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Panel on Education

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council
Secretariat for the meeting on 20 April 2012**

Project Yi Jin

Purpose

This paper summarizes the concerns of the Panel on Education ("the Panel") about Project Yi Jin ("PYJ") and the proposed Yi Jin Diploma ("YJD") to be implemented under the new academic structure ("NAS").

Background

Existing PYJ

2. PYJ (previously named Project Springboard) was launched in October 2000 to provide an alternative pathway and expand the continuing education opportunities for Secondary ("S") 5 school leavers and adult learners. PYJ combines academic and practical skills training, with emphasis on biliteracy, trilingualism and information technology application.

3. PYJ is run by members of the Federation for Continuing Education in Tertiary Institutions ("FCE") on a self-financing basis. Any S5 school leaver under the old academic structure or adult learner at the age of 21 or above can enrol in the programme. A PYJ student is awarded a full PYJ certificate on passing all 10 modules of the programme. The certificate has been assessed by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications as comparable to five passes in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination ("HKCEE") for

continuing education and employment purposes, and is pitched at Level 2 under the Qualifications Framework. Students may take the programme on a full-time or part-time basis. The tuition fee charged by the FCE institutions for taking 10 modules on a full-time basis ranges from \$27,500 to \$29,500. For part-time students, the average tuition fee of each module is \$2,950.

4. The Finance Committee ("FC") approved in May 2000 a commitment of \$200 million to provide funding support for students admitted to PYJ for three academic years from 2000-2001. The funding support mainly takes the form of a 30% reimbursement of the tuition fee for each module that is satisfactorily completed by the students. In July 2002, 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 programme for another two academic years until 2004-2005. In January 2005, FC approved the increase of the commitment of the programme from \$200 million to \$435 million.

5. In June 2008, FC further approved the increase of the commitment to \$790 million to extend PYJ until the 2011-2012 academic year, having regard to the implementation of the New Senior Secondary ("NSS") academic structure in September 2009. The last batch of students under the old secondary school system completed S5 in summer 2010. Although the majority of S5 leavers would have completed their one-year full-time PYJ in the 2010-2011 academic year, to facilitate those students (e.g. HKCEE repeaters, adult learners and part-time students) to complete their courses, PYJ was extended until the 2011-2012 academic year. In June 2010, FC further approved an additional \$280 million to meet the projected funding requirement of PYJ until the 2011-2012 academic year.

New YJD under NAS

6. The first student cohort under NAS will complete their secondary education and participate in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination ("HKDSEE") in 2012. The Administration has been working with the FCE to develop a new programme based on the PYJ model to provide an alternative pathway for S6 school leavers under NAS as well as adult learners to obtain a formal qualification for the purposes of employment and further study.

7. According to the Administration, the qualification of the new YJD will be comparable to the attainment of Level 2 standard in five subjects

in HKDSEE including Chinese and English and will meet the entry requirements for admission to Higher Diploma or Associate Degree programmes.

8. A brief comparison of the existing PYJ and the new YJD is in **Appendix I**.

Members' concerns

9. 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. At the Panel meeting on 9 January 2012, the Administration briefed members on its plan for the development of the new YJD under NAS. The major concerns raised by members about PYJ and the new YJD are summarized below.

Level of financial assistance

10. Members have all along been concerned about the provision of financial assistance to PYJ students. At present, the funding support for PYJ students mainly takes the form of a 30% reimbursement of the tuition fee for each module that is satisfactorily completed by students, irrespective of the financial background of students. Needy students could receive a 100% reimbursement of the tuition fee, subject to their satisfactory completion of the relevant modules and their passing a means-test. Members were of the view that since most of the PYJ students were from grass root families, the Administration should consider setting different scales of reimbursement, say 30%, 50%, 75% and 100%, according to the financial situation of students. Members also pointed out that the reimbursement rate of tuition fees for students enrolled in evening adult education courses had recently been adjusted upwards to 30%, 50% or 100%. As the nature of students attending evening adult education courses and students of PYJ were similar, the Administration should consider adopting similar reimbursement rates for the proposed YJD. Alternatively, the Administration could consider raising the reimbursement rate from the existing 30% to 50% of the tuition fees across the board.

