environment for all gifted students. In 2021/22 and 2022/23, HKAGE organised 38 and 31 parent programmes

Identifying and developing talents of gifted students

(in the forms of seminars, support group and workshops, etc.), which were attended by 2,340 and 1,169 parents respectively.

2.42 ***Enrolment rate of parent programmes.*** Audit examined the enrolment rates (Note 8) of parent programmes held in 2021/22 and 2022/23 and noted that:

- (a) ***Decreased enrolment rate.*** The average enrolment rate for parent programmes decreased significantly from 81% (ranging from 10% to 104%) in 2021/22 to 57% (ranging from 8% to 105%) in 2022/23; and
- (b) ***Low enrolment rates of some programmes.*** The enrolment rates of 12 (32%) of the 38 parent programmes held in 2021/22 and 13 (42%) of the 31 parent programmes held in 2022/23 were below 50%.

2.43 ***Completion rate of parent programmes.*** Audit examined the completion rates of parent programmes held in 2021/22 and 2022/23 and noted that:

- (a) ***Completion rates of some programmes were below 50%.*** The average completion rates of all programmes for 2021/22 and 2022/23 were 62% (ranging from 33% to 100%) and 73% (ranging from 36% to 100%) respectively. The completion rates of 6 (16%) of the 38 parent programmes held in 2021/22 and 5 (16%) of the 31 parent programmes held in 2022/23 were below 50%; and
- (b) ***Target completion rate was not set for parent programmes.*** According to the service agreement signed between the Government and HKAGE, completion rate for parent programmes is one of the performance indicators to measure the effectiveness of programmes. The agreement also required HKAGE to set annual performance targets on its performance indicators in each Business Plan. Audit noted that target was not set for completion rate of parent programmes.

Note 8: *Enrolment rate was calculated by dividing the actual number of enrolments by the maximum capacity of the programme.*

2.44 Audit considers that HKAGE needs to:

- (a) monitor the enrolment rates and completion rates of parent programmes and take measures to improve enrolment rates and completion rates; and
- (b) set target for completion rate of parent programmes and include the target completion rate in the Business Plan.

Consultation and assessment services

2.45 HKAGE provides consultation and assessment services to support students and parents on the special developmental and affective needs related to giftedness. The services include:

- (a) ***Free services.*** Free hotline services on information and advice on nurturing gifted students are available to parents regardless of whether their children are HKAGE members. The information and advice are provided by a psychologist or a counselling advisor; and
- (b) ***Fee-charging services.*** There are two types of fee-charging services:
 - (i) consultation and counselling services for gifted students and their parents are available regardless of whether the students are HKAGE members; and
 - (ii) intelligence quotient assessments are available to HKAGE's members or gifted students intending to apply for HKAGE membership.

After receiving the requests, HKAGE will contact the users to arrange for the consultation and assessment session.

2.46 ***Need to shorten response time for hotline services.*** After receiving a hotline service request, an HKAGE staff will record the users' contact information and service requests, and pass them to the psychologist and counselling advisor. The psychologist or counselling advisor will then contact the users by phone to provide

Identifying and developing talents of gifted students

the requested information and advice. In 2021/22 and 2022/23, HKAGE received 163 hotline service requests that required the handling by the psychologist or counselling advisor (Note 9). Audit analysed the time taken for HKAGE to respond to the service requests. Audit found that, as at 31 December 2023:

- (a) HKAGE had responded to 162 (99%) service requests. The time taken for HKAGE to respond to the requests ranged from 0 (i.e. responded on the same day) to 361 days, averaging 72 days. For 18 (11%) of the 162 requests, the time taken was more than 180 days; and
- (b) for the remaining 1 case, the time elapsed from the date of service request was 143 days.

2.47 *Need to shorten waiting time for consultation and assessment sessions.* Of the 162 hotline service requests received in 2021/22 and 2022/23 that had been responded by HKAGE as at 31 December 2023, 118 (73%) required the arrangements of consultation or assessment sessions. Audit analysed the waiting time for the consultation or assessment sessions (i.e. duration between the date of service requests and the date of consultation or assessment sessions). Audit found that the waiting time for consultation and assessment sessions was relatively long, ranging from 0 to 362 days (averaging 85 days). For 17 (14%) of the 118 consultation and assessment sessions, the waiting time was over 180 days.

2.48 Audit considers that HKAGE needs to:

- (a) take measures to shorten the response time for hotline service requests for consultation and assessment services; and
- (b) explore measures to shorten the waiting time for consultation and assessment sessions.

Note 9: *In 2021/22 and 2022/23, in addition to the 163 hotline service requests that required the handling by the psychologist or counselling advisor, HKAGE also received 151 general enquires from its hotline. The 151 enquiries were responded by HKAGE's administrative officers.*

Satellite Centres

2.49 In 2020/21, HKAGE started a pilot run for establishing Satellite Centres in various locations. Three schools were invited to become Satellite Centres. In 2022/23, HKAGE rolled out the initiative and three more schools had become Satellite Centres since then. According to HKAGE:

- (a) the objectives of establishing Satellite Centres are to:
 - (i) enrich the resources and learning opportunities for HKAGE members and other gifted students;
 - (ii) enhance the accessibility of HKAGE's services to a wider population of students, their parents and teachers; and
 - (iii) reach out to the community in different regions for the promotion of gifted education; and
- (b) when selecting the schools to become Satellite Centres, HKAGE considers a number of factors, including the schools' locations, facilities and readiness to become a Satellite Centre.

2.50 Audit reviewed the operation of the 6 Satellite Centres as at January 2024 and found that:

- (a) ***Locations of Satellite Centres.*** The 6 Satellite Centres were located in Sha Tin (2 centres), Eastern District, Sai Kung, Yau Tsim Mong District and Yuen Long. Through the collaboration with schools, it was expected that the Satellite Centres would reach out to the communities in different regions for the promotion of gifted education. Of the 6 Satellite Centres, 2 (33%) were located in Sha Tin. According to HKAGE, one of the Satellite Centres in Sha Tin was next to HKAGE for synergy. In Audit's view, when setting up new Satellite Centres in the future, HKAGE needs to take into account the locations of the existing ones; and
- (b) ***New agreements not signed with schools.*** The duration of the collaboration agreements signed between HKAGE and schools were three years. Audit

Identifying and developing talents of gifted students

noted that the agreements signed with the first three schools had already expired on 31 December 2023. However, as at January 2024, the agreements were not yet renewed.

2.51 Audit considers that HKAGE needs to:

- (a) take into account the locations of the existing Satellite Centres when setting up new ones in the future; and
- (b) take measures to ensure that agreements with collaborating schools on the operation of Satellite Centres are renewed in a timely manner.

