

LCQ15: Funding programmes under the Quality Education Fund

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

Question:

The Quality Education Fund (QEF) announced in May 2018 the allocation of \$3 billion to set up the Dedicated Funding Programme for Publicly-funded Schools (the Programme) for application by schools to launch school-based curriculum development and support measures for students, which would be implemented starting from the 2018/19 school year. In addition, QEF also provides funding support for priority themes which address the needs of education. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective numbers of applications received and approved by the authorities in each school year since the implementation of the Programme;
- (2) of the average numbers of years taken from the receipt of an application by the authorities to the receipt of (i) written approval and (ii) funding by an applicant of the Programme;
- (3) of the respective numbers of applications received and approved by the authorities for each priority theme in each of the past three school years (set out in a table); and
- (4) among the approved applications mentioned in (3), of the following information in relation to applications under the priority themes of "Information Technology in Education", "Positive Values" and "STEM/STEAM Education": concepts, major categories of expenditure, as well as objectives and goals?

Reply:

President,

The Quality Education Fund (QEF) was established in 1998 to fund projects that aim to promote quality school education. Starting from 2003, the QEF has introduced priority themes, and has reviewed the themes and made adjustment from time to time to meet the needs of education development in Hong Kong. To further support students' learning, raise the quality of school education and promote quality school education, the QEF has implemented the Dedicated Funding Programme for Publicly-funded Schools (DFP) starting from the 2018/19 school year, for applications by publicly-funded primary and secondary schools (including special schools), schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme and kindergartens joining the Kindergarten Education Scheme to

launch school-based curriculum development and/or student support measures, as well as relevant school improvement works and/or procurement of supplies. Schools can apply for funding to carry out school-based pilot or improvement projects to optimise learning and teaching and support for students. Our reply to the Hon Holden Chow's question is as follows:

(1) and (2) Since the implementation of the DFP, over 2 100 applications had been received, of which about 1 800 applications were approved, 34 applications were rejected, 310 applications are being processed. The number of DFP applications received and approved by the QEF by school year is set out below:

School year	Number of applications#	Number of applications approved#
2018/19	713	683
2019/20	532	529
2020/21	427	425
2021/22	234	149
2022/23	236	12
Total	2 142	1 798

excluding applications withdrawn by schools.

To ensure the proper use of public funds, individual applications were processed in accordance with the prevailing procedures and assessment criteria. In view of the difference in magnitude, complexity and funding amount sought, the time required for processing individual applications varies. In general, for projects of a smaller scale, the assessment and release of application result could be done within six months the soonest, and most successful applications were approved within one year. However, for those schools' applications which lack sufficient details, the QEF Secretariat would have to follow up with the schools for clarification and supplementary information on a need basis, leading to longer processing time. The related process allows schools to further review and refine the project proposals, improve the project design and enhance the overall effectiveness of project implementation.

Upon approval of the applications, the QEF will enter into an agreement with the schools setting out the project details and conditions for funding approval. The schools will then commence the projects and receive the funding in accordance with the conditions. There is currently a template of agreement for adoption. Upon notification of funding approval, the signing of agreement and disbursement of funds of projects of a smaller scale were processed within four months the soonest. However, the conditions for funding approval (such as the timing of fund disbursement or the funding schedule) may vary depending on the progress and nature of the projects. Some schools may, after receipt of funding approval, revise the details of their proposals (such as the implementation schedule) and, therefore, the time required for concluding

the agreement and disbursement of funds may be longer. The QEF will continue to encourage schools to implement the project the soonest possible so that the funding could support schools' needs and results can be achieved in a timely manner.

(3) and (4) Various priority themes have been introduced under the Priority Themes Funding Programme to meet the needs of education development in Hong Kong. There are currently seven priority themes, namely STEM/STEAM Education, Information Technology (IT) in Education, Assessment Literacy, Life-wide Learning, Positive Values, Students' Balanced Development and Effective Leadership and School Management.

Projects under STEM/STEAM Education aim at cultivating students' ability to integrate and apply knowledge and skills within and across key learning areas of Science Education, Technology Education, Mathematics and Arts Education, and developing their creativity, collaborative skills and competence in solving problems with innovative thinking; projects under IT in Education aim at promoting e-learning through the use of information technology, with a view to enhancing learning and teaching/pedagogical innovations, catering for learner diversity, and encouraging students to use IT for self-directed learning; and projects under Positive Values aim at nurturing students' positive values and attitudes, such as perseverance, respect for others, national identity, integrity and care for others, as well as fostering a supportive and harmonious school environment conducive to the promotion of positive values and proper attitudes among students through strengthening support for and collaboration among stakeholders, including teachers, parents, school staff and community members. In general, major expenditure items of funded projects include employment of project personnel to support the implementation of project activities, procurement of services and related equipment.

