

ITEM FOR FINANCE COMMITTEE

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

Members are invited to approve a new commitment of \$1,100 million for injection into the Language Fund.

PROBLEM

We need to strengthen the teaching and learning of English in our secondary schools and to support the wider use of Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject in primary and secondary schools.

PROPOSAL

2. The Secretary for Education and Manpower (SEM) proposes to inject \$1,100 million into the Language Fund (the Fund) to –
 - (a) strengthen the teaching and learning of English in secondary schools, and
 - (b) support the wider use of Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject in primary and secondary schools.

JUSTIFICATION

3. There is an outstanding balance of \$550 million^{Note 1} in the Fund as at the end of November 2005. However, more than \$489 million have been /earmarked

Note 1

A total of \$1,400 million have been injected into the Fund since 1994. Added to this is a total interest income of \$186 million accrued by the Fund over the years. Taking into account the total grants of \$1,030 million already approved for various projects (of which \$401 million has already been spent and \$629 million has been committed for initiatives in progress) and \$6 million already spent on other miscellaneous expenses, there was an outstanding balance of \$550 million left in the Fund as at the end of November 2005.

earmarked for committed initiatives under planning. This includes about \$200 million for the continued operation of the Task Force on Language Support^{Note 2} for at least five years, about \$200 million for strengthening support to schools and teachers in language education at primary and pre-primary levels, about \$45 million for the development and implementation of pilot projects to promote the use and learning of Chinese and English Languages in new and effective approaches (e.g. through pop culture and language arts), and about \$44 million for the continued operation of various ongoing initiatives (such as the Workplace English Campaign, English Festivals, and Putonghua Festivals). The non-earmarked balance of about \$61 million as at the end of November 2005 could not support new initiatives in the pipeline as explained below.

Strengthening the teaching and learning of English in secondary schools

4. The Education Commission (EC) put forward recommendations on the long-term arrangements for the medium of instruction (MOI) for secondary schools in early December 2005. The Administration has accepted EC's recommendations, and is prepared to invest substantial resources to strengthen the teaching and learning of English in secondary schools using Chinese as the MOI (CMI schools), so as to ensure that their students would also be proficient in English while learning their subjects better through the mother tongue. This is also an objective widely supported by the community.

English enhancement scheme for CMI schools

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

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

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Note 2

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

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

- (a) schools will be invited to apply for non-recurrent funding normally spanning across 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, and hire of service for the purpose of knowledge transfer;
- (b) a panel comprising both representatives from the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) 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);

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- (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 shortcomings and determine whether, and if so, the extent to which the school should continue to receive funding for the remaining three-year period having regard to its circumstances including but not limited to the student performance; 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). Schools failing to honour this commitment will have to reimburse to the Fund the grants they have received under the scheme.

8. Given the school-based nature of the applications, we do not intend to set any floor or ceiling on the amount of funding for each case. According to initial school-based plans drawn up by individual schools, the funding requirements may range from about \$300,000 to \$500,000 a year over a six-year period. For budgetary purpose, therefore, we propose to earmark a total sum of \$830 million for the scheme, assuming all CMI schools would apply and would require no more than \$500,000 a year to build capacity.

Study on extended learning activities conducted in English in CMI schools

9. The Administration has accepted the EC's recommendation that CMI schools may allocate not more than 15%, 20% and 25% of the total lesson time at Secondary 1, 2 and 3 levels respectively for extended learning activities conducted in English. The aim is to enhance students' exposure to and usage of English while allowing them to learn the subject matter mainly through the mother tongue.

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

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

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

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

12. The scale of support required for EMI schools in English Language teaching and learning is therefore much smaller than that for CMI schools, and the amount of support may vary significantly between schools. Making reference to initial proposals drawn up by individual schools, the requirements may range from about \$300,000 to \$500,000 in total. For budgetary purpose, therefore, we propose to earmark \$50 million for the scheme, assuming that each EMI school would require no more than \$500,000. As in the case of the scheme for CMI schools, we do not propose to specify an absolute floor or ceiling since the funding required must be school-based and result-oriented. Again, successful applicants would have to enter into performance contracts setting out targets on capacity building and students' performance within an agreed timeframe, which may be shorter than six years. EMI schools will aim for higher standards or alternative achievements, given the differences in the circumstances of CMI and EMI schools as a start. As the additional support for EMI schools will probably be spread out over a shorter timeframe and may even be one-off in nature, a mid-term review for continued funding as applied to CMI schools would not be relevant.

