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Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

Meeting on 14 May 2012

Updated background brief on digital inclusion

Purpose

This paper summarizes the views and concerns expressed by Members on issues relating to digital inclusion in Hong Kong during previous discussions.

Background

2. Digital 21 Strategy provides a blueprint for the development of information and communication 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 to needy groups in the community, thereby bridging the digital divide of the under-privileged groups. 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. The Task Force agreed that priority should be given to three needy groups, namely the elderly, low-income families with children and people with disabilities (PwD) and/or chronic illness. A number of digital inclusion initiatives were commissioned with the advice and support of the Task Force through tripartite collaboration between the community, the business sector and the Government. Highlights of the initiatives include:

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

- (a) the District Cyber Centres (DCC) pilot scheme to enable young people from poor families and other needy members of the community to access and use ICT and online services helping them integrate into the information society;
- (b) the one-year "Be NetWise" Internet education campaign to educate Internet users, especially young students, on the appropriate and safe use of the Internet;
- (c) the dedicated portal for the elderly providing one-stop information and service to address the interests and needs of the elderly;
- (d) the Central Fund for Personal Computer set up by the Social Welfare Department to assist PwD to acquire personal computer facilities for self-employment or receiving supported employment service at home;
- (e) the Computer Recycling Programme coordinated by the Education Bureau and the Environment Protection Department to provide refurbished computer with one-year free Internet access service to needy students of primary and secondary schools;
- (f) installing public computers with Internet connection at various places including public libraries and youth and social centres for free public access;
- (g) the Digital Solidarity Fund administered by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service to sponsor digital inclusion projects by non-government organizations (NGOs) for different needy groups; and
- (h) the grant of subsidy for Internet access charges to primary and secondary school students from low-income families.

Previous discussions

Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

3. The Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting (the ITB Panel) received regular updates from the Administration on the digital inclusion initiatives undertaken by the Government, NGOs and the private

sector in the context of the implementation of the Digital 21 Strategy. Panel members considered that more resources should be allocated to drive up ICT adoption and help integrate the needy groups, such as the low-income families with children, PwD, and the elderly in the digital society. Members called on the Administration to draw up quantifiable performance indicators and benchmark to measure the progress and effectiveness of the digital inclusion initiatives.

4. At the ITB Panel meeting on 12 April 2010, members noted that while the various digital inclusion initiatives had improved the ICT accessibility among children in low-income families, not much progress had been made among PwD. They urged the Administration to expeditiously draw up specific policy strategy and implement targeted measures to help integrate PwD into the information society.

5. The Administration advised that to address the accessibility requirements of PwD, a set of accessibility guidelines and best practice for the design of web pages and electronic services had been developed and updated with reference to international standards and input from disabled groups. All government websites were required to comply fully with the guidelines. In addition, workshops had been organized by the Task Force with community organizations and representatives of the PwD sub-groups, with a view to drawing up relevant plans and initiatives to address their specific needs in ICT adoption.

6. Some ITB Panel members opined that to increase the elderly's ability to use digital services in the digital environment, computer and ICT facilities should be installed in elderly centres to provide on-line platform for the elderly to stay connected with their families and friends. Panel members also asked about the number of sessions conducted by NGOs for teaching the elderly digital techniques for use in daily life.

7. The Administration advised that to provide the elderly with more convenient access to the relevant contents and services on the Internet, a dedicated elderly portal would be launched to provide one-stop information service on elderly services, pooling together information around their interests, such as those related to their daily lives, medical and health, housing and care, social and recreational activities, as well as silver hair market information. The various computer courses offered by the Elder Academies would also help enhance their computer knowledge and ability to use digital services, as well as expand their social circle through the Internet.

8. At the ITB Panel meeting on 14 March 2011, some members opined that efforts should be focused on narrowing the digital divide for the underprivileged groups, such as PwD, the elderly, and low-income new

arrivals from the Mainland. The Administration was requested to set a benchmark and target timeframe to measure the progress and effectiveness of applying digital inclusion initiatives among these target groups. Some members suggested assisting PwD to purchase personal computers and enhancing the web accessibility of PwD by subsidizing their Internet access charges.

9. The Administration advised that the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) would commission in 2011 a further study on the information and communications technology take-up of PwD and the elderly, and would report the study findings to the Panel. The Panel requested the Administration to formulate a long term plan with reasonable and attainable targets on digital inclusion in respect of different underprivileged groups.

