

For Discussion
On 13 May 2010

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Injection into the Language Fund

PURPOSE

In his Budget Speech delivered in February 2010, the Financial Secretary proposed injecting \$500 million into the Language Fund to further upgrade our biliterate and trilingual proficiency with a view to maintaining the competitiveness of Hong Kong and embracing the opportunities brought by our economic integration with the Mainland. The Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) met in March 2010 to discuss the proposal and advise on the measures to enhance language proficiency. This paper seeks Members' views on the Administration's proposal for the funding injection.

PROPOSAL

2. We propose to inject a sum of \$500 million into the Language Fund for introducing and strengthening measures to enhance language education, especially on Putonghua and English language, for primary and secondary students and the workforce of Hong Kong.

JUSTIFICATIONS

3. In order to sustain the work of the Language Fund as well as to meet the rising expectation of the community on language standards of our students and workforce, there is a need to launch new initiatives and strengthen existing measures, including but not limited to the following areas:

- (a) strengthening the teaching and learning of English at secondary schools;
- (b) enhancing support measures for Non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students;
- (c) creating a facilitating language learning environment (including English and Putonghua) for students in schools;
- (d) strengthening research and development on language education to facilitate

the formulation of language education policies; and

- (e) raising language (English and Putonghua) proficiency of Hong Kong's workforce.

4. The non-earmarked balance of \$16.3 million in the Language Fund as at end of March 2010 cannot support the above proposed initiatives which are explained below. The proposed lump sum injection will provide the Trustee of the Language Fund with flexibility in the disbursement of funding on the advice of SCOLAR.

(a) Strengthening the teaching and learning of English in secondary schools

5. The Education Bureau launched the English Enhancement Scheme (EES) for Secondary Schools in 2006 with a view to building up schools' capacity in the teaching and learning of English and enhancing students' English proficiency on the premises that schools will continue to be classified into schools using Chinese as the medium of instruction (MOI) (CMI schools) and schools using English as the MOI (EMI schools). A total amount of \$880 million was then earmarked from the Language Fund for the EES for schools to apply through four batches between 2006 and 2007 to implement school-based English enhancement measures. For budgetary purposes, the ceiling for CMI schools was set at \$3.0 million while that for EMI schools was \$0.5 million. The actual amount of funding for each school depended on individual schools' application proposals. A total of 439 schools participated in the scheme¹, of which 310 are CMI schools and 129 are EMI schools. The amount of funding approved was \$728 million with another estimated sum of \$55 million earmarked for schools whose measures are subject to review, leaving a balance of no more than \$97 million.

Need for additional resources

6. With the implementation of the MOI Fine-tuning starting from Secondary 1 in the 2010/11 school year, schools will no longer be classified into "CMI schools" and "EMI schools". The MOI arrangements of schools will become diversified with appropriate teaching strategies devised to address students' needs having regard to the schools' circumstances. Against this development, individual schools continuing with their EES projects may need to re-visit their existing measures and make appropriate refinements so as to tie in better with their MOI arrangements as from the 2010/11 school year. Moreover, schools which have not applied for the EES or may have completed their EES projects will also merit the provision of some resources to further enhance the English environment within schools to facilitate the implementation of their diversified MOI arrangements. In this light, we see the need to provide additional funding for schools to implement new school-based measures or refine the existing measures in

¹ This includes 392 public-sector schools (including seven special schools) and 47 schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS).

the years leading up to the full implementation of the Fine-tuning at junior secondary levels by the 2013/14 school year.

Objective of the scheme

7. The proposed Refined EES seeks to enable schools to build on the basis of the original EES where appropriate and re-focus their school-based measures to develop a whole-school language policy such as having more cross-curricular English enrichment programmes through in-depth collaboration of English language teachers and non-language teachers to sustain capacity building in the teaching and learning of English, enhancing the smooth transition between different key stages of English learning, catering for learner diversity in English learning, etc. Given the different school contexts, individual schools are expected to formulate targeted English enhancement measures according to their own needs upon the change of their MOI arrangements under the Fine-tuning. Schools should also consolidate existing resources and practices and come up with holistic and coherent plans to ensure that the extra funding to be provided will make sustainable impact on students' English language learning.

