

# **Provision of Consultancy Services for the Review of the Continuing Education Fund**

## **Report**

**Submitted by**

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## Executive Summary

### Review objectives

1. The objective of the consultancy services is to summarize, analyse and provide observations on the views gauged through
  - a) A **literature review** of the schemes aiming at encouraging continuous learning in the foreign economies with a frame of relevance to Hong Kong;
  - b) Various **focus groups** of the CEF and potential CEF stakeholders and the general public; and
  - c) Data obtained from a survey on a representative sample of CEF applicants, claimants and other learners.

with a view to facilitating the Government to introduce improvements to the CEF on the *scope, operation* and the *future development* of the scheme, including but not limited to the *domains* of CEF courses, *level of assistance, application eligibility and procedures* (in particular the requirement for opening CEF accounts before the commencement of CEF courses, the number of claims can be submitted, the time limit for submitting reimbursement claims and the upper age limit), *quality assurance* of CEF courses and *safeguards of applicants' interest*, etc.

### Methodology

2. The review comprises a *literature review* on the schemes with the objective of promoting continuous learning in 5 economies with a frame of relevance to Hong Kong in order to establish reference points for the changes that may need to be made to the CEF. Economies included are Canada, Finland, Macau, Singapore and South Korea.
3. The review also covers the gathering of views on related issues from the general public and the CEF and potential CEF stakeholders through *focus groups* discussions and in-depth interviews. The duration of the focus group is around 1 hour. The CEF and potential CEF stakeholders include the following 11 groups of stakeholders. A total of 250 stakeholders were enumerated through focus group discussions and in-depth interview.

Stakeholder groups	No. of stakeholders
a) Applicants	40
b) Claimants	49
c) Other learners	22
d) Employers of claimants	10
e) Employers in general	10
f) Employees in general	30
g) Elderly persons	28
h) NGOs for elderly persons	25

i) CEF course providers	14
j) Non-CEF course providers	19
k) Others	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>

4. In addition, a user survey has been conducted on a representative sample of people who have applied for opening the CEF accounts (i.e. the applicants), people who have applied for claiming the CEF subsidies (claimants) and people who have not applied for opening the CEF accounts (other learners). A total of 600 applicants, 542 claimants and 1002 other learners were enumerated.

## Study findings

### *Implementation of CEF*

#### *Promoting CEF*

5. The user survey findings show that most learners who have not applied for CEF are aware of CEF. Among those who knew about CEF, a higher proportion was of the younger or more educated groups. Apparently, efforts made in the past to promote CEF to potential learners are quite effective, and the effectiveness is greater for potential learners who are younger or more educated. While education institutions have helped promote CEF to applicants and claimants, newspapers and magazines, the social media and words of mouth have played a major role in promoting CEF to other learners.
6. Nevertheless, most stakeholders are of the view that the government should step up publicity of the CEF, targeting in particular elderly persons as well as employers.

#### *Eligibility and procedures*

7. From study findings reviewed above, it is evident that more than half of applicants and claimants consider the current age limit, total number of claims and the validity period are appropriate. The majority of applicants and claimants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the maximum subsidy limit being set at \$10,000. This view was shared by CEF course providers and non-CEF course providers, employers of claimants and other employers in general. It was suggested that the maximum subsidy limit should be revised upward based on objective criteria such as the inflation rate. On the other hand, amongst the interviewed groups, social workers of elderly centres found the subsidy limit sufficient, as elderly persons are mainly interested in attending interest classes with lower course fees. Needless to say, there is always a trade-off on whether maintaining the existing subsidy limit such that a greater number of learners can benefit for a given amount of money or

increasing the maximum subsidy limit such that the benefit accrued to individual claimants will be greater. The latter inevitably leads to additional financial provision.

8. In addition, both applicants and claimants agreed with the application procedures in various aspects including the requirement of opening of the CEF accounts and the eligibility of claim reimbursement. It was nevertheless suggested that measures like the use of electronic submission of applications should be adopted to facilitate both applicants and claimants.

#### *Quality assurance*

9. The user survey findings show that both applicants and claimants are satisfied with the existing quality assurance measures such as the requirement that all new CEF courses must be accredited by the HKCAAVQ, that all CEF course details should be uploaded to the CEF homepage, that CEF course fees must be paid on a monthly basis with the same amount every month, that institutions operating the CEF courses must follow the CEF's refund policy and that the CEF will undertake surprise inspections on the training institutions. They consider these measures are capable or very capable of protecting the interests of students.
10. Nevertheless, concerns are expressed over some practices of some course providers such as the bundling of several courses such that the claimants have to complete the entire bundle of courses before allowing them to apply for reimbursements, higher course fees compared with similar non-CEF courses, the quality of instructors and the quality of CEF courses in the eight domains not accredited by HKCAAVQ.

#### *Reasons for not applying for CEF*

11. It may be of interest to note the user survey findings show that most learners who are not aware of the CEF do not consider applying for CEF because they are not aware of the procedures for applying for CEF. For those who are aware of the CEF, they do not apply for the CEF for a variety of reasons including no urgent need, too busy and no knowledge of the application procedures.

#### *Impact of CEF*

##### *Expectation*

12. The user survey shows that the majority of applicants and claimants hoped that studying CEF courses would help equip themselves better, enhance their competence for coping with the needs of current and future job and enhance their work-related knowledge. Apparently, they were of the view that CEF courses prepared them for employment.

### *Perceived impact*

13. It may be worth noting from the user survey findings that the majority of applicants and claimants are of the view that the CEF has allowed them to take the courses they have longed to study. Most of them agreed that the CEF has helped them improve their knowledge and skills, and such views are shared by employers of claimants and other employers in general.

### ***Needs and demand for continuing education***

#### *Needs for continuing education: changes in job requirements*

14. The user survey findings show that less than half of applicants and claimants who are employed indicate that there is no change in requirement in work place related knowledge and skills. This transpires that more than half of applicants and claimants who are employed are of the view that there is a change in requirement for the above-mentioned knowledge and skills. This may explain why the applicants and claimants are taking advantage of the CEF to help them pursuing continuing education.
15. Furthermore, more than 10% of applicants and claimants who are employed are of the view that they are incapable or very incapable of adapting to the requirement for more knowledge about Mainland China and for a better global perspective.
16. A number of salient points may be observed from the above analysis by contrasting the views of applicants and claimants on the one hand and other learners on the others, and by comparing the views on changes in requirements for different work place related knowledge and skills. These observations are summarized below-
  - a) A higher proportion of applicants and claimants are of the view that there is a change in requirement for different work place related knowledge and skills, compared to other learners;
  - b) For most work place related knowledge and skills reviewed above, the proportion of applicants and claimants who consider they are incapable or very incapable of adapting to the changes in requirements is higher than that of other learners, with the exception of changes in requirement for higher occupational skills;
  - c) Among the various work place related knowledge and skills discussed above, a relatively higher proportion of applicants, claimants and other learners considered that they were incapable or very incapable of adapting to changes in requirement for a better global perspective and more knowledge about Mainland China.

In other words, the CEF are helping those who are more in need of upgrading themselves to adapt to changes in work place requirements.

### *Measures of employers to encourage employees' pursuit of continuing education*

17. The more common measures are in-house training, financial subsidy for training courses/further education and flexible work arrangements for studying training courses/further education. About 30% of applicants, 35% of claimants and 51% of other learners who were employed indicated that their employers did not have any arrangement to encourage them to pursue continuing education.

### *Continuing education undertaken*

18. The user survey findings show that only about 13% of other learners who have not applied for CEF have attended continuing education courses in the past 12 months prior to the interview. Their main reasons for doing so are all work place related, which include “to enhance work-related knowledge”, “to ensure competence for coping with the needs of current or future job” and “to equip myself better”.
19. In addition, for these learners, the courses they have undertaken are all covered by the existing CEF domains or are areas related to SCS-related courses covered by the CEF, with the exception of personal health.

### *Future interests in pursuing continuing education*

20. The user survey findings show that while less than half of applicants and claimants indicate that they are planning to pursue continuing education and training in the coming 12 months, more than half of other learners are planning to do so in the coming 12 months. Apart from the eight domains and SCS-related courses covered by the CEF, a significant proportion of applicants, claimants and other learners have interests in courses related to personal healthcare (3%, 7% and 11% respectively).
21. In addition, in determining which domains of study should be included or excluded from the CEF, more than half of applicants and claimants have suggested to take into account “provide added-value to the students or can improve the overall standard of skills of individual industries”, “respond to changes in occupational skill requirements”, “help to develop new industries” and “follow closely with Hong Kong society's needs and its financial development, so as to co-ordinate with the changes in its economic structure”.

### *Suggested domains to be included in the CEF*

22. Views have been gathered from claimants, other learners who have not applied for CEF as well as course providers on new domains to be included in the CEF. Their views, together with demonstrated demand based on the



types of courses attended by applicants, claimants and other learners who have not applied for CEF, are summarized in the table below.

	User survey			Focus group discussions		
	Applicants	Claimants	Other learners	Claimants	Other learners	Course providers
ICT and multimedia	√	√	√			√
Health care	√	√	√	√		√
Occupational safety						√
Food safety						√
Early childhood education						√
Home repairs and maintenance				√		
Arts and culture				√		√
Sign language and braille				√		
Horticulture				√	√	√
Environmental studies				√	√	√
Testing and certification						√

### *Continuing education for the elderly*

23. According to views of social workers of elderly centres and elderly persons consulted in the study, there are mainly three types of continuing education courses organized for the elderly, namely training related such as language courses, interest related and physical exercise related. Many of these courses are subsidized by the government such as courses operated under the Adult Education Subvention Scheme and the Elder Academy Scheme administered by the Labour and Welfare Bureau. Due to limited funding and venue, courses organized by elderly centres are usually pitched at elementary level.
24. Furthermore, elderly persons usually prefer to attend interest classes rather than courses that are employment linked. They do not like to take examinations. They do not want to tie up with a course which extends over a long period of time (say 6 months) and requires regular attendance on a weekly if not daily basis.
25. Courses suggested to be organized for the elderly include financial management, travel and tourism, art and craft such as painting, photography, Chinese calligraphy and dancing, language, healthcare, Chinese medicine, beauty care, babysitting and elderly care services.

### **Recommendations**

26. *To sum up from the above discussion, it is recommended that the upper age limit of the CEF be raised from 65 to 70.*
27. *It is recommended to include three new domains in the CEF, namely health care, ICT and environmental studies.*

28. *It is recommended that measures should be taken, leveraging on information and communication technology, to streamline the application procedures, with a view to facilitate applicants and claimants on the one hand and course providers on the other.*
29. *It is recommended that the government should step up monitoring the practices of CEF course providers and the quality of CEF courses. Consideration should be given to establish a mechanism for allowing CEF applicants and claimants to provide feedbacks on the CEF.*
30. *It is recommended that the government should step up efforts in promoting the CEF through the mass media and social media, targeting in particular elderly persons and employers. It is recommended that the focus of future promotion activities should be placed on explaining more clearly to the public the procedures for applying for CEF and in promoting to employers the importance of continuing education for their employees.*
31. *In view of the positive impact of the CEF, it is recommended that the government should continue to inject funding to the CEF so as to provide the financial incentive in motivating people to pursue continuing education.*
32. *On the premise that continuing education is essential to individuals in order to help them cope with changing job requirements, it is recommended that in the spirit of continuing education the government should review the maximum subsidy limit, in order to motivate more individuals to continue to pursue continuing education. Consideration should also be given to revise the maximum subsidy limit taking into account inflation such that the “purchasing power” of the CEF subsidy is maintained.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Review objectives

- 1.1 The objective of the consultancy services is to summarize, analyse and provide observations on the views gauged through
- a) A **literature review** of the schemes aiming at encouraging continuous learning in the foreign economies with a frame of relevance to Hong Kong;
  - b) Various **focus group** of the CEF and potential CEF stakeholders and the general public; and
  - c) Data obtained from a survey on a representative sample of CEF applicants and claimants and other learners

with a view to facilitating the Government to introduce improvements to the CEF on the *scope, operation* and the *future development* of the scheme, including but not limited to the *domains* of CEF courses, *level of assistance, application eligibility and procedures* (in particular the requirement for opening CEF accounts before the commencement of CEF courses, the number of claims can be submitted, the time limit for submitting reimbursement claims and the upper age limit), *quality assurance* of CEF courses and *safeguards of applicants' interest*, etc.

### Scope of the review

- 1.2 The scope of the review is to conduct a *literature review* on the schemes with the objective of promoting continuous learning in 5 economies with a frame of relevance to Hong Kong in order to establish reference points for the changes that may need to be made to the CEF. Economies included are Canada, Finland, Macau, Singapore and South Korea.
- 1.3 The review also covers the gathering of views on related issues from the general public and the CEF and potential CEF stakeholders through *focus groups* discussions and in-depth interviews. The duration of the focus group is around 1 hour. The CEF and potential CEF stakeholders include the following 11 groups of stakeholders:
- a) People who have applied for opening the CEF accounts;
  - b) People who have applied for claiming the CEF subsidies;
  - c) People who have not applied for opening the CEF accounts;
  - d) Employers of the people who have applied for claiming the CEF subsidies;
  - e) Employers in general;
  - f) Employees in general;
  - g) Elderly persons (aged 60 or above);
  - h) Non-government organisations for elderly persons;

- i) CEF course providers; and
- j) Course providers in general.
- k) Others

1.4 In addition, a user survey has been conducted on a representative sample of people who have applied for opening the CEF accounts (i.e. the applicants), people who have applied for claiming the CEF subsidies (claimants) and people who have not applied for opening the CEF accounts (other learners).

