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Panel on Education

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the special meeting on 17 July 2008**

Medium of instruction for secondary schools

Purpose

This paper summarizes the discussions of the Panel on Education (the Panel) on issues relating to the medium of instruction (MOI) policy for secondary schools.

Background

2. The Administration promulgated in 1997 and implemented in 1998 the MOI Guidance for Secondary Schools (the MOI Guidance) which set out the MOI arrangements for secondary schools. According to the MOI Guidance, schools which adopt English as MOI (EMI schools) must demonstrate their fulfillment of the three prescribed criteria, namely, student ability, teacher capability and support measures. As a result of the implementation of the Guidance, the number of EMI schools has been maintained at 112 and some 300 schools have adopted Chinese as their MOI (CMI schools).

3. In 2000, the Administration accepted the recommendation of a joint working group set up by the former Board of Education and the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) that the MOI arrangements for secondary schools should be reviewed in the 2003-2004 school year alongside the review of the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) mechanism. The Education Commission (EC) set up in July 2003 a Working Group on Review of SSPA and MOI for Secondary Schools (the Working Group) to take forward the review.

4. In February 2005, the Working Group published the "*Review of Medium of Instruction for Secondary Schools and Secondary School Places Allocation - Consultation Document*" for public consultation. After taking into account the views collected during the consultation period, the Working Group issued in

December 2005 the "*Report on Review of Medium of Instruction for Secondary Schools and Secondary School Places Allocation*" (the Report) which set out its recommendations on the long-term MOI arrangements for secondary schools. The Working Group affirmed that the overall direction of the MOI policy should be "*to uphold mother-tongue teaching and enhance English proficiency concurrently*". The Working Group did not object to allowing some schools to adopt English as their MOI, subject to their fulfillment of the prescribed criteria to ensure quality. With a view to nurturing students' proficiency in both Chinese and English, the Working Group set out a series of measures to enhance the teaching and learning of English. The major recommendations of the Working Group which were accepted by the Administration are in **Appendix I**.

Deliberations of the Panel

5. The Panel held three meetings with the Administration and the Working Group to discuss the Consultation Document and the Report. Members in general considered that the Working Group had struck a balance among various interests in mapping out the revised MOI arrangements. Nevertheless, members had raised concern about various issues as set out below.

The "between-school streaming" approach

6. The majority of members in general supported the broad direction of mother-tongue teaching and the between-school streaming approach, i.e. schools being bifurcated into CMI schools and EMI schools. They opposed the within-school approach, i.e. a school could have both EMI and CMI teaching, for the MOI arrangement. Given the cultural and political background of Hong Kong and the preference of parents, members agreed that EMI schools should continue to exist. However, the Administration should promote the positive image of CMI schools and provide more resources for these schools to enhance the English proficiency of their students. There was also a view that the recommendations of the Working Group were confusing. On the one hand, the Working Group affirmed that students learned best in their mother tongue. On the other hand, it had recommended that EMI schools should continue to operate and only students with good academic results would be allowed to learn in English. Concern had been raised about pre-mature bifurcation of schools into EMI and CMI schools at junior secondary education.

7. According to the Administration, some people had criticized the between-school streaming approach as divisive since secondary schools had to adopt either CMI or EMI at junior secondary levels. Some schools considered that they should have the flexibility to use different MOI for different categories of students within the school. However, the Working Group was of the view that the within-school streaming approach would increase teachers' workload tremendously and intensify the labelling effect within a school. As students' ability to learn through English had for a long time been one of the prescribed criteria for EMI

teaching, the labelling effect would unlikely go away in the short term. The Administration aimed to reduce the labelling effect over time by working with the school sector to demonstrate that students in CMI setting could learn subjects better as well as learn English well. On balance, the Administration accepted the Working Group's recommendation to continue with the between-school streaming approach.

