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Education Bureau
Government Secretariat, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
The People's Republic of China

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2 June 2017


Mr Anthony CHU
Clerk to Public Accounts Committee
Legislative Council Secretariat
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central
Hong Kong

Dear Mr CHU,

Public Accounts Committee
Consideration of Chapter 8 of the Director of Audit's Report No. 68
The Language Fund

I refer to your letter of 17 May 2017 on the captioned subject. Please find attached our responses/information requested. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,


(Ms Jenny CHAN)
for Secretary for Education

c.c. Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury
Director of Audit

Public Accounts Committee
Consideration of Chapter 8 of the Director of Audit's Report No. 68
The Language Fund

The Administration's Response to
Issued Raised in Letter of 17 May 2017

Part 2 : Management of initiatives

Management of support measures to school and teachers

- 1. According to paragraph 2.4 of the Audit Report (all paragraph number hereinafter refers to that of the Audit Report), around 73% of funding of Putonghua as the medium of instruction for teaching the Chinese Language subject ("PMIC") Support Scheme was used for the supply teacher grant. What kind of school plans had been carried out and what was the expenditure involved? How many teachers attended the relevant professional development programmes and what was the expenditure involved? Did the Government measure the effectiveness of the above measures; if yes, please provide the details.**

A: 1

In the 2008/09 school year, SCOLAR launched the "Scheme to Support Schools in Using Putonghua to Teach the Chinese Language Subject" ("the Support Scheme") to provide primary and secondary schools that intended to adopt PMIC on a pilot basis with necessary support. The supply teacher grant was provided to participating schools to create room for teachers to implement various school-based plans for introducing or enhancing PMIC as well as to attend professional development activities. For instance, project schools might employ one full time teacher and create room for their teachers to attend professional development activities related to PMIC based on their need. As the activities varied, we do not possess the number of teachers who had attended professional programmes.

According to the findings of the annual questionnaire survey on the project schools conducted by SCOLAR since 2008/09, the Support Scheme had facilitated the implementation of PMIC in the participating schools. For instance, school teachers gained, to a different extent, a better

understanding of the pedagogical knowledge and skills of PMIC. After the completion of the Support Scheme, over 95% of the schools continue to implement PMIC in the 2015/16 school year.

- 2. According to paragraph 2.6, the limitations of the evaluative study were listed out. In this connection, will the Education Bureau ("EDB") inform this Committee the followings:**
 - a) why were there only four schools selected to conduct the PMIC Support Scheme? If it was due to the decrease in the number of participating schools, whether EDB has evaluated the reasons of such decrease; and**
 - b) why the evaluative study was not conducted at an earlier stage, which could widen the scope to cover more than four schools?**

- 3. According to paragraph 2.7, EDB commented that as the evaluative study only focused on examining the specific cases among the schools participated in the PMIC Support Scheme, there were limitations of its findings which might not be deemed as the ultimate conclusion on the subject of using PMIC. In this connection, whether EDB agrees that the evaluative study costing \$ 1.42 million cannot generate the result with reference value? Will the Government conduct a similar evaluative study in the future; if yes, what improvement measures will be taken? Also, according to paragraphs 2.22(b)(ii) and 2.23, EDB agreed to conduct research which would provide more conclusive findings, and determine the way forward in relation to the use of PMIC. Please advise on the timetable for conducting such research.**

A: 2&3

Among about 1 000 primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong, a total of 160 schools had implemented PMIC on a pilot basis under the Support Scheme from the 2008/09 to 2013/14 school years in four phases. Different measures, such as interviewing principals and teachers of participating schools and lesson observation, have been used to monitor the progress and evaluate the effectiveness of the Support Scheme.

In order to understand the issues and concerns of implementing PMIC, SCOLAR commissioned The Education University of Hong Kong

(formerly known as the Hong Kong Institute of Education) to conduct a longitudinal study (the “Longitudinal Study” hereafter) under the Support Scheme. The case study approach of the Longitudinal Study could provide detailed and contextual information for understanding the different processes, strengths and issues of schools under different conditions which are of reference value to schools of similar contexts. Four schools, with different school backgrounds and experiences of implementing PMIC were therefore selected upon the stage when such basic information was available. The cost had not been the consideration for adopting the case study approach.

