

Gifted Education Fund
Application for Funding Support to Provide
Off-school Advanced Learning Programmes for Gifted Students

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

Priority Themes

1. Q: What is meant by off-school advanced learning programmes?
A: Off-school advanced learning programmes refer to off-school education programmes designed to expose gifted students to high quality and challenging learning experiences in their areas of talent or, where suitable, in a wider range of disciplines or even across disciplines.

2. Q: What are the priority themes for programmes to be organised this year?
A: Priority consideration will be given to applicant organisations with proposals under one or more of the following four themes:
 - (a) STEAM-related Mentorship Programmes
 - (b) Humanities and Social Science Research Programmes
 - (c) Apprenticeship and Entrepreneurship Programmes
 - (d) Self-initiated Research Studies

3. Q: What are the objectives of above priority themes?
A: The objectives of the four priority themes are as follows:
 - (a) STEAM-related Mentorship Programmes
 - To equip gifted students with the essential knowledge and skills in STEAM-related fields to facilitate future advanced research studies or pursuit of related career.
 - (b) Humanities and Social Science Research Programmes
 - To engage gifted students in research-based social sciences projects and equip them with the essential knowledge and skills in social sciences research.
 - (c) Apprenticeship and Entrepreneurship Programmes
 - To provide gifted students authentic work experience at large corporates to gain professional knowledge and experiences under the joint efforts of the post-secondary institution and the business sector.
 - To provide gifted students collaborative learning experiences as a team and to equip them with the knowledge and skills in setting up and running a business.
 - To develop gifted students' creativity and problem solving skills through challenging contexts.
 - (d) Self-initiated Research Studies
 - To provide personalised learning opportunities to gifted students who will conduct research under mentorship and support in areas of their interest to develop the competence and habit of self-directed learning.

Apart from developing the knowledge and skills of students, the designed programmes should also nurture their values and attitudes. It would be desirable to include elements of affective education of gifted students in the programmes.

4. Q: Can applicant organisations submit applications beyond the priority themes?
A: The coverage of the present priority themes is sufficiently wide. The applicant organisations should propose programmes that best match the specified priority theme(s). A programme can be cross-disciplinary and cover more than one priority theme.
5. Q: Can applicant organisations submit applications based on their existing programmes that happen to cover the priority themes?
A: Apart from proposing completely new programmes, applicant organisations can renew/revamp existing programmes that cover the priority themes and apply for funding support to run the programmes. However, precautions have to be taken to avoid the issue of double subsidy. Relevant history of the programmes has to be clearly mentioned in the paper application form (GEForm_2023) **or** electronic application form (eForm_91).

Target beneficiary

6. Q: Are students from private/ international schools eligible for joining the off-school advanced learning programmes?
A: All students, as at the date of application, studying in secondary day-schools, primary schools (including public sector schools, Direct Subsidy Scheme schools, English Schools Foundation schools, private schools) are eligible to join the off-school advanced learning programmes. However, students of evening schools, students of private studies, holders of student visa for entry into Hong Kong for studies and holders of Form of Recognizance issued by the Immigration Department are ineligible for the programmes.
7. Q: How are the students selected for joining the off-school advanced learning programmes?
A: The Education Bureau will inform local primary and secondary schools about the programmes via circular memorandum. Programme information and application form are also available from the webpage “Gifted Education Fund: Off-school Advanced Learning Programmes (current school year)” (https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/curriculum-area/gifted/ge_fund/gef/asp.html). Schools will be requested to identify and nominate gifted students to apply for the programmes. Parents or guardians can also help their children to apply for the programme(s). In the latter case, schools are only required to acknowledge the application. The successful applicant organisations would each propose a selection mechanism and confirm the eligibility/suitability of the students to participate in the programmes after studying the application forms and the supporting documents/ arranging a short test/ conducting an interview with the students.

8. Q: What is the medium of instruction for the off-school advanced learning programmes?
A: The allowable medium of instruction is English or Chinese. The applicant organisations should state clearly in the paper application form (GEForm_2023) **or** electronic application form (eForm_91) the medium of instruction adopted for the programme material and the class teaching/ discussion respectively. The applicant organisations are reminded to observe the medium of instruction commonly used for primary education and secondary education in Hong Kong when it proposes a programme for gifted students in relevant Key Stage¹.

