

For discussion on  
2 March 2018

## **Legislative Council Panel on Education**

### **Community Care Fund Assistance Programme: Provision of Subsidy to Needy Primary and Secondary Students for Purchasing Mobile Computer Devices to Facilitate the Practice of e-Learning (“the Assistance Programme”)**

#### **Purpose**

This paper invites comments of the Legislative Council Panel on Education on the Government’s proposal to seek funding from the Community Care Fund (CCF) for provision of subsidy to needy primary and secondary students studying in public sector schools<sup>1</sup> to purchase mobile computer devices<sup>2</sup> for three school years starting from 2018/19 in order to facilitate the practice of e-learning in line with schools’ development in promoting information technology (IT) in education.

#### **Background**

2. The Chief Executive’s 2017 Policy Agenda announced that the Government would invite the CCF to consider providing subsidy to needy primary and secondary students for purchasing tablet computers, so as to facilitate the practice of e-learning.

#### **Development of IT in Education**

3. The Education Bureau (EDB) has launched the Fourth Strategy on IT in

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<sup>1</sup> Public sector schools include government, aided and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools.

<sup>2</sup> Schools can use, as appropriate to their instructional designs, different types of mobile computer devices for e-learning, including tablet computers, notebook computers or other devices that can connect to the Internet (e.g. Chromebook).

Education in 2015/16 school year for using IT to enhance the effectiveness of learning and teaching, increase classroom interaction, and promote students' ability in self-directed learning, problem-solving, collaboration, etc. One of the key measures is to establish WiFi campus for all public sector schools by phases to facilitate e-learning through the use of mobile computer devices. Relevant works will be basically completed in the 2017/18 school year.

4. Schools have been positive towards implementing e-learning and tried out various strategies to make the most of mobile computer devices for learning and teaching. Among them, a number of schools have adopted the "Bring Your Own Device" (BYOD) policy so that student learning has become more personalised. The Government understands that this policy may create financial burden on students from low-income families. To avoid students from being deprived of e-learning due to financial reasons, the Government has invited the CCF to consider providing subsidy to needy primary and secondary students studying in public sector schools for purchasing mobile computer devices.

### **Consultation**

5. In formulating the Assistance Programme, EDB has consulted various stakeholders, including schools at different stages of implementing e-learning, schools adopting BYOD, the Steering Committee on Strategic Development of Information Technology in Education, school councils, school heads organisations and teachers associations (e.g. the Hong Kong Association for Computer Education and the Association of IT Leaders in Education). In general, stakeholders shared the view that, for the effective implementation of e-learning in schools, it would be necessary to subsidise needy primary and secondary students to purchase mobile computer devices. While a full subsidy could be provided to primary and secondary students in receipt of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) or full grant under the School Textbook Assistance Scheme (STAS), a half subsidy should be provided to those receiving half grant under STAS. To ensure proper use of public

money, stakeholders agreed that the subsidy should not be provided across the board, but should be made available depending on the extent to which schools are implementing e-learning, such as whether students were studying in schools or classes adopting the BYOD policy. Moreover, the Assistance Programme should cover different types of mobile computer devices, for example, tablet computers and notebook computers, so that schools can take into account their own e-learning requirements when choosing suitable devices for their students, with the difference in the cost of the devices covered by schools/parents.

6. In the course of consultation, stakeholders generally supported that schools should formulate their BYOD policy and implementation timetable having regard to their progress in implementing e-learning, parents' preferences and teachers' professional judgement. To ensure that the subsidy would be used directly for purchasing mobile computer devices for students to practise e-learning, stakeholders generally accepted that schools should procure devices of standardised specifications for their students through bulk purchase. This would also facilitate management of the devices and the using of the software and e-learning systems adopted by the schools. However, they expected EDB to provide relevant support, such as providing sample documents and guidelines on procurement procedures to alleviate the administrative burden on schools.

7. For better management of students' devices in class by teachers and, thus, effective e-learning, stakeholders were of the view that schools should be allowed to purchase mobile device management system with the subsidy. Moreover, to ease the financial burden on needy families, stakeholders also suggested that the subsidy should cover a three-year warranty and other basic accessories for the device, for example, screen protector and protective cover.

8. Some stakeholders were concerned about implementation details concerning such situations as when a student beneficiary was promoted to a secondary school or transferred to another school using a different device from the original school. Since such circumstances would be beyond the control of students, stakeholders opined that EDB should allow students to purchase new

devices to meet their learning needs and that the students should return the used devices to their original schools.

## **Detailed recommendations**

### Target beneficiaries

9. Target beneficiaries of the proposed Assistance Programme must fulfill the following requirements:

- (i) studying in public sector primary or secondary schools and receiving CSSA from the Social Welfare Department or full grant/half grant from the Student Finance Office of the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency; and
- (ii) studying in schools and classes implementing e-learning and adopting BYOD.

