

WOMEN'S COMMISSION
The New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education

INTRODUCTION

This paper informs Members of the progress of the reform in senior secondary education initiated by the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) and the development of the subject Liberal Studies (LS) in supporting the New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum, and invite Members' views on them.

BACKGROUND

2. In 2000, the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) endorsed the recommendation of the Education Commission (EC) to adopt a 3-year senior secondary and 4-year undergraduate academic system ("3+3+4") to facilitate the implementation of a more flexible, coherent and diversified senior secondary curriculum. A Working Group was then set up by EC on the *Review of the Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Interface with Higher Education*. In 2003, the Working Group made further recommendations on the development of a new curriculum, assessment and examination and on university admissions. The Chief Executive accepted the recommendations in his Policy Address in 2004 and undertook to consult the public on the implementation details.

3. EMB published a document entitled *Reforming the Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education – Actions for Investing in the Future* on 20 October 2004. A 3-month public consultation was followed to seek the views of different stakeholders from the education and other community sectors. During the consultation, there was active discussion in the community and EMB received nearly 3,300 written submissions. Overwhelming support for the general direction, vision and goal of the proposed "3+3+4" system is received. Some basic principles for subsequent development were set and a 4-month second-stage consultation to further refine the Curriculum and Assessment (C&A) Frameworks of the NSS subjects was launched in June 2005.

AGREED PRINCIPLES AFTER THE CONSULTATION

4. In the consultation, there is general agreement that the NSS curriculum will enable students to build a broader knowledge base and a more solid foundation for whole-person development and life-long learning. It is acknowledged that reducing one public examination would create more time for productive learning and that the new academic structure will provide smoother articulation for further studies in Hong Kong and be better connected with other major education systems in the world. There is also strong support for a balanced student programme that includes 4 core subjects, 2-3 elective subjects and other learning experiences. The community also supports in general a shared funding model to finance the reform.

5. Other basic principles set in the first consultation include:

- The “3+3+4” reform will be implemented in 2009/10 school year, instead of 2008/09 school year as previously proposed, after careful consideration of the community feedback and the readiness of schools and teachers.
- The new academic structure for senior secondary education is applicable to ALL students, including students with special educational needs (SEN).
- A combination of core subjects, elective subjects or courses for Career-oriented Studies (COS), and other learning experiences would provide a broad and diversified curriculum to suit individual interest and aptitude. COS courses will have a status deemed comparable to the NSS elective subjects and provide access to multiple progression pathways to further studies and employment.
- Positive values and attitudes will be continuously strengthened in the core and elective subjects, and other learning experiences as appropriate. There will be an overall strengthening of Chinese elements across different student programmes.
- More subject choices should be offered to students at the school level in their senior secondary 1 (SS1) classes to enable them to explore their interests before they make decisions for SS2 and SS3.

- Liberal Studies would be studied by all students as a core subject to enable them to make connections across knowledge areas and see things from different perspectives. Liberal Studies will be assessed in the same way as other subjects, so that the subject will be given the same due recognition as other subjects.
 - Some subjects, including courses for COS, are not easily offered in school owing to a lack of facilities, resources and space. EMB will explore the use of a *Diversity Learning Grant* and special measures such as “centralized” teaching and/or networked classes to help schools provide the relevant opportunities for students who have talents in such areas.
 - While the current HKCEE and HKALE will be replaced by one examination leading to the credential *Hong Kong Diploma for Secondary Education* (HKDSE), the HKCEE and the HKALE will be made available to repeaters in 2011 and 2013 respectively.
 - A “standards-referenced” approach to reporting student achievement will be adopted to allow for a fuller appreciation of each student’s achievements and potential in the HKDSE. School-based Assessment (SBA) will be phased in, with any transitional timeline to be recommended by CDC-HKEAA Committees, in consultation with front-line teachers. To avoid excessive workload pressures, SBA will be built into ongoing teaching and learning activities within the classroom and not designed as “add-on” activities. An emphasis should be placed on quality rather than quantity. HKEAA will require that all SBA be designed in ways that enable teachers to authenticate student work and principals to sign off that the work assessed is the work of the students concerned.
 - A *New Senior Secondary Curriculum Guide* will be made available in 2006 to help schools implement the various facets of NSS, including school development planning, professional development of staff, curriculum planning, changing paradigm of learning, teaching and assessment and other learning experiences.
6. HKEAA will work closely with *University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate* (UCLES) to ensure international recognition of HKDSE by benchmarking key levels in the new HKDSE subjects to British *General Certificate of Education* (GCE) grades. It will also negotiate direct recognition of both the current

examinations and the HKDSE with overseas universities.

