



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部教育局  
Education Bureau  
Government Secretariat, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region  
The People's Republic of China

本局檔號 Our Ref. : EDB(HE)CR 2/2041/17

電話 Telephone : 3509 8501

來函檔號 Your Ref. :

傳真 Fax Line : 2804 6499

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Clerk to Panel  
Legislative Council Panel on Education  
Legislative Council Complex  
1 Legislative Council Road  
Central  
Hong Kong  
(Attn: Ms Angel Wong)

Dear Ms Wong,

**Legislative Council Panel on Education**

**Follow-up to the Meeting on 4 January 2019**

At its meeting on 4 January 2019, the Panel on Education passed four motions proposed under the agenda item “Recurrent funding for University Grants Committee-funded universities”. The Government’s response is set out below.

Regarding the request to increase the number of subsidised places

All along, the Government has strived to provide secondary school leavers with flexible and diversified articulation pathways with multiple entry and exit points through promoting the quality and sustainable development of the publicly-funded and self-financing post-secondary education sectors. With the continued development of both sectors, currently over 70% of young people in the relevant age cohort have access to post-secondary education, which includes sub-degree education, and about 48% of them have access to degree education. In 2018/19, there are sufficient publicly-funded and self-financing first-year first-degree (FYFD) places to cater for the needs of all Secondary Six students meeting the minimum entrance requirements.

In recent years, the Government has implemented a series of measures to further increase the opportunities and subsidies for local students to pursue undergraduate programmes, in a bid to provide secondary school leavers with broader and more diversified articulation pathways. These measures include:

網址 : <http://www.edb.gov.hk> 電子郵件 : [edbinfo@edb.gov.hk](mailto:edbinfo@edb.gov.hk)

Web site : <http://www.edb.gov.hk> E-mail : [edbinfo@edb.gov.hk](mailto:edbinfo@edb.gov.hk)

香港添馬添美道 2 號政府總部東翼 7 樓 7/F, East Wing, Central Government Offices, 2 Tim Mei Avenue, Tamar, Hong Kong

- (a) increasing the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded senior year undergraduate intake places to 5 000 starting from 2018/19;
- (b) implementing the Non-means-tested Subsidy Scheme for Self-financing Undergraduate Studies in Hong Kong and the Mainland, covering students enrolled in local self-financing undergraduate programmes, self-financing top-up degree programmes and designated Mainland undergraduate programmes, since 2017/18;
- (c) introducing the Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors (SSSDP) to provide around 1 000 students per cohort with subsidy for pursuing self-financing undergraduate programmes in selected disciplines to meet Hong Kong's manpower needs. The SSSDP has been regularised in 2018/19, with the subsidised quota increased to about 3 000 per cohort;
- (d) implementing the Hong Kong Scholarship for Excellence Scheme since 2015/16 to support up to 100 outstanding students per cohort to study in renowned universities outside Hong Kong in order to nurture a diversified pool of top talents to propel Hong Kong's development; and
- (e) introducing the Mainland University Study Subsidy Scheme so that needy students pursuing studies in designated Mainland institutions may receive a means-tested grant during their study period.

Given the declining student population and assuming the same level of academic performance among secondary school graduates<sup>1</sup>, all secondary school graduates meeting the minimum entrance requirements for university admission should be able to receive different forms of government subsidisation for admission into local (including UGC-funded universities and self-financing post-secondary sector), overseas and Mainland FYFD programmes when the above measures have been fully implemented. In addition, the Task Force on Review of Self-financing Post-secondary Education submitted its report to the Government in December 2018 and recommended that the Government should conduct a more focused study to review the structure and curriculum of sub-degree (in particular the Higher Diploma) programmes to reflect their refined positioning in Hong Kong's higher education sector, i.e. Associate Degree qualification should be positioned as primarily preparing students for articulation to general degree programmes, and Higher Diploma qualification should be positioned as preparing students for either employment at para-professional level in relevant industries and profession, or articulation to specialised professional degree programmes. The implementation of this recommendation may affect the demand of future sub-degree graduates for articulating to the senior year undergraduate programmes. It is therefore not suitable at this stage to change the number of intake places of UGC-funded senior year undergraduate programmes (5 000 places per year). We will follow up on the recommendations of the Task Force and closely examine the developments.

