

FACT SHEET

Mainland Experience Scheme for Post-secondary Students

1. Background

1.1 The Government proposed in the 2011-2012 Budget to allocate HK\$100 million to launch a five-year "Mainland Experience Scheme for Post-secondary Students" to subsidize local post-secondary students to participate in such activities as short-term internship or learning programmes in the Mainland. This fact sheet aims to provide the Panel on Education with information on this Scheme and other similar schemes funded by the Government.

2. Mainland Experience Scheme for Post-secondary Students

2.1 The Mainland Experience Scheme for Post-secondary Students seeks to encourage young people to see for themselves and learn more about our country's latest development. The Scheme is available for both publicly-funded and self-financing post-secondary institutions. The institutions have to submit a proposal and raise funds themselves, supplemented with government subsidies on a "one on one" matching basis. The funds will be used to support participation of post-secondary students in short-term internship, learning or exchange programmes in the Mainland. The institutions should indicate in their proposals how they are going to work with the Mainland educational institutions or enterprises concerned, as well as how they will ensure the proper use of funds. It is estimated that over 30 000 students will benefit from this five-year Scheme, with each of them receiving a subsidy of up to HK\$3,000. The Scheme is expected to commence in July 2011.

3. Other related government subsidization schemes

3.1 Generally speaking, Mainland experience activities or programmes offered to post-secondary students may be organized by the institutions or the students themselves, and by external organizations. The latter may serve as an initiating, a collaborating or a supporting organization. A considerable number of relevant activities have been held by the institutions, which vary in aim, format, target participants and sponsors, with the content primarily featuring China experience, social service, academic exchange and internship. There are also programmes organized for students of specific disciplines, or for special purposes, such as supporting the reconstruction work in the Sichuan earthquake-stricken areas.

3.2 At present, the Government facilitates the implementation of the Mainland experience programmes for post-secondary students mainly through setting up funding schemes under which institutions and organizations may apply for financial support. Since Hong Kong's return to China, the Government has launched several schemes to finance programmes that enable young people to gain experience in different aspects of the Mainland. The target audience of these schemes generally covers all young people in Hong Kong. The contents of these schemes are set out in ensuing sections.

The Community Participation Scheme for Organizing Study Tour to the Mainland

3.3 The Scheme was established in 1998, which is administered by the Commission on Youth ("the Commission") under the Home Affairs Bureau ("HAB"). The aim of the Scheme is, via sponsoring community organizations to organize study tours to the Mainland, to enhance Hong Kong youth's awareness and understanding of their home country, foster exchange with the Mainland people and strengthen the youngsters' sense of national identity. In addition to receiving subsidy from the Commission, the Scheme is also funded by the charity donation from the Board of Management of the Chinese Permanent Cemeteries.

3.4 The applicant of the Scheme must be a locally registered organization, a statutory body or a recognized community organization. To be eligible for funding, a project should carry a specific theme, and be non-profit making and has not yet commenced. The proposed study tour should comprise three elements, including understanding China's history, political system, economic system, culture, arts, people's livelihood, social system, etc.; interacting and liaising with people in the Mainland; and sharing out their experience to the community after completing the project. The projects may be organized by a single organization/school or jointly organized by multiple organizations/schools. Those participants of the proposed study tours must be Hong Kong youth aged between 12 and 29, who hold a valid Hong Kong Permanent Identity Card. For projects providing practical work placement in the Mainland, the participants must be full-time Hong Kong students aged between 18 and 24. In addition, exchange study programmes involving Mainland groups being invited to Hong Kong may also apply for subsidy, where the Mainland participants of such study tours should also be young people aged between 12 and 29.

3.5 In 2011-2012, the amount of sponsorship for each project is between HK\$50,000 and HK\$600,000¹. The Working Group on Youth National Education of the Commission ("the Working Group") is responsible for vetting the applications. Their major considerations for granting sponsorship are: the objective, aim and content of the project; the target participants and number of beneficiaries; contents of the activities and creativity of the project; amount of allocation requested; values and objectives to be promoted; self-evaluation mechanism; feasibility of the project and related arrangements; and background, expertise qualification and past experience of the applicant in organizing similar activities.

