

On QEF's assessment criteria on applications:

Submission to the Legco Panel on Education

Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union

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This paper comments on Quality Education Fund's assessment criteria on applications. QEF's suspension of consideration of applications from non-school entities, its insufficient emphasis on awards for outstanding performance and its refusal to fund recurrent projects will be discussed.

Suspension of consideration of applications from non-school entities

QEF has made it a policy this year to fund only projects from schools.

This might be interpreted as amounting to suspension of many of QEF's six terms of reference that are outside the capacity of individual primary and secondary schools, specifically the second one, namely funding awards for schools and teachers, like those with better value-added performance within quality circles formed on a voluntary basis.

It is questionable whether a public body can suspend its own terms of reference.

The Audit Department has criticized QEF for not having met, in as late as its third year, its second term of reference, which states that teachers with better performance should be awarded. It is difficult, if not impossible, for schools to design awards schemes, especially an innovative one like our inter-school value-added competition of all round achievement, which awards teachers in the better schools.

Insufficient emphasis on awards for outstanding performance

According to the Education Commission Report No. 7 (ECR7), QEF was set up to fund the following 6 areas of quality measures:

- (a) school-based innovative projects and experiments;
- (b) awards for outstanding performance of schools and teachers;
- (c) promotion of extra-curricular activities;
- (d) educational researches and consultancies;
- (e) school-based courses; and
- (f) institutional reviews to monitor schools.

In the past 3 years, QEF has not laid enough emphasis on funding area (b), which is for awards. If it being QEF's second term of reference is any indication of its relative importance, its fair ratio of funds should be at least one-sixth of the total. In actual fact, the amount of funds that QEF has put into area (b) is far less.

Refusal to fund recurrent projects

One operational criterion of QEF is that all projects are to be one-off. This may be a legitimate criterion as far as areas (a), (c), (d), (e) and (f) are concerned. But awarding outstanding performance of teachers and schools is by nature a recurrent quality measure. Although awards must be given in retrospect, the incentive effect on improving teaching and management works only in anticipation. The promise of a medium to long-term recurrent award is an essential feature of a market mechanism.

One-off or even short-term award systems can only encourage short term and shortsighted improvements among teachers and principals. They do not have the more valuable effect of encouraging basic changes in attitudes and practices.

Specifically, the non-recurrent criteria will exclude the possibility of introducing value-addedness into our school system. As value-added is equal to 'final value' minus 'initial value', it is expected that the 'final value' will mainly reflect the attainment of students of the graduating year in a school. If this award scheme were only for the duration of 1 year, it would seem it does not help towards winning for a school to teach P1 to P5, or S1 to S4 well. Then the incentive for schools to teach students of every year-level well, especially the foundation years, would be lost. This would be a big opportunity foregone for every dollar allotted for awards.