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28 October 2021

Council Business Division 4  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
Legislative Council Complex  
1 Legislative Council Road  
Central, Hong Kong  
(Attn: Mr Raymond SZETO)

Dear Mr SZETO,

**Evaluation reports of Community Care Fund assistance programmes**

At the meeting of the Panel on Home Affairs of the Legislative Council held on 21 December 2016, Members noted that the Community Care Fund would provide the Panel with the programme evaluation reports. The following six evaluation reports are hereby attached for Members' information:

- (1) the evaluation report of the “Pilot Scheme on Subsidised Cervical Cancer Screening and Preventive Education for Eligible Low-income Women”;
- (2) the evaluation report of the programme on “Providing Hostel Subsidy for Needy Undergraduate Students (2019/20 and 2020/21 Academic Years)”;
- (3) the evaluation report of the programme on “Increasing the Academic Expenses Grant under the Financial Assistance Scheme for Post-secondary Students (2019/20 and 2020/21 Academic Years)”;

- (4) the evaluation report of the programme on “Enhancing the Academic Expenses Grant for Students with Special Educational Needs and Financial Needs Pursuing Post-secondary Programmes (2018/19 to 2020/21 Academic Years)”;
- (5) the evaluation report of the programme on “Provision of Subsidy to Needy Primary and Secondary Students for Purchasing Mobile Computer Devices to Facilitate the Practice of e-Learning” ; and
- (6) the evaluation report of the programme on “Subsidy for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Recipients Living in Rented Private Housing”.

For enquiries, please feel free to contact the undersigned. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,



(Ms Sandra CHUNG)

for Secretary for Home Affairs

c.c.

Secretary for Education (Attn: Ms Jeanne FUNG)

Secretary for Food and Health (Attn: Ms Patsy LAM)

Director of Social Welfare (Attn: Mr Kelvin TAM)

**Community Care Fund  
Pilot Scheme on Subsidised Cervical Cancer Screening and  
Preventive Education for Eligible Low-income Women  
Evaluation Report**

**Purpose**

This paper reports the evaluation results of the three-year Pilot Scheme on Subsidised Cervical Cancer Screening and Preventive Education for Eligible Low-income Women (the Pilot Scheme) under the Community Care Fund (CCF) launched in December 2017 and completed in December 2020.

**Background**

2. The Government has been implementing the territory-wide Cervical Screening Programme in collaboration with healthcare professionals in the public and private sectors and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), to facilitate and encourage women to receive regular cervical cancer screening. To encourage the uptake of such screening among low-income women, the Commission on Poverty (CoP) approved a budget of \$78.61 million under the CCF at its meeting in May 2017 to launch the Pilot Scheme from 13 December 2017 for three years.

3. Women aged 25 to 64 who have ever had sex are recommended to have regular cervical cancer screenings every three years after two annual consecutive normal screens. Women aged 65 or above who have ever had sex and have never received a screening should also be screened. Women who are beneficiaries of one of the following forms of assistance are eligible to join the Pilot Scheme –

- (a) Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme (CSSA) or Level 0 voucher under the Pilot Scheme on Residential Care Service Voucher for the Elderly;
- (b) Waiver of medical charges under the medical fee waiving mechanism of public hospitals and clinics;
- (c) Old Age Living Allowance;
- (d) Working Family Allowance Scheme (formerly known as Low-income Working Family Allowance);
- (e) Work Incentive Transport Subsidy Scheme; or
- (f) Having household member(s) granted subsidy/remission under the School Textbook Assistance Scheme or the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme.

4. Women in receipt of CSSA, Level 0 voucher under the Pilot Scheme on Residential Care Service Voucher for the Elderly or waiver of medical charges under the medical fee waiving mechanism of public hospitals and clinics (i.e. beneficiaries of paras. 3(a) and (b) above) are fully subsidised and will receive free services; whereas the other eligible women (i.e. beneficiaries of paras. 3(c) to (f) above) are partially subsidised and have to pay \$100 per visit to the service providers under the Pilot Scheme. Fees charged under the Pilot Scheme is in line with the prevailing government practices in providing subsidised cervical screening services at the Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs) under the Department of Health (DH).

5. The initial estimated number of beneficiaries was up to 66 990, including about 19 300 fully subsidised and 47 690 partially subsidised cases, with an aim to bringing the cervical screening coverage rate to 80% among the target population<sup>1</sup>.

### **Implementation of Pilot Scheme**

6. In this Pilot Scheme, DH was the implementing department and had served as the overall administrator and coordinator. Eligible women were subsidised to undergo cervical cancer screening tests at 10 service centres of three NGOs, namely the Centre of Research and Promotion of Women's Health of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong and the United Christian Nethersole Community Health Service. The service agreements engaged with these three service providers outlined the details and scope of services, including reaching out to target communities, such as through collaborating and liaising with community women groups or NGOs and recruiting eligible low-income women to enroll to the Pilot Scheme, verifying applicants' eligibility, providing cervical cancer screening and preventive education, the use of Cervical Screening Information System (CSIS), etc. Nevertheless, no minimal enrolment target was set in the service agreements in view of the uncertainty on the reception of the Pilot Scheme from eligible women.

