

For discussion
on 7 February 2005

LEGCO PANEL ON EDUCATION

INJECTION INTO THE LANGUAGE FUND

PURPOSE

This paper seeks Members' views on a proposal to inject \$500 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 (now the Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower) Incorporation Ordinance, to provide financial support for projects and activities aimed at improving Hong Kong people's proficiency in Chinese (including Putonghua) and English. 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 management framework. The Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR), established in 1996 to advise Government on language education issues in general, is responsible for advising the Trustee of the Fund on the policies and procedures governing the operation of the Fund. Its terms of reference are at Annex A.

3. On 23 February 2001, the Finance Committee approved another grant of \$200 million to the Language Fund so that the Fund can continue to support research and development projects aimed at raising local language standards.

4. In 2002, SCOLAR launched a comprehensive review of language education in Hong Kong at the invitation of the Secretary for Education and Manpower. The review examined a host of issues related to language education, conducted thorough discussions with stakeholders and a two-month public consultation, and was concluded with a basket of

recommendations which gained wide public support. To facilitate implementation of the recommendations, the Finance Committee approved an injection of \$400 million into the Language Fund on 21 February 2003 for initiatives including the establishment of a Task Force on Language Support, the Professional Development Incentive Grant Scheme for Language Teachers, a range of pilot projects on new and effective Chinese and English teaching approaches, a Putonghua Summer Immersion Course Subsidy Scheme, the development of a Putonghua proficiency scale, a research on using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject, and so on.

PRESENT POSITION

5. There is an outstanding balance of \$340 million in the Language Fund as at January 2005, but more than \$245 million have been earmarked for funding the initiatives yet to be completed as set out in para. 4 above. This includes about \$200 million for the continued operation of the Task Force of Language Support for at least five years; and about \$45 million for implementation of pilot projects on new and effective teaching approaches on Chinese and English, e.g. through pop culture and language arts. The balance of the Language Fund available as at January 2005 is about \$95 million, which could not support new initiatives in the pipeline as explained below.

PROPOSALS

6. As our continuous investment into language education, we propose to inject a further \$500 million into the Language Fund to enable the Administration and SCOLAR to explore new initiatives to address the latest concerns in language education and to continue with successful initiatives currently being implemented, including the following –

- a) the continued implementation of the Professional Development Incentive Grant Scheme for Language Teachers given the current allocation is likely to be completely committed by as early as mid-2005; and
- b) provision of strengthened support to schools, teachers and students in pre-primary and primary schools in view of the first Territory-wide System Assessment results in 2004.

JUSTIFICATIONS

Professional Development Incentive Grant Scheme for Language Teachers

7. The Professional Development Incentive Grant Scheme for Language Teachers (the Scheme) was set up in 2004 on SCOLAR's recommendation to encourage serving language teachers, particularly those who have neither a degree nor any teacher training in the relevant language subject, to upgrade their professional qualifications to match that required of their counterparts entering the profession in the 2004/05 academic year or later¹. \$225 million was allocated from the Language Fund to provide each successful applicant to the Scheme, upon completion of an approved programme for qualification upgrading, 50% of the tuition fee up to a maximum of \$30 000. It was estimated that this initial allocation could provide subsidies to about 7 500 teachers in a five-year timeframe.

8. Teachers' actual response to the Scheme since its launch in April 2004 was, however, much stronger than we had expected. As at mid-January, SCOLAR has already received 4 200 applications and 3 790 of which have been approved. The grant earmarked amounts to approximately \$114 million. This shows that serving teachers are strongly committed to their professional development. Judging from this rate of applications received by the Scheme in the previous months, it is likely that funds for earmarking of grants to applicants would be run out by as early as mid- or the latter half of 2005.

