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Panel on Education

**Updated background brief prepared by Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 13 May 2010**

Injection into the Language Fund

Purpose

This paper summarizes the deliberations of the Panel on Education ("the Panel") on injection into the Language Fund.

Background

2. The Language Fund was set up in March 1994 to fund projects and activities aimed at improving Hong Kong people's proficiency in Chinese (including Putonghua) and English. It is held in trust under the Permanent Secretary for Education Incorporation Ordinance (Cap. 1098). The Fund is operated in accordance with a Trust Deed which sets out the objects of the Fund, the broad principles governing the disbursements, as well as its management framework. Its annual audited accounts are tabled in the Legislative Council.

3. The Standing Committee on Language Education and Research ("SCOLAR"), which was established in 1996 to advise Government on language education issues, is responsible for advising the Trustee of the Language Fund on the policies and procedures governing the operation of the Fund.

Deliberations of the Panel

4. Since the setting up of the Language Fund with an initial allocation of \$300 million, the Administration had further injected a total of \$2,200 million into the Fund, i.e. \$200 million in 2001, \$400 million in 2003, \$500 million in May 2005 and \$1,100 million in the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years. The Panel discussed each of the proposals for injection. The deliberations of the Panel are summarized in the following paragraphs.

First injection proposal

Need for the injection

5. The Panel was consulted on the proposal for injecting \$200 million into the Language Fund at its meeting on 15 January 2001. According to the Administration, SCOLAR had taken stock of the work done since its establishment, and had identified possible priority areas for further action which included –

- (a) strengthening language teaching and learning for the young (i.e. pre-school and primary students), given the importance of early exposure;
- (b) enriching the language environment for students through, for example, strengthened immersion programmes;
- (c) strengthening and continuing projects which had been piloted and proven to be effective and successful in enhancing language teaching and learning, such as the Support Centre for Teachers Using Chinese as the Medium of Instruction;
- (d) supporting Government's overall policy on teacher training; and
- (e) studying education systems in other places where students had proven to be able to master both mother tongue as well as one or more second/foreign languages, and identifying proven practices which might have application to Hong Kong.

As the Language Fund had a balance of \$79.2 million only at that time, there was a need to replenish the Language Fund so that further initiatives to raise Hong Kong people's standards in Chinese and English could be funded.

Members' concerns

6. Members expressed concern that despite huge investment in the Language Fund, the language standard in Hong Kong was declining. Some members expressed reservations about the effectiveness of a three-year pilot scheme to be conducted by SCOLAR to send pre-service teachers to attend overseas immersion training as part of their training programme. There was a view that recruiting quality teachers would be the most straightforward and important way to raise the language standard of students. The Administration should increase funding allocation, such as using the Language Fund, to employ more quality language teachers in order to achieve the objective of enabling students to become biliterate (in written Chinese and English) and trilingual (in Cantonese, Putonghua and spoken English).

7. The Administration pointed out that feedback from the education institutions and participants on the effects of immersion programmes had been encouraging.

One of the main objectives of injecting \$200 million into the Language Fund was to implement the pilot scheme. The Language Fund which was established to provide non-recurrent funding for quality language projects would not have sufficient funds to support projects requiring recurrent expenditures.

8. Members noted that more funding had been allocated to English language projects than Chinese and Putonghua projects. According to the Administration, the big difference in total funding between English and Chinese projects were attributed to some costly English language projects such as the Funding Scheme for Workplace English Training which had a budget of \$50 million.

9. The proposed injection was approved by the Finance Committee ("FC") at its meeting on 23 February 2001.

Second injection proposal

Need for the injection

10. SCOLAR conducted a review of language education in Hong Kong in 2001-2002. The Panel received a briefing on the findings and recommendations of the review at its meeting on 20 January 2003. The Administration informed the Panel that while the Education and Manpower Bureau ("EMB") and the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority were expected to implement most of the SCOLAR's recommendations with their own recurrent resources, SCOLAR also planned to carry out a number of new non-recurrent initiatives with the support of the Language Fund. A list of these initiatives is in **Appendix I**. According to the Administration, there was a need to inject \$400 million into the Language Fund to meet the funding requirements of the initiatives being planned by SCOLAR and other proposals from interested parties.

