

For discussion
on 9 May 2005

LEGCO PANEL ON EDUCATION

USE OF LANGUAGE FUND – PROPOSALS TO STRENGTHEN SUPPORT IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION AT PRE-PRIMARY AND PRIMARY LEVELS

PURPOSE

This paper seeks Members' views on proposals to strengthen language education at pre-primary and primary levels with recent injection into the Language Fund.

BACKGROUND

2. On 4 March 2005, the Finance Committee (FC) endorsed an injection of \$500 million into the Language Fund for purpose of continuing our support to language teachers in their professional development and to strengthen support to schools and teachers in language education at primary and pre-primary levels (vide FCR(2004-05)44 at **Annex.**)

3. On language teachers' professional development, we proposed to allocate \$300 million out of the injection for the continued operation of the Professional Development Incentive Grant Scheme for Language Teachers (PDIGS) to support at least 10 000 serving language teachers for their professional development in addition to the Scheme's original intended coverage.

4. At the same time, we proposed to allocate a sum of \$200 million on strengthening support in language education at primary and pre-primary levels in view of that the same period being the most critical age for language education for children's development and in the light of the first Territory System Assessment for Primary 3 conducted last year. We proposed to explore the implementation of a basket of measures, including sponsoring teachers to go onto overseas immersion courses, intensive training on specific aspects of the learning and teaching of language subjects (e.g. grammar/phonics in context, and writing and vocabulary building skills, etc.), programmes specific for professional development of

pre-primary teachers, and other support measures to be designed.

5. While details of these measures and the exact allocation amongst them were subject to further deliberations by the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR), the Administration undertook at Members' request to further consult this Panel on the use of funds in relation to para. 4 above.

LATEST POSITION

6. On 6 April 2005, SCOLAR endorsed the allocation of a further \$300 million to PDIGS for sponsoring an additional 10 000 serving language teachers in their professional development. The Trustee of the Language Fund (i.e. the Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower) has subsequently approved the allocation.

7. As regards support measures for strengthening language education in primary and pre-primary levels, SCOLAR will consider proposals, initially, as set out in subsequent paragraphs.

PROPOSALS

Overseas Immersion Programmes for Language Teachers

8. We propose to sponsor local serving English teachers of primary schools to take overseas immersion programmes of four to eight weeks for exposing them to an authentic English language learning environment and building their capacity for continuing improvement, built on the experience of the eight- to ten-week Compulsory Language Immersion Programme for pre-service English Language and Putonghua teacher trainees in all teacher education institutes (TEIs), which costs on average \$34,000 to \$42,000 for English courses, and about \$16,000 to \$19,000 for Putonghua ones.

9. We are mindful of the difficulty of releasing teachers to go onto a training tour during the course of a school term, and will assess the demand before firming up the scheme. We shall also explore with TEIs programmes that center around the summer vacation or other longer school breaks during the year such as Christmas, Chinese New Year and Easter. Programme lengths would need to be appropriately adjusted as such, and we also intend to sponsor the necessary cost for arranging supply teachers during the said period of leave.

10. If the proposed scheme is to be implemented within the framework set out above, the amount of resources to be invested would be quite significant. As such, we will also explore means through which new skills and experience acquired by participating teachers would be translated into improvement in the learning and teaching of the English language subject in the wider context of the school. These means might include undertakings to act as a resource teacher to help other English teachers in the school to work more closely with other language teachers including the Native-speaking English Teacher, and experience and knowledge sharing on curriculum development and pedagogy among teachers.

11. Dialogue with stakeholders including TEIs, school principals and teachers will be conducted before finalising the proposals. .

Intensive training on specific aspects of the learning and teaching of language subjects

12. We propose to inject additional resources for supporting primary school teachers of language subjects to attend intensive courses focused on specific aspects of the learning and teaching of the relevant language subjects (e.g. grammar/phonics in context, and writing and vocabulary building skills.) Consideration will also be given to provide support in areas such as the learning and teaching through reading and language arts. These courses are normally ten- to fifteen-hour long. However, the format of how these courses might be conducted is a secondary concern and it might vary from case to case.

