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3 June 2010

Miss Odelia LEUNG  
Clerk to the Panel on Education  
Legislative Council Building  
8 Jackson Road, Central  
Hong Kong

Dear Miss LEUNG,

**Supplementary Information on Level of English Standard  
of Local Secondary School Students**

I refer to the Panel meeting held on 13 May 2010 at which the Administration was requested to provide further information on the English standard of local secondary school students as compared with their overseas counterparts; as well as the English proficiency of students in schools using Chinese as the Medium of Instruction (“CMI schools”) as compared with their counterparts in schools using English as the Medium of Instruction (“EMI schools”).

**English standard of local secondary school students as compared with their overseas counterparts**

Students’ performance in the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) Use of English and the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) English Language provides useful points of reference for the said comparison. The former is benchmarked against the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), and the latter the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE). Figures below show that the standard of English of local students compares favourably with overseas counterparts.

## Comparison of performance levels on the HKALE to that on IELTS

IELTS is an internationally-validated English testing instrument. Its results are reported on a band scale from 0 to 9. Candidates scoring Band 6 are considered competent users who have a generally effective command of the language, while those scoring Band 7 are considered good users who generally handle complex language well. For the purpose of recruitment into the HKSAR Government, an overall band of 6.5 or above are generally accepted as equivalent to “Level 2” in the Use of English paper of the Government's Common Recruitment Examination<sup>1</sup>, which is considered as meeting the English language proficiency requirements of all degree or professional grades.

Based on samples of candidates taking the 2004 HKALE, the HKEAA has conducted a research study to equate performance levels on the HKALE to performance on the IELTS. The comparison is as follows -

Grade in the HKALE Use of English (AS-Level)	Equivalent Range of Overall IELTS Band Score
A	7.41 - 8.30
B	6.92 - 7.40
C	6.51 - 6.91
D	6.03 - 6.50
E	5.40 - 6.02

In 2009, about 42% of the day school candidates in the HKALE Use of English attained Grade D or above, which is broadly equivalent to the IELTS band score 6 (competent users) or above. For Members' additional information, IELTS has been adopted by the University Grants Committee (UGC) as the assessment for the Common English Proficiency Assessment Scheme (CEPAS) since 2002/03. In 2008/09, about 71% of all full-time and part-time final year undergraduate students participated in CEPAS. About 87% of the students obtained a score in the 6.0 – 7.5 range, which means they were “competent” or “good” users. Furthermore, the average overall score of all the test takers of IELTS in Hong Kong was 6.36 in 2009. It ranked the tenth among the most frequent regions of origin in IELTS 2009.

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<sup>1</sup> IELTS has four parts testing the four language skills, namely listening, reading, writing and speaking. To be accepted as equivalent to “Level 2” in CRE, the IELTS test taker should achieve an overall band of 6.5 or above with no subtest score below Band 6 obtained in the same sitting; and the results should be obtained within the 2-year period before the time of applying for the opening in question.

## Comparison of performance levels on the HKCEE to that on IGCSE

Starting from the 2007 HKCEE, standards-referenced reporting is adopted in Chinese Language and English Language. Candidates' levels of performance are reported using levels with reference to a set of standards for the subject. The results in the English language subject are recognized as equivalent to the IGCSE results as follows:

Levels attained in HKCEE	5*	5	4	3
Grades attained in IGCSE	A*	A	B	C

In 2009, the percentage of day school candidates obtaining level 3 or above in HKCEE English Language (equivalent as Grade C in IGCSE English<sup>2</sup>) was about 43.8%. In the same year, the average percentage of worldwide candidates achieving Grade C or above in IGCSE English as a Second Language was 51.8%<sup>3</sup>.