Audit recommendations

2.52 Audit has *recommended* that the Executive Director, The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education should:

- (a) **monitor the enrolment rates and completion rates of parent programmes and take measures to improve enrolment rates and completion rates;**
- (b) **set target for completion rate of parent programmes and include the target completion rate in the Business Plan;**
- (c) **take measures to shorten the response time for hotline service requests for consultation and assessment services;**
- (d) **explore measures to shorten the waiting time for consultation and assessment sessions;**
- (e) **take into account the locations of the existing Satellite Centres when setting up new ones in the future; and**
- (f) **take measures to ensure that agreements with collaborating schools on the operation of Satellite Centres are renewed in a timely manner.**

Response from The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education

2.53 The Executive Director, The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education agrees with the audit recommendations. He has said that HKAGE will:

- (a) step up the monitoring of the completion rates of parent programmes;
- (b) take measures to shorten the response time and waiting time of the consultation and assessment services, and review the provision of consultation and assessment services by according priority to its members and their parents; and
- (c) explore the establishment of Satellite Centres in different regions whilst ensuring the timely review of agreements with existing ones and continuing the present practice of organising some programmes and activities in other schools.

PART 3: GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES OF THE HONG KONG ACADEMY FOR GIFTED EDUCATION

3.1 This PART examines the matters relating to the governance and administrative issues of HKAGE, focusing on the following areas:

- (a) safeguarding national security (paras. 3.2 to 3.7);
- (b) performance measurement (paras. 3.8 to 3.12);
- (c) corporate governance (paras. 3.13 to 3.18); and
- (d) administrative issues (paras. 3.19 to 3.29).

Safeguarding national security

3.2 *School administration.* According to the School Administration Guide issued by EDB to aided schools, all levels of school personnel should perform their respective functions and work in collaboration:

- (a) to facilitate the effective formulation and implementation of measures for safeguarding national security in schools; and
- (b) to ensure that relevant measures are timely devised and implemented in areas such as school administration, staff management and training, learning and teaching, student guidance, discipline and support, as well as home-school co-operation to enable staff and students to understand the importance of national security and to enhance their law-abiding awareness and sense of national identity.

3.3 *Procurement procedures.* EDB has issued guidelines to the public sector schools offering full curriculum on procurement procedures to safeguard national security. According to the guidelines, schools should include specific clauses into the

quotation/tender documents to allow disqualification of a supplier and to terminate the contract in the interest of national security:

- (a) notwithstanding anything to the contrary in the quotation/tender documents, the school reserves the right to disqualify a supplier on the grounds that the supplier has engaged, is engaging, or is reasonably believed to have engaged or be engaging in acts or activities that are likely to cause or constitute the occurrence of offences endangering national security or otherwise the exclusion is necessary in the interest of national security, or is necessary to protect the public interest of Hong Kong, public morals, public order or public safety; and
- (b) the school may immediately terminate the contract upon the occurrence of any of the following events:
 - (i) the contractor has engaged or is engaging in acts or activities that are likely to cause or constitute the occurrence of offences endangering national security or which would otherwise be contrary to the interest of national security;
 - (ii) the continued engagement of the contractor or the continued performance of the contract is contrary to the interest of national security; or
 - (iii) the school reasonably believes that any of the events mentioned above is about to occur.

Need to strengthen measures for safeguarding national security

3.4 Although HKAGE is not covered by the guidelines issued by EDB, its responsibilities to safeguard national security are as important as those of the public sector schools. Audit noted that up to January 2024, HKAGE had not formulated or implemented specific measures for safeguarding national security. For instance, although HKAGE engaged service providers to deliver its programmes and services to its members and stakeholders, it has not incorporated specific measures for safeguarding national security in its Procurement Policy, the tender documents and contracts.

3.5 Audit considers that HKAGE needs to take measures to strengthen its guidelines and regulations relating to the safeguarding of national security, including measures pertinent to school administration and procurement procedures.

Audit recommendation

3.6 Audit has *recommended* that the Executive Director, The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education should take measures to strengthen HKAGE's guidelines and regulations relating to the safeguarding of national security, including measures pertinent to school administration and procurement procedures.

Response from The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education

3.7 The Executive Director, The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education agrees with the audit recommendation. He has said that in relation to the safeguarding of national security, HKAGE has updated its guidelines, administration and procurement procedures, and regulations in March 2024.

Performance measurement

Performance indicators

3.8 According to the service agreement signed between the Government and HKAGE:

- (a) in July every year, HKAGE is required to submit to EDB a Three-year Business Plan together with a Budget; and
- (b) HKAGE shall set out in each Business Plan annual performance targets based on the performance indicators. The performance indicators and the annual performance targets should have been approved by the Board.

A set of performance indicators (comprising 19 performance indicators grouped under 5 aspects) were included in the agreement. According to EDB, HKAGE should set targets for the performance indicators listed in the service agreement and include the targets in the Three-year Business Plan.

3.9 *Targets were not set for some performance indicators.* Audit reviewed HKAGE's Three-year Business Plan for 2023/24-2025/26. Audit found that in the Business Plan, of the 19 performance indicators listed in the service agreement:

- (a) for 15 (79%) indicators, there was no mentioning of the performance indicators in the Business Plan and no targets had been set;
- (b) for 1 (5%) indicator, a quantified target was set. However, the timeframe for achieving the target was not mentioned; and
- (c) for the remaining 3 (16%) indicators, quantified targets with timeframe for achieving them were set.

3.10 With a view to improving performance measurement, Audit considers that HKAGE needs to set targets for the performance indicators listed in the service agreement.

Audit recommendation

3.11 Audit has *recommended* that the Executive Director, The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education should set targets for the performance indicators listed in the service agreement.

Response from The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education

3.12 The Executive Director, The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education agrees with the audit recommendation.

Corporate governance

3.13 HKAGE's Board is HKAGE's governing body. The Board manages the affairs, administration and business of HKAGE. The corporate governance matters of HKAGE are set out in its Corporate Governance Manual.

Delays in distributing meeting notice and documents to Board members

3.14 HKAGE's Corporate Governance Manual requires that for Board meetings:

- (a) ***Meeting notice.*** Notice of regular meetings shall be given to the Board members at least 10 business days before the date of the meeting. Such notice period may be shortened at the discretion of the Chairman of the Board or, in his absence, of the Vice Chairman; and
- (b) ***Meeting documents.*** The Board Secretary shall distribute available documents relevant to the meeting agenda and the previous Board meeting minutes to the Board members at least 5 business days before the date of the meeting.

3.15 Audit reviewed HKAGE's 9 Board meetings held in the 3-year period from 2020/21 to 2022/23. Audit found that of the 9 Board meetings held:

- (a) ***Meeting notice.*** The requirement on serving meeting notice at least 10 business days before the date of the meeting was not complied with in 8 (89%) meetings, with delays ranging from 1 to 3 days (averaging 1.5 days). The Chairman or the Vice Chairman had not approved a shortened notice period; and
- (b) ***Meeting documents.*** The requirement on serving meeting documents at least 5 business days before the date of the meeting was not complied with in 3 (33%) meetings, each with a delay of 1 day.

