

立法會

Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(4)321/14-15(02)

Ref : CB4/PL/ED

Panel on Education

Meeting on 12 January 2015

Background brief on various initiatives to broaden the opportunities for local students to receive subsidized higher education

Purpose

This paper summarizes the major views and concerns expressed by members on salient issues related to major initiatives proposed and launched by the current term of government to broaden the opportunities for local students to receive subsidized higher education.

Overview of the major initiatives

2. The Financial Secretary proposed in the 2013-2014 Budget to make two separate injections of \$20 million each into the HKSAR Government Scholarship Fund ("GSF") and the Self-financing Post-secondary Education Fund ("SPEF") to set up scholarships and awards to give recognition to meritorious students with special educational needs ("SEN") pursuing post-secondary programmes. The Administration has planned to award the scholarships to about 100 SEN students every year under the two Funds and the scholarship amount would be pitched at \$10,000 for each SEN student in the 2013-2014 academic year. A student may be nominated more than once if he/she meets the selection criteria. The financial proposal was approved by the Finance Committee ("FC") on 12 July 2013. The new scholarships and awards were launched in the 2013-2014 academic year as the Endeavour Merit Award ("EMA") and the Endeavour Scholarships ("ES") under GSF and the Self-financing Post-secondary Scholarship Scheme of SPEF respectively.

3. In the 2014 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced a series of initiatives to provide secondary school leavers with broader and more diversified articulation pathways both in and outside Hong Kong. After consultation at the Panel on Education ("the Panel"), the financial proposals giving effect to the following initiatives were approved by FC on 12 July 2014.

(A) Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors ("SSSDP")

4. The Government has introduced the SSSDP to subsidize up to 1 000 students per cohort to pursue self-financing undergraduate programmes in selected disciplines to meet Hong Kong's manpower needs. Under SSSDP, the subsidy will be disbursed to the relevant institutions based on the actual enrolment of eligible students and subject to the quota for the designated programmes. The SSSDP will benefit three cohorts of students starting from the 2015-2016 academic year (i.e. those entering the first year of studies in the 2015-2016, 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 academic years) and its effectiveness will then be reviewed. The programmes and number of subsidized places will also be subject to annual review.

(B) Hong Kong Scholarship for Excellence Scheme ("HKSES")

5. Previously known as the Scholarship Scheme for Studying Outside Hong Kong, HKSES is a new scholarship scheme to support up to 100 outstanding local students per cohort to pursue studies in renowned universities outside Hong Kong. The HKSES will benefit three cohorts of students starting from the 2015-2016 academic year and then be subject to a review on its effectiveness. Under HKSES, the awardees will receive a non-means-tested scholarship to cover their tuition fees, or a maximum of \$250,000 per annum, whichever is lower. A means-tested bursary, subject to a ceiling of \$200,000 per student per annum, will be provided to those financially less well-off students.

(C) Mainland University Study Subsidy Scheme ("MUSSS")

6. In view of the rising demand for pursuing higher education in the Mainland, the Government has introduced the MUSSS to support needy students pursuing post-secondary study programmes at institutions participating in the Scheme for Admission of Hong Kong Students to Mainland Higher Education Institutions ("Admission Scheme")¹. The MUSSS will benefit three cohorts of students (around 2 000 students in total) starting from the 2014-2015 academic year and then be subject to a review on its effectiveness. Under MUSSS, a means-tested subsidy of up to HK\$15,000 (i.e. about RMB12,000 at prevailing exchange rate) per student per year will be provided. The actual number of beneficiaries under the MUSSS will depend on the number of actual intake via the Admission Scheme.

¹ The Admission Scheme was a Government-to-Government level collaboration project implemented since the 2012-2013 academic year. Under the Admission Scheme, Hong Kong students were exempted from taking the Mainland's Joint Entrance Examination. Hong Kong students could seek admission to the Mainland higher education institutions participating in the Admission Scheme on the basis of their Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination results.