7. By close of the Pilot Scheme, a total of 930 cervical cancer screenings were completed. Among which, 345 (37%) are fully subsidised and the remaining 585 (63%) are partially subsidised. A breakdown of the number of screenings by age group and type of subsidy received is at the **Appendix**. The provisions for the Pilot Scheme was \$78.61 million (including \$3.74 million for administrative fee). The disbursements involved were about \$0.53 million (and a related administrative fee of about \$1.92 million). The remaining balance was about \$76.16 million.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the assumption that the cervical screening coverage rate for low-income women is the same as those of the general female population, i.e. 55.4% as derived from the Behavioural Risk Factor Survey 2016 result, with 80% being the ideal coverage rate in developed countries.

## Evaluation of Pilot Scheme

8. DH captured statistics of screening results from the computerised registry, CSIS, for monitoring and evaluating the screening performance among participants. DH also monitored the enrolment and outreach efforts carried out by service providers through monthly reporting. Upon completion of the Pilot Scheme, an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Pilot Scheme was conducted. The details are set out in the ensuing paragraphs.

### *(a) Participation rate*

#### *(i) Promotional activities and education*

9. A series of promotional activities were conducted by DH, which included conducting a press conference and a briefing for 14 local NGOs and women's groups, distribution of promotional materials (including around 8 300 posters, 57 300 leaflets and 400 DVDs of the Pilot Scheme) to relevant local healthcare providers, government departments, district councils and NGOs and setting up of a dedicated webpage. Having reviewed the experience of the implementation of the Pilot Scheme during the first year, DH, in consultation with the Food and Health Bureau, had worked out with the three service providers in April 2019 various enhancement measures in order to step up publicity efforts and facilitate participation. The service providers subsequently engaged district offices and community groups (such as NGOs providing foodbank services) for promotion and outreach activities, developed sets of QR codes to facilitate peer promotion of the Pilot Scheme by social media, distributed souvenirs such as cool towels and water-proof bags to participants through the service providers as additional incentives for joining the Pilot Scheme, etc. Also, message was broadcasted via radio programmes for ethnic minorities (EM) as well as video clips and promotional materials targeting EM groups in six EM languages were made available on the dedicated website and for distribution as appropriate.

10. The service providers also conducted around 300 sessions of health talks / workshops / promotional activities, in which around 30 promotional activities (e.g. carnival, health talks) were organised in collaboration with other local NGOs, reaching out to over 12 000 eligible low-income women.

11. Despite various promotional activities mentioned above, the overall enrolment remained low. In addition, the arrangement of outreach activities in the third year of the Pilot Scheme was also markedly impeded by the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic.

#### *(ii) Barriers for participation*

12. The three service providers had all reported difficulties in recruiting low-income women to the Pilot Scheme. On one hand, this is not unexpected and this phenomenon is generally consistent with local and overseas' experiences that participation in preventive health services, such as cervical cancer screening, are usually low among the hard-to-reach and underprivileged groups. Additionally,

service providers reported difficulties in specifically recruiting low-income female population due to perceived barriers and fear of potential stigmatisation following the disclosure of one's own socioeconomic status as belonging to the low-income group. The need to provide documentary proof on belonging to the low-income group in order to be eligible for the Pilot Scheme is considered to be a hurdle because local female residents, regardless of financial status, are entitled to cervical screening service at MCHCs at the same charges and they are not required to provide any documentary proof in relation to their income (except CSSA recipients).

**(b) *Quality of screening service provided by service providers***

13. The quality of services delivered by the service providers were considered good as reflected by a negligible level (0.1%) of smear samples that were unsatisfactorily taken. Among 929 satisfactorily taken smear samples, 53 (5.7%) were tested abnormal<sup>2</sup>. Referrals for further management, if needed, were also made in a timely manner and in accordance with relevant guidelines. According to the telephone survey on 197 enrolled participants, about 180 of them were satisfied with service provided and 135 respondents expressed willingness to recommend the Pilot Scheme to their acquaintances. There was no report of complaint or complication/incident during the three-year of implementation. Site visits by DH confirmed that service providers had performed satisfactorily in terms of record keeping and processes for timely disbursement of funds.

**Conclusion**

14. This three-year Pilot Scheme was implemented during 13 December 2017 to 12 December 2020 as scheduled. Based on the available quality indicators like the rate of smear samples that were unsatisfactorily taken, rate of abnormal findings and feedback from clients, services delivered by the service providers were considered of good quality.

15. The Pilot Scheme provided an opportunity for the Government to explore a new way to reach out to the low-income groups to promote and provide cervical cancer screening. Given the low level of participation and the aforesaid intrinsic barriers for participation, this new mode of service delivery does not seem to be an effective means of driving cervical screening in the low-income / underprivileged groups although the quality of screening services provided by the service providers was good. Nevertheless, the Pilot Scheme offered valuable experience for DH to collaborate with NGOs to work together to improve the public health and address the health disparity between the low-income / underprivileged groups and other groups. As the women participating in the Pilot Scheme have also registered with the CSP, their screening results and date for next screening are stored in the computer system,

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<sup>2</sup> Among them, 21 were Atypical Squamous Cells of Undetermined Significance (ASCUS) with high-risk HPV negative, 14 were ASCUS with high-risk HPV positive, 9 were Low-grade Squamous Intraepithelial Lesion, 3 were High-grade Squamous Intraepithelial Lesion, and the remaining 6 carried other abnormal result.

namely CSIS, of the CSP. Therefore, regardless of the effectiveness of the Pilot Scheme, the participants and their health care providers can check the women's records in the CSIS which will also send reminder letters, where appropriate, to those who need rescreening, thus facilitating the women to receive screening again from different service providers such as MCHCs and Woman Health Centres under DH, family doctors, general practitioners or NGOs.

