

EDB announces application details of Quality Education Fund e-Learning Funding Programme – Provision of Mobile Computer Devices and Internet Services Support

The Education Bureau (EDB) today (May 17) issued a circular memorandum to all public sector primary and secondary schools and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools informing them of the details of the Quality Education Fund e-Learning Funding Programme – Provision of Mobile Computer Devices and Internet Services Support (Funding Programme). Participating schools can apply for funding to purchase mobile computer devices for loan to needy students, and to provide Internet services support for students who are unable to acquire appropriate Internet services due to constraints of their living environment, so that all students can have equal opportunities in accessing e-learning. The EDB also announced the extension of the programme period of the Dedicated Funding Programme for Publicly-funded Schools (DFP).

A spokesman for the EDB said, "Under the epidemic, the blended mode of learning, i.e. face-to-face classes, e-learning at home and other modes of learning, already has become the new normal in teaching and learning. To further support schools in implementing the blended mode of learning and teaching under the new normal, the 2020 Policy Address proposed that funding would be set aside in the Quality Education Fund (QEF) to implement a three-year programme. The Funding Programme proposal is supported by the QEF Steering Committee, and will be implemented starting from the 2021/22 school year. The funding set aside for providing mobile computer devices and Internet services support is about \$1.5 billion, benefiting about 310 000 students."

The spokesman pointed out that the Government has all along kept in view and implemented different measures to support grass-roots students' e-learning such as providing Internet access subsidies to eligible families to support needy students for conducting e-learning at home, and implementing a three-year assistance programme through the Community Care Fund (CCF) to subsidise needy primary and secondary students for purchasing mobile computer devices since the 2018/19 school year. Upon the outbreak of COVID-19, students have needed to conduct e-learning at home before the full resumption of face-to-face classes. The EDB has strengthened its support for grass-roots students. On the one hand, flexible arrangements have been made to the CCF Assistance Programme, and all public sector primary and secondary schools and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools implementing e-learning have been encouraged to join the programme. In the 2020/21 school year, about 870 schools are participating in the programme, and about 140 000 students are expected to benefit from it, which is four times the total number of student

beneficiaries in the past two school years. On the other hand, to strengthen support for needy primary and secondary students who are unable to acquire appropriate Internet services due to constraints of their living environment, the EDB provided schools in need with a one-off top-up grant from late 2020 to early 2021 for them to purchase portable Wi-Fi routers and mobile data cards, benefiting over 15 400 students.

The above-mentioned CCF Assistance Programme will end by August this year. To facilitate the funding disbursement from the QEF to schools for benefiting students as early as possible, the EDB streamlined the administrative arrangements for schools with reference to the application procedures of the aforementioned CCF Assistance Programme. The EDB has also extended the ambit of beneficiaries. In addition to students who are receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance or are beneficiaries of the School Textbook Assistance Scheme, a quota is also provided for schools to identify students with genuine financial needs according to school-based criteria so that those students can also benefit.

During the three-year implementation period, schools can apply for the Basic Funding for each eligible student once to purchase a mobile computer device (with a three-year warranty and a mobile device management system installed) and basic accessories (e.g. a protective cover, a stylus pen and a headset) for loan to the student. The maximum amount provided for each student is \$4,700. Schools can also apply for the Additional Funding to purchase portable Wi-Fi routers and mobile data cards for loan to financially needy students who are unable to acquire appropriate Internet services due to the constraints in their living environment. The maximum amount provided for each student beneficiary over the three-year implementation period is \$1,700.

In addition, the QEF has implemented the four-year DFP starting from the 2018/19 school year for application of funding by public sector primary and secondary schools (including special schools), DSS schools and kindergartens joining the Kindergarten Education Scheme to launch school-based curriculum development and/or student support measures. The DFP was originally scheduled to end in the 2021/22 school year. As the epidemic may have affected schools' participation in the DFP, the QEF has decided to extend the implementation period of the DFP for two years until the 2023/24 school year to allow more time for schools to make holistic planning and optimise the use of the additional resources under the DFP (the total indicative value of projects at about \$500,000 for a kindergarten and that at about \$2 million for a school from the primary and secondary school (including special school) sectors). The prevailing application procedures and requirements will remain unchanged.