English proficiency of students in CMI schools

8. While supporting the between-school streaming approach, members stressed the importance of the English proficiency in maintaining the competitiveness of Hong Kong as an international metropolis. Members expressed concern that many serving English Language teachers had yet to achieve the required proficiency level. They urged the Administration to map out strategic plans to enhance the English proficiency of students in CMI schools in the long term.

9. According to the Chairman of the Working Group, the Working Group was well aware of the importance of teachers' capability and an English-rich learning environment to facilitate English teaching and learning in CMI schools. SCOLAR had set up the Professional Development Incentive Grant Scheme to support and encourage serving language teachers to acquire the relevant qualifications essential to ensuring their adequate preparation in proficiency, subject knowledge and pedagogy. EC had also recommended the introduction of a targeted English enhancement scheme (the Scheme) for CMI schools by way of further injection into the Language Fund. The Scheme emphasized capacity building and was school-based as well as result-oriented. CMI schools were encouraged under the Scheme to work out their plans and measures to build up capacity for raising the English proficiency of their students on a sustainable basis. Schools would be invited to submit their proposals on enhancing the language proficiency of their students which should incorporate measures to create an English-rich environment for students. Upon approval, schools would be required to enter into a "performance contract" with the Administration. Under the contract, schools were required to achieve specific targets in enhancement of the English proficiency of their students. They would be expected to improve deployment of English Language teachers, develop a collaborative and reflective teaching culture, implement measures to cater for student diversity, and adopt a whole-school approach in enhancing the language proficiency of students. On student learning outcome, schools would be expected to set out their action plans and specific targets over six years, starting from the 2006-2007 school year, with interim milestones of achievement.

Thresholds on EMI-capable students

10. Members noted that according to the research conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) in 2004, about 40% of Secondary 1 (S1) students at most were able to learn through English, and the Working Group recommended that these students should be identified on the basis of students'

internal assessment results (including the second term of Primary Five (P5) and the first and second terms of P6) as scaled by the Pre-Secondary One Hong Kong Attainment Test (Pre-S1 HKAT). Members enquired about the scientific basis in overseas countries for supporting the research findings that only 40% of S1 students were capable of learning through English or a second language. Members were concerned whether the percentage of the students capable of learning through English would change with improvement in the quality of basic education and/or with the implementation of the revised MOI arrangements in the long term.

11. The Chairman of the Working Group pointed out that in proposing the 40% threshold, the Working Group had made reference to the standard adopted by the Administration under the MOI Guidance and the research conducted by CUHK. While agreeing that the percentage of S1 students capable of learning through English could change with improvement in the quality of pre-primary and primary education in the long term, the Chairman of the Working Group advised that many overseas researches had shown that the capability of a student to overcome the language barrier when learning through a second language varied according to his learning motivation and proficiency in native language. In the circumstances of Hong Kong, assessment of students' EMI capability solely on the basis of their English proficiency would lead to over-emphasis on the subject of English Language by primary schools and parents. To ensure the development of a balanced curriculum in primary schools, the Working Group therefore recommended that the internal assessment results of P6 students should be scaled on the basis of their overall performance in Chinese Language, English Language and Mathematics in Pre-S1 HKAT.

Language education in primary schools

12. Some members expressed concern that students might opt for CMI schools only because of their worry that their application for enrolment in popular EMI schools would be rejected, and mother-tongue teaching was not a factor for consideration. These members held the view that students should be given a real choice to study in EMI or CMI schools. As the thresholds on EMI-capable students had allowed only the top 40% of P6 students with a choice and had created an adverse labelling effect against CMI schools and their students, members considered that the Administration should aim to increase the percentage of students who were capable of learning through English by improving the quality of language education in primary schools. Members held the view that only if more than 80% of S1 students could learn through English would students really have a choice to study in EMI or CMI schools. Enrolment in CMI schools and EMI schools could then reflect the preference of students to learn through mother-tongue or English. Members also considered that the Administration should aim to upgrade the biliterate and trilingual proficiency of the population. There was a suggestion that the Administration should allocate additional resources to improve the quality of language education at primary level.

