



SCOLAR

語常會

**STANDING COMMITTEE
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語文教育及研究常務委員會**

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**Employers satisfied with the English proficiency
of graduate employees: SCOLAR's survey**

A survey commissioned by the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) suggests that Hong Kong employers are generally satisfied with the English language proficiency of local university graduate employees.

“The results remind us that our prevailing wisdom that the English standard of our younger generation today is seriously lagging behind that of their counterparts in the old days might not be entirely accurate,” Chairman of SCOLAR Mr Michael Tien said today (November 28).

The survey was conducted by the Hong Kong Policy Research Institute (HKPRI) between September and October 2005 to tap views of local employers in the private sector on English language competencies expected of local university graduate employees. A summary of the survey is at Annex A.

The Institute carried out in-depth interviews with leading establishment(s) (most of which employing between 500 and over 1,000 staff members, and in any case not less than 50) in seven major industry sectors in Hong Kong (manufacturing & construction; wholesale & retail trades, import & export trades; restaurants & hotels; transport, logistics, storage & communications; financing, insurance & real estate; business service; and community, social & personal services, and others). A telephone survey on the subject with 500 business enterprises primarily small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in the above sectors was also carried out.

Survey results showed that the level of English language competencies expected of local university graduate employees for different categories of jobs by leading corporations in various industries range from IELTS (the International English Language Testing System) 5.5 equivalent to IELTS 7.0 equivalent; and SMEs averaged from IELTS 5.58 equivalent (in the case of the finance, insurance and real estate sectors) to IELTS 6.30 equivalent (in the case of communications sector).

Earlier in 2004, SCOLAR invited employers, including the HKSAR Government, multi-national and local large corporations and SMEs, to nominate employees having graduated from local universities for one to three years and considered to be satisfactorily proficient in English to take the IELTS test. About 200 took part in the test. Around 85% of those nominated by their employers in the private sector attained a level in the 5.5 – 7.5 range, with an average attainment of Level 6.5. The result of the study is summarised at Annex B.

HKPRI's survey results were also compared to the results of the Common English Proficiency Assessment Scheme, in which the IELTS was also used as the assessment tool for testing final-year undergraduate students.

Earlier this year, 8,700 local final-year undergraduates participated in the said scheme. The average overall score was Level 6.64, with some 87% of the students in the 6.0 – 7.5 range, meaning that they were “competent” or “good” users” in English. The range is also commonly adopted as a benchmark for the purpose of recruitment of university graduate employees overseas.

“The numbers speak for themselves. A vast majority of our local graduates are competent enough to attain the levels of proficiency expected by their prospective employers,” Mr Tien commented.

“We do not intend to hold onto these figures and be complacent about our students’ performance. The results show that our work in promoting the importance of good language skills in recent years is in the right direction and we should be optimistic. Of course, the community, including the education sector, the Government, businesses, and all other relevant stakeholders, must not stop striving to keep up with Hong Kong’s increasing aspiration in language proficiencies,” he said.

SME employers in various sectors were also asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with the English language competences of local university graduate employees. According to the survey, employers were in general satisfied with the English language competences of graduate employees having graduated for less than one year. A relatively lower proportion of establishments in the manufacturing and construction sectors, and in the community, social & personal services, and others sectors are satisfied with the English language competences of these employees. The Institute believes these sector specific phenomenon might have to do with individual sector's competitive edge in recruiting the cream of university graduates.

For large corporations, with the exception of the insurance and hotel sectors, establishments interviewed are generally satisfied with the English language competences of their local university graduate employees. A detailed breakdown is however not available due to the limited number of large corporation establishments interviewed.

Some human resources executives interviewed suggested that graduate employees should improve on their report writing skills, presentation skills and trade- or job-related English.

“The survey shows that, while we are generally not in a bad shape, there are specific areas which we should put more focus on. We would continue to closely monitor the situation by working more closely with the business and education sectors, and take action as necessary, say, through our Workplace English Campaign,” Mr Tien said.

The survey report on English language competencies expected of local university graduate employees will be uploaded onto the SCOLAR website at <http://www.language-education.com>.

Established in 1996, SCOLAR advises the Government on language education issues and on the use of the Language Fund.

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