

For discussion
on 12 December 2005

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Injection into the Language Fund

PURPOSE

In the Policy Agenda of his Policy Address delivered in October 2005, the Chief Executive pledged to increase resources, by topping up the Language Fund, for enhancing the language standards of the community. This paper seeks Members' views on our proposal to inject \$1.1 billion into the Language Fund.

PROPOSAL

2. We propose to inject a sum of \$1.1 billion into the Language Fund over the coming two years to strengthen the teaching and learning of English in our secondary schools and to support the wider use of Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject in primary and secondary schools.

JUSTIFICATIONS

I. Strengthening the teaching and learning of English in secondary schools

3. The Education Commission (EC) has put forward recommendations on the long-term arrangements for the medium of instruction (MOI) for secondary schools, details of which are set out in the paper on "Review of Medium of Instruction for Secondary Schools

and Secondary School Places Allocation” (LC Paper No. CB(2)581/05-06(01)). The Administration has accepted EC’s recommendations, and is prepared to invest substantial resources to strengthen the teaching and learning of English in secondary schools using Chinese as the MOI (CMI schools), so as to ensure that their students would also be proficient in English while learning their subjects better through the mother tongue. This is also an objective widely supported by the community.

Targeted English enhancement scheme for CMI schools

4. At present, CMI schools are provided with additional recurrent resources in the form of additional English teachers (ranging from one to four depending on the size of the school). They also receive a recurrent grant for developing materials or activities related to English learning. However, there is still considerable room for CMI schools to do more in providing an English-rich environment for students and enhancing the capacity of their teachers (both in English Language and in other subjects) in helping students learn English in a CMI environment.

5. In this regard, the EC has recommended the introduction of a support programme which emphasizes capacity building and is school-based as well as result-oriented. We fully support this approach as opposed to a “one size fits all” programme. Given the diversity among individual CMI schools, in terms of the family background and English proficiency of their students, the school culture and existing practices on the teaching and learning of English, we need a school-based approach to assess the needs of individual schools in formulating further improvement plans.

6. We propose to launch an incentive scheme starting from the 2006/07 school year with the following key features –

- (a) schools will be invited to apply for non-recurrent funding spanning across, say, six years to implement measures that would help them to build up capacity for raising the English proficiency of their students on a sustainable basis. Examples of such measures include teacher training, curriculum development, hire

of service for the purpose of knowledge transfer, etc;

- (b) a panel comprising both EMB representatives and language education experts will examine the school's proposals and decide on the amount of grants to be approved. Instead of a unilateral vetting process, the panel will engage in professional discourse with the principal and English language teachers of the school to agree on an appropriate plan, taking into account the school context;
- (c) upon approval, each school has to enter into a "performance contract" with EMB, specifying targets to be achieved in terms of both input and output –
 - (i) the input parameters include plans on professional upgrading of teachers, effective deployment of English Language teachers, development of collaborative and reflective teaching culture, measures to cater for individual differences, creation of an English-rich environment and student engagement, and a whole-school approach to enhancing the language proficiency of students. The school should consolidate existing resources and practices and come up with a holistic and coherent plan to ensure that the extra funding sought will make a significant impact on student learning outcome;
 - (ii) the output will be assessed objectively, such as improvements in student performance in public examinations. Depending on the existing level of performance, schools are expected to set targets of improvement over six years with interim milestones of achievement (e.g. additional 10 percentage points of students obtaining a pass or credit (and above) in English Language (Syllabus B) in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination).
- (d) the school management committee and parents will monitor the implementation of the plan and evaluate the school's

achievements against the targets in the performance contract. This will be supplemented by periodic external school reviews and a mid-term review at the end of three years to be undertaken jointly by the school management and EMB. The mid-term review will identify any shortcomings and determine whether the school should continue to receive funding for the remaining three-year period; and

- (e) since the objective of the scheme is to enhance English proficiency in a CMI setting, the school will have to commit to adopting the CMI mode for the entire duration of the scheme, i.e. six years.

7. Given the school-based nature of the applications, we do not intend to set any floor or ceiling on the amount of funding for each case. For budgetary purpose, we propose to earmark a total sum of \$830 million for the scheme, assuming all CMI schools would apply and would require no more than \$500,000 a year to build capacity. Disbursement of funds will take into account the cash flow requirements for the school-based proposal, subject to the mid-term review as explained in paragraph 6(d) above.

