

Community Care Fund Programme School-based Fund (Cross-boundary Learning Activities) Evaluation Report

Purpose

1. This paper outlines the findings of the report on the evaluation of the effectiveness of the School-based Fund (Cross-boundary Learning Activities) (the Fund) and recommends the future mode of operation.

Background

2. The former Community Care Fund (CCF) Steering Committee approved the implementation of the Fund at its meeting on 20 April 2011 to subsidise primary and secondary students from low-income families to participate in cross-boundary learning activities, thus providing these needy students with more opportunities to join such activities together with other students and enabling them to increase their knowledge, widen their horizon and enhance their learning experience. The Fund is a three-year programme running from July 2011 to June 2014¹. The budget for this assistance programme is \$164.4 million per annum (excluding administrative costs), and the total expenditure is estimated to be \$496.2 million.

3. The target beneficiaries are Primary 1 to Secondary 6 students studying in Hong Kong government, aided and caput schools and schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme who are in receipt of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA), or full or half grant from the Student Financial Assistance Agency (SFAA). Students who meet the “financially needy” criteria as determined by individual schools are also eligible (no upper limit). In 2012-13, the scope of the Fund was extended to cover subsidy for students representing Hong Kong in competitions outside the territory. Within the three-year period, each student may receive subsidy from the CCF to meet expenses for participating in one cross-boundary learning activity and for representing Hong Kong in one competition outside the territory. To benefit more students, the CCF stipulates that schools may only use the provision of the Fund to subsidise the same student in one cross-boundary learning activity and one competition outside the territory during the three-year implementation period (July 2011 to

¹ In this paper, “year” refers to the implementation period of the Fund:
2011-12 means from 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2012;
2012-13 means from 1 July 2012 to 30 June 2013; and
2013-14 means from 1 July 2013 to 30 June 2014.

June 2014), with the maximum amount of subsidy for each activity/competition capped at \$3,000.

4. According to the decision made by the former CCF Steering Committee, during the three-year implementation period of the Fund, the Education Bureau (EDB) should work out the maximum amount of funding to be reserved for each participating school in the coming year by making reference to the estimated annual funding from the CCF and the number of students receiving CSSA, or full or half grant from the SFAA in each participating school. At the end of each school year, participating schools are required to submit an annual activity and financial report and funding will be disbursed on a reimbursement basis when the report has been vetted by the EDB. Before the commencement of the assistance programme, the EDB arranged briefings for schools to consult them about its implementation details and circular memorandum would be issued afterwards to invite applications from schools.

Progress and evaluation of the programme

5. The EDB has finished disbursing the 2011-12 and 2012-13 provision of the Fund and completed the relevant evaluations. Funding allocation and utilisation rates are summarised as below:

Year	No. of schools allocated with funding	No. of schools having organised cross-boundary learning activities	No. of schools allocated with funding but without organising cross-boundary learning activities (as percentage of total no. of schools allocated with funding)	Estimated provision for schools allocated with funding (\$)	Amount of provision used (\$)	Utilisation rate
2011-12	812	625	187 (23%)	149,952,060	52,067,289	35%
2012-13	804	692	112 (14%)	161,460,940	61,883,021	38%

2011-12:

6. In 2011-12, a total of 812 schools applied for the Fund and were allocated with funding. Of these, 625 schools (343 secondary schools, 249 primary schools, 32 special schools and the Vocational Training Council) used the provision of the Fund to organise cross-boundary learning activities and submitted to the EDB an annual activity and financial report. As for the remaining 187 schools allocated with funding, they did not use the provision of the Fund to organise any cross-boundary learning activities.

7. For the 625 schools that used the provision of the Fund to organise cross-boundary learning activities, altogether \$52.07 million from the Fund was used, accounting for 35% of the provision reserved. There were a total of 22 093 student beneficiaries. About 70% of the beneficiaries were secondary students and 30% were primary students. The per capita subsidy was \$2,357 on average.

