

## Notes from Asia Pacific, January 2012

### Singapore

Following the publicity push last week for the polytechnic route, there is now emphasis on the Junior College (JC) route, with a plug for the 12 JCs which do *not* offer the Integrated Programme (which enables students to skip O levels). 75% of JC students obtain places at local universities, compared with 15% from polys (due to rise to 20% by 2015).

The highest-profile current Government-led educational exercise continues to be the HE review, led by Minister of State for Education Mr Lawrence Wong, which is charged with recommending how to increase university places for Singaporeans. Mr Wong's Committee is visiting Hong Kong this month, to study the HE system there. They will see the expansion of places in publicly-funded universities and the move to the 4-year (Chinese) model of university provision, with a more general introductory first year. The committee has previously looked at university models in Europe, including in France and Finland. It will submit its report by the end of this year.

### South Korea

There is growing concern about violence in S Korean schools. There was a national outcry on the news of the suicide of a bullied middle-school pupil at the end of December and there have also been reports of alleged instances of sexual violence and misconduct among pupils. A "students' rights" ordinance for Seoul was passed in December which, among other things, barred corporal punishment in schools but there is now pressure to have this reversed. In response, the Students' Rights Ordinance Enactment Movement Headquarters in Seoul said in a statement that "protecting students' rights is a necessary condition to increase students' willingness to study and for them to learn about human rights and democracy."

### Vietnam

Some private centres offering vocational/professional qualifications awarded by overseas institutions have been stopped from accepting students on the grounds that the qualifications offered are not officially recognised. They are the Raffles International Vocational Center in Ho Chi Minh City (linked to the Raffles College of HE in Singapore), the Education and Research Center (linked to the Universities of Greenwich and Wolverhampton in the UK and the Australian Institute of Business Administration) and the ILA Foreign Language Center (linked to the Martin College in Australia). This is part of the general regulatory clamp-down on private educational institutions and emphasises the importance of scrutinising the probity of any private organisation engaged with. There is concern in the press about the numbers of bona fide students left stranded in mid-course by these developments.

### Malaysia

The Education Ministry has announced its aim to achieve 100% basic literacy and numeracy skills for Year Three (age 10) pupils nationwide by next year. The current level of achievement is 96.8%, which is an improvement following the introduction of the remedial "LINUS" programme designed to ensure pupils acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills at the end of three years of primary education. The Education Minister Muhyiddin said that the government, having taken into account weaknesses in the teaching-learning process, had introduced a National Key Result Area on literacy and numeracy to evaluate pupils' capability from Year One. This included physical condition, hearing and vision. The National Union of the Teaching Profession said LINUS was effective and had received positive response from teachers although others have raised unresolved questions about whether

the 100% target includes students with learning difficulties or special educational needs. The Government is also considering a remedial literacy programme for National Service trainees.