SCOLAR Secretariat will continue to collect relevant data to monitor the implementation of PMIC in schools in Hong Kong. With a view to having a more holistic view on the implementation of PMIC in schools in Hong Kong, SCOLAR conducted the “Territory-wide Survey on the Use of Putonghua as Medium of Instruction to Teach Chinese Language in Schools of Hong Kong” in the 2008/09, 2012/13 and 2015/16 school years respectively. The next Survey will be conducted in the 2017/18 school year.

4. According to paragraphs 2.22(b)(i) and 2.23, EDB agreed to consider ways to facilitate schools adopting PMIC to implement the recommendations. What is the progress?

A: 4

Based on the needs of schools, EDB will continue to offer professional support to schools on teaching the Chinese Language Subject irrespective of whether the schools are adopting Putonghua or Cantonese as the MOI. Learning resources provided by EDB, such as the “Lexical Items for Chinese Learning in Primary Schools”, “Anthology of Classical Chinese Poetry and Essay for Reading Aloud in Primary Schools”, “Anthology of Classical Chinese Poetry and Essay for Reading Aloud in Secondary Schools” etc., have both Cantonese and Putonghua versions and demonstration of recitation. EDB will consolidate good practices of schools in Chinese Language (including Putonghua) learning and teaching and disseminate them through different platforms. EDB will also continue to provide teachers with various professional development opportunities

and learning/teaching resources for enhancing their professional knowledge and skills.

- 5. According to paragraph 2.10, the Education Commission and Planning Division ("ECPD") of EDB, instead of the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research ("SCOLAR") Secretariat, was made responsible for the administration of the English Enhancement Scheme ("EES") and the Refined English Enhancement Scheme ("REES"). In this connection, what was the role of ECPD in operating the Language Fund ("LF")? Why was ECPD made responsible for carrying out EES and REES, but not other LF programmes?**

A: 5

It is not uncommon for individual Divisions within EDB to be assigned the task of administering some projects / programmes implemented in schools to benefit students. As regards the EES and REES that ECPD was tasked to administer, SCOLAR had advised to try out the following enhanced arrangements for the schemes which aimed to facilitate participating schools' implementation of school-based measures to strengthen schools' capacity of teaching and learning English with a view to improving English proficiency of students:

- (a) Setting up of an expert panel comprising SCOLAR Members, language education experts and academics in tertiary institutions, frontline teachers and representatives from EDB to assess the appropriateness and feasibility of the school-based plan of each applicant school. Apart from vetting the school plans, the panels offered professional dialogue with individual schools specifically those adopting the Chinese medium to allow schools chances for reflection and to refine, if necessary, the proposed school-based measures so as to better tie in with their school context before agreeing on the implementation plan for approval for funding; and
- (b) Upon approval, each participating school needed to enter into a performance contract with the Government setting out details of its implementation plan with the school-based measures to be

implemented and qualitative and quantitative outcome targets to be achieved within a specified timeframe.

With the aforementioned enhanced arrangements, it was believed that the schemes would be more fruitful to bring about effective teaching and learning for students.

In addition to the above, SCOLAR also advised ECPD to take on a dual role, viz. supporting and monitoring, in administering the two schemes. The resources and expertise required of this role were considered beyond the capacity of the SCOLAR Secretariat. ECPD was made responsible for carrying out the EES and REES because both schemes related to the medium of instruction policy for junior secondary levels which is overseen by ECPD. The EES launched in 2006 was implemented pertaining to the reaffirmation of the policy of upholding the mother tongue as the principal medium of instruction for schools at junior secondary levels, and that all schools, irrespective of their medium of instruction adopted at the junior secondary levels, should strive to enhance students' English proficiency. The REES launched in 2010 aimed to enable schools to build on the basis of their original plans under the EES and refocus their school-based measures upon changing circumstances (relating to the implementation of the fine-tuned medium of instruction arrangements for junior secondary levels starting from the 2010/11 school year) to continue to strengthen schools' capacity of teaching and learning English with a view to improving English proficiency of students. Hence, ECPD, being the related subject Division of EDB, is in the best position to administer the two schemes.