Eligibility

8. Similar to the original EES, all public-sector secondary schools, DSS secondary schools and special schools offering ordinary secondary curriculum will be invited under the Refined EES. Taking into account the budget approved under the original EES and the capacity of the market in providing the relevant services to schools, we intend to set a budgetary ceiling of \$1.0 million for each applicant school under the Refined EES. This ceiling would apply to all applicant schools alike as schools will no longer be classified into CMI schools and EMI schools upon the implementation of the Fine-tuning.

Vetting and monitoring

9. Vetting criteria would be drawn up to decide the amount of funding to be approved. Considerations would include the merits of individual schools' proposals, how the proposed measures seek to tie in with the MOI arrangements of the schools concerned, schools' capacity to implement all the remaining school-based measures under the original EES and the proposed measures under the Refined EES. A vetting panel comprising language education experts and representatives from the Education Bureau (EDB) will assess the appropriateness and feasibility of the English enhancement measures proposed by schools in the Refined EES. Schools are expected to commence their approved measures in the 2010/11 school year the earliest to tie in with their fine-tuned MOI arrangements and complete their implementation by the 2013/14 school year the latest. Upon approval of their proposals, schools would be required to enter into a performance contract with the Government which would include their implementation details and output targets to be achieved. In line with the School Development and Accountable Framework,

the Refined EES plan should also form part and parcel of their whole-school language policy and should be incorporated into the School Development Plans to which the schools concerned are held accountable for the purpose of evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures in facilitating the implementation of fine-tuned MOI arrangements within the schools. Moreover, the EDB would monitor schools' performances for verification and advisory purposes in the form of supervisory visits.

10. In March 2010, SCOLAR deliberated and supported the proposal, subject to consultation with stakeholders and the approval by the Finance Committee on the proposed funding injection into the Language Fund. We have gauged the views of school representatives, including school councils and associations in finalising the implementation details of the Refined EES. Their response was positive in general and they welcomed the provision of additional resources for enhancing students' learning effectiveness. Some schools were concerned about how to formulate their proposals so as to maximise the benefits of the additional funding to students' learning and requested for workshops organised by EDB to facilitate their planning work.

11. Offsetting the funding balance of the original EES of about \$97 million as at December 2009, and taking into account that the actual amount of funding for each school would be subject to vetting on the merits of individual proposals, we intend to earmark a sum of **\$323 million** from the Language Fund for the Refined EES. The exact scope and sum required may be refined depending on the progress of the scheme and the advice of SCOLAR.

(b) Enhancing Support Measures for NCS Students

12. We have put in place a series of measures to improve the learning and teaching of the Chinese language of NCS students since the 2006/07 school year. These measures include:

- (a) setting up designated schools² with a view to facilitating the development of supporting teaching materials and the sharing of experiences with other schools admitting NCS students;
- (b) enhancing the support for the learning and teaching of the Chinese language through the development of the Supplementary Guide to the Chinese Language for NCS students, reference learning and teaching materials and assessment tools, etc.; and
- (c) provision of after-class support service through the establishment of the Chinese Language Learning Support Centres.

² Designated schools are schools which have admitted a critical mass of NCS students and are provided with focused support by EDB to enhance the learning and teaching of NCS students.

13. Upon examination of the support measures put in place for NCS students with reference to the feedback from major stakeholders, we see the merits of providing additional resources for schools to provide after-school support for NCS students in order to reinforce their learning of the Chinese language in schools. Further, this would serve to complement the after-school support service of the Chinese Language Learning Support Centres being operated by the University of Hong Kong which have been set up in ten designated locations benefitting largely NCS students of designated schools.

14. We intend to implement a project on after-class support for NCS students in non-designated schools to reinforce what they have learnt in the Chinese language. Funding will be provided to non-designated schools on annual application for a period of three years to roll out various modes of after-school Chinese extended learning at schools such as training of skills in learning Chinese, peer collaboration in studying Chinese, tutorial classes, etc. The proposed project will allow time for the Chinese Language Learning Support Centres to expand their existing services to support the NCS students studying in non-designated schools.