8. The EDB approached 50 of the schools that had been allocated with funding but did not use the provision to conduct any cross-boundary learning activities and learnt that the major reasons were: (i) the schools did not have plans to organise any cross-boundary learning activities in 2011-2012; (ii) the number of students signing up was not sufficient for forming a study group/No application was received from their students; and (iii) the inexpensive tour fare could be covered by other sources of subsidy and there was no need to seek funding from the CCF.

9. To find out the reasons behind the low utilisation rate among schools that were allocated with funding from the Fund and had conducted cross-boundary learning activities, the EDB approached 22 of the schools with a utilisation rate of under 30% and learnt that the major reasons were: (i) not many students signed up for the activities; (ii) places within Guangdong were chosen as the destinations of cross-boundary learning activities and the tour fare per student was below \$3,000; (iii) both time and manpower were short; and (iv) some schools were heavily engaged with the new senior secondary curriculum, etc. and had scaled back their cross-boundary learning activities.

10. Of the 22 093 beneficiaries, about 50% were students in receipt of full grant from the SFAA, followed by those receiving half grant from the SFAA and CSSA. Students meeting the school-based “financially needy” criteria accounted for about 10%. Below is a breakdown of the figures:

CSSA (%)	Full grant of textbook assistance (%)	Half grant of textbook assistance (%)	Meeting school-based “financially needy” criteria (%)	Total (%)
3 761 (17.0%)	9 504 (43.0%)	6 258 (28.3%)	2 570 (11.6%)	22 093 (100%)

11. The Mainland was the primary destination for cross-boundary learning activities (over 60%), with places within Guangdong accounting for one-third. Taiwan and Southeast Asian countries were chosen as the destinations by about 30% of the schools. Below is a breakdown of the figures:

Destination	No. of activities	Percentage
Mainland (within Guangdong)	263	21.8%
Mainland (outside Guangdong)	497	41.2%
Taiwan	240	19.9%
Other Asian countries	146	12.1%
Australia/New Zealand	16	1.3%
Europe	22	1.8%
The United States/Canada	20	1.7%
Others (Mexico)	1	0.1%
Total	1 205	100%

Revised estimates of provision:

12. In 2011-12, the estimated provision for schools allocated with funding was \$149.95 million and the amount eventually used was \$52.07 million, much lower than the original estimated level. The utilisation rate was only 35%. Against this background, the CCF Steering Committee agreed to revise the funding proposal. Based on the utilisation rate of the provision in 2011-12, \$63.25 million and \$72.74 million were reserved for this programme in 2012-13 and 2013-14 respectively. As such, the revised estimate for the three-year implementation period of the Fund amounted to \$188.06 million (excluding administrative costs). However, the estimated amount available to each participating school shall remain unchanged at the same level as based on the number of eligible student beneficiaries in each school, so that the planning for cross-boundary learning activities will not be affected.

13. In 2011-12, the EDB conducted a survey among schools to gather their views on the Fund. The findings are summarised at **Appendix I**.

2012-13:

14. In response to the requests of certain schools and parents, the former CCF Steering Committee agreed to extend the scope of the Fund from subsidising needy students in cross-boundary learning activities to supporting needy students in representing Hong Kong in competitions outside the territory in the second year. Within the three-year implementation period of the Fund, each student may receive subsidy on their expenses for participating in one cross-boundary learning activity and for representing Hong Kong in one competition outside the territory.

15. In 2012-13, a total of 804 local schools applied for the Fund and were allocated with funding. Of these, 692 schools (371 secondary schools, 289 primary schools, 31 special schools and the Vocational Training Council) used

the provision from the Fund to organise cross-boundary learning activities and submitted to the EDB an annual activity and financial report. As for the remaining 112 schools allocated with funding, they did not use the provision of the Fund to organise any cross-boundary learning activities.

16. For the 692 schools that used the provision from the Fund to organise cross-boundary learning activities, altogether \$61.88 million from the Fund was used, accounting for 38% of the provision reserved. A total of 23 805 students were benefited. About 70% of the beneficiaries were secondary students and 30% were primary students. The per capita subsidy was \$2,600 on average.