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<sup>1</sup> For secondary school graduates applying for FYFD programmes, the general entrance requirement is attainment of Level 3 or above in Chinese Language and English Language, and Level 2 or above in Mathematics (Compulsory Part) and Liberal Studies in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination. In 2018, out of the 50 642 day school candidates sitting for the HKDSE Examination, 21 264 (or 42%) met the general entrance requirement.

Overall, we do not see the need to increase the number of UGC-funded FYFD and senior year undergraduate places at this stage. Any additional increase in the provision of “manpower-planned” places will result in the number of student places for UGC-funded FYFD programmes being deviated from the student number targets. In fact, before submitting their triennium planning proposals for UGC’s consideration, the UGC-funded universities would draw reference to the Government’s advice on manpower requirements with a view to meeting the growing manpower demand in certain disciplines, such as healthcare. The UGC strives to ensure that the higher education sector is capable of meeting the manpower requirements of Hong Kong, but it will also take the actual needs of the universities into consideration when allocating student places. The Government will continue to exercise prudence in its planning for provision of subsidised higher education opportunities, with due emphasis on both quality and quantity.

Regarding the request for the UGC to set up a dedicated fund to encourage universities to maintain a stable teaching staff establishment

The eight UGC-funded universities are independent autonomous institutions established pursuant to their respective ordinances, and each has a council to serve as the supreme governing body. The respective ordinances and statutes of the universities set out their objectives, functions and governance structure, and delineate the power that universities may exercise to carry out their objectives and functions. The UGC’s Notes on Procedures (NoP) clearly state that UGC-funded universities enjoy autonomy in the development of curricula and academic standards, selection of staff and students, initiation and conduct of research, internal allocation of resources, etc., and they are accountable for their decisions on such matters. Observing the NoP, the Government and UGC have all along supported and safeguarded academic freedom and institutional autonomy on the premise that universities demonstrate appropriate financial and public accountability.

Matters concerning the appointment, promotion and remuneration of academic staff fall within the autonomy of UGC-funded universities, and neither the Government nor the UGC plays a part in it. In fact, the Government deregulated the salary scales of UGC-funded universities in 2003 to ensure their competitiveness in recruiting talents. All UGC-funded universities have established personnel policies and mechanisms appropriate to their circumstances for handling the appointment of academic staff in light of actual situations and teaching needs. These universities also have an appeal mechanism to ensure fairness and impartiality in the conduct of such matter. As far as we know, universities have put in place relevant mechanisms and procedures, which have been brought to the attention of their staff through suitable channels, for example, internal circulars and the universities’ intranets. When necessary, universities will review and refine the relevant arrangements in a timely manner. Academic staff may convey their views, if any, to the universities and relevant committees through various channels.

The UGC has all along attached great importance to the quality of teaching and learning in universities. Over 75% of the block grant disbursed to UGC-funded universities is dedicated to teaching. In addition, the UGC has also encouraged and enhanced universities' teaching and learning through various teaching and learning initiatives, including the annual provision of the Teaching Development and Language Enhancement Grant (TDLEG) to universities to enhance teaching quality and students' language proficiency; organisation of the annual UGC Teaching Award to honour those who excel in teaching in the UGC sector; and implementation of the Funding Schemes for Teaching and Learning Related Proposals in the 2012-15 and 2016-19 triennia to incentivise universities to explore and promote development in sector-wide strategic areas of teaching and learning, language enhancement and internationalisation. The amount of TDLEG to be provided for universities in the 2019-22 triennium will amount to \$781.2 million, representing an increase of \$268.4 million over the previous cycle. The increased provision will enable universities to focus on efforts to bring funded projects to conclusion, and continue to implement meaningful initiatives identified in previous funding schemes. Of equal importance is that this helps the UGC assure the community that it values teaching and learning as much as research.

Yours sincerely,



( Sharon Ko )  
for Secretary for Education

c.c. Secretary-General, University Grants Committee