

ITEM FOR FINANCE COMMITTEE

HEAD 53 – GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT : HOME AFFAIRS BUREAU

Subhead 700 General non-recurrent

New Item “Multi-faceted Excellence Scholarship”

Members are invited to approve the creation of a new commitment of \$100 million under Head 53 – Government Secretariat: Home Affairs Bureau to establish a Multi-faceted Excellence Scholarship.

PROBLEM

We propose to better nurture the next generation by fostering a culture of multi-faceted excellence through the establishment of a scholarship scheme, as set forth by the Chief Executive (CE) in the 2014 Policy Address.

PROPOSAL

2. The Secretary for Home Affairs proposes to set up a Multi-faceted Excellence Scholarship (the Scholarship) to support universities and tertiary institutions in admitting about 20 local undergraduate students a year who excel in sport, arts and/or community service, as from the 2015/16 academic year.

JUSTIFICATION

Existing University Admission Channels for Students with Multi-faceted Talents

3. Currently, students who wish to make use of their Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) examination to apply for

/first-year-first-degree

first-year-first-degree (FYFD) undergraduate places offered by the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions are required to go through the Joint University Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS).

4. JUPAS is essentially an iteration system set up by the universities to match the choices of students and the intake places available. Admission is generally considered to be based primarily on students' academic merits. Although students with non-academic talents can provide information about their Other Experience and Achievements (OEA) in their applications, it is entirely up to the universities to consider whether and, if so, the extent such information would be taken into account. Students are not informed of whether and how OEA information, ranging from sport and cultural achievements to community services and overseas excursion experience, has been taken account of in the selection process. In 2014, out of 63 678 JUPAS applications, 51 874 (81.5%) applicants submitted OEA information. With so many and diverse OEA submissions of such a vast diversity, it is understandable that the universities may not have the administrative capacity to assess each and every case in detail. This has given rise to the public perception over the years that JUPAS is focused on academic results.

5. Secondary school principals may nominate students who have outstanding achievements in non-academic areas under the School Principal's Nominations (SPN) mechanism under JUPAS. In 2013, out of 1 887 nominees, 927 (49.1%) received offer during the Main Round of JUPAS¹, as compared with the admission of 12 601 (18.2%) out of a total of 69 397 JUPAS applicants. This indicates that nominees under the SPN mechanism stand a better chance of admission to UGC-funded FYFD programmes than other applicants. However, it remains unclear whether the offers given under SPN were attributed to the principals' nominations based on non-academic achievements, the nominees' academic merits, or both.

6. Apart from the above schemes which are operated by the JUPAS office, there are other channels that give special consideration to students with other talents. The Sports Federation & Olympics Committee of Hong Kong, China (SF&OC) and the Hong Kong Sports Institute (HKSI) may also nominate elite athletes for universities' consideration. However, given HKSI's and SF&OC's mission of promoting elite sports, only a small number of very top athletes with exceptional sports achievements will be considered.

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¹ JUPAS 'Main Round Offers' refers to the first round of offers made by the participating institutions to applicants who have acquired the required rating for admission to the respective programmes.

Existing Scholarships for Students with Multi-faceted Talents

7. We are mindful that many universities provide various forms of scholarships to students with multi-faceted talents. The Government has also devoted substantial resources to give recognition and emphasis to non-academic achievements, including the injection of \$1 billion each into the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government Scholarship Fund and the Self-financing Post-secondary Education Fund as approved by the Finance Committee (FC) vide FCR(2012-13)33² in 2012-13 to provide a total of 10 000 scholarships/awards a year for students with talents in non-academic fields. However, most of these scholarships are only open for application by students after they have already been admitted to by the institutions. The few pre-admission scholarships available for prospective students are awarded mainly on academic merits.

8. Most of the existing scholarships are awarded directly to the students for covering their tuition fees. From the universities' perspective, the existing scholarships do not provide any financial incentives for admitting more students with non-academic talents because universities are not given additional places or resources for admitting these students.

The proposed Scholarship

9. Under the proposed Scholarship, UGC-funded and self-financing institutions will be provided with additional resources to cover the costs of admitting a total of about 20 additional local students a year starting from the 2015/16 academic year. These scholarship places will be extra undergraduate places in addition to those currently funded by UGC (i.e. under the over-enrolment quota currently allowed by the Government³). The awardees will not be required to pay tuition fees as it will be fully covered by the Scholarship. The Scholarship will serve as an admission channel which places emphasis on non-academic achievements. The target students are HKDSE graduates who have met all the basic requirements of university admission and/or any further requirements stipulated by individual faculties and departments, and excel in sport, arts and/or community service for meeting the selection criteria.

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² Scholarship schemes under both Funds operate on a merit basis. Among other things, the Talent Development Scholarship (TDS) under the HKSAR Government Scholarship Fund are offered to students enrolled in full-time publicly-funded programmes at degree or above levels who have demonstrated talent or potential in (a) Sports and games; (b) Music and performing arts; (c) Culture, arts and design; or (d) Innovation, science and technology. The TDS amount is pitched at \$10,000 per student.

³ According to UGC's established funding policy, over-enrolment across the whole institution not exceeding 4% for local students is permitted.