16. At present, local female residents (including EM), regardless of financial status, are entitled to cervical cancer screening service at MCHCs under DH at the same charges, while some women such as CSSA recipients receive free services. DH will continue to work with other government departments (including the Social Welfare Department and Housing Department), District Health Centres (DHC), DHC Express and the NGOs providing relevant services to low-income women to promote the awareness of cervical cancer prevention among these women via different channels. DH will launch new publicity campaigns, as appropriate, via websites, television, radio, newspapers, magazines, social media, etc. to promote the CSP and advocate the adoption of primary and secondary (i.e. screening) preventive measures.

Food and Health Bureau  
Department of Health  
June 2021

## Appendix

### **Number of screenings Breakdown by age group and type of subsidy received by beneficiaries**

<b>Age group</b>	<b>No. of fully subsidised screenings</b>	<b>No. of partially subsidised screenings</b>	<b>Total no. of screenings (%)</b>	
25-29	10	21	31	3.3%
30-34	26	76	102	11.0%
35-39	63	140	203	21.8%
40-44	77	134	211	22.7%
45-49	70	113	183	19.7%
50-54	40	48	88	9.5%
55-59	29	17	46	4.9%
60-64	20	8	28	3.0%
65 and above	10	28	38	4.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>930</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Notes:

1. Age refers to the age of the beneficiaries as at the date when the smear sample was taken after enrollment into the Pilot Scheme.
2. A total of 755 participants received subsidised screenings under the Pilot Scheme.

**Community Care Fund**  
**Providing Hostel Subsidy for Needy Undergraduate Students**  
**Evaluation Report**  
**(2019/20 and 2020/21 Academic Years)**

## **Background**

The Community Care Fund (CCF) Task Force endorsed in March 2014 the proposal to provide hostel subsidy for needy undergraduate students (the Programme), who were offered hostel places by their institutions, to meet their hostel expenses so that they would not be denied hostel accommodation due to a lack of means. The Programme was to be implemented for three years starting from the 2014/15 academic year (AY). In June 2014, the Commission on Poverty (CoP) approved the implementation of the Programme under the CCF. The CoP subsequently approved twice in April 2017 and April 2019 the extension of the Programme, resulting in the implementation for a total of seven years up to the 2020/21 AY. Two evaluation reports of the Programme, covering the respective periods from the 2014/15 AY to the 2016/17 AY and from the 2017/18 AY to the 2018/19 AY, were submitted to the CoP in April 2017 and April 2019.

## **Implementation of the Programme**

2. Undergraduate students who applied for the financial assistance under the Tertiary Student Finance Scheme – Publicly-funded Programmes or the Financial Assistance Scheme for Post-secondary Students, passed the means test administered by the Student Finance Office (SFO) of the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency and confirmed by their institutions as hostel residents<sup>1</sup> in the semester<sup>2</sup> are eligible for the hostel subsidy under the Programme. Eligible students are not required to apply for the hostel subsidy separately, and are provided with the hostel subsidy through autopay service of

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<sup>1</sup> The subsidy does not cover students staying in premises other than student hostels provided by the institutions, such as those solely occupying or sharing a private flat as tenants.

<sup>2</sup> To ensure effective use of the subsidy, coupled with the fact that certain students may not be able to stay in the hostel throughout the entire semester because of adjustment difficulties and/or other academic needs during the initial period of hostel accommodation, needy students may still be eligible to receive the subsidy as long as they are confirmed by their institutions as the registered occupants of the hostel places concerned for at least 75% of the time during a semester. Also, institutions may recommend the offer of the subsidy to needy students with genuine difficulties in meeting the above accommodation time requirement (for example due to unexpected family or health reasons or participation in overseas exchange programmes arranged by their institutions).

their banks at the end of each semester. The actual amount of subsidy receivable is determined with respect to the student's level of assistance as assessed under the assistance scheme concerned and the actual hostel fee payable.

3. In the 2014/15 AY, the maximum amount of hostel subsidy for each eligible student was \$8,000. The subsidy was adjusted annually in accordance with the movement of the Consumer Price Index (A) (CPI(A))<sup>3</sup>. The maximum amount of the subsidy was adjusted to \$9,430 and \$9,740 for the 2019/20 AY and the 2020/21 AY respectively.

4. The approved funding provision for the Programme is \$263.1 million, including \$256.3 million for disbursement and \$6.8 million for administrative fee. The accumulated number of student beneficiaries since the implementation of the Programme up to end March 2021 is 34 297 person-times. The total disbursement is around \$203.13 million and the administrative fee is around \$6.03 million. In the 2019/20 AY, the Programme has benefitted 4 533 students with a disbursement of about \$24.59 million. For the first semester of the 2020/21 AY<sup>4</sup> (as at end March 2021), there are 1 828 student beneficiaries with a disbursement of about \$7.25 million.

### **Evaluation of Programme Effectiveness**

5. The effectiveness of the Programme is summarised as follows –

(a) Support for Students

According to the information obtained from the tertiary institutions, the maximum amount of the subsidy could, generally speaking, provide substantial support to students to meet their hostel expenses, based on the rates of a hostel double room excluding meals and summer residence.

(b) “Live-in” Requirement

Considering that certain students might not be able to reside in hostels throughout the entire semester, students were eligible for the subsidy as

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<sup>3</sup> From the 2014/15 AY to the 2018/19 AY, the maximum amount of subsidy was \$8,000, \$8,450, \$8,790, \$9,040 and \$9,180 respectively.

