



Continuing Education Fund

Guidance Notes for Application

Importance Notes

Continuing Education Fund (CEF) Application Form [SFO 313 (2020)] is a combined application form for account opening and fee reimbursement under CEF. With effect from 1 April 2019, applicants who apply for CEF for the first time are only required to complete the combined form and provide all supporting documents for applying for both account opening and fee reimbursement at the same time. The combined form is also applicable to applicants who have already opened a CEF account to apply for fee reimbursement only.

There are many CEF reimbursable courses in the market, which are offered by a wide range of institutions / course providers. Courses provided by different institutions / course providers seek to meet the needs of different learners and their quality may vary. We therefore appeal to all CEF learners to select courses carefully. Learners should consider their own situations and needs and make reference to the course information on our website (<https://www.wfsfaa.gov.hk/cef>) to verify and compare the course details (e.g. course title, entry requirements, course outline, assessment requirements, course fees and payment method, etc.) provided by institutions / course providers. Please note that the tuition fees of all CEF reimbursable courses must be collected on equal monthly instalments basis except those which have been granted exemption by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare. For any enquiries, please call the Office of the Continuing Education Fund (OCEF)'s 24-hour hotline at 3142 2277 (Handled by the staff of "1823").

There are no restrictions on the number of maximum claims and validity period for applicants who have enrolled CEF reimbursable course with course commencement date on or after 1 April 2019. Applicants may pursue suitable CEF reimbursable courses with flexibility before reaching the upper age limit. Applicants are advised to check the status and balance of their CEF accounts before enrolling in a CEF reimbursable course. For applicants who have opened a CEF account, they can check the usable balance of subsidy by logging in the CEF website or the 24-hour hotline. A "subsidy calculator" is available on the CEF website to facilitate applicants to estimate the eligible subsidy.

1. CEF

- 1.1 The CEF subsidises adults with learning aspirations to pursue continuing education and training. Eligible applicants (pursuant to section 2.3) may submit unlimited number of claims for reimbursement of fees on successful completion of CEF reimbursable courses up to a maximum sum of HK\$20,000. The co-payment ratios by learners (i.e. the percentage of fees to be borne by learners) for the first HK\$10,000 subsidy is 20% of the course fee¹ and that for the second HK\$10,000 subsidy is 40% of the course fee.
- 1.2 For applicants who have opened a CEF account before 1 April 2019, they are also eligible for claiming the additional HK\$10,000 subsidy and the unused balance (if any) of the original subsidy of HK\$10,000 regardless of whether their accounts were closed in the past. The co-payment ratios as set out in section 1.1 above are applicable to these applicants.

2. ELIGIBILITY

2.1 Which courses meet the application criteria?

Only continuing education and training courses registered under CEF as "reimbursable courses" are eligible for fee reimbursement. A list of the reimbursable courses can be obtained from the CEF website (<https://www.wfsfaa.gov.hk/cef>), or OCEF.

2.2 What fees may be reimbursed?

- (a) (i) **For applicants who have opened their accounts on or after 1 April 2019:** only course fees for CEF reimbursable courses **commenced on or after 1 April 2019** are reimbursable;

¹ Course fees refer to tuition fees and examination fees for taking designated benchmark tests / examinations (if applicable) in respect of language proficiency courses (pursuant to section 5.2). Any other fees, such as late charges and change of course fee charges, etc. are not reimbursable.

- (ii) **For applicants who have opened their accounts before 1 April 2019, and the account is still valid on 1 April 2019** (i.e. generally those applicants who have opened their accounts on or after 1 April 2015, have not reached the age of 66, have unused balance for the original HK\$10,000 subsidy and have not reached the maximum number of 4 claims): course fees for CEF reimbursable courses **commenced after the opening of the CEF account and before 31 March 2019** are reimbursable (please refer to section 2.4(b) below). Course fees for CEF reimbursable courses **commenced on or after 1 April 2019** are also reimbursable; and
 - (iii) **For applicants who had opened their accounts before 1 April 2019 and the accounts were closed before 1 April 2019** (i.e. generally those applicants who have opened their accounts before 1 April 2015, or reached the age of 66, or fully claimed the original HK\$10,000 subsidy, or reached the maximum number of 4 claims): only tuition fees for CEF reimbursable courses **commenced on or after 1 April 2019** are reimbursable.
- (b) Applicants studying language proficiency course can submit application for reimbursement of fees after successfully completed a CEF reimbursable course and passed a specified benchmark test / examination (if applicable) at the specified (or higher) level in respect of a language proficiency course.