13. The Administration responded that it had already increased the funding for primary school education by about 70% as compared with the allocation in 1997, and a large proportion of the increase was to improve language education at primary schools. The relevant measures included the introduction of the Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme, specialized teaching starting with English Language, the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers, the Capacity Enhancement Grant to primary schools for employing English Language Teaching Assistants, creation of curriculum leaders, and allocations from the Language Fund and Quality Education Fund for the implementation of various schemes and programmes to enhance language education in primary schools.

Latest development

14. On 26 February 2008, the Education Bureau (EDB) issued a press release announcing that the Administration was determined to uphold mother-tongue teaching but would be prepared to make some adjustments to the existing MOI policy to allow certain degree of flexibility for schools to enhance students' exposure to English and to raise their motivation and interest in learning English. Adjustment to the MOI policy must be premised on the following broad principles -

- (a) the three objective criteria of student ability, teacher capability and support measures must continue to be taken into account in considering whether English should be adopted as the MOI;
- (b) there must be a defined mechanism to ensure effective implementation; and
- (c) there should be high degree of transparency to ensure that the community and parents are well informed of the specific MOI framework put in place by individual schools, the rationale and implementation details.

Relevant papers

15. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in **Appendix II**.

Major recommendations of the Working Group on medium of instruction (MOI) policy for secondary schools

Conceptual framework of MOI policy

The Working Group upheld the rectitude of mother-tongue teaching and re-affirmed the policy considerations behind the MOI Guidance. The Working Group considered it more desirable to continue with the bifurcation approach than to adopt a within-school approach. In charting the way forward for the MOI arrangement, the Working Group arrived at the following conceptual framework –

"In principle, all secondary schools should adopt mother-tongue teaching at junior secondary levels. There is no objection to individual schools using English as the MOI if they fully meet the prescribed criteria of student ability, teacher capability and support measures. However, the Working Group encourages these schools to adopt mother-tongue teaching. All secondary schools (including CMI schools) should endeavour to raise the English proficiency of their students."

Prescribed criteria for EMI teaching

Student ability to learn through English

2. For the purpose of assessing students' ability to learn through English, the Working Group recommended that -

- (a) students' internal assessment results in primary schools in the second term of Primary five (P5) and the first and second terms of P6 would be taken as the basis;
- (b) the internal assessment results would be scaled by the pre-Secondary one Hong Kong Attainment Test (pre-S1 HKAT) currently conducted annually;
- (c) samples of the pre-S1 HKAT results would be collected biennially and average of the results of the two most recently sampled pre-S1 HKATs would be taken to derive the instrument to scale primary schools' internal assessment results of the coming cohort of P6 students proceeding to S1; and
- (d) the top 40% of students on the basis of the scaled scores would be taken as having the ability to learn through English.

3. For school level, the Working Group recommended that -
- (a) schools intending to adopt English as MOI must have at least 85% of its S1 students being able to learn through English;
 - (b) should EMI teaching by class be adopted, such a class should have at least 85% students being capable of learning through English;
 - (c) should schools be bifurcated into EMI and CMI schools, an EMI school should have at least 85% of its S1 intake being capable of learning through English; and
 - (d) for "through-train" secondary schools intending to adopt English as the MOI, the threshold percentage of EMI-capable S1 intake could be flexibly lowered to 75%, but this percentage only applied to S1 entrants from the linked primary schools. As for S1 intake from other primary schools, the threshold percentage should be maintained at 85%.

Teacher capability to teach through English

4. Regarding teacher capability to teach through English, the Working Group recommended that -
- (a) the specific basic requirement for EMI teachers should be a Grade C or above in English Language (Syllabus B) of the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) or its equivalent;
 - (b) for serving EMI teachers who had not attained the qualification or its equivalent, they might meet the specific basic requirement within two years from the 2005-2006 school year, or opt for classroom observation by subject and language experts; and
 - (c) EMI teachers should accumulate a minimum of 15 hours of EMI-related continuous professional development activities for every three years.