<sup>4</sup> Figures for the second semester are not yet available.

long as they were registered occupants of the hostel places concerned for at least 75% of the time during a semester. Institutions considered this “live-in” requirement appropriate. This requirement could also ensure the proper use of public funds.

(c) Adjustment Mechanism for the Maximum Amount of the Subsidy

The maximum amount of the subsidy was adjusted annually according to the movement of the CPI(A). In the 2019/20 AY and the 2020/21 AY, the adjustment rates were +2.7% and +3.3% respectively. Based on the information provided by institutions, the hostel fees of the majority of the institutions were adjusted at a similar rate or had not been adjusted in the past two AYs. The adjustments of the maximum amount of the subsidy were on the whole in line with the revision of hostel fees.

(d) Workflow of the Programme

The Programme was operated along the existing mechanism of disbursing subsidy to eligible students who passed the means test of SFO and no separate application was required. The arrangement was considered convenient to target beneficiaries and could minimise administrative cost and work.

## **Conclusion**

6. The Programme has rendered appropriate assistance to needy undergraduate students to meet their hostel expenses. The overall administration of the Programme has been smooth. To ensure that eligible students can continue to receive such financial assistance, the Programme will be incorporated into the Government’s regular assistance programmes starting from the 2021/22 AY.

Education Bureau  
June 2021

**Community Care Fund**  
**Increasing the Academic Expenses Grant under**  
**the Financial Assistance Scheme for Post-secondary Students**  
**Evaluation Report**  
**(2019/20 and 2020/21 Academic Years)**

**Background**

The Community Care Fund (CCF) Task Force endorsed in March 2014 the proposal to launch an assistance programme for three years from the 2014/15 academic year (AY) to increase the academic expenses (AE) grant under the Financial Assistance Scheme for Post-secondary Students (FASP) in order to strengthen the support for financially needy students concerned. In June 2014, the Commission on Poverty (CoP) approved funding under the CCF for the implementation of the Programme. The CoP approved the extension of the Programme twice in April 2017 and April 2019, resulting in its implementation for a total of seven years up to the 2020/21 AY. Two evaluation reports of the Programme, covering the respective periods from the 2014/15 AY to the 2016/17 AY and from the 2017/18 AY to the 2018/19 AY, were submitted to the CoP in April 2017 and April 2019.

**Implementation of the Programme**

2. Students who pursue locally-accredited self-financing full-time sub-degree or degree programmes and passed the means test under FASP administered by the Student Finance Office (SFO) of the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency are eligible for the additional AE grant under the Programme. Eligible students are not required to apply for the grant separately, and are disbursed with the additional AE grant through autopay service. The actual amount of grant receivable by an eligible student is determined with respect to his/her level of assistance as assessed under FASP.

3. In the 2014/15 AY, eligible students were each provided with an additional AE grant up to \$2,000. Such maximum amount was adjusted annually in accordance with the movement of the Consumer Price Index (A)

(CPI(A))<sup>1</sup>. In the 2019/20 AY and the 2020/21 AY, the maximum amount was increased to \$2,340 and \$2,420 respectively.

4. The approved funding provision for the Programme is \$236.87 million<sup>2</sup>, including \$230 million for disbursement and \$6.87 million for administrative fee. The accumulated number of student beneficiaries since the implementation of the Programme up to end March 2021 is 127 494 person-times. The total disbursement is around \$224.48 million and the administrative fee is around \$6.1 million. In the 2019/20 AY and the 2020/21 AY (as at end March 2021), the Programme has benefitted 14 887 and 13 641 students with the disbursements of about \$28.95 million and \$28.82 million respectively.

### **Evaluation of Programme Effectiveness**

5. The effectiveness of the Programme is summarised as follows –

(a) Support for Students

With the launch of this Programme, the AE grant payable to FASP students has been essentially increased by about 40%. In the 2020/21 AY, with the additional AE grant up to \$2,420 on top of the AE grant provided under FASP, an eligible FASP student might receive an AE grant up to \$8,420, an amount comparable to the maximum AE grant receivable by students pursuing science discipline under publicly-funded programmes. The Programme rendered solid support for beneficiaries to meet their AE.

(b) Adjustment Mechanism for the Maximum Amount of the Grant

The maximum amount of the additional AE grant was adjusted annually in accordance with the movement of CPI(A). In the 2019/20 AY and the 2020/21 AY, the adjustment rates were +2.7% and +3.3% respectively. The adjustment mechanism was considered administratively manageable and consistent with that of the AE grant under FASP.

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<sup>1</sup> From the 2014/15 AY to the 2018/19 AY, the maximum amount of the additional AE grant was \$2,000, \$2,110, \$2,190, \$2,250 and \$2,280 respectively.

<sup>2</sup> The CoP approved in April 2021 an additional funding of \$3 million for disbursement. The total funding provision for the Programme was revised from \$233.87 million to \$236.87 million.

(c) Convenient Arrangement for Beneficiaries

The Programme has made use of the existing means test to determine the amount of grants to be disbursed to eligible students. No separate application for the additional AE grant was required. Such arrangement was considered convenient to beneficiaries and could minimise administrative cost and work.

**Conclusion**

6. The Programme has provided substantial support to needy students pursuing self-financing post-secondary programmes to meet their AE expenses. The overall administration of the Programme has been smooth. To ensure that eligible students can continue to receive such financial assistance, the Programme will be incorporated into the Government's regular assistance programmes starting from the 2021/22 AY.