17. Of the 23 805 beneficiaries, about 50% were students in receipt of full grant from the SFSA, followed by those receiving half grant from the SFSA and CSSA. Students meeting the school-based “financially needy” criteria accounted for about 12%. Below is a breakdown of the figures:

CSSA (%)	Full grant of textbook assistance (%)	Half grant of textbook assistance (%)	Meeting school-based “financially needy” criteria (%)	Total (%)
4 052 (17%)	10 194 (43%)	6 667 (28%)	2 892 (12%)	23 805 (100%)

18. The Mainland was the primary destination for cross-boundary learning activities (about 47%), followed by Taiwan and Southeast Asian countries (about 47%). Below is a breakdown of the figures:

Destination	No. of activities	Percentage
Mainland (within Guangdong)	222	16.32%
Mainland (outside Guangdong)	421	30.96%
Taiwan	367	26.99%
Other Asian countries	266	19.56%
Australia/New Zealand	32	2.35%
Europe	30	2.21%
The United States/Canada	22	1.62%
Others	0	0.00%
Total	1 360	100%

19. For 2012-13, since cross-boundary activities also covered representing Hong Kong in competitions outside the territory, 79 of the 23 805 beneficiaries were students who represented Hong Kong in some 30 competitions outside the territory, such as robot-making, music and sports competitions. The awards won included a silver medal in Mathematical Olympiad, first-runner up in team rope skipping and championship in children’s choir.

20. Of the 804 schools that were allocated with funding in 2012-13, 112 schools had not used the provision reserved to organise any cross-boundary learning activities. The EDB approached 60 of the schools that had applied for funding but did not use the provision and learnt that the major reasons were: (i) the schools had plans to organise activities but had to cancel them for various reasons (e.g. epidemic alerts and inclement weather); (ii) schools had secured other subsidy to support the cross-boundary learning activities; and (iii) the small number of students signing up for cross-boundary learning activities was not sufficient for forming a tour group.

21. Regarding the low utilisation rate, the EDB approached 30 of the schools with a utilisation rate of under 40% and learnt that the major reasons were: (i) not many of their students signed up for cross-boundary learning activities; (ii) the schools did not have adequate manpower to organise cross-boundary learning activities; (iii) places within Guangdong were chosen as the destinations of cross-boundary learning activities and the tour fare per student was below \$3,000; and (iv) schools encountered difficulties in finding time for the activities. The reasons are similar to those identified in 2011-12.

22. In 2012-13, the EDB conducted a survey among schools to gather their views on the Fund. The findings are summarised at **Appendix II**.

2013-14:

23. As at April 2014, a total of 799 schools have successfully applied for the Fund and are allocated with funding (400 secondary schools, 364 primary schools, 34 special schools and the Vocational Training Council), accounting for about 80% of the schools in the territory.

Problems encountered in programme implementation

24. Summing up the experience in taking forward the Fund in 2011-12 and 2012-13, we have identified the following problems in its mode of operation and disbursement:

i) Low utilisation rate

In 2011-12 and 2012-13, 187 and 112 schools that were allocated with funding under the Fund respectively did not use the provision to conduct any cross-boundary learning activities for various reasons (e.g. insufficient students signing up to form a tour group, alternative sources of subsidy). As for schools that had used provision from the Fund to conduct cross-boundary learning activities, the overall utilisation rate was low for various reasons (e.g. insufficient number

of signing up students, per capita tour fare of under \$3,000 because Guangdong was chosen as the destination). The average utilisation rate of the two years was merely 36.5%. With such a low utilisation rate, the provision reserved by the Fund had not been put to the best use and this is a wastage of resources.

ii) *The original purpose of the Fund*

The original purpose of the Fund is to support needy students studying in schools that plan to conduct cross-boundary learning activities anyway, so that they will not be deprived of the opportunities to take part in these activities together with other students because of lack of means. Since the inception of the Fund, some schools have reflected to us that they applied for the Fund because other schools were also joining, while others indicated that cross-boundary learning activities were organised because parents urged the schools to do so in the hope that their children could benefit from the Fund. This may explain why some 20% of the schools that had been allocated with funding did not conduct any cross-boundary learning activities at all and the overall low utilisation rate.