10. The Panel closely monitored the progress of the Internet Learning Support Programme² ("ILSP"), which aims to help eligible families to acquire affordable computers and Internet access service and to provide them with technical and social support. As Mr Jeremy Godfrey, the former Government Chief Information Officer, alleged that there had been political pressure from senior Government officials to select a designated party as ILSP Implementer, the Panel held two special meetings on 7 and 16 June 2011 to follow up on the matter. The Panel examined submissions from Mr Godfrey and from the two leading ILSP contenders, as well as papers and documents provided by the Administration, including the reports of the Evaluation Panel for the Implementer of ILSP and the Government's internal correspondence relating to the selection process. Some members requested that powers to summon witnesses under the Legislative Council (Powers and Privileges) Ordinance (Cap. 382) be invoked and a select committee appointed to conduct an inquiry into the matter. Other members, however, said that there was no concrete evidence that there had been a political agenda relating to the selection of the Implementer for ILSP. The Panel agreed that the Administration should provide further papers and documents relating to the selection process as requested by members for further examination. The Administration subsequently provided its responses vide LC Paper No. CB(1)2692/10-11(01) and CB(1)2959/10-11(02) on 8 July 2011 and 30 August 2011 respectively.

² 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 an ILSP. Following consultation with the Panel on Education, the Administration obtained the approval of the Finance Committee (FC) for a funding of \$500 million for these two initiatives at its meeting on 28 May 2010.

Council meetings

11. At the Legislative Council meetings on 25 May 2011 and 9 November 2011, Hon Fred LI and Hon Emily LAU raised questions on the implementation and progress of the ILSP respectively. The Administration advised that as at October 31, 2011, more than 23 000 families had applied to join the programme. The applications were being processed by the two Implementers. So far, 7 147 families had completed registration, of which HKCSS accounted for 2 386 families involving 6 007 students while eInclusion accounted for 4 761 families involving 5 497 students. More than 2 100 computers and 880 Internet access packages had been sold under the ILSP.

Special meetings of the Finance Committee

12. At the special meetings of the Finance Committee held on 5 and 7 March 2012, Dr Hon PAN Pey-chyou expressed concern about the low take-up rate of the ILSP. He urged the Administration to enhance the ILSP to help more low-income families, and to evaluate the performance of the two Implementers. The Administration's reply is in **Appendix I**.

Recent developments

13. At the ITB Panel meeting on 12 April 2012, members referred to a newspaper article (**Appendix II**) and requested the Administration to address the concerns raised therein, in particular the discrepancy in performance between the two ILSP Implementers and the possible abuse of the cash subsidy by the families under the scheme. Panel members also urged the Administration to follow up with the two Implementers to promote the utilization of the ILSP and introduce improvement measures to the scheme, such as by using cash coupons instead of depositing cash subsidy directly into the bank accounts of the needy families.

Latest position

14. The Administration will report to the Panel on 14 May 2012 the latest development of various major digital inclusion initiatives and the progress of the implementation of the ILSP.

Relevant papers

Information paper provided by the Administration for the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 12 April 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/itb/papers/itb0412cb1-1520-3-e.pdf>

Background brief on digital inclusion prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 12 April 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/itb/papers/itb0412cb1-1520-4-e.pdf>

Minutes of Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 12 April 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/itb/minutes/itb20100412.pdf>

Information paper provided by the Administration for the Education Panel meeting on 12 April 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/ed/papers/ed0412cb2-1233-1-e.pdf>

Background brief entitled "Development of e-Learning and provision of Internet access charges" prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the Education Panel meeting on 12 April 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/ed/papers/ed0412cb2-1233-2-e.pdf>

Minutes of Education Panel meeting on 12 April 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/ed/minutes/ed20100412.pdf>

Information papers provided by the Administration for the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 14 March 2011

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/itb/papers/itb0314cb1-1517-5-e.pdf>

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/itb/papers/itbcb1-1023-1-e.pdf>

Background brief on digital inclusion prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 14 March 2011

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/itb/papers/itb0314cb1-1517-6-e.pdf>

Minutes of Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 14 March 2011

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/itb/minutes/itb20110314.pdf>