Members' concerns

11. In its consultation document published in January 2003, SCOLAR recommended that schools should, as far as possible, recruit language teachers with a Bachelor of Education degree in the relevant language subject, or a first degree in the relevant language subject and a Postgraduate Diploma or Certificate in Education with a major in the language subject from the 2003-2004 school year. Members noted SCOLAR's proposal to set up an incentive grant scheme to encourage serving language teachers, particularly those who had neither a degree nor any teacher training in the relevant language subject, to upgrade their professional qualifications in line with that required of their counterparts entering the profession in the 2004-2005 school year or after (subsequently called the Professional Development Incentive Grant Scheme for Language Teachers). Members expressed concern that as serving language teachers would prefer to acquire a degree qualification in education, there might be insufficient degree and postgraduate programmes for serving language teachers within a short period of time.

12. The Administration explained that it had maintained close contact with the

University Grants Committee-funded institutions and other education providers on the provision of degree and postgraduate programme places for the teaching profession and had impressed upon them the great demand for language teachers. The Chairman of SCOLAR pointed out that SCOLAR had not recommended a deadline for some 20 000 serving Chinese and English language teachers to acquire the required qualifications. SCOLAR would give priority to some 6 000 serving Chinese and English Language teachers who did not have post-secondary education or teaching training in the language subject they taught.

13. In response to members' query on the budget for the incentive grant scheme to meet the demand of serving Chinese and English language teachers, the Chairman of SCOLAR informed the Panel that a budget in the region of \$200 million would be required. SCOLAR had recommended the establishment of a special task force of teaching consultants to help serving language teachers acquaint with the latest pedagogical knowledge and skills required for the curriculum reform. Additional resources would be required if the recommendation was accepted by the Administration.

14. The proposed injection was approved by FC at its meeting on 21 February 2003.

Third injection proposal

Need for the injection

15. At its meeting on 7 February 2005, the Panel was consulted on the proposal for injecting \$500 million into the Language Fund. Under the proposal, \$300 million would be allocated for the expansion of the Professional Development Incentive Grant Scheme for Language Teachers in primary and secondary schools; another \$200 million would be allocated to strengthen support for language education at pre-primary and primary levels.

16. On the expansion of the existing Professional Development Incentive Grant Scheme for Language Teachers, the Administration informed the Panel that the initial allocation of \$225 million could provide subsidies to about 7 500 teachers in a five-year timeframe. However, SCOLAR had already received 4 200 applications as at mid-January 2005 and 3 790 had been approved. The 2003 teachers survey conducted by EMB showed that over 20 000 serving Chinese or English language teachers in primary or secondary schools had not acquired the new entry qualification requirements. The Administration therefore proposed an additional allocation of \$300 million from the Language Fund for the expansion of the Scheme which could cover at least an additional 10 000 serving teachers for their professional development.

17. Regarding the strengthened support in language education for children in the pre-primary and primary levels, the Administration pointed out that the results of the first Territory-wide System Assessment Test in 2004 revealed that 24% and 17% of primary three students had not attained the basic competency in English and Chinese

languages respectively. As empirical studies showed that the gap between students not attaining the basic competency in the Territory-wide System Assessment Test and the better performing students would widen at primary six level if the former students were not urgently assisted, there was an urgent need to strengthen support to schools and language teachers at primary three level.

Members' concern

18. Members stressed the need to distribute the funds fairly for the use of both Chinese and English language teachers. At the request of members, the Administration had provided the following information on the disbursement of the Language Fund –

- (a) a breakdown of the committed Language Fund projects by relevant language (**Appendix II**);
- (b) a profile of applications to the Professional Development Incentive Grant Scheme for Language Teachers by subject and level of teaching (**Appendix III**); and
- (c) provision of support by the Task Force of Language Support¹ (**Appendix IV**).

19. When FC considered the proposal for injecting \$500 million into the Language Fund at its meeting on 4 March 2005, some FC members expressed concern about the inadequate provision for language education at pre-primary level. FC had given approval to the proposals, but requested the Administration to brief the Panel on the allocation of the \$200 million among the various measures to strengthen support to schools and teachers in language education at pre-primary and primary levels.

20. The Administration subsequently briefed the Panel on its proposals to strengthen language education at pre-primary and primary levels at its meeting on 9 May 2005. According to the Administration, it would explore the implementation of a basket of measures, including sponsoring teachers to attend overseas immersion courses, intensive training on specific aspects of the learning and teaching of language subjects (e.g. grammar/phones 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.