15. Schools admitting 15 or more NCS students may apply for funding to provide after-school Chinese extended learning services for their own NCS students (as well as NCS students from nearby schools). Schools which have admitted less than 15 NCS students may pool up the NCS students from nearby schools with assistance rendered by the EDB and apply for the grant in providing after-school Chinese extended learning services within their schools. The amount of grant for each applicant school per annum would depend on the number of NCS students –

Number of NCS students	Amount of funding per annum
15-19	\$50,000
20-29	\$100,000
30-59	\$200,000
60 or more	\$300,000

Applicant schools taking the lead in pooling up NCS students from nearby schools will be provided with an additional amount of \$100,000 per annum since the schools will be responsible for the administrative work including liaison with other schools and parents.

16. At the March meeting, SCOLAR deliberated and supported the proposal, subject to approval by the Finance Committee on the proposed funding injection into the Language Fund. We intend to earmark **\$77 million** for enhancing the support measures for NCS students. The exact scope and sum required may be refined depending on the progress of the project and the advice of SCOLAR. In line

with the School Development and Accountable Framework, schools would be held accountable for ensuring the quality and effectiveness of the services. The EDB would monitor schools' performances for verification and advisory purposes in the form of supervisory visits and collection of stakeholders' feedback through surveys.

(c) Creating a facilitating language learning environment for students

17. SCOLAR has launched a number of initiatives to create a richer language environment for students in recent years. The followings are examples of some major initiatives -

- (a) annual promotion of Putonghua since 2005, under which various language activities such as Putonghua public speaking competition, Putonghua student tourism ambassadors programme, and Putonghua Radio Drama Training and Competition were organised by various educational bodies/ media with the funding support from SCOLAR;
- (b) "Drama-in-education English Alliance", under which primary schools are encouraged to introduce drama activities into their English teaching to arouse students' interest and to develop their language skills; and
- (c) promotion of reading, under which secondary students and parents of primary students are trained as Reading Ambassador to promote reading in schools.

18. These are successful initiatives which are well received by schools and students. They can arouse the interest of students in learning the languages, provide students with opportunities to use the languages in non-academic context and increase students' confidence in using the languages. To sustain the momentum, SCOLAR considers that there is a continuing need to provide more opportunities for students to use and learn English language and Putonghua outside the classroom. We have sought SCOLAR's views on launching new initiatives as well as expanding existing measures in width and/or depth to achieve greater impact. At the March meeting, SCOLAR advised that the Government should consider strengthening existing and/or launching new measures along the following directions -

- (a) encouraging student exchanges
Consideration may be given to encouraging inter-school activities (e.g. between local and international schools) to provide students with more opportunities to use English in real life setting. It is also recommended that Mainland exchange programmes should be better utilised to provide students with more opportunities to use Putonghua and interact with the Mainland students.

- (b) enriching the after-school language environment
To encourage students to speak and use English and Putonghua outside classroom, opportunities to use the language in a real life setting should be created. Consideration may be given to recruiting volunteers (e.g. Native English/Putonghua-speaking students, volunteers from the tertiary institutes, trade organisations and professional bodies) to conduct after-school co-curricular activities. The activities, to be conducted in English or Putonghua, would provide students with more opportunities to use the language in a spontaneous manner. These activities should be fun, interactive and attractive to students or complementary to other subjects and need not be tutorial on English or Putonghua.
- (c) promotion of reading and writing
Promotion of reading was the cornerstone in raising language standard. Efforts may include assisting schools to acquire good reading materials, organising book sharing events for students, reading campaign and strengthening parental support on reading. Large-scale campaign/competitions could be launched to promote writing and to compliment the learning of writing in schools; and
- (d) media to play a supporting role
The mass media may also play a supporting role. Consideration can be given to financing a variety of activities, including collaborating with the mass media, in addition to the non-governmental organisations/educationalist/ business community.

19. We intend to earmark a sum of **\$50 million** for implementing measures to create a facilitating language learning environment for students. Subject to the approval of the Finance Committee on the proposed injection into the Language Fund, details of the measures including scope, budget and implementation timetable etc. would be developed and subject to the further advice of SCOLAR.

(d) Research and development projects on language education

20. With globalisation and Hong Kong's closer ties with the Mainland, the community's expectation and demand for language proficiency of our workforce has been changing. Furthermore, the landscape of education in Hong Kong is undergoing many changes, for example, expansion of educational opportunities under the new senior secondary structure, increased choice and diversity for schools such as diversified MOI arrangements, the use of Putonghua to teach Chinese language etc.