Study on extended learning activities conducted in English in CMI schools

8. The Administration has accepted the EC's recommendation that CMI schools may allocate not more than 15%, 20% and 25% of the total lesson time at S1, S2 and S3 respectively for extended learning activities conducted in English. The aim is to enhance students' exposure to and usage of English, while learning the subject matter mainly through mother-tongue.

9. To maximise the effect, the extended learning activities have to be designed strategically and creatively. The content has to be flexible enough to suit individual learning needs and should incorporate both content knowledge and English language elements. Students should be exposed to diversified sources of learning materials, and subject teachers and English Language teachers must work in collaboration to develop and

use the resources. There is little local experience in using extended learning activities to reinforce English learning in CMI schools. Hence, we propose a three-year study to explore how the time allocated for extended learning activities can be utilized effectively for the intended purpose without prejudice to students' learning of subject contents. The study will collect information on current practices in Hong Kong and overseas, develop effective learning models and teaching and learning resources to support extended learning for different content subjects, try out the models in selected schools, provide professional support and eventually disseminate good practices/teaching materials to schools. We estimate that \$15 million would be required for the study.

Additional support for secondary schools using English as the medium of instruction (EMI schools)

10. Under the existing MOI policy, EMI schools are required to provide an English immersion learning environment, i.e. to use English both inside and outside of the classroom. Their students, or the vast majority of them (85% or more), are assessed to be motivated and capable of learning through English. Furthermore, the principal of EMI schools has the discretion, hence the responsibility, to ensure that teachers are fully capable of teaching in English. So, in principle, EMI schools should not require further support in professional upgrading and capacity building. However, we note that there is room for professional development for teachers of EMI schools in raising their awareness of and strengthening the learning of English across the curriculum. There is also potential for some EMI schools to raise the proficiency of their students through the language arts in pursuit of excellence.

11. The scale of support required for EMI schools in English language teaching and learning is therefore much smaller than that for CMI schools, and the amount of support will vary significantly between schools. We propose to earmark \$50 million for strengthening English learning in EMI schools. For budgetary purpose only, we have assumed that each EMI school would require no more than \$500,000. As in the case of the scheme for CMI schools, we do not propose to specify an absolute floor or ceiling since the funding required must be school-based and result-oriented. Again, successful applicants would have to enter

into performance contracts setting out targets on capacity building and students' performance within, say, a six-year timeframe. EMI schools will aim for higher standards or alternative achievements, given the differences in the circumstances of CMI and EMI schools as a start.

II. Support for Schools to increasingly use Putonghua to teach Chinese Language

12. In 2000, the Curriculum Development Council (CDC) stated in its Chinese Language curriculum documents that the use of Putonghua (PTH) to teach Chinese Language is a long-term goal. The Council also recommended, in the interim, a school-based approach whereby schools, depending on their readiness, may use PTH as the MOI for the Chinese Language subject.

13. In September 2005, SCOLAR joined hands with the Primary Chinese Language Education Research Association in conducting a territory-wide survey to find out the extent to which schools are using PTH to teach the Chinese Language. Schools were also asked to identify challenges that they had faced or, for those not planning to do so over the next five years, the perceived difficulties. Over 820 primary and secondary schools responded to the survey. Focused group meetings and school visits were also conducted for a deeper understanding of the issues. A summary of the major findings is at Annex A.

14. Taking into account schools' views, we see a need to strengthen support for schools in the following areas so as to assure the success of the pilot schools in using PTH in teaching the Chinese Language –

(a) Teachers' professional development

In order to create time for curriculum leaders and serving Chinese Language teachers to prepare for the change, we see a need to provide time-limited resource, in the form of an additional Chinese Language/PTH teacher or teaching assistant who would serve as a resource teacher, a mentor, or a coordinator of PTH activities. The Administration also has to work with teacher

education providers to prepare teachers (both pre-service and in-service) for using PTH to teach the Chinese Language, which is more demanding than being proficient in PTH communication, through professional upgrading courses of various depths and modes or Mainland immersion programmes.

(b) Other Support Measures

In switching to using PTH to teach the Chinese Language subject, schools would have to adapt the existing Chinese Language and/or PTH curriculum, and develop school-based learning and teaching materials. It will be useful to set up networks of schools which have been using PTH to teach the Chinese Language to share experiences and good practices.