13. We shall also consider ways to assess the specific needs and tap the demand from teachers in order to decide on areas in which more resources should be focused.

Professional Development of Pre-primary Teachers

14. We note from Members' views expressed at the FC meeting on 4 March 2005 that more emphasis should be given to support for schools and teachers at the pre-primary level. The qualifications requirements, learning approaches and hence the needs in professional development, between kindergarten and primary school teachers are quite different. As such, we had proposed to develop separate programmes for strengthening the professional development of kindergarten teachers. Nonetheless, there is still room for leverage of support measures between the two groups of teachers. For example, kindergarten teachers may also benefit from

overseas immersion courses. Training on specific aspects of the learning and teaching of language subjects may also be provided to kindergarten teachers as well.

15. It should also be reiterated that the exact amount of resources to be devoted from the Language Fund for such purpose will be adjusted as necessary subject to views from different parties and SCOLAR's consideration.

Other Support Measures

16. Other than the proposed measures above, we would also explore the feasibility and likely benefits of other support measures for schools, teachers, students and parents in primary and pre-primary schools on language education. We would begin by looking into the following areas –

- (a) facilitating mentoring or advisory services in the adoption of well-tested teaching approaches;
- (b) promotion of language activities such as songs, stories, games, and on-line/web-based learning materials, etc. structured around the current Guideline to Kindergarten issued by the Curriculum Development Institute;
- (c) stipulation of more specific guidelines in language education for children at pre-primary and primary levels;
- (d) development of exemplar teaching kits for kindergartens and nursery teachers; and
- (e) conducting in-depth researches into language learning at an early age, possibly in relation to neuro-scientific studies, so as to shed light on the language policy at primary and pre-primary levels.

These ideas are broadly framed at this stage. Details on proposals for any of the above will be the subject of further development and discussion by SCOLAR.

THE WAY FORWARD

17. Along the support framework outlined in paras. 8 to 16 above, we would further consult relevant stakeholders in developing detailed implementation plans before they are to be further considered by SCOLAR. We would continue to keep this Panel posted of relevant developments as

and when necessary.

VIEWS SOUGHT

18. Members are invited to give views on the proposals as described in paras. 8 to 17 above.

Education and Manpower Bureau
May 2005

**For discussion
on 25 February 2005**

ITEM FOR FINANCE COMMITTEE

**HEAD 156 - GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT :
EDUCATION AND MANPOWER BUREAU
Subhead 700 General non-recurrent
New Item “Grant to the Language Fund”**

Members are invited to approve a new commitment of \$500 million for injection into the Language Fund.

PROBLEM

We need to continue our support to language teachers in their professional development and to strengthen support to schools and teachers in language education at primary and pre-primary levels.

PROPOSAL

2. The Secretary for Education and Manpower (SEM) proposes to make a further injection of \$500 million into the Language Fund (the Fund) to enable the Administration and the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) to improve language education at the pre-primary, primary and secondary levels by exploring and implementing new initiatives to address the latest concerns in language education and expanding successful initiatives currently being implemented, including the following –

- (a) expanding the Professional Development Incentive Grant Scheme for Language Teachers; and
- (b) strengthening support to schools, teachers and students at primary and pre-primary levels in view of the results of the first Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA) in 2004.

/JUSTIFICATION

JUSTIFICATION

3. There is an outstanding balance of \$340 million^{Note 1} in the Fund as at January 2005, but more than \$245 million have been earmarked for funding committed initiatives being implemented (details set out in paragraph 19 below). This includes about \$200 million for the continued operation of the Task Force on Language Support^{Note 2} for at least five years, and about \$45 million for the development and implementation of pilot projects to promote the use and learning of Chinese and English languages in new and effective approaches, e.g. through pop culture and language arts. The non-earmarked balance of about \$95 million as at January 2005 could not support new initiatives in the pipeline as explained below.

