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Panel on Education

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 13 May 2010**

Project Yi Jin

Purpose

This paper summarizes the concerns of members about Project Yi Jin ("PYJ").

Background

2. PYJ (previously named Project Springboard) was launched in October 2000 as a bridging programme to provide an alternative route and expand the continuing education opportunities for secondary school leavers and adult learners. PYJ is a skill-based programme, with emphasis on biliteracy and trilingualism, information technology application and practical skill training. The Programme comprises 10 modules with a total of 600 contact hours, including 420 contact hours for core modules and 180 contact hours for electives. The seven core modules include Chinese, English I, English II, Putonghua, Mathematics, Information Technology and Communication Skills. As for electives, over 400 practical subjects are offered to cater for students' interest.

3. The Programme is run by member institutions of the Federation for Continuing Education in Tertiary Institutions ("FCE") on a self-financing basis. A student who has successfully completed the Programme will be awarded a full certificate, which is comparable to five passes in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination ("HKCEE") for continuing education and employment purposes.

4. The tuition fee of each module of the Programme varies depending on its contact hours, ranging from \$2,600 to \$2,800. The Finance Committee ("FC") approved in May 2000 a commitment of \$200 million to provide funding support for students admitted to PYJ during the three academic years

from 2000-2001 to 2002-2003. The funding support mainly took the form of a 30% reimbursement of the tuition fee for each module that was satisfactorily completed by the students, and also covered student support activities and publicity.

5. In July 2002, the FC approved the proposal to reimburse the tuition fee in full to needy students upon successful completion of each module. In April 2003, the FC approved the extension of the scheme for another two academic years till 2004-2005. The FC approved the increase of the commitment from \$200 million to \$435 million in January 2005 and to \$790 million in June 2008 to continue the provision of financial assistance for students until the 2011-2012 academic years.

Members' concerns

6. Before the reorganization of Government bureaux on 1 July 2007, PYJ fell within the policy areas of the Education and Manpower Bureau, and matters relating to PYJ were discussed by the Panel on Manpower. After the reorganization, the Education Bureau is responsible for PYJ, and since then, matters relating to PYJ were deliberated by the Panel on Education. The areas of concern raised by members about PYJ are summarized below.

Need for PYJ

7. Members noted that the FC had approved on several occasions the extension of the provision of financial assistance for PYJ students since 2000. Members welcomed the continued provision of financial assistance to needy students who were defined as those eligible for full fee assistance under the means test for the secondary school sector administered by the Student Financial Assistance Agency ("SFAA"). Members sought information on the reasons for extending PYJ till the 2011-2012 academic year.

8. The Administration provided the following reasons for the need to continue with PYJ –

- (a) until the implementation of the new academic structure and the abolition of the HKCEE, PYJ would continue to offer a viable alternative pathway for those who had not performed well in the HKCEE;
- (b) the provision of financial assistance on a reimbursement basis under PYJ provided an incentive for students to work hard and would increase their chance of completing the programme successfully;
- (c) the new academic structure would be implemented from September

2009 and the last batch of students under the current secondary system would complete Secondary 5 in the summer of 2010. Although the majority of Secondary 5 would have completed their full-time PYJ in the 2010-2011 academic year, in order to facilitate those students (e.g. HKCEE repeaters, adult learners and part-time students) to complete their courses, the programme should last until the 2011-2012 academic year; and

- (d) the first student cohort under the new academic structure would complete their senior secondary education and participate in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education ("HKDSE") examination in the summer of 2012. The new PYJ-type programme offering an alternate pathway for students, if any, should be put in place for the 2012-2013 academic year.

Level of financial assistance

9. Members were concerned that except for those students who could pass the means test for full reimbursement of tuition fee, students had to shoulder a tuition fee amounting to \$20,000 over a period of one to two years (depending on whether they were pursuing the Programme on a full-time or part-time basis) for completing the Programme with the 30% reimbursement. Many low-income families could not afford such a high level of tuition fee. Members requested the Administration to consider providing a reimbursement level at 50% of the tuition fee and to explore ways to reduce tuition fees for the Programme.

10. According to the Administration, some 15% of the students admitted in the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 academic years had received full reimbursement of tuition fee as needy students, and on average, they could successfully complete and claim reimbursement for an average of eight modules. As for the other students, they could successfully complete and claim reimbursement for an average of seven modules.

11. The Administration had reviewed the operation of PYJ in 2004 and considered it more appropriate to use the available fund to provide more training places than to enhance the benefits for selected students. Students who could not afford to pay the tuition fee in advance could apply for financial assistance under the Non-means-tested Loan Scheme administered by SFAA. With the average number of student intake increasing from 3 659 in the first four years since the launch of PYJ to 5 381 in the 2004-2005 academic year, FCE had indicated that, the tuition fee could be reduced from \$30,000 to \$28,000 in the 2005-2006 academic year. The Administration assured members that it would continue to explore with FCE the possibility of further lowering the tuition fee.

Effectiveness of the Programme

12. Members noted that when PYJ was launched in 2000, there was a large number of non-engaged youths, and PYJ was intended to be a bridging programme for secondary school leavers and adult learners to gain solid foundation for employment and further education. Members were concerned about the effectiveness of PYJ in achieving its objectives, in particular whether the PYJ qualification was recognized by employers.