### **Organization of the report**

1.5 As findings of the literature have been presented in a separate report, this report will only present findings of the user survey. Nevertheless, in drawing up recommendations for the review, reference is made to the relevant practices in other countries. For in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, a summary of views provided by individual stakeholders is presented in this report together with quantitative data collected from the user survey under relevant sections. The report is organized into the following sections.

- a) Introduction ;
- b) Methodology;
- c) Implementation of CEF;
- d) Impact of CEF;
- e) Needs and Demand for continuing education;
- f) Observations and recommendations.

## 2. METHDODOLOGY

### 2.1 In-depth interviews and focus group discussions

#### *General approach*

- 2.1.1 Conducting focus group discussions is very much different from the face-to-face or telephone interviews in questionnaire surveys. A focus group discussion is not to seek definitive response from individual respondents, following the sequence dictated by the interviewer based a pre-designed structured or semi-structured questionnaire. Instead, the role of the moderator in a focus group discussion is to encourage the respondents' response to a particular topic and to elicit their thinking, attitudes and ideas on the issue. The purpose is not to reach a consensus in a focus group, but rather to encourage the respondents to express different points of view.<sup>1</sup>
- 2.1.2 Thus, it is essential that the moderator should avoid, during the discussion, putting forward his own thinking on the subject matter, or trying to guide the group towards a particular direction, or worse still, conclusion. In summarizing the findings of the discussion, the moderator should also avoid letting his own thinking on the subject matter affects the reporting. Indeed, some researchers even raised concern on possible biases introduced if the moderator shared the professional culture of the discussants or an expert in the field under study.<sup>2</sup>
- 2.1.3 The following procedure was adopted in conducting the focus group discussions:<sup>3</sup>
- a) At the beginning of discussion, the moderator will try to warm up the group by going through the purposes of the discussion. He would have to ensure anonymity of opinions expressed by respondents to encourage better response;
  - b) Then the moderator will proceed to the list of issues to be raised for discussion. The Moderator should try to start with the less threatening and more general ones and then proceed to the more specific, more difficult and controversial ones. The moderator should also try to encourage discussion among the respondents as far as possible;
  - c) During the course of discussion, the moderator has to ensure that the list of issues required to be discussed are covered in the discussion;
  - d) At the end of the discussion, the moderator will try to re-confirm the opinions of different respondents on the various issues raised during the

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<sup>1</sup> Vaughan, Sharon et al. (1996), *Focus Group interviews in education and psychology*, pg.5.

<sup>2</sup> Twohig, Peter L and Putnam, Wayne (2002), "Group interview in primary care research: advancing the state of art or ritualized research", in *Family practice*, 19(3): 278 – 284.

<sup>3</sup> Vaughan, Sharon (1996) and Steward, David et al. (1990), *Focus groups, theory and practice*.

discussion, to ensure that any changes of minds at the course of discussion would be reflected.

- 2.1.4 To facilitate the discussants and interviewees, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were held in different parts of Hong Kong (e.g. Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and NT) in venues easily accessible, especially for applicants and claimants of CEF, members of the public, employees in general and elderly persons, or in venues of trade associations especially for employers. At least 15 *focus groups* (with each focus group catering for 10 – 15 participants) were conducted. The duration of the focus group was not less than an hour.

### ***Selection of interviewees and discussants***

#### *Those who have applied for opening CEF accounts*

- 2.1.5 Although a representative sample is not required for focus group discussions, it is essential that focus group participants come from a diverse background, such that the issues can be approached from multiple perspectives. The following information was used to facilitate selection of participants:

- a) Demographic characteristics of the applicants such as age and sex;
- b) Educational background, if available;

- 2.1.6 Based on the information provided, a random stratified sample of applicants was chosen and the sampled applicants were approached to invite them to participate in the discussions. To encourage response, an honorarium was paid to participants to cover say their cost of traveling and other expenses.

#### *Those who have applied for claiming CEF subsidies*

- 2.1.7 Although a representative sample is not required for focus group discussions, it is essential that focus group participants come from a diverse background, such that the issues can be approached from multiple perspectives. The following information was used to facilitate selection of participants:

- a) Demographic characteristics of the applicants such as age and sex;
- b) Educational background, if available;
- c) Particulars on the courses including course types and institutions attended.

- 2.1.8 Based on the information provided, a random stratified sample of claimants was chosen and the sampled claimants were approached to invite them to participate in the discussions. To encourage response, an honorarium was paid to participants to cover say their cost of traveling and other expenses.

*Those who have not applied for opening CEF accounts*

- 2.1.9 Although a representative sample is not required for focus group discussions, it is essential that focus group participants come from a diverse background, such that the issues can be approached from multiple perspectives. Attempts were made, through a snow-balling approach as well as open recruitment through media, to recruit participants from diverse backgrounds. To encourage response, an honorarium was paid to participants to cover say their cost of traveling and other expenses.

*Employers of those who have applied for claiming CEF subsidies*

- 2.1.10 Although a representative sample is not required for focus group discussions, it is essential that focus group participants come from a diverse background, such that the issues can be approached from multiple perspectives. For claimants of CEF subsidies who have provided information on their employers. The following information was used to facilitate selection of participants:

- a) Demographic characteristics of the applicants such as age and sex;
- b) Educational background, if available;
- c) Particulars on the courses including course types and institutions attended;
- d) Industry sectors of employers.

- 2.1.11 Based on the information provided, a stratified random sample of employers was chosen and these sampled employers were approached to invite them to participate in the discussions. To encourage response, the focus group discussions were held as far as possible in venues of trade associations which are easily accessible. As employers were usually busy to attend focus group discussions, individual in-depth interviews were conducted to cover employers unable to participate in focus group discussions.

*Employers in general*

- 2.1.12 Although a representative sample is not required for focus group discussions, it is essential that focus group participants come from a diverse background, such that the issues can be approached from multiple perspectives. For employers in general, the following information will be obtained to facilitate selection of participants:

- a) Number of employers by industry sectors;
- b) Number of employers by employment size.

- 2.1.13 Based on the information provided, a stratified random sample of employers was chosen from a sample of the list of business establishments maintained by the Census & Statistics Department and the sampled establishments were approached to invite them to participate in the discussions. To encourage response, the focus group discussions will be held as far as possible in

venues of trade associations which are easily accessible. As employers were usually busy, individual in-depth interviews were conducted to cover employers unable to participate in focus group discussions.

*Employees in general*

- 2.1.14 Although a representative sample is not required for focus group discussions, it is essential that focus group participants come from a diverse background, such that the issues can be approached from multiple perspectives. Attempts were made using the snow-balling approach to recruit participants from diverse backgrounds. To encourage response, an honorarium was paid to participants to cover say their cost of traveling and other expenses.

*Elderly persons aged 60 or above*

- 2.1.15 Although a representative sample is not required for focus group discussions, it is essential that focus group participants come from a diverse background, such that the issues can be approached from multiple perspectives. Attempts were made, with assistance from NGOs, to recruit participants from diverse backgrounds.

*Non-governmental organizations for the elderly*

- 2.1.16 Although a representative sample is not required for focus group discussions, it is essential that focus group participants come from a diverse background, such that the issues can be approached from multiple perspectives. A list of such organizations was drawn up and sorted by districts, parent organizations and types of services offered. A random sample of these organizations was drawn and the sampled organizations were approached to invite them to participate in the discussions.
- 2.1.17 Several rounds of focus group discussions were conducted in order to cover sufficient number of NGOs from diverse background. As social workers are very busy, individual in-depth interviews were conducted to cover NGOs unable to participate in focus group discussions.

*CEF course providers*

- 2.1.18 Although a representative sample is not required for focus group discussions, it is essential that focus group participants come from a diverse background, such that the issues can be approached from multiple perspectives. A list of such CEF course providers was drawn up and sorted by districts, parent institutions and types of courses offered. A random sample of these organizations was drawn and the sampled providers were approached to invite them to participate in the discussions.



2.1.19 Several rounds of focus group discussions were conducted in order to cover sufficient number of CEF course providers from diverse background. As staff of the providers is usually very busy, individual in-depth interviews were conducted to cover course providers unable to participate in focus group discussions.

*Course providers in general*

2.1.20 Although a representative sample is not required for focus group discussions, it is essential that focus group participants come from a diverse background, such that the issues can be approached from multiple perspectives. A list of providers of continuing education was drawn up and sorted by districts, parent institutions and types of courses offered. A random sample of these organizations was drawn and the sampled organizations were approached to invite them to participate in the discussions.

2.1.21 Several rounds of focus group discussions were conducted in order to cover sufficient number of course providers from diverse background. As staff of course providers are usually busy, individual in-depth interviews were conducted to cover course providers unable to participate in focus group discussions.

***Information gathered during in-depth interviews/focus group discussions***

2.1.22 To facilitate the conduction of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, an interview/discussion guide was drawn up (see [Annex 1](#)). Information items gathered during the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions is summarized below:

- a) Views on the implementation of CEF (e.g. publicity, level of subsidy and eligibility of applicants);
- b) Views on application procedures;
- c) Views on course coverage of CEF; and
- d) Views on quality assurance measures.

***Number of stakeholders consulted***

2.1.23 A total of 250 stakeholders participated in the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. A breakdown of these 250 stakeholders by stakeholder groups is appended below:

<b>Stakeholder groups</b>	<b>No. of stakeholders</b>
a) Applicants	40
b) Claimants	49
c) Other learners	22
d) Employers of claimants	10
e) Employers in general	10
f) Employees in general	30

g) Elderly persons	28
h) NGOs for elderly persons	25
i) CEF course providers	14
j) Non-CEF course providers	19
k) Others	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>

## 2.2 User survey

### *Coverage of the user survey*

- 2.2.1 Applicants and claimants of CEF were covered in the user survey. From their experience applying for CEF, attending CEF continuing education courses and claiming subsidy from CEF, it is believed that CEF applicants and claimants will be able to comment on the CEF application procedures, reasons for attending CEF courses, the domains of CEF they wish to be included in the CEF, the upper age limit and the level of subsidy.
- 2.2.2 In addition, the views of other learners who have not applied for CEF are also useful in shedding light on reasons why some learners do not apply, and their views on upper age limit, the level of subsidy and domains that should be but have not yet been included in the CEF. Thus, a representative sample of other learners was also covered in the survey.

### *Sample design*

#### *CEF applicants*

- 2.2.3 For CEF applicants, only applications in 2014/15 and 2015/16 were covered in the survey, as the respondents are expected to be able to answer questions with sufficient memory about their experience in using CEF and more willing to share their opinions. A stratified random sampling design was adopted for CEF applicants, with the stratification factors being gender, age and whether degree holders. The purpose of the proposed stratification is to find out views of male and female applicants and applicants of different age groups who may have different preferences and needs for continuing education. Similarly, those with degrees and without degrees may also have different preferences and needs for continuing education. Education level may be one of the major factors when a person considers applying CEF, especially those non-degree applicants, they may need to upgrade themselves through CEF. The distribution of applicants approved in 2014/15 and 2015/16 is summarized in the table below<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> The calculation shown in the table below is based on information from Office of Continuing Education Fund.

Age group	Male		Female		Total <sup>5</sup>
	Degree	Non-degree	Degree	Non-degree	
18 – 35	8151	10513	11207	12312	42183
36 – 50	1907	2265	2098	3544	9814
51 - 65	672	1023	589	1371	3655
<b>Total</b>	<b>10730</b>	<b>13801</b>	<b>13894</b>	<b>17227</b>	<b>55652</b>

2.2.4 The survey aims at enumerating at least 600 CEF applicants, with 50 applicants to be enumerated in each stratum. With an effective sample of 600, the precision of estimates derived will be in the region of plus or minus 0.4 percentage point, at 95% confidence and based on simple random sampling. For an effective sample of 50, the precision of estimates derived will be in the region of plus or minus 13.9 percentage points, at 95% confidence and based on simple random sampling. The sample allocation plan is shown below.

Age group	Male		Female		Total
	Degree	Non-degree	Degree	Non-degree	
18 – 35	50	50	50	50	200
36 – 50	50	50	50	50	200
51 - 65	50	50	50	50	200
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>600</b>

2.2.5 This report is based on data obtained from a sample of 600 applicants interviewed so far, accounting for about 100% of the target sample size. The breakdown by gender, age group and education level is shown in the table below. The data are suitably weighted to reflect by the relevant distribution for all applicants as a whole.