### **English Proficiency of students in CMI schools and EMI schools**

Since the implementation of the Medium of Instruction Guidance for Secondary Schools Guidance in 1998, we have been monitoring the student performance in CMI schools to ensure student learning effectiveness. Given the compounding factors such as parental choice of schools and hence different Secondary 1 intakes, etc. affecting the performance of schools, we have tracked the performance of the cohorts of students in CMI schools sat for the HKCEE in 2003 and so on. Their performance and that of the 2002 HKCEE candidates (i.e. the last pre-guidance cohort of students) were analysed with students divided into high, mid and low ability groups according to their ability during the Secondary School Place Allocation (SSPA). The Education Commission (EC), upon reviewing the MOI and SSPA in 2005, noted that “there were sustained rises in the pass rates in English Language (Syllabus A or Syllabus B) for all ability groups of CMI students over the past three years. This reflected that the overall English Language standard of CMI students was on a steady rise. More and more CMI schools had their pass rates in English Language exceeding the level obtained in 2002. This showed that some CMI schools had adopted effective teaching strategies in English Language and achieved improved outcomes”. The details are set out at the **Annex**. Annexes 2 and 4 of the EC's Report on Review of the MOI and SSPA published in 2005 are relevant.

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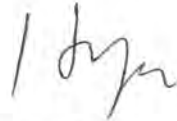
<sup>2</sup> Grade C in IGCSE English (both First Language and Second Language) satisfies the English proficiency requirements of many universities in the UK and other anglophone countries.

<sup>3</sup> In June 2009 and November 2009, the average percentage of worldwide candidates achieving C or above in IGCSE English as a Second Language are 66.1% and 37.5% respectively. Taking the average, the worldwide percentage is 51.8%.

Following the EC's recommendations, the project of English Enhancement Scheme (EES) was launched in 2007 premising on the situation that schools would continue to be classified into CMI schools and EMI schools with a view to building up the capacity of secondary schools in the teaching and learning of English and enhancing students' English proficiency.

Upon approval of schools' proposals under the EES, schools have been required to enter into a performance contract with the Government which includes their implementation details and output targets to be achieved. All participating schools under the EES are expected to have completed their school-based measures under the EES by 2013/14. By then, we can have an overall assessment of schools' performance in achieving the targets set and included in the performance contract to enhance students' English proficiency.

Yours sincerely,



( Mrs Alice CHEUNG )  
for Secretary for Education

# Comparison of the results of different student ability groups in EMI schools and CMI schools \*

Comparison of the pass rates in EMI schools (112 schools)

Student Ability	High				Mid				Low
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2003	2004	2005	2006	
As compared with 2002									
Obtaining 5 or more passes (including Chinese and English)	♦	-0.9 ↓	♦	-0.8 ↓	-2.1 ↓	♦	♦	-3.5 ↓	N.A.
Obtaining 14+ in Best 6 Subjects with Passes in Chinese and English	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦	
Chinese Language	♦	♦	♦	♦	-2.3 ↓	♦	♦	♦	
English Language (Syllabus B)	♦	♦	♦	-0.9 ↓	♦	♦	♦	-3.4 ↓	
English Language (Syllabus A) Grade C or above	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	
English Language (Syllabus A) Grade E or above	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	
Mathematics	♦	♦	♦	-0.6 ↓	♦	♦	-1.1 ↓	-2.0 ↓	
Geography	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦	-4.6 ↓	
History	♦	2.4 ↑	♦	♦	♦	4.6 ↑	♦	5.5 ↑	
Chinese History	♦	-1.1 ↓	♦	♦	♦	-3.7 ↓	♦	♦	
Economics	♦	♦	♦	♦	-3.2 ↓	♦	♦	♦	
Physics	-1.0 ↓	-1.6 ↓	-1.5 ↓	-1.4 ↓	♦	-3.3 ↓	♦	-3.6 ↓	
Chemistry	-0.8 ↓	-1.5 ↓	-0.9 ↓	-0.9 ↓	♦	-4.3 ↓	♦	♦	
Biology	-1.7 ↓	-1.7 ↓	-1.9 ↓	-1.3 ↓	♦	♦	♦	♦	