- 6. According to paragraph 2.11, no arrangements were made between the SCOLAR Secretariat and ECPD on the reporting requirements to SCOLAR. Whether the SCOLAR Secretariat had been informed about the implementation of EES and REES between 2006-2007 and 2013-2014; if no, did the SCOLAR Secretariat voice out this concern?**

A: 6

In the case of the EES and REES, according to the arrangements for reporting of expenditure of the funding approved under LF, ECPD had to

route through the Finance Division of EDB for disbursement of funding to participating schools at key stages as elucidated below:

- (a) Upon approval of the school-based plan of each participating school (which was done by batches. For the EES, there were four batches with school-based measures starting in January 2007 being the earliest and the last batch commencing in July 2008. For the REES, there were two batches. Schools which started their measures in January 2011 were the earliest while those in September 2011 the last), ECPD was required to report to the Finance Division the total amount of funding approved and the cash flow in each of the years concerned with breakdown by individual participating schools for disbursement of funding accordingly;
- (b) Annual report to the Finance Division was required in July of each subsequent year for adjustment as appropriate. The actual expenditure of (or amount of funding required for) each school would depend on the measures actually implemented in the year concerned; and
- (c) Adjustments to the funding were also made in response to requests from participating schools to revise implementation plans. To ensure optimal use of the funding approved, participating schools experiencing genuine difficulties in implementing their approved measures were allowed to revise their implementation plans (including revision to individual school-based measures with corresponding changes in the funding approved and reshuffling of the timeframe for completion of individual measures). Approval was given on individual merits having due regard to advice of the expert panelists (as mentioned in QA5) as appropriate.

The Finance Division issued regular reports on expenditure of the funding to the SCOLAR Secretariat and ECPD from March 2008 to December 2016 when the EES and REES were in progress. Upon completion of school-based measures in the 2013/14 school year, participating schools were required to wind up the relevant accounts in six months' time with audit report for further verification by EDB. Similar to the above, ECPD

was required to report to the Finance Division to finalise the total amount of funding disbursed from LF for the EES and REES.

With the above arrangement, the SCOLAR Secretariat was able to assist SCOLAR in overseeing and monitoring broadly the expenditure of the funding of the EES and REES.

ECPD was also responsible for monitoring the detailed implementation of the school-based measures of participating schools. ECPD had completed the tasks in this regard in a manner similar to other projects implemented in schools by EDB. Relevant reports with statistics compiled were prepared for reference and follow-up within EDB. For instance, in light of SCOLAR's advice on ECPD's taking on a dual role, viz. supporting and monitoring the participating schools, in administering the two schemes (as mentioned in QA5), ECPD had informed the Language Learning Support Section (which was established as an initiative funded by LF to provide Chinese Language (including Putonghua) and English Language support services to all primary and secondary schools with a view to enhancing the professional capacity of their Chinese and English panel heads and teachers to implement the curriculum reform) of the performance of the schools concerned for rendering further support as appropriate.

Upon finalisation of the accounts of the participating schools in early 2017, and observations relating to the implementation details of the school-based measures, ECPD had reported the overview of the EES and REES to SCOLAR in early April 2017.

- 7. According to paragraph 2.11(b), ECPD completed an evaluation on EES and REES in December 2015. Up to November 2016, ECPD had not submitted any evaluation report to SCOLAR. Whether SCOLAR had asked ECPD to submit evaluation reports during December 2015 to November 2016? Were EES and REES implemented independently by ECPD, without being held accountable to SCOLAR on the effectiveness of the schemes?**

A: 7

ECPD conducted an internal evaluation on EES and REES in December 2015 which covered two major areas, i.e. the expenditure of the funding

approved and implementation details of the school-based measures of participating schools. It was a snapshot of the situation after the participating schools submitted the final report of EES and REES including winding up the relevant accounts with audit reports in six months' time (i.e. by 28 February 2015) for further verification by EDB.

