

Consultation launched on Language Education Review

The following is issued on behalf of the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research:

The Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) issued a consultation document entitled 'Action Plan to Raise Language Standards in Hong Kong' and launched a two-month public consultation exercise today (January 2).

Public views are sought on the findings and recommendations of a language education review conducted by the Committee. The Committee will consider the views collected and prepare its final recommendations for submission to the Government.

Speaking at a press conference today, Chairman of SCOLAR Mr. Michael Tien said that the review focused on two major issues - specifying the language competencies expected of students and working adults, and raising students' motivation for language learning.

For the former issue, Mr. Tien said that the SCOLAR recommended setting basic language competencies for primary and secondary students, university graduates and professional groups.

"The language proficiency of students and working adults should then be assessed against the basic competencies set for their education levels," he said.

To raise students' motivation for language learning, the SCOLAR recommends engaging all relevant parties to enhance the language learning environment in Hong Kong through -

- (a) Upgrading the curriculum development and pedagogical capability as well as subject knowledge of language teachers;
- (b) Improving the administrative and professional support from the school management to language teaching and learning;
- (c) Educating and encouraging parents to play a more active role in their children's language learning; and
- (d) Promoting more effective use of the resources available in the community, such as the mass media, in language learning.

The review findings and recommendations are summarised at the Annex.

"Being biliterate and trilingual has been our competitive advantage. Increasing globalisation and a more open China market have made it more important than ever to enhance the English and Chinese proficiency of the community as a whole to meet the challenges of the future," Mr. Tien said.

"Employers have repeatedly expressed concern about the declining language standards among employees. It is vital that we raise our language standards if we are to consolidate Hong Kong's position as Asia's world city," he added.

"We look forward to receiving constructive views from the public on this very important issue," Mr. Tien said.

In early 2001, the Secretary for Education and Manpower invited the SCOLAR to conduct the review.

As part of the review, the Committee has studied relevant literature and official documents, visited local primary and secondary schools, and carried out a survey on students' attitude and motivation. It has also had in-depth discussions with teachers, principals, kindergarten operators, parents, academics, employers, and representatives of education bodies on -

- (a) language standards;
- (b) language teachers;
- (c) language curriculum and pedagogy;
- (d) support from school management, parents and the wider community to language learning.

The consultation document is available at District Offices and the Committee's website at www.language-education.com. Members of the public are welcome to send their views in writing to the SCOLAR Support Unit on or before February 28, 2003 -

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The SCOLAR was established on the recommendation of the Education Commission Report No. 6 in October 1996 to advise the Government on language education issues in general as well as on the use of the Language Fund.

The Language Fund was set up in March 1994. Over the years, it has sponsored close to 260 projects undertaken by various organizations, including tertiary institutions, schools, community and educational bodies, to enhance the biliterate and trilingual capability of the local population.

END/ Thursday, January 2, 2003
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Action Plan to Raise Language Standards in Hong Kong

WHY DO WE NEED TO BE BILITERATE AND TRILINGUAL?

- Being biliterate and trilingual is our competitive advantage. We must maintain and enhance this advantage to ensure our future prosperity.

WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?

- **SPECIFYING A CLEAR AND REALISTIC SET OF LANGUAGE COMPETENCIES EXPECTED OF OUR STUDENTS AND WORKFORCE TO REFLECT THE CURRENT AND FUTURE NEEDS OF OUR SOCIETY.**

Setting basic competencies

- Basic competencies in Chinese and English that are expected of primary and secondary students, university graduates and professional groups should be specified.
- Basic competencies should be clearly defined in statements describing what a person can do in listening, speaking, reading and writing (i.e. descriptors), accompanied by real-life examples of, e.g., writing and speaking (i.e. exemplars).
- To ensure that the demands of the workplace are taken into account, employers and professional bodies should actively participate in setting the basic competencies for students and working adults with educational attainment at Secondary 3, Secondary 5, Secondary 7, university graduate and professional levels.
- Employers should adopt the basic competencies as language requirements for recruitment and promotion.
- Local universities should review admission requirements to ensure that their students have adequate English language competencies to benefit from English-medium undergraduate programmes.

Assessing basic competencies

- Language proficiency of students and working adults should be assessed against the basic competencies set for their education levels.
- Basic Competency Assessment will be the tool for assessing the achievement of basic competencies among students in

Primary 1 to Secondary 3. The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) should complete its development in 2006.

- The Hong Kong Certificate of Education (HKCE) and Hong Kong Advanced Level (HKAL) examinations on Chinese and English will be the tools for assessing the achievement of basic competencies by students in Secondary 5 and Secondary 7. The HKEAA should reform these examinations to set each grade level against specified standards (e.g. Grade E of HKCE should be set against the basic competencies for Secondary 5). It should complete the reform of the HKCE examinations in 2007 and that of the HKAL examinations in 2009.
- The Government and educators should channel resources to help those students who require additional support to achieve the basic competencies expected of them.
- The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) should be used to assess the English language competencies of working adults.
- A general Chinese proficiency assessment should be developed by HKEAA for working adults.
- The SCOLAR has commissioned the HKEAA to develop a Putonghua proficiency scale with descriptors and exemplars to help local workers plan and assess their progress in Putonghua learning.

HOW DO WE GET THERE?