3.16 Audit considers that HKAGE needs to take measures to ensure that meeting notice and documents are served to HKAGE's Board members within the required timeframe.

Audit recommendation

3.17 Audit has *recommended* that the Executive Director, The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education should take measures to ensure that meeting notice and documents are served to HKAGE's Board members within the required timeframe.

Response from The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education

3.18 The Executive Director, The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education agrees with the audit recommendation.

Administrative issues

Need to improve measures relating to Sexual Conviction Record Check (SCRC)

3.19 In 2011, the Hong Kong Police Force implemented SCRC Scheme to enable employers of persons undertaking child-related work to check whether prospective employees or contract renewal employees have any criminal conviction records against sexual offences. The Scheme serves to help employers assess the suitability of the prospective employees or contract renewal employees (Note 10). This helps to reduce the risk of sexual abuse to children and give them better protection. When an SCRC application is accepted by the Hong Kong Police Force, a checking code with

Note 10: *According to the Hong Kong Police Force, to facilitate the application for SCRC, employers are required to provide the prospective employees or contract renewal employees with a documentary proof of possible employment related to children for submission to the Hong Kong Police Force. Employers should only issue such documentary proof to the prospective employees or contract renewal employees at the advanced stage of the employment or contract renewal process. In all events, SCRC should not be used to screen candidates at an early stage of employment process.*

a validity period of 18 months will be issued, enabling the employers to access the SCRC check result. In order to ensure the accuracy of SCRC check result throughout the 18-month validity period, the applicant's check result will be updated on a daily basis to see whether the applicant has become a wanted person, or been newly arrested or charged with any of the specified sexual offences.

3.20 HKAGE has stipulated the requirements on SCRC for its employees in HKAGE's Corporate Governance Manual, and for its service providers' employees in the service contracts:

- (a) ***HKAGE's employees.*** HKAGE's Corporate Governance Manual stipulated that all new employees are required to undergo SCRC; and
- (b) ***Service providers' employees.*** The contracts signed between HKAGE and the service providers required that all prospective employees deployed to provide services for HKAGE are required to undergo SCRC and not to have conviction record against sexual offences.

3.21 ***SCRC on HKAGE's employees.*** Audit examined SCRC records of 36 new employees in the period from 2019/20 to 2022/23. Audit found that of the 36 employees:

- (a) ***SCRC results obtained long before the employment dates.*** For 8 (22%) employees, the dates of SCRC results were long before the employment dates, exceeding 180 days (ranging from 204 to 360 days, averaging 238 days). There was no record showing that HKAGE had accessed the updated results (see para. 3.19) before the employees started their employment; and
- (b) ***SCRC results obtained after the employment dates.*** For 8 (22%) other employees, SCRC results were obtained after they had started their employment. For 3 (8%) employees, the results were obtained 49 to 55 days (averaging 51 days) after they had started their employment.

3.22 *SCRC on service providers' employees.* Audit examined the records of 20 programmes completed in 2021/22. Audit found that, for all the 20 (100%) programmes, HKAGE did not seek confirmations from the service providers on whether they had complied with the requirements on SCRC.

3.23 Audit considers that HKAGE needs to:

- (a) for SCRC on new employees that were conducted long before they reported duty, obtain the updated SCRC results prior to their employment date and document the results accordingly;
- (b) take measures to ensure that SCRC is conducted before the new employees start their employment; and
- (c) seek confirmations from the service providers on whether they have complied with SCRC requirements stipulated in the service contracts.

***Need to ensure employees comply with requirements on
declaration of interest***

3.24 According to HKAGE's guidelines, new employees of HKAGE are required to submit declaration of interest at the time of reporting duties. Audit examined the records on declaration of interest submitted by 36 new employees in the period from 2019/20 to 2022/23. Audit found that for 9 (25%) new employees, the declarations of interests were submitted after the dates of reporting duty. The delays ranged from 1 to 85 days (averaging 19 days). For 2 (6%) new employees, the declarations of interests were submitted over 30 days after they reported duties. In response to Audit's enquiry, HKAGE informed Audit in March 2024 that the delays were due to various reasons including the work-from-home arrangement during the coronavirus disease epidemic.

3.25 Audit considers that HKAGE needs to take measures to ensure that the interest declaration requirements stipulated in HKAGE's guidelines are complied with by new employees.

Some videos on HKAGE's website are not bilingual

3.26 HKAGE uploaded various videos on its website for public's reference. In December 2023, Audit examined 64 videos uploaded on HKAGE's website. Audit found that, of the 64 videos:

- (a) 60 (94%) had Cantonese dubbing only. Of these 60 videos:
 - (i) 52 (87%) had no subtitles;
 - (ii) 3 (5%) had Chinese subtitles only; and
 - (iii) the remaining 5 (8%) had both Chinese and English subtitles;
- (b) 2 (3%) had English dubbing only. The 2 videos had no Chinese subtitles; and
- (c) the remaining 2 (3%) had no dubbing. Of the 2 videos:
 - (i) the content of 1 was in English only; and
 - (ii) the content of the remaining 1 was bilingual.

3.27 Audit considers that HKAGE needs to take measures to ensure that the contents of videos available on its website are bilingual.

Audit recommendations

3.28 Audit has *recommended* that the Executive Director, The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education should:

- (a) for SCRC on new employees that were conducted long before they reported duty, obtain the updated SCRC results prior to their employment date and document the results accordingly;

- (b) **take measures to ensure that SCRC is conducted before the new employees start their employment;**
- (c) **seek confirmations from the service providers on whether they have complied with SCRC requirements stipulated in the service contracts;**
- (d) **take measures to ensure that the interest declaration requirements stipulated in HKAGE's guidelines are complied with by new employees; and**
- (e) **take measures to ensure that the contents of videos available on HKAGE's website are bilingual.**

Response from The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education

3.29 The Executive Director, The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education agrees with the audit recommendations. He has said that:

- (a) HKAGE requires all employees and service providers to undergo SCRC, and will ensure proper and timely documentation on SCRC requirement. Regarding the Audit observation in paragraph 3.21(b), though all employees fulfilled the requirements of SCRC Scheme, HKAGE will keep in view the practice and ensure that the relevant requirements are met;
- (b) all employees must comply with the declaration of conflict of interest requirement. In December 2023, HKAGE introduced e-declaration form to facilitate timely submission; and
- (c) HKAGE will take measures to enhance the use of bilingual resources on its website.

PART 4: EDUCATION BUREAU'S SUPPORT MEASURES FOR GIFTED EDUCATION

4.1 This PART examines EDB's measures for supporting the development and implementation of gifted education, focusing on the following areas:

- (a) PDPs (paras. 4.3 to 4.7);
- (b) Gifted Education School Network (paras. 4.8 to 4.13);
- (c) education resources (paras. 4.14 to 4.22); and
- (d) OSALPs (paras. 4.23 to 4.45).