Age group	Male		Female		Total
	Degree	Non-degree	Degree	Non-degree	
18 – 35	59	53	66	53	231
36 – 50	48	45	45	53	191
51 - 65	41	44	42	51	178
<b>Total</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>600</b>

### *CEF claimants*

2.2.6 For CEF claimants, only claimants in 2014/15 and 2015/16, are covered in the survey. A stratified random sampling design was adopted for CEF claimants, with the stratification factors being gender and domains of study. The purpose of the proposed stratification is to find out views of male and female claimants and claimants who have attended different types of courses who may have different preferences and needs for continuing education. Compared with general factors such as gender and age, course domain is relatively useful and beneficial to the Study. Through course domains, it

<sup>5</sup> Excluding 3,343 applicants who have not provided information on their educational attainment and 108 applicants who are above the age of 65.

could find out the level of satisfactory of CEF such as the diversity of courses, which is one of the main objectives of the Study. The distribution of claimants approved in 2014/15 and 2015/16 is summarized in the table below.

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Logistics	1845	834	2679
Financial services	5030	5563	10593
Business services	6217	9551	15768
Tourism	882	1837	2719
Languages	3431	8003	11434
Design	2750	2094	4844
Creative industries	757	608	1365
Interpersonal and intrapersonal skills for the workplace	155	85	240
Specification of competency standards	1504	3028	4532
<b>Total</b>	<b>22571</b>	<b>31603</b>	<b>54174</b>

2.2.7 The survey aims at enumerating at least 540 CEF claimants, with 60 claimants to be enumerated for each domain of study. With an effective sample of 540, the precision of estimates derived will be in the region of plus or minus 0.42 percentage point, at 95% confidence and based on simple random sampling. For an effective sample of 60, the precision of estimates derived will be in the region of plus or minus 12.6 percentage points, at 95% confidence and based on simple random sampling. The sample allocation plan is shown below.

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Male*</b>	<b>Female*</b>	<b>Total</b>
Logistics	30	30	60
Financial services	30	30	60
Business services	30	30	60
Tourism	30	30	60
Languages	30	30	60
Design	30	30	60
Creative industries	30	30	60
Interpersonal and intrapersonal skills for the workplace	30	30	60
Specification of competency standards	30	30	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>540</b>

2.2.8 This report is based on data obtained from a sample of 542 claimants interviewed so far, accounting for about 100% of the target sample size. The breakdown by gender and domain is shown in the table below. The data are suitably weighted to reflect by the distribution by gender and domain for all claimants as a whole.

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Logistics	26	4	30
Financial services	36	18	54
Business services	68	56	124

Tourism	11	11	22
Languages	51	89	140
Design	18	15	33
Creative industries	6	5	11
Interpersonal and intrapersonal skills for the workplace	10	6	16
Specification of competency standards	142	81	223
<b>Total</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>653*</b>

\* The total is greater than the actual number of claimants interviewed as a claimant may attend courses in more than one domain

### *Other learners*

2.2.9 For other learners who have not applied for CEF, a simple random sampling design is proposed to be adopted. At least 1,000 telephone numbers were randomly sampled. Through telephone interview, at least 1 000 other learners aged 18 or above were interviewed. For an effective sample size of 1,000, the precision of estimates is within the range of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points at 95% confidence, based on simple random sampling. To allow for non-response, more than 1,000 telephone numbers had to be randomly selected. The database was revised and cleaned up if there is any duplication.

2.2.10 This report is based on data obtained from a sample of 1 002 learners interviewed so far, accounting for about 100% of the target sample size. The breakdown by gender and age group is shown in the table below. The data are suitably weighted to reflect by the distribution by gender and age group for Hong Kong population as a whole.

Sex	Age				Total
	18-35	36-50	51-65	66 & over	
Male	146	110	106	81	443
Female	190	179	116	74	559
<b>Total</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>1002</b>

### *Data collection method*

2.2.11 For CEF applicants and claimants, given that their names and telephone numbers are available, the data were collected by telephone interview. For survey involving not complicated and lengthy questionnaires, telephone interview is an acceptable method of data collection, giving a fairly high response rate.

### *Pretest*

2.2.12 To field test the questionnaires and the data collection method, a pretest

survey was conducted on at least 10 CEF applicants, 10 CEF claimants and 10 other learners. In the pretest, the draft field operation manual (including instructions for field staff) and draft questionnaires were tested.

### *Main survey*

2.2.13 For the telephone survey, the procedure adopted is as follows, which is designed to solicit as much cooperation from the respondents as possible. This is an essential step in any good quality survey:

- a) In making the first telephone call, the interviewer would briefly explain the purposes of the survey and re-assure the respondents that data collected in the survey will be kept strictly confidential, and then seek permission for conducting the interview;
- b) A number of telephone enquiry hotlines were deployed to enable the respondents to clarify any questions they may have on the survey, or to make appointment on the preferred interview time. To minimize the possibility of calling a busy hotline number, a “hunting line” system was used such that the telephone call will automatically be directed to a telephone line not in use;
- c) The interviewer was required to make at least 5 call backs, if the first call was not successful, at different times of the day (including calls in the evening) and on different days of the week, to minimize non-contact;
- d) In case a refusal was encountered, the supervisor would take over the case. The case would either be re-assigned to another interviewer or taken up by the telephone survey supervisors. As there are many reasons for refusal cases, such as the interviewee was not free at that moment or problems with the interview manner, but the target respondents not strongly refuse to share opinions. For these cases, the approach mentioned will be adopted. All refusal cases would be first evaluated and follow-up actions will be decided. This arrangement is both for quality control and to minimize non-response.

### *Conduct of the Surveys*

2.2.14 Two field supervisors who have ample experience in telephone interview would lead a team of about 15 mainly full-time enumerators and research assistants to undertake data collection work. These enumerators should have good knowledge of written Chinese and are fluent in Cantonese and at least one other Chinese dialect.

2.2.15 Training on interviewing techniques and code of conduct has already been given to this team of enumerators. In addition, a comprehensive training programme including role play on the subject matter will also be arranged for the enumerators prior to the commencement of the survey.

2.2.16 The progress reporting system and an indoor data editing arrangement, were used to closely monitor and control the quality of the work of the survey.

### ***Quality control***

2.2.17 To ensure that data collected are credible, the following quality control measures were implemented:

#### *During data collection*

- a) Two field supervisors who have experience in conducting surveys, were deployed to supervise the work of the enumerators. Throughout the fieldwork period, they have provided on-site support. For a more difficult case, they would carry out the interview themselves with the enumerators;
- b) An independent team was responsible to conduct quality check on at least 10% of the completed cases to counter-check the accuracy and quality of data collected;
- c) After the completion of the interview, the field supervisors have sample checked some of the data to see if they are properly completed;

#### *After data collection*

- d) Computer programs were developed to validate the data to detect errors that can easily be overlooked during the manual editing stage. Acceptance tests for the various computer data processing systems, quality checks at various stages of data process and keeping audit trails at various stages of computer processing were conducted.

### ***Information gathered in the user survey***

2.2.18 Three sets of questionnaires were designed separately for applicants, claimants and other learners. The questionnaires are appended in Annex 2. Information items gathered in the survey are summarized below:

- a) Channels of knowing about CEF;
- b) Views on eligibilities;
- c) Views on applications arrangement;
- d) Views on quality assurance;
- e) Perceived demand for continuing education;
- f) Perceived impact of CEF.

### 3. IMPLEMENTATION OF CEF

#### 3.1 Promoting CEF

3.1.1 About 76% of other learners have heard about the CEF, indicating that the publicity of CEF is quite effective. A higher proportion of those who were aged 18 - 35 (88%) and aged 36 – 50 (81%) have heard about the CEF, as compared with 73% for those aged 51 – 65 and only 43% for those aged above 65.

3.1.2 During discussions with social workers of elderly centres, they believed that a lower proportion of elderly persons are aware of the CEF because they consider the CEF is not relevant to them as the CEF did not cover those aged above 60 at the time when the CEF was first launched. Even after the upper age limit was extended to 65, the publicity that followed was not intensive enough to arouse the attention of the elderly.

3.1.3 In addition, when analyzed by educational attainment, the proportion of other learners with primary education or below who have heard about the CEF was the lowest at 45%. The percentage increases with the level of education. For those with higher degrees, the percentage was as high as 95%.

Educational attainment	Other learners
Primary or below	44.7%
Junior secondary (Secondary 1–3)	62.2%
Senior secondary/Matriculation	79.2%
Post-secondary education (Non-degree)	91.0%
Post-secondary education (Bachelor degree)	86.0%
Post-secondary education (Master degree or above)	95.2%

3.1.4 For those learners who have heard about the CEF, nearly half of them (48%) knew about the CEF through newspapers and magazines. For applicants and claimants, on the other hand, more than half of them knew about the CEF through education institutions. Presumably, these are education institutions offering CEF courses. Apparently, education institutions have played an important role in promoting CEF and encouraging learners to apply for CEF.

Channels	Applicants	Claimants	Other learners
WFSFAA homepage	7.7%	6.3%	8.0%
Office of the CEF	6.4%	6.1%	4.2%
Education institution	66.9%	71.9%	15.8%
International examination organizations	6.4%	3.5%	2.8%
Friends	28.1%	23.2%	28.3%
Newspaper/magazines	16.9%	14.1%	47.5%
Posters/booklets	5.3%	4.5%	13.6%
Advertisement on buses, TVs, etc.	1.2%	1.2%	10.1%
Online social platforms (e.g., Facebook)	13.9%	10.1%	17.7%
Others	7.9%	8.0%	25.0%
Forgotten/Don't know	1.0%	0.6%	1.9%



- 3.1.5 During discussions with claimants, most of them considered the publicity of the CEF is quite adequate, especially at the time when the CEF was first launched. Many learners who are employed have not applied for CEF because their working hours are very long and cannot afford the time to pursue continuing education. In addition, employers in general do not pay much attention to the continuing education of their employees. It was suggested that the government should promote the CEF to employers, asking them to encourage their employees to pursue continuing education by granting them leave to study. It was also suggested that increased efforts should be made to promote CEF to youth, who may not be aware of the benefits of continuing education.
- 3.1.6 Other stakeholders consulted also shared similar views on the need for the government to step up publicity of the CEF. Those comments and suggestions are summarized below:
- a) Those who have not applied for CEF suggested that, during focus group discussions, the government should step up publicity through the mass media such as television. They should take extra efforts to target youth and the elderly. Publicity activities may also be conducted in conjunction with job fairs;
  - b) During discussions with CEF course providers, it was also suggested that the government should step up publicity of the CEF through the social media and advertisements in public transport such as buses and MTR;
  - c) Employers of claimants and other employers in general also agreed that the government should step up publicity of CEF. They suggested that the government should consider organizing workshops for employers, to explain to employers the benefit of continuing education to both employees and employers.
- 3.1.7 Most other learners who have not applied for CEF are aware of CEF. Among those who knew about CEF, a higher proportion was of the younger or more educated groups. Apparently, effort made in the past to promote CEF to potential learners is quite effective, and the effectiveness is greater for potential learners who are younger or more educated. While education institutions have helped promote CEF to applicants and claimants, newspapers and magazines, the social media and words of mouth have played a major role in promoting CEF to other learners.
- 3.1.8 Nevertheless, it may be worth noting that most stakeholders are of the view that the government should step up publicity of the CEF, targeting in particular elderly persons as well as employers.

## 3.2 Eligibility and procedure

### *Upper age limit*

3.2.1 Currently, a Hong Kong resident aged between 18 and 65 may apply for the CEF. In the user survey, views were gathered on whether the upper age limit of 65 is appropriate. The majority of applicants (81%) and claimants (76%) considered the upper age limit of 65 appropriate. The corresponding percentage of other learners was 66%. For those applicants, claimants and other learners who considered the current upper age limit not appropriate, the median of upper age limit suggested by them was 70.

<b>Current upper age limit of 65</b>	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>	<b>Other learners</b>
Too high	5.2%	4.3%	10.2%
Appropriate	81.0%	75.6%	65.9%
Too low	12.2%	17.6%	15.1%
No opinion	1.5%	2.5%	8.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

3.2.2 During discussions with applicants, several of them were of the view that people aged 65 are still “young” who should have the ability to pursue further education. Furthermore, studying will help those aged above 65 live a more meaningful life, satisfying at least their spiritual needs. Besides, there are people who continue working after reaching 65. A few of them suggested that the upper age limit should be increased to 75 as after all, people aged above 65 have contributed a lot to Hong Kong and should be entitled to benefits under the CEF to facilitate their pursuit of continuing education.

3.2.3 Several applicants opined that if the purpose of CEF is to assist those who are employed to enhance their job-related knowledge and skills, it may be logical to set the upper age limit at 65. If the purpose of CEF is to facilitate people’s pursuit of continuing education for personal development, there is little justification for setting an upper age limit.

3.2.4 Claimants consulted also shared similar views. During discussions with claimants, a number of them suggested that the age limit should be extended beyond 65. They considered that elderly aged above 65 and retirees should be able to “enjoy” continuing education. It is more equitable to allow people aged over 65 to be entitled to the benefits of CEF.

3.2.5 For those who have not applied for CEF, a number of them during focus group discussions opined that the upper age limit of 65 is too low. Some of the elderly persons aged over 65 are still active learners and thus should be entitled to the subsidy under the CEF.