9. Meanwhile, the 2003 teachers survey conducted by this Bureau shows that there are over 20 000 serving teachers of the Chinese or the English Language subjects in secondary or primary schools in Hong Kong who either (i) do not hold a degree majoring in the language subject that they teach, or (ii) has not received any teacher training in the relevant subject, or (iii) both, and are therefore encouraged to upgrade their qualifications (details at Annex B). Given the gap between this potential demand and the limited number of teachers that the Scheme can support without additional resources, we propose that an additional \$300 million should be allocated from the Language Fund to support the continued operation of the Scheme so as to meet the expectation of teachers who are planning to upgrade their qualifications in the coming few years. This

¹ In the Final Report of Language Education Review published in June 2003, SCOLAR recommended and the Administration agreed that starting from the 2004/05 school year, new language teachers should hold at least a Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree majoring in the relevant language subject, or both a first degree and a Postgraduate Diploma (or Certificate) in Education (PGDE/PCEd) majoring in the relevant language subject.

further allocation should be sufficient to cover at least an additional 10 000 serving teachers for their professional development. Timely injection into the Scheme, and hence an early decision on the future of the Scheme, would also provide certainty and assurance to these teachers for better personal planning and pursuing the studies at their own pace.

Follow-up Actions on the Results of the Territory-wide System Assessment Test for Students in Primary Schools

10. The first Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA), or more commonly known as the Basic Competency Assessment (BCA), in Chinese Language, English Language and Mathematics was conducted in July 2004 for students in Key Stage 1 (KS1) (i.e. Primary 3 Level). The overall results were released in December 2004, which revealed that 76% of Primary 3 students had attained the minimally acceptable level of basic competency in English Language. In Chinese Language, the attainment level was 83% and in Mathematics 85%.

11. Students not attaining the basic competency in the TSA would need specific support in the subjects concerned if they are not to have their progress in learning seriously compromised. Empirical studies also show that if these students were not urgently assisted then the gap between them and the better performing students would widen in the next key stage of learning. Since the percentage of students not attaining basic competency is quite significant, particularly in the language subjects (24% in English and 17% in Chinese), we see a need to strengthen support to schools and teachers of these subjects at KS1 as quickly as possible. Otherwise, it can be foreseen that the percentage of students in Key Stage 2 not attaining basic competency in these subjects is bound to be even higher than that of their KS1 counterparts as set out above.

12. In the *Action Plan to Raise Language Standards in Hong Kong (the Action Plan)*², SCOLAR recommended that based on the information collected through the System Assessment (i.e. TSA), the Government should provide additional support and channel available resources to schools according to their need for support in language education, with priority given to helping primary students who failed to attain the basic competencies catch up and achieve the basic competencies for Key Stage 2 before they enter secondary schools. Some members of the public had

² The *Action Plan* was released in June 2003 as the Final Report of the said review on language education in Hong Kong by SCOLAR mentioned in para. 4 of this paper.

also suggested providing paid study leave or supply teachers to relieve teachers on training from their regular duties, which they believed would encourage more serving teachers to pursue professional development. Relevant sections of *the Action Plan* are extracted at Annex C.

13. Currently, major initiatives to support language education in the primary school level include the Primary Native English Teachers Scheme (PNET Scheme), the Task Force on Language Support, and community-school interface activities such as the Reading Ambassador project and the Putonghua/English Festivals initiated by SCOLAR. While the PNET Scheme and the range of community-school interface activities have greatly enhanced the language environment that students are exposed to, and the Task Force on Language Support has provided the needed support to language teachers on enhancing their pedagogy and curriculum development, there is room to strengthen support to schools and teachers in language education in a more focused manner in the light of students' strengths and weaknesses identified through the first TSA.

14. Almost all studies show that an early age (i.e. pre-KS1 and KS1) is the most critical age for language learning in children. The first TSA results have therefore raised the need of urgent action to be taken. Given the diversified views in the field, however, there appears a need to a further and deeper research into the learning of the languages (e.g. in relation to neuro-scientific studies) so as to shed light on the language policy at the pre-primary and early primary level. At the same time, we should look into measures to improve the language education in the pre-primary and primary levels. These may include, inter alia, strengthening of support to language teachers through such scheme as mentoring or advisory services in the adoption of well-tested teaching approaches, promotion of language activities such as songs, stories, games, and on-line/web learning materials, etc. structured around the current Guideline to Kindergarten issued by the Curriculum Development Institute of this Bureau, as well as the stipulation of more specific guidelines in language education for children in the pre-primary and early primary levels.