Application-related Issues

9. Q: Which types of organisations are eligible to submit applications for funding support to provide off-school advanced learning programmes for gifted students?
A: Organisations eligible to apply for funding support from the Gifted Education Fund to offer the programmes include:
(a) Post-secondary institutions (including related faculties, departments, centres, etc. or staff with proven support from respective unit of post-secondary institution)
(b) Non-government organisations (NGOs)
(c) Professional bodies
(d) Technology enterprises
10. Q: Does the Gifted Education Fund support applications that involve collaboration among several eligible organisations?
A: An applicant organisation may submit an application on its own or in collaboration with other eligible organisation(s), if appropriate. Programmes that involve one or more supporting organisation(s) would foster collaboration among organisations of different backgrounds in developing learning and teaching activities that have wide coverage of subject areas or offer cross-disciplinary learning/ research opportunities useful for broadening the perspectives of gifted students.
11. Q: What languages should be used in the programme proposals?
A: The applicant organisations can submit their programme proposals in Chinese or English.
12. Q: What is the maximum number of applications an applicant organisation can submit in each year?
A: There is no limit on the number of applications to be submitted by each applicant organisation every year.
13. Q: What is the expected duration of a proposed programme?

¹ Key Stage refers to the 4 stages of schooling from primary to secondary: Key Stage 1 (junior primary P1-P3), Key Stage 2 (senior primary P4-P6), Key Stage 3 (junior secondary S1-S3) and Key Stage 4 (senior secondary S4-S6) [extracted from the Basic Education Curriculum Guide - To Sustain, Deepen and Focus on Learning to Learn (Primary 1 - 6)]

A: In general, the delivery period of the proposed programme should last from 6 to 9 months. In addition, a preparation period of at most 3 months should be arranged beforehand for the preparation work.

According to prevailing practice, the successful applicant organisation would sign a service agreement with the Grantor in January. Preparation work including recruitment of training staff and enrolment/ selection of student participants would be conducted from February to April. As such, the programme would commence in May at the earliest.

14. Q: What should applicant organisations take note of when designing a programme?

A: The applicant organisations should have a thorough understanding of the policy and the development of gifted education in Hong Kong in order to formulate insightful programme proposals that best meet the needs of gifted students. The proposed programmes should not only focus on the knowledge and skills but also the values education and the affective development of the students.

The programme objectives should be clearly stated and the implementation strategies have to match the set objectives. Being far more demanding than those usually found in ordinary enrichment programmes, the designed learning and teaching activities should be of sufficient challenge to the gifted students. Individualised learning is a special feature of off-school advanced learning programmes and mentorship needs to be available to provide learning support to the students and cater for learner diversity. Besides, appropriate opportunities need to be in place for students to showcase their learning outcomes/ deliverables. To protect the environment, printing booklets to document/ showcase students' work should be avoided.

A detailed programme rundown and a clear budget plan with justifications on each item should be provided in the application form. The applicant organisations should also elaborate, in the programme proposal, on the qualifications and expertise of all members in the training team.

15. Q: Would collaboration with overseas scholars or professionals be allowed in the applications?

A: To allow flexibility and creativity in the design of the programmes, the applicant organisations may propose to collaborate with overseas scholars/ professionals in their applications. Should the required expertise/ experience be available locally, the applicant organisations are advised to work with local professionals as far as possible. The applicant organisations should provide strong justifications on the genuine need to collaborate with overseas scholars/ professionals for the benefit of the student participants and state clearly the expertise and the roles of overseas scholars/ professionals in the proposals for consideration by the Advisory Committee on Gifted Education.

The applicant organisations should also provide a clear breakdown in the budget plan to indicate the cost of overseas collaboration. No more than 50% of the budget should be allocated to overseas organisations/ professionals.

16. Q: What are the criteria for assessing the programme proposals?
- A: Programme proposals will be assessed in accordance with, but not limited to, the criteria under three areas, viz. programme needs, programme feasibility and expected programme outcomes. The programme proposals must strive to meet the criteria in all the three areas. A conceptual framework, an implementation plan with realistic timeline and a detailed budget plan with detailed breakdown of expenditure items as well as clear justifications should be provided. More details can be found in the Guide to Applicants on the website of Application for Funding Support to Provide Off-school Advanced Learning Programmes for Gifted Students (https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/curriculum-area/gifted/ge_fund/gef/asp.html).
17. Q: What is the maximum amount of funding support available to each successful application?
- A: As the nature, duration, frequency of meetings, etc. of each proposed programme varies, we do not set a ceiling on the amount of funding support for each successful application. The applicant organisations need to provide sufficient evidence in the proposal and the budget plan to justify the amount of funding support that they have applied for. The Gifted Education Fund Secretariat will contact the applicant organisations concerned for clarifications if necessary.
18. Q: How do successful applicant organisations receive the funding support?
- A: For successful applications, funding would be paid by phases in accordance with the payment schedule set out in the service agreement to be signed between the successful applicant organisation and the Grantor of the Gifted Education Fund. The funding allotted will only cover expenses incurred during the period between the commencement date and the end date of the programme stipulated in the service agreement.
19. Q: How is the salary rate of staff employed for a programme determined?
- A: Some programmes may require the employment of short-term or part-time staff to carry out duties specific to the programme and their pay rates are calculated on a time-on-programme basis. The salary should be commensurate with the qualifications and experience of the staff to be appointed. The Advisory Committee on Gifted Education will assess the pay rates for appointment of staff proposed by an applicant organisation in the budget plan. Strong justifications need to be provided for the appointment of staff at higher pay rates.
20. Q: Can programme leader receive any salary or remuneration from the programme?
- A: Normally, the applicant organisation shall appoint a programme leader to oversee and lead the programme. No award in the form of cash allowance to this person for whichever capacit(ies) he/ she may carry in the programme is permitted. Should the normal duties of the programme leader be affected because of implementing the programme such as

serving as an instructor/ a mentor, instead of awarding cash allowance as remuneration to the programme leader, consideration should be given to redistributing or assigning his/ her duties to other staff members.