Education Bureau  
June 2021

**Community Care Fund**  
**Enhancing the Academic Expenses Grant for Students with**  
**Special Educational Needs and Financial Needs**  
**Pursuing Post-secondary Programmes**  
**Evaluation Report**  
**(2018/19 to 2020/21 Academic Years)**

**Background**

The Community Care Fund (CCF) Task Force endorsed in March 2015 the proposal to enhance the academic expenses (AE) grant for students with special educational needs (SEN) and financial needs pursuing post-secondary programmes (the Programme). The Programme was to be implemented for three years starting from the 2015/16 academic year (AY). In March 2015, the Commission on Poverty (CoP) approved the implementation of the Programme under the CCF. In June 2018, the first evaluation report of the Programme covering the period from 2015/16 AY to 2017/18 AY was submitted to the CoP, which approved the extension of the Programme for three years from the 2018/19 AY to the 2020/21 AY.

**Implementation of the Programme**

2. Students who fulfil the following criteria are eligible for the enhanced AE grant –
  - (a) confirmed by a relevant professional to have at least one type of SEN including specific learning difficulties, intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorders, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorders, physical disability, visual impairment, hearing impairment, speech and language impairment; and starting from the 2017/18 AY, mental illness;
  - (b) pursuing University Grants Committee-funded or publicly-funded full-time local post-secondary programmes, or full-time locally accredited self-financing post-secondary programmes; and

- (c) eligible to apply for assistance under the Tertiary Student Finance Scheme - Publicly-funded Programmes (TSFS) or the Financial Assistance Scheme for Post-secondary Students (FASP) and passed the means test of the Student Finance Office (SFO) of the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency.
3. Information about the Programme is disseminated to eligible students through the SFO's website and local tertiary institutions. Eligible TSFS or FASP applicants need to apply for the grant and provide to the SFO medical reports/professional certificates issued by relevant organisations/professionals. The SFO disburses the enhanced AE grant through autopay service to bank accounts of eligible students and inform them in writing the amount of grant they receive. The actual amount of grant receivable by an eligible student is determined with respect to his/her level of assistance as assessed under the assistance scheme concerned.
4. In the 2015/16 AY, an eligible student was provided with an enhanced AE grant up to \$8,000. The maximum amount of the grant was adjusted annually in accordance with the movement of the Consumer Price Index (A) (CPI(A))<sup>1</sup>. From the 2018/19 AY to the 2020/21 AY, the maximum amount of grant was increased to \$8,680, \$8,910 and \$9,200 respectively.
5. The approved funding provision for the Programme is \$12.46 million, including \$12.25 million for disbursement and \$0.21 million for administrative fee. The accumulated number of student beneficiaries since the implementation of the Programme up to end March 2021 is 1 083 person-times. The total disbursement is around \$8.46 million and the administrative fee is around \$0.01 million. In the 2018/19 AY, the 2019/20 AY and the 2020/21 AY (as at the end of March 2021), the Programme has benefitted 162, 232 and 250 students with the disbursements of about \$1.25 million, \$1.85 million and \$2.09 million respectively.

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<sup>1</sup> The maximum amount of the grant from the 2015/16 AY to the 2017/18 AY was \$8,000, \$8,320 and \$8,550 respectively.

## **Evaluation of Programme Effectiveness**

6. The effectiveness of the Programme is summarised as follows –

(a) Additional Support for Students

In the 2020/21 AY (as at end March 2021), the average amount of grant (including tuition fee and AE grant) provided to a post-secondary student under the TSFS or FASP was around \$48,000. The average amount of additional AE grant provided to a beneficiary under the Programme in 2020/21 AY was around \$8,400 which offered substantial support to beneficiaries in meeting their academic expenses and effectively alleviating their financial burden.

(b) Flexibility of Cash Subsidy

Beneficiaries under the Programme could make use of the cash subsidy for various purposes including the purchase of wheel-chairs, hearing-aids, computer and IT equipment, speech therapy service and training programmes on enhancement of learning skills, etc. Such provision of cash subsidy allowed flexibility for needy students with SEN to obtain equipment or services to suit their own needs.

(c) Adjustment Mechanism for Maximum Amount of the Grant

The maximum amount of the enhanced AE grant was adjusted by +1.5%, +2.7% and +3.3% respectively from the 2018/19 AY to the 2020/21 AY in line with the movements of the CPI(A). This adjustment mechanism was in line with those for grants under the student financial assistance schemes and considered simple for administration.

(d) Convenient Arrangement

The Programme was operated under the existing mechanism of payment of grant to eligible post-secondary students who passed the means test of SFO. Eligible students were only required to provide relevant

documentary proof certifying that they were identified with SEN and gave consent for SFO to verify the records with relevant authorities/persons. The enhanced AE grant was disbursed to student beneficiaries through autopay service to their bank accounts which was considered convenient and minimised administrative cost.

7. To gauge the views of the beneficiaries on the effectiveness of the Programme, 359 recipients were invited to participate in an anonymous survey in December 2020. 104 responses to the questionnaire were received by January 2021. The response rate was around 29%. Overall speaking, around 76% of the respondents opined that the enhanced AE grant was able to provide support for them; 97% of the respondents found the eligibility criteria appropriate and the application procedure simple; 98% of the respondents considered the bank autopay method appropriate; and 88% of the respondents were satisfied with the Programme.

## **Conclusion**

8. The Programme has provided practical assistance to needy post-secondary students with SEN. The overall administration of the Programme has been smooth. To ensure that eligible students can continue to receive such financial assistance, the Programme will be incorporated into the Government's regular assistance programmes starting from the 2021/22 AY.