15. It is also important to enable capacity building in language teachers, which would bear a great and sustainable impact on the learning and teaching in schools. Local cadre of teachers of primary schools and/or kindergartens could greatly benefit through paid full-time study leave with immersion courses overseas, which would enable them a leap in their capability of creating the necessary language environment in pre-primary and primary schools. We therefore propose to provide financial support to local serving teachers of the English Language subject in taking overseas

immersion programmes of study of duration in the range of four to eight weeks or more. This would complement the PNET Scheme well in the light of the difficulty that we face in recruiting sufficient Native English Teachers for schools in Hong Kong. Professional development of teachers may also be enhanced through intensive courses on different specific aspects of the learning and teaching of the subjects, such as grammar/phonics in context, and writing and vocabulary building skills. Other measures that could be explored include support, through the provision of financial incentives or otherwise, to kindergartens and nursery teachers for the development of exemplar teaching kits to assist these schools and teachers who may not be able to develop their own materials at least at present.

16. These measures to be explored would complement the PNET Scheme and the efforts of the Task Force on Language Support.

SUPPORT SOUGHT

17. Members are invited to support the proposals to inject \$500 million into the Language Fund for initiatives which seek to enhance the quality of language education in Hong Kong, including –

- (a) \$300 million for the expansion of the existing Professional Development Incentive Grant Scheme for Language Teachers; and
- (b) \$200 million for strengthened support in language education for children in the pre-primary and primary level, in the light of the first Territory-wide System Assessment.

18. Subject to Members' views, we plan to seek the Finance Committee's approval of the funding proposal at its meeting on 25 February 2005.

Education and Manpower Bureau
January 2005

Standing Committee on Language Education and Research

Terms of Reference

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

- (a) to advise on the overall policy on language education, including the medium of instruction;
- (b) 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;
- (c) to advise on measures to be adopted to attain the standards mentioned in (b) above;
- (d) 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;
- (e) 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;
- (f) to develop and promote a public education and information programme in respect of language proficiency issues; and
- (g) 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.

**Profile of Academic Qualifications of Language Teachers
in Hong Kong (according to the 2003 Teacher Survey)**

Academic Qualifications of Language Teachers	Primary School		Secondary School	
	Chinese Language Teachers	English Language Teachers	Chinese Language Teachers	English Language Teachers
Hold a degree majoring in the relevant language subject <i>and</i> have received teacher training in the relevant language subject	1 637 (13.8%)	1 269 (13.8%)	3 110 (58%)	2 753 (48.2%)
<i>Either</i> hold a degree majoring in the relevant language subject <i>or</i> have received teacher training in the relevant language subject	9 574 (80.7%)	4 369 (47.5%)	1 547 (28.8%)	2 060 (36.1%)
Have <i>neither</i> a degree majoring in the language subject <i>nor</i> any teacher training in the relevant language subject	648 (5.5%)	3 561 (38.7%)	708 (13.2%)	895 (15.7%)
<i>Total</i>	11 859 (100%)	9 199 (100%)	5 365 (100%)	5 708 (100%)

Note: According to the survey, there are over 20 000 serving teachers who have not completely met the qualifications recommended by SCOLAR in 2003.

Extracts from *Action Plan to Raise Language Standards in Hong Kong*

2.3.6 What action should we take to help students who do not attain the basic competencies in Chinese or English Language? Few agreed that such students should be retained in the same school level unless they also had problems in other subjects. Most who responded to our question in the consultation document believed that students who failed to achieve the basic competencies should be allowed to proceed to the next school level and the next Key Stage. But additional support should be provided to help them catch up and achieve the basic competencies at the end of the next Key Stage. There was also some support for keeping students in the same Key Stage with regard to the particular language subject in which they had difficulties. The majority of the public believed that individual schools should be given the discretion to adopt an approach best suited for their students, considering the schools' own circumstances in terms of student diversity and available resources.

2.3.8 (c) Based on the information collected through the System Assessment, the Government should channel available resources to schools according to their need for support in language education. In terms of resources allocation, priority should be given to helping primary students achieve the basic competencies for Key Stage 2 before they enter secondary schools.

3.4.1 Language teachers undoubtedly play a critical role in language education. They are language models for students, and have a direct influence on students' interest in learning a language. In our survey on students' motivation, students ranked 'teachers' as the most important factor affecting whether they liked a particular language subject or not.

3.4.25 Some members of the public suggested providing paid study leave or supply teachers to relieve teachers on training from their regular duties. This, they believed, would encourage more serving teachers to pursue professional development. There was also support for giving recognition to language teachers who attain the recommended qualifications in the form of a special title and/or an increment.