The QEF received over 400 applications under the priority themes in the past three school years and the number of approved applications is set out in the table below. Applications under the priority themes are submitted by applicants ranging from schools to organisations (including private companies) or even individuals and are diverse in content with varying quality. As such, the approval rate is not as high when compared to other designated funding programmes such as the DFP.

Priority Themes	Number of Applications Approved
STEM/STEAM Education	27
IT in Education	29
Assessment Literacy	5
Life-wide Learning	25
Positive Values	47
Students' Balanced Development	19
Effective Leadership and School Management	5

LCQ21: Electric vehicle charging facilities in government premises

Following is a question by the Hon Lai Tung-kwok and a written reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (November 29):

Question:

The Chief Executive announced in the 2022 Policy Address that about 7 000 additional parking spaces with electric vehicle charging facilities ("charging facilities") would be provided in government premises by 2025. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it is the Government's policy to provide charging facilities in all government premises with spaces available for vehicle parking; if so, of the timetable; if not, the reasons for that;
- (2) of the current total number of parking spaces in government premises across the territory, and the number of parking spaces in government premises already provided with charging facilities before the announcement of the provision of charging facilities for the aforesaid some 7 000 parking spaces;
- (3) of the estimated expenditure for the provision of charging facilities for the aforesaid some 7 000 parking spaces, as well as the actual expenditure incurred so far;
- (4) of (i) the number of parking spaces in government premises which have been provided with charging facilities so far, and (ii) the number of parking spaces with charging facilities in government premises upon completion of the work to provide charging facilities for the aforesaid some 7 000 parking spaces, with a tabulated breakdown by the types of government premises and parking spaces (i.e. those for private cars, motorcycles and light goods vehicles);
- (5) given that at the meeting of the Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to the Development of Electric Vehicles of this Council on May 11, 2020, the Government indicated that the major difficulties in installing quick chargers at existing government premises were the high costs and the enormous space required, whether all the charging facilities for the aforesaid some 7 000 parking spaces are medium chargers; if so, whether it has plans to install additional quick chargers; if not all the charging facilities are medium chargers, of the respective numbers of medium and quick chargers among such

charging facilities; and

(6) whether civil servants using the charging facilities at parking spaces in government premises are required to pay for the charging services; if so, of the fees charged; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

To work towards Hong Kong's goal of achieving carbon neutrality before 2050, the Government has been striving to promote green transport, for which relevant charging facilities are indispensable. As the Chief Executive mentioned in his 2023 Policy Address, the Government strives to expand the network of electric vehicle (EV) charging facilities, and aims to increase the number of public and private parking spaces with charging infrastructure to about 200 000 by mid-2027. This includes the provision of EV chargers at an additional 7 000 parking spaces in government buildings, as the Chief Executive announced in his 2022 Policy Address, in order to take the lead in providing charging facilities in government premises to dovetail with the development of green transport.

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Lai is as follows:

(1) The Government updated the Joint Circular on Green Government Buildings in March 2023, stipulating that all parking spaces for private cars, motorcycles and light goods vehicles (whether indoors or outdoors) within the boundaries of newly built government buildings with tender documents issued on or after April 1, 2023 must be fully equipped with medium EV chargers. As for existing government buildings, where technically feasible, efforts would be taken to provide EV charging facilities for all parking spaces for private cars, motorcycles and light goods vehicles.

(2) According to the data provided by the Transport Department, as at September 2023, the total number of parking spaces (including public and ancillary parking spaces) in Government premises was around 72 500. Furthermore, at the announcement of the provision of EV chargers at an additional 7 000 parking spaces in government buildings in "The Chief Executive's 2022 Policy Address", about 2 200 public parking spaces in government buildings were equipped with EV chargers, and about 690 parking spaces designated for the government fleet were equipped with EV chargers.