Regarding expenditure of the funding, accounts of the two schemes have not been finalised till end-January 2017 due to some schools' subsequent updating to the unspent funding to be returned to EDB, with the last report received in December 2016 upon EDB's scrutiny of relevant records. As regards the implementation details of the school-based measures of participating schools, the findings and observations from the above-mentioned evaluation conducted in December 2015 were yet to be finalised to enable SCOLAR to have meaningful discussion, especially on whether they would shed light on possible enhancement of the overall policy on language education (including the medium of instruction policy for junior secondary levels), specifically measures to be taken on board to enhance English proficiency of students.

EDB had finalised the evaluation and reported the overview of the EES and REES to SCOLAR in April 2017, including major findings and observations.

- 8. According to paragraph 2.12, 41% of participating schools in EES and 45% of participating schools in REES did not show satisfactory performance in meeting the pledged targets vis-a-vis objectives of the schools. Given that the schools that were eligible for EES and REES were required to sign with the Government a performance contract in which the schools pledged qualitative and quantitative targets to be achieved within a specified timeframe, whether SCOLAR and ECPD had set up any penalty mechanism against those schools failing to achieve the targets; if yes, please specify the details; if no, please provide the reasons.**

A: 8

Upon approval, each participating school needed to enter into a performance contract with the Government setting out details of its implementation plan with the school-based measures to be implemented

and qualitative and quantitative outcome targets to be achieved within a specified timeframe. Participating schools were required to submit progress cum expenditure reports annually with the final report within six months upon completion of the schemes (i.e. by 28 February 2015). In parallel, performance of individual schools was verified by supervisory visits conducted by EDB to the participating schools. ECPD was required to seek advice from the expert panelists (as mentioned in QA5) specifically if clause 4.5 (suspension of further funding to a participating school) and clause 9 (compensation to the Government upon termination of the project by the Government) were involved when a participating school committed a breach of any term or other condition of the contract including failing to satisfy the Government with the progress of, among others, implementing the project in accordance with the strategy and implementation plan.

The evaluation was of two levels. Having taken into account views of schools and teachers, it was decided that self-evaluation by schools should be done, in brief, through a 3-point scale in each of the progress reports and a 4-point scale in the final report, with score 1 being the lowest (i.e. not meeting the outcome targets vis-à-vis objectives of the schools concerned) while score 3 (in the progress reports) / 4 (in the final report) referring to meeting all outcome targets vis-à-vis the objectives of the schools concerned. The average points of a school's self-evaluation in the progress reports constituted 10% of the total scores while the school's evaluation in the final report accounted for 40% of the total points. EDB's evaluation was based on school visits including supervisory visits, and the average points, if any, made up for the remaining 50% of the total points of a school. Broadly speaking, schools having a total of 2.6 to 4 points in the evaluation based on the weighting mentioned above were grouped as schools having the pledged targets satisfactorily met vis-à-vis the objectives of the schools concerned. The remaining schools having a total of 1 to 2.5 points were grouped as schools not showing satisfactory performance in meeting the pledged targets vis-à-vis the objectives of the schools concerned.

Based on the findings of the aforementioned, 41% of schools participated in the EES and 45% participated in the REES were classified as not fully and satisfactorily meeting all of their pledged targets vis-à-vis the objectives of the schools concerned. Individual schools concerned were

required to provide justifications and EDB had followed up to examine the situation of the schools concerned. The explanations provided by the schools concerned were considered acceptable. For instance, some schools had difficulties in looking for suitable service providers in their school context in the case of procurement of professional services. The outbreak of the human swine influenza in June 2009 had upset the plan of many schools including the schedule of some schools in implementing some of their school-based measures as a result of class suspension and / or advancing the summer break for students. Competing for students with various school programmes / activities held at the same time was another major reason leading to failure of some schools to meet even the pledged target of student participants. In the above cases, document proofs such as advertisement for procurement of professional services and interview records, timetable of the schools concerned, student registers of the activities, etc. were submitted and considered.