¹ Under the Scheme, participants are provided sponsorship according to the tour destination. In 2011-2012, the maximum amount of sponsorship is between HK\$180 and 400 per head per day. Each participant may receive sponsorship of up to a maximum of 14 days. If the project includes practical work placement opportunity in the Mainland, participants may receive sponsorship of up to a maximum of 31 days, with the amount for the first 14 days calculated according to the tour destination and the remaining 17 days being considered separately.

3.6 Within two months upon completion of the sponsored project, the organizations concerned are required, amongst others, to submit the activity report, financial report and information about the activities (e.g. publications, photos and videos) to the Working Group Secretariat. The Working Group may invite the organizations receiving sponsorship to send two participants to attend its meeting and conduct a presentation. Organizations receiving sponsorship are also required to make public the statements of accounts of income and expenditure of the projects.

3.7 In 2010-2011, the Commission granted over HK\$20 million to 199 approved applications, involving over 10 000 participants, with 9 435 being local young people. Among the successful applications, 19 were put forward by local institutions, and the total subsidy amounted to over HK\$2.5 million. The total number of beneficiaries was 830, with 793 being local young people.² Statistics on the approved funding under the Community Participation Scheme for Organizing Study Tours to the Mainland in the past three years are listed below.³

Table – Statistics on the approved funding under the Community Participation Scheme for Organizing Study Tours to the Mainland in the past three years

	Approved projects	Funding amount (HK\$)	Number of beneficiaries ⁽¹⁾	Projects organized by post-secondary institutions		
				Approved projects	Funding amount (HK\$)	Number of beneficiaries ⁽¹⁾
2010-2011	199	20,219,071	10 697 (9 435)	19	2,566,080	830 (793)
2009-2010	192	15,732,616	7 768 (7 107)	23	2,312,647	885 (725)
2008-2009	214	15,618,424	8 143 (7 778)	15	1,230,003	473 (473)

Note: (1) The number of beneficiaries includes both Hong Kong young people who took part in study tours to the Mainland and the Mainland young people who came to Hong Kong on an exchange programme. Bracketed figures represent the number of local participants.

² Target beneficiaries of individual projects organized by non-post-secondary institutions might also include post-secondary students.

³ Information provided by HAB.

Youth National Education Funding Scheme

3.8 The 2008-2009 Policy Address introduced a plan to allocate additional resources to launch a new funding scheme, namely the Youth National Education Funding Scheme, to sponsor community organizations to organize large-scale or a series of activities with a view to promoting national education amongst Hong Kong young people, thus enhancing their understanding of their home country. The Scheme, coordinated by the Commission, was launched in 2009, with application deadline ending in April of the same year. According to HAB, a total of 20 projects were approved for subsidy under the Scheme. The total value of approved funding amounted to around HK\$12.25 million, benefiting over 17 000 local young people. All the activities organized under the approved projects were carried out and completed between 1 July 2009 and 31 December 2010, and the Scheme also ceased to exist.

3.9 To apply for funding under such Scheme, the proposed projects should have a specific theme with the activities being held in both Hong Kong and the Mainland. The activities held in the Mainland should include exchange programmes with the Mainland people, voluntary services, training courses, seminars, practical work placement, etc., with a view to enhancing Hong Kong young people's understanding of their home country through their personal experience. The amount of sponsorship for each project ranged from HK\$0.4 million to HK\$1.3 million.⁴

⁴ Sponsorship was provided for both local young people participating in activities in the Mainland and the Mainland young people participating in activities in Hong Kong according to the tour destination, with the maximum amount ranging from HK\$160 to HK\$370 per head per day. Moreover, individual expenditure items incurred by those activities held in Hong Kong might also apply for subsidy.

