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FOREWORD

For a number of years, there has been growing concern within the community over language standards and the need for a more concerted approach to improve the language competencies of our population if Hong Kong is to remain a truly cosmopolitan city.

In early 2001, the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) began the task of reviewing language education in schools and in the wider community with the aim of developing a set of recommendations on ways to raise language standards in Hong Kong.

As part of the process, my colleagues and I have reviewed academic and official literature on the subject, visited primary and secondary schools, discussed the issue in depth with key stakeholders, and conducted a survey on language learning.

We are extremely grateful to all the interlocutors for their valuable input in this long and, at times, difficult process.

After months of deliberations, we have drawn up an Action Plan we believe will raise language standards. We are now seeking the views of the public before finalising the plan for submission to the Government. This consultation document summarises the major findings and recommendations of our review.

We look forward to receiving your support and your constructive views on this very important issue.

Michael Tien
Chairman
Standing Committee on Language Education and Research

OUR APPROACH

The recommendations in this consultation document set the **direction** for future language education policies and measures, and are what we consider **realistic** and **achievable**, taking into account factors such as availability of resources and qualifications of serving language teachers.

Our recommendations focus on two major issues -

- (a) **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 (Chapter 2); and
- (b) **creating a more motivating language learning environment** through the collective efforts of all parties concerned (e.g. Government, school management, teachers, parents, employers and the mass media) to help all learners achieve the expected competencies (Chapter 3).

Apart from our recommendations, we have also recorded in this document the views we received on certain controversial issues during our informal consultation with key stakeholders. We hope this would facilitate public discussion on those issues, which have mostly to do with the implementation details and timetable of individual recommendations.

CHAPTER 1

WHY DO WE NEED TO BE BILITERATE AND TRILINGUAL?

- 1.1 At the individual level, language ability has a profound impact on cognitive and social development, academic achievement and career prospects. At the societal level, it is one of the keys to the prosperity of a community.
- 1.2 In Hong Kong, Chinese and English have been commonly used for more than a century. Part of the reason for Hong Kong's success as an international city has been the ability to bridge the gap between the English-speaking, global business community and Chinese-speaking merchants and traders in Hong Kong and the mainland of China. Being biliterate and trilingual has been our competitive advantage.
- 1.3 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.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?

- SPECIFYING A CLEAR AND REALISTIC SET OF EXPECTED LANGUAGE COMPETENCIES

2.1 Basic competencies for Primary 1 to Secondary 7

- 2.1.1 The Curriculum Development Council (CDC) is now developing a full set of learning outcomes, which will describe the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes in Chinese Language and English Language that students are expected to achieve on completing Key Stages 1 to 4¹ (i.e. Primary 1 to Secondary 5). **Basic competencies** (BCs) are subsets of these learning outcomes that all students should achieve at the end of each Key Stage. They represent the language competencies expected of **students in the school system**.
- 2.1.2 We support this work of the Council and recommend that the same effort be extended to Secondary 7, with the addition of a new Key Stage 5.
- 2.1.3 To help the public understand what they refer to, the basic competencies in the use of Chinese and English in listening, speaking, reading and writing should be clearly **illustrated with descriptors² and exemplars³**.
- 2.1.4 The basic competencies for Key Stages 3, 4 and 5 should reflect the level of Chinese and English required to function effectively in the entry-level jobs that students are likely to take up if they leave the school system after completing Secondary 3, 5 or 7. Such competencies will provide a good foundation for further language training in the workplace.
- 2.1.5 To ensure that the views of employers are taken into account in developing the basic competencies for Key Stages 3 to 5, the membership of the Curriculum Development Council's Key Learning Area Committees on Chinese and English Language

¹ Progression from Primary 1 to Secondary 5 is divided into four Key Stages. Key Stage 1 covers Primary 1 to 3, Key Stage 2 Primary 4 to 6, Key Stage 3 Secondary 1 to 3, and Key Stage 4 Secondary 4 to 5.

² 'Descriptors' here refer to statements describing what a person at a particular level of language proficiency can do, e.g. able to understand and respond to simple narrative texts, able to converse about simple every day events.

³ 'Exemplars' refer to actual samples of performance illustrating what a person at a particular level of language proficiency can generally do. They can include, for instance, a piece of writing or recording of a dialogue.

Education (or the working groups set up under them) should be expanded to include **human resources professionals** with expertise in language training.

- 2.1.6 The Council should also make reference to the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) in setting the English Language basic competencies for Key Stages 3 to 5. The University Grants Committee (UGC) has recently adopted the IELTS as a common English proficiency assessment for students graduating from the UGC-funded institutions. The IELTS is used worldwide for the assessment of English language competencies in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Its nine-band scale is illustrated by both descriptors and exemplars.

2.2 Assessment for Primary 1 to Secondary 3

- 2.2.1 Assessment tools should be developed to monitor the progress of students and to assess the extent to which they are achieving the basic competencies.
- 2.2.2 The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) has been commissioned by the Education Department⁴ to develop the **Basic Competency Assessment (BCA)** to monitor students' achievement of the basic competencies for Chinese Language and English Language from Key Stages 1 to 3 (i.e. Primary 1 to Secondary 3). It should complete the project in **2006**.
- 2.2.3 The Basic Competency Assessment is a low-stake assessment and monitoring tool to enhance learning and teaching. The System Assessment programme of the BCA will be conducted on samples of local students. It should provide the Government with information on the overall percentage of students achieving the basic competencies in listening, speaking, reading and writing at the end of Key Stages 1 to 3 (i.e. Primary 3, Primary 6 and Secondary 3), and the variance among schools. It should also allow individual schools to understand the overall language standard of their own students as compared to the standard of the student population as a whole. The Government should channel available resources to schools that need help.
- 2.2.4 Through the Student Assessment programme of the BCA - an online self-directed learning programme on reading and listening, school

⁴ The Education Department and the Education and Manpower Bureau have been re-organized with effect from 1 January 2003.

management and teachers could obtain additional information on individual students' learning needs and problems. They should use this information to supplement what they collect through regular internal assessment (e.g. classroom observation and school examinations) to help identify students who require additional support in language learning.

