

For discussion
on 14 April 2008

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Supplementary Information on the Review of the Financial Assistance Scheme for Designated Evening Adult Education Courses

At the meeting of the Legislative Council Panel on Education on 26 March 2008, the Administration proposed to continue the Financial Assistance Scheme for Designated Evening Adult Education Courses (the Scheme) with enhancements from the 2008/09 school year onwards. Members requested the Administration to review its proposal and consider whether any further changes could be incorporated, including the feasibility of providing free adult evening secondary education for eligible students.

PROPOSED SCHEME

2. In view of the continuing demand for evening adult secondary education and in an effort to provide additional financial assistance for adult learners in need, the Administration proposed at the meeting on 26 March 2008 that the Scheme be continued with the following improvements from the 2008/09 school years onwards –

- (a) to extend the scope of the Scheme to cover junior secondary courses, i.e. Secondary 1 to 3; and
- (b) to add a 50% tuition fee reimbursement assistance level.

Under the enhanced Scheme, adult learners who are enrolled in junior and senior secondary courses provided by the approved course provider(s) and who meet the eligibility criteria, such as having at least 80% attendance, will be eligible for 30% reimbursement of the tuition fees. Full reimbursement (100% of the tuition fees) or half reimbursement (50% of the tuition fees) will be provided for those who have met the eligibility criteria and have passed the means test administered by the Student Financial Assistance Agency (SFAA) for full grant or half grant respectively. The eligibility criteria for financial assistance under the enhanced Scheme are at **Annex A**.

MEMBERS' VIEWS

3. Whilst noting the improvements to the Scheme that the proposal would bring, Members would like the Administration to consider measures to further enhance the support for students attending designated evening adult education courses. Specifically, Members would like the Administration to consider the following –

- (a) To provide adult learners with free education under the Scheme. Some Members suggested that adult learners meeting the eligibility criteria should be provided with full (100%) tuition fee reimbursement similar to the students in public primary and secondary day schools who will be provided with free education starting from the 2008/09 school year under the 12-year free education policy;
- (b) To review the existing payment mode whereby financial assistance is provided on a reimbursement basis to eligible students upon their satisfaction of the eligibility criteria. Some Members considered that upfront payment of tuition fee might have deterred some adult learners from enrolling in the courses; and
- (c) To establish more designated centres under the Scheme, particularly in remote areas. Some Members considered that providing more centres could obviate the need of some adult learners to travel a long way to attend courses (a list of the existing centres is at **Annex B**).

CONSIDERATIONS

4. The objective of the Scheme is to provide an affordable pathway to facilitate adult learners to complete mainstream senior secondary school courses so that no willing adult learners would be deprived of the chance to pursue their studies due to lack of means. In addition, the provision of reimbursement on a non-means tested basis serves to provide effective incentive to encourage adult learners to complete the course. The Administration therefore believes that the direction taken by the existing scheme, viz providing financial assistance to the learner rather than directly to the course organizer, represents the right way forward and should be continued.

5. It is noted that the suggestions set out in paragraph 3(a) and (b) above involve making changes to certain fundamental aspects of the Scheme and warrant very careful consideration. It will be necessary, for example, to carefully assess factors such as whether the proposals represent an effective use of public resources, their possible impact on other private evening schools and any read-across implications on other financial assistance schemes for adult learners.

6. In view of Members' suggestion, we are exploring the possibility of establishing more designated centres. It is, for example, likely that a new designated centre would, subject to there being adequate demand, be established in Tseung Kwan O in the 2008/09 school year. We will also make arrangement for the enhanced scheme to be reviewed shortly after the completion of the 2008/09 school year, when we would have a better grasp of the effectiveness of the improvements to be made under the current proposal. It will also allow the Administration some valuable time to work through the implications of the various suggestions, as explained in paragraph 5 above.

ADVICE SOUGHT

7. Subject to Members' views and support for the enhanced scheme, the Administration will proceed to seek the Finance Committee's approval on 9 May 2008 to expand the ambit of the existing Scheme to implement the proposed enhancements as set out in paragraph 2 above.

Education Bureau
April 2008

**Proposed Eligibility Criteria for
the Enhanced Financial Assistance Scheme
for Designated Evening Adult Education Courses**

- The eligibility criteria for receiving assistance under the improved scheme are as follows –
 - (a) applicants should be aged 17 or above;
 - (b) eligibility is restricted to designated secondary courses (inclusive of all secondary levels) that are quality-assured and commissioned by the Education Bureau;
 - (c) subsidies are provided on reimbursement basis whereby learners are required to attain the following minimum attendance requirements –
 - i) at least 80% attendance; or
 - ii) at least 60% attendance plus an overall pass in the final examination; or
 - iii) at least 60% attendance plus inclusion of an exemption for the remaining 20% attendance to be proved by prescribed means including medical certificates or employers' certification of work commitment; and
 - (d) since Project Yi Jin is an alternative qualification to the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination, applicants may not receive financial assistance under both schemes, regardless of whether they succeed or fail to complete the programme or attain the desired qualification under one of the two schemes. Furthermore, they may not receive financial assistance for repeating the same programme.
- Students meeting the above-mentioned criteria are eligible for reimbursement of 30% of the tuition fees, regardless of their financial position. Full reimbursement (i.e. 100% of the tuition fees) or half reimbursement (i.e. 50% of the tuition fees) will be provided for those who have met the criteria and have passed the means test administered by the Student Financial Assistance Agency (SFAA) for full grant or half grant respectively. Students with financial hardship for making upfront payment of the initial tuition fees may apply for loans under the Non-means Tested Loan Scheme administered by the SFAA.

Annex B

Designated Centres in the 2007/08 School Year

There are currently ten designated centres under the Scheme, one on Hong Kong Island, three in Kowloon and six in the New Territories. Their specific locations are as follows –

	Name of the Centre	Location
1	Hotung Secondary School	Wanchai, Hong Kong
2	Queen Elizabeth School	Mongkok, Kowloon
3	Kowloon Technical School	Sham Shui Po, Kowloon
4	NTHYK Tai Po District Secondary School	Tai Po, NT
5	Tsuen Wan Government Secondary School	Tsuen Wan, NT
6*	Tuen Mun Government Secondary School	Tuen Mun, NT
7*	Lung Cheung Government Secondary School	Wong Tai Sin, Kowloon
8*	Ha Kwai Chung Government Secondary School	Kwai Chung, NT
9*	Shatin Government Secondary School	Shatin, NT
10*	NTHYK Yuen Long District Secondary School	Yuen Long, NT

* No courses were run in these centres in the 2007/08 school year due to insufficient enrolment.