- **CREATING A MORE MOTIVATING LANGUAGE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT TO HELP ALL LEARNERS ACHIEVE THE EXPECTED COMPETENCIES.**
- A survey conducted by the SCOLAR found less than 50% of students strongly or very strongly motivated to learn Chinese and English, and only 25% with similar level of motivation to learn Putonghua.
- The survey found stronger motivation among students who liked language subjects, had teachers who could arouse their interest in the subjects, or found the content of the subjects interesting.
- Yet only 30% to 55% of the students said they had language teachers who could arouse their interest in the Putonghua, English Language and Chinese Language subjects; and only 22% to 41% of students found the content of the three language subjects interesting.
- All relevant parties should work together to raise students' motivation for language learning, particularly their interest in language subjects.

Curriculum and pedagogy

- The survey findings support the direction of the current curriculum reform, indicating that students would be motivated if they are taught what is appropriate in depth and breadth, relevant to their daily life, and stimulating and interesting. Students also preferred more activities and greater use of multi-media resources in language learning.

Teachers

- To ensure the success of the curriculum reform -
 - The Hong Kong Institute of Education will provide more intensive and focused Professional Upgrading Courses on curriculum leadership, development and management for panel chairpersons or curriculum leaders of language subjects; and
 - A task force of teaching consultants should be set up to assist individual schools in enhancing their teachers' knowledge and skills in language teaching.
- To ensure that language teachers are proficient in the language they teach, well grounded in subject knowledge, and acquainted with the latest theories and practices in language teaching and learning -
 - All English Language and Putonghua teachers should meet the Language Proficiency Requirement as soon as possible.
 - From the 2003/04 school year, schools should, as far as possible, recruit only language teachers with a Bachelor of Education degree in the relevant language subject, or a first degree in the relevant language subject and a Postgraduate Diploma or Certificate in Education with a major in that language subject.
 - New language teachers without the qualifications specified above should acquire them within 3-5 years of taking up the employment.
 - School management should avoid deploying teachers without the specified qualifications to teach languages.
- Given many serving language teachers do not hold the specified qualifications, we should encourage them to acquire those qualifications by offering them each an incentive grant covering 50% of the course fees, subject to a maximum of \$30,000.
- Language teachers with the specified qualifications and at least three years of teaching experience should be given the title of "Professional Chinese/English Language Teacher" as recognition.

School management

- School management should provide leadership and support for the implementation of the curriculum reform in their schools by promoting a language-across-the curriculum approach, encouraging greater use of information technology and multi-media resources, and opening up new opportunities for experiential learning. Most importantly, they should explain to parents and solicit their support for the schools' language teaching approaches.
- School principals should familiarize themselves with the principles of the curriculum reform and enhance their skills in change management through continuing professional development.
- School management should also critically review their schools' work processes and deployment of resources to reduce the non-teaching workload of language teachers.

Parents

- Parents should cultivate in their children an interest in reading and language learning, and support teachers in implementing the curriculum reform.

The mass media

- Schools, parents and students should make better use of the mass media, particularly English and Putonghua television and radio programmes, as a resource for language learning.
- Chinese television programmes with high viewing ratings should be broadcast with Cantonese/Putonghua NICAM.
- To promote using English television programmes in the teaching and learning of English -
 - All English television programmes should have English subtitles;
 - Students, teachers and parents should help to select programmes of interest to students for broadcast on the free English channels; and
 - The SCOLAR has started a pilot project, with support from the Language Fund, to develop language learning materials and activities based on selected English television programmes.
- The Language Fund will sponsor the Annual Hong Kong News Awards to recognise Chinese and English news and headline writing of high language standard.

MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION

- To achieve the aim of education, a language that poses the least barrier in the learning process should be used as the medium of instruction (MOI), which for most students is their mother tongue.
- The SCOLAR supports adopting the students' mother tongue as the MOI. If a second language is to be adopted as the MOI, three pre-conditions - teachers' proficiency, students' proficiency and the provision of suitable support measures - must be fulfilled.
- The MOI policy review to be conducted later this year should re-examine the mechanisms used to ensure those three pre-conditions are being met by schools using or wishing to use a second language as the MOI.

TEACHING CHINESE LANGUAGE IN PUTONGHUA

- Findings from a limited number of local studies conducted so far indicate that students who learn Chinese Language in Putonghua show improvement in Putonghua proficiency but not necessarily in Chinese Language.
- No firm policy or timetable for adopting Putonghua as the MOI for Chinese Language is recommended pending further studies on the conditions required to ensure a successful switch and prevent possible negative outcomes.
- Schools which consider that they have the pre-conditions for success in place are strongly encouraged to try using Putonghua in teaching Chinese Language. These schools should ensure that the Chinese Language teachers deployed to teach the subject in Putonghua satisfy the Language Proficiency Requirement for Putonghua teachers in speaking and classroom language.

ISSUES FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

- What should be done if students fail to achieve the basic competencies in either Chinese or English Language?
- Should the English language requirement for admission to local English-medium undergraduate programmes be set against international standards?
- Should university students be required to attain an expected level of Chinese and English before they are granted a degree?
- Should a deadline be set for all serving language teachers to acquire the specified qualifications? Or should we offer

them salary increment as incentive?

- Should we set a timetable for adopting Putonghua as the MOI for Chinese Language now even when we are not certain about the necessary conditions for a successful switch?

Standing Committee on Language Education and Research
January 2003