2.2.5 *A question was raised during our informal consultation: What should be done if students fail to achieve the basic competencies in either Chinese or English Language for a particular key stage, say, Key Stage 1?*

- *Some suggested that these students should be required to stay in the same school level (e.g. Primary 3) until they achieved the relevant basic competencies.*
- *Others suggested that students should proceed to the next school level (e.g. Primary 4) but be kept from progressing to the next Key Stage (e.g. staying in Key Stage 1) for the particular language subject they had difficulties in.*
- *Still others argued that students should proceed to the next school level (e.g. Primary 4) and Key Stage (e.g. Key Stage 2), but additional support should be provided to ensure that they achieved the basic competencies in the particular language at the end of the next Key Stage (e.g. Key Stage 2).*

We welcome public views on what actions should be taken to help these students reach the expected level.

2.3 Assessment for Secondary 5 and 7

2.3.1 To monitor students' achievement of the basic competencies for Key Stages 4 and 5 (i.e. Secondary 5 and 7), the Hong Kong Certificate of Education (HKCE) and the Hong Kong Advanced Level (HKAL) examinations are the most widely accepted public examinations for the purpose. The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority is now considering converting its examinations **from norm-referenced⁵ to standards-referenced⁶** where appropriate. We recommend that the Authority should complete the revamping of the **HKCE** Chinese Language and English Language examinations from norm-referenced to standards-referenced ones in **2007**. The Authority

⁵ In a norm-referenced examination, the performance of a candidate is compared to that of other candidates, and grades are awarded according to the relative standing of the candidates in the cohort.

⁶ In a standards-referenced examination, the performance of a candidate is compared to a set of performance standards, and grades are awarded according to the standard attained by the candidates.

should also complete the development of standards-referenced **HKAL** Chinese Language and Culture and Use of English examinations in **2009**, subject to reform of the senior secondary education structure.

- 2.3.2 The Authority should ensure that Grade E (or the passing grade) of the future standards-referenced HKCE Chinese Language and English Language examinations reflects the basic competencies for Key Stage 4 (i.e. Secondary 5 students). Similarly, Grade E of the HKAL Chinese Language and Culture and Use of English examinations should reflect the basic competencies for Key Stage 5 (i.e. Secondary 7 students).

2.4 Language requirements for university admission

- 2.4.1 Secondary 7 students going on to further studies should have the necessary Chinese and English language competencies to benefit from higher education programmes conducted in either of the two languages.
- 2.4.2 With regard to Chinese, students admitted to higher education programmes should demonstrate language competencies not lower than the basic competencies for Key Stage 5 (i.e. Grade E in the HKAL Chinese Language and Culture examination).
- 2.4.3 We note that international students admitted to the undergraduate programmes in the United Kingdom are generally required to demonstrate a level of English equivalent to a pass (i.e. Grade C or above) in the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (GCE O-Level) (Overseas) English examination⁷ or Band 6 in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). While some of the universities in Hong Kong also adopt similar requirement for the admission of, for instance, non-local students, all local universities accept Grade E in the HKAL Use of English examination as the general minimum requirement for local Secondary 7 students. As it is unclear how the level of English represented by a GCE O-Level (Overseas) pass or IELTS Band 6 compares to that of a HKAL Use of English Grade E, we recommend local universities to consider if their present general minimum requirement is adequate, and if not, whether

⁷ Since the mid-1960s, Grade C or above in the HKCE English Language (Syllabus B) examination and its predecessor has been recognised as equivalent to a pass (Grade C or above) in the GCE O-Level (Overseas) English examination, based on regular vetting by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate.

a higher HKAL Use of English grade should be adopted for admission to their English-medium undergraduate programmes.

2.4.4 *A question was raised during our informal consultation: Why is GCE O-Level (Overseas) pass or IELTS Band 6 not adopted by local universities as the general minimum requirement for the admission of all students?*

- *Some suggested that while the HKAL Use of English examination was tailored to the local school curriculum for Secondary 6-7, the GCE O-Level (Overseas) English Language examination and the IELTS were not.*
- *Others argued for benchmarking the HKAL Use of English Grade E against GCE O-Level (Overseas) pass or IELTS Band 6 so that the language requirement for admission to local universities would be comparable to those adopted overseas.*

We welcome public views on these suggestions.

2.5 Basic competencies expected of university graduates and working adults

2.5.1 For **working adults** who wish to assess their **English language competencies**, we recommend that they make use of the IELTS. We shall carry out a study to establish the equivalence between the IELTS band scores and the passing grades of the future Basic Competency Assessments and standards-referenced HKCE and HKAL examinations, which reflect the basic competencies for Key Stages 3 to 5 (i.e. Secondary 3, 5 and 7). This will show the working population and their employers how the IELTS results compare to those of the curriculum-based assessment.