Professional Development Incentive Grant Scheme for Language Teachers

4. The Professional Development Incentive Grant Scheme for Language Teachers (the Scheme) was launched in 2004 on the recommendation of SCOLAR to encourage serving language teachers, particularly those who possess 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 school year or later^{Note 3}. We allocated \$225 million from the Fund to reimburse 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 of \$225 million could provide subsidies to about 7 500 teachers in a five-year time frame.

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Note 1 A total of \$900 million have been injected into the Fund since 1994. Added to this is a total interest income of \$161 million accrued by the Fund over the years. Taking into account the total grants of \$715 million already approved for various projects and \$6 million already spent on other miscellaneous expenses, there was an outstanding balance of \$340 million left in the Fund as at January 2005.

Note 2 The Task Force of Language Support was set up in the 2003/04 school year under SCOLAR's recommendation to support schools to implement the curriculum reform, with particular respect to language learning and teaching. Task Force members include experienced teachers and language experts.

Note 3 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 degree majoring in the relevant language subject, or both a first degree and a Postgraduate Diploma (or Certificate) in Education majoring in the relevant language subject.

5. The actual response of serving teachers to the Scheme since its launch in April 2004 was much stronger than we had expected. As at mid-January 2005, SCOLAR has already received 4 200 applications, 3 790 of which have been approved (involving about \$114 million). This shows that many serving teachers are strongly committed to their professional development. At this rate of applications received, it is likely that funds earmarked for the purpose would have been committed by as early as mid- or the latter half of 2005.

6. Meanwhile, the 2003 Teachers Survey conducted by the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) 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 –

- (a) do not hold a degree majoring in the language subject that they teach; or
- (b) have not received any teacher training in the relevant subject; or
- (c) both of the above,

Encl.1

and are therefore encouraged to upgrade their qualifications. Detailed breakdown of the profile of these serving teachers is set out at Enclosure 1. Given the gap between this potential demand and the limited number of teachers that the Scheme can support with the initial allocation of \$225 million, we propose to allocate an additional \$300 million from the Fund to cover at least an additional 10 000 serving teachers. This will help to meet the expectation of teachers who are planning to upgrade their qualifications in the coming few years.

Strengthening Support in Language Education in Primary and Pre-primary Levels

7. Currently, major initiatives to support language education in the primary school level include the Primary Native-speaking 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 curriculum development, there is room to strengthen support to schools and teachers in language education in a more focused manner.

8. The first TSA 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%.

9. 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 Key Stage 2 (KS2) (i.e. Primary 6 Level). 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 soon as possible.

10. SCOLAR recommended, in the “Action Plan to Raise Language Standards in Hong Kong” (the Action Plan)^{Note 4}, 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 KS2 before they enter secondary schools. Some members of the public 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 Enclosure 2.

Encl. 2

11. At the same time, we are mindful of studies which generally conclude that an early age (i.e. pre-KS1 and KS1) is the most critical age for language learning in children. Taking this and the TSA results into consideration, we need to look into measures to improve language education at the pre-primary and primary levels. Our current plans include –

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Note 4

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 paragraph 19 of this paper.

