

LCQ21: Provision of self-financing post-secondary education

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hoi-yan and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (December 18):

Question:

In its review report submitted to the Education Bureau last year, the Task Force on Review of Self-financing Post-secondary Education re-affirms the Government policy of supporting the parallel development of the publicly funded and self-financing post-secondary education sectors, which is conducive to the diversified development of higher education in Hong Kong. However, some members of the self-financing post-secondary education sector have pointed out that currently the Government has merely launched the "Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors" (SSSDP) and the "Non-means-tested Subsidy Scheme for Self-financing Undergraduate Studies in Hong Kong", which are insufficient to promote the development of self-financing institutions. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the following information about SSSDP:

- (i) the number of applications approved and the total amount of subsidy granted, as well as the average, highest and lowest amounts of subsidy granted in respect of the approved applications, in each of the past three academic years;
- (ii) whether it has reviewed the effectiveness of SSSDP; if so, of the criteria adopted for the review; if not, whether it will conduct such a review; and
- (iii) whether it knows the post-graduation employment situation of the students who received subsidies; if so, of the details; if not, whether it will conduct a relevant survey;

(2) as a think tank has suggested that the percentage for non-standard entry to programmes of self-financing post-secondary institutions (i.e. admission of students whose results in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination do not meet the basic entrance requirements of undergraduate programmes), which is currently set at 5 per cent, be relaxed, whether the Government will consider the suggestion; if so, of the details and implementation timetable; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether it will allocate additional resources to self-financing post-secondary institutions to enable them to strengthen the cooperation with the relevant sectors, thereby ensuring that the programmes that they offer are responsive to market needs; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) as the Government will launch an Enhancement and Start-up Grant Scheme

for Self-financing Post-secondary Education to provide financial support for self-financing post-secondary institutions which are interested in offering programmes that meet market needs but require high start-up costs, of the specific content of the Scheme (including the expenditure involved, the implementation timetable and the criteria for vetting and approval of the applications)?

Reply:

President,

The Government has been supporting the sustainable and healthy development of the self-financing post-secondary sector and has introduced various measures to support the self-financing post-secondary institutions and their students. Apart from the Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors (SSSDP) implemented in the 2015/16 academic year, the Government has introduced a few new initiatives specifically benefitting the self-financing post-secondary sector, including the Non-means-tested Subsidy Scheme for Self-financing Undergraduate Studies in Hong Kong, which was implemented in the 2017/18 academic year, and the Seventh Round of the Matching Grant Scheme, which was applicable to the self-financing degree-awarding institutions only. At the same time, we have been channelling additional resources to the self-financing post-secondary institutions and their students through various existing measures to assist in the development of new campuses and the promotion of teaching and learning, etc. The major measures supporting the self-financing post-secondary institutions and their students are set out at the Annex.

The Government has accepted in full the review report published by the Task Force on Review of Self-financing Post-secondary Education (the Task Force) in December 2018, and will continue to promote the parallel development of the publicly-funded sector and the quality self-financing post-secondary sector in higher education, so as to better meet the community's needs. The Committee on Self-financing Post-secondary Education (CSPE) was revamped in November 2019 to enhance its role in facilitating the regulation, support, and co-ordination of the self-financing post-secondary education sector. The CSPE has commenced work on amending the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap. 320). It will work with the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) to explore how to enhance the academic accreditation standards and practices, with a view to raising the standards of self-financing post-secondary education. Furthermore, the Government will introduce an Enhancement and Start-up Grant Scheme for Self-financing Post-secondary Education to provide financial support for self-financing institutions which are interested in offering designated sub-degree or undergraduate programmes that meet market needs but require high start-up costs, so as to help such programmes take off and to alleviate the financial burden of students in terms of tuition. The Legislative Council (LegCo) Panel on Education will be consulted on the details of the scheme.

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Hoi-yan is as follows:

(1) The SSSDP has been implemented as a pilot scheme since the 2015/16 academic year. It aims to increase the supply of subsidised undergraduate places by leveraging the supply of the self-financing post-secondary education sector, and to nurture talent in support of specific industries with keen demand for human resources. Given the positive response from various stakeholders to the SSSDP, the Government has regularised it since the 2018/19 academic year and increased the number of subsidised places from about 1 000 per cohort to about 3 000 per cohort. The designated programmes under the SSSDP fall into ten disciplines, including health care, architecture and engineering, testing and certification, creative industries, logistics, tourism and hospitality, computer science, financial technology, insurance, and sports and recreation. Moreover, starting from the 2019/20 academic year, the Government has further expanded the coverage of the SSSDP to subsidise about 2 000 students per cohort enrolling in the designated sub-degree programmes in the selected disciplines.