2.3 *Who is eligible?*

Persons who meet the following eligibility criteria can apply for CEF –

- 2.3.1 (a) are Hong Kong residents who have the right of abode or the right to land or to remain in Hong Kong without restriction, i.e. “A” (right of abode), “R” (right to land) or “U” (remain in Hong Kong without restriction) should appear below the date of birth on the HK Smart Identity Card, or holders of one-way permit from the Mainland China. For details of the meaning of symbols, please visit the website of the Immigration Department (<https://www.immd.gov.hk/>); and
 - (b) are aged between 18 and 70 (i.e. before reaching the age of 71) both at the time when the CEF reimbursable course commenced and at the time when an application is submitted pursuant to section 3.1. Sections 2.3.2, 2.4(d), 2.4(e), 5.1, 5.2 and 5.7 shall be read subject to this age limit.
- 2.3.2 (a) for applicants who meet the criteria as set out in sections 2.3.1(a) and 2.3.1(b) above and have not opened CEF accounts before 1 April 2019, they are eligible for fee reimbursement up to a maximum sum of HK\$20,000 for courses commenced on or after 1 April 2019 (pursuant to section 1.1).
 - (b) for applicants who have opened CEF accounts before 1 April 2019 and meet the criteria as set out in sections 2.3.1(a) and 2.3.1(b) above, they are also eligible for claiming the additional HK\$10,000 subsidy and the unused balance (if any) of the original subsidy of HK\$10,000 regardless of whether their accounts were closed in the past (pursuant to section 1.2).

2.4 *Other conditions –*

- (a) The date of receipt of the application by OCEF will be taken as the date of the application submitted.
- (b) The application for reimbursement of fees for course(s) which commenced before 1 April 2019 (only applicable to applicants mentioned in section 2.2(a)(ii) above) **must be submitted within the validity period of the CEF learner’s account and before reaching the age of 66.**
- (c) For CEF reimbursable courses that commenced before 1 April 2019, reimbursement claims will be processed in accordance with the requirements in force before 1 April 2019 (including the subsidy ceiling of HK\$10,000, requirement on the maximum number of 4 claims, etc.).
- (d) The application for fee reimbursement for course(s) which commenced on or after 1 April 2019 must be **submitted within one year upon the successful completion of the courses and before reaching the age of 71.** Late applications will not be accepted.
- (e) Each applicant may submit an unlimited number of reimbursement applications for CEF reimbursable course commenced on or after 1 April 2019 before reaching the age of 71. Each claim may include one or more than one CEF reimbursable course. Each eligible applicant is entitled to a maximum sum of HK\$20,000 subsidy in respect of all CEF reimbursable courses pursued.
- (f) In processing the applications for fee reimbursement of courses to which commenced on or after 1 April 2019, if there is an unused balance for the first HK\$10,000 subsidy, the unused balance and co-payment amount by the applicant (pursuant to section 1.1) of the first HK\$10,000 subsidy would be used for calculation of the fee reimbursement amount first. The balance of the remaining course fee after deduction of the reimbursement amount under the first HK\$10,000 subsidy will then be allotted to the second HK\$10,000 subsidy for calculation. A “subsidy calculator” is available on the CEF website to facilitate applicants to estimate the eligible subsidy.