Background

4.2 EDB provides various support measures on gifted education:

- (a) ***Support measures for schools and teachers.*** These include:
 - (i) PDPs;
 - (ii) Gifted Education School Network; and
 - (iii) education resources; and
- (b) ***Support measures for students.*** These measures are provided by EDB via OSALPs.

Professional Development Programmes

4.3 EDB organises PDPs on gifted education for school principals and teachers to facilitate the implementation of school-based gifted education and to equip teachers

with the professional capacity to identify and nurture students with potential in various areas. There are two types of PDPs:

- (a) ***Programme for all schools.*** These programmes are posted on EDB's online platform for enrolment by school principals and teachers. Examples include seminars, briefing sessions and e-learning courses; and
- (b) ***Programme for targeted schools.*** These are mainly programmes designated for specific groups of participants, e.g. members of the Gifted Education School Network (see para. 4.8). Examples include Gifted Education School Network meetings, outreach talks and School Staff Development Programmes.

Need to enhance attendance rates of some PDPs

4.4 In the 5-year period from 2018/19 to 2022/23, EDB organised 883 PDPs on gifted education, comprising 364 (41%) programmes for all schools and 519 (59%) programmes for targeted schools. Participants are required to complete the programmes by attending a face-to-face or an online session at a scheduled time (Note 11). Audit reviewed the records of the 883 PDPs. Audit found that:

- (a) ***Enrolment rates.*** The enrolment rates of individual programmes ranged from 5% to 290%, averaging 96%. Of the 364 programmes for all schools, 189 (52%) were oversubscribed. There was no oversubscription for programmes for targeted schools; and
- (b) ***Completion rates.*** The completion rates of individual programmes ranged from 49% to 100%, averaging 91%. Audit found that:
 - (i) the completion rates of programmes for all schools were relatively lower than those for targeted schools:
 - ***Programmes for all schools.*** The completion rates of individual programmes ranged from 49% to 100%, averaging

Note 11: *For 20 of the 883 PDPs, the participants can complete the programmes online within a designated period of time, usually 2 months. Other than the 20 PDPs, the participants are required to complete the programmes at a scheduled time.*

Education Bureau's support measures for gifted education

78%. The completion rates of 80 (22%) programmes were below 70%; and

- **Programmes for targeted schools.** The completion rates of individual programmes ranged from 89% to 100%, averaging 99.9%; and
- (ii) the completion rates of programmes for all schools were on a decreasing trend, from 84% in 2018/19 to 69% in 2022/23 (see Table 11).

Table 11

**Completion rates of programmes for all schools
(2018/19 to 2022/23)**

Year	Completion rate
2018/19	84%
2019/20	81%
2020/21	79%
2021/22	75%
2022/23	69%
Average	78%

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

4.5 Audit considers that EDB needs to:

- (a) consider conducting adequate re-runs for PDPs that have been oversubscribed to meet the demand for them; and

- (b) encourage teachers who have enrolled in PDPs to avoid no-show or drop-out and complete the programmes as far as possible.

Audit recommendations

4.6 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Education should:**

- (a) **consider conducting adequate re-runs for PDPs that have been oversubscribed to meet the demand for them; and**
- (b) **encourage teachers who have enrolled in PDPs to avoid no-show or drop-out and complete the programmes as far as possible.**

Response from the Government

4.7 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendations. She has said that EDB will:

- (a) continue to review the delivery mode and themes of PDPs for school principals and teachers and provide more training places; and
- (b) keep in view the completion rates of PDPs and remind teachers who have enrolled in PDPs to complete the programmes as far as possible.

Gifted Education School Network

4.8 In 2016/17, EDB launched the Gifted Education School Network to promote effective curriculum development and professional exchange among schools and teachers. The target participants of the Network are curriculum leaders (e.g. gifted education co-ordinators, panel heads) in schools and teachers who are committed and enthusiastic about the promotion of school-based gifted education programmes. The Network operates in the form of a professional learning community and provides intensive support to the participants throughout the school year. EDB organises various activities for the Network participants, including meetings, open classes, inter-school visits and experience sharing sessions. Network participants are required to contribute and share good practices for dissemination to other schools.

Need to encourage schools to participate in Gifted Education School Network

4.9 Audit reviewed the number of primary schools and secondary schools participating in the Gifted Education School Network in the period from 2019/20 to 2023/24. Audit found that among some 1,200 schools, the number of schools participating in the Network ranged from 29 (3%) to 87 (7%) each year (averaging 56 (5%)). The cumulative number of schools that have participated in the Network in the period was 151 (13%) (see Table 12):

- (a) ***Primary schools.*** Among some 600 primary schools, 13 (2%) to 45 (7%) (averaging 26 (4%)) participated in the Network each year. The cumulative number of schools that have participated in the Network in the period was 77 (13%); and
- (b) ***Secondary schools.*** Among some 600 secondary schools, 16 (3%) to 42 (7%) (averaging 29 (5%)) participated in the Network each year. The cumulative number of schools that have participated in the Network in the period was 74 (13%).

Education Bureau's support measures for gifted education

Table 12

Number of participating schools in Gifted Education School Network (2019/20 to 2023/24)

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Primary schools					
No. of schools	587	589	591	593	604
No. of participating schools for the year	24 (4%)	13 (2%)	22 (4%)	28 (5%)	45 (7%)
Cumulative no. of participating schools since 2019/20 (Note)	24 (4%)	27 (5%)	40 (7%)	52 (9%)	77 (13%)
Secondary schools					
No. of schools	521	522	514	516	569
No. of participating schools for the year	22 (4%)	16 (3%)	29 (6%)	38 (7%)	42 (7%)
Cumulative no. of participating schools since 2019/20 (Note)	22 (4%)	27 (5%)	45 (9%)	59 (11%)	74 (13%)
Overall					
No. of schools	1,108	1,111	1,105	1,109	1,173
No. of participating schools for the year	46 (4%)	29 (3%)	51 (5%)	66 (6%)	87 (7%)
Cumulative no. of participating schools since 2019/20 (Note)	46 (4%)	54 (5%)	85 (8%)	111 (10%)	151 (13%)

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

Note: A school that participated in the Network for more than one year in the period was counted as one in the cumulative number of participating schools.

Education Bureau's support measures for gifted education

4.10 In response to Audit's enquiry, EDB informed Audit in February 2024 that:

- (a) the Gifted Education School Network is intended to be of a manageable size to facilitate more intensive and in-depth interaction among the participants; and
- (b) with the exception of schools that are experienced in gifted education and ready to play a more prominent role in sharing good practices, and schools with new curriculum leaders, schools having joined the Network in previous years are not normally invited to participate again in subsequent years.

4.11 Audit considers that EDB needs to:

- (a) encourage schools, especially those that have not participated in the Gifted Education School Network before, to participate in the Gifted Education School Network; and
- (b) publicise the good practices shared in the Gifted Education School Network.

