

Latest implementation progress of Arts and Culture Sector Subsidy Scheme under Anti-epidemic Fund

A spokesperson for the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) said today (April 30) that the \$150 million Arts and Culture Sector Subsidy Scheme, which was established under the Anti-epidemic Fund (AEF) to assist the arts and culture sector to sail through the difficulties arising from COVID-19, has disbursed about \$100 million so far to relevant organisations to assist various arts groups and freelance arts workers.

Since March, the HAB has dispersed over \$50 million subsidies to nine major performing arts groups, 14 venue partners of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, 33 grantees of the Arts Capacity Development Funding Scheme of the HAB, the Hong Kong Arts Festival Society and the Hong Kong Maritime Museum. These arts groups will make use of the subsidies to pay the salaries of their staff, contractors and freelance workers as much as possible.

Under the Arts and Culture Sector Subsidy Scheme, the HAB has entrusted the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC) to implement the Support Scheme for Arts and Cultural Sector (Support Scheme) totalling \$50 million, covering performances and activities affected by the epidemic from January 29 to June 30, 2020. In addition to the continued provision of approved year grants and project grants, the HKADC has dispersed an additional \$80,000 subsidy to each of the 42 organisations receiving grants from the HKADC and \$15,000 subsidy to each of the 203 projects funded/activities commissioned by the HKADC in March. The HKADC has also advised these arts groups to make use of the subsidies to pay the salaries of their staff, contractors and freelance workers as much as possible. As to arts projects not funded by the HKADC and freelancers, they are also covered by the Support Scheme. The HKADC has received applications from more than 340 relevant projects and about 2 000 freelancers. The HKADC will approve the subsidies to eligible applicants as soon as possible. Apart from salaries from the arts groups which engaged them for a project, arts and culture freelancers may also apply for up to \$7,500 subsidies from the HKADC for other arts and culture jobs affected by the epidemic.

Under the second phase of the AEF, if arts and culture freelancers have taught any interest class in a school or a subvented non-governmental organisation, they may apply for \$7,500 subsidy under the second phase of the AEF from the Education Bureau or Social Welfare Department (however, an applicant may only make application to one department and cannot receive subsidy from both departments). In addition, if the relevant individual has made contribution to the Mandatory Provident Fund as a self-employed person in 2019, he may also apply for the one-off \$7,500 subsidy under the Employment Support Scheme. We hope the measures above may assist arts and

culture freelancers to tackle the difficulties.

The HAB also pays the full rent for tenants of arts spaces under the Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre and the HKADC from February to April 2020 and provides 75 per cent off rental reduction for them from May to September. About 200 arts space tenants will benefit from the measures involving about \$10 million.

The HAB has engaged the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong (Barwo) to collect details of the affected professional Cantonese opera performances in the period from January 29 to April 30, and disburse the subsidies to the practitioners of various categories involved in the performances. These practitioners include actors/actresses, martial artists and musicians as well as staff responsible for the sets, costumes, transportation and administration, etc. While most of them are freelancers, both members and non-members of Barwo are included. The principle of subsidisation under the scheme is to help mainly the frontline and low-income practitioners, under which frontline staff enjoys a higher percentage of the subsidy. From January 29 to April 30, around 200 professional Cantonese opera performances have been cancelled, affecting around 700 practitioners. The total amount of subsidies is \$8.3 million. Since April 23, Barwo has started to disburse the subsidies to the Cantonese opera practitioners. The HAB is in discussion with Barwo about covering the performances scheduled for May and June in the scheme as well.