Education Bureau Circular Memorandum No. 86/2022

From: Permanent Secretary for Education

To: Heads of Government, Aided (including Special Schools), Caput and Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) Schools

Ref: EDB(EID/ITE)/IT/PRO/189

Date: 2 June 2022

Quality Education Fund e-Learning Funding Programme— Provision of Mobile Computer Devices and Internet Services Support (2022/23 School Year)

Summary

This circular memorandum (CM) informs schools of the implementation details of the "Quality Education Fund e-Learning Funding Programme—Provision of Mobile Computer Devices and Internet Services Support" (Funding Programme) in the 2022/23 school year, and invites all public sector primary and secondary schools[1] (including special schools) and Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools to participate in the Funding Programme.

Background

2.   The Community Care Fund (CCF) implemented a three-year Assistance Programme in the 2018/19 to 2020/21school years to subsidise needy primary and secondary students to purchase mobile computer devices for relieving the financial burden of students from low-income families under the development of BYOD in schools, and to support their e-learning at home under the epidemic. This programme had ended in end-August 2021. To further support schools in implementing the blended mode of learning and teaching under the "new normal", the Quality Education Fund (QEF) has implemented a three-year funding programme starting from the 2021/22 school year, to subsidise schools to purchase mobile computer devices for loan to needy students, and to provide portable WiFi routers and mobile data cards for students who are unable to acquire appropriate Internet services due to the constraints in their living environment, so that all students have equal opportunities in accessing e-learning. In the first (2021/22) school year, over 700 schools have joined this Funding Programme.

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[1] Public sector schools include government, aided and caput schools.

Details

Application Requirement of Schools

3. Public sector primary and secondary schools (including special schools) and DSS schools meeting the following requirements are invited to participate in the Funding Programme:

> (i) schools implement e-learning to support the blended mode of learning and teaching under the "new normal", and students are required to use their personal mobile computer devices for learning at schools or at home; and
>
> (ii) schools will arrange for the loan of mobile computer devices and related equipment to eligible students.

4. Applications under the Funding Programme will be handled separately from other QEF funding projects and will not be counted under the existing application quota of each school. Schools that have participated in this programme in the 2021/22 school year are also required to submit application again if they need to apply for funding for new eligible students in the 2022/23 school year.

Student Beneficiaries

5. During the 2022/23 school year, students meeting the following criteria are eligible to benefit from the Funding Programme:

> (i) those receiving the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) from the Social Welfare Department;
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> (ii) those receiving full grant/half grant of the School Textbook Assistance Scheme (STAS) from the Student Finance Office; or
>
> (iii) those with limited economic means identified by schools.
> Schools may establish their school-based criteria according to their school contexts and students' family background for identifying students who are with limited economic means but are not receiving CSSA or STAS. The maximum number of students in this category is 10% of the number of student beneficiaries that meeting the criteria of CSSA and STAS in that school year. If individual schools have genuine needs, they may apply to the Information Technology in Education (ITE) Section of the EDB for increasing the number of student beneficiaries in this category, which will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

6. Student beneficiaries should not have received similar government assistance before, including the CCF Assistance Programme mentioned above. For students who have already acquired mobile computer devices under the CCF Assistance Programme, schools could

apply for the Funding Programme to purchase suitable devices for loan to them provided that their devices have been used for more than three years **and** are unable to operate / meet the schools' new learning and teaching requirements. If necessary, schools can check with the Education Bureau whether their newly enrolled students have benefited from the CCF Assistance Programme. For details, please refer to the Bureau's website at https://www.edb.gov.hk/ited/qeffp/pre-checking. For other special cases[2], please consult the ITE Section of the EDB.

7.　　Schools may also apply for funding to purchase portable WiFi routers and / or mobile data cards for loan to financially needy students who are unable to acquire appropriate Internet services (e.g. through broadband services) due to the constraints in their living environment (e.g. subdivided units, old buildings and remote areas). Schools should examine student information to identify students who are not receiving appropriate Internet services, and when needed, may request the students concerned to provide further information[3] to ensure their applications reflect the actual situation.

