

LCQ5: Funding for bachelor's degree programmes in Chinese medicine

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Wing-kwong and a reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (November 29):

Question:

Regarding the funding of the University Grants Committee (UGC) for the full-time bachelor's degree programmes in Chinese medicine offered by the Hong Kong Baptist University, The Chinese University of Hong Kong and the University of Hong Kong, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows the numbers of UGC-funded first-year intake places for the aforesaid programmes in the 2019-2022 triennium and the 2022-2025 triennium, and the total amount of UGC recurrent grants allocated to the aforesaid three universities for such programmes since 2020, with a breakdown of the respective amounts of funding by portion of teaching ("T-portion"), research and professional activity;

(2) given that UGC, in allocating funding for the T-portion, groups the relative cost weightings into three price groups (i.e. Medicine and Dentistry, Engineering and Laboratory Based Studies, and Others) by broad academic programme category, and it is learnt that Chinese medicine does not fall under Medicine and Dentistry, or Studies Allied to Medicine and Health under Engineering and Laboratory Based Studies, whether the Government knows the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it knows if UGC will categorise Chinese medicine under Medicine and Dentistry or Studies Allied to Medicine and Health, so that bachelor's degree programmes in Chinese medicine can receive appropriate funding for the T-portion; if UGC will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government and the University Grants Committee (UGC) have been proactively nurturing talents for various sectors in Hong Kong and attach great importance to the manpower needs of Chinese Medicine. Under the existing mechanism, education and healthcare are specific manpower-planned disciplines, which now covers Chinese Medicine. The number of student places offered by the eight UGC-funded universities in the manpower-planned disciplines are determined by the Chief Executive-in-Council (CE-in-C) every triennium, taking into account the recommendations of relevant bureaux, and the universities will admit the specified number of students during the triennium. If there is an increase in the demand for specific manpower-

planned programmes, the relevant bureaux will seek additional resources within the Government in accordance with the established procedures, which will then be disbursed to the universities in the form of a block grant through the UGC. On the premise that the student number targets have been met, the universities may flexibly deploy their resources to meet the needs of different disciplines.

Since the questions raised by the Hon Chan Wing-kwong involve different bureaux/departments, having consulted the Health Bureau, our reply is as follows:

(1) During the planning exercise for the 2019-22 and 2022-25 triennia, the CE-in-C approved the provision of 79 and 70 first-year-first-degree (FYFD) intake places respectively for the Chinese Medicine programmes on the recommendation of the relevant bureau. The relevant programmes are offered by the Hong Kong Baptist University, the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the University of Hong Kong. The numbers of FYFD intake places provided by the above universities in the 2019-22 triennium were 30, 25 and 24 respectively, while the numbers of FYFD places to be provided in the 2022-25 triennium are 30, 20 and 20 respectively. As aforementioned, recurrent grants are disbursed to the universities by the Government through the UGC in the form of a block grant. As such, we do not have the relevant figures on the portion of recurrent grants allocated to the Faculty of Chinese Medicine or School of Chinese Medicine within the universities.

(2) and (3) During the triennial planning exercise, the UGC assumes an advisory role in assessing the public funding requirements of the universities in accordance with the established formula. On such basis, the UGC recommends the amount of recurrent grants to be allocated to the universities within the triennium for the Government's consideration. Subject to the decision of the CE-in-C, the UGC Secretariat will disburse the funding in accordance with the Government's decision.

The methodology adopted by the UGC in determining the funding recommendations for the allocation of recurrent grants to the UGC-funded universities is made public in the Government's Legislative Council Brief on Recurrent Funding for the UGC-funded Universities for each triennium. Among others, the funding for the Teaching Portion is determined on the basis of student numbers, their study levels, i.e. sub-degree, undergraduate, taught postgraduate and research postgraduate programmes, modes of study, i.e. part-time and full-time, and disciplines of study, etc. Some subjects are more expensive than the others because they require special equipment, laboratory, or more staff time, which will be reflected in the determination of the proposed allocation for each university. In accordance with the above principle, the UGC currently places 17 academic programme categories into three price groups, with Price Group A being Medicine and Dentistry with a relative cost weighting (RCW) of 3.6, Price Group B being Engineering and Laboratory-Based Studies, including Chinese Medicine programmes under Studies Allied to Medicine and Health disciplines, with a RCW of 1.4, and Price Group C being Others with a RCW of 1.0. For research postgraduate programmes, the RCW values are 1.8, 1.4 and 1.0 respectively. The UGC will continue to make

reference to different data, such as the average teaching expenditure per student, in reviewing and refining the mechanism from time to time.

I must stress that the funding allocated by the Government to the universities is in the form of block grants, and the underlying philosophy is that the universities have to assume the primary responsibility for optimising the use of limited public resources, and to properly manage and balance the allocation of resources among different disciplines on their own. The RCW adopted by the UGC is only one of the many basic parameters for devising funding recommendations. It is entirely different from the internal mechanisms of the universities for allocating resources to different disciplines; hence, the two should not be casually pegged. Under the principle of institutional autonomy, the Government and the UGC will not intervene in the internal resources allocation by the universities, and the universities have to be responsible for their own internal decisions. In fact, the number of student places for Chinese Medicine undergraduate programmes only accounts for 1 per cent to 3 per cent of the total number of student places allocated to the aforementioned three universities. With the Government's annual recurrent grants to the three universities amounting to more than \$10 billion in total, we believe that the universities have sufficient room for ensuring the proper allocation of resources.

The existing mechanism allows the universities to apply for extra-formulaic adjustments if there is a special need for additional resources for individual programmes which the universities have genuine difficulties in meeting such a need. In the past, there were cases where disciplines in Studies Allied to Medicine and Health being supported by the relevant bureaux in terms of policies and resources, and provided with extra-formulaic additional funding to subsidise the fees for Clinical Practice. Should there be any such requests on the special needs of resources relating to the Chinese Medicine programmes, the UGC Secretariat will refer them to the relevant bureau for consideration.

Thank you, President.