2.5.2 To give **university graduates** a better idea of the English Language basic competencies employers expect of them, we shall consult human resources experts to determine the IELTS band scores that reflect that level of competencies. We encourage professional bodies to similarly specify the level of English expected of their **professional groups** with reference to the IELTS band scores. The basic competencies expected of university graduates and professional groups will likely be higher than those for Key Stage 5 (i.e. Secondary 7).

2.5.3 For the assessment of **Chinese language competencies**, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority should **develop a**

general Chinese proficiency assessment, that is not curriculum-based, to meet the needs of working adults. The Authority should establish, as far as possible, equivalence between the results of this general proficiency assessment and the future Basic Competency Assessments and standards-referenced HKCE and HKAL examinations. For instance, there should be at least three grades in the general Chinese proficiency assessment corresponding to the Chinese Language basic competencies for Key Stages 3, 4 and 5 (i.e. Secondary 3, 5 and 7).

2.5.4 To ensure that the general Chinese proficiency assessment would cater for all stakeholders, including employers of university graduates and professional groups, the Authority should consult human resources experts and professional bodies to determine the levels of Chinese expected of university graduates and professional groups, which are also likely to be higher than the basic competencies for Key Stage 5 (i.e. Secondary 7).

2.5.5 We recommend that working adults with educational attainment at Secondary 3, Secondary 5, Secondary 7 or university graduate level upgrade their Chinese and English through continuing education. They should aim to achieve the basic competencies for Key Stages 3, 4, 5 and university graduates respectively if they had not reached those levels while at school. This would help to ensure their competitiveness in terms of language competencies.

2.5.6 Moreover, we expect university students to make the necessary efforts to upgrade their Chinese and English to the level employers expect of them when they graduate. Tertiary institutions should provide suitable language enhancement programmes to support their students in such efforts.

2.5.7 *A question was raised during our informal consultation: Why are university graduates not required to attain an expected level of Chinese and English before they are granted a degree?*

- *Some argued that university graduates were the cream of the crop and should be subject to higher demands in terms of language proficiency.*
- *Others believed that university education and language proficiency were two separate issues, and the latter should not be made a pre-requisite of a degree award.*

We welcome comments from the public on these views.

2.6 Putonghua proficiency scale for the general public

- 2.6.1 Since **Putonghua** was only introduced into schools as a core subject in 1998, and the social environment affecting students' learning of Putonghua is changing rapidly, it is considered premature to develop learning outcomes or basic competencies for Putonghua for the different Key Stages.
- 2.6.2 The majority of Hong Kong's existing workforce did not learn Putonghua while at school. They now need to upgrade their Putonghua proficiency to meet the growing demand of the workplace. To help them plan and assess their progress in Putonghua learning, we need a scale of proficiency and an appropriate assessment tool that cater to their specific needs (e.g. the need to strengthen both listening and speaking skills).
- 2.6.3 In response to the demand for a mechanism to certify Putonghua proficiency, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority has been offering the Test of Proficiency in Putonghua (TPP) since 1988. To serve the needs of the public better, we have commissioned the Authority to develop a **Putonghua proficiency scale** to illustrate, with descriptors and exemplars, the different levels of Putonghua proficiency certified by the TPP, and to improve the assessment where necessary.

2.7 Employers' demands as driving force

- 2.7.1 We should never under-estimate employers' demands as a driving force behind improvement in language standards. We recommend employers to set clear language requirements for recruitment and promotion. For positions requiring educational attainment at Secondary 3, Secondary 5, Secondary 7, graduate and professional levels, we encourage employers to set their language requirements with reference to the basic competencies expected of these respective education levels.
- 2.7.2 As the largest employer in Hong Kong, the Government should take the lead in adopting the basic competencies as reference in reviewing its language requirements for civil service appointments in future.

CHAPTER 3

HOW DO WE GET THERE?

- CREATING A MORE MOTIVATING LANGUAGE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

3.1 Students' attitude and motivation

- 3.1.1 While we work towards establishing a clear and realistic set of expected language competencies and developing the necessary tools to assess their achievement, we must also strive to **create a more motivating language learning environment** to help our students and workforce achieve those competencies.
- 3.1.2 As part of the review, we conducted in March 2002 a perception survey on students, parents and teachers to ascertain local students' attitude towards language learning and the factors affecting their motivation. 23 primary and 29 secondary schools participated in the survey, with 1,193 questionnaires completed by students, 1,011 by their parents, and 512 by their Chinese and English Language teachers.
- 3.1.3 The survey found that, based on students' self perception, less than 50% of our students were strongly or very strongly motivated to learn Chinese and English, and only 25% had strong or very strong motivation to learn Putonghua. Based on teachers' perception, the proportion of students strongly motivated to learn Chinese and English drops to about 10%.
- 3.1.4 In Hong Kong, most students would appreciate the value of learning Chinese and English well. Good results in the HKCE and HKAL Chinese and English language examinations are essential for admission to Secondary 6 or higher education, and for getting a good job. Examinations have thus acquired a huge importance in our culture. Nevertheless, students in our survey were less likely to feel strongly motivated to learn languages if all they had in mind was the passing of examinations.
- 3.1.5 On the other hand, the survey revealed a significant positive link between students' interest in language subjects and their level of motivation for language learning. Students had a stronger motivation to learn languages if they liked language subjects, had teachers who could arouse their interest in the subjects, or found the content of the subjects interesting.

