

Academic criticises class plan

By CAROL SCOTT

THE Government, planning to save \$406 million by expanding classes, was accused yesterday of having no commitment to the future of education in the territory.

Dr Cheng Kai-ming, senior lecturer in the University of Hongkong's Education Department, said government policy hardly went beyond 1997.

He warned that the administration and teachers were on course for their greatest confrontation of recent years over the Education Department's proposed expansion of Primary One, Form One and Form Four classes from 38 to 40 students.

"Hongkong's future, post-1997, will depend on human resources but the production machinery which will improve our resources is now at stake," he said.

"I am convinced the Government is preoccupied by administrative and financial matters and has lost sight of the long-term wellbeing of Hongkong. Frankly, this is an overt sign of the Government's irresponsibility."

The proposal was particularly inappropriate at a time when the tertiary sector was expanding and the focus should be on improving the quality of teachers and students.

Hongkong's teaching force was still underqualified, he said. Most primary school classes were taught by non-graduates and 30 per cent of secondary school teachers were non-graduates.

"The Government is pursuing an ambitious

■ THE Secretary for Education and Manpower, Mr John Chan Cho-chak, yesterday stressed that the Government was committed to education and the development of human resources.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of Education and Careers Expo '92 and British Education Exhibition '92, Mr Chan said Hongkong was undergoing a period of rapid technological development and economic restructuring.

It needed to optimise its human potential to meet new challenges, he said.

policy which will see 18 per cent of students go on to higher education within three to four years. Without improvements to the system, our teachers will be those who were not qualified for higher education themselves," he said during a luncheon address.

The Education Commission - the Government's top advisory body on educational policy - is considering how to improve the quality of the teaching force and its recommendations will be published in its fifth report, to be released later this year.

One of the proposals under consideration is the establishment of a general teaching council to work on the professional development and training of teachers.

But Dr Cheng doubted whether the commission's recommendations would be acted upon in full.

He said they would probably go the way of the remedies and improvements contained in the fourth report of November 1990 - shelved because of lack of funds.

"The legitimacy of the Education Commission is at

"We recognise that education and training are of vital importance in maintaining our supply of quality personnel.

"The Government has therefore given high priority to the expansion of tertiary education and vocational training, as well as to the improvement of the quality of education at all levels."

More than 160 local and overseas exhibitors and 151 British educational institutes are taking part in the exhibitions which will run at the Convention and Exhibition Centre until Sunday.

stake," Dr Cheng said.

"One has to bear in mind that the Education Commission comprises chairpersons from all the major policy advisory bodies, as well as deputies of the relevant government branches and departments."

"If the recommendations of the Education Commission are seen as reasonable and justified, but the Government is not prepared to put them into implementation, the Education Commission will find difficulties in justifying its role."

He suggested a solution might be for teachers to take a more active role in policy-making. They should sit on the Education Commission and, in the long term, the development of an Education Council would allow representatives from the major educational bodies to set their own agenda of concerns.

At present the Education Commission responds to the agenda set by the Government "and their major concerns are economic or political, not educational", he said.