- 9. According to paragraph 2.15, the returns of unspent funds by the 75% of the English Enhancement Grant Scheme ("EEGS") projects took an average of 95 days after the final report submission due date. Whether the Government has evaluated the reasons of the late return by the participating schools; if yes, the details; if no, the reasons? Has EDB explored any measures to ensure the timely return of unspent funds in the future; if yes, please provide the timetable for implementing the improvement measures.**
- 10. According to paragraph 2.16, schools applying for EEGS should submit an implementation plan with targets to be attained which should preferably be measureable. However, why did SCOLAR still approve applications with targets vaguely set and not easily measureable? Whether SCOLAR had given out advice in assisting participating schools to set out measureable targets? How did SCOLAR measure the effectiveness of participating schools when the targets were vaguely set (refer to the examples given in paragraph 2.16)?**
- 11. According to paragraph 2.20, the SCOLAR Secretariat was preparing a review of the Professional Development Incentive Grant Scheme for Language Teachers ("PDIGS"). What was the scope of the review?**

Whether the findings of the review will be publicly disclosed? Since 4252 teachers did not possess the qualifications outlined by SCOLAR, whether the Government plans to seek their views on applying for PDIGS?

Management of language education community projects

12. According to paragraphs 2.22(d) and 2.23, EDB agreed to strengthen the project monitoring of future LF schemes. Please provide details of the measures and the implementation timeline.

A: 9-12

The replies to questions 9 to 12 are as follows:

EEGS

The approach in counting late return of unspent funds by “the final report submission due date” under EEGS does not reflect the practical situation. As explained to the Audit Commission, returning of unused allocated fund to the LF by schools would take place upon checking of the End-of-project Reports and Final Financial Reports by the SCOLAR Secretariat. To ensure timely submission of relevant reports by participating schools and their returning unused funds the soonest practicable under the New Grant Scheme to Primary Schools to be implemented from 2017/18 to 2021/22 school years, the SCOLAR Secretariat has considered the following measures:

- emails alongside with fax messages requesting schools to submit the relevant reports within three months after completion of the project will be issued twice (viz, about three months before the completion date of the project and soon after the completion date of the project); and
- additional manpower, if feasible, will be deployed to check the relevant reports from schools with a view to returning unused funds by the schools concerned the soonest practicable.

A panel comprising language education experts and representatives from the EDB assessed the appropriateness and feasibility of the enhancement

measures proposed by the applicant schools under EEGS and recommended revision to the schools' proposals if necessary. The SCOLAR Secretariat provided guiding questions in the template on school-based implementation plan to facilitate schools to set out details such as deliverables/outputs that should preferably be measurable as well as progress monitoring and evaluation on the measures adopted. Schools' self-evaluation of various measures implemented reflected that the objectives of the Scheme were met as the learning and teaching of English language in the schools were generally strengthened and the effects were sustainable in the schools. The experience of the Scheme demonstrated that with the support of the additional resources, primary schools were stimulated to implement various initiatives for strengthening the learning and teaching of English language, and achieving their school-based targets.

As regards the new grant scheme, the SCOLAR Secretariat has uploaded reference notes onto the SCOLAR website with a view to facilitating schools in preparing their school-based implementation plans including setting targets (preferably measurable) to be attained.

PDIGS

The SCOLAR Secretariat is preparing a scheduled review of PDIGS covering the age profile of eligible serving language teachers, views of school heads on the Scheme, level of subsidy per eligible teacher vis-à-vis the current level of tuition fees and the level of unspent earmarked amount for the Scheme, etc. Subject to the review findings, the SCOLAR Secretariat will consider appropriate measures to encourage applications and adjusting the level of the funding previously earmarked for PDIGS so that amount which would unlikely be spent can be put to gainful use.

- 13. As stated in paragraph 2.26, spot checks and surprise visits should be conducted in accordance with the Work Manual of LF ("the Work Manual") to monitor project progress. However, according to paragraph 2.27, spot checks and surprise visits were no longer conducted. Instead, the SCOLAR Secretariat conducted observation visits. In this connection, whether the Work Manual was no longer applicable; if yes, why did the SCOLAR Secretariat not update the Work Manual? Why did the SCOLAR Secretariat not record the**

details of observation visits conducted? Whether the SCOLAR Secretariat provided guidelines for observation visits?