3.2.6 During discussions with social workers of elderly centres, it was pointed out that many elderly persons are active learners. Continuing education will also benefit the elderly in helping them maintain a happy and healthy life, through active engagement in learning and meeting other learners. They

suggested that the upper age limit should be raised from 65 to at least 70. Several other social workers consulted even suggested that the upper age limit should be removed.

3.2.7 Non-CEF course providers consulted also shared similar views. Several of them considered that the upper age limit should be raised from 65 to 70. They pointed out that some students are at the age of 65, though they believe that these elderly students will not join the labour force again after completion of their courses. From their experience, those aged above 70 may not be able to cope with their courses of study which are quite demanding.

3.2.8 Employers of claimants and other employers in general consulted also suggested that the upper age limit should be raised from 65 to at least 70. They pointed out that many elderly persons aged above 65 are still very healthy and active at work. These elderly persons also have the ability to pursue continuing education.

***Length of eligibility period***

3.2.9 Currently, a CEF applicant has to successfully complete CEF courses within four years from the date his/her CEF account is opened with the Office of the CEF (OCEF) set up under the WFSFAA. Slightly less than half of applicants (49.9%), slightly more than half of claimants (54%) and other learners (54%) considered that the eligibility period of four years is appropriate. About 45% of applicants considered that it was too short, whereas for claimants and other learners, the percentages were lower, at 39% and 15% respectively. For those who considered the eligibility period not appropriate, the median of the length of eligibility period suggested by them was 6 years for applicants and claimants and 2 years for other learners. The lower median value for other learners reflects the lower percentage of other learners, as compared with applicants and claimants, who considered the length of eligibility too short.

<b>Length of eligibility period</b>	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>	<b>Other learners</b>
Too long	3.7%	5.2%	16.9%
Appropriate	49.9%	54.2%	54.2%
Too short	45.3%	39.3%	14.7%
No opinion	1.2%	1.3%	14.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

3.2.10 During discussion with applicants, several of them expressed dissatisfaction with the eligibility of four years. They pointed out that once they have opened a CEF account, they have to complete their courses of study within four years. This is considered to be too stringent, because sometimes they are very busy with their work and hence cannot complete their courses of study within the eligibility period. Consideration could be given to allow a longer eligibility period for those who are employed. Some of them may even spend a lot of time searching for an appropriate course to attend. Thus, many of them suggested to abolish the eligibility period requirement, as the purpose

of CEF is to encourage continuing education which should last throughout one’s lifespan. Their views obviously reflect the 44% of applicants enumerated in the user survey who considered the eligibility period too short.

- 3.2.11 Claimants consulted were also of the view that the eligibility of four years is too short. During discussions with claimants, several of them indicated that to complete a part-time degree course requires more than four years. In addition, one claimant shared his experience that after he had opened a CEF account, the course he had applied to study was cancelled. He was not aware that the “countdown” of the eligibility period of four years has already started. It was therefore suggested that people should be able to check details of their CEF account, including the remaining period of eligibility, online.
- 3.2.12 Several claimants recalled their experience that it often took time for them to obtain endorsement from the course providers. There are incidents that the applicants cannot obtain the reimbursements within the eligibility period of four years. It was suggested that the eligibility period should be lengthened to more than four years.
- 3.2.13 During the discussions with non-CEF course providers, several of them considered that eligibility period of four years reasonable. They had an impression that the fees of most CEF courses exceed \$10,000. Thus, it is not difficult to complete a CEF course and exhaust this subsidy limit within four years.

***Maximum number of claims***

- 3.2.14 Currently, claimants are allowed a maximum of 4 claims within the four-year validity period. The majority of applicants (50%) and claimants (77%) and more than half of other learners (63%) considered it appropriate. For those who considered the four-claim limit was not appropriate, the median of the maximum number of claims suggested by them was 6 for applicants, claimants and other learners.

<b>Maximum number of claims</b>	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>	<b>Other learners</b>
Too many	3.9%	2.2%	4.5%
Appropriate	73.7%	77.0%	63.3%
Too few	21.1%	18.7%	19.2%
No opinion	1.3%	2.1%	13.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

- 3.2.15 During the discussions with applicants, a number of them considered the maximum number of claims of 4 years is adequate. As the subsidy limit is only \$10,000, it usually takes less than four claims to exhaust \$10,000.

### *Subsidy limit of CEF*

3.2.16 Currently, applicants and claimants can claim a maximum of \$10,000 to cover 80% of the fees of all the CEF-registered courses they have successfully completed. The majority of applicants (75%) and claimants (80%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this arrangement.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>
Strongly disagree	24.9%	33.8%
Disagree	50.3%	46.4%
Agree	22.5%	17.1%
Strongly agree	2.1%	1.4%
No opinion	0.2%	1.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

3.2.17 The views of male and female applicants and claimants do not differ much. On the one hand, a slightly higher percentage of male applicants, as compared with female applicants, considered the subsidy limit of \$10,000 was sufficient. On the other hand, a slightly lower percentage of male claimants, as compared with female claimants, considered the subsidy limit of \$10,000 was sufficient.

<b>% agree or strong agree that the subsidy limit of \$10,000 is sufficient</b>	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>
Male	23.4%	16.6%
Female	20.6%	18.6%

3.2.18 During the discussions with applicants, several of them were of the view that the maximum limit of \$10,000 was not adequate. This amount was set more than ten years ago, and no allowance has been made for inflation. Besides, the financial subsidy is to help people to pursue further education during their life span from 18 to 65 years of age. People’s learning needs for and interests in continuing education will invariably be different at different stages in life. It was thus suggested by a few respondents that a financial subsidy of \$10,000 should be available to applicants once every five years to meet the different and changing learning needs of applicants.

3.2.19 A number of applicants opined that while “more is better” as far as subsidy is concerned, there should be an objective criterion in determining the subsidy limit such as the course fees of programmes for professional upgrading and enhancement, which are much higher than the course fees for interest classes. It was also suggested that the 80% limit of course fees should be increased to 100% in order to help learners pursue continuing education. Several applicants also questioned the rationale for setting the 80% limit.

3.2.20 During the discussions with claimants, many of them lamented a subsidy limit of \$10,000 is only sufficient to motivate learners to attend courses like interest classes. It is not sufficient to motivate learners to attend job related training and degree level courses. For courses offered by self-financing post-secondary institutions, the fee for a course in one subject is at least \$8,000. If a learner attends a course in two subjects, the learner will have used up the

entire CEF subsidy of \$10,000. It was suggested that the subsidy limit should be linked to the level of courses attended. For instance, the subsidy limit may remain at \$10,000 for courses at QF Level 3, but should be increased for courses at QF Level 4 or higher. Some even suggested raising the subsidy level to around \$20,000, as the course fee for a degree-level programme is around \$40,000.

- 3.2.21 During the discussions with people who have not applied for CEF, several of them considered the subsidy limit of \$10,000 is inadequate. They pointed out that the course fee for a basic course in post-secondary institutions is around \$27,000 and for a more advanced course, around \$46,000. Thus, the subsidy of \$10,000 is hardly sufficient to motivate people to pursue continuing education to upgrade their qualifications or levels of skills. Several of them commented that they may be motivated to apply for the CEF if the subsidy limit is higher. They also pointed out that the subsidy limit has not been revised since it was first introduced more than ten years ago.
- 3.2.22 CEF course providers also share similar views. During discussions with CEF course providers, most of them were of the view that the subsidy limit should be raised to say \$30,000 which is only equivalent to about 20% to 25% of the total fees for a degree course. Furthermore, CEF subsidy should cater for the different continuing education needs of learners at different stages of their life. It was thus suggested that there should be regular, separate subsidy to help learners pursue continuing education at different stages of their life, say 18 to 39 years and 40 to 65 years.
- 3.2.23 Non-CEF course providers consulted also considered the subsidy limit of \$10,000 too low. They remarked that for a degree course requiring 4 years to complete, the fee is about \$40,000 per annum. A non-degree course pitched at the elementary level usually charges around \$10,000. The CEF can no longer support a learner who wants to continue to attend the advanced course, after completing the elementary course.
- 3.2.24 Apparently, most applicants, claimants, other learners who have not applied for CEF, and course providers are focusing on courses leading to a qualification like degree or even higher degree. This is indeed a good sign that many applicants and claimants are making use of the CEF to help them finance of their pursuit of a qualification or degree. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that there are also continuing education courses not leading to a degree, but are extremely useful to the learners, especially those who do not have high level of education attainment. As shown in the table below, the percentage of applicants and claimants with junior secondary education or below who considered the subsidy limit of \$10,000 is higher than the corresponding percentages for those with say degrees or higher degrees.

<b>% agree or strong agree that the subsidy limit of \$10,000 is sufficient</b>	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>
Junior secondary or below	47.6%	29.1%
Senior secondary	25.8%	20.6%
Post-secondary (non-degree)	24.5%	14.0%

Post-secondary (first degree)	20.2%	17.5%
Post-secondary (master degree or above)	12.3%	15.2%

3.2.25 During discussions with employers of claimants and other employers in general, they pointed out that the subsidy limit of \$10,000 is too low and should be increased. They said that many of their employees have expressed interests in pursuing continuing education but cannot afford the course fees charged by course providers. Several employers considered that the fees of many courses offered by course providers too expensive. They suggested that the subsidy limit should be adjusted taking inflation into account. Sharing the views of applicants and course providers discussed above, some of them suggested that the subsidy should be provided on a recurrent basis, say once every ten years.

3.2.26 While the views of employers may well be true for employees, it may also be noted that the CEF caters for the continuing education needs of employees, as well as employers or the self-employed, retirees, homemakers and students. As depicted in the table below, their views on the adequacy of the \$10,000 subsidy differ. For instance, the proportion of employers, the self-employed and retirees who considered the subsidy limit of \$10,000 sufficient is higher than the corresponding percentage for employees.

<b>% agree or strong agree that the subsidy limit of \$10,000 is sufficient</b>	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>
Employer or self-employed	46.6%	24.1%
Employee (full time/part time)	20.0%	15.8%
Retired	28.2%	37.5%
Homemaker	24.0%	21.1%
Students	30.2%	30.5%

3.2.27 Opportunity has been taken to solicit the views of social workers of elderly centres. They considered that subsidy limit of \$10,000 too low and suggested that this limit should be raised.

3.2.28 From the study findings reviewed above, it is evident that more than half of applicants and claimants consider the current age limit, total number of claims and the validity period are appropriate. On closer examination of the user survey findings, it may be observed that as high as 45% of applicants and 39% of claimants considered the eligibility period of four years not adequate. From discussions with applicants and claimants, it transpires that some applicants and claimants may not be able to complete their CEF courses and apply for reimbursements within the eligibility period of four years for reasons like too busy with work.

3.2.29 In addition, it may be worth noting that the majority of applicants and claimants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the maximum subsidy limit being set at \$10,000. This view was shared by CEF and non-CEF course providers, employers of claimants and other employers in general and social

workers of elderly centres. It was suggested that the maximum subsidy limit should be revised upward based on such objective criteria like the inflation rate. Nevertheless, account should also be taken of the fact that the views are diverse for applicants and claimants of different background.

### ***Other application procedures***

3.2.30 There is a number of procedures CEF applicants and claimants have to observe. For instance, according to CEF regulations, applications for opening an account for the CEF should be submitted before the course commences. The majority of applicants (75%) and claimants (82%) agreed or strongly agreed with this requirement.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>
Strongly disagree	2.4%	0.6%
Disagree	21.9%	17.1%
Agree	65.1%	68.6%
Strongly agree	9.5%	13.0%
No opinion	1.2%	0.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

3.2.31 During the discussions with applicants, several of them pointed out this arrangement was inflexible. They cited incidents that after commencement of the courses, they found that the instructors were not performing well, or the course providers changed the instructors. If they chose to stop attending the course, they might not have sufficient time to complete another course within the eligibility period of four years. They suggested that more flexibility should be given to applicants in changing their courses of study after opening their CEF accounts.

3.2.32 In addition, several applicants found the application procedure cumbersome and time-consuming. After completing the application forms, they have to submit to the course providers for endorsement and then submit to the OCEF. This procedure can hardly be completed within one week. Furthermore, it was suggested that electronic submission should be accepted. This will obviate the possibility of postal delay and loss. This will also facilitate the custody of fee payment receipts.

3.2.33 Several applicants opined that it usually takes 8 weeks after submission of the application for them to receive OCEF's confirmation that their applications are successful. This is considered too long.

3.2.34 According to CEF regulations, applicants had to pay for the first term fee before the start of the course. The majority of applicants (81%) and claimants (81%) agreed or strongly agreed with this requirement.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>
Strongly disagree	1.1%	2.8%
Disagree	16.9%	14.2%
Agree	70.9%	71.9%



Strongly agree	9.8%	9.0%
No opinion	1.3%	2.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

3.2.35 According to CEF regulations, documents other than the application form can be submitted in photocopies. The great majority of applicants (95%) and claimants (97%) agreed or strongly agreed with this arrangement.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>
Strongly disagree	0.2%	0.0%
Disagree	4.6%	2.3%
Agree	77.7%	75.4%
Strongly agree	17.2%	21.6%
No opinion	0.2%	0.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

3.2.36 According to CEF regulations, applicants must attend 70% of total lecture hours or the upper required attendance rate (whichever is higher). The great majority of claimants (96%) agreed or strongly agreed with this arrangement.