- 3.1.6 However, only 30% to 55% of the students surveyed said their language teachers had been successful in arousing their interest in the Putonghua, English Language and Chinese Language subjects. When it comes to the content of the subjects, the proportion of students who found the three language subjects interesting drops to 22% to 41%.
- 3.1.7 It is imperative, therefore, that we **raise Hong Kong students' motivation** for language learning, particularly their interest in the relevant language subjects.
- 3.1.8 To stimulate and strengthen students' motivation, all relevant parties must align their objectives and efforts, and work together to create an environment conducive to language learning. The survey findings indicate that -
- (a) **teachers** must be able to arouse students' interest in language subjects by improving their teaching methods such as providing more learning activities and making greater use of multi-media teaching and learning resources;
 - (b) when developing the whole-school language **curriculum**, teachers must take into account the needs, interests and ability levels of their students, and consider how to make language learning more relevant to the daily life of students;
 - (c) **schools** should create an environment that provides more opportunities for the use of English and Putonghua;
 - (d) **parents** must act to support their children's language learning in school, and play an active role in promoting their children's interest in extensive reading; and
 - (e) 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.

3.2 Guiding principles of language learning

- 3.2.1 Before moving on to look at individual factors, we would like to highlight a few guiding principles underlying effective language learning. These are set out below -
- (a) To make language meaningful and useful to the learner, it is essential that the learning and teaching of the four key language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) be integrated.

Listening and speaking skills are pre-requisites for oral communication and should be developed from an early stage;

- (b) Proficiency in a language is more than just the mastery of the four skills. It entails an appreciation of the cultural background as well as the **appropriate use** of the language in a variety of contexts;
- (c) It is conducive to language development if learners are exposed to language(s) at a young age through activities they **can do and enjoy**;
- (d) Language is a tool for communication. It is thus important to enable learners, particularly young ones, to learn a language and **apply it in meaningful and purposeful contexts**;
- (e) **Extensive reading** has been proven to be very beneficial to language learning; and
- (f) A person's intellectual ability and analytical power is intertwined with the development of language ability.

Medium of instruction

- 3.2.2 In relation to the last principle, it is important to note that the overall aim of education is to nurture new generations that are capable of effective communication, life-long learning, innovation, and critical and exploratory thinking. To achieve this aim, a language that is not a barrier in the learning process – for most students, their mother tongue – should be used as the medium of instruction (MOI).
- 3.2.3 If a second language, such as English, is to be adopted as the MOI, three pre-conditions – teachers' proficiency in the language, students' proficiency in the language, and the provision of suitable support measures – must be fulfilled so that the MOI itself does not become a barrier to learning.
- 3.2.4 We support adopting the students' mother tongue as the MOI unless the above three pre-conditions are fulfilled. A review of the MOI policy will be conducted by the Government later this year in conjunction with the review of the secondary school places allocation system. The **review** should re-examine, among other things, the mechanisms used to **ensure that the three pre-conditions are being met** by the secondary schools using or wishing to switch to English as the MOI.

Teaching Chinese Language in Putonghua

- 3.2.5 Since November 2000, the Curriculum Development Council has stated in its Chinese Language curriculum documents that **using Putonghua to teach Chinese Language is the Council's long-term goal**. Under the current MOI policy, Chinese-medium schools may use either Cantonese or Putonghua to teach Chinese Language and other academic subjects. Pending further studies and deliberation, the Council recommended a school-based approach and advised schools to consider their own circumstances in deciding whether to use Putonghua as the MOI for the Chinese Language subject.
- 3.2.6 In the small number of local studies conducted so far, students who learned Chinese Language in Putonghua had all shown improvement in Putonghua where proficiency was assessed. On the other hand, while some of the studies found better performance in Chinese Language among students taught in Putonghua, others showed no difference or some negative outcomes. More studies should be conducted to further understand the conditions necessary for schools to make a successful switch to using Putonghua as the MOI for Chinese Language and prevent possible negative outcomes before a firm policy and timetable can be formulated.
- 3.2.7 We foresee the growing use of written Chinese and Putonghua in both the official and business arenas, and fully endorse the Curriculum Development Council's vision. In the light of its benefit to the learning of Putonghua, we strongly **encourage schools to try using Putonghua to teach Chinese Language** if they consider that they have the pre-conditions for success in place. These schools should ensure that the Chinese Language teachers who teach the subject in Putonghua satisfy the **Language Proficiency Requirement for Putonghua teachers in speaking and classroom language**.
- 3.2.8 In 2000, we launched a Putonghua Summer Immersion Course Subsidy Scheme with support from the Language Fund to provide subsidies to teachers at a maximum of \$10,000 each to attend immersion courses in the mainland. So far, over 400 serving Putonghua and Chinese Language teachers have benefited from the Scheme. We intend to continue with the Scheme, giving priority to serving Chinese Language teachers who are not at the same time

Putonghua teachers⁸. It will help to enhance the Putonghua proficiency of Chinese Language teachers and allow more schools to try teaching Chinese Language in Putonghua.

3.2.9 Some schools have expressed an interest in using their Capacity Enhancement Grant to engage Chinese Language teachers from the mainland to assist them in the switch to Putonghua as the MOI for Chinese Language. We fully support this initiative, provided that the teachers to be engaged hold qualifications that are equivalent to a local degree in Chinese Language and recognised teacher training in the subject.

