

**Financial Assistance Scheme for
Evening Adult Education Courses**

Information Note

Further to the meeting on 6 April 2005, this note provides supplementary information on the scope of the proposed financial assistance scheme.

- (a) Hong Kong has introduced nine-year free and universal basic education for nearly three decades. People up to the age of 40 today have benefited from this policy.
- (b) Since 2000, the Government has introduced a range of programmes for adult learners that lead to alternative qualifications for people who may have dropped out of school in early years. These include the Project Yi Jin, the Skills Upgrading Programme, the Continuing Education Fund, the Workplace English Campaign, the part-time training courses provided by the Employers Retraining Board and financial assistance for students who enrolled in self-financed sub-degree programmes. These programmes offer a wide range of courses covering generic skills (e.g. language, interpersonal skills), applied learning and trade-specific knowledge and skills.
- (c) Hence, the overall investment in adult education has increased significantly, and the range and diversity of adult education broadened.
- (d) There has been a steady decline in the enrolment in the evening adult education courses, especially at the junior secondary levels. The overall completion rate is about 60% for the past 3 years. Furthermore, only 16% of the S5 graduates attained 5 passes in the HKCEE in 2003/04. The passing rate is even lower, below

10%, if S5 repeaters are excluded.

- (e) More and more adult learners have chosen and benefited from the other learning opportunities. In particular, enrolment in the Project Yi Jin (PYJ) has increased significantly over the years. Successful completion of PYJ is recognised to be comparable to attaining five passes in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) with articulation to a range of post-secondary courses.
- (f) Adults aged 21 or above may enrol in PYJ, irrespective of their formal educational background. From the 2000/01 to 2003/04 school years, some 2500 adult learners over the age of 21 have completed the programme.
- (g) Evaluation of the PYJ shows that participants find the courses more relevant and more suited to adult learners and individuals who are less academically oriented. In the past 4 years, 57% of the learners obtained passes in all ten modules and achieved full certificates which is comparable to 5 passes in HKCEE. With perseverance, some graduates of PYJ have made their way to the university.
- (h) It has been alleged that PYJ is not recognised by employers. In fact, over 50% of PYJ graduates have been successfully employed. We anticipate that this percentage will continue to increase in the coming few years.
- (i) For newly arrived adults from the Mainland, the Government has implemented measures to facilitate their integration into the community. These include, for example, familiarization programmes, language courses, and employment seminars. If they wish to pursue academic studies, they may choose to go back to school if they are under 21 years of age or attend PYJ or other self-financed or publicly funded adult education programmes if they are over 21 years.
- (j) The existing Adult Education Subvention Scheme also offers

flexible modular courses, including languages, generic skills and information technology (IT). They provide bridging for those who do not possess the necessary language proficiency or other foundation skills (e.g. IT and numeracy) to cope with academic work at the senior secondary level.

- (k) Furthermore, we will also require the operator(s) selected to run evening courses to provide bridging programmes to ensure smooth induction and to adapt the senior secondary curriculum to cater for the diverse academic backgrounds of the learners.

2. We firmly believe that adults over the age of 21 will be better served by focusing on specific areas of competences that will prepare them for employment, rather than taking a traditional academic programme of studies, a large part of which are not relevant to everyday life or work. It has to be recognised that the junior secondary curriculum and textbooks are designed for adolescents. As such, they are out of sync with the needs and maturity of adult learners.

3. We share Members' wish to help people who are most in need of upgrading themselves. In a lifelong learning society, education places a stronger emphasis on attitude, generic skills, diversity and individual needs. Adult education must also move with time, and focus on learning outcomes.

4. In working out the scope of the scheme, we have carefully considered all relevant factors as listed above. Besides, the proposed financial assistance scheme is formulated after many rounds of meetings and discussions with representatives of adult learners and concern groups. Their views have been fully considered and incorporated as far as possible. Hence, the present proposal is an optimal one taking into consideration the needs of learners and cost-effectiveness. The scheme will be subject to a review in the third year of operation.

5. A lead time of about four months is required for commissioning the service providers. If we are to implement the scheme with effect from the coming school year, we will need to seek the approval of the Finance Committee on 6 May 2005, at the latest. Members should note

that without your confirmation of agreement by 25 April 2005, the timeline for submission would not be met. However, if Members wish to discuss the matter further at the Education Panel, we shall be happy to oblige.

Education and Manpower Bureau
April 2005