Information paper provided by the Administration for the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel special meeting on 7 June 2011

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/itb/papers/itbcb1-2299-2-e.pdf>

Background brief on Internet Learning Support Programme prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel special meeting on 7 June 2011

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/itb/papers/itb0607cb1-2374-3-e.pdf>

Minutes of Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel special meeting on 7 June 2011

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/chinese/panels/itb/minutes/itb20110607.pdf>

Papers and documents provided by the Administration for the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel special meeting on 16 June 2011

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/itb/papers/itb0616cb1-2451-1-e.pdf>

Minutes of Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel special meeting on 16 June 2011

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/chinese/panels/itb/minutes/itb20110616.pdf>

Council question on Internet Learning Support Programme raised by Hon Fred LI on 25 May 2011

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/counmtg/hansard/cm0525-translate-e.pdf>

Council question on Internet Learning Support Programme raised by Hon Emily LAU on 9 November 2011

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr11-12/english/counmtg/hansard/cm1109-translate-e.pdf>

Administration's paper on supplementary information on the selection of implementation agent for the Internet Learning Support Programme

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/chinese/panels/itb/papers/itb0616cb1-2692-1-ec.pdf>

Administration's paper dated 26 August 2011 in response to letter from Hon LEE Wing-tat and Hon Emily LAU as set out in LC Paper No. CB(1)2959/10-11(01)

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/itb/papers/itb0616cb1-2959-2-e.pdf>

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
8 May 2012

Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2012-13

Reply Serial No.

**CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY TO
INITIAL WRITTEN QUESTION**

EDB316

Question Serial No.

2203

Head: 47 – Government Secretariat : Subhead
Office of the Government (No. & title):
Chief Information Officer

Programme: (3) IT in the Community

Controlling Officer: Government Chief Information Officer

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Education

Question: Regarding the Internet Learning Support Programme (ILSP), please inform this Committee of the following:

- (a) What are the estimated total expenditure and manpower involved for ILSP in 2011-12? What are the number of applicants and the distribution of application quota for each district?
- (b) The Administration plans to conduct a mid-term review in 2012-13. What are the total expenditure and manpower involved? What are the contents of the service plan?

Asked by: Hon. PAN Pey-chyou

Reply:

- (a) The Government has allocated about \$55 m in total to the two Implementers in 2011-12 for implementation of the Internet Learning Support Programme, of which about \$30 m and \$25 m are given to eInclusion Foundation Ltd and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service respectively. The amount of allocations are based on the financial requirements set out in the Implementers' respective business plans. Under the Funding and Operation Agreement, the two Implementers are required to provide details of actual expenditure of the Programme in 2011-12 in their progress reports to be submitted to us in April this year. We will provide the relevant information for the Legislative Council Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting in May 2012.

Besides, OGCIO created 2 new time-limited posts for 3 years in 2011-12 to cope with the additional workload arising from the Programme. The staff cost involved is about \$1.6 m per annum.

The Programme is implemented by the two organisations in the Eastern and Western parts of Hong Kong respectively. All families eligible for receiving Internet Access Subsidy under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance scheme or through the Student Financial Assistance Agency can join the Programme. As at 31 January 2012, more than 36 000 families and their school-age children have joined the Programme, of which about 19 700 families are from the Eastern part and 16 500 families from the Western part of Hong Kong.

- (b) We will conduct a mid-term review of the Programme after two years of implementation, i.e. in mid-2013, and complete it before commencement of the 2013/2014 school year. The expenditure and manpower involved for the mid-term review will be absorbed through internal resource redeployment. The mid-term review aims to examine the outcomes of the Programme with a view to enhancing the implementation arrangement as well as setting the work priorities and service targets for the remaining 3 years of the Programme. Major work includes:
- (i) assessing the outcomes and implementation arrangement of the Programme;
 - (ii) making recommendations on the implementation arrangement and service standards according to the latest market development and the students' online learning needs;
 - (iii) setting the service standards and targets for the remaining 3 years of the Programme; and
 - (iv) conducting preliminary assessment on the sustainability arrangement of the Programme after its completion in 2016, and recommending corresponding follow-up measures.

Signature _____

Name in block letters _____ Daniel Lai

Post Title _____ Government Chief Information Officer

Date _____ 22.2.2012

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Newspaper cutting

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