

ITEM FOR FINANCE COMMITTEE

HEAD 146 - GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT : EDUCATION AND MANPOWER BUREAU

Subhead 700 General other non-recurrent New Item "Grant to the Language Fund"

Members are invited to approve a one-off grant of \$200 million to the Language Fund.

PROBLEM

There is a need to replenish the Language Fund so that further initiatives to raise Hong Kong people's standards in Chinese (including Putonghua) and English can be funded.

PROPOSAL

2. The Secretary for Education and Manpower proposes a one-off grant of \$200 million to the Language Fund (the Fund).

JUSTIFICATION

The Language Fund

3. The Fund was set up in March 1994 with an initial allocation of \$300 million from Government to fund projects and activities aimed at improving Hong Kong people's proficiency in Chinese (including Putonghua) and English. It is held in trust under the Director of Education Incorporation Ordinance (Cap. 1098) and operates under a trust deed which sets out the objects of the Fund, the broad principles governing the disbursements, as well as its management framework. The objects and disbursement principles are at Enclosure 1. The

Encl. 1

/Standing

Encl. 2 Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) advises the trustee on policies and procedures governing the operation of the Fund¹, and supports the trustee in enhancing the language proficiency of the community. The terms of reference of SCOLAR is at Enclosure 2.

Achievements of the Language Fund

Encl. 3 4. Over the past six years, the Fund received a total of 937 applications seeking grants of \$1,578 million. Of these the Fund approved 236 projects, and another eight in-house research and development projects conducted by SCOLAR itself. The grants committed amount to \$350.6 million, leaving the Fund with an uncommitted balance of \$79.2 million as at 31 October 2000². A breakdown of the 244 projects by language and project type is at Enclosure 3.

Encl. 4 5. These projects are undertaken by a wide range of organisations, including tertiary institutions, post-secondary colleges, schools, community organisations, educational bodies, government departments and professional bodies. The projects complement the Administration's efforts in language education, and have laid a good foundation for further promoting language teaching and learning. A brief description of the more notable projects and their achievements is at Enclosure 4.

Priority areas for further funding support

6. The SCOLAR is now taking stock of the work done by itself and other agencies in promoting language teaching and learning, with a view to channelling efforts and funding to priority areas which include –

- (a) strengthening language teaching and learning for the young (i.e. pre-school and primary school students), given the importance of early exposure;
- (b) enriching the language environment for students through, for example, strengthened immersion programmes;
- (c) identifying good practices learned from past projects which were effective in enhancing language teaching and learning, so as to refine and disseminate them, and develop strategy to try them out;
- /(d)

¹ A Language Fund Advisory Committee used to advise the trustee on the operation of the Fund. The SCOLAR took over this work upon its establishment in 1996.

² Over the years, the Fund accrued a total interest income of \$130 million so that after deducting approved commitments, there is still a balance of \$79.2 million.

- (d) supporting Government's overall policy on teacher training. One possible project that SCOLAR may pursue in this respect is a three-year pilot scheme to provide financial assistance to pre-service language teacher trainees, so that as part of their training programme they may attend immersion training in an environment where the language in question is the native tongue;
- (e) studying other education systems where students are able to master both the mother tongue and one or more second/foreign languages, with a view to identifying success factors and inhibiting factors, and their applicability to Hong Kong; and
- (f) embarking on a comprehensive review on Hong Kong's language strategy with a view to making recommendations to Government on areas of improvement.

7. The Government agrees with the above priority areas and is prepared to support the work to be done by SCOLAR itself or other agencies through the Fund. However, with a remaining balance of \$79.2 million only, the Fund will not be able to meet the requirements of the priority areas. There is therefore a need to replenish the Fund. While it is difficult to give a precise estimate of the amount of funding required for each of the initiatives or priority areas at this stage, on the basis of past experience, we anticipate that an additional \$200 million, together with the remaining balance, should enable SCOLAR and other funded agencies to continue with their work for a reasonable period of time. We shall critically review the use of funds and effectiveness of the funded projects in due course to decide on future funding arrangements.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8. As announced in the 2000 Budget, an annual allocation of \$800 million has been earmarked for education reform. If Members approve the proposal, we shall offset the proposed supplementary provision by reserving an equivalent amount under Head 106 Miscellaneous Services Subhead 251 Additional commitments in 2000-01.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

9. On 25 February 1994, the Finance Committee approved vide FCR(93-94)141 the establishment of the Language Fund with an initial allocation of \$300 million from Government held in trust under the Director of Education Incorporation Ordinance. The annual audited accounts of the Fund are tabled before the Legislative Council.

