

Quality Education Fund Priority Themes

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

Priority Themes

1. Q : What are priority themes?

A : Priority themes are designated by the Quality Education Fund (QEF) with reference to the prevailing trends and directions of the education sector and the changing needs of the society and schools. The priority themes cover areas to which the QEF would give priority consideration in assessing proposals. Elaboration on the respective priority themes is given to facilitate the preparation of proposals.

For details, please refer to the Guide to Applicants of the Priority Themes.

2. Q : Can applicants submit applications beyond the priority themes?

A : For proposals with grant sought exceeding \$200,000, applicants should select the priority theme that best fits the key focus of the proposal. For proposals with grant sought not exceeding \$200,000, applicants are welcome to select the most relevant priority theme.

Apart from the priority themes, applicants may also submit school-based innovative projects that meet the needs of the schools and can enhance the quality of school education, or innovative projects built on previous QEF projects. If no priority theme is appropriate for the proposal, the applicant can choose “other theme”.

3. Q : Can applicants submit an application which covers several priority themes?

A : It is common for schools to adopt cross-curricular and cross-Key Learning Areas approaches in learning. The QEF welcomes applications that cover more than one priority theme / cut across different themes. Applicants should choose the priority theme that best suits the key focus of their project proposals when they submit applications.

Points to Note when Submitting Applications

4. Q : What is the maximum number of applications an applicant can submit in each school year?

A : The maximum number of applications an applicant can apply for in the same academic year is as follows:

| Types of Applications | School | Each Independent Faculty/ Department/ Centre of Tertiary Institution | Organisation and Individual |
|---|--|---|------------------------------------|
| Grant sought not exceeding \$200,000 (Any theme in different contexts) | 2 applications | 2 applications | 2 applications |
| Grant sought exceeding \$200,000 (Different themes) | 2 applications (Exceeding \$200,000) and 1 application (Exceeding \$200,000 but not exceeding \$1,000,000) | 3 applications | 2 applications |
| Total | 5 applications | 5 applications | 4 applications |

For details on the number of applications, please refer to the Guide to Applicants of the Priority Themes.

5. Q : How should applicants submit information about collaborating / participating schools / organisations?

A : Applicants should obtain prior consent from the collaborating / participating schools and organisations, and provide the names of the collaborating / participating schools and organisations in the Electronic Project Management System (EPMS). The collaborating / participating schools or organisations must confirm through the EPMS within 14 days of submitting the application. The QEF will process the application upon receiving confirmations from the collaborating / participating schools and organisations through the EPMS. If the schools and organisations fail to confirm through the EPMS, they will not be considered as valid collaborators / participants.

Points to Note for Completing Project Proposal

Innovative Elements

6. Q : What is meant by school-based innovative projects?

A : The QEF encourages projects that support innovation and / or new development, enrichment of students' learning experiences and school-based initiatives that would suit the specific needs of students, teachers and contexts of individual schools as well as the school sector in accordance with education policies.

School-based innovations should not narrowly be interpreted as original proposals that have never been implemented. Innovative projects would cover new ideas or practices (including enhancement and / or adaptation) which serve to supplement and / or complement the existing practices that would facilitate the development of schools to address the needs specific to their own contexts. This also covers projects which can build on and further expand the new ideas / practices that have been generated from projects previously funded by the QEF.

7. Q : Can the applicant apply for funding from the QEF to implement an ongoing project again?

A : Projects funded by the QEF are of a one-off nature without entailing recurrent expenditure on the part of the QEF. Normally, applicants should not apply for funding from the QEF for recurrent implementation of projects which have already received other government funding.

QEF projects should not duplicate any project that the government is undertaking or about to undertake. If similar projects have already received funding from other government sources, applications should not be made to the QEF for duplicate funding. Unless under special circumstances, projects that could have been funded by the applicant's approved recurrent expenditure or other sources will normally not be considered.