	<b>Claimants</b>
Strongly disagree	0.4%
Disagree	3.8%
Agree	65.1%
Strongly agree	30.7%
No opinion	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

3.2.37 According to CEF regulations, if an applicant wishes to apply for refund of the standardized language examination, he must apply it together with the application of reimbursement of the relevant language course fee. The majority of claimants (76%) agreed or strongly agreed with this requirement. However, about 15% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this requirement.

	<b>Claimants</b>
Strongly disagree	1.4%
Disagree	13.4%
Agree	69.5%
Strongly agree	6.4%
No opinion	9.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

3.2.38 During discussions with applicants, several of them pointed out that the requirement for passing public examinations, even though the applicants may have passed the examinations of course providers, before one can apply for reimbursement of course fees is too harsh. It was further pointed out that this requirement only applies to Japanese and Korean language courses. For course in Putonghua, there is no comparable requirement. There is apparently an inconsistency in the CEF requirement. Furthermore, several applicants contended that as there is already in place an attendance

requirement, the requirement for passing public examinations is considered superfluous.

- 3.2.39 During the discussions with CEF course providers, several of them also questioned about the rationale of requiring applicants to pass examinations before they can apply for reimbursements. They stressed that the quality of the CEF courses is assured through various measures enforced by the government and that there is also attendance requirement on the part of the applicants. These arrangements should have already ensured that the applicants are serious in attending CEF courses.
- 3.2.40 Apart from the application procedures discussed above, stakeholders consulted have offered views on other aspects of application procedures. During discussions with claimants, most of them considered the procedures for claiming reimbursements cumbersome and time-consuming. For instance, obtaining endorsement from the course providers on their application forms is rather time-consuming, say up to two months in some cases. Very often several years had passed by the time the claimants have completed their courses of study, it is quite time-consuming to retrieve all relevant course fee receipts for the purpose of claiming reimbursements. Very often, unless the course providers take extra efforts to remind the claimants, the claimants tend to forget to keep all their course fee receipts for the purposes of applying for reimbursements several years later, after they have successfully completed their study. It was therefore suggested that the course providers should maintain their records, including receipts issued to their students, electronically and provide these electronic records to the government, on behalf of the claimants, to facilitate the claimants' application for reimbursements by leveraging on information and communication technology so commonly available nowadays.
- 3.2.41 Some claimants consulted, on the other hand, considered the procedure of applying for reimbursement was quite smooth. This was because the course providers concerned had provided them assistance in their applications. For example, the course providers issued them "letter of completion" which they believed had helped them obtain reimbursements quickly. However, the issuance of "letter of completion" is not a common practice of course providers. It was suggested by several claimants that the government should work with course providers to come up with a simplified procedure for applying for reimbursements.
- 3.2.42 Several other claimants suggested that the government should accept electronic documents and the submission of the documents by electronic means such as emails and WhatsApp. This will help simplify the procedure for claiming reimbursement and avoid possible postal delays. It was also suggested to streamline the procedure by having the government to directly approach course providers to verify the authenticity of applications of reimbursement, thus obviating the need for claimants to approach course providers for verification and then to submit the verified applications to the government.

- 3.2.43 Employers of claimants consulted also criticized that the procedure for applying for reimbursement too complicated. There is definitely room for simplification and streamlining. Several of them suggested that instead of asking CEF claimants to apply for reimbursement, the government should consider directly reimbursing course providers upon the successful completion of the course by the claimants.
- 3.2.44 From the foregoing discussions, it is evident that both applicants and claimants agreed with the various procedural processes and requirements including the requirements of opening of the CEF accounts and the eligibility for claiming reimbursement. Nevertheless, applicants and claimants consulted during focus group discussions expressed dissatisfaction with the application procedures for opening CEF accounts and the procedures of applying for reimbursements. In cases where the course providers could provide a helping hand, it will according to several applicants and claimants help streamline the application procedures. It was suggested that measures like the use of electronic submission of applications should be adopted to facilitate both applicants and claimants.

### **3.3 Quality assurance**

- 3.3.1 The Government completed a review on the scope and operation of the CEF in mid-2007 and implemented a number of improvement measures aiming at further enhancing the operation of the CEF. A series of measures were also introduced to strengthen the quality assurance mechanism for courses registered under the CEF and to safeguard the interests of course participants. These include adopting a risk-based monitoring mechanism for courses; tightening control on course providers to avoid possible abuse; and publishing updated records of CEF courses on the website.
- 3.3.2 Following the CEF review in 2009, the monitoring measures on course providers were further enhanced for protection of learners' interests. More surprise inspections apart from regular inspections were conducted and collection of course fees on equal monthly basis was put in force. To remind the CEF course providers of the revised terms and conditions for operating the CEF courses, a Do's and Don'ts List for CEF course providers was introduced. In particular, CEF applicants are allowed to pay their course fees in equal monthly installments, protecting them against possible defaults on the part of course providers, and encouraging more learners to attend CEF approved courses. To explore rooms for further improving the operation of the CEF, views of applicants and course providers will have to be sought.
- 3.3.3 One of the protocols for monitoring private training institutions which operate CEF approved course is that all new CEF courses must be accredited by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ). The great majority of applicants (85%) and claimants (89%) were of the view that this protocol was capable or very capable of protecting the interests of course students.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>
Very incapable	2.4%	0.6%
Incapable	11.4%	8.2%
Capable	69.5%	71.0%
Very capable	15.3%	18.1%
No opinion	1.4%	2.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

3.3.4 During the discussions with CEF and non-CEF course providers, it was pointed out that there are courses which are internationally recognized or certified (e.g. certified information technology (IT) courses recognized by the IT industry), or generally recognized by the industry (e.g. sports related courses which are recognized by national sports associations). It was suggested that these courses should be exempted from the requirement of accreditation by HKCAAVQ.

3.3.5 Another protocol for monitoring private training institutions which operate CEF approved course is that information of all CEF courses are all uploaded to the CEF homepage. The great majority of applicants (89%) and claimants (90%) were of the view that this protocol was capable or very capable of protecting the interests of course students.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>
Very incapable	0.7%	0.0%
Incapable	9.2%	6.8%
Capable	78.3%	75.9%
Very capable	10.5%	14.4%
No opinion	1.2%	2.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

3.3.6 Another protocol for monitoring private training institutions which operate CEF approved course is that CEF course fees must be paid on a monthly basis with the same amount every month. The majority of applicants (86%) and claimants (83%) were of the view that this protocol was capable or very capable of protecting the interests of course students.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>
Very incapable	1.3%	1.1%
Incapable	11.2%	11.0%
Capable	74.9%	72.6%
Very capable	10.8%	10.7%
No opinion	1.8%	4.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

3.3.7 Another protocol for monitoring private training institutions which operate CEF approved course is that institutions operating the CEF courses must follow the CEF's refund policy. The majority of applicants (87%) and claimants (89%) were of the view that this protocol was capable or very capable of protecting the interests of course students.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>
Very incapable	1.2%	0.2%
Incapable	8.8%	7.9%
Capable	76.0%	74.8%
Very capable	10.8%	14.1%
No opinion	3.1%	3.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

3.3.8 The last protocol for monitoring private training institutions which operate CEF approved course covered in the user survey is that surprise inspections will be conducted on the training institutions. The great majority of applicants (90%) and claimants (90%) were of the view that this protocol was capable or very capable of protecting the interests of course students.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>
Very incapable	1.8%	0.3%
Incapable	6.6%	7.4%
Capable	70.3%	70.1%
Very capable	19.7%	19.6%
No opinion	1.7%	2.7%

3.3.9 Nevertheless, during discussions with applicants, there were views expressed on the monitoring measures on course providers to protect the interests of learners that are not catered for in the above measures. For example, several applicants pointed out that the course fees of a number of courses offered by course providers have been raised once these courses are covered by the CEF. A number of CEF courses are more expensive than similar courses that are not covered by the CEF. It was suggested that the government should check if the course provider has increased the course fee once a course is approved for registration under CEF. If the increase is significant, the course provider has to provide satisfactory explanation.

3.3.10 During the discussions with claimants, several of them also pointed out that there was a tendency for some course providers to set their course fees to around \$12,500, such that learners can claim the maximum of \$10,000 which is 80% of the course fee. The course fees for similar courses which are not covered by CEF, however, are often lower.

3.3.11 Several applicants also suggested that the government should step up monitoring of the quality of instructors in CEF courses. From their experience, they find that the performance of instructors is not satisfactory. For courses in which the medium of instruction is English, the instructors are unable to deliver the course in English satisfactorily. Furthermore, many course providers are not transparent in providing information on the qualifications of their instructors. Information on the qualifications and experience of the instructors is sometimes not published by some course providers.

3.3.12 In addition, several applicants claimed that a course provider requires applicants to complete two courses before they can apply for CEF. This bundling arrangement is considered unacceptable. Another applicant recalled

that the course provider did not allow him to apply reimbursement unless he pursues another course. Several other applicants also recalled their experience of applying for hairdressing and Germany language courses. The course providers insisted that they should complete the elementary, intermediate and even advanced levels of the course before they are eligible for reimbursement of course fees. He considered such arrangement were most inflexible and unreasonable. It was suggested that the government should exercise tighter supervision on the conduct of course providers.

- 3.3.13 Several claimants consulted during a focus group discussion suggested that the government should establish a regular channel for applicants and claimants to voice their views on the CEF courses and on CEF in general. One possibility is to ask claimants to complete an evaluation form on the CEF courses they have taken and on the CEF in general. The evaluation form may also be administered online. Several applicants consulted also suggested that the process of monitoring the quality of CEF courses and the operation of CEF course providers should be as transparent as possible, and the government should proactively explain to the public the quality assurance mechanism.
- 3.3.14 During discussions with employers of claimants and other employers, several of them commented that courses in the eight domains which were included in the CEF before the promulgation of QF in 2008 are not required to be accredited by HKCAAVQ and hence may not be up to the required standards. They suggested these courses should be examined and accredited by HKCAAVQ before these courses can continue to be registered as CEF courses. This will ensure that the quality of these CEF courses are up to the standards expected of like other CEF courses that have been accredited by HKCAAVQ.
- 3.3.15 From survey findings discussed above, it is evident that both applicants and claimants are satisfied with the quality assurance measures which they think are capable or very capable of protecting the interests of students. Nevertheless, concerns are expressed over some practices of some course providers such as the bundling of several courses such that the claimants have to complete the entire bundle of courses before they are allowed to apply for reimbursements, higher course fees compared with similar non-CEF courses, the quality of instructors and the quality of CEF courses in the eight domains not accredited by HKCAAVQ.

#### **3.4 Reasons for not applying for CEF**

- 3.4.1 About 79% of other learners who have heard of CEF did not consider to apply for CEF, there are a variety of reasons for not applying. The more common reasons are not meeting age eligibility (39%), no urgent need (37%), too busy (31%) and no knowledge of application procedure (27%). Only about 21% indicated that they would apply for CEF.

	<b>Other learners<sup>6</sup></b>
My age does not meet the age requirement	39.4%
Do not know the application procedure	27.4%
Do not need any government subsidy	15.1%
Too busy to study any further education/training courses	30.9%
Have no urgent need to have further education/training	37.0%
Others	24.8%
No particular reason	3.3%

3.4.2 Some of the other learners who have not heard of CEF actually have taken training programme or continuing education course in the past 12 months, still, they did not consider to apply for CEF. The more common reasons are “no knowledge of application procedures” (accounting for 78.6% of such learners who have not applied for CEF), “no need for any government subsidy” (19.8%), “too busy to study any further education/training courses” such that they have not applied for CEF to pursue more training courses (21.4%) and “have no urgent need to have further education/training courses” such that they have not applied for CEF to pursue more training courses (21.4%). From the findings, it seems that there is scope for further increasing the number of applicants by mounting more publicity to target other learners who are not aware of the application procedures.

<b>Reasons for not applying for CEF</b>	<b>% of other learners<sup>7</sup></b>
Do not know the application procedure	78.6%
Do not need any government subsidy	19.8%
Too busy to study any further education/ training courses	21.4%
Have no urgent need to have further education/training	21.4%
Others (such as “too old” and “health problems”)	19.8%

3.4.3 It may be of interest to note most learners who have not heard of the CEF do not consider applying for CEF because they are not aware of the procedures for applying for CEF. It follows that the focus of future promotion activities should be placed on explaining more clearly to the public the procedures for applying for CEF.

3.4.4 During discussions with people who have not applied for CEF, several of them explained that they did not apply for the CEF because they considered the application procedure complicated and the requirement of passing examinations difficult to meet. They were afraid that if they could not meet the attendance or examination requirements, they could not obtain reimbursement of the course fees.

3.4.5 During discussions with claimants, several of them suggested that employers should be asked to promote CEF to their employees. Due recognition should also be given to employers who have introduced measures to facilitate and encourage their employees to pursue continuing education. Granting tax allowance to those who have paid course fees to pursue continuing education

<sup>6</sup> As more than one choice is allowed, the figures add up to more than 100%.