Education Bureau  
June 2021

**Community Care Fund**  
**Provision of Subsidy to Needy Primary and Secondary Students for**  
**Purchasing Mobile Computer Devices to**  
**Facilitate the Practice of e-Learning**  
**Evaluation Report**

## **Background**

The Community Care Fund (CCF) Task Force endorsed at its meeting on 5 February 2018 the proposal to implement the assistance programme “Provision of Subsidy to Needy Primary and Secondary Students for Purchasing Mobile Computer Devices to Facilitate the Practice of e-Learning” (the Programme), starting from the 2018/19 school year for three years. The Programme was subsequently approved by the Commission on Poverty on 23 April 2018. It is implemented by the Education Bureau (EDB) and aims at relieving the financial burden on students from low-income families owing to the implementation of “Bring Your Own Device” (BYOD) policy in schools. The total funding amount of the Programme is \$415.54 million, including \$404 million for disbursement and \$11.54 million for administrative fees, and is estimated to benefit 102 000 eligible students.

## **Programme Implementation**

2. The Programme was launched smoothly in the 2018/19 school year and the eligibility of the target beneficiaries are –
  - (a) students studying in public sector schools (including government, aided, caput and Direct Subsidy Scheme primary or secondary schools); and studying in classes implementing e-learning and adopting BYOD; and
  - (b) students receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) or full grant/half grant of the School Textbook Assistance Scheme (STAS).

For students receiving CSSA/full grant of STAS would receive the full grant under the Programme with the maximum subsidy for each student at \$4,500 in the first implementation year. For students receiving half grant, the subsidy provided would be up to \$2,250 in the first implementation year. The maximum level of subsidy would be adjusted annually according to the movement of the Composite Consumer Price Index.

3. EDB invites all public sector schools to participate in the Programme through a circular memorandum every year. Schools having returned the application form could purchase appropriate mobile computer devices for eligible students in accordance with schools' procurement procedures. After completing the procurement, schools are required to submit a report (including the details of student beneficiaries and devices purchased) to EDB for calculating the required subsidy. EDB organised a number of briefing sessions and seminars to explain the details of the Programme for schools. A small team of administrative and technical staff<sup>1</sup> has been formed to provide administrative support to the Programme, and provide schools with necessary professional and technical support as well as training including on procurement, use and management of devices. EDB has also set up a dedicated website offering reference materials and frequently asked questions to assist schools in implementing pertinent measures.

4. The number of student beneficiaries in the first two years of the Programme was around 34 000 and the amount of subsidy disbursed was about \$122 million. According to the questionnaire survey conducted annually by EDB, the number of schools implementing BYOD policy has increased significantly in the past few years. Some schools implementing BYOD policy did not participate in the Programme because their students generally are with better financial background or they already have school-based measures in supporting financially needy students.

5. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic in early 2020, many students need to use mobile computer devices for e-learning at home before full resumption of class. EDB handled applications for the Programme flexibly and accepted applications submitted by all public sector primary and secondary schools implementing e-learning for their eligible students. The CCF Task Force was informed of such arrangements at its meeting on 27 March 2020. EDB explained to schools these flexible arrangements through various channels and encouraged them to submit applications for their needy students. The response from schools was positive and about 870 schools have submitted applications in the 2020/21 school year. The relevant figures are as follows –

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<sup>1</sup> The team consists of one project management officer, two assistant project management officers, one system analyst and two analyst programmers.

	2018/19 School Year	2019/20 School Year	2021/21 School Year
No. of participating school	188	281	About 870
No. of student beneficiary	CSSA: 2 868 Full grant: 8 004 Half grant: 2 984  Total: 13 856	CSSA: 3 857 Full grant: 11 306 Half grant: 5 013  Total: 20 176	CSSA: 27 040 <sup>2</sup> Full grant: 82 930 <sup>2</sup> Half grant: 32 270 <sup>2</sup>  Total: About 142 240 <sup>2</sup>
Subsidy amount	\$49.2 million	\$72.8 million	About \$568 million <sup>2</sup>

*Table 1: Figures on number of student beneficiary and amount of subsidy*

6. Regarding administrative fees, the expenditure as at end April 2021 is around \$8.4 million, including about \$8.18 million for staff cost, \$0.09 million for printing promotional leaflets and about \$0.12 million for general operational expenses.

### **Evaluation of Programme Effectiveness**

7. EDB has been closely monitoring the progress of the Programme as well as schools' procurement. The amount of subsidy covers the cost of mobile computer device, mobile device management system installed at the device as required by schools, basic accessories and three-year basic device warranty. During the three-year implementation period, the maximum subsidy level and average actual subsidy amount of each year are as follows –

		2018/19 School Year	2019/20 School Year	2020/21 School Year
Full grant student	Maximum subsidy level	\$4,500	\$4,610	\$4,740
	Average actual subsidy amount	\$3,984	\$4,116	\$4,317 <sup>2</sup>
Half grant student	Maximum subsidy level	\$2,250	\$2,305	\$2,370
	Average actual subsidy amount	\$1,972	\$2,069	\$2,145 <sup>2</sup>

*Table 2: Maximum subsidy level vs average actual subsidy amount*

<sup>2</sup> Figures are calculated based on the actual data and the estimates reported by schools as at end April 2021.