Project Scope

8. Q : What areas can be covered for projects to be funded by the QEF?

A : Areas and activities under a project that could be funded by the QEF may include but not limited to the following:

- trying out new pedagogy

- developing school-based curriculum and / or assessment
- integrating information technology with school-based learning activities
- organising life-wide learning activities for students, including extra-curricular activities / educational visits
- providing support services to cater for diverse needs of students
- offering school-based professional learning opportunities for teachers and principals
- undertaking educational researches of different scales, including basic research that would have bearings on practices, action research, applied research and evaluation to address specific issues in education (in partnership with schools)

9. Q : Can applicants submit an application proposal involving educational researches?

A : Although educational research is not a stand-alone priority theme, the QEF welcomes application proposals involving evidence-based educational researches which are aligned with the current education policies in Hong Kong and benefit kindergarten, primary, secondary and special education sectors. Such researches, irrespective of their scales, may include basic researches on educational practices, action researches as well as applied researches and evaluation to address specific educational challenges (in partnership with schools). In general, the theoretical framework of an educational research should be aligned with practical needs. In this regard, participation of schools and provision of relevant activities to students and teachers should be included in applications involving educational researches, of which the research findings could create positive impact on the development of school education.

Assessment Criteria

10. Q : What are the criteria for assessing project proposals?

A : Project proposals will be assessed in accordance with, but not limited to, the criteria under the following three areas: Project Needs, Project Feasibility and Expected Project Outcomes.

The project proposals must demonstrate innovative elements and strive to meet the criteria in all the three areas. Innovations, conceptual framework, implementation plan with realistic timeline and detailed budget of expenditure items with sound justifications should also be provided. For details, please refer to the Guide to Applicants of the Priority Themes.

11. Q : What should applicants take note of when setting out the project idea and design?

A : Applicants should have a thorough understanding of the learning and teaching activities / services currently provided for students, such as the weaknesses of the existing practices / services, and elaborate in the project proposals on how the projects can supplement the existing practices / services. Applicants from non-school or non-educational bodies should also ensure that project proposals must be closely related to school education, and demonstrate that they have a good understanding of the situation and needs of the schools in Hong Kong, and the proposed projects can provide innovative elements in learning and teaching or solutions to existing challenges. Besides, applicants should take note of the latest trends of educational development and reforms in order to draw up insightful project proposals.

Regarding project design, each part of the proposal should be inter-related. For instance, the proposed project activities should be designed for attaining the project objectives effectively and the evaluation strategies adopted should be able to measure the effectiveness of the project accurately. With regard to the implementation plan, the necessary conditions, implementation schedule and relevant details should be provided in the proposal. In addition, a proposal should elaborate on the expertise of the project team rather than just quoting any particular experts / renowned scholars, to demonstrate that the whole team possesses the relevant expertise for conducting the project.

Last but not least, for applications which build on previously funded projects, new ideas / practices to be introduced or improvement measures to be adopted should be specified. Applications with repeated project activities of highly similar nature and practice should be discouraged.

12. Q : What are the common causes of failure among those unsuccessful project proposals?

A : In general, unsuccessful project proposals lack clear goals, concrete contents and a comprehensive or feasible project design, and innovative elements on the project objectives, project ideas and implementation methods to address the needs specific to Hong Kong or schools, etc. Quite some unsuccessful project proposals are not cost-effective with insufficient justifications for the expenditure items, or lack sustainability, evaluation and implementation plans, etc. For example:

Project Objectives

- Project objectives are not clear and the project scope is too broad,

- resulting in a lack of focus
- Suggested activities are not directly related to the objectives
- Project objectives are not in line with the current policies and initiatives of the Education Bureau or are not linked to relevant learning areas / curriculum / subjects