A: 13

All the observation visit records were properly kept in individual project files. In carrying out observation visits for promotional projects, SCOLAR Secretariat considers several factors such as the nature of an activity, experience of a programme partner, potential impacts of an activity, etc.. SCOLAR Secretariat will update the Work Manual to promulgate clearer guidelines on the conduct and supervision of observation visits.

14. According to paragraph 2.29, some project grantees submitted the project reports late. Whether the SCOLAR Secretariat had established any penalty mechanism against the grantees for late submission of the project reports? If no, please provide the reasons. What measures will be taken to ensure the reports will be submitted in a timely manner in the future?

A: 14

If there is late submission of a project report, the payment of the next instalment to the grantee concerned shall be withheld until the review of the submitted report is completed. Grantees are required to submit reports according to the schedule stipulated in the agreement. They are reminded of the submission deadlines one month in advance and email reminders will be sent to grantees in case of late submission of reports.

15. According to paragraph 2.33, EDB informed the Audit Commission that the criteria of undertaking independent evaluation were mainly for research and development ("R&D") projects on language learning and enhancing the learning environment. Whether the above criteria for initiating an independent evaluation had been stated in the Work Manual? If not, please provide the reasons and what are the reasons for SCOLAR to set out these criteria.

16. According to paragraph 2.33, working groups ("WGs") had been set up to plan and oversee the language education community projects. Whether WGs were set up to conduct independent evaluation for the

projects? If yes, please provide the details; if no, what was the purpose of having WGs in overseeing the projects?

A: 15&16

The criteria of undertaking independent evaluation were first set out in a SCOLAR Paper and reference to the paper was made in the Work Manual. As for language education community projects, evaluation requirements are spelt out in the agreements signed with the programme partners concerned. They are required to conduct evaluation and collect feedback from participants. Such projects are also monitored by the SCOLAR Secretariat through scrutiny of various reports and visits. Designated Working Groups comprised of SCOLAR Members are set up to map out the themes and objectives of programmes as well as to draw up and review the guidelines in vetting the proposals from various organisations. The progress of the projects is regularly reported to the WGs. SCOLAR Secretariat will ensure that the requirements promulgated in the Work Manual relating to evaluation are up-to-date and complied with.

17. According to paragraphs 2.35(g) and 2.36, EDB agreed to take further measures to enhance the appeal of sponsorship projects. What has EDB done in this regard? Is there any improvement in the number of applications received?

A: 17

To promote sponsorship projects, the commencement of open-call exercises has been announced via different channels, including newspapers, the SCOLAR website, and the Government online portal. The SCOLAR Secretariat will continue to endeavour to promote the sponsorship projects. The number of applications has notably increased from seven in 2016/17 to 12 in 2017/18 school year.

Management of R&D projects

18. According to paragraph 2.39, an example shows that the SCOLAR Secretariat had not taken follow-up action on the reservations and conditions given by the members of the Vetting Committee in assessing the applications for bottom-up R&D projects. In this connection, whether the SCOLAR Secretariat noted the reservations and

conditions given by the members and made reference to the members' comments before approving the relevant application? If yes, please provide the details; if no, please provide the reasons.

A: 18

SCOLAR Secretariat had followed up with the Vetting Committee members on their comments to the relevant application and obtained their agreement before approving the relevant application. The actual amount approved of the application was reduced by taking out the unallowable items according to the application guidelines.

19. According to paragraphs 2.40(a) and 2.41, regarding the vetting of bottom-up research and development projects, EDB agreed to take measures to ensure that recommendations of the Vetting Committee that are subject to reservations or conditions are clarified and followed up. Has EDB promulgated any new guidelines to achieve this? Whether the existing manpower of the SCOLAR Secretariat is capable to handle the follow-up actions; if not, will the SCOLAR Secretariat increase the manpower?