3.2.10 *A question was raised during our informal consultation: Why should we be so concerned about the necessary conditions for a successful switch?*

- *Some argued that without a firm policy and timetable, schools and teachers had little incentive to try using Putonghua to teach Chinese Language.*
- *In the light of negative outcomes found in some of the local studies, others cautioned against moving forward too quickly without sufficient understanding of possible pitfall.*

We welcome public views on this particular issue of setting a timetable for adopting Putonghua as the MOI for Chinese Language among local schools.

3.3 Curriculum and pedagogy

3.3.1 Curriculum is a central element in language learning at school. Our survey found that students were more likely to be **motivated** to learn a language if what they were being taught was seen to be –

- (a) **appropriate** in depth and breadth;
- (b) **relevant** to their daily life; and
- (c) **stimulating** and interesting.

In terms of pedagogy⁹, students preferred learning activities and more extensive use of multi-media resources.

⁸ Serving Putonghua teachers are already eligible for a separate training subsidy from the Education Department to help them attain the Language Proficiency Requirement for Putonghua teachers.

⁹ ‘Pedagogy’ here refers to teaching methods.

Pre-primary level

- 3.3.2 While there is no formal language curriculum at the pre-primary level, language is an integral part of young children's learning activities. Having consulted a number of local early childhood education experts, we consider that **development of a child's mother tongue should take precedence** over the acquisition of other languages. For most young children in Hong Kong, Cantonese and written Chinese is their mother tongue and should be used as the medium of instruction in pre-primary education.
- 3.3.3 We also appreciate that early exposure to a second language could benefit subsequent language development of young children. While we are aware that the great majority of kindergartens in Hong Kong are providing some form of English, and increasingly Putonghua, activities for their students, we must emphasise the need to ensure that such exposure is -
- (a) developmentally appropriate;
 - (b) authentic;
 - (c) accurate;
 - (d) in context;
 - (e) pressure-free; and
 - (f) enjoyable (e.g. through songs and games).
- 3.3.4 To provide better support to kindergartens and child care centres, the Education and Manpower Bureau should –
- (a) disseminate good practices in teaching the mother tongue (i.e. Cantonese and written Chinese) and good strategies for providing effective and appropriate exposure to Putonghua and English for young children; and
 - (b) work with the Hong Kong Education City to provide, through its resource library, a more comprehensive collection of research findings and teaching resources relevant to pre-primary language acquisition for teachers' and parents' reference.
- 3.3.5 Kindergarten teachers and child care workers are important language models for young children. Kindergarten and child care centre operators should use the **Language Proficiency Requirement for English and Putonghua teachers in speaking**, or its equivalent, as reference in the recruitment, deployment and professional

development of staff.

Primary and secondary level

3.3.6 For primary and secondary education, we support the shift **from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred approach** in the current curriculum reform. New curriculum frameworks are set out in the Chinese Language and English Language Education Key Learning Area Curriculum Guides (Primary 1 to Secondary 3) issued by the Curriculum Development Council in September 2002. They seek to build on existing effective practices in language learning and teaching while promoting new developments conducive to broadening and enriching learners' learning experiences.

3.3.7 On English Language Education, new emphases include –

- (a) teaching of **grammar** in context, and providing learners with opportunities for using language purposefully in authentic situations;
- (b) teaching of **phonics** in meaningful contexts to develop learners' speaking (pronunciation), writing (spelling) and reading skills, and to facilitate their acquisition of stress, rhythm and intonation through shared reading at primary level;
- (c) helping learners enhance their **vocabulary** building skills through purposeful tasks and meaningful contexts;
- (d) enhancing language learning through flexible use of a wide variety of quality print and non-print resources;
- (e) ensuring learning and teaching materials and activities are relevant to the **learners' interests**, experience, needs and aspirations;
- (f) facilitating the development of a '**reading to learn**' culture; using language arts to promote reading and help learners develop their critical thinking skills and creativity; and
- (g) creating a **language-rich environment** through promoting cross-curricular approaches¹⁰ to learning (e.g. language camps and fun days).

¹⁰ Language is acquired not only through the language subjects, but in all subjects and often beyond the classroom. Hence, teachers of all subjects should collaborate to support language learning both within and beyond the school.

- 3.3.8 On Chinese Language Education, new emphases include –
- (a) enriching students’ **balanced and holistic learning experience** in listening, speaking, reading and writing;
 - (b) helping students master Putonghua and the simplified Chinese characters to facilitate communication with the mainland and other regions;
 - (c) enhancing **cultural education**, and cultivating students’ understanding of, reflection on, and identification with the Chinese culture;
 - (d) heightening students’ interest in **reading** and expanding its range and quantity; and
 - (e) developing and flexibly employing **diversified learning materials** to cater to the needs of the students and the social development of the times.

- 3.3.9 In line with the curriculum reform and in the light of our survey findings, the Education and Manpower Bureau should –
- (a) help schools review their **whole-school language curriculum and pedagogy** to ensure that students find language learning relevant and interesting;
 - (b) continue to provide support, with resources from the Language Fund, to schools that wish to organise **English language camps** and other co-curricular language activities for their students (following on the success of our pilot project on English language camps in March 2002, which provides a model for similar camps organised by individual schools on their own initiative); and
 - (c) ensure that the 600 plus native English-speaking teachers (**NETs**) currently working in our primary and secondary schools are **properly deployed** to achieve the objectives of enriching the language environment of schools, developing students’ interest in learning English, and helping local teachers to develop innovative teaching methods.