21. In recent years, the focus of SCOLAR's work has been on carrying out initiatives pursuant to previous discussions. Against the background as set out in the above paragraph, there is a need to strengthen research and development in language education taking into account these new developments in the education

arena and in the community. Such research and development projects will provide useful information on the language needs and demand, as well as important feedback on the existing language education policy, which in turn would provide references to the Government on the appropriate strategies on language education and how best to deploy our resources effectively to achieve the greatest impact on enhancing language proficiency. These projects will also enrich the knowledge bank on language learning and good practices, hence facilitating the relevant stakeholders, including schools and course providers, to improve learning and teaching and course provision.

22. SCOLAR has recently set up a Research Committee to identify priority areas for exploration. It will discuss and propose strategies and practical framework for SCOLAR's consideration. We intend to earmark **\$20 million** for the purpose, subject to SCOLAR's further consideration and deliberation on the exact scope and budget required.

(e) Raising workplace language proficiency of Hong Kong's workforce

23. To raise the public's awareness of the importance of enhancing one's English proficiency, SCOLAR has launched the Workplace English Campaign (WEC) under which the public education and publicity efforts are being sustained to encourage our workforce to enhance their English proficiency. SCOLAR has also been promoting Putonghua in collaboration with the media under the annual Putonghua promotion, for example, via production of Putonghua radio segment series and Putonghua publicity programmes.

24. In face of the challenges brought by globalisation and the development of our neighboring economies, Hong Kong needs to maintain competitiveness of her workforce. In doing so, our workforce should be proficient in the international language of English. Hong Kong's increasing cultural, economic and social exchanges with the Mainland has also made the use of Putonghua more essential in the community. We see the need to step up the existing efforts to raise English and Putonghua proficiency of our workforce.

25. SCOLAR considers that the Language Fund can play an important role in raising English and Putonghua proficiency of Hong Kong's workforce. Measures may include:

- (a) design and development of curriculum and language courses that address the needs of individual industries/ occupations;
- (b) giving commendations to companies with good practices to encourage employees for enhancing language proficiency and invite them to publicise the successful experiences and good practices;
- (c) promoting development of e-open learning platform(s) to provide easy

access to learning opportunities and let the target users learn at their own pace at time that suit them; and

- (d) launching large-scale publicity campaigns to sustain the efforts of promoting the importance of raising English and Putonghua proficiency. More Internet promotion will be adopted to reach our target (working adults and younger generation) more effectively, and TV promotion will continue to enable us to reach the mass audience.

26. The above are only preliminary ideas that would require further study and planning. We intend to earmark **\$30 million** for raising workplace language proficiency of Hong Kong's workforce. Subject to the approval of the Finance Committee on the proposed injection into the Language Fund, details of the measures including scope, budget and implementation timetable etc. would be developed and subject to the further advice of SCOLAR.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

27. As set out in paragraphs 3-26 above, we intend to allocate the proposed injection of **\$500 million** as follows:

Measures	Estimated expenditure (\$ million)
(a) Strengthening English language education in secondary schools	323
(b) Enhancing support measures for NCS students	77
(c) Creating a facilitating language learning environment for students	50
(d) Research & development projects on language education	20
(e) Raising workplace language (English and Putonghua) proficiency	30
TOTAL	500

The detailed arrangements for the above measures, the timeframe of implementation and the exact allocation amongst the proposed measures will be subject to further deliberation by SCOLAR.

28. Subject to Members' views, we plan to seek the Finance Committee's approval in June 2010 of the proposed injection of \$500 million.

BACKGROUND

The Language Fund

29. 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) 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. 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.

30. Since 1994, the Finance Committee has approved five injections into the Language Fund. Details of the injections are summarised below:

Year	Amount (\$ million)
1994	300
2001	200
2003	400
2005	500
2006	1,100
TOTAL	2,500

31. Over the years, through the use of Language Fund, projects spanning a wide variety of language education and research activities have been conducted by a range of organizations including tertiary institutes, schools, educational bodies, and government departments. Major projects and initiatives carried out or being carried out have been complementing the Administration's efforts in building a professional language teaching force, supporting for the learning and teaching of languages in school, as well as supporting the development of school-based programmes for upgrading the students' language proficiency. Many of them pioneer innovation and changes in language education. A highlight of these projects is at the Annex.