Audit recommendations

4.12 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Education should:**

- (a) **encourage schools, especially those that have not participated in the Gifted Education School Network before, to participate in the Gifted Education School Network; and**
- (b) **publicise the good practices shared in the Gifted Education School Network.**

Response from the Government

4.13 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendations. She has said that EDB will:

- (a) encourage schools that have not joined the Gifted Education School Network before to participate whilst appreciating that schools would need to consider their own circumstances including their development focus and priorities, readiness of teachers responsible for gifted education, resources and manpower deployment; and
- (b) continue to publicise the good practices consolidated from the Gifted Education School Network so that all schools will benefit.

Education resources

4.14 *EDB's education resources on gifted education.* EDB's education resources on gifted education are available on its website. These resources include the School-based Gifted Education and Talent Pool Resource Kit, Experience Sharing Compendium for Gifted Education School Network, and various information booklets on gifted education. The target users of the resources include teachers, parents and stakeholders involved in gifted education.

4.15 *Office of the Government Chief Information Officer's guidelines on government web pages.* According to the Government Chief Information Officer's guidelines on accessibility requirements and best practices for the design of government web pages:

- (a) government websites should be available in traditional and simplified Chinese and English; and
- (b) it is imperative to implement a "mobile-friendly" design by automatically adjusting website contents to fit into different screen sizes, resolutions and orientations to provide a good user experience for website access across different devices (including desktops, notebook computers, tablets and smartphones).

Not all online resources are available in traditional and simplified Chinese and English

4.16 In January 2024, Audit examined 15 items of online resources on gifted education (consisting of booklets, information kits and posters published by EDB) available on EDB's website. Overall speaking, 4 (27%) of the 15 items were available in traditional and simplified Chinese and English. Audit found that:

- (a) whilst traditional Chinese version was available for all the 15 items, simplified Chinese version was not available for 10 (67%) items; and
- (b) English version was not available for 6 (40%) items.

4.17 With a view to catering for the needs of all teachers, parents and other stakeholders involved in gifted education, Audit considers that EDB needs to provide education resources in traditional and simplified Chinese and English as far as possible.

Need to improve mobile-friendliness of EDB's web pages on education resources for gifted education

4.18 In view of the popularity of smartphones in Hong Kong and to build a smart Government, Bureaux and Departments are appealed to make their websites mobile-friendly. The purpose of mobile-friendly design is to cater for different screen sizes of the mobile devices, so as to provide a consistent user experience across different mobile platforms. The website can automatically detect the sizes of the mobile devices and adjust web pages accordingly for the best viewing effects. Horizontal scrolling will not be required when viewing website contents on mobile devices.

4.19 In January 2024, Audit checked the mobile-friendliness of 20 web pages on EDB's website on education resources for gifted education. Audit found that the contents of 13 (65%) of the web pages were not mobile-friendly and did not automatically adjust to fit into the screen sizes of some mobile devices.

4.20 Audit considers that EDB needs to improve the mobile-friendliness of its web pages on education resources for gifted education.

Audit recommendations

4.21 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Education should:**

- (a) **provide education resources in traditional and simplified Chinese and English as far as possible; and**
- (b) **improve the mobile-friendliness of EDB's web pages on education resources for gifted education.**

Response from the Government

4.22 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendations. She has said that:

- (a) EDB will continue to provide education resources in traditional and simplified Chinese and English as far as possible; and
- (b) EDB has implemented measures to improve the mobile-friendliness of the web pages on education resources for gifted education since February 2024.

Off-school Advanced Learning Programmes

4.23 Since 2019/20, EDB invites post-secondary institutions, non-governmental organisations, professional bodies and technology enterprises to apply for funding support from GE Fund to provide OSALPs for gifted students at primary and secondary levels in Hong Kong. OSALPs aim to expose gifted students to high quality and challenging learning experiences in their areas of talent or, where suitable, in a wider range of disciplines or even cross disciplines, so as to fully develop their potential.

Education Bureau's support measures for gifted education

4.24 In the period from 2019/20 to 2022/23, 42 OSALPs were approved, involving approved funding of \$39.4 million (see Table 13).

Table 13
Number of OSALPs approved and amount of approved funding
(2019/20 to 2022/23)

Year	OSALPs approved (Number)	Approved funding (\$ million)
2019/20	4	4.3
2020/21	13	11.1
2021/22	14	13.0
2022/23	11	11.0
Total	42	39.4

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

Approved funding applications were predominantly from post-secondary institutions

4.25 ***Applications received and approved.*** Four types of organisations (i.e. post-secondary institutions, non-governmental organisations, professional bodies and technology enterprises) are eligible for applying funding support for providing OSALPs. Audit examined the funding applications for OSALPs received by EDB in the period from 2019/20 to 2022/23. Audit found that the percentages of funding applications from organisations other than post-secondary institutions were low (see Table 14):

- (a) ***Applications received.*** Of the 143 applications received:
 - (i) 69 (48%) were from post-secondary institutions (ranging from 27% in 2019/20 to 70% in 2020/21);

Education Bureau's support measures for gifted education

- (ii) 37 (26%) and 19 (13%) were from non-governmental organisations and technology enterprises respectively (ranging from 21% in 2021/22 to 33% in 2019/20 and 8% in 2020/21 to 27% in 2019/20 respectively); and
 - (iii) none were received from professional bodies; and
- (b) ***Applications approved.*** Of the 42 approved applications:
- (i) 34 (81%) were received from post-secondary institutions. In all four years, the percentages of approved applications from post-secondary institutions were over 70% (ranging from 73% in 2022/23 to 100% in 2019/20);
 - (ii) the percentages of approved applications received from eligible organisations other than post-secondary institutions (i.e. non-governmental organisations, technology enterprises and professional bodies) were low, ranging from 0% in 2019/20 to 27% in 2022/23 (averaging 16%); and
 - (iii) the overall percentage of approval for applications received from eligible organisations other than post-secondary institutions (i.e. 8 (14%) out of 56) was lower than that for applications received from post-secondary institutions (i.e. 34 (49%) out of 69).

Education Bureau's support measures for gifted education

Table 14

**Number of OSALPs funding applications
(2019/20 to 2022/23)**

Type of organisations	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Overall
<i>Applications received</i>					
Post-secondary institutions	4 (27%)	25 (70%)	20 (46%)	20 (41%)	69 (48%)
Non-governmental organisations	5 (33%)	8 (22%)	9 (21%)	15 (31%)	37 (26%)
Technology enterprises	4 (27%)	3 (8%)	6 (14%)	6 (12%)	19 (13%)
Professional bodies	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Others (Note)	2 (13%)	0 (0%)	8 (19%)	8 (16%)	18 (13%)
Total	15 (100%)	36 (100%)	43 (100%)	49 (100%)	143 (100%)
<i>Applications approved</i>					
Post-secondary institutions	4 (100%)	10 (77%)	12 (86%)	8 (73%)	34 (81%)
Non-governmental organisations	0 (0%)	2 (15%)	1 (7%)	3 (27%)	6 (14%)
Technology enterprises	0 (0%)	1 (8%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	2 (5%)
Professional bodies	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	4 (100%)	13 (100%)	14 (100%)	11 (100%)	42 (100%)

56

8

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

Note: Organisations other than the four specified types are not eligible for funding support for OSALPs.