21. Members noted with concern the very small allocation for the professional development of pre-primary teachers. Members pointed out that some 7 000 pre-primary teachers had not completed a certificate programme in early childhood education and the costs of the Compulsory Language Immersion Programme for pre-service English Language and Putonghua teacher trainees in teacher education

¹ 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.

institutes were as high as \$42,000 and \$16,000 respectively. However, only \$20 million would be used for the professional development of pre-primary teachers.

22. The Administration pointed out that the qualifications requirements, learning approaches and the needs in professional development for kindergarten and primary school teachers were different. The Administration had proposed to develop separate programmes for strengthening the professional development of kindergarten teachers. SCOLAR would examine the needs of pre-primary teachers in professional development and determine their share of the \$500 million injection into the Language Fund. The allocation of \$20 million was an initial estimate and could be adjusted. Based on past experience, short duration courses focused on specific areas of teaching and learning would be more suitable for serving pre-primary teachers to complement their general professional upgrading.

23. The Administration further informed members that a number of empirical research into the language education in Hong Kong had been conducted. The Administration would study the results with a view to promoting a wider adoption of the best practices in language education at pre-primary and primary levels. The proposed allocation would mainly be used in the development of separate programmes for strengthening the professional development of pre-primary teachers in specific aspects of language teaching in a more focused approach. For instance, pre-primary teachers would be provided with five to six three-hour courses on promotion of language activities, such as songs, stories, games and on-line/web-based learning materials, which were structured around the current guideline issued to kindergartens by the Curriculum Development Institute.

Fourth injection proposal

Need for the injection

24. The Administration consulted the Panel on 12 December 2005 on the proposal for injecting a sum of \$1,100 million into the Language Fund (\$600 million in 2005-2006 and \$500 million in 2006-2007) to strengthen the teaching and learning of English in secondary schools and to support the wider use of Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject in primary and secondary schools through the following measures –

- (a) launch an incentive scheme starting from the 2006-2007 school year to support schools using Chinese as the medium of instruction ("CMI schools") to implement school-based and result-oriented measures for six years for raising the English proficiency of their students on a sustainable basis (**Appendix V**);
- (b) conduct a study to explore how the time allocated for extended learning activities in English could be utilized effectively for the intended purpose without prejudice to students' learning of subject contents;
- (c) provide additional support for secondary schools using English as the

medium of instruction ("EMI schools") for professional development of teachers and strengthening the learning of English across the curriculum; and

- (d) provide additional manpower for pilot schools for adopting Putonghua in teaching the Chinese Language and support for professional upgrading of their teachers for the purpose.

Members' concerns

25. Members expressed concern about the input and output performance targets to be specified in the performance contract for assessing a CMI school's improvement in English teaching and learning. Members opined that student performance in public examinations largely depended on the quality of student intake as well as the quality of teaching and learning. Given the decline in student population, it was highly likely that the top Primary 6 graduates would continue their secondary studies in popular public sector EMI schools, Direct Subsidy Scheme schools and private independent schools. As a result, more CMI schools would have a large enrolment of band three students and these schools would be in a disadvantaged position to achieve the output performance targets. Members considered that the Administration should not withdraw the funding support should a participating school fail to achieve the agreed targets after the first three years under the incentive scheme.

26. The Administration assured members that the incentive scheme was intended to cover all schools without any pre-condition for participation. It would agree with the participating CMI schools on their input and output performance targets, taking into account the school context and their existing status.

27. In response to members' call for enhancing the language proficiency of pre-primary students, the Administration informed members that a pilot scheme had been launched in October 2005 to provide support to 17 kindergartens in providing quality English exposure to pre-primary students. The pilot scheme would run until the end of the 2005-2006 school year. The results of the pilot scheme would provide useful references for the formulation of a more comprehensive and sustainable support strategy for English and/or Putonghua Language education at pre-primary level. The Administration planned to extend the pilot scheme to cover all of the 700 plus kindergartens in the long run, and would consider providing pre-primary teachers with the opportunities to participate in overseas immersion programmes.

28. Members were concerned whether the use of Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language would be in conflict with the policy on mother-tongue teaching and would affect student learning outcome. In the Administration's view, similar to EMI teaching, effective use of Putonghua required the provision of a Putonghua-rich environment and appropriate support for schools and teachers. As views and readiness of schools on the use of Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language still varied, the Administration had yet to formulate a policy in this regard. The Administration considered it appropriate to provide funding support for schools which wished to pilot teaching the Chinese Language in Putonghua. Based on their

experience, the Administration would decide on the future direction and formulate a more concrete plan on the matter.