10. The award of scholarships would comprise three key steps, viz. the nomination, selection and matching process, as follows –

(a) Nomination by secondary schools

In order to ensure the quality of the Scholarship recipients, each secondary school principal would be allowed to nominate only one HKDSE student in their school who has outstanding achievements in sport, arts and/or community service;

(b) Shortlisting and selection of candidates

The applications will be shortlisted with reference to a set of objective criteria. They will also be preliminarily rated in accordance with the significance of honours, qualifications and prizes the nominated students have obtained. In order to encourage youths to pursue multi-faceted excellence, students whose achievement matches the undergraduate programme(s) they choose will be given extra credits. An Assessment Panel comprising well-respected individuals in the fields of education, sport, arts and community service will interview the shortlisted candidates with a view to coming up with around or more than 20 nominations; and

(c) Referral of selected candidates to universities

To give due regard to universities' autonomy in admission, the students nominated by the Assessment Panel will be referred to universities for consideration. If deemed necessary, the universities may conduct further interviews with the nominees to assess whether they have the aptitude for the programme chosen. Such interviews may be arranged during or after the HKDSE examinations, but in any event before the release of the HKDSE results, following individual university's admission schedule. We expect the universities to give conditional offers to the nominees that they intend to admit, which means that the offers will be conditional upon the nominees attaining basic university admission requirements or any further requirements stipulated by individual faculties/departments. In accordance with JUPAS' established practice, after the release of HKDSE results, universities would consider the nominees' HKDSE results, as well as the interview performance (if any) to decide whether to admit the nominees. If admitted, the nominees will be placed at the top of the "merit list" submitted to the JUPAS office by the corresponding programme. Nominees whose HKDSE results meet the admission conditions and who pass further interviews (if any) will secure the scholarship offer.

11. Around 20 students will be awarded the Scholarship each year. As the profile of the candidates and the Assessment Panel's decision are uncertain at the application stage, there will be no quota set on each area of multi-faceted excellence. The number of Scholarship holders for each area will depend on the Assessment Panel's nomination.

Funding Arrangement

12. For UGC-funded institutions, the funding arrangement will follow UGC's established funding mechanism for these institutions. Specifically, the funding to these institutions for each Scholarship recipient will be pitched at 62.5% of the full unit cost of the first undergraduate year of study, and 100% of the full cost of subsequent years⁴. The actual amount of the funding for each place will be adjusted on the basis of the study discipline, in the same way that UGC adjusts the unit funding rate for different disciplines based on the different costs of operating different disciplines⁵. Funding to these institutions will also be regularly adjusted in accordance with civil service pay and price movements. The Scholarship will be provided to the respective institutions directly to cover the cost of the programme enrolled. For other self-financing tertiary institutions, the funding will be pitched at 100% of the tuition fee of the respective undergraduate programme.

13. We expect that the commitment of \$100 million would be adequate for the Scholarship to operate for five cohorts of students. We will review the effectiveness of the Scholarship after it has run into operation for two to three years' time.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Non-recurrent Expenditure

14. The proposed Scholarship will require a non-recurrent funding of \$100 million to cover the costs of the additional undergraduate places for about 20 students per cohort. Subject to the approval of the proposal by the FC, we will make provision for the funding required in the Estimates of the respective financial years for implementing the proposal.

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⁴ The average total subsidy for a four-year degree programme is around \$894,000, i.e. \$246,500 x 62.5% + \$246,500 x 3.

⁵ For reference, the average student unit cost for each undergraduate place is around \$246,500 per annum at 2013 price level. It serves as a basis for further adjustments according to the study discipline.

15. The estimated cash flow requirement for the Scholarship is as follows –

					2020-21 and beyond	Total
2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	(\$'000)	(\$'000)
(\$'000)	(\$'000)	(\$'000)	(\$'000)	(\$'000)		
5,000	10,000	15,000	20,000	20,000	30,000	100,000

Recurrent Expenditure

16. The additional workload for the establishment and administration of the Scholarship will be absorbed within Home Affairs Bureau's existing staffing establishment. There will hence be no extra recurrent expenditure arising from this proposal.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

17. Subject to the approval of FC, we will hold a briefing session for the first batch of Scholarships at the beginning of the 2014/15 academic year to brief secondary school principals on the details. Nomination by school principals will be invited before end-2014. It will be followed by the selection of candidates for referral to universities in February or March 2015. We expect that the universities will inform the successful candidates of the final conditional offers prior to the release of HKDSE results in mid-July 2015. The results will be announced in early August 2015, together with the announcement of JUPAS Main Round offer results.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

18. We consulted the Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs on 24 March 2014. Members generally supported the proposal for submission to FC for funding approval.

19. The Scholarship proposal was first conceived by the Commission on Youth and they have been kept informed of the details of the proposal highlighted above. We have consulted the Heads of Universities Committee which shares our policy objective of promoting multi-faceted excellence and has given its in-principle support to the proposed Scholarship. They also find the proposed

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framework workable, including the conditional offers to candidates by their faculties/departments. We have consulted the admission offices of all UGC-funded institutions, as well as a number of self-financing tertiary institutions on the modus operandi. The regional school heads associations (representing secondary school principals) are also in favour of launching the Scholarship.

BACKGROUND

20. In the 2014 Policy Address, CE sets out his vision on nurturing the next generation as “The Government fosters a culture of multi-faceted excellence and helps nurture young people through education, employment and whole-person development. We provide them with diversified learning, training and development opportunities that match their abilities, aspirations and education levels.” He also suggests that the Government will provide students with more opportunities for higher education in five ways, one of them being the establishment of a \$100 million scholarship scheme for 20 local students a year who excel in sport, arts and community service starting from 2015/16 academic year.

21. To implement CE’s vision on youth development, apart from establishing the proposed Scholarship, we will also increase support to community organisations and uniformed groups, and strengthen the networking and communication with young people at the district level, through organising various activities such as voluntary services, leadership training camps and study tours.

Home Affairs Bureau
May 2014