

For discussion on  
6 December 2019

## **Legislative Council Panel on Education**

### **Targeted Taught Postgraduate Programmes Fellowships Scheme**

#### **Purpose**

The Chief Executive announced in the 2019 Policy Address Supplement that the Government would implement the Targeted Taught Postgraduate Programmes Fellowships Scheme on a pilot basis for five cohorts from the 2020/21 academic year, with a view to providing fellowships to meritorious local students to pursue targeted taught postgraduate (TPg) programmes that meet Hong Kong's development needs. This paper seeks Members' views on the scheme.

#### **Background**

2. Universities shoulder the responsibility to nurture talent, enhance the overall competitiveness of the society and meet the strategic needs of Hong Kong. With the rapid development of the society in recent years, many sectors are in dire need of talent equipped with more in-depth and interdisciplinary knowledge. TPg programmes allow individuals who possess undergraduate qualifications or even working experience to pursue knowledge of specific areas or with close connection with one's professional development to nurture talent that are needed for the development of Hong Kong. At present, except for a few University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded TPg programmes<sup>1</sup> which are offered to cater for specific manpower needs, most TPg programmes are provided on a self-financing basis.

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<sup>1</sup> TPg programmes offered by the UGC-funded sector are in general operated on a self-financing basis. TPg programmes that meet specific manpower requirements and those which are required for providing full training of certain professionals can be publicly-funded. These programmes include dental specialists, training for clinical psychologists and educational psychologists, and other programmes related to the professions of education, law, medicine, architecture and urban planning, etc.

## Targeted Taught Postgraduate Programmes Fellowships Scheme

3. Immediately following the announcement of the Chief Executive's 2019 Policy Address, the UGC invited all UGC-funded universities to submit proposals on programmes and fellowship places. A task force led by Sir Howard Newby, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Liverpool in the United Kingdom, has also been set up. The task force, which comprises overseas academics and experts who are well experienced in the relevant fields and with no conflict of interest, is responsible for finalising the details of the scheme and assessing the proposals submitted by the universities.

4. The main objectives of the scheme are to attract more meritorious local students to pursue further studies in priority areas conducive to the development of Hong Kong, and to encourage universities to establish more innovative and multi-disciplinary programmes that are beneficial to the society. The scheme will provide fellowships to meritorious local students who pursue such programmes, subject to a ceiling of \$120,000 per student for the first cohort (for the entire programme and irrespective of the mode or duration of study), to subsidise their tuition fees. The scheme is expected to provide a maximum of 500 fellowships for the first cohort of students (admitted in the 2020/21 academic year) and 1 000 thereafter.

### *UGC's assessment arrangements*

5. After preliminary consultation with the eight UGC-funded universities, the UGC proposes that eligible programmes covered by the scheme should encompass one or more of the following seven areas which are conducive to the development of Hong Kong:

	<b>Priority Area</b>	<b>Example</b>
1	STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics)	Subjects related to the promotion of the development of STEM, STEM education
2	Promoting good health	Biomedical technology, healthy ageing
3	Developing a sustainable environment	Sustainable urban development, smart cities

	<b>Priority Area</b>	<b>Example</b>
4	Enhancing Hong Kong's strategic position as a regional and international business centre	Politics, economics and culture in the Greater Bay Area and under the Belt and Road Initiative
5	Advancing emerging research	Financial technology, big data, artificial intelligence/robotics, advanced manufacturing/precision engineering
6	Promoting the creative industries	Integration of creative digital technology, industrial design and technological innovation
7	Promoting the cultural and heritage industries	Nature and heritage conservation

6. The task force will consider the proposed TPg programmes and the number of fellowships to be allocated to each programme in accordance with the following criteria:

- (a) relevance to the seven priority areas;
- (b) the manpower requirements and market demand presented by the universities should prove that meritorious students can be attracted to pursue the programme;
- (c) the capability of the programme in nurturing talent and supporting the high value-added and diversified development of Hong Kong, as well as the social impact;
- (d) the university's previous experience in offering relevant programmes; and
- (e) the long-term sustainability of the programme.

### *Mode of eligible TPg programmes*

7. As eligible programmes approved by the UGC are still self-financing programmes, the tuition fees payable by non-fellowship recipients should not be lower than the total tuition fees payable by fellowship recipients. To ensure competitiveness of the fellowship and diversity of the programmes pursued by students, as well as to enable more programmes to benefit from the scheme, the proportion of fellowship recipients in the total number of students in each of the eligible programme should not exceed 30%. In addition, while applications for fellowships are open to local students only, universities may continue to admit non-local students to the programmes.