\* The figures show only the rise and drop in pass rates greater than 0.5 percentage point and statistically significant  
N.A. - Not applicable

Comparison of the pass rates in CMI schools (about 300 schools)

Student Ability	High				Mid				Low			
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2003	2004	2005	2006	2003	2004	2005	2006
As compared with 2002												
Obtaining 5 or more passes (including Chinese and English)	♦	♦	7.4 ↑	12.1 ↑	♦	2.4 ↑	9.0 ↑	12.5 ↑	♦	2.1 ↑	3.0 ↑	4.8 ↑
Obtaining 14+ in Best 6 Subjects with Passes in Chinese and English	♦	4.9 ↑	7.7 ↑	12.4 ↑	1.2 ↑	2.5 ↑	3.9 ↑	5.4 ↑	♦	0.6 ↑	0.9 ↑	1.2 ↑
Chinese Language	4.3 ↑	4.8 ↑	6.9 ↑	10.2 ↑	2.4 ↑	2.8 ↑	7.2 ↑	10.8 ↑	1.2 ↑	2.3 ↑	4.7 ↑	7.7 ↑
English Language (Syllabus B)	-6.3 ↓	-4.3 ↓	2.8 ↑	5.8 ↑	-5.1 ↓	♦	8.1 ↑	9.0 ↑	-4.8 ↓	♦	2.3 ↑	3.6 ↑
English Language (Syllabus A) Grade C or above	♦	♦	♦	23.2 ↑	2.9 ↑	2.1 ↑	5.9 ↑	13.7 ↑	♦	0.8 ↑	1.8 ↑	2.2 ↑
English Language (Syllabus A) Grade E or above	♦	♦	6.9 ↑	12.9 ↑	3.4 ↑	♦	7.1 ↑	15.2 ↑	♦	♦	4.0 ↑	6.4 ↑
Mathematics	1.7 ↑	2.0 ↑	1.9 ↑	1.3 ↑	1.5 ↑	1.1 ↑	2.9 ↑	♦	1.6 ↑	♦	1.5 ↑	♦
Geography	8.1 ↑	11.8 ↑	15.6 ↑	14.2 ↑	11.2 ↑	9.7 ↑	14.8 ↑	11.1 ↑	6.6 ↑	♦	4.1 ↑	♦
History	7.0 ↑	9.6 ↑	10.7 ↑	10.7 ↑	5.9 ↑	6.2 ↑	7.3 ↑	6.1 ↑	7.6 ↑	♦	♦	♦
Chinese History	♦	4.4 ↑	8.4 ↑	12.7 ↑	♦	♦	4.0 ↑	7.3 ↑	-4.0 ↓	-5.2 ↓	-2.9 ↓	♦
Economics	2.9 ↑	10.7 ↑	9.1 ↑	10.3 ↑	♦	7.9 ↑	4.9 ↑	5.3 ↑	-9.2 ↓	♦	-5.8 ↓	-5.2 ↓
Physics	♦	♦	2.3 ↑	4.1 ↑	-4.4 ↓	-4.2 ↓	-1.7 ↓	3.3 ↑	-5.3 ↓	-7.2 ↓	-7.5 ↓	♦
Chemistry	3.0 ↑	3.4 ↑	5.4 ↑	5.9 ↑	♦	♦	4.1 ↑	5.0 ↑	♦	-6.1 ↓	-3.6 ↓	♦
Biology	♦	4.6 ↑	4.1 ↑	3.6 ↑	♦	4.6 ↑	6.0 ↑	3.8 ↑	-5.0 ↓	♦	-3.7 ↓	-9.3 ↓

♦ - rise or drop is not statistically significant    ↑ - rise is statistically significant    ↓ - drop is statistically significant  
The small, mid and large arrows show the rise or drop of the pass rates from greater than 0.5 to 2.0, greater than 2.0 to 5.0 and greater than 5.0 percentage points respectively