iii) *Room for improvement for objectives of learning activities*

Under the operation of the Fund, with the approval of their management committee, schools may receive funding from the Fund according to their number of eligible student beneficiaries. Upon completion of the cross-boundary learning activities, they have to submit an annual activity and financial report to the EDB and apply to the CCF for reimbursement of expenses. Since the Fund does not have a pre-approval mechanism for screening learning activities, there is room for improvement for the thematic appropriateness of the activities in terms of student needs.

iv) *Extra workload for schools and teachers*

Schools reflected to us that joining the Fund had created additional workload for them, such as design of activities, liaison with co-organisers and tour escorting. Administrative costs incurred by the schools are not covered by the Fund.

v) *Accompanying teachers of mainstream schools not subsidised*

The Fund primarily aims to subsidise needy students but not accompanying teachers. Except for special schools which can allocate up to 20% of the maximum amount of subsidy to support the

carers of students, the expenses of accompanying teachers of other schools will not be subsidised by the Fund and have to be absorbed by the schools themselves. Some schools were of the view that the Fund should subsidise the accompanying teachers as well.

vi) *Inadequacy of a subsidy of \$3,000*

The majority of schools considered a subsidy of \$3,000 inadequate for supporting the needy students. For example, the amount is not enough for covering the expenses on learning activities in the Southeast Asia.

vii) *Cross-boundary learning activities not an essential element*

There were public opinions that cross-boundary learning activities were not essential elements but merely part of the student activities. People suggested that the CCF devote its resources to more essential items. Besides, some travel agencies organised study tours that charged a fare close to the Fund's subsidy level of \$3,000 and made a profit by inviting schools to co-organise.

viii) *Reserved provision for junior primary students not put to best use*

At present, the same amount of subsidy is reserved for all primary and secondary students, irrespective of their level of study. But data showed that Primary 1 to Primary 3 students seldom participate in cross-boundary learning activities and the corresponding amount of provision used in 2011-12 and 2012-13 was below \$0.26 million, accounting for less than 0.3% of the overall funding used. Over the past two years, only 108 students had benefited in total, representing 0.8% of the total number of primary student beneficiaries. Resources could be redeployed to help other needy persons.

ix) *No upper limit for school-based "financially needy" criteria*

To support students in exceptional circumstances, schools may set their own "financially needy" criteria according to their respective situations and exercise discretion to provide uncapped subsidy for underprivileged students not meeting the eligibility criteria of the Fund, that is not receiving CSSA, or full or half grant from the SFAA. In 2011-12 and 2012-13, 25 and 34 schools respectively subsidised more than 50% of their student beneficiaries according to the school-based "financially needy" criteria, while 5 and 4 schools respectively subsidised about 90% of their student beneficiaries according to such criteria (see table below for details). The EDB is

concerned about the leniency of the “financially needy” criteria set by individual schools.

Meeting school-based “financially needy” criteria	No. of schools		Total (as percentage of overall school figures)
	2011-12	2012-13	
0 - 12.5%	476	512	988 (75%)
>12.5% - 25%	59	75	134 (10%)
>25% - 37.5%	41	44	85 (6%)
>37.5% - 50%	24	27	51 (4%)
>50% - 62.5%	14	16	30 (2%)
>62.5% - 75%	6	8	14 (1%)
>75% - 87.5%	0	6	6 (0.5%)
>87.5% - 100%	5	4	9 (0.7%)
Total	625	692	1 317 (100%)

Recommendations for way forward and justifications

25. The EDB is supportive of the Fund’s efforts to help primary and secondary students from low-income families so that they will not be deprived of the opportunities to join cross-boundary learning activities organised by their schools together with other students because of lack of means. But after reviewing the existing mode of operation of the Fund, we consider that there is room for improvement in this respect. To address the issues raised above and enhance the effectiveness of cross-boundary learning activities, the EDB proposes that schools conduct cross-boundary learning activities under the framework of the Quality Education Fund (QEF).