15. Initial discussion with some schools suggests that a sum of \$400,000 to \$500,000 per year would be required over a period of three years. As over 160 schools have expressed interest in the said survey in paragraph 13 above in trying out the use of PTH to teach the Chinese Language subject, and taking into account areas in need of strengthened support as set out in (a) and (b) in paragraph 14 above, we propose to allocate \$200 million over the next three years to support interested primary and secondary schools in making the switch. Broadly speaking, we envisage the allocation of funds to be as follows –

- (a) Additional manpower; and
- (b) Professional upgrading.

16. Detailed support measures will be worked out by SCOLAR in consultation with the CDC, pilot schools, and teacher education providers. Based on the experiences from the pilot schools, EMB will decide on the future direction and, where appropriate, formulate a more concrete plan and timeframe for full implementation of PTH as the MOI for teaching and learning of the Chinese Language.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

17. As described above, we propose to inject a sum of \$1.1 billion into the Language Fund. We expect a considerable number of the eligible schools would submit their applications over the next two years and we need to assure the school sector that funding has been set aside for the said purposes. We therefore propose to inject \$600 million in 2005-06 and the remaining \$500 million in 2006-07, subject to the commitment of \$1.1 billion being approved by the Finance Committee.

18. Subject to Members' views, we plan to seek the Finance Committee's approval of the funding proposal.

BACKGROUND

19. The Language Fund was set up in 1994 to provide financial support for projects and activities aimed at improving Hong Kong people's proficiency in Chinese (including Putonghua) and English. Since its establishment and initial injection in 1994, three further injections from Government have been made to ensure the availability of sufficient resources to meet the changing needs and higher expectations of our community in language education.

20. The existing provision for the Language Fund has been largely committed or earmarked for on-going initiatives already launched or in the planning. Hence, we need to make a further injection into the Fund to support new initiatives as set out in this paper. The latest position of the Language Fund, including the progress of major on-going initiatives supported by the Fund, is summarized at Annex B.

**Summary of Survey Results on the Use of Putonghua
to teach Chinese Language in Hong Kong**

The Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) and the Primary Chinese Language Education Research Association jointly conducted a survey on the arrangement in using Putonghua (PTH) to teach Chinese Language in primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong between September and October 2005. A survey questionnaire was sent to all local government, aided, caput and DSS schools and by submission deadline, 446 primary and 378 secondary schools have responded.

2. Major findings in primary schools are summarized below –

(a) Of the 446 schools responded –

- 28% (125 schools) indicate that they are using PTH to teach Chinese;
- 72% (321 schools) indicate that they are NOT using PTH to teach Chinese.

(b) Of the 125 schools that indicate that they are using PTH to teach Chinese, major challenges identified include –

- A lack of the necessary language environment (71%, 89 schools)
- Insufficient PTH proficiency in teachers / Lack of relevant teaching training (58%, 73 schools)
- Insufficient PTH proficiency in students (52%, 65 schools)
- A lack of appropriate teaching materials (50%, 62 schools)

(c) Of the 321 schools that indicate that they are NOT using PTH to teach Chinese –

- 37% (118 schools) indicate that they would consider switching to using PTH to teach Chinese in the coming five years;
- 58% (187 schools) indicate that they would NOT consider switching to using PTH to teach Chinese in the coming five years.

(d)Of the 187 schools that indicate that they would NOT consider switching to using PTH to teach Chinese in the coming five years, major obstacles identified are –

- Insufficient PTH proficiency in teachers / Lack of relevant teaching training (66%, 124 schools)
- A lack of the necessary language environment (60%, 112 schools)
- Lack of sufficient support to school in resources (39%, 72 schools)
- Insufficient PTH proficiency in students (37%, 69 schools)
- Skeptical of its influence on students' critical thinking development (36%, 68 schools)
- Lack of guidelines (37%, 69 schools)

3. Major findings in secondary schools are summarized below –

(a)Of the 378 schools responded –

- 22% (84 schools) indicate that they are using PTH to teach Chinese;
- 78% (294 schools) indicate that they are NOT using PTH to teach Chinese.

(b)Of the 84 schools that indicate that they are using PTH to teach Chinese, major challenges identified include –

- A lack of the necessary language environment (79%, 66 schools)
- Insufficient PTH proficiency in students (70%, 59 schools)
- Increase in teachers' workload (63%, 53 schools)
- Insufficient PTH proficiency in teachers / Lack of relevant teaching training (57%, 48 schools)

(c)Of the 294 schools that indicate that they are NOT using PTH to teach Chinese –

- 16% (48 schools) indicate that they would consider switching to using PTH to teach Chinese in the coming five years;
- 81% (237 schools) indicate that they would NOT consider

switching to using PTH to teach Chinese in the coming five years.