(3) To achieve the target of 7 000 additional EV charging parking spaces, relevant departments will increase the number of EV chargers in government buildings under construction or planning, so long as the provision is technically feasible and will not affect the progress of the works. Expenditures involved will depend on the specific circumstances of individual projects, and the number of parking spaces to be equipped with EV chargers in respective buildings are still under planning and possible adjustments. Hence, the Environmental Protection Department does not have relevant information.

(4) As at September 2023, about 2 550 public parking spaces in government buildings were equipped with EV chargers in Hong Kong. In addition, around 730 parking spaces designated for the government fleet were equipped with EV chargers.

Upon completing the installation of EV charging facilities at the additional 7 000 parking spaces as mentioned above, more than 10 000 parking spaces in government buildings in Hong Kong will be equipped with charging facilities. The majority will be parking spaces for private cars. As the implementation is still in progress, the exact number of parking spaces to be equipped with EV chargers in each government building has yet to be confirmed. The usage of parking spaces will also be decided by respective departments in the future based on their operational needs. Therefore, the Government cannot provide a detailed breakdown.

(5) The abovementioned 7 000 chargers are mainly medium chargers. As for quick chargers, the Joint Circular on Green Government Buildings updated in March 2023 stipulates that, for new car parks having no less than 100 parking spaces, a minimum of two quick chargers with output power no less than 100 kW shall be set up to support EVs for quick top-ups. As for government buildings under construction or planning, departments will make reference to relevant guidelines and consider providing more medium and quick chargers in car parks if technically feasible.

(6) The Government will progressively marketise EV charging services in government car parks from end-2023, and impose charging fees on users. Regarding EV chargers in other government buildings, on the basis that the normal operation of the government fleet will not be affected, respective departments can take into account the actual operational circumstances and needs of the car parks under their management, and consider opening up the EV chargers for different users, including civil servants. Charging fees should be determined based on the "user pays" principle.

LCQ11: Impacts of Government's cuts in recurrent expenditure

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Tik Chi-yuen and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (November 29):

Question:

During the debate on the Member's motion on "Reviewing public finance policies" in this Council on the 8th of this month, the Government indicated

that it would deduct 1 per cent from the recurrent expenditure resources of various policy bureaux and government departments for the 2024-2025 financial year, and an additional 1 per cent would be deducted for the 2025-2026 financial year. There are views pointing out that, in the 2022-2023 financial year, the Government's overall recurrent expenditure was already cut by 1 per cent, and amid it, 164 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) receiving lump sum grant subvention were subjected to a cut in subvention of nearly \$1.22 million each on average, which has already seriously affected the operation of such organisations. Some members of the welfare sector are concerned that if recurrent expenditure is cut by a further 1 per cent in each of the next two financial years, the impact is likely to be even more extensive, rendering the underprivileged groups unable to receive appropriate services. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the actual amount of funding cut for NGOs receiving government subvention in the 2022-2023 financial year;

(2) of the actual amount of funding cut for each public hospital, as well as government, aided and Direct Subsidy Scheme primary and secondary schools in the 2022-2023 financial year;

(3) whether it has assessed the respective numbers of headcounts that will have to be cut by NGOs as a result of further funding cuts by the Government in the next two financial years and the service recipients that will be affected; and

(4) whether the Labour and Welfare Bureau will undertake to absorb the expenditure cuts required in the next two financial years without cutting the funding for NGOs?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau, the Health Bureau and the Education Bureau, the reply to the question raised is as follows:

Faced with the pressure on public finances, the Government has to control expenditure. Therefore, the Government decides that bureaux and departments should jointly implement a Productivity Enhancement Programme (PEP), under which bureaux and departments are required to cut 1 per cent recurrent expenditure allocation in 2024-25 and a further 1 per cent in 2025-26. The resources thus spared would be re-allocated for the implementation of new policy initiatives. The objectives of the PEP are to control the overall growth of government expenditure and encourage bureaux and departments to achieve savings, through business process of re-engineering and re-prioritisation, so as to provide greater room for internal reallocation of resources, improving existing services and implementing new services for achieving higher efficiency.

(1) The Financial Secretary announced in the 2021-22 Budget to implement an

expenditure reduction programme, applicable to all bureaux and departments, to reduce the recurrent government expenditure by 1 per cent in 2022-23.