Financial position as at end March 2010

32. Added to the injection of \$2,500 million is a total interest income of \$446.6 million accrued by the Fund over the years. Taking into account that \$1351.1 million has already been spent and \$1579.2 million has been committed or earmarked for initiatives in progress or planned, there is a non-earmarked balance

of \$16.3 million.

Education Bureau
May 2010

Major Completed/ On-going Language Fund Projects

(I) Professional Development of Language Teachers

- **The Professional Development Incentive Grant Scheme for Language Teachers (PDIGS)** – PDIGS was launched in 2004 to encourage serving language teachers to attain certain qualifications by providing financial incentives to them. PDIGS provides serving language teachers (i.e. those who joined the profession before 2004/05) incentive grant to meet 50% of their tuition fees, subject to a maximum of \$30,000 per teacher. A total of \$525 million has been allocated for the Scheme. Since its launch in April 2004, altogether more than 8,000 applications have been approved with funds spent and earmarked at about \$207 million. Overall speaking, the percentage of language teachers equipped with relevant subject knowledge and pedagogy has risen from 29% in 2003/04 to 62% in 2008/09. This two-fold increase is remarkable over a period of five years.
- **Overseas Immersion Programme for English Language Teachers** – though the use of Language Fund, SCOLAR started to sponsor the Overseas Immersion Programme in 2006/07. The objectives of the Programme are to provide English language teachers of primary schools with an opportunity to learn and experience innovative learning and teaching methods, materials and curricular activities in English as a second language, and to gain deeper knowledge of the English language and understanding of the culture of English-speaking countries. The programme was extended to cover principals of primary schools in 2007/08 to broaden their exposure and to enhance their curriculum leadership in English language education. SCOLAR sponsors each participant 85% of the tuition fee upon successful completion of the tour. \$27 million has been allocated for the project. Teacher participants are required to implement a school plan to improve English language teaching in their school after completion of the programme. As of April 2010, 401 teachers and 53 principals in 20 tours have been sponsored through the Programme. Teachers reported that the immersion programmes had given them an eye-opening experience. Many have introduced the newly acquired teaching methods into their classes/ schools.
- **Putonghua Summer Immersion Course Subsidy Scheme** – the Scheme provides a maximum subsidy of \$12,500 for teachers to attend summer immersion courses in the Mainland. The rate of subsidy is based on the teachers' performance in the PTH Shuiping Ceshi that they have achieved before and after the immersion courses. \$24 million has been allocated for running the Scheme from 2000 to 2012. The Scheme has been conducted

on an annual basis (except 2003 and 2008 due to SARS and Beijing Olympics respectively). Over the years, over 1450 teachers were subsidised under the Scheme. With more schools trying the use of Putonghua to teach Chinese Language Subject in recent years, this subsidy scheme would help enhancing the capacity of Chinese language teachers, and hence conducive to the attainment of the long-term vision to use Putonghua to teach Chinese language.

(II) Supporting Schools in the Learning and Teaching of Languages

- **The Task Force on Language Support** – The Task Force, with an allocation of \$278 million from the Language Fund, was established in 2004 to help schools implement the curriculum reform. It seeks to promote curriculum leadership development and enhance the quality of language education through the process of curriculum planning, implementing different learning and teaching strategies and on-going evaluation. Support is rendered to schools through on-site visits (by conducting collaborative lesson planning and action research), professional development activities of different scales and on different topics, and consultancy services. The Task Force, which comprises language experts and seconded teachers, has provided intensive school-based support to nearly 580 and 320 primary schools in Chinese and English language education respectively and 415 and 370 secondary schools in Chinese and English language education respectively in the past five years. In the 2009/10 school year, support is being rendered to about 400 primary and secondary schools. Experiences of those schools are documented and shared through CD-ROMs, publications, and the website of EDB and Hong Kong Education City. The Task Force is now established as the Language Learning Support Section under the School-based Support Services Office in EDB.
- **“Quality English Language Education at Pre-primary Level” Project** – the Project was launched in 2006/07 to provide training and support to kindergarten teachers in pedagogical knowledge and appropriate teaching approaches and skills. Each participating kindergarten will receive either intensive on-site support or consultancy service for two years. \$85 million has been allocated for the project. Over the past four years, the team has provided support to 112 kindergartens. In the 2009/10, the team is supporting 73 kindergartens. The Project is well received by principals, teachers of kindergartens and the parents. The Project explores and develops more comprehensive models of quality English exposure to children at pre-primary level and thereby facilitates the formulation of a long-term strategy on supporting English language education at pre-primary level.
- **Scheme to Support Schools in Using Putonghua to Teach Chinese**