(d)Of the 237 schools that indicate that they would NOT consider switching to using PTH to teach Chinese in the coming five years, major obstacles identified are –

- Insufficient PTH proficiency in teachers / Lack of relevant teaching training (83%, 196 schools)
- A lack of the necessary language environment (73%, 172 schools)
- Insufficient PTH proficiency in students (67%, 158 schools)
- Skeptical of its influence on students' critical thinking development (49%, 117 schools)
- Skeptical of its contribution to improvement in students language proficiency (49%, 117 schools)

Education and Manpower Bureau
December 2005

Background and Latest Position of the Language Fund

Background

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 the 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.

2. On 23 February 2001, the Finance Committee approved a 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.

3. In 2001, 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 a grant 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 (PDIGS) 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.

4. In early 2005, in response to the encouraging response during the first year of operation of the PDIGS and the call for strengthened support to language education in the pre-primary and primary levels following the release of the first Basic Competency Assessment results for Primary 3 in 2004, the Finance Committee approved a grant of \$500 million to provide additional funding for the former and to work out measures on the latter.

Progress since the Previous Injection

5. SCOLAR has approved the topping up of PDIGS by \$300 million in April 2005. As a result, the Scheme is now funded with a total of \$525 million from the Language Fund, making it possible to sponsor up to 17 500 serving language teachers to further professional development to obtain the desired qualifications on pedagogical and subject knowledge. As of November 2005, about 6 800 teachers (including both Chinese Language and English Language teachers in primary and secondary schools) have already applied for earmarking of funds under the Scheme.

6. In order to better understand the teaching of English in kindergartens of various scales and profiles, a pilot scheme was launched in October 2005 to provide support to 10 to 15 kindergartens in providing quality English exposure to pre-primary students. Support will focus on areas including teachers' English proficiency and subject and pedagogical knowledge, teaching materials, and the English language environment in school. The pilot scheme would run until the end of the 2005/06 school year and the cost is \$2 million. Experience of this pilot scheme will be crystallized to pave the way for a more comprehensive and sustainable support strategy for English and/or Putonghua language education for pre-primary level in Hong Kong, and we plan to earmark some \$100 million from the Language Fund for extending the pilot scheme to cover all of the 700-odd kindergartens in the territory in the long run.

7. At the same time, we believe that opportunities to participate in overseas immersion would greatly help teachers' professional development by giving them an opportunity to experience innovative learning and teaching methods, materials, curricula, activities in an English as a second language (ESL) context and to reflect on their own teaching in Hong Kong.

Such immersion would also help to improve teachers' professionalism in terms of language proficiency and cultural awareness, widen their horizon for better self-confidence in handling a foreign language, their open-mindedness and tolerance to change, as well as their critical and independent thinking. As such, we are planning to launch an overseas immersion programme to expose serving English teachers in primary schools to an authentic English language as well as cultural environment overseas. While details have yet to be worked out, the programme under planning would offer participants not just an opportunity of classroom learning in an authentic English environment, but also a chance to attach to local schools to co-teach and co-work with local teachers in classrooms. Home-stay arrangements would be made as far as possible to optimize the benefits of the immersion experience. The possibilities of supply teachers provision to schools and credit exemption for participating teachers would also be explored. We aim to work with local teacher education providers in delivering the programme. As a start, we plan to launch a pilot to test out the programme content, its effectiveness and relevant logistical arrangements with around 100 serving teachers in the 2006/07 school year. The cost of the pilot is expected to be around \$5 million. At the same time, a similar programme in smaller scale to test out the concept among kindergarten teachers is also being planned. To prepare for an implementation in full swing, we would earmark some \$100 million from the Language Fund to support about 1 500 to 2 000 serving teachers to join the programme in the years to come.

Latest Position

8. As at the end of October 2005, total fund accrued since establishment of the Fund in 1994 amounted to \$1,583 million (including four injections by Government totaling \$1,400 million and accumulated interest of \$183 million), of which \$401 million has already been spent and \$629 million has been committed for initiatives in progress. In addition, \$489 million has been earmarked for initiatives under planning. The available balance of the Language Fund to support new initiatives would be \$64 million.

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