

**For discussion
on 12 July 2002**

FCR(2002-03)31

ITEM FOR FINANCE COMMITTEE

**HEAD 146 - GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT :
EDUCATION AND MANPOWER BUREAU
Subhead 700 General other non-recurrent
Item 027 Project Springboard and Web-site on Continuing Education**

Members are invited to modify the scope of Head 146 Government Secretariat : Education and Manpower Bureau Subhead 700 General other non-recurrent Item 027 Project Springboard and Web-site on Continuing Education by increasing the rate of fee reimbursement under Project Yi Jin from 30% to 100% of the tuition fee for needy students with effect from the 2002/03 academic year.

PROBLEM

At present, students of Project Springboard (which has been re-titled as Project Yi Jin)¹ are reimbursed 30% of the tuition fee upon satisfactory completion of a course module, irrespective of their financial background. We need to increase the rate of reimbursement to help needy students.

/PROPOSAL

¹ The English title of the programme was changed from "Project Springboard" to "Project Yi Jin" on 25 April 2002 to avoid resemblance to the name of a charitable organisation .

PROPOSAL

2. The Secretary for Education and Manpower proposes to modify the scope of Head 146 Government Secretariat : Education and Manpower Bureau Subhead 700 General other non-recurrent Item 027 Project Springboard and Web-site on Continuing Education by increasing the rate of tuition fee reimbursement from 30% to 100% for needy students, subject to their satisfactory completion of the relevant modules and their passing a means-test. The proposal will take effect from the 2002/03 academic year. Specifically, it will apply to eligible students pursuing the second year of two-year part-time programmes in the 2002/03 academic year, and eligible full-time and part-time students to be admitted in the 2002/03 academic year.

3. Other students who have not applied for the means-tested reimbursement, or have applied but failed the means-test, will continue to be reimbursed 30% of the tuition fee upon satisfactory completion of the relevant modules.

JUSTIFICATION

4. It has been the Government's objective to promote life-long learning to upgrade our human resources and enhance the competitiveness of Hong Kong in an increasingly knowledge-based society. To this end, we launched Project Yi Jin to provide an alternative route and expand the continuing education opportunities for secondary school leavers and adult learners in October 2000. The programme is run by the Federation for Continuing Education in Tertiary Institutions (FCE) on a self-financing basis. With an allocation of \$200 million approved by this Committee in May 2000, the Government provides funding for student support activities and the reimbursement of tuition fee to students admitted during the initial period from the 2000/01 to 2002/03 academic years (including part-time students admitted in the 2002/03 academic year and completing the programme a year later). The reimbursement arrangement is to provide an additional incentive for students to work hard to complete the modules.

5. The programme comprises ten modules and the cost of each module varies between \$2,600 and \$3,400, with the total cost standing at about \$30,000. As approved by this Committee in May 2000, students who have satisfactorily completed each module will be reimbursed 30% of the tuition fee paid for that module. This means that students have to shoulder about \$21,000 over a period of one to two years (depending on whether they are pursuing the programme on a full-time or part-time basis) if they can obtain the 30% reimbursement in all ten modules.

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6. According to some parents and students, some students from low income families are unable to pay for the tuition fee. With the unemployment rate running high, it is likely that more students from low income families will be unable to shoulder the tuition fee. It is necessary to provide additional assistance to these students in order not to deprive them of the opportunity of joining the programme due to a lack of financial means. We propose to define this group of needy students as those who are eligible for full assistance under the means-test administered by the Student Financial Assistance Agency for student financial assistance in the secondary school sector. For example, students from a four-member family with total family income not exceeding \$8,500 a month will be eligible for full reimbursement of tuition fees upon satisfactory completion of the relevant modules.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

7. Assuming a student size of 4 000 for Project Yi Jin in the 2002/03 academic year (including part-time students pursuing their second year of study, and both full-time and part-time students newly admitted in the 2002/03 academic year), a 11% eligibility rate for the means-tested reimbursement and an average passing rate of 85% for the modules², we estimate that about 370 students will be eligible for full reimbursement. These students are in any case eligible for a reimbursement at a rate of 30% of their tuition fees (i.e. about \$9,000) under the existing reimbursement scheme. Under our present proposal, each of them will get an additional 70% reimbursement (i.e. about \$21,000), meaning an additional expenditure of about \$7.8 million on fee reimbursement for this group of students. All additional expenditure will be met from savings within the \$200 million commitment for Project Yi Jin. Such savings are available because the numbers of students taking part in Project Yi Jin and those satisfactorily completing the programme are lower than originally envisaged.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

8. Project Yi Jin aims to upgrade students' knowledge in biliteracy, trilingualism and application of information technology through combining academic pursuits with practical skills training. Students who successfully complete all ten modules will be awarded a full certificate. This full certificate has been evaluated by

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² The assumptions on student size and passing rate take into account experience in the 2000/01 and 2001/02 academic years. The assumption on eligibility rate for the means-tested reimbursement is based on the percentage of Project Yi Jin students passing the means test for full grant assistance under the Student Travel Subsidy Scheme (for which full-time Project Yi Jin students are eligible) in the 2001/02 academic year.

the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation as comparable to five passes in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) for the purposes of continuing education and employment. Holders of the full certificate can further their study in the FCE member institutions. The Government has also accepted the holders of the full certificate in applications for civil service posts which require five passes (including English and Chinese) in the HKCEE. The initial results show that the programme has been successful in helping the students. Of the 3 033 full-time students who completed the programme in 2001, 57% pursued further studies and 33% took up jobs. As undertaken earlier, we will conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the programme in the 2002/03 academic year.

9. We consulted the Legislative Council Panel on Manpower on the above proposal on 27 June 2002. The Panel was generally supportive of the proposal.

Education and Manpower Bureau
July 2002