10. We consulted the Legislative Council Panel on Education on 15 January 2001. Members in general supported this proposal and were of the view that continuous support should be given to projects which were proven to be useful.

Education and Manpower Bureau
February 2001

Objects and Disbursement Principles of the Language Fund

Objects

The Trustee shall hold the capital and income of the Language Fund upon trust to apply the income and all or such part or parts of the capital at such time, in such manner, to such extent and subject to such conditions as the Trustee may (after considering the advice of the Committee^(Note)) determine for any one or all of the following purposes –

- (a) to support, directly and indirectly, proficiency in the use of the Chinese (including Putonghua) and English languages by the people of Hong Kong; and
- (b) to fund programmes, projects, research, textbooks, reference materials, teaching aides, language teachers, language experts, educationalists, education and training institutions, courses, training, publications and publicity directed towards the enhancement in the use of the Chinese (including Putonghua) and English languages by the people of Hong Kong.

The broad principles governing the disbursements from the Language Fund

- (a) Equal importance should be given to improving proficiency in Chinese and English;
- (b) a balance should be maintained between meeting the specific needs of schools and those of the community at large;
- (c) for school children, emphasis should be put on increasing opportunities for language learning, in particular through extra-curricular activities;
- (d) innovative ideas and learner-friendly, pragmatic approaches should be encouraged; and
- (e) a positive attitude towards learning and acquiring proficiency in the languages should be cultivated.

^(Note) “Committee” here refers to the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research, which took over the work of the Language Fund Advisory Committee since 1996.

**Terms of Reference for
Standing Committee on Language Education and Research
(SCOLAR)**

To advise the Government on language education issues in general, and in particular –

- (i) to advise on the overall policy on language education, including the medium of instruction;
- (ii) to advise on the setting of language standards, including general goals for language learning at different levels of education and specific language attainment targets at each stage of education;
- (iii) to advise on measures to be adopted to attain the standards mentioned in (ii) above;
- (iv) to identify research and development projects which are necessary for the enhancement of language proficiency and language in education, and to implement or oversee the satisfactory completion of such projects;
- (v) to co-ordinate all research and development activities relating to language proficiency by relevant agencies; monitor their progress, evaluate their effectiveness, and make recommendations to the government accordingly;
- (vi) to develop and promote a public education and information programme in respect of language proficiency issues; and
- (vii) to advise the Trustee of the Language Fund on policies and procedures governing the operation of the Language Fund, and to provide such assistance as the Trustee may require to support, directly or indirectly, the enhancement of the language proficiency of the community.

Number of Funded Projects by Language and Project Type

Language Group	Number of Projects	Amount of Grant (\$ million)
English	92	242.4^(Note)
Chinese, including -	133	83.4
<i>Chinese</i>	<i>104</i>	<i>60.9</i>
<i>Putonghua</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>15.8</i>
<i>Chinese and Putonghua</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6.7</i>
Cross Language	19	24.8
Total	244	350.6

Project Type	Number of Projects	Amount of Grant (\$ million)
Language Learning Activities	119	133.7
Public Education Programmes	19	81.0
Production of Teaching and Learning Packages	38	36.6
Teacher Training	18	43.5
Research on Language Teaching and Learning	50	55.8
Total	244	350.6

^(Note) The sum includes a grant of \$50 million to support the Funding Scheme for Workplace English Training and \$13.4 million to develop, operate and promote the Scheme.