7. A Working Group, comprising representatives of universities, HKEAA, the *University Grants Committee* (UGC) and EMB was established in October 2004 to provide a forum for liaison on articulation between the new senior secondary education and higher education, and study the interface issues relating to “3+3+4”. In support of the proposed “3+3+4” reform, UGC and the *Heads of Universities Committee* (HUCOM) issued a joint statement in January 2005 indicating their support for all 4 core subjects – Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics and Liberal Studies – to be considered as mandatory requirements for university entrance. Universities are committed to providing more specific information required for tertiary admission. It is anticipated by mid-2006, they will provide details of specific admission requirements at the faculty/programme level.

LIBERAL STUDIES AS A CORE SUBJECT

8. The introduction of Liberal Studies as a core subject has generated a great deal of public discussions. Substantial changes to the design of the subject have been made taking into consideration the comments and suggestions made by the public. A synopsis of the changes includes:

- The number of core units in the curriculum design of Liberal Studies will be reduced from 9 to 6 in order to allow sufficient time for students to develop a deep enough understanding of issues, develop their thinking skills to deal with the complex issues, and to develop and reflect on values.
- Double marking will be adopted for the written examination of Liberal Studies to ensure reliability of marking of questions involving open-ended responses.
- A *Senior Secondary Curriculum Support Grant* and other supporting measures will be provided to schools so that Liberal Studies along with the whole senior secondary programme could be implemented smoothly.
- EMB will provide not less than 100 hours of training for all Liberal Studies teachers to help them acquire the basic knowledge and skills required for teaching the subject. Of these 100 hours, about 35 hours will be mandatory, and the rest will be up to the discretion of teachers according to their needs.

- A web-based resource platform will be launched to provide the basic information required to understand the NSS Liberal Studies curriculum, updated learning and teaching materials relevant to each unit, exemplary learning and teaching practices, and school case studies for teachers' reference. Schools and teachers will ensure that all students no matter what their socio-economic status background can access the information needed.

ISSUES RELATED TO EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND GENDER IN GENERAL

9. Every measure has been incorporated as far as possible to ensure that the new academic structure for senior secondary education is applicable to ALL and offers equal opportunity to all students. For instance, students with SEN but deemed capable will follow the academic structure, curriculum and assessment modes as their counterparts in ordinary schools. They may have different choices of subjects to meet their capabilities and interests. For mentally handicapped (MH) students, their current 10-year basic education curriculum structure would be re-structured to ensure a meaningful 12-year curriculum programme with clear learning outcomes and assessment standards. MH students of different capacities will also have *Individualised Education Programmes* (IEP) and assessment criteria as tailored by teachers and specialist staff.

10. EMB will develop in collaboration with other parties including schools and HKEAA the necessary guidelines and templates for the production of a *Senior Secondary Student Learning Profile* (SLP) that provides a comprehensive picture of the full range of achievements and abilities of *individual* students. The full potential of students will be recognized through the SLP and “standards-referenced” reporting in the HKDSE, instead of using the norm-referenced approach as in the current HKCEE and HKALE.

11. EMB will also ensure that all students, regardless of social background will have the same opportunities to gain access to the new NSS curriculum, including the COS courses and other learning experiences provided. As mentioned previously, special measures such as “centralised” teaching and/or networked classes will be put in place to help schools provide the necessary opportunities for students who have talents in such areas. Grants, in particular the *Diversity Learning Grant*, will be

available to encourage schools to offer a diversified curriculum for different students.

12. As regards the issue of gender in particular, the design of the NSS curriculum, like the current curriculums at various levels, is meant to be gender neutral as far as possible. For instance, in the NSS *Design and Applied Technology* which conventionally is thought to be for boys, the subject has been repositioned to enhance the interactive use of hands and minds to help develop the mental abilities of students, so that they can be more adapted to the rapidly changing society. In the current C&A Framework for the subject, it was explicitly spelt out that students are expected to nurture their competence to:

- (a) become independent thinkers and innovative problem solvers;
- (b) build up their practical skills and knowledge in technology, design and their development;
- (c) identify needs, wants and opportunities in improving the quality of living and develop design and technological responses as well as entrepreneurship accordingly; and
- (d) become discriminating, informed and responsible users of products, and to develop their awareness of the interplay between technology and aesthetic, enterprise, social, cultural and ethical issues.