11. The Administration advised that the current eligibility for student financial assistance was more relaxed than the time when PYJ was launched. Following the relaxation of the eligibility for assistance provided to needy students in 2011, the number of students eligible for 100% financial assistance had substantially increased. The Administration would carefully consider members' suggestions having regard to the financial implication and priority in allocation of resources. According to the information provided by the Administration in the examination of the Estimates of Expenditure 2012-2013, the number of applications for 100% tuition fee reimbursement and 30% fee reimbursement under PYJ for 2010-2011 were about 3 428 and 15 495 respectively.

Effectiveness of PYJ

12. Some members had raised concern about the effectiveness of PYJ in achieving its objectives, in particular whether the PYJ qualification was recognized by employers.

13. The Administration advised that the enrolment for PYJ had progressively increased from around 2 000 to 3 000 in the first few years of launch to 15 000 and 16 000 in 2009 and 2010. Furthermore, according to the findings of the annual graduate survey conducted by the FCE, around 50% of the graduates were engaged in work and almost 40% were furthering their studies through associate degree, certificate or pre-associate degree programmes in the past three years. Among those who were employed, some 300 to 500 PYJ graduates were recruited by Government departments each year in the past five years.

The YJD qualification

14. Members were concerned that although a PYJ full certificate was comparable to five passes in HKCEE, they did not include a pass in the subject of Mathematics. As a result, a PYJ full certificate did not meet the entry requirements of some of the civil service grades which required five passes in HKCEE, including Chinese, English and Mathematics. Members noted that to address such a concern, the Administration was examining the possibility of including an additional subject of Mathematics elective course under the new programme. For students who had satisfactorily completed the said Mathematics elective course, the qualification was deemed comparable to the attainment of Level 2 standard in five subjects in HKDSEE including Chinese, English and Mathematics. Given that Mathematics was already a core module in the

PYJ programme, members enquired whether the new YJD could be designed in such a way that it was deemed comparable to the attainment of Level 2 standard in five subjects in HKDSEE including Chinese, English and Mathematics without the need for including an additional Mathematics elective course.

15. The Administration advised that the current PYJ certificate was accepted by the Government as meeting the entry requirements of more than 30 civil service grades which required five passes in HKCEE, including Chinese and English. Many civil service grades popular among PYJ students such as the disciplined service grades did not require a pass in Mathematics. Only five civil service grades required five passes in HKCEE including Chinese, English and Mathematics. These five grades were Assistant Clerical Officer, Assistant Taxation Officer, Land Inspector II, Assistant Trade Controls Officer and Supplies Supervisor II. As these grades were required to handle figures, a pass in Mathematics was necessary. The Administration further advised that given the varied aptitude for Mathematics among students, requiring the attainment of the equivalent of Level 2 standard in Mathematics across the board for the award of YJD might be too high a threshold for many students. The proposed Mathematics elective course would provide an option for students who had the interest and ability to pursue a higher attainment in Mathematics for career and study purpose.

16. Members considered it important for the Administration to enhance promotion to make it clear to students that the YJD did not include the attainment of Level 2 standard in Mathematics, and the availability of the Mathematics elective course for those who wished to obtain Level 2 standard in the subject. The Administration undertook to follow up on members' view.

17. There was also a view that top-up classes should be provided to graduates of the existing PYJ to obtain a qualification comparable to Secondary ("S") 6 under NAS. Members were concerned whether the entry qualification for many civil service grades would continue to be five passes in HKCEE as the basic qualification after the implementation of NAS would be S6. The Administration advised members that it would discuss the issue of top-up classes with FCE.