A: 19

SCOLAR Secretariat had already conducted the review of R&D Projects (bottom-up) in September 2016 and reported the outcomes and recommendations to SCOLAR in December 2016. Endorsed by SCOLAR, the Guide to Applicants has been revised to make clearer the principles for allowable and unallowable costs to assist applicants in preparing budget proposals. The revised Guide to Applicants has already been released in March 2017. SCOLAR Secretariat will ensure that qualified and conditional recommendations, if any, are distinguished from clear recommendations and are followed up accordingly.

Part 3 : Governance and administrative issues

Governance of SCOLAR

20. According to paragraphs 3.3 and 3.5, the two-tier report system requires the members to submit a Declaration Form to register their personal Interests when they first join SCOLAR. However, for the

appointment of SCOLAR members for the term from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2017, the Secretariat only sent the Declaration Forms to members two days after the commencement of the term. Why were the Declaration Forms not sent earlier to allow members to register their personal interests before the commencement of the term? Will the SCOLAR Secretariat send the Declaration Forms together with the appointment letters in future? Also, according to paragraph 3.5, nine SCOLAR members returned the Declaration Forms on conflicts of interest more than 30 days after the commencement of the term, what measures have been taken by EDB to ensure that Declaration Forms are submitted by members in a timely manner?

A: 20

The two-tier report system on declaration of interests commenced only since July 2015 on the advice of SCOLAR Chairman. Regarding the late submission of the declaration forms from some Members, the Secretary of SCOLAR had reminded them of completion of the declaration form. In future, we will send out the declaration forms together with the appointment letters whenever possible, and continue to follow up on late submissions whenever necessary.

21. According to paragraph 3.8, many WGs only held one meeting from 1 July 2015 to 30 October 2016 and some of them recorded low attendance rates. Will SCOLAR review the work and structure of these WGs; if yes, please provide details; if no, please provide reasons.

A: 21

Working Groups under SCOLAR are normally set up specifically to oversee projects or on a need basis. SCOLAR Secretariat had reviewed the functions of various Working Groups when the current term commenced in July 2015 before inviting Members to join the Working Groups. The Working Groups usually meet to review the outcome of the projects implemented in the last school year(s)/round and discuss the next focus/theme. Separate vetting committee meetings will be held to consider the project proposals received through open-call exercises. We will review again the functions and membership composition when the new term begins.

Administrative issues

- 22. According to paragraph 3.20, 6 of the 13 initiatives had been completed or terminated for over one year but the unspent balance of the earmarked funding had not been ploughed back to LF. The SCOLAR Secretariat stated that the closure of project account hinges on a number of factors, for example, submission of final report, settlement of all payments, acceptance of audited report, and refund of unused balance from applicant school. In this connection, whether the SCOLAR Secretariat took any role in these factors which would help expedite the closure of project accounts; if yes, please provide details; if no, please provide reasons.**

A: 22

Of the six projects which have been completed or terminated for over one year but the unspent balance of the earmarked funding had not been ploughed back to the LF, three of them were subsequently closed following refund of unused balance from the school applicant and submission of final report from the programme partner, i.e. ploughing back has been done. For the remaining three projects, two of them will be closed shortly, i.e. ploughing back of unspent balance would be done. SCOLAR Secretariat had made effort in chasing the reports and completing the payment settlement. The last one will be closed in 2018 when the project is fully completed.

- 23. According to paragraph 3.24(b), the actual total funding of \$262 million approved for the period from March 2014 to June 2016 was \$251.3 million less than the interest income of \$513.3 million earned from the Exchange Fund. In this connection, whether the balance of \$251.3 million of interest income was saved up to cope with the challenges during the times of market volatilities; if yes, please provide details; if no, why did the amount of funding approved to support new initiatives decrease dramatically from 2014 to 2016?**

A: 23

We have been prudent in working out the budgets for projects and would recommend implementing worthwhile projects on their merits. We also note a decline in the approved amount of funding from 2014 to 2016, with

the reasons being: (a) proposals on promotion of Chinese (including Putonghua) and English projects are submitted to SCOLAR for consideration and approval on a bi-annual basis since 2015. Hence the funding for these projects approved in 2015 (\$35.92 million) included projects to be implemented in the subsequent school year of 2016/17; (b) SCOLAR had in 2014 and 2015 approved a few projects with substantial amount of funding which lasts for a few years, i.e. “Strengthening language support for different stages of school education” from 2014/15 to 2019/20 school years (total amount of \$185 million with \$80 million allocated for a period up to 2016/17), “Support Scheme on Early Language and Literacy Development in Chinese and English Language of Young Children” from 2015/16 to 2018/19 school years (total amount of \$63.4 million), “Research and Development Projects 2015/16” (total amount of \$50.9 million); and (c) a number of new initiatives with substantial funding were still at the planning stage in 2016. In fact, three new major initiatives involving about \$240 million were recently approved by SCOLAR to be implemented from 2017/18 school year.

