

Preliminary Proposal on Review of University Language Policy

I. TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE QAC TASK FORCE

The QAC Task Force on Review of University Language Policy (“Task Force”) was constituted by the University in October 2016. The mandate of the Task Force includes an assessment of the efficacy and maintenance of the current University Language Policy (ULP) and “Guidelines” (see **Section III** below) in respect of the recent graduation of the first cohort of undergraduate students under the four-year degree (“3+3+4”) reforms. At the University’s 4th Senate meeting held in June 2016, the Chairman requested that a Task Force be established to undertake the timely and “holistic examination of the ULP” including, as necessary and appropriate, proposing changes, improvements, and any pertinent recommendations to the University by the end of January 2017. Any such recommendations carried forward, subsequently reviewed and endorsed by the University and its stakeholders, would (at least optimally) be implemented for AY 2017–2018.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The University has had an operable ULP in force since 2003. (See [Appendix 1](#) for a detailed digest of specific University actions taken in respect of the ULP since then.) The Task Force notes two aspects of this historical record for particular emphasis: (1) the University’s consistent emphasis upon and affirmation of English as the Medium of Instruction (MOI) for all curricular and co-curricular learning on campus; and (2) the increasing weight accorded by the University to employer opinion when responding, in support of the English MOI, to a series of interim surveys (2003, 2006, and 2013) conducted by the Education Bureau (EDB) of the Government of the HKSAR.

III. CURRENT GUIDELINES, STAKEHOLDERS’ INPUT, AND DISPOSITION

- (1) The Task Force draws attention to the existing “Guidelines” for the ULP currently in force as recently revised and endorsed by the University’s Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) in November 2016. (See [Appendix 2](#).) In form of a concise layperson’s summary, the current ULP and its implementation under the current “Guidelines” follows the commitment to the English MOI formally adopted by the University in 2003 (CARC Minutes, 2003). The ULP’s affirmation of the English MOI principle was subsequently made subject to an “exemption” procedure actionable after AY 2011–2012 (6th Senate meeting, 28 June 2012). Obtaining “exemption” from the English MOI for selected academic curricula currently requires annual Language Policy Implementation (LPI) and Medium of Instruction (MOI) plans duly submitted to the QAC which, pending successful confirmation by the University Senate, exempts curricula integrally “related to Chinese language and culture” and delivering “comparative or interdisciplinary elements involving Chinese materials, texts, and culture”. The ULP was subsequently reviewed, endorsed, and updated in AY 2014–2015, with the QAC and Senate further resolving that “mixed mode MOI” (within individual courses) would **not** be permissible under the ULP and that “dominant” MOI must likewise be declared and endorsed by all academic curricula, again as confirmed by the University Senate. Since AY 2014–2015, moreover, the University has required all Faculties and Departments, via the QAC, to report increasingly detailed information via the annual LPI and MOI reporting mechanisms.

- (2) In conducting its review, the Task Force has undertaken a thorough consultation of all pertinent stakeholders to the ULP and its implementation, receiving input at various public events through the autumn of 2016 from various student constituencies (Ug, TPg, and RPg), administrative staff, and faculty in diverse roles (ranging from front-line teachers to unit managers). The Task Force will enjoin these same, diverse stakeholders to additional consultation on its preliminary findings and proposed recommendations in February/March 2017 in advance of formal submission of its report to the Senate (via QAC) and University management.
- (3) The Task Force is disposed to be as widely consultative as is practically feasible given the time constraints, ever mindful of the University's historical commitment to the English MOI (since 2003), as well as its adherence to the English-language medium in the broader social and community context of "biliterate-trilingual" learning for our students (兩文三語). We likewise affirm that its unique, trilingual, and biliterate social context establishes Hong Kong as one of the most vibrant and competitive learning environments anywhere in the world. Accordingly, it falls to the Task Force to ensure that the ULP continues to harness only the most caring, serviceable, and affirming aspects of this learning environment in support of the whole-person development of our University's graduates moving forward.

IV. BENCHMARKING

The Task Force has conducted preliminary research as to "best practices" manifested in the operative MOI and language policies operating elsewhere at our sister tertiary institutions in Hong Kong. (See [Appendix 3](#).) While not directly cited in the several recommendations that follow, several of the practices and language policies in force at other local universities have informed our positive and inclusive approach to the set of common predicaments and potentials all institutes of higher learning in Hong Kong share.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TASK FORCE

Preamble: University Language Policy Statement

The Task Force resolves that the over-arching mission and aims of the University are best achieved in the education of students to reach the highest intellectual, academic, and workplace standards in broader national and international contexts. Within China, internationally, as well as in service to the local community in Hong Kong, our graduates' employment prospects and meaningful achievement of life opportunities increasingly depend upon language competencies in Putonghua and in English complementing native fluency in Cantonese.

