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LABOUR AND WELFARE BUREAU
GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT

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24 April 2018

Miss Betty MA
Clerk to Panel on Manpower
Legislative Council
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong

Dear Miss MA,

**Legislative Council Panel on Manpower
Follow-up Issues**

I refer to the Secretariat's letter dated 22 March 2018 enclosing two motions under agenda item III "Proposed further enhancement measure of Continuing Education Fund and additional funding injection" passed by the Panel on Manpower at the meeting on 20 March 2018. I am authorised to provide a reply (at **Annex**) for Members' reference.

Yours sincerely,



(Daniel FONG)

for Secretary for Labour and Welfare

Legislative Council Panel on Manpower

**Response to the motions concerning Continuing Education Fund
passed at the meeting of the Panel on 20 March 2018**

**Suggestion to Explore Lifting the Upper Age Limit for Applying
Continuing Education Fund**

Continuing Education Fund (CEF) was established in June 2002 to encourage local workforce to pursue continuing education by providing them with subsidies for continuing education and training, with a view to facilitating Hong Kong's transition to a knowledge-based economy and adaptation to an increasingly globalised economy. In order to enhance the operation of CEF, the Office of CEF under the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency engaged a consultant in June 2016 to conduct a review of CEF, which was completed in September 2017.

2. Taking into account the findings and recommendations of the Consultancy Study, as well as opinions received from various stakeholders and the public during the review, we propose to implement a series of enhancement measures. These enhancement measures include the relaxation of the current upper age limit for CEF applicants from 65 to 70, this initiative alone would increase the number of eligible CEF applicants by over 390 000. We consider this is a reasonable enhancement to CEF, notwithstanding that the bulk of CEF applicants actually has been concentrated in the 18 to 29 age groups.

3. On the other hand, the Government is already providing various schemes specifically targeting the elderly's needs, such as "the Elder Academy Scheme" and the "Adult Education Subvention Scheme" which charge very low fees (or totally free). In the 41 District Elderly Community Centres and 169 Neighbourhood Elderly Centres, there are various interest class and learning courses that are either free or charged at a nominal cost. In addition, we have to consider the possible impact to the market of continuing education if the upper age limit is lifted. We cannot preclude the situation that currently free courses targeted at citizens of higher age might be turned into fee-charging courses. This will not only undermine the intended policy effect of CEF, but may also deprive the interest and learning opportunities of the elderly who are interested in taking such courses.

4. Taking the above factors into account, the Government would maintain the proposal to relax the upper age limit to 70.

Suggestion to Include Fees For Taking Tests/Examinations Related to Vocational Skills under CEF Subsidy Scope

5. At present, the CEF subsidy ceiling is \$10,000 and we propose to increase to \$20,000. Currently, a CEF applicant who has successfully completed a CEF course may claim reimbursement of a maximum of 80%¹ of the course fees paid. In fact, any preparation courses for professional qualification examinations may apply for registration as CEF courses as long as they fall within the specified CEF domains and comply with relevant requirements. Though we do not have statistics of the relevant courses, we note that a number of CEF courses contain content and elements of examinations for vocational skills that tie in with relevant tests and examinations, e.g. individual examinations for registration of electrical workers by the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department, skills assessment and trade tests by the Construction Industry Council, professional examinations of the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI), Certified Solutions Architect Associate of Amazon Web Services, etc. Separately, there are programmes related to driving skills registered in Qualifications Register (QR).

6. Upon the implementation of the enhancement measures, the scope of CEF courses will be expanded to all eligible courses under QR². We believe that most of the preparation courses for professional qualification examinations could apply for registration as CEF courses. If a course provider is recognised for conducting assessment and awarding a qualification of relevant industry or profession, and the relevant professional qualification examination has been adopted as a part of the internal assessment of the course concerned and comply with the requirements of the Qualifications Framework for inclusion into QR, such course together with the examination may also be registered as a CEF course.

7. The market now provides a variety of trades tests and professional qualification examinations with a very broad coverage (e.g. law, accounting,

¹ Under the enhancement measures planned to be implemented, an applicant may claim a maximum of 60% of the course fees when claiming for the second \$10,000 subsidy. Course fees may include the examination fees of specified language benchmark tests /examinations.

² While programmes funded by University Grants Committee and provided by Employees Retraining Board are not included, the number of eligible CEF courses would increase from about 7 800 at present to at least 11 800 upon expansion of the scope.

engineering, education, and even beauty, craftsmanship, cookery, etc.). At present, there is still the absence of objective and unified standards for certifications at present, as well as the absence of linkage of these examinations with any training courses of the industry concerned, which may not match the policy objective of CEF to encourage continuing education. As such, the Government would maintain the existing arrangement and the proposed enhancement measures in paragraphs 5 and 6 above.

8. We will seek funding approval for the injection into CEF from the Legislative Council Finance Committee at its meeting of 27 April 2018. Subject to the funding approval, we expect that all the enhancement measures would be implemented on 1 April 2019.

Labour and Welfare Bureau
April 2018