(D) Multi-faceted Excellence Scholarship ("MES")

7. In line with the Government's youth policy of encouraging diversification and pursuit of excellence, the Government has established MES², which is administered by the Home Affairs Bureau, to encourage University Grants Committee ("UGC")-funded and self-financing institutions to admit about 20 local students a year who excel in sport, arts and/or community service with effect from the 2015-2016 academic year.

Deliberation on relevant issues

8. A number of issues were raised by members when being consulted on the relevant financial proposals at the meetings of the Panel held on 10 June 2013, 27 January and 14 April 2014, as well as when considering the financial proposals at the relevant meetings of FC. Their major views and concerns are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Provision of publicly-funded undergraduate places

9. While welcoming the various initiatives announced in the 2014 Policy Address to broaden the opportunities for local students to receive subsidized higher education, some members considered that the crux of the problem was the shortage of publicly-funded undergraduate places. The Administration was urged to further increase the number of UGC-funded first-year-first-degree ("FYFD") places and senior year undergraduate places³.

10. The Administration stressed that it was committed to enabling more young people to receive post-secondary education. Starting from the 2012-2013 academic year, the FYFD places in UGC-funded institutions had been increased to 15 000 per annum. However, in considering whether or not the number of UGC-funded FYFD places should be adjusted, it was necessary to take into account all relevant factors including the decline in secondary student population. According to the Administration, during the 2012-2013 to 2014-2015 academic years, the annual intake of senior year undergraduate places in UGC-funded institutions had been progressively increased from 2 000 to 4 000 per annum. It would be further increased to 5 000 per annum progressively from the 2015-2016 to the 2018-2019 academic year.

² The Administration consulted the Panel on Home Affairs on 24 March 2014 on the funding proposal which was subsequently approved by FC on 12 July 2014.

³ The subsidized senior year undergraduate places would provide opportunities for outstanding sub-degree graduates to bridge over to the last two years of the four-year undergraduate programmes under the new academic structure.

11. Some members were concerned that certain initiatives such as HKSES and MUSSS sought to encourage local students to leave Hong Kong for further studies, thereby easing pressure on the Government to increase local subsidized undergraduate places. In this regard, the Administration highlighted that the objective of the various initiatives announced in the 2014 Policy Address was to provide students with more diversified opportunities and choices in higher education.

Scope of MUSSS

12. Members considered that in addition to the Mainland, the Administration should consider providing subsidy to students pursuing post-secondary studies in nearby places outside Hong Kong, notably Taiwan and Macau. In this regard, the Administration explained that the scope of MUSSS would only cover post-secondary programmes pursued at those Mainland institutions participating in the Admission Scheme because the Scheme had a number of unique features distinct from other admission arrangements. The Admission Scheme was the only government-to-government initiative on supporting Hong Kong students studying outside Hong Kong. The academic qualifications attained by local students upon graduation from the Mainland institutions participating in the Admission Scheme would be recognized for the purpose of pursuing further study in tertiary institutions in Hong Kong.

13. In response to members' enquiries about the Admission Scheme, the Administration informed the Panel that the number of participating institutions had increased from 63 in 11 provinces/municipalities in the 2012-2013 academic year to 75 institutions in 14 provinces/municipalities in the 2014-2015 academic year. There were some 3 200 students participating in the Admission Scheme in 2014, which represented an increase of 43% of that in 2013⁴.

Concerns about HKSES

14. Some members considered that if HKSES was to achieve its intended objective of grooming a top cadre of local talents with global vision, the awardees should be required to return to work in Hong Kong for a specified period after graduation. There was another view that such a requirement might have implications on existing publicly-funded university education since students currently pursuing UGC-funded programmes were not required to give an undertaking to stay and work in Hong Kong after graduation.

15. After taking into account various views including those from members, the Administration confirmed that awardees under HKSES would be required to

⁴ See LC Paper No. CB(4)720/13-14(01).

undertake to return to Hong Kong upon graduation to work for at least two years or a period equivalent to the duration of the scholarship, whichever was longer. However, some flexibility would be allowed for deferring or waiving the requirement, such as where the graduates continued their postgraduate studies overseas.

