

**Community Care Fund
Increasing the Academic Expenses Grant under
the Financial Assistance Scheme for Post-secondary Students
Evaluation Report**

Background

The Community Care Fund (CCF) Task Force agreed at its meeting on 10 March 2014 to launch a programme to increase the academic expenses grant under the Financial Assistance Scheme for Post-secondary Students (FASP) (the Programme) to strengthen the support for needy students pursuing locally-accredited self-financing post-secondary programmes. The Programme was planned to run for three years from the 2014/15 academic year.

2. The Programme was approved by the Commission on Poverty at the meeting on 12 June 2014 to be jointly implemented by the Education Bureau and the Student Finance Office (SFO) of the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency with funding provided by CCF.

Implementation of the Programme

3. Target recipients of the Programme are students who are pursuing locally-accredited self-financing full-time sub-degree and first degree programmes eligible for FASP and have passed the means test¹ under SFO.

4. To inform students eligible for the additional academic expenses grant about this Programme, SFO uploads details of the Programme onto its website and notifies students of the same through their institutions. Eligible students who apply for FASP need not submit separate applications for the Programme. SFO informs successful applicants in writing and disburses the additional academic expenses grant

¹ There are five levels of assistance under the income test, i.e. 100%, 75%, 50%, 25% and 15% of the maximum assistance level, subject to discount according to the asset value of the applicant's family (i.e. -100%, -80%, -60%, -40%, -20% or -0%).

through automatic payment. The actual amount of grant receivable is determined according to the student's level of assistance granted under FASP.

5. The additional academic expenses grant is adjusted annually according to the movement of the Consumer Price Index (A) (CPI(A)). In the 2014/15 academic year, eligible students were each provided with an additional academic expenses grant of up to \$2,000. The maximum amount was adjusted to \$2,110 and \$2,190 in the 2015/16 and 2016/17 academic years respectively.

6. As at the end of January 2017, the Programme benefited 22 878, 21 960 and 16 596 students in the 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17 academic years respectively, with the disbursement involved amounting to about \$97 million.

Evaluation of Programme Effectiveness

7. The effectiveness of the Programme is summarised as follows:

(a) Support for students

With the launch of this Programme, the academic expenses grant payable to students pursuing self-financing post-secondary programmes was increased by nearly 40%. In the 2016/17 academic year, with the additional academic expenses grant of up to \$2,190 on top of the academic expenses grant receivable under FASP, student beneficiaries might receive a non-repayable academic expenses grant of up to \$7,620, which was comparable to the amount available to students pursuing science discipline under the publicly-funded programmes. The Programme has rendered solid support for beneficiaries to ease their financial burden of meeting academic expenses.

(b) Adjustment mechanism for the amount of grant

The maximum amount of the additional academic expenses grant was adjusted by 5.6% and 4% respectively in the 2015/16 and 2016/17 academic years according to the movement of the CPI(A). The adjustment mechanism was consistent with that of the academic expenses grant under FASP and facilitated

programme administration by SFO.

(c) Implementation of the Programme

The Programme operated under the existing mechanism of disbursing grant to eligible students who passed the means test of SFO. No separate application for the Programme was required. Such arrangement was considered convenient to target beneficiaries and minimised the administrative cost and work.

Conclusion

8. The Programme has rendered appropriate assistance to needy students pursuing self-financing post-secondary programmes in meeting their academic expenses. The overall administration of the Programme was smooth and cost-effective. The Programme has met its objective and is in line with the aims of CCF.

Education Bureau

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