

For discussion
on 15 January 2001

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LegCo Panel on Education

Language Fund

Purpose

This paper seeks Members' views on a proposal to inject \$200 million into the Language Fund.

Background

2. The Language Fund was set up in March 1994 with an initial allocation of \$300 million, held in trust under the Director of Education Incorporation Ordinance, to provide programmes and initiatives aimed at raising Hong Kong people's standards in Chinese (including Putonghua) and English.

3. The Fund is operated in accordance with a Trust Deed which sets out the objects of the Fund, the broad principles governing the disbursements, as well as its management framework. The Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) advises the Director of Education, the Trustee, in managing the Fund. The terms of reference of SCOLAR is at **Annex A**.

Present position

4. Over the past six years, a total of 937 applications from various sectors of the community seeking grants of \$1,578 million from the Fund were received, of which a total of 244 projects were approved with grants committed at \$350.61 million, leaving an uncommitted balance of \$79.2 million ^(Note). A breakdown of the 244 projects by language and project type is at **Annex B**.

^(Note) Over the years, the Fund accrued \$130 million in interest so that after deducting approved commitments, there is still a balance of \$79.2 million.

5. The approved projects include (i) language learning activities; (ii) public education programmes; (iii) production of teaching and learning packages; (iv) teacher training; and (v) research on language teaching and learning. These projects are undertaken by various sectors of the community, including tertiary institutions, post-secondary colleges, schools, community organisations, educational bodies, government departments, commercial/industrial organisations and individuals. A brief description of the more notable Language Fund projects is at **Annex C**.

Proposal

6. The Language Fund projects implemented so far have laid a good foundation for further development, particularly in promoting academic and action research on language teaching and learning in the Hong Kong context. These projects form a useful complement to the other measures on language education undertaken by the Administration.

7. The current SCOLAR started its new term in November 2000. It is now taking stock of the work done by SCOLAR and other agencies in the past in promoting language teaching and learning, with a view to identifying priority areas for further action. The possible areas include :

- (a) strengthening language teaching and learning for the young (i.e. pre-school and primary students), given the importance of early exposure;
- (b) enriching the language environment for students through, for example, strengthened immersion programmes for students;
- (c) strengthening and continuing projects which have been piloted to be effective and successful in enhancing language teaching and learning, such as the Support Centre for Teachers Using Chinese as the Medium of Instruction;
- (d) supporting Government's overall policy on teacher training. One possible project that SCOLAR may pursue in this respect is to conduct a 3-year pilot scheme to provide financial assistance to pre-service teacher trainees, so that they may go

overseas for immersion training as part of their training programme. Government and teacher education institutes are actually devising the arrangements for the immersion element; and

- (e) studying other education systems where students have proved to be able to master both mother tongue as well as one or more second/foreign languages, and identifying proved practices which might have application in Hong Kong.

Since the Language Fund now has a balance of only \$79.2 million, and as the Fund is expected to play an important role in supporting the future development of Hong Kong's language strategy, we propose that an additional sum of \$200 million be injected to the Language Fund.

Publicity

8. The focus of the Language Fund in the past years has been on development of materials and research work. While there are dissemination efforts (including sharing sessions, workshops, seminars for teachers, distribution of teaching and learning materials to schools, development of databases and networks for teachers and students), they have mostly been of a limited scale, mostly on an individual project basis only. SCOLAR has agreed that more proactive publicity has to be done in the coming year, including the formulation of a strategy with high profile programmes to widely publicize the products and best practices which have been developed, so that stakeholders including not only teachers, but also students, parents and members of the public will also have easy access to these products.

Support sought

9. Members are invited to support the proposal to inject \$200 million into the Language Fund.

Education and Manpower Bureau
January 2001

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.

**Allocation of Funds
by Language Group and Project Type
as at 1.12.2000**

Annex B

Language Group	No. of Projects	Amount of Grant (\$ in million)
English	92	242.45
Chinese	104	60.92
Putonghua	24	15.81
Chinese & Putonghua	5	6.66
Sub-total for Chinese Group	133	83.39
Cross Language	19	24.77
TOTAL	244	350.61

Project Type	No. of Projects	Amount of Grant (\$ in million)
Language Learning Activities	119	133.66
Public Education Programmes	19	81.06
Production of Teaching and Learning Packages	38	36.61
Teacher Training	18	43.51
Research on Language Teaching and Learning	50	55.77
TOTAL	244	350.61

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 \$133.66 million have been funded. Notable examples are:

- **Popular Reading Award Scheme ("普及閱讀計劃")** - The Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union had, with financial support from the Language Fund, organised a series of game activities in five separate programmes between 1994 and 1998 aimed at raising students' interests in reading. The wide variety activities were well-received with more than 100,000 students participated in these programmes.
- **Collection of Students' Outstanding Writings ("學生文集")** - To encourage students to take part in creative writing, 33 primary and secondary schools have been sponsored to organise writing competitions and activities which have resulted in 38 publications of collected works of their students.
- **Putonghua Exchange Camp ("活學普通話文化交流營")** - This was a 7-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 understanding of the Mainland. 66 local students participated in this programme. An assessment showed that students' proficiency in Putonghua had been 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 to English language enhancement. 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.

(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 \$81.06 million have been carried out. Notable examples are :

- **Funding Scheme for Workplace English Training** - To raise awareness of the importance of English in our community and to improve the English standard among the workforce in Hong Kong, a total of \$50 million has been set aside for this purpose. \$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, a total of 13,908 applications from individuals have been received, out of which 11,543 have been processed with a committed funding of \$15,899,739. As for development of training courses, \$1,372,760 has been earmarked for 18 such courses.
- **Feature articles on language learning practices and experience of celebrities ("名人學語文")** - This is a compilation of interviews with

a number of local 13 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.

- **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").

(III) Production of Teaching and Learning Packages

A total of 38 projects (totalling \$36.61 million) have been carried out on the production of various types of teaching and learning materials, such as VCDs, CDs, cassette tapes, video tapes, CD-ROMs and booklets. These projects provide quality resources for language teaching and learning as well as good opportunities for school-based action and research activities. Notable examples are :

- **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.
- **Big Book** - This teaching kit comprises strategies for teaching English in primary schools with 18 units of work containing reading and language development activities.
- **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.

- **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.

(IV) Teacher Training

To provide immediate support to and encourage continuing learning among teachers, 18 projects (amounting to \$43.51 million) have been 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)** - 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.
- **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") - Starting from 2000, SCOLAR will sponsor a total of 500 primary and secondary Putonghua teachers within a three-year period to take part in a four-week immersion programme in the Mainland. The first cohort of 163 teachers completed the course and the result 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 they had attended the course.

- **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 also made accessible on the World Wide Web 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 \$55.77 million) supported by the Language Fund which have been or are being carried out include research and studies on the Medium of Instruction (MOI) policy, the Chinese Language Competence of Primary School Children, Schools Using Putonghua as the MOI for the Chinese Language Subject, English

Language Critical Literature Review, Review of Workload of Language Teachers (Chinese and English) and Monitoring and Evaluation of the Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme, etc. These studies provide additional reference for policy deliberation and formulation.