3.4 Language teachers

- 3.4.1 Teachers were ranked by students in our survey as the most important factor in affecting whether they liked a language subject or not. They have **the most direct impact** on students’ interest in learning

languages.

Preparation of language teachers

- 3.4.2 Effective language teachers need to be **proficient** in the language they teach, have a good grounding in **subject knowledge**, and be acquainted with the latest theories and practices in **language teaching and learning**. They synthesise and apply their knowledge and skills to motivate and help their students to improve language ability.
- 3.4.3 Language teachers should be familiar with the skills in teaching, e.g., reading, writing, listening, speaking, vocabulary, syntax, language structure and language arts. They should be acquainted with the latest developmental psychology and education theories, school and classroom management skills, education research methodology and education policy. Language teachers should also cultivate an interest in reading and an appreciation of the relevant cultures.
- 3.4.4 In terms of subject knowledge, language teachers should possess linguistic knowledge of the language (e.g. an understanding of the sound, structural and meaning systems of Chinese and English) as well as knowledge of language education. For English Language teachers, knowledge of the social-cultural aspects of English as an international language and that of second language acquisition and bilingualism are also essential.
- 3.4.5 As a basis for designing pre-service as well as in-service training programmes for Chinese Language and English Language teachers, we have drafted a **framework of professional development** for the reference of the Education and Manpower Bureau and local teacher education providers. The framework covers subject knowledge, pedagogical skills, proficiency in the language, and the general professional understanding, values and attitudes that language teachers should acquire before they enter the profession and seek to upgrade throughout their career.
- 3.4.6 Teachers are important language models for their students. We support the Language Proficiency Requirement for Teachers and urge all English Language and Putonghua teachers to meet the requirement as soon as possible. School management should closely monitor the progress of their teachers in meeting the requirement and ensure that their teachers do so within the specified time frame.

Qualifications of language teachers

- 3.4.7 Schools should, as far as possible, **recruit teachers with the following qualifications** to teach languages **from the 2003/04 school year** –
- (a) a Bachelor of Education degree in the relevant language subject; or
 - (b) a first degree in the relevant language subject and a Postgraduate Diploma or Certificate in Education (PGDE or PCed) with a major in that language subject.
- 3.4.8 In cases where a school finds it necessary to appoint a new teacher without the above-mentioned qualifications to teach language, it should ensure that the candidate holds at least a sub-degree, and should only offer the appointment on the following condition –
- (a) if the new recruit holds a first degree in the relevant language subject, that he/she should complete the PGDE or PCed programme with a major in that language subject within three years of taking up the employment; or
 - (b) if the new recruit holds a first degree with a major that is not relevant to the language subject he/she teaches, that he/she should complete the PGDE or PCed programme with a major in that language subject and a postgraduate level programme focusing on the subject knowledge of the particular language within five years of taking up the employment; or
 - (c) if the new recruit does not hold a first degree, that he/she should complete a Bachelor of Education programme with a major in the relevant language subject within five years of taking up the employment.
- 3.4.9 To help new teachers referred to in paragraph 3.4.8(b) acquire the necessary subject knowledge, we encourage teacher education providers to custom design postgraduate level programme for these teachers.
- 3.4.10 Our long-term goal is to develop a professional language teaching force with the qualifications specified in paragraph 3.4.7. School management should encourage serving language teachers to acquire those qualifications, and move progressively towards deploying only teachers with such qualifications to teach languages.

- 3.4.11 According to the Teacher Survey conducted by the Education Department in 2001, about 16 000 (91%) out of 17 500 serving Chinese Language teachers and 10 000 (67%) out of 15 000 serving English Language teachers in all local ordinary primary and secondary schools had post-secondary education or teacher training in the language subject they taught. However, only about 2 400 (14%) serving Chinese Language teachers and 1 900 (13%) serving English Language teachers held a Bachelor of Education degree in the relevant language subject, or a first degree in the relevant language subject¹¹ and a PGDE or PCed with a major in that language subject. To support and encourage serving language teachers to acquire the qualifications specified in paragraph 3.4.7, we recommend setting up an **incentive grant scheme** to provide each teacher with a grant covering 50% of course fees, subject to a maximum of \$30,000.
- 3.4.12 As a form of recognition, we recommend that language teachers who have acquired the specified qualifications and with at least three years of teaching experience should be given the title of “Professional Chinese Language Teacher” or “Professional English Language Teacher”.
- 3.4.13 *A question was raised during our informal consultation: Why a deadline is not set for all serving language teachers to acquire the specified qualifications?*
- *Some were of the view that nothing could be achieved without a deadline.*
 - *Others were concerned that a deadline would put additional pressure on language teachers, who were already required to meet the Language Proficiency Requirement for Teachers.*
 - *Still others argued that some experienced teachers were very effective even without the specified qualifications and should not be forced to acquire them.*
- 3.4.14 *On the other hand, those who were in favour of a more positive approach asked: Why can we not offer an increment in addition to a title as recognition for the language teachers who have acquired the specified qualifications?*
- *Some agreed that the offer of an increment and special*

¹¹ Relevant language subjects refer to only Chinese/English Language and Chinese/English Literature in the Teacher Survey.

recognition would highlight the importance of acquiring the specified qualifications.

- *Others felt that financial incentive and special recognition should not be necessary to entice teachers to pursue continuing professional development, which was a responsibility of all serving teachers.*
- *Still others were concerned about the huge recurrent financial implication of providing an increment to all languages teachers who have acquired the specified qualifications and the knock-on effect on teachers of other subjects.*

We would appreciate public views on the best approach to motivating serving language teachers to pursue further education or training relevant to their profession.