School support measures

5. The Working Group recommended that schools using English as the MOI should purposefully and strategically devise school-based measures for supporting EMI teaching and should set out the related strategies and support measures in their school development plans and annual school reports. The former Education and Manpower Bureau (re-organized as the Education Bureau (EDB) on 1 July 2007) should assess and monitor the implementation of the support measures under the existing framework of quality assurance and schools' self evaluation.

MOI arrangements at school level

Junior secondary levels

6. The Working Group recommended that the mother tongue should be the principal MOI for secondary schools and the between-school streaming arrangement should be maintained. A school should adopt the same MOI in all junior secondary classes. If individual schools chose to adopt English as the MOI, they had to meet the three prescribed criteria of student ability, teacher capability and support measures. The choice of EMI for these schools should be subject to a review every six years for quality assurance. Schools changing their MOI status should announce their arrangements one year before implementation. Any changes should start with the S1 classes and progress each year to a higher grade level.

Senior secondary levels

7. Subject to the fulfillment of the criteria on teacher capability and support measures, secondary schools adopting mother-tongue teaching at junior secondary levels might, in consideration of the student ability, choose to adopt EMI teaching at senior secondary levels for certain subjects in some classes. However, they were required to -

- (a) put in place well-designed bridging programmes and support measures systematically and strategically at junior secondary levels so as to help students get prepared; and
- (b) meet the same criteria on teacher capability and support measures as prescribed for EMI teaching at junior secondary levels.

8. Schools adopting EMI teaching at junior secondary levels should continue to adopt English as the MOI at senior secondary levels. They should use English to teach Liberal Studies under the new academic structure for senior secondary education. EDB might, however, determine which modules/themes under Liberal Studies might be allowed to be taught in Chinese by these schools.

MOI Arrangements for Direct Subsidy Scheme Schools

9. Direct Subsidy Scheme secondary schools might maintain the existing flexibility in MOI arrangements. They might adopt different MOI by class according to students' ability. However, they were not allowed to adopt different MOI by subject at junior secondary levels.

Enhancing English proficiency of students in CMI schools

10. The Working Group recommended the following measures to enhance English proficiency of students in schools adopting mother-tongue teaching -

- (a) schools adopting mother-tongue teaching at junior secondary levels might choose to allocate, on top of English Language lessons, not more than 15%, 20% and 25% of the total lesson time at S1, S2 and S3 respectively for extended learning activities conducted in English;
- (b) additional resources currently provided for CMI schools should continue and these schools should be allowed to opt for replacing part or all of the additional teaching posts with a cash grant; and
- (c) the Government should make an injection into the Language Fund for supporting an English enhancement scheme for schools adopting mother-tongue teaching. Participating schools would be provided with non-recurrent additional grants. They should undertake to attain agreed performance targets on capacity building for effective teaching of English and on students' academic attainment in English

Implementation timetable for MOI recommendations

11. The implementation of the revised MOI arrangements for secondary schools, viz. the first review of MOI status for individual schools, would be deferred from the 2008-2009 school year to the 2010-2011 school year. Schools wishing to adopt English as the MOI should demonstrate to EDB that they had satisfied the two criteria on teacher capability and support measures when submitting their applications in the 2008-2009 school year. The ability of S1 intake in September 2008 and September 2009 would be taken into account in determining whether a school had met the student ability criterion.

Council Business Division 2
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**Relevant papers on
medium of instruction for secondary schools**

Meeting	Date of meeting/ issue date	Paper
Panel on Education	21.5.2001 (Item VII)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	14.3.2005 (Item V)	Minutes Agenda
Legislative Council	16.3.2005	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 11 - 14 (Question)
Panel on Education	6.4.2005 (Item IV)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	12.12.2005 (Item IV)	Minutes Agenda
-	26.2.2008	Press release issued by the Education Bureau on way forward for the medium of instruction policy
-	16.3.2008	Speech by the Secretary for Education on the medium of Instruction policy