

For discussion
on 12 April 2010

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Review of the Financial Assistance Scheme for Designated Evening Adult Education Courses

Purpose

This paper –

- (a) briefs Members on the results of the review of the Financial Assistance Scheme for Designated Evening Adult Education Courses (the Scheme); and
- (b) seeks Members' views on the proposal to improve the Scheme from the 2010/11 school year onwards with the following enhancements –
 - (i) to run the Scheme as a recurrent programme instead of the current non-recurrent arrangement;
 - (ii) to extend the coverage of the Scheme so that the number of designated centres will increase from five to a maximum of 15 (or one to three centres in each of the five regions) throughout the territory; and
 - (iii) to reimburse tuition fees to eligible adult learners twice a year instead of once per year under the existing Scheme.

Background

2. The Government introduced the Scheme in the 2005/06 school year for adult learners (aged 17 or above) studying evening senior secondary courses. This Scheme replaced the previous arrangement whereby the Government operated the government evening schools. Under the Scheme, adult learners enrolled in senior secondary courses, i.e. Secondary 4 to Secondary 7, run by approved course provider(s) at designated government school premises, would be eligible for the basic 30% reimbursement of tuition fees if they meet the eligibility criteria. Full reimbursement (100%) of tuition fees would be provided for those who also passed the means test administered by the Student Financial Assistance Agency (SFAA) for full grant.

3. The Finance Committee (FC) approved the Scheme for three years (i.e. until the 2007/08 school year) with a total provision of \$36 million on a non-recurrent basis. Upon the completion of a review by the Government, FC approved in May 2008 the continuation of the Scheme from the 2008/09 school year onwards with the following enhancement –

- (a) extending the levels of study of the Scheme to cover junior secondary courses, i.e. Secondary 1 to 3; and
- (b) adding a 50% tuition fee reimbursement for those who passed the means test administered by the SFAA for half grant.

There is currently one approved operator under the Scheme who will run the Scheme till the 2009/10 school year.

4. During the discussion of the Scheme in 2008, Members considered that the Government should further enhance support for adult learners pursuing evening secondary courses. The Government has undertaken to review the issue after the completion of the 2008/09 school year.

Survey on evening secondary courses operation

5. In order to better understand the operation of the evening secondary schools and to provide a reference for the review, we have conducted a survey of all the 36 schools/centres (including those five under the Scheme) operated by 18 operators offering adult evening education in the 2008/09 school year. Among those surveyed, 34 schools/centres (or 94%) responded. The findings of the survey are summarised below –

- (a) In 2008/09, there were 36 schools/centres operating evening secondary classes. Among them, 24 schools/centres (operated by 14 operators) offered only Secondary 4 to 5 classes.
- (b) Among the schools/centres that responded, there were 6 715 students enrolled during the 2008/09 school year. About 31% and 54% of these students were enrolled in Secondary 4 and 5 classes respectively while 8.5% were enrolled in Secondary 6 and 7 classes. The rest, about 6.5%, enrolled in Secondary 1 to 3 classes.
- (c) The schools/centres were located in 14 districts. The four districts with no adult evening education were Central and Western, Southern, Islands and Kowloon City.

- (d) The overall drop-out rate was about 30%, with a higher rate at junior secondary levels.
- (e) Tuition fee charged varied among the various levels. Details are as follows –

Course Providers	Tuition fees (per annum)		
	Secondary 1 – 3	Secondary 4 – 5	Secondary 6 – 7
Under the Scheme	\$7,400	\$8,750	\$11,130
Other non-profit-making providers	\$7,200 – \$9,800	\$4,200 – \$12,050	\$8,400 – \$17,325
Other private providers	\$10,000	\$7,200 – \$16,200	\$7,350 – \$18,000

- (f) Non-profit-making schools have a significantly higher percentage of trained graduate teachers (81%) than other private providers (31%).

6. A survey has also been conducted on the students under the Scheme. The ratio of young adults under the Scheme has increased significantly over the past five years. In 2008/09, about 75% of the students were under the age of 30 and about 33% were under 20. The corresponding figures in 2003/04 were 48% and 16% respectively. The prior education attainment of the students has also improved over the years. Students with an education level of senior secondary or above has risen from 27% in 2003/04 to over 72% in 2008/09.

