

April - too late to take action?

The Education Department said yesterday it would not be able to provide "realistic" estimates on the number of primary classes that will be closed because of shrinking intake until about April.

But the Hongkong Professional Teachers' Union (PTU) warned that by then it may be too late to take any substantial measures to find alternative employment for redundant teachers.

Moreover, it will be too late to implement plans for converting surplus primary schools into secondary schools as the Director of Education recently suggested.

The President of the PTU, Mr Szeto Wah, said: "Surely, even if the department does not have the exact figures, they have enough information by way of population projections - the number of openings that are likely to be made available by teachers who have reached retirement age - to have a rough estimate now."

"What harm is there in getting together now with teachers and working out some possible solutions? Why leave it to virtually the last minute?"

The PTU has estimated that in September total primary enrolment in all types of schools would decrease by more than 53,000, that over 1,300 classes would be closed because of under-utilisation and about 1,600 teachers and headmasters would be made redundant.