

## 2,000 students hit by grants delay

MORE than 2,000 tertiary students are still struggling to pay a 41.2 per cent rise in tuition fees this semester.

Annual fees went up from \$17,000 to \$24,000 this year and six weeks into term, 10 per cent of applicants for grants and loans from the Student Financial Assistance Agency (SFAA) have received nothing.

The agency provides funds for approximately 40 per cent of all tertiary students.

Carly Chan Tsz, 20, a second year design student at Hong Kong Polytechnic, had to pay her \$12,000 first-semester fees before term started in September, but her grant only arrived in late October.

"I borrowed the money from other people," she said. "We were all worried when the money didn't appear. Last year, the students had no problems."

Classmate Jose Kee Pui-ye, 20, has still to receive her grant or written notification of when she will get it.

"I have telephoned several times, but they told me I will have to wait until December," she said. She applied in May.

The agency has a performance pledge which says it will deal with applications within three months.

Miss Kee has been supporting herself with a part-time job and by borrowing money from her sister. "We aren't angry but really worried."

In August, the agency said it had too few staff to deal with this year's 54.9 per cent increase in applications, caused by

By ALICE CAIRNS

rising fees and the increasing number of students entitled to aid.

An extra 10 temporary workers and five permanent staff were still unable to handle the workload, Alfred Wong Wai-kin, the agency's controller, said at the time.

At the beginning of November, assistant controller Wallace Wu Hon-cheong said it had cleared about 90 per cent of the applications.

The department has made plans to handle another rise in fees to \$31,030 next year. "We will get additional staff so the situation will not get any worse," Mr Wu said. "This year we made a projection based on the previous year's figures, but no one could have predicted such a large rise."

Individual colleges have also set up deferral plans.

At Baptist College, 178 students applied for deferred payment, compared with about 60 last year.

At Hong Kong Polytechnic, 202 students have asked for deferred payment in the first term of 1994-95, compared with 266 for the whole year in 1993-94, and just 86 in 1992-93.

Rita Tang Ng Pui-chun, student affairs officer at the polytechnic, estimated that 90 per cent of students with deferred payment were waiting for grants or loans.