

**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.

---

<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