4.26 ***Invitations to submit funding applications.*** EDB maintained a list of potential programme providers for OSALPs. Each year, EDB invites programme providers on the list to submit funding applications for OSALPs. The application documents are also posted on EDB's website for other organisations' information. Audit examined the list of potential programme providers adopted for the invitation exercises in the period from 2019/20 to 2022/23, and found that:

Education Bureau's support measures for gifted education

- (a) each year, among the four types of organisations eligible for OSALPs funding, the number of professional bodies, technology enterprises and non-governmental organisations being invited were few, ranging from 0 to 11 (see Table 15); and

Table 15

Number of potential programme providers invited (2019/20 to 2022/23)

Type of organisations	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Overall
Post-secondary institutions	13 (76%)	72 (77%)	76 (80%)	73 (77%)	234 (77%)
Non-governmental organisations	4 (24%)	9 (9%)	9 (9%)	11 (12%)	33 (11%)
Professional bodies	0 (0%)	8 (8%)	7 (7%)	7 (7%)	22 (7%)
Technology enterprises	0 (0%)	6 (6%)	4 (4%)	4 (4%)	14 (5%)
Total	17 (100%)	95 (100%)	96 (100%)	95 (100%)	303 (100%)

} 69
(23%)

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

- (b) for post-secondary institutions, while 234 invitations were sent, the number of applications received was 69. For the three other types of organisations, while 69 invitations were sent, the number of applications received was 56.

4.27 In response to Audit's enquiry, EDB informed Audit in February 2024 that:

- (a) EDB adopted an open, fair and merit-based system in processing and vetting applications from all types of eligible organisations, without any quota for individual types of organisations;
- (b) post-secondary institutions, given their expertise, were generally more experienced in offering learning programmes;

Education Bureau's support measures for gifted education

- (c) quite a number of organisations other than post-secondary institutions participated as supporting organisations in the approved OSALPs. In the period from 2019/20 to 2022/23, 15 (58%) of the 26 supporting organisations (involving 13 OSALPs) were organisations other than post-secondary institutions; and
- (d) EDB considered that, over the past four years, the themes covered by the OSALPs were sufficiently wide and there was increasing variety of themes covered by the applications received.

4.28 EDB informed the Legislative Council's Finance Committee in its meeting in July 2018 on the injection of funding to GE Fund that:

- (a) ACGE had been deliberating on how to enhance the provision of gifted education by engaging more stakeholders in the development of advanced learning programmes; and
- (b) EDB proposed to allocate more resources to support local gifted education by engaging relevant stakeholders to offer a wider spectrum of advanced learning programmes to cater for the needs of more gifted students.

4.29 As the aim of OSALPs is to engage more stakeholders, Audit considers that EDB needs to:

- (a) step up efforts in encouraging eligible organisations to apply for OSALPs; and
- (b) review the list of potential programme providers with a view to identifying more potential programme providers for OSALPs application invitations.

Monitoring of OSALPs

4.30 Service agreements are signed between EDB and the programme providers of OSALPs. The programme providers are also required to follow the requirements in EDB's guidelines on OSALPs. According to the service agreements and EDB's guidelines:

- (a) ***Final Financial Reports and Final Reports.*** Programme providers shall submit Final Financial Reports and Final Reports within three months after the completion of the programme or immediately in case of early termination of the programme; and
- (b) ***Interim Financial Reports and Progress Reports.*** Depending on the duration of the programmes, the programme providers may also be required to submit up to three Interim Financial Reports and two Progress Reports.

4.31 ***Delays in submission of financial statements and reports.*** Audit examined the records for submission of financial statements and reports by the programme providers in the period from September 2019 to January 2024. Audit found that:

- (a) ***Final Financial Reports and Final Reports.*** Of the 31 Final Financial Reports and 31 Final Reports that were due for submission:
 - (i) 18 (58%) Final Financial Reports were submitted late. The delays ranged from 2 to 134 days, averaging 34 days; and
 - (ii) 12 (39%) Final Reports were submitted late. The delays ranged from 2 to 134 days, averaging 34 days; and
- (b) ***Interim Financial Reports and Progress Reports.*** Of the 62 Interim Financial Reports and 60 Progress Reports that were due for submission:
 - (i) 10 (16%) Interim Financial Reports were submitted late. The delays ranged from 1 to 43 days, averaging 12 days; and
 - (ii) 8 (13%) Progress Reports were submitted late. The delays ranged from 1 to 41 days, averaging 12 days.

4.32 ***Need to improve lesson observations.*** According to OSALPs Guide to Applicants, EDB will evaluate the quality and effectiveness of individual programmes by ways of lesson observations. In the period from September 2019 to September 2023, 31 OSALPs were completed. Audit examined the 92 lesson observations carried out by EDB on the 31 OSALPs. Audit found that the frequency,

Education Bureau's support measures for gifted education

mode of result documentation and follow-up actions taken for the lesson observations varied:

- (a) ***Frequency.*** The number of lesson observations conducted on each of the OSALPs varied and ranged from 1 to 7, averaging 3;
- (b) ***Documentation of results.*** Of the 92 lesson observations:
 - (i) for 29 (32%), there were written records on the results of the lesson observations. Of these 29 observations:
 - for 14 (48%), photos taken during the observations were included as part of the record; and
 - for 15 (52%), no photos were included;
 - (ii) for 61 (66%), only photos showing students attending lessons were kept as the records of lesson observations. No written records were available showing comments or remarks made by the officers conducting the lesson observations;
 - (iii) for 1 (1%), a press release issued by the programme provider was used as the record. No written records were available showing comments or remarks made by the officer conducting the lesson observation; and
 - (iv) for the remaining 1 (1%), the result of the lesson observation was not available; and
- (c) ***Follow-up actions.*** Of the 92 lesson observations:
 - (i) for 18 (20%), the comments and/or views arising from the observations were communicated to the instructors and recorded in the lesson observation records;
 - (ii) for the remaining 74 (80%), there was no record showing that the comments and/or views arising from the observations had been communicated to the programme providers; and

- (iii) for all the 92 lesson observations, there was no record showing that EDB had taken actions to ensure that the comments and/or views arising from the lesson observations had been followed up by the programme providers.

4.33 In response to Audit's enquiry, EDB informed Audit in February 2024 that:

- (a) EDB, being GE Fund Secretariat, had been taking active measures to ensure the timely submission of reports by the programme providers, including sending them the details of submission deadlines at the end of the programmes, and requiring them to submit draft reports at least one month before the deadlines. In many cases, the reason for the delays in submission was related to the time taken for the programme providers to seek clearance and endorsements from their administrative units and designated officers; and
- (b) starting from OSALPs approved in 2022/23, EDB has required its officers to document the results of lesson observations on a standard form. Furthermore, EDB officers evaluate OSALPs with the programme providers on a regular basis.