In other words, there is much less reliance on craftsmanship and heavy machineries and more emphasis on the development of thinking skills, creativity and the appreciation of design in economical developments, and the curriculum is meant to be for both genders.

13. Likewise, in the NSS *Home Economics* which is always mistaken to be for girls, the aims of the curriculum are to enable students to foster positive values and attitudes for the well-being of the families and society; to become responsible citizens and informed consumers; to demonstrate good use of management and organisational skills in handling resources, analysing contextual factors, devising and implementing strategies independently to solve problems; and to evaluate critically the impact of social, cultural, economic, scientific and technological developments on the well-being of individuals, families and society as a whole. *Food Science & Technology* (FST) and/or *Fashion, Clothing & Textiles* (FCT) will be used as the

context for study, instead of the narrow experiences pertaining to the home environment. Meaningful learning will therefore be engaged by both sexes.

14. It may be worth noting that curriculum development has always be an interactive process in Hong Kong, involving both the steering and facilitating roles by the government through EMB and the active participation of frontline teachers and principals to ensure its successful implementation. To foster proactively a balanced view of both genders in cultural, social and political developments, the CDC-HKEAA Committee on Chinese History (Secondary) has deliberately put forward the elective “女性社會地位：傳統與變遷” (“The role of female in the Community: Tradition and Transformation”) as one of the modules to be studied by students in the NSS *Chinese History*. (Students are to study 2 out of the 6 elective modules.) Students taking this module will be able to acquire a critical understanding of the role of women in traditional Chinese society, and the subsequent changes as well as the contributing factors. This will help them develop balanced views regarding the roles, functions and contributions of the two different sexes.

GENDER EDUCATION AND LIBERAL STUDIES

15. Liberal Studies, with its student-oriented design and a cross-disciplinary nature, has always been regarded as an appropriate platform for delivering gender education. In a previous informal meeting, EMB officers informed members of the Women’s Commission the updated development of the NSS Liberal Studies Curriculum and the way gender education can be provided through this subject. The CDC-HKEAA Committee responsible for the development of Liberal Studies also discussed the views received from this meeting and adopted the following approaches in the delivery of gender education through Liberal Studies:

- (a) In the Curriculum & Assessment Framework put forwarded for consultation, it has been explicitly spelt out that students should have relevant learning experiences in Basic Education related to ‘uniqueness of an individual, similarities and differences between the two sexes, sex role, personal identity and self-esteem, self-image and self-awareness’, etc, before engaging in the study of Unit 1.
- (b) A critical understanding of ‘how gender identity affects the self-image of an adolescent will be delivered through Unit 1: *Personal Development and Interpersonal Relationships* of the proposed curriculum. Students are invited

(listed in the Explanatory Notes) to explore and assess the significance of gender differences on the perceived importance of personal autonomy, interpersonal relationships, personal performance, etc. They will also examine the sources and impact of gender differences in the formation of self-image and self-esteem.

- (c) Gender education can be delivered through an analysis of different social issues from the gender perspective. Liberal Studies encourages students to examine issues from multi-perspectives. Liberal Studies teachers will be reminded that an analysis of social issues from the gender perspective by students should be encouraged. There are thus ample opportunities for gender education throughout the curriculum.
- (d) The CDC-HKEAA Committee on Liberal Studies regarded that ‘gender’ as a proposed additional theme in Independent Enquiry Studies (IES) was not necessary. The draft Liberal Studies curriculum should have already provided sufficient space for examining gender issues. In fact, strengthening the nurture of positive values and attitudes, an agreed basic principle after the first consultation as outlined in paragraph 5, will also help to develop respect for the opposite sex and individual differences.

THE SECOND CONSULTATION

16. In view of the complexity of issues and the far-reaching implications of the new academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education, EMB has adopted a stage-wise incremental approach in developing the NSS curriculum, including Liberal Studies. Critical milestones are set and the strategies for managing change include encouraging active participation and continuous communication with different stakeholders, with periodic review for timely and responsive adjustment to realize the ultimate goals. A second consultation of the C&A Frameworks of all NSS subjects was launched in June 2005. Schools and public can provide comments and suggestions on or before 30 September 2005 for the consideration of the relevant CDC-HKEAA Committees, before the latter finalize their proposals in mid-2006.

ADVICE SOUGHT

17. Members are invited to:-
- (a) note the progress; and
 - (b) provide comments and suggestions.

Education and Manpower Bureau
August 2005