

**Legislative Council Panel on Manpower
(Meeting on 27 June 2002)**

Enhanced Tuition Fee Reimbursement for Needy Students of Project Yi Jin

PURPOSE

This paper seeks Members' views on our proposal to increase the fee reimbursement for needy students of Project Yi Jin (formerly known as Project Springboard)^{Note} in the 2002-03 academic year.

BACKGROUND

2. 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 five 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 the Finance 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. The reimbursement arrangement is to provide an additional incentive for students to work hard to complete the modules.

3. The programme 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 the programme will be awarded a full certificate. This full certificate has been evaluated by the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation as comparable to five passes in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE). Holders of the full certificate can further their study in the FCE member institutions.

Note: 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 organization.

The Government has also accepted the holders of the full certificate in the applications for more than 30 civil service posts which require five passes (including English and Chinese) in the HKCEE.

4. 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 percentage pursued further studies and 33 percent took up jobs. As undertaken earlier, we will conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the programme in the 2002/03 academic year.

PROPOSAL

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 the Finance 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 \$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. We propose to increase the reimbursement from 30% to 100% of the tuition fee for needy students.

6. According to feedback from some parents and students, some students from low income families are unable to pay for the tuition fee even though they wish to enroll in the programme. 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 for the secondary school sector administered by the Student Financial Assistance Agency. For example, students from a 4-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. The exact amount of additional expenditure for our proposal will depend on the size of student intake, the percentage of students eligible for full assistance under the means-test, and the rate of students satisfactorily completing the modules. Assuming a student intake of 4 000 (both full-time and part-time) in the 2002-03

academic year, a 11% eligibility rate for the means-test and an average passing rate of 85% for the modules, we estimate that 370 of them (all figures projected based on the experience in the 2000-01 and 2001-02 academic years) will be eligible for full reimbursement. They would have been 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. \$21,000), meaning an additional expenditure of about \$7.8 million on fee reimbursement. All additional expenditure will be met from the \$200m commitment for Project Yi Jin.

ADVICE SOUGHT

8. Members are invited to comment on the proposal as set out in paragraphs 5 to 6 above.

Education & Manpower Bureau
June 2002