26. The QEF was established in 1998 with a government injection of \$5 billion to provide an effective channel for worthwhile projects from the school education sector to be funded. For the detailed operation of the QEF, please refer to **Appendix III**.

27. The EDB proposes that schools apply for funding to conduct cross-boundary learning activities through the QEF mechanism. The justifications are set out below:

- Each year, the QEF selects priority themes according to the development trend and direction of our education sector as well as the needs of the society and schools at different stages, so that the education sector, schools and professional stakeholders can continuously enhance the quality of school education. In 2013-14, a total of 11 priority themes are introduced by the QEF².

² The priority themes are: Catering for Students’ Learning Diversity, Effective Learning and Teaching of

- The QEF Steering Committee is responsible for assessing the project proposals submitted by schools according to the assessment criteria. Funded projects should cater for the needs and development of local students, teachers and schools and demonstrate an innovative element. If the school-based projects initiated by schools involve learning activities outside Hong Kong (including those in the Mainland and overseas), such as cross-boundary learning activities, the proposals should elaborate on the planning of the entire learning programme, with cross-boundary learning activities forming an integral part of and complementing other elements of the programme. This mechanism can ensure that the cross-boundary learning activities under planning are specific to the level and needs of the participating students.
- Under the QEF, if a project involves cross-boundary learning activities, each needy student may receive a subsidy up to \$6,000 for such activities and the accompanying teachers may also be subsidised. Since funding under the QEF is disbursed in advance, parents of student beneficiaries or the schools need not settle the expenses out of their own pocket. Subsidy under the QEF may cover the direct costs incurred by the implementation of the proposed projects, such as remuneration for staff recruited, expenses on equipment and general expenses.
- Starting from 2013-14, assessment procedures for applications not exceeding \$600,000 can generally be completed within three months. From 2014-15 onwards, assessment procedures for applications not exceeding \$150,000 will be streamlined to facilitate preparation of applications by schools.

28. As the QEF requires that projects with cross-boundary learning activities should have the support of relevant learning elements, the assessment mechanism should be able to ensure the effectiveness and appropriateness of the projects. Besides, the QEF's level of subsidy is on the whole more generous and flexible than that of the Fund. The EDB therefore proposes that subsidy for schools' cross-boundary learning activities be applied for under the QEF.

29. The CCF Task Force studied the evaluation report on the effectiveness of the Fund at its meeting on 10 March 2014. Members of the Task Force in general agreed that the programme had room for improvement and learnt that the QEF was in a better position to assist students in participating in cross-boundary learning activities. However, some members were concerned about the QEF's procedures for approving school applications. After deliberations, the Task

Force proposed that the Fund be suspended upon the completion of the programme for 2013-14. The EDB was tasked to keep in view students' use of funding from the QEF or other sources in cross-boundary learning activities and report to the CCF Task Force. The Commission on Poverty at its meeting on 24 March 2014 endorsed the relevant proposal.

Education Bureau
April 2014

School-based Fund (Cross-boundary Learning Activities)
Views gathered from schools in 2011-12

The Education Bureau conducted evaluation on the School-based Fund (Cross-boundary Learning Activities) (the Fund) in September 2012. Of the 812 questionnaires sent out, 521 were returned. The response rate was about 65%. The key findings are summarised below:

- The vast majority of the schools (497 schools or 95%) opined that the Fund could help students from low-income families who would otherwise have been unable to take part in cross-boundary learning activities. Students subsidised by the Fund were able to benefit in terms of knowledge, personal development and social skills, with broadened learning experience being most remarkable (500 schools or 96%).
- In selecting students according to the school-based “financially needy” criteria, schools mainly relied on the applications from parents (71%), followed by teachers’ nominations (52%). A small number of schools also conducted selection interviews (14%).
- For school staff in charge of matters related to the Fund, their work was mostly to escort students during the trip (391 schools or 75%) and liaise with co-organisers (384 schools or 74%).
- According to the schools, students subsidised by the Fund and their parents were very positive about the programme. About 83% of these students and 84% of their parents gave the Fund a “good” rating.
- On the other hand, the schools also put forward a number of suggestions for the improvement of the Fund, which mainly cover two aspects: (i) subsidy on school administrative costs should be granted to recruit additional staff to escort students during the trip or remunerate teachers who assume the role; and (ii) funding should be disbursed by the EDB at the earliest time possible after the submission of the annual activity and financial report/before the departure date of the tour to relieve the burden of low-income families.

School-based Fund (Cross-boundary Learning Activities)
Views gathered from schools in 2012-13

The Education Bureau conducted evaluation on the School-based Fund (Cross-boundary Learning Activities) (the Fund) in September 2013. Of the 862 questionnaires sent out, 550 were returned. The response rate was about 64%. The key findings are summarised below:

I. Overview:

- The vast majority of the schools (533 schools or 97%) opined that the Fund could help students from low-income families who would otherwise had been unable to take part in cross-boundary learning activities. The percentage was higher than 2011-12. Students subsidised by the Fund were able to benefit in terms of knowledge, personal development and social skills, with broadened learning experience being most remarkable (526 schools or 96%). The percentage was the same as 2011-12.
- In selecting students according to the school-based “financially needy” criteria, schools mainly relied on the applications of parents (69%), followed by teachers’ nominations (46%). A small number of schools also conducted selection interviews (10%). This was similar to the overall situation in 2011-12.
- For school staff in charge of matters related to the Fund, their work was mostly to liaise with co-organisers (399 schools or 80%). When compared with 2011-12, there was less involvement in escorting students during the trip (362 schools or 72%). In addition, most schools joined hands with travel agencies to arrange cross-boundary learning activities (508 schools or 92%).
- According to the schools, students subsidised by the Fund and their parents were very positive about the programme. About 87% of these students and their parents gave the Fund a “good” rating. The percentage was higher than 2011-12. And about 73% of their teachers gave the Fund a “good” rating.
- Regarding the workload created by joining the Fund, about 22% of the school teachers rated it as “very heavy”, 48% rated it as “heavy”, 28% rated it as “average”, and the rest rated it as “not heavy” or did not give a response.
- Assuming no subsidy from the Fund, most schools expressed that they

would still organise cross-boundary learning activities (387 schools or 70%), while seven of them said that they would reduce the number of activities correspondingly. They cited “parents” (51%) and “other subsidy (such as the Quality Education Fund and the Hong Kong Jockey Club Life-wide Learning Fund)” (43%) as the major source of support, while “sponsoring bodies” (19%) and “non-government organisations” (7%) would play a lesser role.

- On the other hand, the schools also put forward a number of suggestions for the improvement of the Fund, which mainly cover three aspects: (i) to extend the scope of subsidy; (ii) to increase the amount of subsidy or the number of subsidised trips; and (iii) to provide administrative support.

II. Profile of schools under the subsidy of the Fund:

- The utilisation rate of surveyed schools that had applied to the Fund and conducted cross-boundary learning activities in 2012-13 was as follows:

Utilisation rate	No. of schools	Percentage of no. of schools responding to the survey
0-20%	82	16.9%
21-40%	140	28.9%
41-60%	100	20.7%
61-80%	57	11.8%
81-100%	105	21.7%
Total	484	100%

- Regarding the use of provision, a total of 322 schools had a utilisation rate of below 60%. The three major reasons for the low utilisation rate were: (i) not many of their students signed up for cross-boundary learning activities (127 schools); (ii) the schools did not have adequate manpower to organise cross-boundary learning activities (119 schools); and (iii) places within Guangdong were chosen as the destinations of cross-boundary learning activities and the tour fare per student was below \$3,000 (107 schools). Other reasons include: schools encountered difficulties in finding time for the activities; schools were heavily engaged with the new senior secondary curriculum, etc. and had scaled back their cross-boundary learning activities.