Notable Language Fund Projects

(I) Language Learning Activities

These are language learning activities organised by schools and various educational bodies which provide a wide variety of opportunities of language learning for students. So far, 119 projects amounting to \$133.7 million have been funded. Notable examples are –

- **Collection of Students' Outstanding Writings ("學生文集")** - To encourage creative writing, the Fund sponsored 33 primary and secondary schools to organise writing competitions and activities which have resulted in publication of 38 collections of their students' work.
- **Putonghua Exchange Camp ("活學普通話文化交流營")** - This was a seven-day exchange programme with The Young Pioneers of China ("內地中國學生少年先鋒隊") held in 1999 which aimed at enhancing students' proficiency in Putonghua as well as their understanding of the Mainland. 66 local students participated in this programme. An assessment showed that students' proficiency in Putonghua was substantially raised after the exchange camp.
- **English Speaking Summer Camps** - This was a short immersion programme held in 1996 providing junior secondary students with an English speaking environment to practise authentic and interactive use of English. It also provided an experimental setting for local educators and teachers to study and explore the feasibility and effectiveness of using English camps as an informal means of enhancing English proficiency. Assessment results indicated that there was a significant improvement in the participants' oral English performance after joining the summer camp.
- **English Support Measures for Schools Using Chinese as the Medium of Instructions (English Corner)** - The Language Fund provided a grant which enabled the 274 participating schools to procure audio-visual equipment and reading materials to set up English Corners so as to create an environment conducive to English learning in school. Financial support was also given for schools to organise extra-curricular activities, such as learning in groups and language games.

- **Popular Reading Award Scheme ("普及閱讀計劃")** - A series of game activities in five separate programmes was organised between 1994 and 1998, aimed at raising students' interests in reading. The wide variety of activities were well-received, and more than 100 000 students participated in these programmes.
- **The Extensive Reading Scheme in Chinese ("小學中文廣泛閱讀計劃")** - A total of 108 schools with more than 13 000 primary 5 and 6 pupils participated in this programme held between 1995 and 1998. A number of seminars were also organised to enable participating teachers to share their experience and views.

(II) Public Education Programmes

Production of public education programmes is an effective means to arouse public awareness of the need for better language standards. To date, 19 such projects totalling \$81 million have been carried out. Notable examples are –

- **Radio and television programmes** - A number of popular radio and television programmes have been produced by Radio Television Hong Kong, including One Minute Chinese ("中文一分鐘"), Putonghua TV Series for Children ("普通話親子劇場"), Youth Weekly ("反斗英語") and Basic English ("點蟲蟲之開開心心學英文").
- **Feature articles on language learning practices and experience of celebrities ("名人學語文")** - This is a compilation of interviews with 13 local celebrities (including Messrs Jacky Chan (成龍), Louis Cha (金庸), Tung Chiao (董橋) and Chow Yun Fat (周潤發), etc.) on their experiences in language learning.
- **Funding Scheme for Workplace English Training** - \$50 million has been set aside to promote the importance of English in our community and to improve the English standard among the workforce in Hong Kong. \$40 million is for subsidizing individuals to attend training courses to attain specified benchmarks, while the remaining \$10 million is for companies to develop their own training programmes. So far, the Fund has received a total of 13 908 applications from individuals, and committed \$15.9 million for 11 543 of them. In addition, \$1.4 million has been earmarked for development of 18 training courses.

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(III) Production of Teaching and Learning Packages

A total of 38 projects (totalling \$36.6 million) have been carried out to produce various types of teaching and learning materials, such as VCDs, CDs, cassette tapes, video tapes, CD-ROMs and booklets. These materials are quality resources for language teaching and learning, and the projects themselves are good opportunities for school-based activities and research for academics and frontline teachers and staff development professionals to refine language teaching methods. Notable examples are –