Proposed enhancements

Changing the Scheme to a recurrent programme

7. In recent years, the Government has provided a range of programmes and assistance such as Project Yi Jin, Skills Upgrading Scheme, Continuing Education Fund, etc for adult learners to pursue continuing education and training. However, there is a continued demand from adult learners to pursue formal secondary education by attending evening mainstream secondary courses. Since the implementation of the Scheme in the 2005/06 school year, the enrolment figures for the mainstream evening secondary schools (including courses under the Scheme and courses offered by other private evening schools) have been quite stable with an average of about 5 000 students each year. The enrolment figures as at the beginning of the respective school year, with those under the Scheme and its share of the total enrolment shown in brackets, are tabulated below –

School Year	Enrolment			
	Secondary 1-3	Secondary 4-5	Secondary 6-7	Total
2005/06	336 (NA)	3 854 (931 or 24%)	820 (0 or 0%)	5 010 (931 or 19%)
2006/07	361 (NA)	3 673 (1 028 or 28%)	718 (27 or 4%)	4 752 (1 055 or 22%)
2007/08	360 (NA)	4 132 (993 or 24%)	457 (25 or 5%)	4 949 (1 018 or 21%)
2008/09	345 (271 or 79%)	4 728 (1 155 or 24%)	479 (49 or 10%)	5 552 (1 475 or 27%)
2009/10	316 (264 or 84%)	3 926 (1 071 or 27%)	608 (130 or 21%)	4 850 (1 465 or 30%)

8. The number of adult learners enrolled in Secondary 4 in the 2009/10 school year dropped from 1 579 to 572, representing a decrease of 1 007 or 64% against the 2008/09 school year. We believe that some adult learners might have adopted a “wait and see” attitude towards the new Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education under the New Senior Secondary (NSS) academic structure and this might have affected the enrolment of Secondary 4 under the NSS. However, we consider that adult evening education will continue to serve as a useful avenue for adults, particularly working adults and new immigrants who did not have the opportunity to receive or complete basic education in Hong Kong, to receive formal secondary education and the demand for evening secondary courses will continue under the NSS. Furthermore, this pathway also provides a second chance for those secondary school leavers who wish to make further attempts at public examinations. For instance, the average passing rate of students under the Scheme in the 2008/09 school year was about 56% (excluding drop outs) and about 14% of those who sat for the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination in 2009 attained at least five passes.

9. Having considered the result of the above surveys and the continued demand for adult evening secondary courses, we **recommend** that the Scheme should be carried forward and made recurrent in nature, and be extended in coverage and improved in operating parameters so as to provide more assurance to students aspiring to take up and complete secondary education.

Extending the coverage of the Scheme

10. Under the current Scheme, five centres¹ are operating classes in the 2009/10 school year. We have received suggestions that more designated centres, apart from government premises, should be provided. To benefit more students from different geographical locations, we **recommend** extending the coverage of the Scheme by designating one to three centres in each of the five regions² throughout the territory. In each of the five regions, we will make available government secondary schools as operating centres and invite interested non-profit-making evening secondary course operators to join the Scheme on a by-region basis. These operators may also propose using their own centres to our satisfaction as possible premises for operation. We plan to designate one to three centres in each region, although the exact number of centres will depend on the response to our invitations and the merits of applications. To ensure those adult learners who have already joined the Scheme and enrolled in the current designated centres will not be adversely affected, the existing five designated centres will have priority over other applications in the respective region. Similar to the existing arrangement, we will seek to ensure the quality of services provided under the Scheme by specifying the qualifications of the teaching staff and requiring that the level of tuition fees be approved beforehand.

11. Under the new arrangement, the number of designated centres and course operators is expected to increase, widening the choice and access for the benefit of our adult learners. We envisage that the number of adult learners benefiting from the Scheme will increase from the current 30% to over 60% of the total student population.

Improving administration of the Scheme

12. We have also reviewed the administration of the Scheme. Some students have suggested that the existing attendance requirement of 80%, or 60% plus an overall pass or exemption, for receiving financial assistance should be lowered. We have examined the existing eligibility criteria for financial assistance under the Scheme (at [Annex](#)), particularly the minimum attendance requirement of at least 80% or 60% plus an overall pass/exemption. We consider that the existing attendance requirements are necessary to provide an incentive for the adult learners to attend classes as much as possible and ensure the proper use of public money. Lowering the requirement may not be conducive to

¹ The five designated centres are namely Hotung Secondary School, Kowloon Technical School, Queen Elizabeth School, New Territories Heung Yee Kuk Tai Po District Secondary School and Tsuen Wan Government Secondary School. We have also designated another six centres but no classes were offered at these centres due to insufficient enrolment.

