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Panel on Commerce and Industry

Meeting on 18 January 2011

**Background brief on
financial support for Partner State Key Laboratories**

Purpose

This paper provides background information on Partner State Key Laboratories (SKLs) and the views and concerns expressed by Members on related issues in previous discussions.

Background

2. The Mainland/Hong Kong Science and Technology Co-operation Committee (the Co-operation Committee) was formed in 2004. It is a high-level steering committee for the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) of the Central Government and the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau (CEDB) of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government to jointly formulate and co-ordinate technology exchanges and collaboration initiatives between Hong Kong and the Mainland.

3. The SKL scheme is one of the major national technology development schemes managed by MOST. SKL is the highest nationally recognized technological infrastructure which possesses high quality research team, state-of-the-art research facilities and equipment, as well as a good environment for conducting research and experiment. SKLs carry out innovative research taking into account the direction of national technology development, national economy, social development and national security aspects.

4. According to the Administration, Hong Kong universities are keen to contribute to the nation's scientific and technological development through the SKL scheme. In late 2007, the Innovation and Technology Commission (ITC) under CEDB agreed with MOST to coordinate the invitation of applications for the establishment of Partner SKLs in Hong Kong. It was the first time that formal applications for SKLs were invited in Hong Kong. Preliminary assessments on the applications were conducted by the Research Grant Council of HKSAR and the results were submitted to MOST for its consideration in 2008. As at mid 2010, MOST has approved 12 laboratories operated by the Hong Kong universities to become Partner SKLs (four at the University of Hong Kong, three at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, two at the City University of Hong Kong, two at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and one at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology). The technology areas engaged by these Partner SKLs included synthetic chemistry, molecular neuroscience, marine pollution, chiral science, hepatic disease research, ultra-precision machining services, and phytochemistry and sustainable use of plant resources in the western part of the Mainland.

Previous discussions

5. On 16 June 2009, the Administration briefed the Panel on Commerce and Industry (the Panel) on Mainland-Hong Kong Technology Co-operation. Noting that several universities in Hong Kong had secured the agreement of MOST to set up Partner SKLs in Hong Kong with the relevant SKLs in the Mainland, Panel members urged the Administration to provide assistance to local universities in their bid to set up Partner SKLs.

6. At the Legislative Council meeting on 3 June 2009, there was a motion debate on promoting research and development. Members urged the HKSAR Government to strive for setting up more partner SKLs in Hong Kong so that they might directly participate in more technological research projects at the state level, and assist the relevant industries to strive for participation in formulating the standards for state products.

7. At the special meeting of the Finance Committee held on 22 March 2010, Dr Hon Samson TAM asked about the latest development of the setting up of Partner SKLs in Hong Kong. He urged the Administration to conduct a full review with MOST on the mode of operation of Partner SKLs, such as exploring the possibility of setting up the infrastructures by local universities and research institutes without partnering with Mainland's research institutes. The Administration's reply is in the **Appendix**.

Recent developments

8. At the Panel meeting on 19 October 2010, the Administration briefed members on the major initiatives relating to the Commerce, Industry and Tourism Branch and ITC of CEDB under the 2010-2011 Policy Agenda. Members noted that the Administration was actively working on measures to provide support to the 12 Partner SKLs through the Innovation and Technology Fund (ITF)¹ with the aim to further enhance their research capability.

9. At the Panel meeting on 16 November 2010, the Administration briefed members on the creation of a favourable ecological environment to facilitate the realization of research and development results. Members noted that it was necessary to align the ITF to meet changing circumstances as well as long term development goals. In this connection, the Administration had announced a new initiative to provide financial assistance to Partner SKLs in Hong Kong to enhance their research capability, details of which would be worked out in early 2011.

Latest position

10. The Administration will brief the Panel on 18 January 2011 on the proposal for providing financial support for the partner SKLs.

Relevant papers

Hansard of Council meeting on 3 June 2009

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/counmtg/hansard/cm0603-translate-e.pdf>

Progress report on the motion on "Promoting Research and Development" provided by the Administration in August 2009

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/counmtg/motion/cm0603-m5-prpt-e.pdf>

¹ The ITF was set up as a statutory fund under the Public Finance Ordinance (Cap. 2) by resolution of the Legislative Council on 30 June 1999. On 9 July 1999, the Finance Committee approved the proposed injection of HK\$5 billion into ITF which came into operation on 1 November 1999. The ITF is currently administered by ITC and comprises four programmes, namely the Innovation and Technology Support Programme, University-Industry Collaboration Programme, General Support Programme and Small Entrepreneur Research Assistance Programme.