21. Q: Does it allow payment of administrative charges to post-secondary institutions funded by the University Grants Committee?

A: For programmes submitted by post-secondary institutions funded by the University Grants Committee, the applicant organisations may include administrative charges to be paid to the post-secondary institution in the budget plan with justifications and breakdown for consideration by the Advisory Committee on Gifted Education.

22. Q: Does it allow provision of fringe benefits (e.g. Mandatory Provident Fund contribution, medical and dental insurance, gratuity, untaken leave payment, etc.) to the programme staff?

A: All programme personnel, if employed on a full-time basis, should be remunerated on a fixed salary point during the whole programme period. In normal circumstances, salary increment is not allowed. Fringe benefits of staff, e.g. education allowance, medical and dental insurance, etc., should not be included in or charged to the programme. Terms of employment should be specified in accordance with the Employment Ordinance, Employees' Compensation Ordinance and, where applicable, the Mandatory Provident Fund Schemes Ordinance.

23. Q: Can applicant organisations include the audit fee in the budget?

A: For grant exceeding HK\$100,000, the Grantee is required to submit audited accounts upon completion of the programme. Therefore, the applicant organisations may include the audit fee in the budget plan for consideration by the Advisory Committee on Gifted Education.

24. Q: Is there any expenditure that would not be supported by the Gifted Education Fund ?

A: The applicant organisations should determine allowable costs for their programmes according to the general principles as follows:

- (a) The cost is in accordance with the terms and conditions stipulated in the service agreement;
- (b) The cost is incurred within the ambit and the scope of the approved budget;
- (c) The cost is incurred within the programme period;
- (d) The cost is necessarily incurred for the purposes for which the Gifted Education Fund is provided;
- (e) The cost is reasonable and accords with the principles of sound financial management, in particular in terms of value for money and cost-effectiveness; and
- (f) The cost is actually and provably spent. It is adequately documented by accounting records and documents such as invoices, receipts, payroll records, timesheets, etc.

Costs such as expenses for rates, renovation, entertainment and prizes, food, insurance premiums (except for public liability insurance and/or group personal accident insurance in special circumstances with strong justifications), etc. would not be allowed.

Rights and Commitments of a Successful Applicant Organisation

25. Q: Can a successful applicant organisation collect additional fees such as travel fees for visits, handouts, insurance, etc. from the student participants?

A: A successful applicant organisation is not allowed to collect additional fees from the student participants. They should carefully plan the programme activities and include all necessary fees in the budget plan submitted along with the proposal.

26. Q: Is there any minimum enrolment for a programme to proceed?

A: The demand of off-school advanced programmes for gifted students remains high and small-class teaching is encouraged to cater for learner diversity. There is no minimum enrolment for a programme to proceed at the moment. However, successful applicant organisations are expected to have networks with local primary/ secondary schools and play an active role in promoting the programmes to schools/ parents.

27. Q: What are the commitments of a successful applicant organisation?

A: A successful applicant organisation will be required to sign a service agreement with the Grantor. The service agreement will set out in details the conditions of the funding support. The successful applicant organisation will be required to play an active role in assuring the quality of the programme. A quality assurance mechanism needs to be included in the proposal and the detailed implementation plan for consideration by the Advisory Committee on Gifted Education.

28. Q: What reports need to be submitted by a successful applicant organisation for its programme?

A: A successful applicant organisation is required to submit reports according to the arrangement and schedule stipulated in the service agreement with the Grantor. General requirement is as follows:

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| Submission of progress report(s) | 1 st progress report: six months after signing of the service agreement 2 nd progress report: one year after signing of the service agreement |
| Submission of interim financial report(s) | Every six months after signing of the service agreement |
| Submission of final report | Submission of final report and final financial report at the end of the programme |
| Submission of final financial report | |

29. Q: Does a successful applicant organisation need to return the unused fund, if any, upon the

completion of the programme?

A: Upon completion of the programme, a successful applicant organisation is required to return the unused fund, if any, to the Gifted Education Fund Secretariat.

In case of any inconsistency or ambiguity between the English version and the Chinese version of this document, the English version shall prevail.

Gifted Education Fund Secretariat

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