

立法會

Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)321/17-18(06)

Ref : CB2/PL/MP

Panel on Manpower

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 21 November 2017

Continuing Education Fund

Purpose

This paper sets out background information on the Continuing Education Fund ("CEF") and summarizes the past discussions by the Panel on Manpower ("the Panel") on the subject.

Background

2. In the 2001 Policy Address, the Chief Executive ("CE") announced that the Government would set aside \$5 billion to subsidize those with learning aspirations to pursue continuing education and training programmes. The aim was to help people to pursue continuous learning, thereby preparing them for the knowledge-based economy. The Finance Committee approved in April 2002 a commitment of \$5 billion for launching CEF in June 2002. Upon reviews of CEF in 2003 and 2007, improvement measures were introduced to enhance the quality and relevance of CEF courses, strengthen the monitoring of course operation and widen scope of CEF to cover more sectors and domains. As an relief measure during the financial tsunami, a further funding of \$1.2 billion was injected into CEF in July 2009.

3. Under CEF, eligible applicants¹ will be reimbursed 80% of their course

¹ Applicants should meet the following criteria:

- (a) aged from 18 to 65 at the time of application;
- (b) are Hong Kong residents who have the right of abode or the right to land or to remain in Hong Kong without restriction;
- (c) have enrolled in and paid the tuition fee on equal monthly instalments basis for a reimbursable course before the course commences;
- (d) have not obtained any other public funds or publicly-funded financial assistance for the same course; and
- (e) application should be submitted before the course commences.

fees, subject to a maximum sum of \$10,000 (whichever is the less), on successful completion of a reimbursable course. The fees for more than one reimbursable course may be reimbursed within a four-year period for a maximum of four claims from the date of opening a CEF account, subject to the maximum ceiling of \$10,000 per applicant not being exceeded.

Deliberations of the Panel

Terms and conditions for CEF course providers

4. Some members were concerned about the credibility of CEF course providers, the quality of courses and the qualifications of course instructors. The Administration advised that all new courses had to undergo formal accreditation before registration under CEF. The accreditation was a quality assurance process in which the academic or vocational standard of the course, the governance and management structure of the course provider, the quality assurance mechanism, etc. would be examined. The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications ("HKCAAVQ") would also consider the fitness and propriety of the course director and responsible person of the course provider concerned. The course provider was required to comply with a set of terms and conditions laid down in the Letter of Approval issued to it after the approval and registration of the respective courses under CEF ("the CEF Terms and Conditions").

5. Regarding the quality of courses and the qualifications of course instructors, the Administration explained that course providers were required to recruit an adequate number of appropriately qualified and experienced instructors under the CEF Terms and Conditions. When course providers applied for registration of their courses under CEF, they had to provide specific information on the qualifications of the instructors for assessment. After a course had been registered under CEF, the course provider had to obtain written approval of the Administration before changing the instructors.

Inspection of CEF courses and other monitoring measures

6. Some members expressed concern whether the Office of the Continuing Education Fund ("OCEF") and HKCAAVQ had been effective in monitoring course operations. According to the Administration, CEF course providers were subject to the ongoing monitoring of OCEF and HKCAAVQ to ensure compliance with the CEF Terms and Conditions. During regular inspections, OCEF and HKCAAVQ required course providers to provide documentary proofs (such as enrolment forms, attendance records, assessment test and answer sheets, course evaluation forms, receipts of course fees and promotional

brochures) of students who had applied for CEF reimbursement. In addition to regular inspections, OCEF also conducted surprise inspections during classes to check the attendance record and the number of learners present. A written warning would be issued to a course provider when non-compliance was detected. If the non-compliance was serious or repetitive in nature, the Labour and Welfare Bureau ("LWB") would, in consultation with OCEF and HKCAAVQ, consider de-registering the concerned courses from the list of CEF reimbursable courses. In case of suspected criminal offences, OCEF would refer the case to the relevant law enforcement agencies for follow-up.

CEF courses and review of CEF

7. Some members considered that the Administration should proactively work with labour organizations in planning of CEF courses as appropriate. Some members were also concerned about the problem of manpower mismatch, particularly in the new emerging industries, and considered it imperative for LWB to work collaboratively with the Education Bureau ("EDB") and the Innovation and Technology Bureau to address the problem. The Administration explained that at present, training courses under eight specified domains (i.e. business services, financial services, logistics, tourism, creative industry, design, language, and interpersonal and intrapersonal skills for the workplace) could be registered as CEF courses by application, subject to the assessment by HKCAAVQ and approval by LWB. Besides, courses designed in accordance with the Specification of Competency Standards ("SCS") drawn up by the respective Industry Training Advisory Committees under the Qualifications Framework of EDB and registered as SCS-based courses under the Qualifications Register might also apply for registration under CEF.

8. To encourage the public to pursue continuing education, members called on the Administration to make reference to the Singaporean's practice to raise the reimbursable ceiling for those who had exhausted the allowance and allow eligible applicants to apply for the allowance up to the maximum in every five or 10 years. According to the Administration, most of the eligible applicants with CEF accounts in fact had not exhausted the maximum sum of \$10,000 per applicant.

9. Members were advised that the Administration had commissioned an independent consultant to assist in conducting a review of CEF. Members were concerned about the scope and timeframe for the review. According to the Administration, the review covered the amount of reimbursable ceiling, how the course domains could be enriched and how the course monitoring mechanism could be enhanced, which was expected to be completed within 2017. Enhancement measures would then be launched as soon as practicable.

Recent development

10. In her Policy Address delivered on 11 October 2017, CE announced that the Administration was reviewing the operation of CEF, and would plan to inject an additional \$1.5 billion into CEF to encourage the public to pursue life-long learning and continuing education.

11. The Administration will brief the Panel on the review of CEF and proposed funding injection at the meeting on 21 November 2017.

Relevant papers

12. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
15 November 2017

Relevant papers on the Continuing Education Fund

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Manpower	20.12.2001 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Finance Committee	26.4.2002 (Item No. 2)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	17.7.2003 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
	17.5.2007 (Item VI)	Agenda Minutes
	18.6.2009 (Item II)	Agenda Minutes
	12.7.2010 (Item III)	Agenda Minutes
Legislative Council	2.7.2014	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 14)
	24.6.2015	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 19)
	23.11.2016	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 17)
Panel on Manpower	23.1.2017 (Item III)	Agenda Minutes