

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Financial Assistance Scheme for Evening Adult Education Courses

PURPOSE

This paper proposes a financial assistance scheme for adult learners to attend the evening adult education courses to be commissioned by the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB).

BACKGROUND

2. In recent years, the Government has introduced various initiatives to provide more diversified courses and training opportunities to adult learners of different background. These courses and training opportunities include: basic education courses under the Adult Education Subvention Scheme; English Language courses under the Continuing Education Fund; various courses under the Employees Retraining Board and the Skills Upgrading Scheme; and Project Yi Jin (PYJ) which provides an alternative path for adult learners and some Secondary 5 school leavers who have not attained five passes in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE).

3. With the availability of a diversity of courses for adult learners, and in the wake of the declining enrolment of the government-run evening adult education courses, EMB has commissioned two course operators to operate, with government subvention, the evening adult education courses for two years starting from September 2003. The course operators also provide other diversified courses which are operated on a self-financed mode with a fee remission scheme to help those with financial difficulties. Upon the completion of the two-year service by August 2005, they have to continue to run all the courses in a self-financed mode and provide a fee remission scheme for the needy learners.

PROBLEM

4. Although the education and training opportunities being provided by the Government can largely meet the needs of adult learners, there are some who prefer taking the mainstream secondary courses and sitting for the HKCEE instead of taking the alternative path of PYJ.

THE PROPOSAL

5. We therefore propose to implement a financial assistance scheme for the adult learners, who have attained the basic education, to pursue their studies through the mainstream senior secondary school courses. This proposal is made following discussions with some adult learner representatives and the existing EMB-commissioned adult education course providers.

Objectives

6. The proposed financial assistance scheme aims to:
- (a) provide an affordable pathway to facilitate adult learners to complete mainstream senior secondary school courses;
 - (b) ease the financial hardship of adult learners so that no willing adult learners would be deprived of the chance to pursue their studies due to lack of means; and
 - (c) achieve cost effectiveness with subsidies going direct to the adult learners.

Salient features of the scheme

7. The scheme will take effect from the 2005/06 school year for a period of three years. The scheme is targeted at adult learners who will be admitted to the courses to be offered in the designated school premises by the EMB-commissioned course operators. The courses are similar to those offered at the mainstream senior secondary levels.

8. The operation of the scheme will make reference to that of the existing PYJ as follows:

- (a) the subsidy levels include a basic subsidy of 30% of the course fees for all learners; and a full fee remission (i.e. 100% of the course fees) for those with exceptional financial hardship;
- (b) the standard means test used for PYJ for assessing eligibility of learners for full fee remission will be adopted for the proposed scheme; and
- (c) subsidies are on reimbursement basis whereby learners should have attained 80% attendance for meeting the eligibility criteria^{Note}.

9. Learners obtaining subsidy for adult education under this scheme would not be eligible for subsidy for PYJ, or vice versa, since the attainment of qualifications for both is pitched at the HKCEE standard.

Implementation

10. EMB will commission suitable non-profit-making course provider(s) to operate the senior secondary school courses in designated school premises located in different regions. They have to operate the courses in a self-financed mode. Adult learners admitted to the designated senior secondary classes will be eligible for financial assistance under the proposed scheme.

11. The Student Financial Assistance Agency (SFAA) will be responsible for processing applications and releasing subsidy to adult learners. Similar to PYJ, adult learners with hardship may apply for loans from the Non-means Tested Loan Scheme to pay for the initial school fees.

12. The scheme will be subject to a review in the third year of operation (i.e. the 2007/08 school year) with due regard to the effectiveness of the scheme as

^{Note}: Since adult learners may sometimes have to be absent from classes due to the engagement of extended day-time job, we will consider the feasibility and viability of providing the following relaxed criteria in respect of the requirement of 80% attendance:

- at least 60% attendance plus an overall pass in the final examination; or
- at least 60% attendance plus inclusion of an exemption for the remaining 20% attendance to be proved by prescribed means including medical certificates or employers' certification of their need to take overtime work.

well as the potential impact of the proposed reform of the academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education.

PUBLIC REACTION

13. The proposal is made after our consultation with some adult learners on the broad direction of providing subsidies to adult learners direct and introducing means to bring down the school fees.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

14. We estimate that the annual expenditure for the scheme is in the region of \$12 million and this may benefit up to about 3 600 learners.

15. We plan to seek the approval of the Finance Committee to create a non-recurrent commitment of about \$36 million under Head 173 Student Financial Assistance Agency to cover the expenditure of the proposed student financial assistance for evening adult education courses for three years from 2005/06 to 2007/08. We will absorb the administrative costs from existing resources.

ADVICE SOUGHT

16. Members are invited to comment on the proposal in paragraphs 5 to 12 above.

Education and Manpower Bureau
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