

Academics launch scientific survey 'to counter critics'

A GROUP of academics will systematically quiz about 2,000 people on political reform, in a bid to dispel claims by pro-Beijing commentators that public surveys on the topic were unscientific.

The Concerned Staff of Tertiary Education Institutions for Constitutional Development announced details of its project yesterday, one day after the Legislative Councillors had called on the public to speak up.

Many councillors promised, in their two-day debate on the political Green Paper, that they would abide by the majority view whether to introduce direct elections next year.

The academics' move was in reaction to a commentary in a pro-Beijing newspaper



last month, which claimed the surveys conducted by district boards, political groups and other organisations on the issue were neither scientific nor representative.

The group, which comprises about 30 lecturers and executives of tertiary institutions, co-sponsored a Commercial Radio phone-in programme on political reform in May.

The project co-ordinator is Dr Fung Wing-kam of the City Polytechnic. He said the group did not have any political stand and members held differing views.

But given the abundant

resources of the institutions, the group would be able to conduct a large-scale and objective survey on the controversial topic of political reform.

More than 70 post-secondary students will help conduct the survey. Letters will be sent to about 2,000 households today to inform them of the survey.

The students will visit families, chosen randomly, from next Tuesday to August 3.

The organisers expected about 60 percent of residents approached to respond to the survey.

The findings will be sent to the official independent Survey Office and announced to the public in mid-September before the four-month consultation period ends.

Catholics urge early elections

A CATHOLIC group yesterday issued a statement calling for direct elections next year as it would be one way to "realise democracy fully".

The Working Party on the Green Paper of the Hongkong Diocesan Justice and Peace Commission, a group appointed by Bishop John Baptist Wu, also said at least one-quarter of the legislative seats should be elected directly.

The call follows the Bishop's appeal to the territory's 250,000 Catholics, two weeks ago, to speak out on the Green Paper.

In an 11-paragraph letter, the working party said: "It is not only consistent with the principle of equal chance

for political participation but also confirms it is a public right to take part in government."

"Legco, being a law-making body, has the responsibility to monitor the administration and its composition will affect its monitoring capacities directly.

"If the future legislature is created through direct elections, it will be more representative and directly accountable to the public with their trust and support.

"Direct elections is more consistent with the Joint Declaration as the document states the future legislature will be constituted by elections," it said.

The group also criticised the Government because

the Green Paper did not fully discuss the structures of the Legislative Council. It was putting the cart before the horse, it added.

The group said introducing direct elections next year would not be hasty and would be more to the benefit of the political transition.

Bishop Wu, in a seven-paragraph letter addressed to his congregation and carried as an open letter in the *Kung Kao Po* newspaper, said everyone had the freedom to participate in improving the legislature and administration.

He also said it was their duty to express their opinions on various options in the Green Paper.