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Panel on Education

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council
Secretariat for the meeting on 9 January 2012**

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 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. 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 Language, English Language I, English Language II, Putonghua, Mathematics, Information Technology and Communication Skills. A range of practical subjects are offered to cater for students' interest.

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 during the three academic years from 2000-2001 to 2002-2003. 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, and also covers student support activities and publicity. Student financial assistance and non-means-tested loans are also available for eligible 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.

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 Panel"). The areas of concern raised by members about PYJ are summarized below.

Level of financial assistance

7. Members noted that FC had approved on several occasions the extension of the provision of financial assistance for PYJ students since 2000. While Members welcomed the continued provision of financial assistance to needy students, they 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 some \$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) 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 fee for PYJ.

8. The Administration advised members that it 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 the Student Financial Assistance Agency. In response to a Member's written question in the examination of the Estimate of Expenditure 2011-2012, the Administration advised that the number of applications for 100% tuition fee reimbursement under PYJ for the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 academic years were 3 028 and 3 221 respectively. The number of applications for 30% fee reimbursements in these two academic years were 15 353 and 16 793 respectively.

Effectiveness of PYJ

9. 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. Some members were concerned about the effectiveness of PYJ in achieving its objectives, in particular whether the PYJ qualification was recognized by employers.

10. The Administration advised members that it had 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 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.

11. 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.

Positioning of PYJ under the new academic structure

12. 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 NSS curriculum would include a range of Applied Learning courses, it was designed to prepare students for the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education ("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.

13. 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 NSS curriculum which would overlap with the PYJ programme with similar emphasis on practical elements, PYJ might no longer be necessary.

14. At the Panel meeting on 13 May 2010, the Administration advised members that in the light of the findings of the first stage of the study completed in the first half of 2010, the Administration was considering the implementation of a new programme based on the existing model of PYJ under the new academic structure. The intention was that a student who had successfully completed the new programme would be awarded a qualification that would be comparable to Level 2 in five subjects in HKDSE and Level 3 under the Qualifications Framework.

15. Some members pointed out that although a PYJ full certificate was comparable to five passes in HKCEE, they did not mean passes in the subjects of Chinese Language, English Language and Mathematics. As a result, a PYJ full certificate did not meet the entry requirement of some of the civil service grades which required five passes in HKCEE, including Chinese Language, English Language and Mathematics.

16. 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 current PYJ certificate had been accepted by the Government as meeting the entry requirements of some 30 civil service grades which required five passes in HKCEE, including Chinese Language and English Language. Some civil service grades required a pass in the subject of Mathematics, and a PYJ graduate without attaining a passing grade in the subject of Mathematics in HKCEE would not meet the entry requirement of these grades. Members were of the view that the subject of Mathematics should be strengthened under the new PYJ and the qualification of the new PYJ should be comparable to Level 2 in five subjects in HKDSE including the subject of Mathematics.

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 S6 under the new academic structure. 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 the new academic structure would be S6. The Administration advised members that it would discuss the issue of top-up classes with FCE.

Latest developments

18. The Administration will brief members at the Panel meeting on 9 January 2012 on its plan for the development of the Yi Jin Diploma under the new academic structure and seek members' views before finalizing the details for implementation in the 2012-2013 academic year.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
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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

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Finance Committee	14.1.2005	Minutes FCR(2004-05)37
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

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