

Call to expand foreign study

By LANA WONG
and SUSAN FURLONG

THE government scheme to subsidise students studying in Britain should be expanded to cover other countries or be scrapped altogether, Legislative Councillors say.

A teacher representative on the council, Mr Cheung Man-kwong, says Hongkong needs to absorb overseas experience but questions why the scheme should be confined to just Britain.

There was a need for some Hongkong students to study abroad to help develop Hongkong's cultural and commercial activities as an international city, he said.

But Britain was not the only place that Hongkong students could learn from. Students should be assisted if they want to study in places outside Britain or even in non-English speaking nations, he said.

"There is no reason why Hongkong only helps the British education institu-

tions to earn money from Hongkong students. It is unfair to other countries," said the United Democrats spokesman on education.

Expanding the scheme to other countries would encourage people to learn from a variety of different cultures, he said.

The Government should set a ceiling on the amount of funds and number of students based on conditions in Hongkong, with countries assigned quotas of student places, he said.

He also suggested the scheme be changed from a grant to loan basis so the public purse would not suffer too much if the students did not return to the territory after their studies.

If the scheme was not expanded to include other countries, it should be scrapped and the money saved spent on primary education, Mr Cheung said.

This academic year about 1,770 students were funded under the scheme with the government

spending about \$30 million in grants and another \$28 million in loans.

The amount given out to each student is generally based on the difference between a "notational" home fee and the overseas fee.

But, following an Executive Council request, the scheme will be reviewed in the next academic year, a source in the Education and Manpower Branch said.

The Executive Council asked for the review in 1990 after Britain raised its fees for home students, reducing the gap between home and overseas fees.

All options will be considered including the possible abolition of the programme, the source said.

The Co-operative Resources Centre's spokesman on education, Mr Henry Tang Ying-yen, said the scheme should be extended or abolished to be fair to all students who want to study abroad.

He said all university students who studied overseas faced high fees and the Government's funding

programme should not give preference to one country.

Legislator and chairman of the Commission on Youth, Mr Eric Li Ka-cheung, said the programme should be widened to include more countries but should definitely not be scrapped.

Students expressed more interest in studying in Canada, Australia and the United States and the funding scheme should reflect this, he said.

But the scheme should also include a provision that recipients return to Hongkong after their studies, he added.

"The chances are greater that students who go to the UK will return to Hongkong," he said.

Professor Felice Lieh-mak said the scheme should not be changed because it encouraged familiarity with British culture and customs.

Other scholarships catered to students wanting to enrol in universities elsewhere.