

LCQ12: Mainland University Study Subsidy Scheme

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Chiang Lai-wan and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (August 18):

Question:

The Government has, since the 2014/2015 academic year, implemented the Mainland University Study Subsidy Scheme (MUSSS) to provide subsidies for Hong Kong students pursuing undergraduate studies on the Mainland, thereby ensuring that none of them will be deprived of post-secondary education opportunity because of a lack of means. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the following information on MUSSS for the 2020/2021 academic year: (i) the number of applicants, (ii) the respective numbers of students who passed the means test and were granted a subsidy (means-tested subsidy) and those who were granted a non-means-tested subsidy, with a breakdown by the Mainland institutions in which the applicants studied, (iii) the amount of subsidies disbursed, and (iv) the respective numbers of students who were granted half-rate and full-rate means-tested subsidies;

(2) of the respective numbers of students admitted to Mainland institutions through (i) the Scheme for Admission of Hong Kong Students to Mainland Higher Education Institutions (Admission Scheme) and (ii) the School Principal Nomination Scheme (SPNS) under the Admission Scheme who were granted subsidies in each academic year since the launch of MUSSS;

(3) of the staffing establishment of the government officers responsible for implementing MUSSS, the average time taken for vetting and approving each application, and the month in which the subsidies are disbursed in general;

(4) as I have learnt that MUSSS has been scheduled not to be open for applications for the 2021/2022 academic year until mid-August this year, which is a delay of more than two months when compared with the previous two years, of the reasons for that; and

(5) given that classes of Mainland institutions generally commence in early September, whether the Government will expeditiously vet and approve applications for MUSSS, with a view to disbursing the subsidies in time before the students depart for the Mainland to pursue their studies; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In response to the various parts of the question raised by Dr the Hon

Chiang Lai-wan, a reply from the Education Bureau (EDB) is as follows:

(1) In the 2020/21 academic year, 4 277 applications were received under the Mainland University Study Subsidy Scheme (MUSSS), and subsidies of about \$49 million have been disbursed. The number of recipients and the amount of subsidies are tabulated below, and the breakdown by the Mainland institutions in which the recipients studied is at Annex.

| 2020/21 Academic Year (as at July 31, 2021) | |
|---|------------|
| Total number of recipients of subsidies | 3 833 |
| (a) Full-rate means-tested subsidy | 2 271 |
| (b) Half-rate means-tested subsidy | 784 |
| (c) Non-means-tested subsidy | 778 |
| Amount of subsidy | |
| Amount of subsidy disbursed under means-tested subsidy for (a) and (b) (HK dollars) | 44,738,400 |
| Amount of subsidy disbursed under non-means-tested subsidy for (c) (HK dollars) | 4,356,800 |

(2) For the 2014/15 to 2020/21 academic years, the total numbers of students who received subsidies through the MUSSS and, among them, the numbers of students who entered designated Mainland institutions through the Scheme for Admission of Hong Kong Students to Mainland Higher Education Institutions (Admission Scheme) are tabulated below. The EDB does not maintain any information on the number of students admitted to Mainland institutions through the School Principal Nomination Scheme under the Admission Scheme who were granted subsidies.

| Academic Year# | Total Number of Students Receiving Subsidies | Number of Students Admitted to Designated Mainland Institutions Through the Admission Scheme |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| 2014/15 | 263 | 263 |
| 2015/16 | 479 | 479 |
| 2016/17 | 2 190 | 829 |
| 2017/18 | 3 056 | 1 249 |
| 2018/19 | 3 147 | 1 332 |
| 2019/20 | 3 218 | 1 444 |
| 2020/21 (as at July 31, 2021) | 3 833 | 1 920 |

Before the 2016/17 academic year, the MUSSS only accepted applications from students admitted to designated Mainland institutions through the Admission Scheme. Starting from the 2016/17 academic year, the Government has expanded the MUSSS to cover all students pursuing undergraduate studies at designated

Mainland institutions, irrespective of the admission channel.

(3) and (4) The EDB and the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency (WFSFAA) handle the work relating to the MUSSS within the existing staff establishment. As the personnel concerned are also responsible for other duties, we do not have any figures solely relating to the MUSSS.

In general, the MUSSS is open for applications from June to July preceding to the commencement of the relevant academic year. The application period will last for about three months and may be subject to extension as necessary. There are two types of applications for the MUSSS, namely renewal application and new application. Applicants for subsidy renewal will be arranged to submit their applications during the initial stage of the application period. Since students making first-time applications are usually newly admitted to Mainland institutions and it takes time for them to complete the enrolment and related procedures, they will normally submit their applications at a later stage of the application period (around August). The EDB will vet the applications according to the eligibility criteria of the MUSSS, which includes checking of the applications for "means-tested subsidy" by the WFSFAA and commissioning an organisation to verify the school places of the students with the Mainland institutions. The aforementioned procedures will be completed in November or early December at the earliest, and the EDB will inform the applicants of the results and disburse the subsidies to the students concerned from December to the first quarter of the following year.

Submission of applications for subsidy renewal for the 2021/22 academic year has started since early July 2021 as scheduled. Regarding new applications, the EDB, upon reviewing the operation of the MUSSS and its prevailing eligibility criteria, has proposed to refine the eligibility criteria of the non-means tested portion to cover students who are admitted to Mainland institutions through the School Principal Nomination Scheme under the Admission Scheme but not attaining the general entrance requirement. The new arrangements will be applicable to new applications for the 2021/22 academic year. In this connection, the EDB has submitted a paper to the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council in late July 2021, and plans to accept new applications for the 2021/22 academic year starting from mid-August this year.

The timetable of the MUSSS for the 2021/22 academic year will be similar to the arrangements in the past. We expect that the processing of the vast majority of applications will be completed and subsidies will be disbursed by the first quarter of 2022.

(5) The EDB has all along been committed to completing the processing of applications as soon as possible for disbursing the subsidies to students expeditiously. As mentioned above, for new applications in general, students are required to complete the relevant admission procedures before submitting applications in August, and it takes time for the EDB to verify the school places concerned with the Mainland institutions. Besides, means tests have to be conducted for applicants for the "means-tested subsidy" to confirm their eligibility. As such, there will be practical difficulties in disbursing the

subsidies before commencement of the academic year in September. The EDB will keep reviewing the operation of the MUSSS and seek to shorten the time required for processing the applications as far as practicable.