- On the other hand, for schools that had applied for the Fund but did not conduct any cross-boundary learning activities in 2012-13, the reasons were as follows: (i) the schools had plans to organise cross-boundary learning activities but had to cancel them for various reasons (e.g. epidemic alerts and inclement weather) (20 schools); (ii) schools had secured other subsidy to support the cross-boundary learning activities (11 schools); and (iii) the small number of students signing up for cross-boundary learning activities was not sufficient for forming a tour group (10 schools).
- As to ways to improve the operation of the Fund and encourage schools to make more use of the funding, the major views were: (i) no limit should be set on the time that each student could be subsidised by the Fund; (ii) the amount of funding should be increased; and (iii) Subsidy should be given to teachers and staff escorting students during the trip.

Operation of the Quality Education Fund

Formally established on 2 January 1998 with an allocation of \$5 billion from the Government, the Quality Education Fund (QEF) provides an effective means to finance worthwhile projects from the school education sector. The funding scope, assessment and operation of the QEF are outlined below for reference:

- The QEF finances various school projects on quality education mainly within the ambit of basic education, i.e. kindergarten, primary, secondary and special education. There are different types of projects, including: (i) projects for promoting effective learning; (ii) projects for promoting all-round education; (iii) projects for implementing school-based management; (iv) research projects for exploring education issues; and (v) projects for application of information technology.
- The QEF Steering Committee is responsible for advising the Government on the policies and procedures regarding the operation of the QEF. The Assessment and Monitoring Sub-committee and the Dissemination and Promotion Sub-committee are set up under the Steering Committee to provide support for the overall operation of the QEF.
- The QEF Steering Committee is responsible for assessing application proposals. For projects to be approved, they must fall within the scope of the QEF and be able to meet its objective to enhance quality school education. The project proposals must demonstrate an innovative element¹ and will be assessed in accordance with the criteria covering the following three aspects: (i) project needs (e.g. whether there is a demonstrated need for the project); (ii) project feasibility (e.g. whether the project has a realistic scope and an attainable target); and (iii) expected project outcomes (e.g. whether there are clearly stated criteria for evaluation with evidence-based measures for assessing the attainment of project objectives).
- Under the QEF, a funding ceiling on the cost of learning activities outside Hong Kong (including those in the Mainland and overseas) is set at \$6,000. The actual subsidy for each student may vary depending on their social-economic background. Students in receipt of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance and full grant from the Student Finance Assistance Scheme (SFAS) can receive 100% support (i.e. \$6,000), and those in receipt of half grant from the SFAS can get 75% (i.e. \$4,500), while students not receiving the above assistance can get 50% (i.e. \$3,000).

¹ Covering new ideas or practices (e.g. enhancement, adaptation) which serve to supplement or complement the existing practices in individual schools to bring about positive capacity and/or impact on learning and teaching.

- Provided that the applications submitted by schools are complete with the support of all required documents, applications for grant not exceeding \$600,000 will be processed within three months. In order to facilitate better use of the funding by school applicants to enhance the quality of education, each school applicant can submit at most three applications. In other words, each school may concurrently have three on-going projects at most. To better assist schools in implementing projects on enhancing the quality of education, the application procedures for projects seeking a grant of \$150,000 or below will be streamlined. Applicants are only required to submit an application proposal of not more than six pages and each of them can apply for funding for at most two projects of this category in each school year. The approval procedures take about three months to complete.
- Schools interested in joining the QEF programme may submit their applications to the QEF. Forms for application proposals, guidelines and frequently asked questions are available on the QEF website. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the QEF. The QEF website also contains information on the preparation of progress reports, final reports, financial statements, and other matters that should be noted.
- The QEF has set up a Cyber Resource Centre with a view to promoting the resources originating from the QEF as well as sharing good practices of successful projects among teachers and schools. Resources collected at the Centre include project proposals, final reports, publications, video clips and teaching and learning materials, etc.