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Legislative Council

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Subcommittee on Poverty

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 17 December 2013**

Digital inclusion initiatives for under-privileged groups

Purpose

This paper summarizes the major issues raised by committees of the Council on issues relating to digital inclusion initiatives for the under-privileged groups.

Background

2. Digital 21 Strategy provides a blueprint for the development of information and communications technology ("ICT")[1] in Hong Kong. Building a digitally inclusive, knowledge-based society is one of the five key action areas promulgated by the Government in its latest version of the 2008 Digital 21 Strategy. One of the Government's priority work focus in this action area is to provide Internet connections for needy groups in the community, thereby bridging the digital divide of the under-privileged groups.

3. A Task Force on Digital Inclusion ("the Task Force") was established in July 2008 under the Digital 21 Strategy Advisory Committee to advise the Government on the formulation of relevant strategies and initiatives on digital inclusion to improve access to ICT facilities and connectivity, ICT skills, and facilitate the development of useful content for the needy groups. In consultation with the Task Force, the Government focused the digital inclusion initiatives in 2011-2012 on three priority groups, namely, students from low-income families[2],

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[1] ICT refers to all technologies and applications that involve information processing and/or exchange over communication networks, including the internet.

[2] Low-income families refer to those families with children who are full-time students receiving

persons with disabilities ("PWDs") and the elderly. Highlights of these initiatives include –

(a)   the Internet Learning Support Programme ("ILSP");

(b)   Web Accessibility Campaign;

(c)   development of assistive technology for PWDs;

(d)   encouraging ICT adoption among the elderly;

(e)   District Cyber Centre Pilot Scheme; and

(f)   conducting survey on ICT adoption of under-privileged groups.

Internet Learning Support Programme

4 .   In his 2010-2011 Budget, the Financial Secretary announced a two-pronged strategy to assist students from low-income families to undertake web-based learning at home through provision of an Internet access subsidy and ILSP. These initiatives aimed at helping eligible families acquire affordable computers and Internet access service and providing them with technical and social support. Following consultation with the Panel on Education ("the ED Panel"), the Administration obtained approval of the Finance Committee ("FC") for a funding of $500 million for these two initiatives at its meeting on 28 May 2010.

5.   ILSP was launched under the brand name "i Learn at Home" ("一家一網 e 學習") in July 2011. The Administration had commissioned eInclusion Foundation Limited ("eInclusion") and WebOrganic ("the Implementers") to implement ILSP in the eastern and western parts of the territory respectively. eInclusion was jointly formed by the Boys' & Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong ("BGCA") and the Internet Professional Association and WebOrganic was formed by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service. It was envisaged that ILSP would help students from low-income families, especially those who currently did not have Internet connection at home, to gain access to the Internet. According to the Administration, ILSP would be managed by a non-profit-making organization which would work closely with

education at primary and secondary levels and who are eligible for the flat-rate grant for School-related Expenses under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme or financial assistance under the Student Financial Assistance Agency.

community organizations, educators, Internet service providers, ICT suppliers and government agencies to –

(a) identify needy students' Internet learning needs; and

(b) make available, by making use of existing facilities and services of government departments and non-governmental organizations where possible –

i. affordable internet access services and computers; and

ii. training and technical support to the target families in a cost-effective manner.

6. Currently, the following baseline services are undertaken by the Implementers under ILSP –

(a) sourcing affordable computers suitable for web-based learning with flexible payment options;

(b) sourcing Internet service for learning purpose at concessionary pricing;

(c) student training on proper and safe use of the Internet for learning purpose;

(d) training to help parents provide guidance and support their children with web-based learning;

(e) technical and user support; and

(f) counselling for Internet-related issues such as Internet addiction, cyber-bullying, etc.

Members' deliberations

Implementation of ILSP

7. Some members of the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel ("the ITB Panel") expressed concern that the take-up of ILSP was slower than originally envisaged. The Administration advised that it had since January 2012 streamlined the enrolment procedures to encourage

participation. To monitor the implementation of the programme, the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer ("OGCIO") had entered into Funding and Operation Agreement ("F&OA") with the two Implementers, setting out their performance targets, obligations, and governance and accounting requirements, etc. A Programme Steering Committee led by the Government Chief Information Office ("GCIO") and comprising representatives from the Education Bureau ("EDB") and the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") had been set up to monitor programme delivery and resolve matters of common concern. In addition, OGCIO also monitored the programme through regular working level meetings with the Implementers, their regular performance reports with supporting data and statistics, annual business plan and audited accounts, and site visits. OGCIO would conduct a review of the implementation arrangements in mid-2013. According to the Administration, as at 31 March 2013, of the 282 000 eligible families, 65 904 (23.4%) had enrolled in ILSP and 17 652 (26.8% of those enrolled and 6.3% of eligible families) had received at least one type of services from the Implementers in the past two school years.