24. According to paragraphs 3.25(a) and 3.26, EDB agreed to step up efforts in developing suitable performance indicators for LF and provide more details of the effectiveness of LF in the progress reports to the Legislative Council. What has been done in this regard?

A: 24

SCOLAR Secretariat has already set certain performance targets of projects, including the number of beneficiaries and expected outcomes of activities/programmes and the budgets involved in the proposals for SCOLAR’s consideration. For those applications which are bottom-up initiatives (e.g. research and development studies on language education on a need basis and sponsorship programmes with proposals invited through open call exercises), the number of approved projects in each year depends on the number of applications received, and most importantly, the quality of project proposals submitted by applicants. As such, it is difficult for LF to set outcome targets such as the number of approved projects and the number of beneficiaries for these bottom-up initiatives. That said, we are working on how best to further improve the Fund’s performance measurement and its reporting of performance measures as appropriate in

launching various initiatives. We shall also provide more information on the LF projects in our progress report to the Legislative Council.

25. According to paragraphs 3.25(d) and 3.26, EDB agreed to endeavour to identify and fund more worthwhile initiatives. What is the latest position?

A: 25

SCOLAR has recently approved implementation of three major new initiatives from the 2017/18 school year, they are “Vocational English Programme” (\$10 million), “Grant Scheme on Promoting Effective English Language Learning in Primary Schools” (\$186 million), and “Capacity Building Programme on Chinese and English Literacy and Pedagogy for Kindergarten Teachers” (\$42 million).

Part 4 : Language proficiency of students and working adults

26. According to paragraph 4.3, over 20% and over 30% of Secondary 3 students did not meet the basic competencies in Chinese Language and English Language respectively. For the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination, there were about 15% and 20% of Secondary 6 students who did not attain "Level 2" or above in Chinese Language and English Language (i.e. the minimum language requirement for articulation to sub-degree programmes) respectively in 2016. Instead of providing one-for-all language learning programmes, whether LF had programmes to assist the above students in learning Chinese Language and English Language before sitting for the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination; if yes, please provide details and its effectiveness; if no, please provide reasons. What measures will be taken by EDB to improve the Chinese and English language proficiency of students? Has EDB sought advice from SCOLAR as stated in paragraphs 4.5(a) and 4.6?

A: 26

All along, EDB has been encouraging schools to make use of the flexibility provided by the curriculum to extend students' learning space both in/outside class and create diversified language environment in schools in accordance with students' abilities, so as to enhance students' language

proficiency through practice and application. Since the LF is deployed with a view to focusing on strategic areas such as facilitating effective language education policy formulation and implementation through initiating research studies, creating and nurturing a facilitating language learning environment for students in and beyond school settings, as well as catering for learner diversity, EDB will continue to seek SCOLAR's advice on the appropriate measures/initiatives for enhancing biliteracy and trilingualism of students in Hong Kong.

27. According to paragraph 4.4, since the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination was discontinued in 2012, no tools have been available to measure the Putonghua proficiency of students. According to paragraphs 4.5(b) and 4.6, EDB agreed to seek advice from SCOLAR on the development of a set of assessment instruments for gauging Putonghua proficiency of students. What has been the progress so far?

A: 27

As mentioned in our response that we generally agree with the audit recommendations, SCOLAR will consider the recommendation in the Audit Report and will continue to advise EDB on ways for gauging Putonghua proficiency of students. Proposals which have to take into account findings and experiences in various studies will be put up for deliberation by SCOLAR when ready.