Information paper provided by the Administration for the Commerce and Industry Panel meeting on 16 June 2009

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ci/papers/ci0616cb1-1866-3-e.pdf>

Minutes of the Commerce and Industry Panel meeting on 16 June 2009

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ci/minutes/ci20090616.pdf>

The 2010-2011 Policy Address - "Policy Agenda"

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/1011agenda-e.pdf>

The Administration's replies to Members initial written questions for the special meeting of the Finance Committee held on 22 March 2010

http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/fc/fc/w_q/cedb-ct-e.pdf

Information papers provided by the Administration on the policy agenda of Commerce, Industry and Tourism Branch and Innovation and Technology Commission, Commerce and Economic Development Bureau for the meeting on 19 October 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/ci/papers/ci1019cb1-17-3-e.pdf>

Minutes of the Commerce and Industry Panel meeting on 19 October 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/ci/minutes/ci20101019.pdf>

Information paper provided by the Administration for the Commerce and Industry Panel meeting on 16 November 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/ci/papers/ci1116cb1-389-5-e.pdf>

Minutes of the Commerce and Industry Panel meeting on 16 November 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/ci/minutes/ci20101116.pdf>

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Legislative Council Secretariat
14 January 2011

Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2010-11

Reply Serial No.

**CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY TO
INITIAL WRITTEN QUESTION****CEDB(CT)073**

Head: 155 - Government Secretariat : Subhead
Innovation and Technology (No. & title):
Commission

Question Serial No.

2691

Programme: (4) Planning for Innovation and Technology Development

Controlling Officer: Commissioner for Innovation and Technology

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development

Question: The Commission is responsible for processing applications for setting up state key laboratories (SKL) in Hong Kong. In this regard,

- (a) Currently, how many SKL projects are assisted by Hong Kong in the implementation and monitoring work? What are the research areas, projects, expenditures and Mainland partners involved? What were the new projects implemented in 2009?
- (b) How many applications are still pending? What are their research areas, projects, expenditures and Mainland partners? How much time is needed to process an application?
- (c) Has the Administration conducted a full review with the Ministry of Science and Technology on the mode of operation of SKLs in Hong Kong? (e.g. to explore the possibility of setting up SKLs by local universities and research institutes without partnering with Mainland's research institutes) If yes, what are the details? If no, what are the reasons and the major difficulties involved?

Asked by: Hon. TAM Wai-ho, Samson

Reply: (a) At present, a total of 9 laboratories in 5 universities from Hong Kong has been approved as Partner State Key Laboratories (SKLs) by the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST). Among these 9 laboratories, 4 gained their approval in 2009 through the coordination of the Innovation and Technology Commission (ITC). The Partner SKLs are fully funded by the universities concerned.

More information about these 9 approved Partner SKLs is in the table below.

	Name (which includes its research focus)	University	Mainland partner
1.	SKL of Phytochemistry and Plant Resources in West China #	Chinese University of Hong Kong	Kunming Institute of Botany, Chinese Academy of Sciences - SKL of Phytochemistry and Plant Resources in West China
2.	SKL of Molecular Neuroscience #	Hong Kong University of Science and Technology	Institute of Neuroscience, Shanghai Institutes for Biological Sciences, Chinese Academy of Sciences - SKL of Neuroscience (in Shanghai)
3.	SKL of Marine Pollution #	City University of Hong Kong	Xiamen University - SKL of Marine Environmental Science

	Name (which includes its research focus)	University	Mainland partner
4.	SKL of Ultraprecision Machining Technology #	Hong Kong Polytechnic University	Tsinghua University and Tianjin University - SKL of Precision Measurement Technology and Instruments
5.	SKL of Emerging Infectious Diseases	University of Hong Kong	Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention - SKL for Infectious Diseases Prevention and Control (in Beijing)
6.	SKL of Brain and Cognitive Sciences	University of Hong Kong	Institute of Biophysics, Chinese Academy of Science - SKL of Brain and Cognitive Sciences (in Beijing)
7.	SKL of Oncology in South China	Chinese University of Hong Kong	Sun Yat-Sen University Cancer Center - SKL in Oncology in South China (in Guangzhou)
8.	SKL of Agrobiotechnology	Chinese University of Hong Kong	China Agricultural University - SKL of Agrobiotechnology (in Beijing)
9.	SKL of Millimeter Waves	City University of Hong Kong	Southeast University-SKL of Millimeter Waves (in Nanjing)

Notes:

(1) Those new Partner SKLs approved in 2009 are marked with a # after their name.

- (b) At present, there are 3 laboratories in areas such as Chirosciences, Synthetic Chemistry and Liver Research, which have got MOST's in-principle endorsement for approval as Partner SKLs. The costs are fully met by the universities.

The approval process generally takes about 2 years, which includes an initial assessment with peer review conducted by the Research Grant Council, and an on-site visit conducted by MOST officials.

- (c) The Administration has hitherto not conducted a full review as the arrangement is relatively new. With more experience collected, we will conduct a full review with the universities concerned, as well as our counterparts in the Mainland. We will continue our close liaison with MOST to facilitate the formal approval of these 3 laboratories, and there-after review the operation of SKLs in Hong Kong as and when necessary.

Name in block letters Miss Janet Wong

Post Title Commissioner for Innovation and Technology

Date 16.3.2010