

**Community Care Fund**  
**Enhancing the academic expenses grant for students with special**  
**educational needs and financial needs pursuing post-secondary programmes**  
**Evaluation Report**

**Background**

The Community Care Fund (CCF) Task Force agreed at its meeting on 11 March 2015 to launch a programme to enhance the academic expenses (AE) grant for students with special educational needs (SEN) and financial needs pursuing post-secondary programmes to strengthen the support for these students. The programme was approved by the Commission on Poverty on 27 March 2015 for implementation, with funding from CCF, from the 2015/16 to the 2017/18 academic year for three years.

**Implementation of the Programme**

2. Beneficiaries of the programme must fulfill the following criteria:
  - (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 academic year, mental illness;
  - (b) pursuing exclusively University Grants Committee-funded or publicly-funded full-time post-secondary programmes in Hong Kong, or full-time locally accredited self-financing post-secondary programmes; and
  - (c) eligible 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. An eligible post-secondary student beneficiary can receive an enhanced AE grant of up to \$8,000 in the 2015/16 academic year. The maximum amount of the enhanced grant is adjusted annually in line with the movement of the Consumer Price Index (A)(CPI(A)). In the 2016/17 and 2017/18 academic years, the maximum amount has been adjusted to \$8,320 and \$8,550 respectively. The actual amount receivable by the beneficiary is determined with respect to the student's level of assistance assessed in the means test of SFO<sup>1</sup>.

4. To inform students about the programme, SFO uploaded details of the programme onto its website and also notified students through relevant institutes. Applicants need to provide SFO with medical reports/professional certificates issued by relevant organisations or professionals. To comply with the requirements for the ordinance regarding protection of personal data (privacy), applicants are also required to grant consent to SFO, the Education Bureau (EDB), other government bureaux/departments or related public organisations for the disclosure of their relevant personal data necessary for the processing of their claims for the enhanced AE grants.

5. As at end of April 2018, the programme benefitted 128, 145 and 163 students in the 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18 academic years respectively with about \$3.24 million disbursed.

### **Evaluation of Programme Effectiveness**

6. The effectiveness of the programme has been reviewed and the major findings are provided as follows:

#### **(a) Additional support for students**

The maximum amount of the enhanced AE grant for post-secondary students with SEN and financial needs was \$8,000 in the 2015/16 academic year, and adjusted to \$8,320 and \$8,550 in the 2016/17 and 2017/18 academic years respectively. In the 2016/17 academic year, the average amount of grant (including tuition fee and AE grant) provided to a post-secondary student under TSFS and FASP was around

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<sup>1</sup> There are five levels of assistance under the income test, i.e. 100%, 75%, 50%, 25% and 15% of the maximum assistance level, subject to discounting according to the asset value of the applicant's family (i.e. -0%, -20%, -40%, -60%, -80% or -100%).

\$45,660. The average amount of the enhanced AE grant provided to a beneficiary in the 2016/17 academic year was around \$7,200, rendering to beneficiaries solid support to meet their academic expenses to alleviate their financial burden.

(b) Implementation of the programme

The programme operates under the existing mechanism of payment of grant to eligible post-secondary students who passed the means test of SFO. Students eligible for applying AE grant are only required to provide relevant documentary proof certifying that they have been identified with SEN and grant consent for SFO to verify the records with relevant authorities/persons. Follow the existing arrangement for disbursing AE grant, the enhanced AE grant for SEN students is disbursed to eligible recipients through autopay to their designated bank accounts reported under TSFS/FASP. The arrangement is convenient for the beneficiaries and also minimise administrative cost.

(c) Flexibility of cash subsidy

There are suggestions that the programme should reimburse to beneficiaries the actual cost for the purchase of study aids or specific equipment in order to alleviate their financial burden. However, students with SEN have different needs. For instance, those with specific learning difficulties may have little need for specific equipment but they need to develop interest and to participate in community activities to boost their confidence, independence and self-direction. Disbursement in the form of cash subsidy allows the greatest degree of flexibility for students with SEN to obtain appropriate support according to their individual needs.

(d) Adjustment mechanism for the enhanced AE grant

The maximum amount of the enhanced AE grant was adjusted by 4% and 2.8% respectively in the 2016/17 and 2017/18 academic years in line with the movements of the CPI(A).

This adjustment mechanism was consistent with those for grants under the student financial assistance schemes and other CCF programmes (namely the hostel subsidy and the additional AE grant for self-financing post-secondary students).

7. In addition, to gauge the views of the beneficiaries on the effectiveness of the programme, SFO issued an anonymous questionnaire to 246 programme recipients in late December 2017. 58 replies were received by April 2018. Overall speaking, 80% of the respondents considered the enhanced AE grant able to provide support for their academic expenses. 98% of the respondents considered the present payment method through autopay to their bank accounts appropriate and over 70% are satisfied with the programme.

## **Conclusion**

8. To sum up, the programme has rendered appropriate assistance to post-secondary students with SEN and financial needs. The administration of the programmes was smooth and cost-effective. The programme has met its objective and is in line with the aims of the CCF.

**Education Bureau**  
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