8. Schools would determine device specifications based on their pedagogical design and use of e-learning resources. From the analysis on the reports submitted by schools (see Figure 1 below), the subsidy provided could generally cater for student’s need on the whole. Only a few schools adopted devices of higher specifications rendering the cost exceeding the maximum level of subsidy of that school year. In the 2020/21 school year, about 1.5% of the student beneficiaries are involved in such situation.

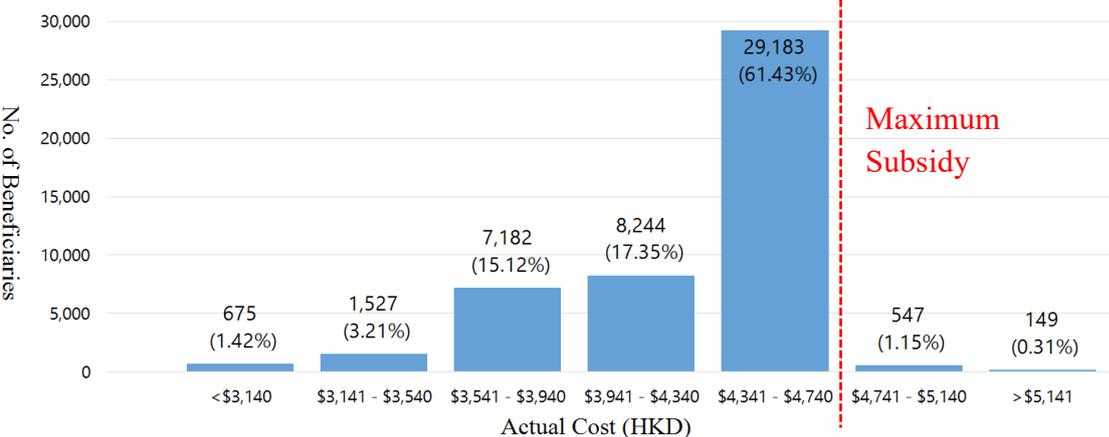


Figure 1: Actual cost of device and accessories purchased in the 2020/21 school year (as at end April 2021)

9. EDB has been maintaining communication with the education and trade sectors, and gathering views through schools visits, focus group meetings, questionnaire survey (please refer to the Appendix for details), etc., with a view to evaluating the effectiveness of the Programme. Schools agreed with the Programme’s objectives and directions in effectively supporting the financially needy students when implementing BYOD policy for e-learning. Schools were also of the view that the amount of subsidy provided was adequate and its coverage was appropriate, allowing schools to purchase suitable equipment for needy students to cater for schools’ e-learning needs. In terms of administrative work, more schools encountered difficulties in the following areas: (a) verification of students’ eligibility; (b) communication with parents; (c) handling technical issues of mobile computer devices. On the whole, schools reflected that the administrative workload for implementing the Programme was acceptable and they agreed that the reference materials provided by the EDB were useful.

10. Under the COVID-19 epidemic when face-to-face classes have not yet fully resumed, primary and secondary schools have deployed diversified strategies, including e-learning, in supporting students to learn at home systematically, achieving “suspending classes without suspending learning”. Many practitioners in the education sector and researches of universities<sup>3</sup> pointed out that schools’ participation

<sup>3</sup> “eCitizen Education 360” ([https://360-cms.ecitizen.hk/uploads/bulletin01\\_v9\\_en\\_0868d8d54b.pdf](https://360-cms.ecitizen.hk/uploads/bulletin01_v9_en_0868d8d54b.pdf))

in the Programme to implement BYOD policy was very helpful for schools in implementing effective online learning during the epidemic.

## **Conclusion and Way Forward**

11. The Programme has not only achieved its objective in relieving the financial burden on students from low-income families under the development of BYOD policy, but also supported needy students in their learning at home amid the COVID-19 epidemic. To conclude, the Programme has provided appropriate support to needy students to practise e-learning, which is in line with the objective of the CCF.

12. Looking forward, a blended mode of learning, i.e. face-to-face classes, e-learning at home or other modes of learning, may become the “new normalcy” in teaching and learning. The Government will further support schools in implementing a blended mode of teaching and learning under the “new normalcy”. As announced in the 2020 Policy Address, \$2 billion will be set aside in the Quality Education Fund to launch a three-year programme starting from the 2021/22 school year, under which schools could apply for funding to purchase mobile computer devices for loan to needy students and to provide Wi-Fi routers and mobile data cards to students who do not have access to appropriate Internet services due to the constraints in their living environment. EDB will refine the relevant operational measures based on the mode and experience of this Programme to ensure all students will have equal opportunities in accessing e-learning.

Education Bureau  
June 2021



# **Community Care Fund Subsidy for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Recipients Living in Rented Private Housing Evaluation Report**

## **Purpose**

This paper concludes the ‘Subsidy for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Recipients Living in Rented Private Housing’ Programme (the Programme) administered by the Social Welfare Department (SWD).

## **Background**

2. Rent allowance is payable to CSSA households (including those who rented public rental housing and private housing) for meeting rental-related expenses. The amount of allowance is equal to the actual rent paid by the household, or the maximum rent allowance (MRA) determined with reference to the number of household members eligible for the CSSA, whichever is the less. The MRA is adjusted annually in accordance with the movement of the Consumer Price Index (A) rent index for private housing (rent index).

3. The objective of the non-contributory CSSA Scheme is to assist the recipients to meet their basic needs. The Government adjusts the MRA annually in accordance with the aforementioned established mechanism. The Government must be very cautious whenever it considers proposed increase in MRA as it may give rise to false expectations that the objective of the CSSA Scheme is to relentlessly upgrade the living conditions of CSSA recipients. Furthermore, each increase in the MRA could also induce the rise of the rent level at the lower end of the private rental market, thereby adding burden to the low-income non-CSSA households and resulting in a situation in which the living conditions for CSSA households are being improved at the expense of the low-income non-CSSA households, whereas the significant financial implications involved have to be borne by taxpayers.

