

## Section 2: Language Education

### Target

The language policy of the HKSAR Government is to enable students and the working population to be biliterate (in Chinese and English) and trilingual (in Cantonese, Putonghua and English).

### Last Year's Progress

#### Standing Committee on Language Education and Research's (SCOLAR) Language Education Review

In early 2001, the SCOLAR began a review of the language education policy and measures in Hong Kong. Literature review, school visits, in-depth discussions with key stakeholders as well as a survey on students' motivation for language learning were conducted as part of the review. After almost two years of research and deliberation, the SCOLAR issued a consultation document titled 'Action Plan to Raise Language Standards in Hong Kong' in January 2003 for an eight-week public consultation. A total of 193 submissions were received from education-related bodies, schools, tertiary institutions, political parties, and individual members of the public.

The following recommendations made by the SCOLAR are generally supported by the public:

#### (1) Specifying Assessment Competencies Expected of Students and Workforce

- Basic competencies in Chinese and English expected of students, university graduates and junior professionals should be specified.

#### Students

- The Curriculum Development Council should take into account both educational and vocational considerations in setting the basic competencies for students at the level of Secondary 3 and above.
- For assessing students in Primary 1 to Secondary 3, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) is working on a Basic Competency Assessment for implementation starting from 2003 to 2006.

- The HKEAA will develop standards-referenced Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examinations on Chinese and English for assessing Secondary 5 students from 2007. It will also try to complete the development of standards-referenced Hong Kong Advanced Level Examinations on Chinese and English for assessing Secondary 7 students from 2009.
- The Government and educators should channel resources to help those students who require additional support to achieve the basic competencies expected of them.

### Working adults

- Working adults should enhance their language abilities through continuing education to attain the language competencies expected of them. Employers, including the Government, should adopt the basic competencies as language requirements for recruitment and promotion.
- To assess their English language proficiency, working adults can make use of the internationally recognised English tests available in Hong Kong. We also recommend the HKEAA to develop a general Chinese proficiency assessment suitable for local working adults, to help them assess their Chinese language proficiency.

## (2) Creating a More Motivating Language Learning Environment

- School management, teachers, parents, the mass media, and Government should work together to create a more motivating language learning environment for local students and working adults.
- The SCOLAR considers that those teachers who possess specified qualifications to teach languages should have a good grounding in subject knowledge, and be acquainted with the latest theories and practices in language teaching and learning. Teachers should flexibly employ diversified teaching methods to cater to students' interests, needs and abilities. They should also suitably adjust the curriculum to enhance students' interests in language subjects.
- All English Language and Putonghua teachers should meet the Language Proficiency Requirement within the Government-specified time frame.

- New language teachers should hold a Bachelor of Education degree majoring in the relevant language subject or both a first degree and a Postgraduate Diploma or Certificate in Education majoring in that language subject. As for serving language teachers, the SCOLAR recommends that an incentive grant be provided to encourage these teachers to acquire the specified qualifications.
- To facilitate curriculum reform, the SCOLAR supports the Hong Kong Institute of Education to conduct more intensive and focused professional upgrading courses, concentrating on curriculum leadership, development and management, for chairpersons of language subject panels or curriculum leader.
- In addition, a task force of district-based teaching consultants should be set up to help individual schools improve their teachers' knowledge and skills in language teaching.
- School management should gradually assign only those teachers with the required qualifications to teach language subjects and critically review their schools' work processes and deployment of resources to reduce the non-teaching workload of language teachers.
- Moreover, school management should strengthen language-across-the-curriculum approach, promote greater use of information technology and multi-media resources, open up new opportunities for experiential learning, and actively explain to parents the school's language teaching approaches.
- Parents should cultivate in their children an interest in reading and language learning, and support teachers in implementing the curriculum reform.
- 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) Medium of Instruction (MOI)

- 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 English as the MOI for all subjects.
- 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. Schools that believe they have the preconditions for success in place are strongly encouraged to try using Putonghua in teaching Chinese Language. As a basic condition, 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.

#### *Tasks Ahead for the Coming Year*

After taking into account views received from the public, the SCOLAR has forwarded its final recommendations to the Government for consideration. The SCOLAR has planned to issue its final report in end June or early July, and by that time the Government will also put forward timetables for implementing various recommendations.