

NOTE FOR FINANCE COMMITTEE

Mainland University Study Subsidy Scheme

PURPOSE

This paper informs Members of the Government’s plan to refine the prevailing eligibility criteria of the non-means tested portion of the Mainland University Study Subsidy Scheme (MUSSS) to cover students who are admitted to Mainland universities through the School Principal Nomination Scheme (SPNS) under the Scheme for Admission of Hong Kong Students to Mainland Higher Education Institutions (the Admission Scheme) with effect from the 2021/22 academic year.

SPNS UNDER ADMISSION SCHEME

2. The Admission Scheme, which has taken effect since the 2012/13 academic year, has been introduced jointly by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Education Bureau (EDB) to enable participating Mainland universities to admit Hong Kong students based on Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) results, thereby exempting these students from the need to take the Mainland’s Joint Entrance Examination or universities’ own entry examinations. While most programmes under the Admission Scheme adopt the general entrance requirement (GER)¹ for admission to undergraduate programmes, Mainland universities may admit students through the SPNS with a slightly lower threshold, i.e. at least ten scores from the four core subjects with each subject score not lower than “two”.

3. Whilst students admitted to designated Mainland institutions, including those admitted through the SPNS, are eligible for the means-tested subsidy² under the MUSSS, they are eligible for the non-means-tested subsidy

/under

¹ The GER for admission to undergraduate programmes is “3322” for the four core subjects of Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics and Liberal Studies in the HKDSE respectively. With the reform of the Liberal Studies subject to be “Citizenship and Social Development” with grading of “Attained (A)” and “Not Attained (NA)”, the GER will be revised to “332A”, starting from the 2024 admission year.

² The means-tested subsidy under the MUSSS covers all financially needy Hong Kong students pursuing undergraduate studies in designated Mainland institutions, irrespective of the channels of their admission to the institutions.

under the MUSSS only if they meet the GER. There have been recent calls for the Government to review the prevailing eligibility criteria of the non-means-tested subsidy so that those students admitted through the SPNS but not attaining the GER can also benefit in recognition of their non-academic achievements.

4. Having reviewed the matter, we have concluded that the GER should continue to be adopted as a general requirement for the non-means tested portion of the MUSSS for consistency across different subsidy schemes. That said, we propose refining the eligibility criteria starting from the 2021/22 academic year to cover students admitted through the SPNS but not attaining the GER so that they could also apply for the non-means tested portion of the MUSSS. This is in recognition of the objective of the SPNS to allow students who may not have good grades but possess other non-academic achievements (e.g. sports, arts, etc.) to further their studies on the Mainland.

IMPLICATIONS

5. According to the information from the MoE, 2 026 HKDSE students were offered a place at Mainland universities through the Admission Scheme in the 2020/21 academic year, of whom 655 were nominated through the SPNS. It is estimated that around 35% of the students who were offered a place took up the offer eventually (figures of the Admission Scheme and SPNS in recent years are tabulated at Enclosure 1). Noting that some of the students admitted through the SPNS may have attained the GER and would therefore be eligible for the non-means tested portion of the MUSSS under the prevailing eligibility criteria, we estimate that the additional caseload and resultant financial implications arising from the proposed refinement should be limited and will be absorbed by EDB's existing resources.

Encl. 1

WAY FORWARD

6. We circulated an information paper to the Legislative Council (LegCo) Panel on Education in early July 2021 and received no adverse comments from its members. The proposed refinement of the eligibility criteria for the non-means tested portion of the MUSSS will take effect from the 2021/22 academic year onwards. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

BACKGROUND

7. With the approval of the Finance Committee (FC) of the LegCo vide FCR(2014-15)15 in July 2014, EDB launched the MUSSS to provide financial support to Hong Kong students pursuing undergraduate studies on the Mainland, thereby ensuring that no student will be deprived of post-secondary education opportunity because of a lack of means.

8. The MUSSS, introduced as a pilot scheme for three cohorts, formerly only provided a means-tested subsidy. In July 2017, EDB sought the FC's approval vide FCR(2017-18)24 to implement a package of priority initiatives on quality education, including the introduction of an additional non-means-tested subsidy for students meeting the GER but failing to obtain a subsidised university education place in Hong Kong. Eligible students pursuing studies in both local self-financing undergraduate programmes as well as in Mainland institutions would be offered a subsidy through the Non-Means-Tested Subsidy Scheme for Self-financing Undergraduate Studies in Hong Kong and the MUSSS respectively. As such, the non-means tested portion of the MUSSS was established with the GER as an eligibility criterion for students pursuing undergraduate degree programmes at Mainland universities³. A table showing the number of the MUSSS recipients and amount of subsidy disbursed in the 2017/18 to 2020/21 academic years is at Encl. 2 Enclosure 2.

9. The level of subsidy under the MUSSS is determined based on the costs of Hong Kong students studying on the Mainland. Information on study-related expenses is collated for analysis from those Mainland universities where the majority of Hong Kong students are studying. The rates are reviewed annually by EDB where the subsidy level of the non-means tested portion of the MUSSS is set at about one-third of the full-rate means tested portion of the MUSSS to maintain relativity⁴. At present, the level of subsidy of the non-means tested portion of the MUSSS stands at HK\$5,600 per year.

Education Bureau
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³ With the exception of students pursuing undergraduate degree programmes in Huaqiao University (華僑大學) in Fujian under the Pilot Scheme on the Articulation of Hong Kong Sub-degree Graduates in Huaqiao University (香港副學位畢業生升讀華僑大學銜接學位課程試行計劃), a scheme similar to top-up degrees in Hong Kong and open to graduates of sub-degree programmes in Hong Kong without prescribing the HKDSE minimum results as the entry threshold.

⁴ There are three subsidy levels under the MUSSS, namely (i) the means tested full rate, (ii) the means tested half rate (at 50% of the means tested full rate), and (iii) the non-means tested rate. The actual amounts of the subsidy at the three levels in the 2020/21 academic year are HK\$16,800, HK\$8,400 and HK\$5,600 respectively.

**Scheme for Admission of Hong Kong Students to Mainland Higher Education Institutions
and its School Principal Nomination Scheme (SPNS)
Student Enrolment Figures for the 2016/17 to 2020/21 Academic Years**

Academic Year	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
(A) Total Number of Students Receiving an Offer	1 391	1 295	1 556	1 784	2 026
(B) Number of Students Receiving an Offer through SPNS, included in (A)	657	649	502	562	655
(C) Ratio of SPNS Offers to Total (B)/(A)	47%	50%	32%	32%	32%
(D) Enrolment Rate of (A) (i.e. ratio of students with offer eventually enrolled in the programme)	32%	33%	38%	35%	41%

**Mainland University Study Subsidy Scheme
Number of Recipients and Amount of Subsidy Disbursed
in the 2017/18 to 2020/21 Academic Years**

Academic Year	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21 (as at end February 2021)
Total number of recipients of subsidies	3 056	3 147	3 218	3 490
(a) Full-rate subsidy under means-tested subsidy	1 797	1 872	1 901	2 077
(b) Half-rate subsidy under means-tested subsidy	744	667	640	710
(c) Non-means-tested subsidy	515	608	677	703
Amount of subsidy disbursed under means-tested subsidy (HK\$) for (a) and (b)	32,535,000	37,052,400	37,312,800	40,857,600
Amount of subsidy disbursed under non-means-tested subsidy (HK\$) for (c)	2,575,000	3,404,800	3,791,200	3,936,800