16. Noting that under the HKSES, priority would be given to applicants pursuing programmes that were not currently offered by local universities, some members were concerned that the demand for graduates of such disciplines might not be great in Hong Kong. In this regard, the Administration advised that whilst priority would be given to programmes that were conducive to building up Hong Kong's long-term competitiveness, in particular those not available in Hong Kong, there was no restriction on the disciplines of study.

17. Some members were concerned that HKSES would only benefit top students who might already have many choices, rather than students from financially disadvantaged families. The Administration clarified that HKSES also included a means-tested bursary which would be available for application by awardees who had financial difficulties.

18. In response to members' enquiries about the proportion of scholarships set for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes under HKSES, the Administration advised that while there would be no pre-determined split of or quotas for awardees at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, HKSES would primarily benefit students pursuing studies at undergraduate level. At the request of FC, the Administration updated the Panel in November 2014 that a Steering Committee had been set up to advise the Administration on the policy, strategy and administration of HKSES. The HKSES was officially launched on 25 November 2014⁵.

Implementation of SSSDP

19. Some members sought information on the selection of designated disciplines and programmes to be supported under the SSSDP. In this regard, the Administration advised that an inter-departmental working group comprising the Education Bureau and other relevant bureaux/departments had been convened to identify the disciplines that were in need of manpower and the relevant self-financing post-secondary programmes. Initially, the key disciplines identified were health care, construction industry, testing and certification, creative industry, and tourism and hospitality. The Administration would explore the possibility of requiring the programmes to allocate the places through the Joint University Programmes Admissions System to ensure that

⁵ See LC Paper No. CB(4)197/14-15(01).

eligible students would be selected through a merit-based system.

20. According to the information provided by the Administration in July 2014 subsequent to obtaining funding approval by FC, there would be five participating post-secondary institutions providing 13 programmes with a total of 940 subsidized places in the 2015-2016 academic year under SSSDP⁶.

Scholarships and support measures for SEN students

21. Some members considered that the amount of \$10,000 under EMA and ES could hardly provide adequate assistance to SEN students in pursuing their studies. There was a view that given the relatively small number of SEN students undertaking post-secondary studies and the enormous difficulties that had to be overcome by them, the awards should be extended to all SEN students pursuing post-secondary programmes.

22. As explained by the Administration, the setting up of EMA and ES was not an attempt to resolve all the problems confronted by SEN students. The scholarships and awards aimed at giving recognition to meritorious SEN students and would be in addition to other support measures available to SEN students. On the amount of the scholarships, the Administration advised that it had made reference to the amount of other scholarships and awards under GSF and SPSS.

23. Some members stressed that what SEN students needed most in pursuing higher education was effective learning support rather than awards. They also urged the Administration to deploy more resources to assist SEN students in primary schools and secondary schools so as to build up their capability for pursuing higher education. In this regard, the Administration advised that starting from the 2013-2014 financial year, an additional recurrent funding of \$12 million had been provided to the Vocational Training Council each year for the purchase of equipment and learning aids to support SEN students. Under the auspices of institutional autonomy, individual post-secondary institutions should also provide the necessary support and services to cater for the specific needs of their SEN students. The Administration reiterated that the introduction of EMA and ES aimed to complement other forms of financial assistance and support measures for SEN students.

⁶ See LC Paper No. CB(4)969/13-14(01).

Latest position

24. The Administration will brief the Panel on the latest position of various initiatives to broaden the opportunities for local students to receive subsidized higher education at the meeting to be held on 12 January 2015.

Relevant papers

25. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 4
Legislative Council Secretariat
8 January 2015

Relevant papers

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Education	25.1.2013	CB(4)318/12-13(01)
Panel on Education	10.6.2013 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Finance Committee	12.7.2013 (Item No.3)	FCR(2013-14)29 Minutes of the 38th meeting
Panel on Education	27.1.2014	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Education	14.4.2014 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes CB(4)720/13-14(01) CB(4)969/13-14(01) CB(4)197/14-15(01)
Finance Committee	12.7.2014 (Item Nos. 10-12 and 17)	FCR(2014-15)15 FCR(2014-15)16 FCR(2014-15)17 FCR(2014-15)20 Minutes of the 32nd meeting Minutes of the 33rd meeting Minutes of the 34th meeting