<sup>7</sup> As more than one choice is allowed, the figures add up to more than 100%.

was also suggested as a means to encourage people to apply for CEF. The above will help encourage more learners to apply for CEF.

- 3.4.6 From the study findings presented above, most learners who are not aware of the CEF do not consider applying for CEF because they are not aware of the procedures for applying for CEF. For those who are aware of the CEF, they do not apply for the CEF for a variety of reasons including no urgent need, too busy and no knowledge of application procedure.



## 4. IMPACT OF CEF

### 4.1 Expectations

4.1.1 Undoubtedly, applicants have expectations on the potential benefits of CEF and claimants have benefited from studying the CEF courses. The user survey shows that the majority of applicants and claimants hoped that studying CEF courses would help equip themselves better (70.3% for applicants and 72.2% for claimants), enhance competence for coping with the needs of current and future jobs (65% and 74%) and enhance their work-related knowledge (59% and 72%). Apparently, they view CEF courses are preparing them for employment.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>
To enhance work-related knowledge	59.2%	71.9%
To enhance competence for coping with the needs of current/future job	65.4%	73.8%
To increase promotion opportunities at the current workplace	39.8%	49.1%
To be able to find a better job in the same industry	37.7%	45.9%
To learn new skills in order to change industries	36.2%	53.1%
To learn new skills in order to start a new company	22.3%	28.5%
To increase employment competitiveness in order to find a new job/start a new company outside Hong Kong	49.4%	43.5%
To be able to adapt to changes in the needs of the labour market	37.2%	44.0%
To equip myself better	70.3%	72.2%
To develop personal interests	45.7%	54.3%
To enhance interest in continuous education	36.6%	44.5%
To enhance self-confidence	36.0%	44.3%

### 4.2 Perceived impact

4.2.1 As regard the impact of CEF, the direct benefit accrued to applicants and claimants is the financial subsidy provided to them. The user survey shows that the majority of applicants (78%) and claimants (82%) agreed or strongly agreed that the CEF allows them to take the courses they have longed to study.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>
Strongly disagree	1.3%	1.5%
Disagree	19.9%	15.7%
Agree	67.4%	67.5%
Strongly agree	10.2%	14.5%
No opinion	1.2%	0.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

4.2.2 However, the user survey shows that less than half of applicants (40%) and claimants (45%) agreed or strongly agreed that without the CEF subsidy they

would not have studied for these courses. In other words, these respondents would probably study the courses even if there was no CEF subsidy.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>
Strongly disagree	8.0%	5.8%
Disagree	51.5%	47.6%
Agree	32.6%	35.9%
Strongly agree	7.5%	9.0%
No opinion	0.3%	1.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

4.2.3 The user survey also shows that more than half of applicants (63%) and claimants (64%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that without the CEF subsidy they could not afford the course fees. This further demonstrates that the majority of both applicants and claimants would probably continue further education without CEF subsidy.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>
Strongly disagree	7.9%	6.1%
Disagree	54.9%	57.4%
Agree	30.4%	30.2%
Strongly agree	6.5%	5.9%
No opinion	0.3%	0.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

4.2.4 During the discussions with applicants, many of them indicated that they were motivated to pursue further education because of the financial subsidy provided by CEF. Without the CEF, some of them may not have taken the study programmes, especially for those who are older. One applicant opined that he has taken a course because of the CEF. Another applicant indicated he planned to study Spanish language, but subsequently gave up because the course was not covered by the CEF.

4.2.5 On the other hand, during the discussion with claimants, a number of them indicated that they would pursue continuing education even without CEF subsidy. Nevertheless, they would tend to choose courses eligible for CEF subsidy among courses in the same or similar disciplines.

4.2.6 Non-CEF course providers also believed that courses covered by CEF are more likely to be chosen by students than comparable courses that are not covered by CEF. This is based on their experience that some students, after learning that the courses they offer are not covered by the CEF, give up applying for their courses and opt for similar courses offered by CEF course providers.

4.2.7 Nevertheless, it would still be of interest to note that the majority of applicants (80%) and claimants (88%) agreed or strongly agreed that the CEF has helped them improve their knowledge and skills. This demonstrates the useful impact of CEF on the knowledge and skills of applicants and claimants.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>
Strongly disagree	2.4%	1.2%
Disagree	16.2%	10.6%
Agree	67.6%	74.4%
Strongly agree	12.8%	13.2%
No opinion	1.1%	0.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

4.2.8 During discussions with applicants, most of them agreed that CEF has encouraged them to pursue further education, enhancing their knowledge and skills and their personal quality. It also helps them find personal goals. For those who have children, attending study courses enables them to appreciate the study pressure faced by their children at school. Through realizing studying is not easy, they will encourage their children to relax when pressed by examination and study pressure and will not be too demanding on their children over their children's school work.

4.2.9 During discussions with employers of claimants and other employers in general, they were of the view that continuing education has helped their employees enhance their knowledge and skills. They believed that continuing education will also help their employees acquire a better understanding of their professions and the industries they are working in. This is especially useful for many youths who take up a job without any prior knowledge and understanding of the nature of work involved and the characteristics of the industries concerned. Employers are also of the view that attending job-related training programmes will help increase their employees' sense of belonging to their professions and the industries they are working in. In particular, for industries facing a shortage of skilled workers, continuing education has helped these industries increase their reserve of skilled manpower.

4.2.10 From the above findings, it may be worth noting that the majority of applicants and claimants are of the view that the CEF has allowed them to take the courses they have longed to study. Most of them agreed that the CEF has helped them improve their knowledge and skills, and such views are shared by employers of claimants and other employers in general.

## 5. NEEDS AND DEMAND FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION

### 5.1 Needs of continuing education: changes in job-related requirements

5.1.1 In the user survey, information was gathered on the economic activity status of applicants and claimants. As shown in the table below, the majority of applicants (72%) and claimants (79%) were working as employers, self-employed or employees. The corresponding percentage was lower for other learners, at 53%. About 22% of applicants, 10% of claimants and 8% of other learners were students.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>	<b>Other learners</b>
Employer	1.9%	2.2%	2.0%
Self-employed	8.7%	6.0%	8.1%
Employee (full time/part time)	61.5%	70.5%	42.5%
Retired	1.2%	3.1%	19.4%
Homemaker	2.0%	3.5%	16.8%
Student	21.6%	10.0%	8.4%
Not working and not studying	2.8%	4.1%	2.9%
Others	0.4%	0.5%	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

5.1.2 For those who were employed, they were facing changes in the work requirements of their current/most recent jobs. For a number of them, they considered that they were incapable or very incapable of adapting to the changes. For instance, slightly more than half applicants (57%) and claimants (53%) and 68% of other learners indicated that there was not an increased usage of computers or other equipment/instruments. Only 3% of applicants, 3% of claimants and 4% of other learners indicated they were incapable or very incapable of adapting to an increase usage of computers or other equipment/instruments.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>	<b>Other learners</b>
Very incapable	1.1%	0.4%	0.5%
Incapable	2.2%	3.0%	3.0%
Capable	32.3%	33.8%	20.6%
Very capable	6.4%	9.5%	6.8%
No change	57.2%	52.6%	68.3%
No opinion	0.7%	0.8%	0.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

5.1.3 Less than half applicants (48%) and claimants (40%) and 61% of other learners indicated that there was no change in requirement for higher occupational skill levels. Only 2% of applicants, 3% of claimants and other learners indicated they were incapable or very incapable of adapting to the requirement for higher occupational skill levels.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>	<b>Other learners</b>
Very incapable	0.1%	0.0%	0.9%
Incapable	1.9%	2.8%	2.5%
Capable	45.8%	49.0%	29.1%

Very capable	4.0%	8.1%	5.3%
No change	48.0%	39.8%	61.3%
No opinion	0.2%	0.4%	1.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

5.1.4 Less than half applicants (44%) and claimants (37%) and 61% of other learners indicated that there was no change in requirement for more occupational skills. Again only 4% of applicants, 5% of claimants and 4% of other learners indicated they were incapable or very incapable of adapting to the requirement for higher occupational skill levels.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>	<b>Other learners</b>
Very incapable	0.0%	0.1%	0.9%
Incapable	4.0%	5.2%	3.0%
Capable	48.3%	50.8%	29.9%
Very capable	2.6%	6.4%	4.1%
No change	44.1%	36.7%	61.0%
No opinion	0.9%	0.8%	1.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

5.1.5 Slightly more than half applicants (55%) and claimants (52%) and 76% of other learners indicated that there was no change in requirement for higher educational attainment. About 8% of applicants, 7% of claimants and 6% of other learners indicated they were incapable or very incapable of adapting to the requirement for higher educational attainment.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>	<b>Other learners</b>
Very incapable	1.1%	0.5%	1.1%
Incapable	6.8%	6.8%	5.3%
Capable	32.2%	36.2%	14.4%
Very capable	4.5%	4.5%	2.3%
No change	55.0%	51.6%	75.5%
No opinion	0.5%	0.3%	1.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

5.1.6 Slightly less than half applicants (48%) and claimants (48%) and 68% of other learners indicated that there was no change in requirement for higher language skill levels. About 6% of applicants, 11% of claimants and 5% of other learners indicated they were incapable or very incapable of adapting to the requirement for higher language skill levels.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>	<b>Other learners</b>
Very incapable	0.3%	0.1%	0.9%
Incapable	6.1%	10.5%	3.8%
Capable	41.1%	36.9%	24.1%
Very capable	3.7%	3.9%	2.3%
No change	48.0%	47.6%	68.4%
No opinion	0.8%	1.0%	0.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

5.1.7 Slightly less than half applicants (47%) and claimants (49.9%) and 70% of other learners indicated that there was no change in requirement for multi-lingual skills. About 5.5% of applicants, 9% of claimants and 7% of other learners indicated they were incapable or very incapable of adapting to the requirement for multi-lingual skills.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>	<b>Other learners</b>
Very incapable	0.1%	0.3%	1.2%
Incapable	5.4%	9.0%	5.5%
Capable	44.1%	38.7%	20.0%
Very capable	2.9%	1.8%	2.6%
No change	46.9%	49.9%	70.1%
No opinion	0.6%	0.4%	0.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

5.1.8 Less than half applicants (41%) and claimants (43%) and 57% of other learners indicated that there was no change in requirement for more workplace interpersonal skills (e.g., communication techniques, conflict handling, etc.). About 8% of applicants, 8% of claimants and 3% of other learners indicated they were incapable or very incapable of adapting to the requirement for more workplace interpersonal skills.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>	<b>Other learners</b>
Very incapable	0.6%	0.4%	0.3%
Incapable	7.0%	7.8%	2.4%
Capable	43.0%	42.2%	33.6%
Very capable	7.4%	6.7%	6.6%
No change	41.0%	42.6%	56.5%
No opinion	1.0%	0.2%	0.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

5.1.9 Less than half applicants (39%) and claimants (31%) and 53% of other learners indicated that there was no change in requirement for more workplace personal skills (e.g., creativity, individual thinking, problem-solving, etc.). About 6% of applicants, 5% of claimants and 4% of other learners indicated they were incapable or very incapable of adapting to the requirement for more workplace personal skills.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>	<b>Other learners</b>
Very incapable	0.4%	0.1%	0.5%
Incapable	5.9%	4.8%	3.0%
Capable	48.6%	56.7%	36.6%
Very capable	5.9%	7.5%	5.2%
No change	38.8%	30.7%	53.3%
No opinion	0.4%	0.2%	1.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

5.1.10 More than half applicants (61%), claimants (54%) and other learners (67%) indicated that there was no change in requirement for more knowledge about Mainland China. About 13% of applicants, 16% of claimants and 6% of

other learners indicated they were incapable or very incapable of adapting to the requirement for more knowledge about Mainland China.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>	<b>Other learners</b>
Very incapable	0.7%	1.2%	0.9%
Incapable	12.7%	14.6%	4.8%
Capable	18.9%	25.4%	24.2%
Very capable	4.7%	3.1%	1.9%
No change	60.9%	53.8%	67.3%
No opinion	2.1%	1.9%	0.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

5.1.11 Slightly more than half applicants (51%), 45% of claimants and 66% of other learners indicated that there was no change in requirement for a better global perspective. About 10% of applicants, 12% of claimants and 5% of other learners indicated they were incapable or very incapable of adapting to the requirement for a better global perspective.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>	<b>Other learners</b>
Very incapable	0.1%	0.2%	0.6%
Incapable	10.1%	11.3%	4.8%
Capable	33.4%	39.1%	24.6%
Very capable	3.6%	2.5%	2.7%
No change	51.3%	45.4%	66.0%
No opinion	1.4%	1.5%	1.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

5.1.12 It may be of interest to note that less than half of applicants and claimants who are employed indicate that there is no change in requirement for higher occupational skill levels, no change in requirement for more occupational skills, no change in requirement for higher language skill levels, no change in requirement for multi-lingual skills, no change in requirement for more workplace interpersonal skills, no change in requirement for more workplace personal skills and no change in requirement for more knowledge about Mainland China. It transpires that more than half of applicants and claimants who are employed are of the view that there is a change in requirement for the above-mentioned knowledge and skills. This may explain why the applicants and claimants are taking advantage of the CEF to help them pursue continuing education.