4. Owing to economic downturn, the MRA was frozen from 2003 to 2011. The Programme was first launched in October 2011 to provide a transitional subsidy to relieve the financial burden faced by CSSA households in rented private housing in face of the periodic increase of rent. Specifically, the Programme provided a one-off subsidy to CSSA recipients living in rented private housing and paying a rent which exceeded the prevailing MRA under the CSSA Scheme. The subsidy was disbursed on one-off basis yearly and the monthly-calculated subsidy is either 50% of the portion of the household’s rental amount exceeding the applicable MRA or 15% of the applicable MRA, whichever is the less. The Government sought the approval from the Commission on Poverty in December 2020 for the last extension of the Programme until April 2021 so that the Government had time to assess the impact brought by the increase in the MRA as mentioned in paragraph 5 below and to assess whether the

recurrent MRA which had been significantly increased could help the recipients to meet the basic rental expense in the absence of this transitional Programme.

### **The Increase in MRA Following the CSSA Review and Annual Adjustments**

5. In the 2019 Policy Address, the Government announced a host of CSSA improvement measures, which included increasing the MRA significantly. Following the approval of the Legislative Council Finance Committee in May 2020, the SWD raised the MRA from 1 July 2020. The increase ranged from 3% to 27% according to household sizes.

6. In addition to the increase implemented on 1 July 2020, the MRA level had also been raised under the annual adjustment mechanism in the same year as well as in 2021 (i.e. on 1 February 2020 and 1 February 2021 respectively). As illustrated in table below, the increase of the MRA as at February 2021 for different household sizes ranged from 8% to 33% comparing to that of January 2020 –

<b>No. of eligible members in the household</b>	<b>Levels of MRA per month (\$)</b>				<b>Level of increase compare (a) to (d)</b>
	<b>Jan 2020 (a)</b>	<b>Feb 2020 (b)</b>	<b>July 2020 (c)</b>	<b>Feb 2021 (d)</b>	
1	1,885	1,945	2,475	2,515	33.4%
2	3,795	3,915	4,370	4,440	17.0%
3	4,955	5,115	5,245	5,330	7.6%
4	5,275	5,445	5,910	6,005	13.8%
5	5,290	5,460	6,590	6,695	26.6%
6 or above	6,610	6,820	7,675	7,800	18.0%

### **Effectiveness of the Programme and Other Considerations**

7. Having considered the following factors, the SWD has discontinued this transitional Programme –

- (a) the MRA was frozen from 2003 to 2011. The Programme was launched to provide a transitional allowance to relieve the financial burden faced by CSSA households as a result of the periodic increase of rent. It is important to note that, the MRA has been adjusted 11 times since 2011 according to the established annual adjustment mechanism and following the recent CSSA review, representing a total increase ranging from around 60% to 100% for different household sizes;

- (b) the Programme is never intended to bring the ratio of CSSA households in rented private housing whose rent allowance totally covered their rent to a certain level or to affect the rental behavior or preference of CSSA recipients which may otherwise result in the self-actualising effect of raising the rent paid and in turn the MRA;
- (c) the average total CSSA payment has increased significantly over the years. For instance, the average monthly CSSA payment for a four-person household has risen from \$10,371 in 2011 to \$16,975 in 2021, representing an increase of 63.7%. Over the same period, the Social Security Assistance Index of Prices (SSAIP)<sup>1</sup> and Consumer Price Index (A) only registered an increase of 42% and 40% respectively;
- (d) there has been a consistent drop in market rent level. The rent index has been recording a month-to-month decrease since April 2020. This is the first time since 2003 that the rent index recorded such downward trend for 12 months (from April 2020 to March 2021);
- (e) the Task Force for the Study on Tenancy Control of Subdivided Units (the Task Force) set up by the Transport and Housing Bureau (THB) in April 2020 submitted its report to the Government on 31 March 2021. The Task Force considers in principle that the Government should implement suitable tenancy control on subdivided units (SDUs) in order to safeguard the interests of grass-root tenants of SDUs, and recommends that the tenancy control measures on SDUs be effected through legislation. The THB has carefully considered the report of the Task Force, and agrees in principle with the various legislative proposals to introduce tenancy control on SDUs as put forward by the Task Force in its report. The Government is now working on the drafting of the enabling legislation, and aims to introduce the relevant bill into the Legislative Council as soon as possible within the current legislative session; and
- (f) while the Community Care Fund will continue to deploy its existing resources to implement the approved assistance programmes, the Government must take a prudent approach in the use of public fund.

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<sup>1</sup> Under the established mechanism, the Government adjusts annually the CSSA payment rates (including the standard rates) in accordance with the movement of SSAIP.

## **Conclusion**

8. The Programme has already achieved its objective of providing a transitional subsidy to temporarily relieve the financial burden faced by CSSA households in view of the frozen MRA level. With the Government's continued implementation of improvements under the CSSA Scheme (especially for the recurrent rental allowance) and the continued drop in market rent level as reflected by the rent index, this transitional Programme has concluded in end-April 2021. The Government will continue to monitor the situation and provide effective and timely assistance under the CSSA Scheme to CSSA recipients to meet their basic needs.

Social Welfare Department  
June 2021