Support for curriculum reform

- 3.4.15 Besides a good grounding in subject knowledge, pedagogy and proficiency, we recommend providing additional support to language subject panel chairpersons (or curriculum leaders) and language teachers to ensure the success of the curriculum reform.
- 3.4.16 We need to equip the **chairpersons of language subject panels** (or curriculum leaders) with the necessary knowledge and skills to provide leadership in adapting the language curricula to suit the specific needs of their schools. The 16-week full-time professional upgrading courses currently run by the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd) will be revamped to provide more intensive and focused training courses for Chinese Language and English Language panel chairpersons (or curriculum leaders), concentrating on curriculum leadership, development and management. To ensure that the training will meet the needs of front-line practitioners and address the issues they face in teaching and learning, the HKIEd should seek inputs from panel chairpersons (or curriculum leaders) on the design of the courses with regard to both the content and the mode of delivery.
- 3.4.17 To support language panel chairpersons (or curriculum leaders) in implementing the curriculum reform, we must also acquaint all serving language teachers with the latest **pedagogical** knowledge and skills required for the curriculum reform. We recommend engaging experienced teachers (serving or recently retired) with outstanding teaching practice for three years. They should undergo training in

mentoring and change management skills as well as the latest innovations in pedagogy. This group could then become a **special task force of teaching consultants**. Its members would be stationed in districts to work with individual schools, with a view to enhancing their pedagogical capability. They will guide and encourage language teachers to collaborate on integrating new knowledge and skills into their teaching practice. They will also help to build district-based networks among language teachers to facilitate ongoing professional development. The initial target is to engage 180 teachers on a full-time basis or the equivalent on a part-time basis.

- 3.4.18 Apart from language panel chairpersons (or curriculum leaders) and language teachers, the support and leadership of **school principals** hold the key to the success of curriculum reform at school level. We recommend that curriculum reform and change management should form the core part of the continuing professional development of principals.
- 3.4.19 On the overall demand for and supply of language teachers, the Government should monitor the situation closely and make adjustments to the provision of training places as and when necessary. The Government should also consider how to increase the opportunities for language teachers to engage in continuing professional development beyond the qualifications referred to in paragraph 3.4.7.

3.5 School management

- 3.5.1 Language panel chairpersons (or curriculum leaders) and language teachers must have the **professional and administrative support of school management** to develop and implement a language curriculum and a teaching approach that best suit the needs and interests of students.
- 3.5.2 One of the most frequent and justified complaints of language teachers is their **heavy workload**. School management should make better use of the additional resources provided in recent years and critically review the school's work processes to **reduce the non-teaching workload** of language teachers so that they can focus on improving the effectiveness of language teaching and learning. In support of such efforts, the Education and Manpower Bureau should disseminate good practices more widely for the reference of school management.

- 3.5.3 In terms of professional support, school management should –
- (a) familiarise itself with the principles of the curriculum reform and provide the necessary leadership and support for its implementation in school (see also paragraph 3.4.18);
 - (b) **discourage an examination-oriented culture** and the inappropriate and ineffective use of homework and assessment, such as excessive drilling and dictation;
 - (c) **explain to parents** the school's language teaching approaches;
 - (d) promote a **language-across-the curriculum approach** and involve teachers of all subjects in supporting students' language learning;
 - (e) nurture a high quality team of language teachers by **encouraging teachers to engage in continuing professional development**, and progressively reduce deploying teachers without post-secondary education or teacher training in the relevant language subjects to teach languages;
 - (f) **promote greater use of information technology and multi-media resources** to make language learning more interactive and interesting; and
 - (g) explore and **open up new opportunities for experiential learning** through, e.g. language camps and fun days, debates, speech and drama activities, immersion programmes and placements in local commercial firms.

3.6 Parents

- 3.6.1 Parents have most day-to-day contact with students and significant direct influence on their attitude towards language learning. Notwithstanding the fact that parents are faced with competing demands from both work and home, they should make the best effort to spend more time to **build a good relationship with their children from a young age** so as to –
- (a) nurture a good reading habit in their children;
 - (b) expose their children to a wider variety of high quality language learning resources including those found in the mass media; and
 - (c) stimulate their children's desire to communicate and build their confidence in listening, speaking, reading and writing through giving appropriate support and encouragement.

- 3.6.2 We support the launching of a comprehensive parent education programme and the large-scale promotion of a **reading campaign** by the Education Department. They would help parents understand what they could do to encourage their children to widen their horizons and develop good language ability.
- 3.6.3 The **parent education programme** should –
- (a) encourage and show parents how to provide support to their children’s language learning in school;
 - (b) help parents recognise that too much emphasis on examination results and excessive drilling and tutorial classes are not effective means to sustain children’s interest in language learning in the long term;
 - (c) help parents understand that raising their children’s motivation for language learning is the key to enhancing their children’s language standard; and
 - (d) encourage parents to support language teachers in the implementation of the curriculum reform.
- 3.6.4 Parents can go a long way towards creating a conducive language learning environment and raising their children’s interest in learning languages.

3.7 The wider community

The mass media

- 3.7.1 Beyond a student’s school and home, the mass media is one of the most potent agents of public education. Most people come into contact with the mass media, in particular television and newspapers, every day. The quality of language used in the mass media has a great impact, therefore, on both students and the wider community.
- 3.7.2 Our survey found that **television was the most popular mass medium among students**. Those who watched English and Putonghua television programmes had a much stronger motivation to learn the two languages. However, 36% of the students surveyed said they never or very seldom watched English television programmes, while 65% said they never or very seldom watched Putonghua programmes.