13. The Administration advised that since the introduction of PYJ in the 2000-2001 academic year, 32 000 students (as at October 2006) had benefited from the Programme. The Programme had been popular and welcomed by students and parents, as reflected in the steady increase in annual enrolment. About 6 000 and 7 000 students had enrolled in the Programme in the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 academic years. The Administration conducted a tracking survey on the graduates of PYJ in early 2004 to evaluate the effectiveness of the Programme. It was found that PYJ had fulfilled its purpose of providing an alternative educational pathway and expanding the continuing education opportunities for the low achievers in the HKCEE. At the time of the survey, 37% of the respondents were pursuing further studies, 36% were working and 17% were working and studying at the same time. For those who were pursuing further studies, over 90% were taking full-time Associate Degree, Pre-Associate Degree, Higher Diploma, Diploma and Certificate courses. The survey also revealed that the respondents generally found that their capabilities for self-learning and lifelong learning had improved after attending PYJ. For those who were working, 89% managed to secure a job within six months of completion of PYJ. The survey also captured feedback from parents, employers and teachers of PYJ graduates in Associate Degree and other programmes. The majority of them expressed a positive view towards the Programme.

14. A tracer survey conducted in 2006 indicated that more than 30 students who graduated from PYJ courses in the 2001-2002 academic year were taking degree courses either in local or overseas universities. The information provided by the Administration in June 2008 showed that about 40% of the graduates of full-time PYJ courses were engaged in employment upon graduation, over 30% would pursue further studies and about 20% would work and study at the same time. In 2007-2008, 384 students who had completed PYJ had joined the civil service, with 262 of them working in the Hong Kong Police Force.

Long-term development and positioning of PYJ

15. Members pointed out that as the implementation of the new academic structure would have impact on PYJ, the Administration should review its long-term development and positioning. Although the new senior secondary

curriculum would include a range of Applied Learning courses, it was designed to prepare students for HKDSE to pursue university education. An alternative pathway should be provided under the new academic structure for those students with less interest in academic subjects who did not wish to attend or could not succeed in HKDSE.

16. The Administration advised that there were two main streams of view on the long-term development and positioning of PYJ under the new academic structure. The majority view was that as some students might not be able to attain a satisfactory result at HKDSE, PYJ should be continued to provide an alternative path for these students. However, there was also a view that as a range of Applied Learning courses would be offered under the new senior secondary curriculum which would overlap with the PYJ programme with similar emphasis on practical elements, PYJ might no longer be necessary. The Administration would carefully consider the need for PYJ under the new academic structure. As the first student cohort under the new academic structure would complete their senior secondary education and participate in HKDSE in 2012, the new PYJ, if any, should be put in place in the 2012-2013 academic year.

Qualification and articulation

17. Members were concerned about the prospect for existing PYJ students with the implementation of HKDSE in 2012. Currently, a full certificate of PYJ programme was assessed by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications as comparable to five passes in HKCEE, and was pitched at level 2 under the qualifications framework. Members considered that the Administration should provide appropriate articulation programmes for PYJ students to pursue further studies leading to the award of a qualification comparable to five passes in HKDSE.

18. The Administration explained that despite the implementation of HKDSE in 2012, the qualification of five passes in HKCEE would continue to be recognized by employers for employment purpose and post-secondary institutions for admission to their pre-associate degree or sub-degree programmes. The Administration would consider the provision of articulation programmes for graduates of the existing PYJ in its review on the long-term development and positioning of PYJ. There was a view that should PYJ be continued, a full certificate of the new PYJ programme should be broadly equivalent to HKDSE qualification under the new academic structure and pitched at level 3 of the qualifications framework.

19. In response to a Member's written question in the examination of the Estimate of Expenditure 2010-2011, the Administration advised that it was currently working with FCE to consider the merits and feasibility of providing a new programme based on the existing model of PYJ under the new academic structure. The first stage of the study was expected to be completed in the

first half of 2010. If the new programme was considered meritorious and feasible, a second stage of the study would be carried out to design the details of the programme which would be put in place from the 2012-2013 academic year onwards. This study would include, among other things, designing a new programme based on PYJ model, the successful completion of which would lead to a qualification comparable to a certain level in HKDSE under the new academic structure.

Relevant papers

20. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
7 May 2010

Relevant papers on Project Yi Jin

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Manpower	30.3.2000 (Item III)	Minutes Agenda
Finance Committee	26.5.2000	Minutes FCR(2000-01)19
Legislative Council	14.3.2001	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 55 - 57 (Question)
Legislative Council	17.10.2001	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 32 - 33 (Question)
Legislative Council	9.1.2002	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 64 - 67 (Question)
Legislative Council	27.2.2002	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 47 - 55 (Question)
Panel on Manpower	27.6.2002 (Item V)	Minutes Agenda
Finance Committee	15.7.2002	Minutes FCR(2002-03)31
Panel on Manpower	28.3.2003 (Item VI)	Minutes Agenda
Finance Committee	25.4.2003	Minutes FCR(2003-04)4
Panel on Manpower	16.12.2004 (Item VI)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	3.1.2005 (Item I)	Minutes Agenda
Finance Committee	14.1.2005	Minutes FCR(2004-05)37

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Manpower	20.1.2005 (Item I)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	3.6.2005 (Item I)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Manpower	20.10.2005 (Item II)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Manpower	24.10.2006 (Item I)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	8.5.2008 (Item VI)	Minutes Agenda
Finance Committee	13.6.2008	Minutes FCR(2008-09)27

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