29. The injection proposal was approved by FC at its meeting on 13 January 2006.

Relevant papers

30. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in **Appendix VI**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
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The Standing Committee on Language Education and Research
Review of Language education in Hong Kong in 2001-2002
New Non-recurrent Initiatives

	Initiative	Estimated Funding Commitment (\$M)
1.	Setting up district-based task forces of teaching consultants to assist individual schools to enhance the teaching approaches of their language panels (training and engaging 180 experienced teachers for three years)	300
2.	Incentive grants for serving language teachers to upgrade their subject knowledge and pedagogy (covering 50% of the course fees, subject to a maximum of \$30,000)	200
3.	Pilot projects on new and effective Chinese and English teaching approaches	50
4.	Putonghua Summer Immersion Course Subsidy Scheme for eligible Chinese Language teachers to attend immersion course in the mainland (maximum grant at \$10,000)	20
5.	Development of a Putonghua proficiency scale to help working adults plan and assess their Putonghua learning	2
6.	Further research on using Putonghua to teach Chinese Language to better understand conditions necessary for successful switch from using Cantonese to using Putonghua to teach Chinese Language	2
7.	Promoting the use of television programmes in the teaching and learning of English	2
8.	Research on pre-primary language education	1
9.	Sponsoring the Annual Hong Kong News Awards for three years to recognise high language standard in Chinese and English news and headline writing	1
	Total	578

Source: Extracted from Enclosure 3 to the Administration's paper FCR(2002-03) provided in February 2003.

Breakdown of Language Fund Projects by Relevant Language

Relevant Language	Number of Projects Completed / Committed	Grant Disbursed / to be Disbursed (\$ million)
English	112	260.4
Chinese	104	58.2
Putonghua	43	63.8
Chinese & Putonghua	5	6.6
Cross Languages	28	325.3
Total	292	714.3

Source: Extracted from Annex A to the Administration's paper CB(2)884/04-05(01) provided in February 2005.

**Professional Development Incentive Grant Scheme
For Language Teachers**

Profile of Applications by Applicants' Subject and Level of Teaching

	English	Chinese
Applications Approved		
Primary	998	1734
Secondary	491	508
Primary / Secondary	79	114
Total Approved	1568	2356
Applications Received		
* Total Received	1780	2529

* Applications received but not yet approved were under process.

Source: Extracted from Annex B to the Administration's paper CB(2)884/04-05(01) provided in February 2005.

Statistics on the Task Force of Language Support

I. Members of the Task Force

Subject Specialized in	Current Strength of Team
Chinese	38 *
English	17
Total	55

* Including 15 language experts from the Mainland under a Guangdong-Hong Kong exchange programme.

II. Support received by Schools

Subject Specialized in	Number of Schools receiving support in the Subject
Chinese	180
English	Over 160
Total	Over 340

Source: Extracted from Annex C to the Administration's paper CB(2)884/04-05(01) provided in February 2005.

**Key features of the incentive scheme for schools
using Chinese as the medium of instruction starting from the 2006-2007
school year**

- (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.

Source: Extracted from the Administration's paper CB(2)581/05-06(03) provided in December 2005.

Relevant documents on the Language Fund

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Education	15.1.2001	Minutes CB(2)666/00-01(04)
Finance Committee	23.2.2001	Minutes FCR(2000-01)74
Panel on Education	20.1.2003	Minutes EMB/SSU/CR 6/2041/96 Consultation paper and leaflet entitled "Action plan to raise language standards in Hong Kong"
Finance Committee	21.2.2003	Minutes FCR(2002-03)57
Panel on Education	7.2.2005	Minutes CB(2)795/04-05(04) CB(2)884/04-05(01)
Finance Committee	4.3.2005	Minutes FCR(2004-05)44
Panel on Education	9.5.2005	Minutes CB(2)1429/04-05(01)
Panel on Education	12.12.2005	Minutes CB(2)581/05-06(01) CB(2)581/05-06(03)
Legislative Council	21.12.2005	[Written Question 17] Asked by Hon Tam Heung-man Language education programmes not funded by the Language Fund Hansard (English) (pages 84-88)
Finance Committee	13.1.2006	Minutes FCR(2005-06)39