² The five regions are Hong Kong Island, Kowloon East, Kowloon West, New Territories East and New Territories West and their boundaries will be the same as those for the geographical constituency areas in respect of Legislative Council election.

encouraging adult learners to complete their secondary education. We will therefore maintain the existing eligibility requirement.

13. The Scheme aims to ease the financial hardship of needy adult learners so that no willing adult learners would be deprived of the chance to pursue their secondary education due to lack of means. The Scheme currently provides 30% subsidy to all adult learners who meet the eligibility criteria, 50% subsidy to those who also pass the means test administered by the SFAA for half grant and full fee reimbursement for those who also pass the means test for full grant. In the 2008/09 school year, about 66% of the adult learners in the five designated centres (excluding drop outs) met the eligibility criteria and benefited from the Scheme. Among them, 65% received 30% reimbursement of tuition fee regardless of their financial position, while 16% and 19% received half grant and full grant respectively. It is also noteworthy that adult learners with financial hardship for making upfront payment of the tuition fees may apply for loans under the Non-means tested Loan Scheme administered by SFAA. Those learners under the age of 22 and without a day-time job who are eligible for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) may opt to apply for school grants (under the CSSA Scheme) which cover the tuition fees and other related expenses, to attend the evening secondary courses under the Scheme. We consider that the existing arrangement has maintained a balance of prudent use of public resources and assisting willing adults to pursue their secondary education.

14. We have also reviewed whether the administration of the Scheme could be enhanced. At present, financial assistance is provided on a reimbursement basis to eligible learners once a year. Some students commented that the once-a-year frequency could put students with financial difficulty under pressure. In an effort to disburse the subsidies to eligible students in a more timely manner, we recommend reimbursing tuition fees in two instalments after each term rather than one instalment after the whole school year. Hence, the attendance requirement will be calculated on a school term basis accordingly.

Financial implications

15. With the proposed enhancements set out in paragraph 1(b) above, the estimated annual expenditure³ of the Scheme will increase from the current \$3.3 million to about \$10.7 million. The actual amount of expenditure will depend on a number of factors such as the number of intakes, the level of tuition fee charged and the number of adult learners meeting the eligibility criteria as well as the number of such adult learners eligible for half/full fee reimbursement. We will absorb all the recurrent funding required using our existing resources.

³ Financial assistance will be payable on a reimbursement basis upon completion of the relevant school term. With implementation of the proposed enhancements, cash flow will be incurred from 2011-12.

16. To lower the operating costs and keep the tuition fees at a reasonable level, we propose to continue arranging reimbursement of rental charges to those approved course providers operating evening secondary courses in government school premises. The annual expenditure in this regard is estimated to be about \$1.5 million. We will continue to meet the funding requirement within our existing resources.

Way Forward

17. Subject to Members' comments, we plan to conduct an open exercise inviting interested course providers to operate evening secondary courses under the enhanced Scheme in May 2010. We will also continue to monitor the implications of the new academic structure on the demand for and operation of adult evening education to consider if further improvements are warranted.

Education Bureau
April 2010

**Existing Eligibility Criteria for the Financial Assistance Scheme
for Designated Evening Adult Education Courses**

- The eligibility criteria for receiving assistance under the Scheme are as follows –
 - (a) applicants should be aged 17 or above;
 - (b) eligibility is restricted to designated secondary courses (inclusive of all secondary levels) that are quality-assured and commissioned by the Education Bureau;
 - (c) subsidies are provided on reimbursement basis whereby learners are required to attain the following minimum attendance requirements –
 - (i) at least 80% attendance; or
 - (ii) at least 60% attendance plus an overall pass in the final examination; or
 - (iii) 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 work commitment; and
 - (d) since Project Yi Jin is also pitched at secondary education level and offers an alternative route to mainstream secondary education, applicants may not receive financial assistance under both schemes, regardless of whether they succeed or fail to complete the programme or attain the desired qualification under one of the two schemes. Furthermore, they may not receive financial assistance for repeating the same level of study under the Scheme.
- Students meeting the above-mentioned criteria are eligible for reimbursement of 30% of the tuition fees, regardless of their financial position. Full reimbursement (i.e. 100% of the tuition fees) or half reimbursement (i.e. 50% of the tuition fees) will be provided for those who have met the criteria and have passed the means test administered by the Student Financial Assistance Agency (SFAA) for full grant or half grant respectively. Students with financial hardship for making upfront payment of the initial tuition fees may apply for loans under the Non-means-tested Loan Scheme administered by the SFAA.