8. Members of the ED Panel also raised concern about the low participation rate of ILSP. In their view, if timely and adequate assistance was not available to needy students, the problem of digital divide would become more serious. According to the Administration, it had collected data on the general usage of Internet in teaching and would continue to collect data in different aspects of the use of e-learning platforms. The implementation of ILSP would be taken into account when formulating the next Information Technology in Education Strategy.

9. Some members of the ITB Panel expressed concern about the media reports on the development and progress of the implementation of ILSP, and the termination of F&OA with eInclusion by the Administration. The Administration advised that there was scope for fine-tuning ILSP by focusing on services that were not readily available in the market, trimming services that had abundant alternative providers and adopting a more on-demand model of service delivery. The Administration was mindful of its undertaking to FC that the services should be made available to the target families in a cost-effective manner.

10. The Administration further advised that it had terminated F&OA with eInclusion with effect from 19 May 2013, and appointed BGCA to take over the implementation of ILSP in the eastern part of Hong Kong as guarantor of eInclusion in accordance with the F&OA. BGCA had been delivering frontline services under ILSP. With well-established social

networks and expertise in providing support for students from low-income families and their parents, it took over the implementation of ILSP with minimal disruption to the service recipients.

Mid-term review of ILSP

11.   Noting that Internet adoption of students from low-income families had increased significantly from 87% in 2010 to 96% in 2012, members of the ITB Panel urged the Administration to continue its efforts to identify and assist the last 4% of eligible families which could be the most needy families. The Administration should also implement measures to increase service take-up and reduce the unit cost for reselling computers and Internet services to the recipients.

12.   The Administration advised that under the current scheme, target beneficiaries could acquire computers through hire purchase and this arrangement would continue. The Administration would undertake ILSP promotion in collaboration with the Implementers and other government departments. To avoid any possible confusion over the different brand names, the Administration would use a single brand name to sharpen the public image of ILSP. It would continue to source discounted offers of computers and Internet services for the target beneficiaries. It would also review the service of reselling computers and explore more cost-effective means of providing this service.

13.   Members of the ITB Panel called on the Administration to co-ordinate with relevant government bureaux and departments, including EDB, SWD and the Home Affairs Department, to arrange district-oriented promotion to identify needy families for ILSP. The Administration advised that it had been sourcing information from relevant bureaux and departments to identify needy families for ILSP.

Strengthening support for the elderly and PWDs in ICT adoption

14.   Noting that the Administration aimed to increase the usage rates of computer and Internet by the elderly from the current 20% and 18.4% to 25% and 23% respectively by 2014, some members of the ITB Panel urged the Administration to set higher performance targets for the elderly group and take proactive steps to meet the targets. The Administration advised that through the "eElderly" portal and other sponsored projects, the Administration was confident that the ICT adoption rate among the elderly would continue to increase.

15.   Some members of the ITB Panel considered that the Administration should strengthen the support for PWDs in ICT adoption and implement measures to encourage people beset with impairment to use ICT and enhance their awareness of ICT. The Administration advised that it had not set any target for the use of ICT by people beset with impairment, including those beset with visual, physical, hearing or cognitive impairment, which covered a very wide scope. The Administration had however set targets for Web Accessibility and had been working towards having all government websites to conform to Level AA standard of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines Version 2.0 promulgated by the World Wide Web Consortium by 2013. About 40% of the websites commonly used by people beset with impairment had incorporated with key accessibility features.

ICT-related assistive technology for PWDs

16.   At the special FC meeting on 10 April 2013 to examine the Estimates of Expenditure 2013-2014, a written question was raised on the Government's efforts to encourage the development and application of ICT-related assistive technology for PWDs. The Administration advised that measures had been implemented to promote wider adoption of ICT by PWDs and encourage the development of ICT-based assistive tools and applications for them. In 2012-2013 and 2013-2014, the "Sponsorship Scheme on Development of Digital Inclusion Mobile Applications" was launched to encourage the local industry to develop mobile applications and websites with appropriate contents and services that catered for the needs of under-privileged groups, and to help PWDs and other under-privileged groups enhance their quality of life through the adoption of ICT. From the 45 proposals received, seven proposals were selected for funding support. Development work would complete by the end of 2013 and the applications would be available for free use. The expenditure of this scheme in 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 were $0.34 million and $2.46 million respectively.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
11 December 2013

Relevant papers on
Digital inclusion initiatives for under-privileged groups

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting	12 April 2010 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting	14 March 2011 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting	7 June 2011 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting	16 June 2011 (Item II)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting	14 May 2012 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Education	7 February 2013 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Finance Committee	10 April 2013	Administration's replies to members' written questions in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2013-2014 Pages 149 – 150
Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting	10 June 2013 (Item III)	Agenda Minutes

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