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## **New A-level subject to raise English standards**

**By Liaw Wy-Cin**

FROM 2009, pre-university students with a flair for the English language will be able to take it as an A-level subject.

The hope is that they will go on to work as teachers, writers and in other related fields - and help raise the English language standard here.

The new subject will be distinct from General Paper and literature.

While General Paper does teach students how to write well in English, the emphasis is on current affairs and general knowledge.

And literature is the study of texts rather than the language itself.

In contrast, a key component of the new A-level subject will be how to use the language in different situations.

While details of the curriculum will be known only next year, it is also likely to include the following:

- Sociolinguistics: How language use varies in society according to, for instance, socio-economic class or geographical location.
- Psycholinguistics: How the brain is wired to process and produce language.
- Bilingualism: How the first language picked up might affect the learning of a second language.

The new subject can be taken as a contrasting subject for science students or as another subject option for arts students.

A-level students have to offer at least one subject outside their area of specialisation. The subjects are offered at three ascending levels of difficulty - H1, H2 and H3.

The new English language subject can be taken at the H1 or H2 level.

In addition, some junior colleges - exactly how many will be announced next year - will offer a specialised English Language Elective Programme.

The Ministry of Education will give them extra resources to provide enrichment activities for students.

One school all revved up about the new initiatives is Anglo-Chinese Junior College (ACJC).

Principal Kelvyna Chan told The Straits Times: 'Judging from canteen talk with my teachers, there is a lot of interest in the new A-level subject. We are also very interested in offering the elective programme and we hope to put up a paper to make our case.'

ACJC students are reputed to have a strong command of English.

Its A-level General Paper distinction rate in 2004 and 2005 was twice the national average.

This will be on top of their current study load at the National Institute of Education.

Areas covered include language proficiency, grammar instruction and language development.

Only those with strong university backgrounds in English will be exempt from some modules.

MOE is also looking into allowing primary school teachers to specialise in two rather than three subjects, allowing teachers to delve deeper into each subject, including English.

Besides enhancing training and development, MOE is also focusing on how it recruits and deploys teachers.

Of the additional 10 teachers promised to all schools by 2010, two will teach English language.

By that time, every primary school will also have a specialist English language teacher to help come up with innovative teaching methods.

As for the much-publicised plan to recruit 'native speakers' to teach English here, MOE said it has already hired 10 from Britain after placing advertisements in overseas newspapers earlier this year.

Said Minister of State (Education) Lui Tuck Yew: 'At the end of the day, the conclusion is that we do need more qualified English teachers.'

'Teacher recruitment is important to us and growing that pool of potential people to be recruited as teachers in the future is also something that we have to work on,' said Rear-Admiral (NS) Lui.

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