Project Design

- Elaboration on the learning and teaching activities is inadequate
- The contents of the learning activities fail to meet the learning needs of the students of the relevant levels
- Most of the project time is spent on procurement of equipment and staff recruitment, resulting in insufficient time for implementation of learning and teaching activities
- The project is solely for the purchase of equipment and / or school improvement works, and there are insufficient details about the learning and teaching activities, failing to illustrate how the equipment / construction works will facilitate the implementation of the activities and their necessity
- Proposed learning activities are activities regularly held in schools such as morning assemblies, weekly assemblies, and graduation ceremonies; and it is unclear how the project will help the applicant school improve existing practices / implement new strategies to facilitate school development
- The applicant plans to hire a large number of project staff; their duties are overlapping and the applicant fails to provide justifications on the need to hire them

Teachers' Involvement

- Learning and teaching activities under the project are almost entirely carried out by the project staff, and the level of participation of school teachers is low

In addition, applicants should take note of the format requirements and the page limit of the project proposal. Applicants should also take the processing time of the application into account when the proposed commencement date for the project is determined. For details, please refer to the Tips for Writing a Good Application Proposal.

13. Q : As a non-governmental organisation (NGO) or tertiary institution, what should we take note of when applying for QEF?

A : NGOs and tertiary institutions should propose insightful projects in response to the latest trends and reforms on educational development. The proposal should be closely connected with school education and address the current

situation and needs of the schools in Hong Kong with a view to infusing innovative teaching elements or providing solutions to existing challenges. In order to address the specific needs of the target service recipients, NGOs and tertiary institutions should have a thorough understanding on the current situation of the learning and teaching activities / student services in the participating schools and collaborate with school teachers when devising project activities which are not covered by the current services.

Budget

14. Q : What should applicants take note of when formulating the budget plan?

A : Applicants are required to submit a detailed budget plan and justifications. Expenditure items in the budget should be classified into six major categories: staff cost, equipment, services, works, general expenses and contingency. For details of each expenditure item, please refer to the Explanatory Notes for Completing the Application Form in the Guide to Applicants.

Applicants may also refer to the General Guidelines on Management and Monitoring of Projects to understand the general principles for allowable costs to avoid including unallowable costs in the budget plan.

15. Q : Does the QEF allow employment of project staff at a rate higher than the minimum pay rates applicable to similar personnel?

A : Applicants should make reference to the latest market prices and the QEF pricing standards when formulating their budget. Candidates are normally assumed to be appointed at the minimum pay rates applicable to similar personnel. Strong justifications have to be provided for the appointment of staff at higher pay rates.

16. Q : What should applicants take note of when calculating the salaries of full-time / part-time project staff?

A : All project personnel, if employed on a full-time basis, should be remunerated on a fixed salary point during the whole project period. Normally, salary increment is not granted.

Some projects may require the employment of short-term or part-time personnel, such as project assistants and research assistants to carry out duties specific to the project. Salaries of such personnel should be calculated on a time-on-project basis and while salary should be commensurate with qualifications and experience, candidates are normally assumed to be

appointed at the minimum pay rates.

17. Q : Does the QEF support applications to purchase IT hardware such as tablet PCs, Bring Your Own Device and electronic interactive display boards?

A : Applicants must clearly explain the objectives and implementation details of the project, such as the necessity of using relevant hardware, the rationale for having additional hardware / resources, how to effectively utilise the relevant hardware and how to complement the applicant's existing resources, etc., in order to enhance / adapt the current practices.

If the application is solely for the purchase of hardware but lacks corresponding teaching ideas or strategies, and fails to demonstrate how teachers can participate in the project and how to effectively utilise the relevant hardware, it will be unlikely to be supported by the QEF.

Learning Activities outside Hong Kong

18. Q : Does the QEF support projects involving study trips outside Hong Kong?

A : In accordance with the priority themes and the different learning needs of the students, applicants may include learning and exchange activities outside Hong Kong for students in their projects. These activities should help broaden students' horizons and learning experiences, and enable students to learn about different cultures and enhance language proficiency.

