

Community Care Fund
Providing Hostel Subsidy for Needy Undergraduate Students
Evaluation Report

Background

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

2. The Programme was approved by the Commission on Poverty at the meeting on 12 June 2014 to be jointly implemented by the Education Bureau and the Student Finance Office (SFO) of the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency with funding provided by CCF.

Implementation of the Programme

3. Target recipients of the Programme are students who are pursuing publicly-funded or locally-accredited self-financing full-time undergraduate programmes eligible to apply for the Tertiary Student Finance Scheme - Publicly-funded Programmes (TSFS) or the Financial Assistance Scheme for Post-secondary Students (FASP) and have passed the means test¹ under SFO. They should be residing in student hostels provided by their institutes² and confirmed by

¹ 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 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.

their institutes as hostel residents in the semester³.

4. To inform students eligible for the hostel subsidy about this Programme, SFO uploads details of the Programme onto its website and notifies students of the same through their institutes. Students who are pursuing publicly-funded or self-financing degree programmes and have applied for assistance under TSFS or FASP need not apply for the hostel subsidy separately.

5. The hostel subsidy is disbursed through automatic payment to eligible students at the end of each semester. The actual amount of subsidy receivable is determined according to the student's level of assistance and the hostel fee payable. Eligible students are informed in writing by SFO of the amount of subsidy they are eligible to receive.

6. The hostel subsidy is adjusted annually according to the movement of the Consumer Price Index (A) (CPI(A)). In the 2014/15 academic year, eligible students were each provided with a hostel subsidy of up to \$8,000. The maximum amount was adjusted to \$8,450 and \$8,790 respectively in the 2015/16 and 2016/17 academic years.

7. As at the end of January 2017, the Programme benefited 5 995 and 6 064 students in the 2014/15 and 2015/16 academic years respectively, with the disbursement involved amounting to about \$69 million. The actual number of beneficiaries for the 2016/17 academic year will only be available when the institutes confirm the residing period of students in the hostels at the end of the first semester.

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 can recommend providing the subsidy for needy students with genuine difficulties who fail to meet the above accommodation time requirement (for example due to unexpected family or health reasons or participation in overseas exchange programmes arranged by their institutions).

Evaluation of Programme Effectiveness

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

(a) Support for students rendered by the hostel subsidy

The Programme 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 lack of means. According to the information obtained from institutes by SFO, the maximum amount of hostel subsidy of \$8,790 for the 2016/17 academic year was sufficient for a student sharing a double room to meet most of the hostel expenses, excluding meals and summer hostel residence. The Programme has rendered solid support for the beneficiaries.

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

In view of 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, it is stated that students are eligible for the subsidy as long as they are the registered occupants of the hostel places concerned for at least 75% of the time during a semester. Institutes considered this “live-in” requirement appropriate. This requirement also ensured the proper use of public funds.

(c) Adjustment mechanism for the subsidy amount

The maximum amount of subsidy was adjusted annually according to the movement of the CPI(A) and the adjustment rates were 5.6% and 4% respectively in the 2015/16 and 2016/17 academic years. Based on the information provided by institutes, the average annual hostel fees revision was from 3.5% to 4% for the past two academic years. Hence, the adjustment rate was on the whole in line with the average annual hostel fees revision.

(d) Implementation of the Programme

The Programme operated under the existing mechanism of disbursing subsidy to eligible students who passed the means test of SFO. No separate application for the hostel subsidy was required. Such arrangement was considered convenient to target beneficiaries and minimised administrative cost and work.

Conclusion

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

Education Bureau

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