

LCQ8: Supporting students with special educational needs in post-secondary institutions

â€‹Following is a question by Dr the Hon Chow Man-kong and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Education, Dr Sze Chun-fai, in the Legislative Council today (November 27):

Question:

It is learnt that the community has all along been concerned about whether various post-secondary institutions can adequately support students with special educational needs (SEN) in terms of their learning needs, so as to equip them for pursuing further studies and joining the workforce. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows the number of SEN students studying in the eight universities funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC) (the eight universities) in the current academic year, together with a breakdown by type of SEN, including but not limited to hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical disability, and specific learning difficulties;

(2) as the Government has indicated in its reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council on November 8 last year that the UGC further allocates additional resources to the eight universities between 2022 and 2025 by providing an additional special funding of \$67.5 million for the Special Grant to Enhance the Support for Students with Special Educational Needs (the Special Grant), which seeks to enable the universities to (i) enhance the teaching and learning experience of SEN students, (ii) strengthen staff training, and (iii) promote campus integration, whether the Government knows the actual amount of funding granted to each university, the expenditure on items (i) to (iii), as well as the relevant specific measures and their effectiveness respectively;

(3) whether it knows if the UGC will extend or regularise the Special Grant in the future to continuously implement one of the strategic recommendations of the Persons with Disabilities and Rehabilitation Programme Plan, which is to provide adequate resources and ensure equal opportunities for SEN students to receive higher education or pursue further studies; if the UGC will, of the estimated relevant annual expenditure; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) as some organisations and their assistance seekers have relayed that some university students need to engage sign language interpretation services to support their studies, but due to limited study hours funded by their universities, rather exorbitant sign language interpretation costs have to be borne by such students in their three or four-year undergraduate programmes, whether the authorities will require the eight universities to strengthen the

support for such students and ensure that the relevant measures are put in place in a proper and effective manner, so that no such students will be unable to complete their studies or pursue further studies because of lack of means; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) whether the authorities will consider offering dedicated post-secondary programmes that are suitable and able to provide support for SEN students, complemented by related all-round support services (including but not limited to sign language interpretation), so that they can equip themselves and join the workforce; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The eight University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded universities have all along been making special teaching arrangements and providing support services to students with special educational needs (SEN).

Our replies to Dr the Hon Chow Man-kong's questions are as follows:

(1) In the past three academic years (AY), the numbers of full-time UGC-funded sub-degree and undergraduate students with SEN (Note 1) are tabulated below by their types of SEN –

Type of SEN	2021/22 AY	2022/23 AY	2023/24 AY (provisional figures)
Special Learning Disabilities	102	120	163
Autism	89	97	109
Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder	152	189	276
Physical disability	38	32	43
Visual impairment	32	36	35
Hearing impairment	83	81	98
Speech and language impairment	17	13	10
Mental illness	201	301	419
Others (Note 2)	233	284	355
Total	947	1 153	1 508

Note 1: The numbers of students with SEN are based on information provided by individual students.

Note 2: Including different types of disabilities, visceral disability /chronic illness, etc.

We do not have the relevant figures for the 2024/25 AY for the time being.

(2) and (3) To assist students with SEN in pursuing UGC-funded programmes and adapt to campus life, as well as promoting an inclusive culture, the UGC has launched the Special Grant for Enhancing Support for Students with SEN (the Special Grant) since 2015 to provide additional resources for universities to take forward three key objectives, i.e. (i) improving the educational experience of students with SEN, (ii) enhancing staff training and (iii) promoting an inclusive campus. The subsidy scope of the Special Grant is comprehensive, with specific initiatives covering professional services such as educational psychology services, development of e-learning platforms, enhancement of awareness of students with SEN through seminars, workshops, online resources, etc, implementation of integrated education, improvement of campus accessibility, and provision of additional assistive tools for students with SEN, etc.

With the support and efforts of the stakeholders over the years, the Special Grant has been effective in supporting students with SEN and promoting a caring culture among staff and peers. According to the results of surveys conducted by the UGC-funded universities among students with SEN in the 2022/23 AY, the average student satisfaction rating was 4.1 (i.e. above the "satisfactory" level) on a five-point scale. The UGC has also noted the positive impact of the Special Grant on the UGC-funded universities in deepening their institutional changes and addressing the needs of students with SEN in a more organised and systematic manner.

In view of its effectiveness, the UGC has further increased the funding to \$67.5 million in the 2022/23 – 2024/25 (2022-25) triennium to extend and enhance the support for students with SEN, and to expand the scope of funding to cover employment support, etc. The special grant for the 2022-25 triennium was allocated primarily with reference to the average numbers of students with SEN enrolled in full-time publicly-funded sub-degree and undergraduate programmes at the UGC-funded universities in the past five AYs. Allocations of the special grant to the UGC-funded universities are set out in the table below –

UGC-funded universities	Special grant allocated in 2022-25 triennium in \$ million
City University of Hong Kong	7.2
Hong Kong Baptist University	5.0
Lingnan University	3.3
The Chinese University of Hong Kong	11.3
The Education University of Hong Kong	3.4
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University	10.1

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology	12.8
The University of Hong Kong	14.4
Total	67.5

Regarding the expenditure in different areas, the UGC-funded universities will formulate appropriate support strategies and allocate budgets having regard to their actual circumstances. Overall, the UGC-funded universities deploy about 40 per cent of the funding for staff and general expenses, while about 50 per cent of the remaining funding is deployed to enhance the learning experience of students, 20 per cent to strengthen staff training, and 30 per cent to promote an inclusive campus.

Recurrent funding for the UGC-funded universities is provided on a triennial basis. Like other funding schemes, the existing special grant is aligned with the current funding cycle (i.e. the 2022-25 triennium). For the arrangements of the next triennium, the UGC will continue to communicate with the funded universities closely, and consider the means for supporting the universities as they continue to provide appropriate assistance for students with SEN in a timely manner.

(4) Under the existing arrangements, the UGC-funded universities may make use of the special grant to support students with hearing impairment, including hiring staff to provide sign language interpretation service to support their learning. The UGC believes that the funded universities will balance the needs of different students with SEN and deploy the special grant appropriately to render suitable support, including those with hearing impairment. Meanwhile, with the rapid advancement in technology, the UGC encourages the funded universities to actively explore the use of new technologies and adopt various technological solutions to provide more comprehensive support to students in need in a more cost-effective manner.

(5) Under the existing policy on integrated education, the Education Bureau advocates "equal opportunities and enhancing students' learning having regard to the uniqueness of individual students". With suitable support and assistance from institutions, all students are provided with equal learning opportunities such that students with SEN can overcome their learning barriers and join the mainstream campus life together with others. On the one hand, the UGC is making use of the special grant to motivate the UGC-funded universities to provide students with SEN with the necessary support, barrier-free facilities and information such that they can learn in the same way as their peers. On the other hand, the special grant promotes an inclusive campus through various means to advocate the sharing of campus life among teachers, students and those with SEN such that they can learn to respect, understand and accept each other, thereby cultivating whole-person development in a wider context. At the same time, with the special grant for the 2022-25 triennium, the UGC has further expanded the scope of funding to cover activities and projects that will help students to join the society and develop their careers in the future. This involves encouraging the

universities to provide more comprehensive, targeted and practical support to students with SEN, and to enable them to plan and prepare for their career paths upon graduation as early as possible during their studies. Apart from the special grant, the UGC-funded universities could make use of the block grant to take forward integrated education on their campuses.