- (g) In seeking fee reimbursement, the conditions set out in section 2.3 must be fully met. In respect of any courses, modules or units of study credits for which the fees are to be reimbursed, the applicant must not have obtained any other public funds or assistance under any other publicly-funded financial assistance schemes for the same course, such as pursuing courses funded by the University Grants Committee, grants or loans from the Financial Assistance Scheme for Post-secondary Students administered by the Student Finance Office of the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency (SFO, WFSFAA), subsidy from the “Non-means-tested Subsidy Scheme for Self-financing Undergraduate Studies in Hong Kong” or “Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions / Sectors”, etc.
- (h) If loans for tuition fee payments obtained from Non-means-tested Loan Scheme (NLS) administered by SFO, WFSFAA are borrowed to meet the payment of fees for a CEF reimbursable course, the fees may be eligible for reimbursement subject to other eligibility criteria being met. The CEF reimbursement would be used to offset any outstanding NLS loans borrowed by the applicant for paying the tuition fee in respect of the same course. Any remaining balance of the CEF reimbursement after offsetting the loan amount will be credited to the designated account of the applicant.
- (i) Applicants are required to input the courses in sequence from the earliest course commencement date up to the latest one when completing the application form. OCEF may rearrange the sequence of courses submitted for the purpose of maximizing the reimbursed amount.

3. HOW TO APPLY

3.1 Paper-based application

Complete the application form [SFO 313 (2020)] which can be obtained from OCEF or Home Affairs Enquiry Centres, or downloaded from CEF website (<https://www.wfsfaa.gov.hk/cef>). Completed application form together with copies of supporting documents should be submitted to:

Office of the Continuing Education Fund
Units 07-11, 25/F., CDW Building
388 Castle Peak Road, Tsuen Wan
Hong Kong

Applicants may also place their applications in the **drop-in boxes** on 12/F., Cheung Sha Wan Government Offices or near the main entrance of OCEF.

3.2 Electronic application

Complete and submit the online application form through “GovHK” (<https://www.gov.hk/en/residents/forms/>). After the online submission of the application form and the required documents, applicants are required to print a hard copy of the form and sign the Declaration at Part D, and then submit the form to the institution / course provider concerned for certification to prove that the applicants have successfully completed the course(s) concerned. Original of the certified and signed application form should be submitted to OCEF within 14 calendar days after online submission.

4. DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Applications are processed subject to availability of funds. In the event that CEF no longer has funds available when an applicant submits an application, the application will not be approved regardless of whether the applicant fulfills the eligibility requirements for claiming reimbursement from CEF. All provisions in these Guidance Notes shall be read subject to this section.

5. NOTIFICATION OF APPLICATION RESULTS AND PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS

- 5.1 Applicants should submit to OCEF the completed application form with certification by institution / course provider together with copies of supporting documents [Hong Kong Smart Identity Card, one-way permit (if applicable), documentary proof of course fee paid, documentary proof that the applicant has successfully completed the CEF reimbursable course(s) and the front page of his / her bank passbook or bank statement showing the name, account number and bank name / bank code]. “**Successful completion**” of a CEF reimbursable course means that the applicant must have attended no less than 70% of the contactable hours of the CEF reimbursable course or such higher attendance requirement as prescribed for the CEF reimbursable course (whichever is higher) and attained an overall mark of either 50% or such higher percentage of assessment(s) as prescribed for the CEF reimbursable course (whichever is higher) as assessed by whichever method approved by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare (including any examination and assignment requirements with approved weighting). Documentary proof of successful completion of a CEF reimbursable course may include a certificate of completion, a letter or a transcript from the institution / course provider certifying that the applicant has passed the relevant course assessment and attendance requirements.