Level and Use of Funding

8.　　Schools can apply for the "Basic Funding" for each eligible student once during the three-year implementation period of the Funding Programme. The maximum amount for each student is $4,700. Schools could use the funding for purchasing part / all of the following items for loan to the student:

> (i)　　a mobile computer device with product warranty for three years;
> (ii)　　a mobile device management system; and
> (iii)　　basic accessories for meeting learning needs, including screen shield, protective cover, detachable keyboard, stylus pen, mouse and headset.

9.　　Furthermore, for supporting financially needy students who are unable to acquire appropriate Internet services due to the constraints in their living environment, schools could apply for the "Additional Funding" for purchasing portable WiFi routers for loan to students, and/or providing them with mobile data cards. The amount of funding will be calculated based on the actual need of the students concerned in each school year, and the maximum amount of funding provided to each student beneficiary over the three-year implementation period is $1,700 under this Funding Programme. For each student beneficiary, a maximum of $800 would be provided for purchasing portable WiFi router and / or mobile data cards in the first

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[2] For student beneficiaries under the CCF Assistance Programme, if their devices cannot meet the e-learning needs after changing school (i.e. due to different operating system), they are exempted from the "three-year" requirement and their new schools may apply funding for them.

[3] Schools can refer to the references and Frequently Asked Questions on the website (https://www.edb.gov.hk/ited/qeffp) for more information.

year. In each of the subsequent school years, depending on whether the students are still eligible and their actual need, schools may apply for funding to purchase mobile data cards for them, at a maximum of $450 per eligible student. In this regard, for students who benefited from this programme in the 2021/22 school year and are still unable to acquire appropriate Internet services in the 2022/23 school year due to the constraints in their living environment, schools need to include them again in applying for the "Additional Funding".

10. The QEF will calculate the disbursement based on the actual expenses incurred to purchase the necessary equipment for the student beneficiaries during the school year of participation. It is non-recurrent in nature and should not entail recurrent financial burden on the QEF. If schools have already received similar assistance from other Government sources, they should not apply to the QEF for repeated funding support. Schools should carefully consider the need for purchasing the equipment. If the students have already acquired some/all of the items needed through other channels or if schools could deploy existing equipment for loan to their students[4], there would be no need to purchase the equipment again to avoid wastage.

Funding Application and Disbursement Arrangements

11. The ITE Section of the EDB has been entrusted to handle applications and funding disbursement, etc. For schools intending to join the Funding Programme in the 2022/23 school year, please complete the attached application form (**Annex II**) and return it to the ITE Section **on or before 31 January 2023**. The ITE Section will normally acknowledge the receipt of the application within seven working days. Upon receiving the acknowledgement, schools should undertake the procurement procedures of the related equipment as soon as possible so that students concerned could be benefited early.

12. The QEF will calculate disbursement based on the actual expenses incurred. Upon completion of the procurement procedures, schools should submit the following electronic documents through the Communication and Delivery System (CDS) of WebSAMS for funding calculation:

     (i)   "List of Device Purchased and Student Beneficiaries",

     (ii)   copy of the invoice(s) / payment receipt(s) issued by the supplier(s), and

     (iii) copy of proof of students' eligibility.

13. The required funding will normally be disbursed within two months after schools' return of the complete information. If schools need to revise the number of financially needy

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[4] Including the equipment returned by beneficiary students under this Funding Programme (2021/22 school year) when they left the school. Please refer to paragraph 15 for details.

students, they may update the submitted documents and revise the amount of funding required. All participating schools must complete the procurement process and submit the required documents on or before end-April 2023 for funding disbursement and settle payment by the end of the 2022/23 school year. The details of funding disbursement will be issued under a separate cover in due course.