5.1.13 Furthermore, more than 10% of applicants and claimants who are employed are of the view that they are incapable or very incapable of adapting to the requirement for more knowledge about Mainland China and for a better global perspective.

5.1.14 A number of salient points may be observed from the above analysis by contrasting the views of applicants and claimants on the one hand and other learners on the other, and by comparing the views on changes in requirements for different work place related knowledge and skills. These observations are summarized below:

- a) A higher proportion of applicants and claimants were of the view that there was a change in requirement for different work place related knowledge and skills, compared to other learners. This may suggest that those who are more aware of changes in requirements in work place related knowledge and skills are more likely to apply for CEF to pursue continuing education to enhance their knowledge and skills;
- b) For most work place related knowledge and skills reviewed above, the proportion of applicants and claimants who considered they were incapable or very incapable of adapting to the changes in requirements is higher than that of other learners, with the exception of changes in requirement for higher occupational skills. This may also suggest that those who consider they are incapable of adapting to changes in work place related knowledge and skills are more likely to apply for CEF to pursue continuing education. In other words, the CEF are helping those who are more in need of upgrading themselves to adapt to changes in work place requirements;
- c) Among the various work place related knowledge and skills discussed above, a higher proportion of applicants, claimants and other learners considered that they were incapable or very capable of adapting to changes in requirement for a better global perspective (10% of applicants, 12% of claimants and 5% of other learners), more knowledge about Mainland China (13%, 16% and 6%), work place interpersonal skills (8%, 8% and 3%), workplace personal skills (6%, 5% and 4%), higher language skills (6%, 11% and 5%), multilingual skills (5.5%, 9% and 7%) and higher educational attainment (8%, 7% and 6%). The domains now covered in the CEF are obviously able to help applicants, claimants and other learners beef up their competence in these aspects.

## 5.2 Employers’ measures to encourage employees’ pursuit of continuing education

5.2.1 According to applicants, claimants and other learners who were employed, their employers have introduced a number of measures to encourage them to pursue continuing education. The more common measures are in-house training (accounting for 49.5% of applicants, 45% of claimants and 32% of other learners), financial subsidy for training courses/further education (26%, 29% and 15%) and flexible work arrangements for studying training courses/further education (28%, 27% and 14%). About 30% of applicants, 35% of claimants and 51.5% of other learners who were employed indicated that their employers did not have any arrangement to encourage them to pursue continuing education.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>	<b>Other learners</b>
Providing leave for training courses/further education	21.4%	20.3%	11.5%
Providing financial subsidy for training courses/further education	25.8%	28.5%	15.2%
Allowing flexible work arrangements for studying training courses/further education	27.6%	27.3%	13.8%



Displaying or distributing information on training courses/further education at the workspace	20.3%	17.3%	10.4%
Providing in-house training	49.5%	45.1%	32.3%
Do not have any arrangement to encourage further education/training	30.4%	34.5%	51.5%

5.2.2 It may be of interest to note from the above analysis that a significant proportion of applicants (30%), claimants (35%) and other learners (52%) answered that their employers did not have any arrangement to encourage them to pursue continuing education. Obviously the CEF has a role to play in providing financial subsidy to people to encourage them to pursue continuing education. The comparative lower proportion among applicants and claimants may also imply an indirect coherent effect between CEF and employers' support to staff in pursuing continuing education.

### 5.3 Continuing education undertaken

5.3.1 To help cope with changes in work place related requirements, one of the measures people can take is to pursue continuing education. Apart from applicants and claimants who have or are studying CEF courses, only about 14% of other learners have attended continuing education courses in the past 12 months prior to the interview. Their main reasons for doing so include “to enhance work-related knowledge” (accounting for 57% of other learners), “to ensure competence for coping with the needs of current or future jobs” (66%) and “to equip myself better” (60.5%). These motives for undertaking continuing education are all work place related.

Reasons for attending continuing education courses	Other learners
To enhance work-related knowledge	57.3%
To enhance competence for coping with the needs of current/future job	65.6%
To increase promotion opportunities at the current workplace	25.5%
Being asked by my employer/boss to attend	28.8%
To be able to find a better job in the same industry	19.6%
To learn new skills in order to change industries	21.1%
To learn new skills in order to start a new company	11.1%
To increase employment competitiveness in order to find a new job/start a new company outside HK	27.0%
To be able to adapt to changes in the needs of the labour market	25.4%
The course has a good reputation	23.3%
To equip myself better	60.5%
To develop personal interests	40.9%
To enhance interest in continuous education	35.9%
To enhance self-confidence	36.1%
Others	6.0%

5.3.2 For the 86% of other learners did not attend any continuing education course in the past 12 months prior to the interview, their main reasons for not attending any continuing education course are “too busy and no time to attend courses” (accounting for 44% of other learners), “no interest” (26%)

and “have adequate skills already and thus no urgent need” (25%). These reasons are unlikely to be addressed by providing financial subsidy through the CEF.

5.3.3 Nevertheless, about 15% of other learners indicated that they could not find any useful courses and 13% also indicated that they were financially unable to pay for the cost of continuing education. By expanding the coverage of CEF to include more courses of interest to learners and by providing financial subsidy through the CEF, it may possible to attract these learners to pursue continuing education.

<b>Reasons for NOT attending continuing education courses</b>	<b>Other learners</b>
No information about the courses	13.9%
Cannot find any useful courses	15.4%
The class timetable for the interested course is not suitable	14.3%
The class location for the interested course is inconvenient	10.0%
Cannot meet the entry requirements of the course	6.9%
Not admitted to the course as too many people applied	3.8%
Financially unable to pay for the cost of continuing education	13.2%
Too busy and no time to attend the courses/trainings	44.3%
Have adequate skills already and thus have no urgent need to have further study/training	25.3%
No interest to have further study/training	25.5%
Health-related reasons	11.0%
Others	11.7%

5.3.4 The types of CEF courses attended by 14% of other learners who have pursued continuing education in the past 12 months prior to the interview are summarized below. The types of courses in domains covered by the CEF are mainly financial services (12%), business (11%), languages (23%) and interpersonal and intrapersonal skills (31%). A higher proportion of them have attended courses in domains not covered by CEF (45%) and courses registered as SCS-based under Qualifications Framework (16%).

	<b>Other learners</b>
Logistics	1.3%
Financial services	12.1%
Business services	10.8%
Tourism	2.1%
Languages	22.8%
Design	6.7%
Creative industries	5.5%
Interpersonal and intra-personal skills	31.4%
Courses registered as SCS-based under Qualifications Framework	16.4%
Other domains not covered by CEF	45.2%

5.3.5 More specifically, apart from the eight domains designated in the CEF, namely logistics, financial services, business services, tourism, languages, creative industries, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills for the workplace and design, there are several types of courses that are more popular among

other learners who have attended continuing education courses in the past 12 months. These include problem-solving skills (attended by 7% of other learners) who have attended continuing education courses in the past 12 months), property management (4%), information and communications technology (5%), and personal healthcare (7.5%). Apparently, the study interests of other learners extend beyond the eight domains covered by the CEF to include personal healthcare. It may be noted that SCS-based courses for property management and information and communications technology are covered in the CEF.

	<b>Other learners</b>
Problem-solving skills	6.9%
Property management	3.9%
Information and communications technology	4.6%
Personal healthcare	7.5%

5.3.6 It may be of interest to note from the above findings that only about 14% of other learners who have not applied for CEF have attended continuing education courses in the past 12 months prior to the interview. Their main reasons for doing so are all work place related, which include “to enhance work-related knowledge”, “to ensure competence for coping with the needs of current or future job” and “to equip myself better”.

5.3.7 In addition, for these learners, the courses they have undertaken are all covered by the existing CEF domains or areas related to SCS-based courses covered by the CEF, with the exceptions of personal healthcare.

## 5.4 Future interests in pursuing continuing education

5.4.1 About 41% of applicants, 41% of claimants and 59% of learners indicated that they were planning to pursue continuing education and training in the coming 12 months. The types of courses they are interested in are appended in the table below.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>	<b>Other learners</b>
Logistics	1.0%	3.7%	3.3%
Financial services	8.2%	7.8%	8.0%
Business services	15.3%	20.5%	10.1%
Tourism	2.5%	3.0%	3.0%
Languages	49.9%	33.5%	40.6%
Design	5.6%	7.0%	9.8%
Creative industries	6.9%	5.2%	15.2%
Interpersonal and intrapersonal skills	4.3%	7.3%	28.2%
Courses registered as SCS-based	12.2%	17.9%	26.4%
Others	17.3%	19.7%	68.2%

[Note: Multiple choices were allowed]

5.4.2 More specifically, apart from the eight domains designated in the CEF, namely logistics, financial services, business services, tourism, languages, creative industries, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills for the workplace

and design, there are several types of courses that are more popular among applicants, claimants and other learners who are planning to attend continuing education courses in the coming 12 months. These include property management (2%, 1% and 3%), beauty industry (2%, 6% and 1%), catering (3%, 3% and 3%), information and communications technology (ICT) (7%, 4.5% and 7%), personal healthcare (6%, 7% and 12%), infant care at home (2.5%, 1.5% and 5%) and elderly care at home (3%, 0.3% and 4%). It may be noted that some of the courses have already been covered by the CEF.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>	<b>Other learners</b>
Property management	1.9%	1.0%	3.4%
Beauty industry	1.7%	6.2%	1.0%
Catering	3.0%	3.2%	3.0%
Information and communications technology	7.2%	4.5%	6.9%
Personal healthcare	6.1%	6.9%	12.1%
Infant care at home	2.5%	1.5%	5.2%
Elderly care at home	3.3%	0.3%	4%

5.4.3 From the above analysis, it is apparent that the demand for continuing education of applicants, claimants and other learners, in terms of the types of courses, extends beyond the eight domains covered by the CEF. In particular, a significant proportion of them have interests in courses related to personal healthcare (6%, 7% and 12%).

5.4.4 Furthermore, it may be of interest to note that in determining which domains of study should be included or excluded from the CEF, more than half of applicants and claimants suggested factors that should be taken into account were “provide added-value to the students or can improve the overall standard of skills of individual industries” (accounting for 59.5% of applicants and 68% of claimants), “respond to changes in occupational skill requirements” (60% and 60%), “help to develop new industries” (52.5% and 53%) and “follow closely with Hong Kong society’s needs and its financial development, so as to co-ordinate with the changes in its economic structure” (58% and 58%).

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Claimants</b>
Can provide added-value to the students or can improve the overall standard of skills of individual industries	59.5%	68.0%
Can respond to changes in occupational skill requirements	60.0%	59.9%
Can respond to the needs of social welfare and citizens’ livelihoods	40.2%	45.7%
Can strengthen the family and social integration of citizens, and improve their cultural quality	41.8%	41.3%
Can increase citizens’ ability to serve society	47.5%	48.9%
Helpful to industries with labour shortages	44.2%	48.9%
Help to develop new industries	52.5%	52.7%
Can follow closely with Hong Kong society’s needs and its financial development, so as to co-ordinate with the changes in its economic structure	57.8%	58.1%
Can link up with post-secondary courses	46.5%	48.0%

Overlap with other government-subsidized courses	32.3%	33.9%
Can strengthen Hong Kong society's capability to cope with the challenges of an ageing population	38.9%	41.2%
Help to develop the "Silver Hair" industry	34.9%	37.8%

[Note: Multiple choices were allowed]

5.4.5 It may be of interest to note from the above analysis that while less than half of applicants and claimants indicate that they are planning to pursue continuing education and training in the coming 12 months, more than half of other learners are planning to do so in the coming 12 months. Apart from the eight domains and SCS-based courses covered by the CEF, a significant proportion of applicants, claimants and other learners have interests in courses related to personal healthcare (6%, 7% and 12% respectively).

5.4.6 In addition, in determining which domains of study should be included or excluded from the CEF, more than half of applicants and claimants have suggested to take into account "provide added-value to the students or can improve the overall standard of skills of individual industries", "respond to changes in occupational skill requirements", "help to develop new industries" and "follow closely with Hong Kong society's needs and its financial development, so as to co-ordinate with the changes in its economic structure".

## 5.5 Additional domains to be covered by CEF

5.5.1 Apart from views of applicants, claimants and learners on their future plans to pursue continuing education which may serve as useful reference on the coverage of the CEF, views of stakeholders are also gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions on domains to be covered by the CEF. Their views are presented in the paragraphs below.

5.5.2 During discussions with claimants, they were of the view that the domains covered by the CEF should regularly be updated. Several applicants consulted during focus group discussion shared similar views. They suggested that the CEF should cover new and emerging industries such as healthcare, especially in view of growing demand from an ageing population. Other domains suggested are rehabilitation, psychological health, nutrition, physical education training and braille for the deaf and blind, home repair and maintenance, multimedia, arts and music.

5.5.3 During discussions with CEF course providers, it was pointed out that the eight domains currently covered by the CEF were outdated. Domains that were suggested to be covered by the CEF include early childhood education and services, elderly care services, healthcare, paramedical services, nursing, food safety, occupational safety, testing and certification, science subjects, specific topics in information and communication technology such as big data and cloud technology, gardening and horticulture, workplace Cantonese targeting for ethnic minorities, as well as handicraft and art related courses useful for the innovative industries.