- 5.2 **Applicants studying language proficiency courses are required to pass a specified benchmark test (if applicable) at the specified (or higher) level to be eligible for fee reimbursement.** Benchmark tests should be taken by the applicants after the course has commenced and before the date the applicants reach the age of 71 (for courses commenced before 1 April 2019, the benchmark test should be taken after the course has commenced and before the applicant reaching the age of 66 for applications pursuant to section 2.4(b)). Applicants can make use of the same benchmark test to support the claims for more than one CEF language proficiency course. However, the examination date of the benchmark test must fall after the course commencement date of the reimbursable course(s) used for claiming CEF. Information on the specified benchmark tests and levels of the language proficiency courses can be obtained from the Reimbursable Course List in CEF website. Benchmark test fees may be reimbursed only if the application is submitted together with a reimbursement claim for the relevant language proficiency course.
- 5.3 Copies of all submitted supporting documents are not returnable. Applicants should **retain copies** for their own reference.
- 5.4 Reimbursement will be made by direct credit to the designated saving / current account nominated by the applicant for receipt of the reimbursement. The name of the applicant on the account **must** be exactly the same as the name on the HK Smart Identity Card. Credit card accounts, fixed deposit accounts, foreign currency accounts and loans accounts are not acceptable for direct credit of reimbursement.
- 5.5 OCEF will acknowledge receipt of applications by means of SMS messages through applicants' local mobile phone number. If local mobile phone number has not provided or the local mobile phone number provided by the applicants is incorrect, OCEF will not be able to issue acknowledgement to these applicants. Applicants who would like to receive an "Acknowledgement of Receipt of Application" in writing should attach a stamped and self-addressed envelope and submit it to OCEF together with the application form. Please mark "Request for Acknowledgement of Receipt of Application" on the envelope. If no stamped and self-addressed envelope is attached, OCEF will not issue any acknowledgement of receipt in writing. Applicants are requested to fill in the relevant information in the application form accurately. If applicants do not receive any acknowledgement of receipt by SMS messages or in writing from OCEF after 10 working days from the date of submission of their applications, please contact OCEF at 3142 2277.
- 5.6 In general, application results will be issued **within 6 weeks from the date of receipt of the application for existing CEF account holders or 8 weeks for applicants who submit an application for the first time**, subject to provision of complete and satisfactory supporting documents. If the information provided by applicants is incomplete or there are discrepancies in the information provided, applicants will be requested to give an explanation or provide supplementary information, in which case the processing time will be longer. In case the CEF reimbursement has to be made to offset the NLS loans, or in other exceptional circumstances, the processing time will also be longer. If applicants do not receive any written reply from OCEF 2 weeks after the above-mentioned time, please contact OCEF at 3142 2277 immediately.
- 5.7 The CEF account for an applicant will be invalidated when the full sum of HK\$20,000 subsidy has been reimbursed, or on the date the applicant reaches the age of 71 (whichever is earlier).
- 5.8 For updated information of CEF, please visit CEF website (<https://www.wfsfaa.gov.hk/cef>).

6. HANDLING OF INFORMATION

- 6.1 Applicants are obliged to supply information pertaining to their personal data, as required in the application. In accordance with section 3.2.1.2 of the Code of Practice on the Identity Card Number and other Personal Identifiers issued by the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data (PCPD), applicants are requested to furnish a copy of their Hong Kong Smart Identity Card. For the full version of the Code, please visit the website of the PCPD (<https://www.pcpd.org.hk/>). If an applicant fails to comply with these requirements, OCEF may not be able to process his / her application. OCEF will use the personal data provided in the applications for the following purposes –
- Activities relating to the processing and counter-checking of an application under CEF, including the matching of the personal data provided against other data-bases as may be required for the purpose of verifying the criteria set out in sections 2.3 and 2.4 above.
 - Activities relating to the recovery of payments and authentication of the applications, if any.
 - Statistics and research.
- 6.2 The personal data and other supplementary information that are provided in the application may be disclosed to Government policy bureaux and departments and institutions / course providers for the purposes mentioned in section 6.1 above or where such disclosure is authorized and required by law.
- 6.3 If necessary, OCEF will contact the institutions / course providers, other government departments and organizations

to verify the data provided in the application with those held by them for the purposes mentioned in section 6.1 above.

- 6.4 In accordance with sections 18 and 22 and Principle 6 of Schedule 1 of the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Chapter 486 of the Laws of Hong Kong), applicants have the right to request access to and correction of the personal data supplied in their applications.
- 6.5 Enquiries concerning the personal data provided in the applications and requests for the correction of such data may be made in writing to: Office of the Continuing Education Fund, Units 07-11, 25/F., CDW Building, 388 Castle Peak Road, Tsuen Wan, Hong Kong.