### Level and use of subsidy

10. With reference to the market prices of popular mobile computer devices adopted by schools, we propose, in the first year of the Assistance Programme, a subsidy of up to \$4,500 for students receiving CSSA/full grant and \$2,250 for those receiving half grant, or the respective level of the actual cost of the device with items mentioned below, whichever is the lower. The amount of the subsidy will cover the cost of the device, the mobile device management system to be installed on the device, basic accessories (e.g. screen shields and protective covers) and a three-year warranty. The maximum level of subsidy will be adjusted annually according to the movement of the Composite Consumer Price Index. During the three-year implementation period, each student beneficiary will receive the subsidy for purchase of a mobile computer device once. The subsidy cannot be put to other uses. In the event of any circumstances beyond the control of students as mentioned in paragraph 8 above, the beneficiaries will be granted an additional subsidy for purchase of new devices. In such cases,

the student concerned is required to return the used device to the original school which may then use the device for teaching or loan it to other needy students transferred in during the school year.

11. In addition, EDB recommends forming a team of administrative and technical staff to provide administrative support for the Assistance Programme and to provide professional and technical support as well as training to schools on procurement, use and management of devices so that schools can better support students in the use of mobile computer devices for e-learning.

#### Disbursement method

12. To ensure that funding from CCF is used directly to subsidise needy primary and secondary students for purchasing mobile computer devices to facilitate e-learning, it is proposed that the subsidy be disbursed to schools for purchasing the devices for their students. In the light of the design of their respective e-learning programmes and the needs of their students, schools can determine the device specifications on their own and make bulk purchase on behalf of their students. EDB understands that quite a number of schools adopting the BYOD policy have put this practice in place to ensure a common platform for e-learning.

13. EDB will provide provisional funding to schools during summer holidays for procuring devices according to the number of eligible students estimated by schools. The funding amount will be adjusted based on the actual number of eligible students in the first term of the following school year. Schools have the responsibility to verify the eligibility of students and return the unspent balance to CCF by the end of the school year. Starting from the 2017/18 school year, EDB has been providing an additional recurrent cash grant of \$25,000 per month to all public sector primary and secondary schools (including special schools) for strengthening IT staffing support to implement e-learning and various education initiatives which will harness IT. Schools should have sufficient manpower to absorb the extra workload arising from the implementation of this Assistance Programme.

### Roll-out period

14. Since schools are at different stages of implementing e-learning, we propose that schools should be allowed to participate in the Assistance Programme by phases over three years starting from the 2018/19 school year. Findings from the questionnaire survey of the Fourth Strategy on IT in Education show that schools that have established WiFi campus early are more likely to adopt the BYOD policy. According to this trend and with the implementation of this Assistance Programme, EDB estimates that about 70% of schools will join the Assistance Programme within the three-year implementation period, of which half of the classes will adopt the BYOD policy.

### Review on the effectiveness

15. EDB will closely monitor the progress of the Assistance Programme, provide professional and technical support as well as training to schools, so as to help schools implement the Assistance Programme and organise related parent education and student counselling programmes effectively. EDB will review the effectiveness of the Assistance Programme through means such as questionnaire surveys and consultation.

### **Estimated provision**

16. EDB estimates that about 102 000 eligible students will benefit from the Assistance Programme and the amount of subsidy required over the three-year period is about \$404 million. Together with the administrative expenses of \$11.54 million, the total provision for the Assistance Programme is about \$415.54 million. If the number of student beneficiaries of the Assistance Programme exceeds the estimated one, EDB will seek additional funding from CCF.

## **Views of CCF Task Force**

17. At its meeting on 5 February 2018, CCF Task Force discussed and supported the Assistance Programme. At the meeting, some members commented on the scope of target beneficiaries as mentioned in paragraph 9(ii) and suggested removing the condition regarding BYOD; some members were concerned about the ability and attitude of students in using IT and mobile computer devices; and some members hoped for early implementation of the Assistance Programme to benefit needy students.

18. EDB understands that schools would adopt different strategies in promoting e-learning. While some schools make good use of funding from EDB to provide mobile computer devices for students' use at schools and students are not required to bring their own device, some schools adopt the BYOD policy so that student learning can become more personalised. The latter practice may impose financial burden on students from low-income families. Hence, the Assistance Programme focuses on supporting students studying in schools adopting the BYOD policy. EDB will continue to keep in view the implementation of e-learning and the adoption of BYOD in schools and provide appropriate support accordingly.

## **Advice sought**

19. Members are invited to note the paper and comment on the Assistance Programme.

**Education Bureau**  
**February 2018**