Justification

The overall justification for the University Language Policy, accordingly, should be based resolutely upon our students not only achieving sufficient proficiency in English and Putonghua in the near term; but also, when using a gradual approach, seeking to build a foundation whereby our graduates may subsequently achieve mastery in these two world languages. Such will allow the graduates of our University not only to communicate more effectively as proud inheritors of the Chinese origins of humanistic learning locally, in Hong Kong, but also as whole persons contributing to the

knowledge-based economy on the global stage where international perspectives and intercultural awareness remain crucial to the fulfilment of our University's mission.

Rationale

The University Language Policy is proposed in the interest of students' learning experience with a view to enhancing the quality and educational value of their learning.

Affirmations

The Task Force affirms that:

- (1) the “biliterate and trilingual” policy (兩文三語) offers a flexible and sufficient basis for the present review of the scope, efficacy, and proposed changes to the current ULP;
- (2) English is the MOI for the University as a whole;
- (3) students should graduate with a desired level of proficiency in Putonghua for communicative purposes, career training, and intercultural awareness; and
- (4) while perhaps assumed, the pride in and commitment to Cantonese language, literature, and cultural heritage should be addressed and strengthened in the ULP.

Recommendations

The Task Force accordingly recommends that:

- (1) greater opportunities be provided for the learning of English, Putonghua, and other (non-Chinese) languages in immersion learning environments;
- (2) local Cantonese-speaking Chinese-proficient learners be trained and prepared for communicating in English competently;
- (3) proactive steps be taken at the level of course design and in-class teaching to create more embracing curricula for a greater diversity of student backgrounds on-campus—i.e. international students, local Cantonese-speaking students deficient in Chinese literacy, and Putonghua-speaking students lacking Cantonese proficiency—including more care and attention dedicated specifically to the holistic learning and well-being of our students from greater China as well as overseas;
- (4) English- and Putonghua-language credit-bearing curricula be revisited with operational adjustments made in the direction of specific purposes (academic and non-academic) (e.g. English in the disciplines and workplace/career training courses); and
- (5) a supportive and caring on-campus learning environment be otherwise established, maintained, and enhanced in the direction of a formalized Major programme (or comparable set of courses

achieving breadth as well as depth) for Cantonese language instruction, culture, and traditional heritage.

Concrete Actions

In support of the above recommendations, the Task Force proposes the following concrete actions:

- (1) an exclusively English-language curriculum at the General Education (GE) curriculum Level 1 courses (*excluding* the provision of language courses meeting University graduation requirements) for *all* academic units of the University by 2021, thereby fostering
 - (a) increased classroom diversification;
 - (b) broader access to effective English-language learning and assessment for Chinese-speaking students;
 - (c) adequate access to and full accomplishments of the PILOs of the GE curriculum for non-Chinese speaking students; and
 - (d) the substantial and comfortable delivery, in English, of Chinese ideas, themes, and values accessible to introductory learners not possessing adequate fluency or literacy in any Chinese language.

- (2) core credit-bearing Putonghua courses shall be offered in the direction of specific purposes, career training, and intercultural awareness for all students provided that:
 - (a) such courses benefit from an in-house diagnostic cum exemption test in order to determine meaningfully the extent of prior student knowledge and how it fits present aims and objectives for classroom learning;
 - (b) the teaching of *pinyin* be made strictly and apparently relevant to applicable in-class pedagogies and objectives;
 - (c) the calculation of student performance in such courses not be computed as part of the cumulative GPA, but assessed on a distinction/pass/fail basis; and
 - (d) students, however, may be allowed to opt for performance assessment that does contribute to their cumulative GPA.

(See [Appendix 4](#) for a diagram on the proposed paths for fulfilling Putonghua requirement.)

- (3) greater attention needs to be taken when ensuring English language proficiency of all teachers working at the University at the point of recruitment, including resources dedicated to enhancing staff members' English proficiency, as appropriate, well after the point of hire;

- (4) any exemption from ULP provisions pertaining to the delivery of the English MOI shall be standardized subject to specific and actionable criteria to be applied consistently rather than permissioned ad hoc or annually;

- (5) academic units so exempted from the ULP for any subset of their courses must nevertheless make sufficient English-medium courses available to non-Chinese speaking students thereby enabling them to be able to complete their given Major programmes as pedagogically appropriate and justifiable;

- (6) the establishment of a steering committee to explore the future viability and feasibility of an academic concentration (and, eventually, a degree-granting programme) in Cantonese language, literature, and culture;
- (7) the formal establishment of a Cantonese-language learning programme of depth, practicality, and interest for all non-Cantonese-speaking students;
- (8) the revisiting of proficiency baselines deemed reasonable (and of funding support for achieving them) when meeting current English- and Putonghua-language graduation requirements, including securing adequate provision of the funding for language proficiency assessment, e.g. GSLPA (the Graduating Students' Language Proficiency Assessment), COPA and/or IELTS entry- and exit-testing);
- (9) the establishment of minimum language assessment weightings across *all* courses of the University without exception or exemption; and
- (10) the enhancement of "other Language" learning and curricula on campus, distinct from Chinese and English, and in support of other international languages of currency in general.

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QAC Task Force on
Review of University Language Policy

8 March 2017