Support for schools to increasingly use Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject

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

14. In September 2005, the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) and the Primary Chinese Language Education Research Association jointly conducted a territory-wide survey to find out the extent to which schools are using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject. Schools which are already using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject were also asked to identify challenges that they had faced. Those schools not planning to try out the practice over the next five years were asked to indicate the perceived difficulties. Over 820 primary and secondary schools responded to the survey. Focused group meetings and school visits were also conducted for a deeper understanding of the relevant issues. A summary of the major findings is at the Enclosure.

Encl.

15. Based on the result of the survey, we see a need to strengthen support for schools in the following areas so as to ensure the success of pilot schools in using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject –

(a) Teachers' professional development

In order to create time for curriculum leaders and serving Chinese Language teachers to prepare for the change, we should provide time-limited resource, in the form of additional manpower, which could be an additional Chinese Language/Putonghua teacher or teaching assistant who would serve as a resource teacher, a mentor, or a coordinator of Putonghua activities. The Administration also has to work with teacher education providers to prepare teachers (both pre-service and in-service) for using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject, which is more demanding than being proficient in Putonghua communication, through professional upgrading courses of various depths and modes or Mainland immersion programmes.

(b) Other Support Measures

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

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16. Initial discussion with some schools suggests that a sum of about \$400,000 to \$500,000 per year would be required over a period of three years. As over 160 schools have expressed interest in the said survey in paragraph 14 above in trying out the use of Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject, we propose to allocate \$200 million over the next three years to support interested primary and secondary schools in making the switch, taking into account the additional resources required for the areas set out in paragraphs 15 (a) and (b). Schools interested in making the switch, schools already using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject but would like to improve on their existing strategy, and schools that have good practices and proven track record and are willing to share their experiences with other schools would be eligible to apply. Details of the support scheme, including application eligibility criteria, will be further worked out in consultation with SCOLAR, pilot schools, teacher education providers and other stakeholders.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

17. As set out in paragraphs 4 to 16 above, we intend to allocate the proposed injection of \$1,100 million as follows –

Measures	Estimated expenditure (\$ million)
(I) Strengthening the teaching and learning of English in secondary schools	
(a) English enhancement scheme for CMI schools	830
(b) Study on extended learning activities conducted in English in CMI schools	15
(c) Additional support for EMI schools	50
(II) Support for schools to switch to using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject	200
Total	1,095
Round up to	1,100

The exact amount to be spent on each initiative may be refined in the light of variables, such as changes in the number of CMI and EMI schools and the amount to be approved for each application. We will continue to submit periodic reports to SCOLAR on the use of the Fund and seek its advice on any refinement in allocations.

18. Subject to Members' approval, we will inject \$600 million into the Fund in 2005-06 and the remaining \$500 million in 2006-07. For 2005-06, we have earmarked the funding required for the purpose under Head 156 Government Secretariat: Education and Manpower Bureau Subhead 000 Operational expenses. For 2006-07, we will earmark the funding required in the draft Estimates. The injection schedule is proposed with regard to our estimation that a considerable number of the eligible schools would submit their applications for funding over the next two years and the need to assure the school sector that funding has been set aside for the said purposes.

19. In respect of paragraph 17(I)(a), the estimate of \$830 million is to cater for applications from some 330 CMI schools (including government, aided, caput and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools). Disbursement of funds will take into account the cash flow requirements for the school-based proposal, subject to the mid-term review as explained in paragraph 7(d) above.

20. In respect of paragraph 17(I)(b), the estimate of \$15 million is for carrying out the three-year study. The coverage of the study has been set out in paragraph 10 above.

21. In respect of paragraph 17(I)(c), the estimate of \$50 million is to cater for applications from some 125 EMI schools (including government, aided, caput and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools).