Programme structure of the new YJD

18. Members raised concern about the change of programme structure under the new YJD. They noted that the number of modules would be

reduced from 10 to eight, the Putonghua module would be removed and the Liberal Studies ("LS") module would be added.

19. The Administration explained that the new YJD would be reorganized to align with the new senior secondary curriculum and meet students' needs for further studies and employment. It also sought to strengthen students' language and communication skills and broaden their horizons. The Putonghua module which was currently an independent subject would be merged into the Chinese Language module and the LS module would be added to the programme to provide students with a broader knowledge base on Hong Kong, the nation and the world. Furthermore, the Information Technology module would be subsumed in various different modules to enhance students' knowledge on its applications in different areas. While the modules of the new YJD would be restructured to keep abreast of time, the total number of contact hours would remain unchanged at 600.

20. Some members were of the view that the number of contact hours for the modules should be based on students' needs and abilities. For students with low academic attainment or those who wished to continue their studies upon completion of YJD, they might need additional contact hours. Members further suggested that for students who had obtained satisfactory results in certain subjects in HKDSEE, consideration should be given to exempting them from the relevant modules.

Tuition fees and enrolment

21. Regarding members' concern about the level of tuition fees of the new YJD, the Administration assured members that it would take into account relevant considerations including the design of the new programme and the inflation rate since the late fee adjustment in considering FCE's tuition fee proposals.

22. On the estimated enrolment for the new YJD, the Administration advised that it was optimistic that the new programme would be welcome by secondary school leavers. There would be no cap on the number of enrolment for the new YJD and members of FCE were encouraged to accommodate all applications for enrolment as far as practical. Both secondary school leavers under NAS and adult learners at the age of 21 and above could join the new YJD.

Latest developments

23. The Financial Secretary proposed in his Budget Speech for 2012-2013 that \$1 billion be set aside for implementing the new YJD, which is mainly for reimbursement of tuition fees to eligible students.

24. The Administration will brief members at the Panel meeting on 20 April 2012 on the arrangement for the proposed implementation of YJD under NAS. The Administration aims to submit the proposal to FC in May 2012.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
13 April 2012

**Brief comparison of the existing Project Yi Jin
and the new Yi Jin Diploma**

	Project Yi Jin	New Yi Jin Diploma
Target Participants	Secondary 5 school leavers under the pre-NAS academic structure and adult learners aged 21 or above.	Secondary 6 school leavers under the NAS and adult learners aged 21 or above.
Course Content	The programme comprises 10 modules, including seven core modules (Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics, Information Technology, Putonghua and Communication Skills) and three elective modules. A wide range of elective modules, which are primarily practical subjects, are offered to cater for students with different interests and aptitude.	The programme will comprise eight modules with a total of 600 contact hours, including five core modules (Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics, Liberal Studies and Communication Skills) and three elective modules. A wide range of elective modules, primarily practical subjects, will be offered to cater for participants with different interests and aptitude. The previous core modules on Putonghua and Information Technology will be subsumed under relevant core subjects in the new programme. Furthermore, there will be an additional elective module on Mathematics.
Exit Standard	The Project Yi Jin Certificate has been assessed by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications as comparable to five passes in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination for continuing education and employment purposes.	It is intended that upon satisfactory completion of study, a student under the new programme will be awarded a full Yi Jin Diploma (YJD), which will be deemed comparable to the attainment of Level 2 standard in five subjects (including Chinese Language and English Language) in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination. For those students who have satisfactorily completed the additional Mathematics elective module, the qualification is intended to be deemed comparable to the attainment of Level 2 standard in five subjects including Chinese Language, English Language and Mathematics in the HKDSE Examination.

Source: Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2012-2013

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
Panel on Education	13.5.2010 (Item V)	Minutes Agenda
Finance Committee	18.6.2010	Minutes FCR(2010-11)29
Legislative Council	24.11.2010	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 210 - 213 (Question)
Panel on Education	9.1.2012 (Item VI)	Minutes Agenda

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