The Government has all along been committed to building a caring community and looking after the underprivileged. The recurrent expenditure on social welfare has increased by 52.2 per cent from \$79.4 billion in 2018-19 to \$121.0 billion in 2023-24, accounting for about 21.6 per cent of the total estimated recurrent government expenditure. The amount of savings for the social welfare sector arising from the expenditure reduction programme was approximately \$280 million in 2022-23 while the Government's expenditure budget in social welfare increased by approximately \$9 billion during the same period. Moreover, in the course of implementing the expenditure reduction programme, the Government did not reduce cash assistance, including those under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme and the Social Security Allowance Scheme, provided under the social security system. Certain expenditure items, such as foster care allowance, rent and rates of subvented service units and food expenses of short-term food assistance service, were also exempted.

(2) For the health sector, the estimated recurrent government expenditure in this respect in 2022-23 was \$126.6 billion, among which the Government has continued to increase the recurrent provision for the Hospital Authority (HA) according to the triennium funding arrangement agreed in 2017, having regard to projected service demand. In 2022-23, a recurrent subvention of \$90.4 billion was provided to the HA, representing an increase of over 60 per cent as compared with 2017-18, \$7.5 billion of which was used for further supporting the HA in combating COVID-19.

For the education sector, in response to the service-wide measure implemented in 2022-23 to reduce total recurrent government expenditure by 1 per cent, the Education Bureau had fully absorbed the reduction internally. The subvention provided to primary and secondary schools were still determined in accordance with the established mechanism and had not been reduced as a result of the service-wide measure.

(3) and (4) In the face of pressure on public finances, the Government decides that bureaux and departments should jointly implement the PEP. However, the cash assistance provided under the social security system, including those under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme and the Social Security Allowance Scheme, would not be affected by the PEP. The Labour and Welfare Bureau and the Social Welfare Department would review the expenditure situation, adjust priorities, and decide how to allocate resources to implement the PEP while minimising the impact on the welfare services for the public as far as possible. Under the Lump Sum Grant (LSG) Subvention System, subvented organisations should also deploy resources flexibly through an effective and appropriate use of LSG subventions and reserves, and adopt different means so as to reduce expenditure while ensuring that the remuneration of staff and service quality are not affected.

In the course of implementing the PEP, the Government will re-allocate the resources spared under the PEP to take forward new policy initiatives. In this connection, the Government will allocate additional resources in 2024-25

to launch new social welfare services and to enhance existing services, including various new social welfare initiatives announced earlier in the Policy Address.

Reports of the Director of Audit

The Report of the Director of Audit on the Accounts of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region for the year ended 31 March 2023 (Report on the Government Accounts) and Report No. 81 of the Director of Audit on the results of value for money audits were tabled in the Legislative Council this morning (November 29).

The Report on the Government Accounts provides an overall assurance that the financial statements properly present the assets and liabilities of the Government as at March 31, 2023, and the receipts and payments for the year that ended on that date.

Value for money audit is an examination into the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which any bureau of the Government Secretariat, department, agency or other public body has discharged its functions. Report No. 81 of the Director of Audit covers a variety of subjects on the administration of government programmes and provision of public services.

Report No. 81 comprises the following eight chapters:

Chapter Subject

- 1 Expansion of Tai Po Water Treatment Works
- 2 Licensing of food premises
- 3 Maintenance and modernisation of lifts and escalators in public rental housing estates
- 4 Provision of barrier-free facilities in public rental housing estates
- 5 Recycling Fund
- 6 Regulatory control of food premises
- 7 Reindustrialisation and Technology Training Programme
- 8 The Chinese University of Hong Kong: Campus facilities operated by external entities

The Report on the Government Accounts and Report No. 81 of the Director of Audit on the results of value for money audits are available on the Audit Commission's website at www.aud.gov.hk.

CEDD to hold Slope Safety Parent-child Carnival

The Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD) will hold a Slope Safety Parent-child Carnival from December 1 to 4 at Times Square in Causeway Bay to enhance public understanding of landslide hazards and the importance of slope safety.

The carnival will offer fun-filled interactive games and souvenirs to participants. There will also be display panels introducing slope safety information.

The carnival will be held between 11am and 8pm from December 1 to 3 and between 11am and 7pm on December 4 at the covered piazza of Times Square, Causeway Bay. Admission is free. A geotechnical engineer from the CEDD will answer questions from the public on slope safety and maintenance from 11am to 1pm on December 3.

Members of the public can visit the Hong Kong Slope Safety website (hkss.cedd.gov.hk/hkss/en/home/index.html) for information on slope safety.