7. OTHER MATTERS

- 7.1 It is an applicant's responsibility to complete the application form fully and truthfully and attach all the necessary supporting documents. Any misrepresentation or omission may lead to rejection of application and / or full recovery of payments made and possibly court proceedings. Applicants are reminded that it is an offence to obtain property / pecuniary advantage by deception. Any person who does so commits an offence and is liable on conviction to imprisonment for 10 years under the Theft Ordinance (Chapter 210 of the Laws of Hong Kong). It is also an offence under the Prevention of Bribery Ordinance (Chapter 201 of the Laws of Hong Kong) to offer any advantages (e.g. money, gift etc.) to an employee of OCEF or SFO, WFSFAA as an inducement to or reward for facilitating or expediting the processing of applications.
- 7.2 In the event that there is overpayment due to error of calculation, the amount overpaid must be refunded by the applicant in one lump sum upon demand.
- 7.3 Applicants should check the personal data, CEF reimbursable course data and reimbursed amount contained in the Notification of Application Result. Should there be any discrepancies in information such as the name of the institution / course provider, course of study, correspondence address or the bank account number, etc. OCEF should be notified in writing immediately.
- 7.4 Applicants should keep the original of the supporting documents submitted (e.g. tuition fee receipts, proof of completion, etc.) for OCEF's verification in case of need.
- 7.5 The tuition fees of all CEF reimbursable courses must be collected on equal monthly instalments basis except those which have been granted exemption by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare. For the list of exempted institutions / course providers, please visit CEF website (<https://www.wfsfaa.gov.hk/cef>).
- 7.6 Underpaid mail items are subject to surcharge by Hongkong Post. OCEF will not accept underpaid mail items, which will be returned to the sender (with return address) or treated as undeliverable mail (without return address) by the Hongkong Post in accordance with the laid down procedures. For proper delivery of your mail items to OCEF, and to avoid unnecessary delivery delay or unsuccessful delivery, please ensure your mail items bear sufficient postage with return address before posting.
- 7.7 OCEF welcomes any feedback you may have on the scheme and the quality of the CEF reimbursable courses. Any comments may be sent to OCEF or its e-mail address at cef_sfo@wfsfaa.gov.hk.

8. THE PUBLIC'S ROLE AND RIGHT OF APPEAL

- 8.1 We welcome any comments and suggestions on our services and on the way they are delivered. There may be occasions when we are unable to meet the targets pledged. In such instances, all applicants are entitled to a full and prompt explanation. If an explanation is required or if you feel that your application has not been dealt with properly, you may telephone, visit or write to us by post or e-mail. We shall send acknowledgement to you within 3 working days and provide a written response within 15 working days on receipt of the complaint.
- 8.2 If you feel that your application has not been dealt with fairly or that our response to your complaint is not satisfactory, you may write to the Controller, Student Finance Office at the following address –

Student Finance Office
Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency
12/F., Cheung Sha Wan Government Offices
303 Cheung Sha Wan Road, Kowloon
(Fax No. : 2519 3857)
(E-mail : wg_sfo@wfsfaa.gov.hk)

- 8.3 To facilitate early processing of applications and reimbursement of approved fees, we appeal to all applicants to provide complete and accurate information in their applications.
- 8.4 Should there be any discrepancy between the English and Chinese versions of this Guidance Notes, the English version shall prevail.

ENQUIRIES

Enquiries about the Continuing Education Fund should be addressed to the Office of the Continuing Education Fund

Address : Units 07-11, 25/F., CDW Building
388 Castle Peak Road, Tsuen Wan, Hong Kong

Opening hours
Mondays to Fridays : 8:45 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
(Except Public Holidays) 2:00 p.m. – 5:45 p.m.

Website : <https://www.wfsfaa.gov.hk/cef>

E-mail Address : cef_sfo@wfsfaa.gov.hk

**24-hour manned
Enquiry Number : 3142 2277
(Handled by the staff of “1823”)**