3.10 The eligibility for application under this Scheme, including the requirements for both the applicants and participants, was similar to those of the aforementioned Community Participation Scheme for Organizing Study Tours to the Mainland. Likewise, applicants of the Youth National Education Funding Scheme should be a locally registered organization, a statutory body or a recognized community organization, and the target participants should be young people in Hong Kong and/or the Mainland who are aged between 12 and 29. As regards the assessment criteria, the major considerations for granting subsidy under the two Schemes were also similar. In particular, the Youth National Education Funding Scheme-specified that an effective evaluation mechanism was one of the key elements of the content of the proposed activity. To be eligible for funding under the Scheme, a project should include an assessment mechanism for evaluating how the participants' understanding of their home country and their sense of national identity had been enhanced.

Subsidy scheme for "Passing on the Torch – National Education Programme Series"

3.11 The Education Bureau ("EDB") launched the subsidy scheme for "Passing on the Torch – National Education Programme Series"⁵ in 2009-2010 to support mutual learning and exchange initiatives between Hong Kong and the Mainland under the theme of "promoting national education in schools", so as to allow students to learn from their own experience in the Mainland and enhance their sense of national identity. This scheme primarily provides funding and support to voluntary organizations which organize relevant activities for primary and secondary students, while it also accepts applications from organizations seeking to organize the Mainland exchange programmes for post-secondary students and other people in the community. In general, this scheme does not subsidize activities organized solely for the students of a particular school. In 2011-2012, the maximum amount of sponsorship for each approved project under the scheme is HK\$0.5 million, while the total amount of sponsorship for all projects submitted by the same organization should not exceed HK\$1 million⁶. The applications are vetted by EDB in accordance with the established criteria, including the quality of the project, cost-effectiveness, level of participation by students and teachers, and the past experience of the applicants in organizing similar activities.

⁵ "Passing on the Torch – National Education Programme Series" is a government initiative for promoting national education among the younger generation in Hong Kong. In the 2008-2009 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced that a national education platform known as "Passing on the Torch" would be created to promote national education in a more strategic and systematic manner by coordinating the work of various voluntary groups. The platform was established by EDB in 2009, with the major purposes to disseminate information regarding the national education activities organized by EDB and other organizations in Hong Kong (including those targeting post-secondary students and those organized by post-secondary institutions), and provide an online channel for the academia and other bodies to discuss and share their experience. Organizations intending to organize the Mainland exchange programmes may join the "Passing on the Torch - National Education Programme Series" as one of the recognized exchange activities by submitting a letter of intent signed by an authorized person. When applying for funding support, the activities recognized by the "Passing on the Torch" – National Education Platform will be handled with a higher priority.

⁶ Normally, the total amount of sponsorship for all projects submitted by the same organization will not exceed 50% of the costs of all activities.

Internship Programme for University Graduates

3.12 As regards job attachments, the Government previously introduced a programme providing university graduates with internship opportunities in the Mainland. The programme, known as Internship Programme for University Graduates ("GIP"), was a special, time-limited initiative launched in the face of the adverse impact of the financial tsunami on the local job market, with a view to promoting employment among university students who graduated in both 2008 and 2009⁷. Arrangements were made under GIP for university graduates to work as interns and receive training for six to 12 months in local or the Mainland enterprises. GIP planned to provide about 4 000 places for university graduates and among which, up to 1 000 places were earmarked for internships in the Mainland. Admission of eligible graduates to GIP commenced on 1 August 2009. Those graduates taking up internships in the Mainland enterprises received a monthly allowance of HK\$3,000 from the Labour Department ("LD"). Where no accommodation was offered by the Mainland enterprises, an extra accommodation allowance of HK\$1,500 per month was given to each intern by LD. The Mainland interns under GIP were also covered by an insurance policy provided by LD so that the Mainland enterprises had no need to provide any allowances.

3.13 With the gradual improvement of the labour market and more university graduates being able to secure employment, GIP ceased accepting both internship vacancies offered by enterprises and new applications from graduates after 31 March 2010. According to the information provided by the Government, as at the end of April 2010, a total of 239 university graduates took up internships in the Mainland, and they were engaged in various trades, such as financing, business services, insurance, transportation and real estate. The participating Mainland cities included Shenzhen, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Beijing, Chengdu, Dongguan, Foshan, Panyu and Hangzhou.

Research Division
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Tel: 2869 9593

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⁷ Other than local university graduates, those returning from overseas might also participate in GIP.

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