### *Amount of fellowship*

8. To minimise the situation where universities may offer programmes at exorbitant tuition fees, the UGC will set a ceiling on the amount of fellowship. After taking into account factors such as the tuition fee levels of the relevant programmes offered by the eight universities, the UGC proposes to set a ceiling of \$120,000 per fellowship for the first cohort (for the entire programme and irrespective of the mode or duration of study). The fellowship shall only be used for settling tuition fees, and the tuition fees payable by fellowship recipients shall not be lower than the tuition fee level of other UGC-funded programmes (currently \$42,100 per annum). Taking the 2020/21 academic year as an example, if the total tuition fee of a programme exceeds \$162,100, the remaining balance after deducting the maximum amount of fellowship (\$120,000) shall be borne by the student. If the total tuition fee of a programme is \$162,000 or below, the student would only need to pay \$42,100 as tuition fee, with the remainder covered by the fellowship.

9. In view of inflation and adjustment to tuition fee levels, we propose that the ceiling on the amount of fellowship be adjusted according to changes in the annual Composite Consumer Price Index.

### *Criteria for selection of fellowship recipients by universities*

10. As part of the preparatory work for the scheme, the universities will invite students admitted to the eligible programmes in the 2020/21 academic year to submit their applications in the first quarter of 2020 based on the programmes and fellowship places approved by the UGC. Students must submit in their application a proposal expounding on how they can contribute to the priority areas of Hong Kong after completing the programme concerned. In line with the principle of autonomy in student admission, applications for the fellowships will be assessed by the universities themselves based on a rigorous and holistic approach, subject to the following criteria:

- (a) applications are open to local students only;
- (b) the award of the fellowships will be based on merits taking into account the students' academic achievements, professional qualifications, relevant working experience and achievements in other areas as well as the proposals submitted by the students; and
- (c) to avoid double subsidy, applications from students who are receiving other forms of government scholarship (except student financial assistance) for pursuing the same programme will not be considered.

### *Review of the scheme*

11. Universities are required to submit a report to the UGC by the end of each academic year on the disbursement of the fellowships, the students' academic achievements, the characteristics of the programmes, the employment situation of the fellowship recipients upon graduation and the cost of the programmes, etc. for review of the effectiveness of the scheme. The UGC will maintain close contact with the universities and keep the implementation of the scheme under review, so as to consider whether adjustment to the coverage of the priority areas and the fellowship places for each programme is needed.

## Financial implications

12. The proposed scheme will involve a non-recurrent funding of around \$570 million and has no recurrent financial implications for the Government. The estimated cash flow requirement of the scheme is as follows (for reference only):

	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	Total
<b>Number of fellowship places</b>	500	1 000	1 000	1 000	1 000	4 500
<b>Ceiling per fellowship<sup>(Note)</sup> (\$)</b>	120,000	123,000	126,075	129,227	132,458	
<b>Estimated cash flow (\$ million)</b>	60	123	126	129	132	570

Note: The ceiling on the amount of fellowship will be adjusted according to changes in the annual Composite Consumer Price Index (assuming an annual increase of 2.5%).

## Next steps

13. In early November 2019, the universities submitted the proposed lists of programmes to be covered by the scheme as well as the basic information to the task force for consideration. The UGC has also invited the universities to submit detailed proposals on the programmes that have passed the first-round scrutiny. In February 2020, the UGC will meet with the management of each university separately to finalise the list of eligible programmes and the number of fellowship places to be allocated to the programmes concerned. If things go smoothly, the UGC plans to announce in the first quarter of 2020 the list of eligible programmes and the number of fellowship places allocated to each programme. The relevant information will also be uploaded onto the UGC's website for public inspection. Subject to Members' views and the funding approval of the Legislative Council, the universities will arrange for the early completion of the aforesaid procedures and disbursement of the fellowships to the fellowship recipients.

14. After the universities have completed assessing the applications in the first cohort of the scheme, the UGC will invite them to provide feedback on the arrangements of the scheme, which will be taken into account when considering the arrangements for the second cohort of the scheme (i.e. the 2021/22 academic year). The UGC will also conduct a timely review of the scheme and, depending on its effectiveness, make recommendations to the Government on the way forward.

### **Advice sought**

15. Members are invited to note the implementation arrangements for the Targeted Taught Postgraduate Programmes Fellowships Scheme and offer views on the scheme.

**Education Bureau  
University Grants Committee Secretariat  
December 2019**