

Community Care Fund
Providing Hostel Subsidy for Needy Undergraduate Students
Evaluation Report (2017/18 and 2018/19 Academic Years)

Background

The Community Care Fund (CCF) Task Force agreed at its meeting on 10 March 2014 to launch a Programme to provide hostel subsidy for needy undergraduate students (the Programme), who are offered hostel places by their institutions, to meet their hostel expenses so that they will not be denied hostel accommodation due to a lack of means. The Programme was planned to run for three years from the 2014/15 academic year (AY).

2. At the meeting on 12 June 2014, the Commission on Poverty (CoP) approved funding under CCF for the implementation of the Programme by the Education Bureau and the Student Finance Office (SFO) of the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency. On 3 April 2017, the evaluation results for the first phase of the Programme were reported to the CoP, which also approved the extension of the Programme for two more years until the 2018/19 AY.

Implementation of the Programme

3. Target recipients of the Programme were students pursuing publicly-funded or locally-accredited self-financing full-time undergraduate programmes who were eligible to apply for the Tertiary Student Finance Scheme - Publicly-funded Programmes (TSFS) or the Financial Assistance Scheme for Post-secondary Students (FASP) and passed the means test¹ administered by the SFO. They resided in student hostels provided by their institutions² and were confirmed by their institutions as hostel residents in the

¹ There are five tiers of assistance under the means test mechanism, i.e. 100%, 75%, 50%, 25% and 15% of the maximum assistance level, subject to discount according to the asset value of the applicant's family (i.e. -100%, -80%, -60%, -40%, -20% or -0%).

² 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.

semester³.

4. To inform students eligible for the hostel subsidy about this Programme, the SFO uploaded relevant details of the Programme onto its website and notified students of the same through their institutions. Students pursuing publicly-funded or self-financing degree programmes applying for assistance under the TSFS or FASP were not required to apply for the hostel subsidy separately.

5. Eligible students were provided the hostel subsidy through autopay service of their banks at the end of each semester. The actual amount of subsidy receivable was determined according to the student's level of assistance under the assistance scheme concerned and the actual hostel fee payable. Eligible students were informed in writing by the SFO of the amount of subsidy they were eligible to receive.

6. In the 2014/15 AY, eligible students were each provided with a hostel subsidy up to \$8,000. The hostel subsidy was adjusted annually according to the movement of the Consumer Price Index (A) (CPI(A))⁴. The maximum amount was adjusted to \$9,040 and \$9,180 for the 2017/18 and 2018/19 AY respectively.

7. In the 2017/18 AY (as at end of January 2019), the Programme benefited 5 379 students with a disbursement of about \$35 million. The actual number of beneficiaries for the 2018/19 AY would be available after confirmation of the percentage of the residing period of individual students in the hostels at the end of each semester by institutions.

³ 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 persons 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).

⁴ From the 2014/15 to 2018/19 AY, the maximum amount of subsidy is \$8,000, \$8,450, \$8,790, \$9,040 and \$9,180 respectively.

Evaluation of programme effectiveness

8. The effectiveness of the Programme is summarised as follows:

(a) Support for students rendered by the hostel subsidy

The hostel subsidy aims at providing assistance for needy undergraduate students to meet hostel expenses when they are offered hostel places so that they will not be denied hostel accommodation due to a lack of means. According to the information collected by the SFO, the maximum amount of hostel subsidy can, generally speaking, provide substantial support for students to meet the hostel expenses, based on the rates of a hostel double room excluding meals and summer residence.

(b) “Live-in” requirement during a semester

Taking into account the fact that certain students may not be able to reside in hostels throughout the entire semester because of adjustment difficulties and/or other needs during the initial period of hostel accommodation, the Programme accepted that students should remain to be eligible for the subsidy as long as they were the registered occupants of the hostel places concerned for at least 75% of the time during a semester. If a student was only allocated with a hostel place after a semester had started for some time, the percentage of the “live-in” period of the student would be calculated from the date of allocation of the hostel place. Institutions considered this “live-in” requirement appropriate. This requirement also ensured the proper use of public funds.

(c) Adjustment mechanism for the subsidy

The maximum amount of the subsidy was adjusted annually according to the movement of the CPI(A). In the 2017/18 and 2018/19 AY, the adjustment rates were 2.8% and 1.5% 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 adjustment rate was on the whole in line with the revision rate of hostel fees.

(d) Workflow of the Programme

The subsidy under the Programme was disbursed to eligible students based on the existing means test mechanism of the SFO. No separate application for the hostel subsidy was required. Such arrangement was considered convenient to target beneficiaries and could minimise administrative cost and work.

Conclusion

9. The hostel subsidy has rendered appropriate assistance to needy undergraduate students to meet their hostel expenses. The Programme has achieved its objectives and is in line with the aims of the CCF. Its continual implementation is supported by institutions. The overall administration of the Programme is also considered smooth.

Education Bureau
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