Administrative and Accounting Arrangements of Schools

14.   Participating schools are only allowed to use the funding to pay for expenditure items covered by the Funding Programme and must strictly adhere to the "Quality Education Fund General Guidelines on Staff Administration and Procurement Matters". Participating schools will purchase the required equipment first and receive actual expenses incurred afterwards, and thus deposit of the relevant funding into a designated bank account established for general QEF projects as well as submission of progress reports are not required. Participating schools should validate its expenditure in the Funding Programme and return a financial report covering the period from 1 September 2022 to 30 June 2023 to the ITE Section of the EDB by end-June 2023. Transfer of funding out of the Funding Programme is not allowed. Surplus, if any, could not be carried forward to the next school year. The EDB will claw back unspent funding at the end of the school year based on the financial report provided by the school. For government schools, the unused funding will be lapsed at the end of the school year. In case schools consider it is necessary to provide individual student beneficiaries with equipment of cost being higher than the maximum funding level, schools could use other grants or non-government funding to cover the deficit.

15．   Aided, caput and DSS schools are required to record the loan information of equipment for students in accordance with the "School Administration Guide" and / or other relevant guidelines. Government schools are required to follow the relevant EDB circulars and internal guidelines in recording the loan information. Schools must keep record of the provision of related equipment to needy students. Student beneficiaries must return all the borrowed equipment when they leave schools for various reasons (including graduation, further studies, transfer to another schools, etc.) during the implementation period of the Funding Programme. Schools should arrange to lend the returned equipment to newly eligible students and also notify the ITE Section of the EDB to update the records of the student beneficiaries.

16.   Participating schools are required to compile a separate ledger account to record all income and expenditure chargeable to the Funding Programme. Aided (including special schools), caput and DSS schools should observe the requirements as stipulated in the relevant EDB circulars and letters calling for preparation and submission of audited annual accounts. For government schools, the funding will be disbursed in the form of an allocation, and the expenditure should be charged to a designated deposit account.

17.   Participating schools are subject to the monitoring by the QEF. Schools can also conduct self-evaluation on the implementation of e-learning based on the spirit of school-based management. The ITE Section of the EDB will conduct a "Survey on Information Technology in Education" at an appropriate time. Schools should actively share their self-evaluation results on e-learning and the implementation of the Funding Programme.

18.   A working timetable summarising the relevant tasks for schools joining the Funding Programme in the 2022/23 school year is attached at **Annex I** for reference. Besides, schools should properly keep all official invoices, payment vouchers and ledgers related to the Funding Programme as well as record of provision of equipment to students, including name list and verification documents, for seven years after the completion of the Funding Programme for examination purpose.

19.   Upon completion of the three-year Funding Programme, participating schools should handle the purchased equipment in accordance with the "School Administration Guide" and other relevant guidelines. In general, participating schools should give priority on continued deployment of the equipment for e-learning, including lending the equipment to other students in need. Participating schools are required to keep a separate "Assets Register" to record all assets purchased under the Funding Programme.

Submission of Application and Enquiry

20.   Schools interested in participating in the Funding Programme are required to submit the completed Application Form by mail to the following address or by fax at 2382 4403 or 2382 6551:

    ITE Section, the Education Bureau
    Room E420, EDB Kowloon Tong Education Services Centre
    19 Suffolk Road, Kowloon

21.   ITE Section of the EDB will organise identical online briefing sessions on the Funding Programme on 24 June and 30 June 2022. Schools are invited to nominate representatives to attend the briefing sessions and enroll through the Training Calendar System (TCS) [Course ID: EI0020220319]. Schools can visit the website https://www.edb.gov.hk/ited/qeffp to obtain more information including frequently asked questions, information leaflet, and relevant reference documents. For enquiries, please contact the ITE Section of the EDB at 3698 4149 or 3698 3670.