Language Subject – In 2008/09, SCOLAR launched a scheme to assist schools to implement using Putonghua to teach Chinese Language Subject. The Support Scheme is carried out in four phases, providing support to 40 primary and secondary schools in each phase. There will be a total of 160 schools benefited from 2008/09 to 2013/14. The professional support given to schools comprises three components: (a) support rendered by experts from the Mainland and local consultants to help schools implement their plan on using Putonghua to teach Chinese Language Subject; (b) seminars/workshops on theories of and pedagogy in using Putonghua to teach Chinese Language Subject; and (c) exchange activities conducted locally and in the Mainland to increase teachers' exposure to different teaching practices. Supply teacher grant is provided to the participating schools to create rooms for teachers to implement their school plan and attend professional development programmes. About \$225 million was allocated for the Scheme. We believe that, by encouraging and supporting more schools to implement the use of Putonghua to teach Chinese Language Subject, the Scheme would play a significant role in the attainment of the long-term vision of using Putonghua to teach Chinese Language Subject. As of 2009/10, there are 80 primary and secondary schools being supported under the Scheme.

(III) Supporting School-based Language Enhancement Programmes

- **English Enhancement Scheme (EES) for Secondary Schools** – details of the programme is set out at paragraph 5 of the main paper.
- **English Enhancement Grant Scheme for Primary Schools** – the objective of the Scheme is to provide additional resources (a maximum of \$500,000 per school) to primary schools to help develop school-based English enhancement measures to strengthen the learning and teaching of English. \$270 million has been allocated for the Scheme. The Scheme is open for applications in 2010, 2011 and 2012 calendar years. About 260 schools have submitted their application for implementing their school-based programmes starting from 2010/11.

(IV) Creating a Facilitating Language Learning Environment

(Please refer to paragraph 17 of the main paper for details.)

- **Promotion of Putonghua in schools**
- **Drama-in-Education English Alliance**
- **Promotion of Reading via Reading Ambassador and Reading Contract Project**

(V) Raising Workplace Language Proficiency of Hong Kong's Workforce

(Please refer to paragraph 23 of the main paper for details.)

- **Publicity and Public Education Programme on Putonghua**
- **Workplace English Campaign**

(VI) Research and Development

- **Research on factors affecting the use of Putonghua to teach Chinese Language in primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong** – The research aimed to identify the conditions necessary for schools to make a successful switch to Putonghua and prevent possible negative outcomes. From the case studies of the twenty participating schools, six factors were indentified to be conducive to the implementation of using Putonghua to teach Chinese language, i.e. (a) capacity of teachers; (b) attitudes and strategies of the school management; (c) language environment; (d) students' learning ability; (e) arrangements on curriculum, teaching methods, and teaching materials; and (f) support for teaching and learning. The research findings were submitted to the Education Panel of the Legislative Council in July 2008 and are available online for reference by schools and members of the public. The findings of the research provide school management with examples of good practices for adoption in implementing the use of Putonghua to teach Chinese Language Subject. They also inform the design of the above-mentioned "Scheme to Support Schools in Using Putonghua to Teach Chinese Language Subject" which seeks to help participating schools create favorable conditions for the use of Putonghua to teach Chinese Language Subject.
- **Research on the Putonghua proficiency of Hong Kong students** – the research, which is being carried out by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, consists of a 3-year study at Primary 3, Primary 6 and Secondary 3 levels from 2008 to mid-2011. It is expected that the research would generate useful information on the Putonghua proficiency of Hong Kong students and valuable feedbacks on the effectiveness of Putonghua programmes. It will also pave the way for the development of a local Putonghua proficiency scale and a Putonghua test for members of the public, which would provide a useful frame for reference by employers and facilitate working adults to set their own goals in Putonghua learning against a particular level of proficiency in the scale. \$21 million has been allocated for the project.