22. In respect of paragraph 17(II), the estimate of \$200 million is to cater for applications from about 160 primary and secondary schools in the next three years.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Language Fund

23. The Language Fund was set up in March 1994 with an initial injection of \$300 million approved by the Finance Committee (FC) vide FCR(93-94)141 dated 25 February 1994, held in trust under the Director of Education (now the Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower) Incorporation Ordinance (Cap. 1098), to provide financial support for projects and

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activities aimed at improving Hong Kong people's proficiency in Chinese (including Putonghua) and English. The Fund is operated in accordance with a Trust Deed which sets out the objects of the Fund, the broad principles governing the disbursements, as well as management framework. SCOLAR, established in 1996 to advise Government on language education issues in general, is responsible for advising the Trustee of the Fund on the policies and procedures governing the operation of the Fund.

24. On 23 February 2001, FC approved vide FCR(2000-01)74 an injection of \$200 million to the Fund to support research and development projects aimed at raising local language standards.

25. In 2001, SCOLAR launched a comprehensive review of language education in Hong Kong at the invitation of SEM. The review examined a host of issues related to language education, conducted thorough discussions with stakeholders and a two-month public consultation, and was concluded with a basket of recommendations which gained wide public support. FC approved vide FCR(2002-03)57 on 21 February 2003 an injection of \$400 million into the Fund to implement the recommendations of SCOLAR including, inter alia, the establishment of a Task Force on Language Support, the Professional Development Incentive Grant Scheme for Language Teachers (PDIGS), a range of pilot projects on new and effective Chinese and English teaching approaches, a Putonghua Summer Immersion Course Subsidy Scheme, the development of a Putonghua proficiency scale and a research on using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject.

26. In early 2005, in view of the encouraging response during the first year of operation of the PDIGS and the call for strengthened support to language education in the pre-primary and primary levels following the release of the first Basic Competency Assessment results for Primary 3 in 2004, we proposed and FC approved vide FCR(2004-05)44 on 25 February 2005 an injection of \$500 million into the Fund, of which \$300 million is to provide additional funding for the PDIGS and \$200 million is for strengthened support to language education in the pre-primary and primary levels. In this regard, an overseas immersion programme will be launched for English Language teachers in primary schools in the 2006/07 school year. A pilot of the programme for kindergarten teachers will also be implemented in 2006. At the same time, a pilot support scheme to explore measures for strengthening support in English Language teaching in kindergartens has already been launched in October 2005 and the pilot is expected to complete by mid-2006.

Consultation with Legislative Council Panel

27. We consulted the Legislative Council Panel on Education on 12 December 2005. Members supported the proposed injection in general. Some Members expressed concern about the mid-term review to be undertaken at the end of three years under the English enhancement scheme for CMI schools. Some Members suggested that the Government should also ensure that sufficient resources are available for strengthening language education at pre-primary and primary levels.

Education and Manpower Bureau
January 2006

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

The Standing Committee on Language Education and Research and the Primary Chinese Language Education Research Association jointly conducted a survey on the arrangement in using Putonghua to teach Chinese Language subject in primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong between September and October 2005. A survey questionnaire was sent to all local government, aided and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools. By submission deadline, 446 primary schools (70% of a total of 634 primary schools in the above categories) and 378 secondary schools (82% of a total of 460 secondary schools in the above categories) had responded.

2. Major findings in primary schools are summarised below –
 - (a) **Of the 446 schools responded –**
 - 28% (125 schools) indicate that they are using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject
 - 72% (321 schools) indicate that they are NOT using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject
 - (b) **Of the 125 schools that indicate that they are using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject, major challenges identified include –**
 - Lack of the necessary language environment (71%, 89 schools)
 - Insufficient Putonghua proficiency in teachers / lack of relevant teaching training (58%, 73 schools)
 - Insufficient Putonghua proficiency in students (52%, 65 schools)
 - Lack of appropriate teaching materials (50%, 62 schools)
 - (c) **Of the 321 schools that indicate that they are NOT using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject –**
 - 37% (118 schools) indicate that they would consider switching to using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject in the coming five years
 - 58% (187 schools) indicate that they would NOT consider switching to using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject in the coming five years

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

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

3. Major findings in secondary schools are summarised below –

(a) Of the 378 schools responded –

- 22% (84 schools) indicate that they are using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject
- 78% (294 schools) indicate that they are NOT using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject

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

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

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

- 16% (48 schools) indicate that they would consider switching to using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject in the coming five years

- 81% (237 schools) indicate that they would NOT consider switching to using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject in the coming five years

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

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