

Legislative Council Panel on Education Meeting on 9 May 2011

Supplementary information relating to the item on “Enhancement of assistance provided by the Student Financial Assistance Agency to needy students”

Information on students receiving means-tested financial assistance in overseas countries

We have written to relevant agencies in some overseas jurisdictions including Singapore, the United Kingdom and Australia to ask for the relevant statistics, and undertaken to revert to the Panel once relevant information is made available to us. We have received information from the relevant authority of Singapore, which is now set out in the ensuing paragraphs for Members’ reference.

Bursaries for post-secondary students

2. The means-tested government bursary schemes in Singapore for degree and diploma students cover students up to the 66th percentile of per capita gross monthly household income (PCI). In the 2011 academic year, students with PCI of SGD\$1,700 and below will qualify for assistance. Depending on the PCI, the amount of assistance that can be received by a degree or diploma student is set out as follows –

PCI	PCI (SGD)	Bursary per year (SGD)	
		Diploma Students	Degree Students
33 th percentile or below	\$850 or below	\$1,800	\$2,900
34 th to 50 th percentile	\$851 to \$1,200	\$1,350	\$2,150
51 st to 66 th percentile	\$1,201 to \$1,700	\$450	\$800

Students coming from a lower income bracket can receive a larger amount of assistance. Under the relevant means-tested financial assistance schemes operated by the Student Financial Assistance Agency (SFAA), different levels of assistance would be provided to the needy post-secondary students depending on the result of the means test¹.

¹ In the case of mean-tested financial assistance schemes for post-secondary students, i.e. the Tertiary Student Finance Scheme – Publicly-funded Programmes and Financial Assistance Scheme for Post-secondary Students, there are five levels of assistance of 15%, 25%, 50%, 75% and 100% (full assistance) after we have rationalised the tiers of assistance from the 2011/12 academic year.

3. To qualify for the highest level of assistance, the student must not have a PCI exceeding the 33rd percentile; to qualify for any assistance, the PCI of the student must not exceed 66th percentile. The income limits are broadly comparable to those after relaxation of the means test mechanism of SFAA, whereby a student with a monthly family income of around 60% of the median monthly household income will qualify for full assistance and a student with a monthly family income of around 100% of the median monthly household income will qualify for any assistance. That said, in the case of Singapore, the highest amount of bursary a student can get is only about 80% of the average tuition fees of diploma programmes or 40% of the average tuition fees of degree programmes. Under the Tertiary Student Finance Scheme – Publicly-funded Programmes for full-time students pursuing publicly-funded post-secondary programmes, SFAA provides tuition fee grant equal to 100% of the tuition fee payable for a student who passes the means test of SFAA and is eligible for full level of assistance. Apart from tuition fee grants, SFAA also provides means-tested grants for academic expenses for needy post-secondary students, and from the 2011/12 academic year, post-secondary students eligible for receiving full level of assistance can receive an additional \$1,000 academic expenses grant whilst those eligible for less than full level of assistance can also receive an additional grant amount according to their level of assistance.

Assistance for students in primary schools and secondary schools

4. Singapore Government has in place an assistance scheme which seeks to provide financial assistance to needy primary and secondary school students studying in government and government-aided schools. Households with 1 or 2 children with gross income not exceeding SGD\$1,500 per month and households with 3 children or more with gross income not exceeding SGD\$1,800 per month are eligible for assistance. The needy primary and secondary school students concerned would be provided with free textbooks and free school attire, and do not need to pay for the standard miscellaneous fees. The school fees of needy secondary school students would also be waived.

5. Hong Kong has implemented 12 years' free primary and secondary education. The School Textbook Assistance Scheme of SFAA provides cash subsidies for needy primary and secondary school students² for purchase of textbooks and school-related expenses, whilst relevant assistance provided in Singapore is either in kind or in the form

² The School Textbook Assistance Scheme covers primary and secondary school students studying in government, aided, caput and Direct Subsidy Scheme Schools

of fee waiver. SFAA also offers internet subsidies and travel subsidies for needy primary and secondary school students.

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