

LCQ3: Continuing Education Fund

Following is a question by Professor the Hon Lau Chi-pang and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (December 4):

Question:

Regarding the Continuing Education Fund (CEF), will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that the subsidy ceiling of CEF was increased from \$20,000 to \$25,000 per applicant in 2022, whether the Government has considered further increasing the subsidy amount under CEF and lowering the co-payment ratios for subsidised learners (i.e. the percentage of fees to be borne by learners), so as to encourage members of the public to pursue continuing education;

(2) as it is learnt that some of the CEF reimbursable courses (CEF courses) differ from non-CEF courses of the same type in terms of enrolment thresholds, fees, course arrangements and assessment methods, etc., resulting in members of the public inclining to enrol in non-CEF courses, whether the Government will consider improving the design and arrangements of CEF courses to enhance their attractiveness and competitiveness; and

(3) in order to establish Hong Kong's "eight centres" positioning and develop new quality productive forces tailored to local conditions, whether the Government will review the current social positioning of CEF courses and encourage institutions to offer more continuing education courses related to emerging policies (including low-altitude economy, digital economy and innovation and technology industry), so as to keep abreast of the times in promoting the development of continuing education courses?

Reply:

President,

The Government established the Continuing Education Fund (CEF) in 2002 to provide subsidies to adults with learning aspirations to pursue continuing education and training, with a view to complementing the development trend of globalisation and meeting the needs for Hong Kong's transition to a knowledge-based economy. Hong Kong residents aged 18 or above, irrespective of education level, employment or financial status, are eligible to claim for CEF subsidy upon successful completion of CEF reimbursable course (CEF course). There are currently over 4 500 CEF courses offered by over 120 course providers, providing diversified choices for learners.

My reply to the question raised by the Member is as follows:

(1) To keep on promoting continuing education and encouraging members of the public to pursue self-enhancement, the Government raised the CEF subsidy ceiling twice in April 2019 and August 2022, from originally \$10,000 per person at the time of establishment of the CEF to currently \$25,000 per person. The co-payment ratios by learners for the first \$10,000 subsidy has been kept at 20 per cent of the course fee, and that for the remaining subsidy is 40 per cent of the course fee. The objective of putting in place the mechanism of co-payment ratio is to ensure that learners select courses prudently, while preventing course providers from arbitrarily raising the course fees in response to the adjustment to the subsidy ceiling at the same time.

As at end of October 2024, there are about 932 000 accounts under the CEF, among which about 5 700 account holders had used up the subsidy of \$25,000, representing less than one per cent of the total number of accounts under the CEF. Meanwhile, nearly 90 per cent of the accounts under the CEF have an unused balance of \$15,000 or above, enabling learners to continue to take other CEF courses. Currently, the subsidy ceiling will be used up by enrolling in CEF courses with cumulative course fees of \$37,500, while the median course fee of CEF courses is \$7,800. The Government is of the view that the current CEF subsidy ceiling and co-payment ratio arrangements could still satisfy the demand of the learners. The Government will continue to keep in view the operation of the CEF and the views of stakeholders, and consider the need to review the existing arrangements as appropriate.

(2) CEF courses are subject to quality assurance mechanism. All CEF courses must be registered under the Qualifications Register and fulfill the registration criteria under the CEF to ensure that CEF courses could meet the requirements in respect of the content, qualifications of instructors, teaching methodology and assessment methods, etc. in order to safeguard learners' interests. The Government encourages members of the public to pursue continuing education. They could freely select training courses available in the market according to their own preferences and needs.

(3) The National 14th Five-Year Plan has supported the development of Hong Kong in eight key areas ("eight centres"). Currently, many CEF courses are relevant to the business and contents of the "eight centres". The Government will continue to monitor the operation of the CEF and is open to suggestions on optimising its operation and consolidation of local training resources.