- **Effective Teaching and Learning of Chinese Language in Primary School - Comprehensive and Effective Learning of Chinese Characters and Pleasurable Learning of Chinese Writing (小學中國語文高效能教與學：快速認字和提前寫作)** - About 720 primary pupils from six schools participated in this programme held between 1998 and 1999. This project involved the production of a series of teaching materials and training for teachers. To arouse children's interest in learning Chinese characters, children folk songs and language games were collected as teaching materials, and children were encouraged to learn the orthographic forms of Chinese characters (漢字的構字原理和特點) instead of rote learning of strokes. As for the learning of Chinese writing, creative writing was encouraged. Children were engaged in purposeful, real-life and relevant writing tasks, while teachers served as the mentor instead of the examiner.
- **Big Book** - This teaching kit comprises strategies for teaching English in primary schools with 18 units of work containing reading and language development activities. This programme also included a longitudinal case study of the teaching and learning of reading in English held between 1995 and 2000. A total of 13 schools involving 71 teachers and 83 classes had participated in this programmes. Several schools had taken the initiative to further develop their own programmes through in-school meetings with peers, information sharing with parents, and development of instructional materials.
- **Multimedia Software Packages for the Teaching and Learning of Chinese ("多媒體電腦輔助漢語字詞學習系統")** - This is an interactive learning package with CD-ROMs and other teaching materials aiming to help primary school pupils master 520 Chinese words and expressions within a short period of time.
- **Head for Business** - The package is suitable for professional organisations, technical institutes and tertiary institutions which include business communication as part of their English language programmes. The two sets of video packages are relevant to the local Hong Kong business context on both language learning and business communication skills acquisition. Each package contains a video drama, two student workbooks, and one teachers' book.

(IV) Teacher Training

To provide immediate support to, and encourage continuing learning among, teachers, 18 projects (amounting to \$43.5 million) were carried out to provide language teachers with various types of training courses and development programmes. Notable examples are –

- **Support Centre for Teachers Using Chinese as the Medium of Instruction (CMI Centre) (www.cmi.hku.hk)** - To support Government's Medium of Instruction policy, the University of Hong Kong was granted more than \$10 million to set up a CMI Centre to collect, collate and design Chinese language teaching materials for seven academic subjects. A network has also been established to allow teachers to share their experience and resource materials on mother tongue teaching. The webpage of the Centre is now accessed by over 100 000 visitors each month.
- **Language Resource Centre (English, Chinese and Putonghua)** - The Centre aims to let language teachers have physical access to a professional library and a bank of teaching and curriculum materials. It also provides computer links to schools so that teachers can obtain professional advice or gain access to on-line databases of useful materials.
- **Putonghua Summer Immersion Course Subsidy Scheme ("普通話暑期沉浸課程")** - For three years starting from 2000, SCOLAR will sponsor a total of 500 primary and secondary Putonghua teachers to take part in a four-week immersion programme in the Mainland. The first cohort of 163 teachers completed the course and the results of an evaluation of the programme indicated that the majority of these teachers performed better in the National Putonghua Proficiency Test ("普通話水平測試") after attending the course. Out of the 103 participants who had been tested before attending the course, 70 (i.e. 68%) of them attained one or two grades higher in their post-course assessment.
- **Incentive Grants Scheme for English Teachers' Professional Development** - To enhance English teachers' language proficiency, a total of \$10 million has been earmarked to sponsor 500 English teachers, one per school, to undertake advanced studies in the English language system and English language specific pedagogy at undergraduate or postgraduate degree level.
- **Hong Kong Language Education Research Database (SCOLAR's Webpage - www.language-education.com)** - This webpage, which contains more than 1 000 abstracts of articles written by language educators and scholars in Hong Kong, provides educators and researchers with useful information on language-related researches in Hong Kong. It is made accessible on the Internet

to facilitate studies of language learning and teaching in Hong Kong and elsewhere, as well as exchange of ideas and experience among language professionals.

- **TeleGram and TeleTeach Databases (www.telenex.hku.hk)** - TeleGram is a database which provides grammatical information and language awareness activities that enable teachers to better understand how the English language works and what changes it is undergoing. It also discusses students' typical errors and their potential learning difficulties. TeleTeach provides teaching materials that are tailored to the Hong Kong context in terms of the curriculum, public examination syllabuses, class size, etc.

(V) Research on Language Teaching and Learning

The 50 research projects (totalling \$55.8 million) supported by the Language Fund include research and studies on the Chinese Language Competence of Primary School Children, Schools Using Putonghua as the Medium of Instruction for the Chinese Language Subject, and Monitoring and Evaluation of the Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme, etc. These studies provide additional reference for policy deliberation and formulation.