                                    (Ms Wendy Au)
                              for Permanent Secretary for Education

c.c. Heads of Sections – for information

Quality Education Fund e-Learning Funding Programme—
Provision of Mobile Computer Devices and Internet Services Support

Working Timetable for the 2022/23 School Year

Task	Period	Remarks
(i) Returning the Application Form	From June 2022 to **31 January 2023**	The ITE Section will normally send acknowledgement to schools within seven working days upon the receipt of the application.
(ii) Conducting the procurement exercise	School-based arrangement	All procurement procedures should be completed by April 2023, and payment must be settled within the 2022/23 school year.
(iii) Returning information of devices purchased and beneficiaries	From September 2022 to **end-April 2023**	A template will be provided by the EDB for schools to input the information through CDS of WebSAMS.
(iv) Disbursing funding	Normally within two months after completion of (iii)	
(v) Returning financial report	June 2023	Based on the financial report, the EDB will claw back any unspent funding by the end of the school year.
(vi) Returning the annual audited accounts	In accordance with the requirements as stated in relevant circular memorandums issued by the EDB on requesting schools to submit annual audited accounts (2022/23 school year)	Applicable to Aided (including Special schools), Caput and DSS schools.

Quality Education Fund e-Learning Funding Programme－
Provision of Mobile Computer Devices and Internet Services Support (2022/23 School Year)

Application Form
(Please return on or before 31 January 2023 by fax or by mail)

To: IT in Educaiton Section, Education Bureau (Fax no.: 2382 4403 / 2382 6551)

Please fill in all information in block letter, put a ✓ in the appropriate box and delete whichever is inapplicable where marked with *****

Part A: School Particulars

School Name:

School Code: ☐☐☐☐☐☐

School Type: ☐ Primary ☐ Secondary ☐ Special

Finance Type: ☐ Government ☐ Aided ☐ Caput
☐ Direct Subsidy Scheme

School Contact: Tel: Fax: Email:

Person In-charge: Name (English): *Mr/Ms

Name (Chinese): Post Title:

Tel: Email:

Part B: Estimate the Number of Newly Eligible Student Beneficaries in the 2022/23 School Year

[Please provide the estimated number of newly eligible student beneficiaries for the 2022/23 school year (Do NOT include students who have already benefited from the CCF Assistance Programme or this Funding Programme in/after the 2020/21 school year), for reference by the EDB. The actual subsidy would be calculated based on the finalized "List of Device Purchased and Student Beneficiaries" and proof document provided by schools.]

(1) Mobile Computer Devices

	Class Level / No. of Classes / Estimated No. of Newly Eligible Student Beneficaries
• Class level implementing e-learning	☐ P1 ☐ P2 ☐ P3 ☐ P4 ☐ P5 ☐ P6 ☐ S1 ☐ S2 ☐ S3 ☐ S4 ☐ S5 ☐ S6
• No. of participating classes	
• No. of newly eligible student beneficiaries receiving the "Comprehensive Social Security Assistance" in the 2022/23 school year	
• No. of newly eligible student beneficiaries receiving the "School Textbook Assistance Scheme" in the 2022/23 school year	

(2) Internet Equipment

☐   My school **will** apply for "Additional Funding" for purchasing portable WiFi routers and / or mobile data cards for needy students who are unable to acquire appropriate Internet services due to the constraints in their living environment, and the no. of students is about _____.

Part C: Undertaking

My school will implement the Funding Programme in accordance with the EDB Circular Memorandum No. 86/2022, and undertakes the followings:

- We will implement a blended mode of learning and teaching to meet students' learning needs under the "new normal" in the 2022/23 school year, as well as purchase mobile computer devices and related equipment for loan to financially needy students;

- We have established/will establish "Acceptable Use Policy"[1] and will strive to enhance students' information literacy, develop their relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes so that they can use IT effectively and responsibly for e-learning; and

- We will conduct procurement to benefit students as early as possible, and we will submit the required documents by end-April 2023 for funding disbursement.

Signature of Principal   : _____

Name of Principal (English)   : *Mr/Ms_____

Name of Principal (Chinese)   : _____

Date   : _____

School Chop

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[1]   "Acceptable Use Policy" is a policy for governing students' use of mobile computer device, wireless network and information, listing out acceptable and unacceptable acts.