- (a) overseas immersion courses for primary school teachers – we plan to provide financial support to local serving teachers of the English Language subject to take overseas immersion programmes. Such programmes of study are normally in the range of four to eight weeks or more. This would enable capacity building in language teachers, which would bear a great and sustainable impact on the learning and teaching in schools. This would also complement the PNET Scheme well in the light of the difficulty that we face in recruiting sufficient Native-speaking English Teachers for schools in Hong Kong;
- (b) intensive training on specific aspects of the learning and teaching of language subjects for primary school teachers – we plan to support primary school teachers to attend intensive courses focused on specific aspects of the learning and teaching of the language subjects (such as grammar/phonics in context, and writing and vocabulary building skills). These courses will help to enhance professional development of teachers of the Chinese and English Language subjects;
- (c) professional development of pre-primary school teachers – we plan to provide separate programmes to enhance professional development of pre-primary school teachers, given the difference in qualifications requirements, and hence the needs in professional development, between kindergarten and primary school teachers; and
- (d) other support measures – this 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-based learning materials, etc. structured around the current Guideline to Kindergarten issued by the Curriculum Development Institute of EMB; as well as the stipulation of more specific guidelines in language education for children at pre-primary and primary levels. We also plan to explore measures to support, through the provision of financial incentives or otherwise, kindergartens and nursery teachers in the development of exemplar teaching kits. Subject to the advice of SCOLAR, we may also conduct in-depth researches into language learning at an early age (e.g. in relation to neuro-scientific studies) so as to shed light on the language policy at pre-primary and primary levels.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

12. Subject to Members' approval, we will make the injection of \$500 million into the Fund in 2004-05. Funds have been earmarked for this purpose under Head 156 Government Secretariat: Education and Manpower Bureau Subhead 000 Operational expenses.

13. Within the broad parameters set out in paragraphs 6 and 11 above, the proposed injection of \$500 million is intended to be allocated as follows –

Measures	Estimated expenditure (\$ million)
(a) Professional Development Incentive Grant Scheme for Language Teachers in primary and secondary schools	300
(b) Strengthened support for language education at primary and pre-primary levels	
(i) Overseas immersion course for primary school teachers	140
(ii) Intensive training on specific aspects of the learning and teaching of language subjects for primary school teachers	20
(iii) Professional development of pre-primary school teachers	20
(iv) Other miscellaneous support measures	20
Subtotal for (b)	200
Total	500

The exact allocation amongst the proposed measures is subject to further deliberations by SCOLAR.

14. In respect of paragraph 13(b)(i), with reference to existing training programmes compulsory for pre-service English Language and Putonghua teacher trainees, we estimate that an eight-week overseas immersion course would cost about \$35,000 to \$40,000 on average and that some 3 500 to 4 000 serving primary school language teachers would benefit from such courses in the next five years.

15. In respect of paragraph 13(b)(ii), we estimate that as many as 15 000 serving primary school teachers in the Chinese and English Language subjects would benefit from intensive training courses in the teaching and learning of the relevant subjects, each of a duration of around 10 to 15 hours costing \$30,000 to \$40,000 for a class of 25 to 30 teachers, in the next few years.

16. In respect of paragraph 13(b)(iii), given the difference in qualifications requirements, and hence the needs in professional development, between kindergarten and primary school teachers, we estimate that a separate allocation of \$20 million apart from the above is required with an aim to providing training for some 8 000 serving teachers of local kindergartens in Hong Kong.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Language Fund

17. The 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. 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. The terms of reference of SCOLAR are at Enclosure 3.

Encl. 3

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

19. In 2002, SCOLAR launched a comprehensive review of language education in Hong Kong at the invitation of the SEM. 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 FC approved an injection of \$400 million into the Fund on 21 February 2003 for initiatives including, inter alia,

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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 and a research on using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject.

Consultation with Legislative Council Panel

20. We consulted the Legislative Council Panel on Education on 7 February 2005. Members in general supported our plan to put forward the proposal to FC for consideration. In the relevant discussion, a Member suggested that the resources earmarked to support the Chinese and English languages should be largely balanced.

21. As requested by the Members, we issued an information note on 17 February 2005 to the Panel on the breakdown of support provided by the Fund by subjects to Members for reference.

Education and Manpower Bureau
February 2005

Enclosure 1 to FCR(2004-05)44

**Profile of Academic Qualifications of Language Teachers
in Hong Kong (according to the 2003 Teachers 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 (58.0%)	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%)
Total	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 the
“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.

**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 Fund on policies and procedures governing the operation of the 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.
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