- 3.7.3 To make television a better resource for learning languages and to promote its greater use among students, we recommend that -
- (a) programmes with high viewing ratings on the Chinese channel should be broadcast with **Cantonese/Putonghua NICAM**;
 - (b) **all** English programmes on the English channel should be **provided with English subtitles** and priority should be given to programmes for children and young people; and
 - (c) each free English channel should devote the 6 - 7 p.m. time-slot, on at least two weekdays, to **programmes that students find interesting**, to be selected on the advice of students, teachers and parents.
- 3.7.4 We have submitted the recommendations in paragraph 3.7.3 above to the Broadcasting Authority during the public consultation conducted last year on the renewal of the domestic free television programme service licences of Asia Television Limited (ATV) and Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB). We note that in response, the Authority will require ATV and TVB to provide –
- (a) English subtitles for all news, weather, current affairs programmes and emergency announcements on the English channels by 1 December 2004. The Authority will conduct a review in 2007 to assess if this requirement should be extended to other programme types in the light of community feedback; and
 - (b) a minimum of two hours of programmes with educational value targeting teenagers per week between the hours of 5 p.m. and 7 p.m. on the English channels, with English subtitles.
- 3.7.5 To **promote the teaching and learning of English through television programmes** among teachers and students, the Language Fund has provided support for a pilot project to develop learning materials and activities on the basis of two selected television programmes. The project will be launched in the second half of the 2002/03 school year.
- 3.7.6 In the print media, newspapers are the most widely read publications in Hong Kong. The Language Fund will sponsor the Annual Hong Kong News Award to **recognise Chinese and English news and headline writing of high language standard.**

3.7.7 The Workplace English Campaign and Putonghua Month 2002 have successfully enlisted the voluntary help of pop stars in spreading key messages. Further consideration should be given to **promoting language learning through pop culture**, for example, by getting pop stars to perform in English and Putonghua.

Life-long learning

3.7.8 While all relevant parties strive to create a motivating language learning environment, learners should also take the initiative and responsibility to upgrade their language abilities and improve their competitiveness. We urge members of the public to make the best use of the assistance available from the Government to meet the increasing language demands of the workplace, such as -

- (a) The **Workplace English Training Funding Scheme**, which provides subsidies for individual employees to upgrade their English, and for professional bodies and trade organisations to develop English training courses that are not readily available in the market. Up to the end of November 2002, about 10 000 individuals have reached the English benchmark relevant to their job types. Another 8 000 are currently pursuing their studies;
- (b) The **Continuing Education Fund**, which provides subsidies for training in Chinese, English and Putonghua to non-degree-holders aged 18 to 60. Since the Fund was launched in June 2002, over 3,000 applications for language-related training subsidies have been approved; and
- (c) Language training programmes offered by the **Employee Retraining Board**, which have so far benefited over 55 000 persons, aged 30 or above, who are affected by economic restructuring.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

- 4.1 It is vital that we raise the language standards of the community if we are to successfully meet the challenges of tomorrow and consolidate Hong Kong's position as Asia's world city.
- 4.2 Language learning is a complex issue. Both the education and non-education sectors have their roles to play. The Government needs to strengthen communication and collaboration with key stakeholders to ensure that all parties work together to support language learning in Hong Kong. Beyond the realm of language education, the Government should consider whether a more explicit and comprehensive **language policy** should be adopted to promote biliteracy and trilingualism in both the public and private sectors of the community.
- 4.3 As the advisory body on language education both inside and outside the school system, we shall monitor and follow up with relevant Government and educational bodies to ensure that their policies and programmes work in sync to achieve the objectives of raising the overall language standards of our population.
- 4.4 We welcome your views on the findings and recommendations of this review. Please send them in writing by post, fax or e-mail to the SCOLAR Support Unit on or before 28 February 2003 –
- Mail address: 17/F, Murray Building
Garden Road
Central
Hong Kong
(Attn: Language Education Review)
- E-mail address: pcssu@emb.gov.hk
- Fax number: 3150 8018
- For enquiries, please call 2186 7191. To see the full text of the review report for public consultation, please visit our website at www.language-education.com or contact the SCOLAR Support Unit.
- 4.5 After collating your comments and opinions, we will submit our final recommendations to the Government.

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON LANGUAGE EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH**

TERMS OF REFERENCE

To advise the Government on language education issues in general, and in particular -

- (a) to advise the overall policy on language education, including the medium of instruction;
- (b) to advise on the setting of language standards, including general goals for language learning at different levels of education and specific language attainment targets at each stage of education;
- (c) to advise on measures to be adopted to attain the standards mentioned in (b) above;
- (d) to identify research and development projects which are necessary for the enhancement of language proficiency and language in education, and to implement or oversee the satisfactory completion of such projects;
- (e) to co-ordinate all research and development activities relating to language proficiency by relevant agencies; monitor their progress, evaluate their effectiveness, and make recommendations to the government accordingly;
- (f) to develop and promote a public education and information programme in respect of language proficiency issues; and
- (g) to advise the Trustee of the Language Fund on policies and procedures governing the operation of the Language Fund, and to provide such assistance as the Trustee may require to support, directly or indirectly, the enhancement of the language proficiency of the community.

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON LANGUAGE EDUCATION
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