4.34 Audit considers that EDB needs to:

- (a) take measures to ensure that financial statements and reports are submitted by programme providers of OSALPs in a timely manner; and
- (b) improve the lesson observations of OSALPs, including:
 - (i) setting guidelines on the frequency of lesson observations;
 - (ii) ensuring that the results of observations are documented and communicated with the programme providers; and
 - (iii) ensuring that actions are taken by the programme providers to follow up the comments/views arising from lesson observations.

***Final instalments to programme providers disbursed
before receipt of Final Financial Reports and Final Reports***

4.35 According to the service agreements:

- (a) funding for OSALPs are disbursed to the programme providers by quarterly instalments in accordance with the payment schedules set out in the service agreements; and
- (b) programme providers are required to submit Final Financial Reports and Final Reports within three months after the completion of the programme or immediately in case of early termination (see para. 4.30(a)).

4.36 As at 31 January 2024, of the 42 OSALPs approved in the period from 2019/20 to 2022/23, final instalments have been disbursed to the programme providers of 36 OSALPs. Audit reviewed the instalment schedules and the payment records of the 36 OSALPs. Audit found that for all the 36 (100%) programmes:

- (a) in accordance with the payment schedules set out in the service agreements, the final instalments were disbursed to the programme providers prior to the completion of the programmes. The time elapsed between the date of final instalments and the date of programme completion ranged from 30 to 92 days (averaging 63 days); and
- (b) EDB has not received the Final Financial Reports and Final Reports at the time the final instalments were disbursed. As at 31 January 2024, the programme providers of 31 (86%) OSALPs had submitted the Final Financial Reports and Final Reports. The duration between the date of final instalments and the report submission date ranged from 124 to 316 days (averaging 175 days). For the remaining 5 (14%) OSALPs, of which the Final Financial Reports and Final Reports had not been submitted, the time elapsed between the final instalment date and the report submission deadline was 152 days.

4.37 In response to Audit's enquiry, EDB informed Audit in February 2024 that:

- (a) under the existing arrangement, instalments were disbursed to the programme providers on a quarterly basis to ensure sufficient funding for programme providers to carry out OSALPs (e.g. payments for staff salaries) and to avoid making a one-off payment to the programme providers;
- (b) the number of instalments depended on the programme duration. It was inevitable that there was a time gap between the date of final instalment and the date of programme completion; and
- (c) payments to the programme providers were subject to the satisfactory delivery and implementation of OSALPs, which were assessed on a continuous basis. According to the service agreements, EDB was entitled to withhold the payments if it considered that the programme providers had failed to execute OSALPs.

4.38 In Audit's view, Final Financial Reports and Final Reports are crucial in assessing the effectiveness of the programme delivery and ensuring the accuracy in the financial information provided by the programme providers. Disbursing final instalments upon the receipt of such Reports might facilitate the timely submission of such Reports and monitoring of programme delivery. Audit considers that EDB needs to review the practice of disbursing the final instalments to the programme providers of OSALPs before the receipt of the Final Financial Reports and Final Reports.

Need to ensure programme providers' compliance with requirements on SCRC

4.39 In November 2011, EDB issued a circular on SCRC Scheme. The circular informed schools that they are strongly advised to adopt the scheme as soon as practicable in their appointment procedures to further safeguard the well-being of students.

4.40 In 2021/22, EDB updated its guidelines on OSALPs. According to the updated guidelines, to safeguard the well-being of the student participants, the programme providers:

Education Bureau's support measures for gifted education

- (a) should request persons whom they would like to engage in the implementation of the programme to undergo SCRC at the advanced stage of the employment process with a view to verifying the sexual conviction records as declared by them. This can facilitate the programme provider to make an informed decision on selecting suitable staff or training personnel for implementation of the programme; and
- (b) shall not engage any person with convictions of sexual offences as revealed from SCRC for assistance in delivery of the programme.

4.41 Since 2022/23, EDB has required programme providers to submit a confirmation prior to the first session of the programmes, stating that:

- (a) SCRC procedures have been completed;
- (b) the staff and training personnel who will be engaged in the implementation of the programmes have undergone and completed SCRC; and
- (c) no person with convictions of sexual offences as revealed from SCRC will be engaged for assistance in delivery of the programmes.

4.42 Audit examined the records of the 11 OSALPs approved in 2022/23. Audit found that for 10 (91 %) of 11 programmes, instead of submitting a confirmation prior to the first session of the programmes (see para. 4.41), the programme providers submitted the confirmations 17 to 144 days (averaging 65 days) after the first session.

4.43 Audit considers that EDB needs to take measures to ensure that programme providers submit the required confirmation relating to SCRC before the first session of OSALPs.

Audit recommendations

- 4.44 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Education should:**
- (a) **step up efforts in encouraging eligible organisations to apply for OSALPs;**
 - (b) **review the list of potential programme providers with a view to identifying more potential programme providers for OSALPs application invitations;**
 - (c) **take measures to ensure that financial statements and reports are submitted by programme providers of OSALPs in a timely manner;**
 - (d) **improve the lesson observations for OSALPs, including:**
 - (i) **setting guidelines on the frequency of lesson observations;**
 - (ii) **ensuring that the results of observations are documented and communicated with the programme providers; and**
 - (iii) **ensuring that actions are taken by the programme providers to follow up the comments/views arising from lesson observations;**
 - (e) **review the practice of disbursing the final instalments to the programme providers of OSALPs before the receipt of the Final Financial Reports and Final Reports; and**
 - (f) **take measures to ensure that programme providers submit the required confirmation relating to SCRC before the first session of OSALPs.**