The numbers of programmes, the numbers of subsidised places, the numbers of actual intakes, the subsidy amounts, and the total amounts of subsidies, etc of the designated undergraduate programmes under the SSSDP in the past three years are as follows:

Admission Year	No. of Undergraduate Programmes	No. of subsidised places	No. of actual intakes	Total amount of subsidies (\$ million)
2016/17	15	1 030	991	122.5
2017/18	17	1 062	974	185.9
2018/19	37	2 776	1 817 (Note)	469.7

Note: Starting from the 2017/18 academic year, the Government has been providing non-means-tested subsidies for students pursuing self-financing undergraduate programmes other than those designated undergraduate programmes under the SSSDP. In addition, the number of subsidised places under the SSSDP was significantly increased in the 2018/19 academic year. Although the number of students attracted to pursue programmes under the SSSDP almost doubled, the enrolment rate was affected because of competition from other degree programmes.

In the 2018/19 academic year, students on designated laboratory-based undergraduate programmes were each provided with an annual subsidy of an amount up to \$71,700; and those on other designated undergraduate programmes were each provided with an annual subsidy of an amount up to \$41,000.

The Education Bureau (EDB) has been reviewing the implementation of the SSSDP, including the supply of places and admissions, etc, in the light of Hong Kong's social and economic development needs as well as the views of stakeholders (including students, institutions, and industries). In consultation with the relevant bureaux/departments, we will adjust the

arrangements, including the selected disciplines of the SSSDP, the relevant subsidised programmes, and the number of subsidised places. The first cohort of students who received a subsidy to pursue the designated undergraduate programmes graduated in 2019. The participating institutions will submit the employment figures of these graduates in the second quarter of 2020. The statistics will help us understand the situation of graduates joining the relevant industries.

(2) At present, when the HKCAAVQ conducts programme accreditation exercises for the bachelor's degree programmes offered by the non-self-accrediting institutions, it normally allows the institutions to give special consideration to admitting applicants not complying with the minimum entrance requirements or other acceptable equivalent qualifications, subject to an admission ceiling of 5 per cent of the total student intake of the programmes. From the quality assurance perspective, imposing restrictions on the admission of students not complying with the minimum entrance requirements can ensure that there is minimal variation in the learning abilities among students, so as not to affect the quality of teaching and learning. This can also avoid, as far as possible, admitting students who fail to complete their studies because of their learning abilities, which will be a waste of their family's and society's resources, and their own precious time.

The EDB has set up the Sub-committee on Quality Assurance under the revamped CSPE to explore how to enhance the quality of the self-financing post-secondary sector, including the enhancement of the accreditation standards and practices for the self-financing sector. The EDB and the CSPE will continue to work closely with the HKCAAVQ, with a view to striking a balance between providing flexibility in the admission requirements of the self-financing institutions and ensuring the quality of programmes offered by the institutions.

(3) and (4) The EDB has been encouraging the self-financing post-secondary sector to operate programmes that meet community and industry needs. In fact, the self-financing post-secondary sector has sufficient flexibility in launching programmes to provide additional and complementary choices for post-secondary education in Hong Kong and enhance the diversity of our higher education sector as a whole.

The SSSDP not only encourages students to pursue self-financing programmes that nurture talent for designated industries with keen human resources needs, but also incentivises the self-financing institutions to respond to society's development needs swiftly by operating programmes that complement the manpower needs of the relevant industries. For instance, for allied health programmes at the degree level alone, the self-financing institutions have increased training places over the past few years to provide over 1 300 undergraduate places per year under the SSSDP to meet the needs of the sector. Apart from the allied health disciplines, some self-financing institutions have designed new and specialised programmes to groom talent to meet the needs of the community and emerging industries. Examples of such programmes are testing and certification, horticulture and landscape

management, and culinary arts and management. Furthermore, the EDB and the CSPE will conduct suitable strategic coordination for the self-financing post-secondary sector to facilitate the provision of quality programmes by the self-financing institutions, with a view to enriching higher education in Hong Kong and better responding to our manpower needs.

Having considered the recommendations by the Task Force, the Government proposes to earmark \$1.26 billion to set up the Enhancement and Start-up Grant Scheme for Self-financing Post-secondary Education to step up our support for the self-financing post-secondary institutions. This Scheme aims to increase the non-recurrent financial support for the self-financing institutions by offering one-off grants to support the self-financing institutions in offering post-secondary programmes that meet Hong Kong's human resources needs but require high start-up costs, so as to help such programmes take off to nurture the talent needed by the community urgently. We also propose that the additional grants be utilised for enhancement measures (such as facilitating programme and faculty development) or campus facilities improvements, so as to enhance teaching and learning, thereby encouraging the self-financing post-secondary institutions to explore and establish their specialised and niche areas, or undertake projects that are conducive to the sustainable development of the higher education sector as a whole. The EDB will consult the LegCo Panel on Education in early 2020 on the scheme and seek the LegCo's funding approval.

On the other hand, the Task Force on Promotion of Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET) set up in 2018 has been reviewing the promotion of VPET in Hong Kong. One of the tasks of this Task Force is to review how to foster closer collaboration between the industry and institutions to respond to Hong Kong's manpower needs. After considering the views collected during the public consultation period, the Task Force on Promotion of VPET is expected to complete the review and make specific recommendations to the Government in the first quarter of 2020.