- 5.5.4 Furthermore, CEF course providers pointed out the requirement for courses in interpersonal and intrapersonal skills to include an overnight stay, which was the trend ten years ago, is outdated. This is not evidence-based justification to support this requirement. On the contrary, this overnight-stay requirement has severely limited the number of courses available and the number of course providers that have the facilities to run such courses.
- 5.5.5 For those who have not applied for CEF consulted in the study, they suggested new domains such as horticulture and environmental studies to be included in the CEF.
- 5.5.6 To summarize the above findings, domains suggested to be included in the CEF by different groups of stakeholders are shown in the table below.

	User survey			Focus group discussions		
	Applicants	Claimants	Other learners	Claimants	Other learners	Course providers
ICT and multimedia	√	√	√			√
Health care	√	√	√	√		√
Occupational safety						√
Food safety						√
Early childhood education						√
Home repairs and maintenance				√		
Arts and culture				√		√
Sign language and braille				√		
Horticulture				√	√	√
Environmental studies				√	√	√
Testing and certification						√

## 5.6 Continuing education for the elderly

- 5.6.1 In conducting the study, opportunity has been taken to solicit the views of social workers of elderly centres and the elderly. Their views which are presented below may be useful in shedding light on the upper age limit of CEF, the procedures for applying reimbursement and domains to be covered by the CEF.

### *Activities organized for the elderly*

- 5.6.2 During discussions with social workers of elderly centres, it was pointed out that there are mainly three types of continuing education courses organized for the elderly, namely training related such as language courses, interest related and physical exercise related. Many of these courses are subsidized by the government such as courses operated under the Adult Education Subvention Scheme and the Elder Academy Scheme administered by the Labour and Welfare Bureau.
- 5.6.3 The types of activities organized by elderly centres are aimed at engaging the elderly and to enable them to live a meaningful and healthy life. Courses on

dancing, music, language and use of mobile phones and social media are usually organized. These courses have helped the elderly establish social network, continue to remain active and engaged in social activities and be able to take care of themselves. Through learning, it is believed that the elderly can identify new objectives in life and enhance their sense of achievement and self-confidence in dealing with the changes in daily life.

- 5.6.4 Due to limited funding and availability of venues, courses organized by elderly centres are usually pitched at the elementary level. It is difficult for elderly centres to recruit qualified trainers to offer more advanced courses. The duration of courses for the elderly are rather short, lasting for about one or two months with attendance up to several hours a week. The course fees are usually several hundred dollars for a course of 8 sessions.

### ***Interest in CEF courses***

- 5.6.5 Social workers of elderly centres pointed out that elderly may not be interested in CEF courses because the course fees of courses offered by NGOs are usually lower than those of similar CEF courses. Besides, elderly persons usually prefer to attend interest classes rather than courses that are employment linked. They do not like to take examinations, thus reducing further their interest in those CEF courses which require the learners to pass requisite examinations before they can apply for reimbursement. Furthermore, elderly persons do not want to tie up with a course which lasts over a long period of time (say 6 months) and requires regular attendance on a weekly if not daily basis, which is the normal mode of attendance for CEF courses. The 70% attendance requirement for CEF courses is also considered too demanding for elderly persons. The views of elderly consulted are similar.

### ***Subsidy limit***

- 5.6.6 Social workers of elderly centres consulted were of the view that the subsidy limit of \$10,000 is sufficient, as elderly persons are mainly interested in attending interest classes, the course fees of which are usually lower. Most elderly persons are not interested in pursuing courses leading to academic or professional qualifications. The fees of these courses are often much higher than courses not leading to academic or professional qualifications.

### ***Courses suggested for the elderly***

- 5.6.7 Courses that were suggested to be organized for the elderly include financial management and investment in order to help the elderly manage their finance, travel and tourism as many elderly persons like to spend time travelling around, art and craft such as painting, photography, Chinese calligraphy and dancing, language, healthcare, Chinese medicine, beauty care, babysitting and elderly care services. Those elderly who have attended courses in say

babysitting and elderly care will be able to help taking care of their grandchildren. They can also work as part-time workers or even volunteers to provide care services to the very old staying in institutions such as nursing or residential care homes. The views of elderly consulted are similar.



## 6. OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 Implementation of CEF

- 6.1.1 Having consolidated the views collected from stakeholders and the analysis of the continuing education schemes in selected overseas economies, the consultant would like to summarize its observations and make recommendations which are detailed in the paragraphs to follow.

#### *Publicity of CEF*

- 6.1.2 The study findings discussed above show that the publicity of CEF is effective. Even those who have not applied for the CEF are aware of the CEF. Nevertheless, a lower proportion of elderly and those with secondary level of education or below are aware of the CEF. There is thus room for further stepping up efforts in promoting the CEF. It is noted that the mass media and social media have played a major role in promoting the CEF.
- 6.1.3 *It is recommended that the government should step up efforts in promoting the CEF through the mass media and social media, targeting in particular elderly and employers.*

#### *Eligibility and procedure*

- 6.1.4 The study findings show that more than half of applicants and claimants consider the current age limit, total number of claims and the validity period are appropriate, with the exception of the maximum subsidy limit of \$10,000. In addition, both applicants and claimants agreed with the application procedures in various aspects including the requirements of opening of the CEF accounts and the eligibility of claim reimbursement.
- 6.1.5 As regard the maximum subsidy limit of \$10,000, the trade-off is whether maintaining the existing subsidy limit such that for a given amount of money, a greater number of learners can benefit from the CEF, or increasing the maximum subsidy limit such that the benefit accrued to individual claimants will be greater, at least in financial terms, with the inevitable consequence that additional financial provision is required to sustain the CEF. Based on views of stakeholders, a higher subsidy will motivate more learners to continue to pursue continuing education, especially those without the financial means to do so.
- 6.1.6 It may be worth noting that for all countries reviewed in the course of conducting the study have introduced a variety of financial incentive schemes to motivate people to pursue continuing education. Such governmental intervention is considered necessary because of externalities to continuing education. Benefits of continuing education accrued to individual

learners are likely to be smaller than benefits of continuing education to the economy through increase in the supply of educated manpower that can adapt to changing technology, which in turn is conducive to innovation and productivity increase, especially in a knowledge-based economy.

- 6.1.7 *On the premise that continuing education is essential to individuals in order to help them cope with changing job requirements, it is recommended that in the spirit of supporting continuing education the government should review the maximum subsidy limit, in order to motivate individuals to continue to pursue continuing education. Consideration should also be given to revise the maximum subsidy limit taking into account inflation such that the “purchasing power” of the CEF subsidy could be maintained.*
- 6.1.8 *It is also recommended that measures should be taken, leveraging on information and communication technology, to streamline the application procedures, with a view to facilitate applicants and claimants on the one hand and course providers on the other.*

#### ***Quality assurance***

- 6.1.9 As discussed above, both applicants and claimants are satisfied with the quality assurance measures to protect the interests of learners. Nevertheless, there are concerns expressed like practices of some course providers including the bundling of several courses such that the claimants have to complete the entire bundle of courses before allowing them to apply for reimbursements, higher course fees compared with similar non-CEF courses, the quality of instructors and the quality of CEF courses in the eight domains not accredited by HKCAAVQ.
- 6.1.10 *It is recommended that the government should step up actions for monitoring the practices of CEF course providers and the quality of CEF courses, such as ensuring that CEF course providers would not bundle several courses together and monitoring changes in course fees after the course has been included in the CEF. Consideration should be given to establish a mechanism for allowing CEF applicants and claimants to provide feedbacks on the CEF.*

#### ***Reasons for not applying for CEF***

- 6.1.11 As discussed above, most learners who are not aware of the CEF do not consider applying for the CEF because they are not aware of the procedures for applying for CEF. For those who are aware of the CEF, they have not applied for CEF for a variety of reasons including no urgent need, too busy and no knowledge of application procedures. It is believed that if employers put more emphasis on the importance of continuing education, those employees who are too busy to pursue continuing education may be motivated to pursue continuing education.

- 6.1.12 *It is recommended that the focus of future promotion activities should be placed on explaining more clearly to the public the procedures for applying for CEF and in promoting to employers the importance of continuing education for their employees.*

## **6.2 Impact of CEF**

- 6.2.1 As discussed above, most applicants and claimants have high expectations of continuing education, preparing them better for employment. Most of them are also of the view that the CEF has allowed them to take the courses they have longed to study. They also consider continuing education has helped improve their knowledge and skills, and such views are shared by employers of claimants and other employers in general.
- 6.2.2 *In view of the positive impact of the CEF, it is recommended that the government should continue to inject funding to the CEF so as to provide financial incentive in motivating people to pursue continuing education.*

## **6.3 Needs and demands for continuing education**

### ***Needs for continuing education and CEF***

- 6.3.1 Apparently there is a need for continuing education for those who are employed. This is because of the majority of them consider that there are changes in requirement for higher occupational skill levels, more occupational skills, higher language skill levels, multi-lingual skills, more workplace interpersonal skills, more workplace personal skills and more knowledge about Mainland China. In addition, more than 10% of applicants and claimants who are employed are of the view that they are incapable or very incapable of adapting to the requirement for more knowledge about Mainland China and for a better global perspective.
- 6.3.2 Furthermore, about 30% of applicants, 35% of claimants and 51% of other learners who are employed indicate that their employers do not have any arrangement to encourage them to pursue continuing education. This calls for government's actions, among others, in providing financial incentives to employers to facilitate and encourage their employees to pursue continuing education.

### ***Demonstrated demand for CEF***

- 6.3.3 For learners who have not applied for CEF, only about 14% of other learners have attended continuing education courses in the past 12 months prior to the interview. In other words, the demonstrated demand for continuing education among learners who have not applied for CEF does not match the needs for continuing education discussed above, for those who are employed. This

again calls for government's actions, among others, in providing financial incentives to people to pursue continued education.

#### ***Additional domains to be covered by the CEF***

6.3.4 The CEF covers eight domains and SCS-based training. As discussed above most continuing education activities taken by applicants, claimants and other learners fall within the eight domains and SCS-based training programmes. However, on basis of types of courses taken by applicants, claimants and other learners who have not applied for CEF, as well as feedbacks from claimants, other learners who have not applied for CEF, and CEF and non-CEF course providers, the following domains are suggested for inclusion in the CEF:

- a) Health care, including nutrition and personal healthcare, babysitting and elderly health, to take account of the ageing population in Hong Kong, the growth prevalence of trans-parenting or tri-parenting, and growing recognition of the importance of primary health care with emphasis on, among others, preventive approach and person-centred care;
- b) ICT, given its increasing usage in the workplace and daily life. It is noted that courses on ICT is covered by the CEF if it is related to business services. However, there are ICT courses that are not related to business services or purely ICT per se. It is thus desirable to include ICT as a new domain covered by the CEF;
- c) Environmental studies including horticulture, to serve as part of government's efforts to raise community awareness of issues related to environmental protection, energy conservation and sustainable development, and meet the needs to ensure that workers have good knowledge and skills in environmental protection.

6.3.5 It may be worth noting that domains covered by the CEF are very much employment related. This is similar to the approach adopted in Singapore where government support is geared to helping specific segment of the economically active population (e.g. job seekers). Nevertheless, from discussion with stakeholders, it was also stressed that courses related to health care which may or not be employment related are also useful.

6.3.6 *In short, it is recommended to include three new domains in the CEF, namely health care, ICT and environmental studies.*

#### ***Continuing education for the elderly***

6.3.7 It is beyond doubt that continuing education benefits elderly, enabling them to live a meaningful and healthy life. Through learning, the elderly can identify new objectives in life and enhance their sense of achievement and self-confidence in dealing with the changes in daily life.

- 6.3.8 It may be of interest to note that the need to support elderly to pursue continuing education is also recognized in other cities and countries. For instance, in Macau, there is no upper age limit on the eligibility of applicants, allowing elderly persons to benefit from the subsidy through the Continuing Education Development Fund. In Korea, the Third National Lifelong Learning Promotion Plan has shifted the focus to helping elderly citizens to pursue continuing education even up to higher education level.
- 6.3.9 Nevertheless, it is also noted that there are a variety of continuing education courses organized for the elderly. Many of these courses are subsidized by the government such as courses operated under the Adult Education Subvention Scheme and the Elder Academy Scheme administered by the Labour and Welfare Bureau. Care should thus be taken to ensure there is no duplication of efforts and subsidy.
- 6.3.10 There are thus merits of raising the upper age limit of the CEF from 65 to at least 70. There are views that other requirements of the CEF such as the requirement to pass examinations should be relaxed for the elderly. However, given that there are other continuing education courses that do not have similar requirements organized for the elderly by elderly centres, there is no much justification for relaxing the CEF requirements for the elderly. Besides, it is undesirable to create double standards for CEF applicants and claimants of different age groups. After all, as stressed by social workers of elderly centres, many elderly persons are active learners.
- 6.3.11 *To sum up the above, it is recommended that the upper age limit of the CEF be raised from 65 to 70.*