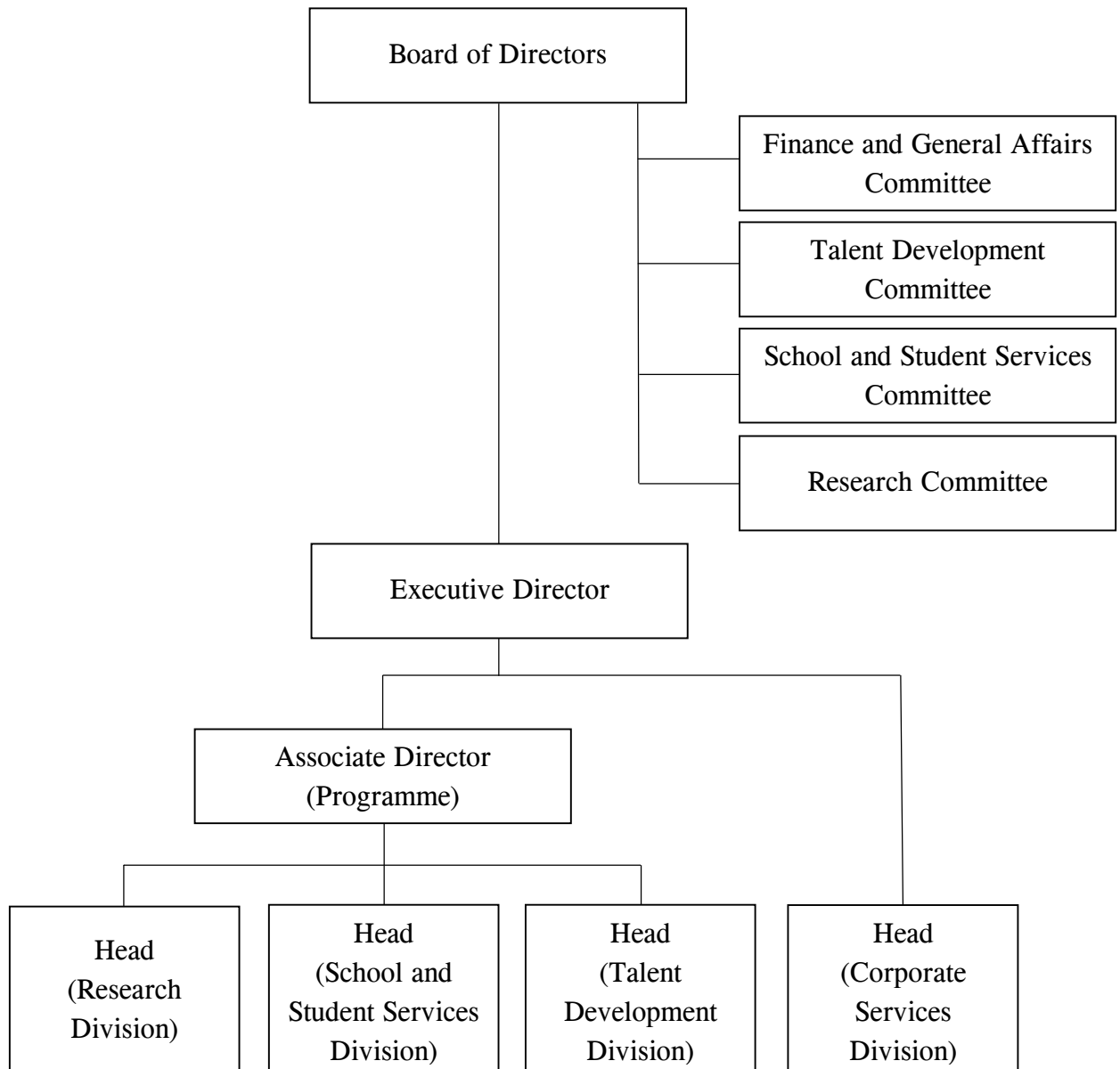
Response from the Government

- 4.45 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendations. She has said that:

Education Bureau's support measures for gifted education

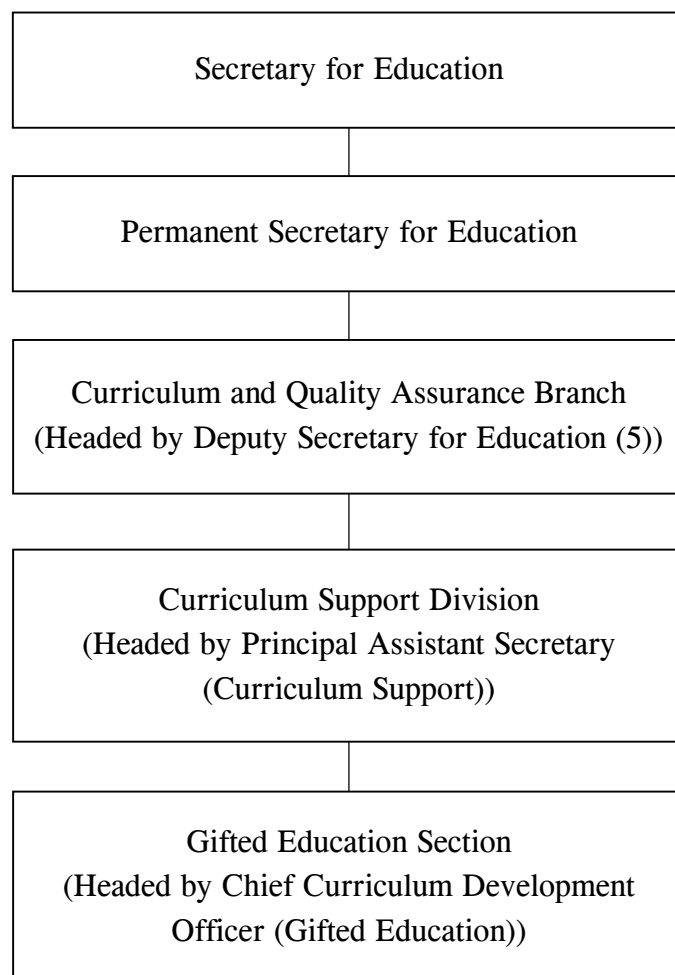
- (a) EDB has been making continuous efforts in inviting organisations other than post-secondary institutions to apply for funding support of OSALPs. EDB has also been encouraging collaboration between post-secondary institutions and other eligible organisations for the submission of applications. From 2019/20 to 2022/23, there has been an increase in the number of organisations other than post-secondary institutions submitting applications for funding support as applicant organisations or supporting organisations;
- (b) it is an ongoing practice that GE Fund Secretariat reviews the list of potential programme providers and adds new programme providers onto the list every year;
- (c) EDB will continue to take active measures to ensure that financial statements and reports are submitted by the programme providers in a timely manner;
- (d) EDB has adopted a multi-pronged approach in evaluating the quality and effectiveness of OSALPs including lesson observations, discussions and meetings with programme providers, scrutiny of the reports submitted by programme providers and student questionnaires. EDB will further review the relevant guidelines and documentation requirements in a holistic manner;
- (e) EDB will critically review the practice of disbursing final instalments to the programme providers of OSALPs before the receipt of Final Financial Reports and Final Reports; and
- (f) EDB has been reminding programme providers to submit the required confirmation relating to SCRC compliance before the first session of OSALPs and will take further measures to ensure their compliance.

**The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education:
Organisation chart (extract)
(31 December 2023)**



Source: HKAGE records

**Education Bureau:
Organisation chart (extract)
(31 December 2023)**



Source: EDB records

Acronyms and abbreviations

ACGE	Advisory Committee on Gifted Education
Audit	Audit Commission
Board	Board of Directors
EDB	Education Bureau
GE Fund	Gifted Education Fund
HKAGE	The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education
OSALPs	Off-school Advanced Learning Programmes
PDPs	Professional Development Programmes
SCRC	Sexual Conviction Record Check
Web-based Learning Courses	Web-based Learning Courses for Gifted/More Able Students