If the school-based projects initiated by schools involve learning activities outside Hong Kong, the proposals should elaborate on the planning of the entire learning programme, with the learning activities outside Hong Kong forming a part of the programme only and complementing other learning activities in the programme, in order to ensure that the learning activities outside Hong Kong are specific to the abilities and needs of the participating students.

19. Q : How does the QEF support students to participate in the proposed learning activities?

A : Under normal circumstances, the QEF sponsors the costs / fees of students participating in activities including camps, study trips, leadership training programmes, etc.

For projects involving trips for students outside Hong Kong (including the Mainland or other parts of the world), the QEF sponsors half of the cost / fee of students participating in the activities or half of the funding ceiling, whichever is the lower. The funding ceiling will be based on the destination of the trip. Please refer to the Explanatory Notes for Completing the Application Form in the Guide to Applicants of the Priority Themes for the funding ceiling of different regions.

The actual amount of subsidy for each student's trips outside Hong Kong will be determined based on the student's social-economic background:

| |
|--|
| General students 50% support of the costs / fees involved in their trips <u>or</u> 50% of the funding ceiling of the respective destination <i>(whichever is the lower)</i> |
| Students in receipt of half remission under the Student Financial Assistance Scheme (SFAS) 75% support of the costs / fees involved in their trips <u>or</u> 75% of the funding ceiling of the respective destination <i>(whichever is the lower)</i> |
| Students in receipt of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) or full remission under the Student Financial Assistance Scheme (SFAS) 100% support of the costs / fees involved in their trips <u>or</u> 100% of the funding ceiling of the respective destination <i>(whichever is the lower)</i> |

Successful Applicants' Commitments and Responsibilities

20. Q : What are the commitments of applicants if their application are successful?

A : Applicants will be required to sign an Agreement with the Trustee of QEF. After the signing of Agreement, grantees are required to implement the project in accordance with the terms and conditions set out in the Agreement. The template of an Agreement has been uploaded onto the QEF website. Applicants may refer to the terms and conditions of the Agreement and the relevant guidelines.

Approved projects are subjected to monitoring by the QEF. Grantees will be required to play an active role in project monitoring and self-evaluation. Grantees and project leaders are also required to participate actively in the promotion, publicity and dissemination activities organised or facilitated by the QEF.

21. Q : Can the grantee start the project before signing the Agreement?

A : The grantee could start the project only after signing the Agreement. The QEF will only cover expenses incurred during the project period, i.e. expenses incurred between the project commencement date and end date specified in the Agreement.

22. Q : What should grantees and project leaders take note of after project commencement?

A : Approved projects are subjected to monitoring by the QEF. Grantees will be required to play an active role in project monitoring and self-evaluation. Grantees and project leaders are also required to participate actively in the promotion, publicity and dissemination activities organised or facilitated by the QEF.

Grantees should note that the contents, outcomes and products developed from all projects sponsored by the QEF are protected by intellectual property rights. Unless otherwise indicated, the Permanent Secretary for Education Incorporated is the owner of the copyright and other intellectual property rights in all products. For details, please refer to the QEF Intellectual Property Rights Policy on the QEF website.

Reference Materials and Other Support

23. Q : Can applicants resubmit an unsuccessful application after refining it?

A : Applicants can refine each unsuccessful proposal and resubmit it once within 12 months from the submission date of the unsuccessful application.

24. Q : What kinds of reference materials are provided to applicants by the QEF?

A : Applicants may visit the QEF Cyber Resource Centre (<http://qcrc.qef.org.hk>) to view information on previously approved projects.

25. Q : What kinds of support are provided to applicants by the QEF?

A : The QEF provides consultation sessions for prospective applicants pertaining to the preparation of proposals for QEF application. Each school, organisation or individual can register to make an appointment for a consultation session (about half an hour) to discuss with project officer of the Secretariat on specified days to address concerns in preparing their

applications, such as queries about the application guidelines, use of the Electronic Project Management System. For details, please visit the QEF website for announcements regarding the consultation sessions.

QEF Secretariat
August 2024