

WOMEN'S COMMISSION

The Latest Development of the New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education

Purpose

This paper reports the progress of the New Senior Secondary (NSS) Academic Structure in three interconnected areas: preparation for NSS; interface with schools, post-secondary institutions, international agencies and employers; as well as communication channels with different stakeholders. It also reports the gender-related issues in the NSS curriculum.

Background

2. The reports “*The New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education – Action Plan for Investing in the Future of Hong Kong*”, published in May 2005 and “*Action for the Future – Career-oriented Studies and the New Senior Secondary Academic Structure for Special Schools*” released in August 2006 have laid down the milestones for the implementation of the new academic structure after consulting the public widely at multiple stages.

Progress

A. Preparation for NSS

Curriculum and Assessment Guides

3. The Curriculum and Assessment (C&A) Guides for the 24 NSS subjects were published in March 2007 after three rounds of consultation. All curricula were benchmarked against relevant subject curricula in Europe, Australia, United States and Asia through international agencies. The C&A Guides outline what is worth our students' learning, how they might be assisted in their learning, as well as the assessment design to determine how their learning could be evaluated and reported.

A Senior Secondary Curriculum Guide which will provide a complete manual for delivering the NSS curriculum will be published in May 2009.

School-based Assessment of NSS subjects

4. To enable schools and teachers to familiarise themselves with the NSS curriculum and to relieve them of the extra burden in the double cohort year (i.e. 2011/12 school year), a phase-in approach will be adopted for the implementation of School-based Assessment (SBA). SBA for 12 subjects, including those with SBA currently in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE), Liberal Studies and the four science subjects (laboratory work only) will be implemented in 2012. SBA for 11 other subjects will be deferred for two to four years and there will be no time-line for implementation of SBA in Mathematics to alleviate the burden of Mathematics teachers during the transitional years and to provide sufficient time for schools to complete the development work and get familiar with the administration of planned SBA activities.

Applied Learning

5. Applied Learning (ApL)¹ is an integral part of the NSS curriculum with the purpose to cater for the diverse learning needs of students. It complements senior secondary subjects by offering studies with stronger elements of practical learning linked to broad professional and vocational fields. It has been piloted in the current S4-5 levels since the 2003/04 school year. In the NSS curriculum, students can choose ApL courses (2-year courses) as their elective subjects in S5-6. These courses are designed, conducted and assessed by the respective course providers under the steering of EDB. Thirty subjects are being developed by 11 course providers. The course list will be finalized at the beginning of the 2009/10 school year. Support programmes (including professional development (PD) programmes for teachers, briefings for school heads, taster programmes for students, etc) and reference materials will be in place by the end of 2009. Students will be subsidised through a Diversity Learning Grant to take ApL courses under NSS.

6. There is no public examination for ApL courses. The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) is responsible for the moderation of assessment results to ensure the consistency of assessment standards. The performance of students in ApL will be reported in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) transcript in two levels: 'Attained' and 'Attained with Distinction'. Students awarded 'Attained with Distinction' will be deemed to have performed at a level comparable to the Standards-referenced Reporting (SRR) of HKDSE at Level 3 or above.

¹ ApL was formerly named "Career-oriented Studies".

7. The recognition of NSS ApL is being discussed with universities, sub-degree providers and employers together with other NSS subjects. Details will be announced in early 2010.

Development of NSS Curriculum for Intellectually Disabled Students

8. The principle of “one curriculum framework for all” guides curriculum adaptations to suit the different learning needs and capabilities of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) (including intellectually disabled (ID) students). Starting from 2006, we have conducted collaborative research and development projects to gather information from special schools with the assistance of universities, local and overseas experts. The C&A supplementary guides of the three core subjects (Chinese Language, Mathematics and Liberal Studies / Independent Living) as well as two elective subjects (Physical Education and Visual Arts) are being developed and will be ready in mid-2009 to facilitate school preparation for the implementation of the new curriculum. More elective subjects (like Technology & Living, Information & Communication Technology, Music and Design & Applied Technology) would be adapted and tried out from the 2008/09 school year and onwards.

Professional Development of Teachers and School Leaders

9. To ensure a smooth implementation of the NSS curriculum in schools, we have enhanced teachers’ understanding of the NSS curriculum and professional capacity in leadership by providing the following-

- School leaders workshops for planning 334 (completed in 2006)
- Middle managers workshops for migration to 334 (completed in 2008)
- Meetings on preparation for 334 with school leaders (in progress)
- PD programmes (including curriculum, pedagogy and assessment) at the subject level (on-going)
- Feasibility study on NSS curriculum planning and timetabling arrangement (completed in 2008)
- Workshops on NSS curriculum planning and timetabling (completed in 2008)
- Workshops on using “Student Option Programme” (SOP)² for NSS timetabling (completed in February 2009)

10. For the 2008/09 school year, we have offered over 100,000 training places for all teachers of the NSS subjects including the training on assessment offered by HKEAA. The number of places offered is sufficient as a whole and there is no

² SOP is a software developed by EDB for analyzing students’ preference in the choice of subjects.

significant slippage of planned programmes. A survey on contingency PD needs arising from staff mobility and changing plans will be carried out in April 2009 to better inform our planning on NSS PD programmes for teachers in the 2009/10 school year and beyond.

Other Professional Support

11. To cater for the diverse needs of schools, the School-based Support Services Office (SBSSO) of EDB is offering support on a Key Learning Area (KLA) basis and theme basis through on-site visits, consultancy services and PD activities. Schools and teachers are also networked to share issues of common concern and improve communication among different stakeholders in the development of NSS. Input was also drawn from the tertiary institutions through the “University-School Support Programmes” financed by the Education Development Fund.

12. In the 2008/09 school year, the SBSSO is providing on-site support to about 320 secondary schools.

Textbooks and Learning & Teaching Resources

13. To ensure that quality of textbooks would meet the aims and objectives of the NSS curricula, the Curriculum Development Institute of EDB worked closely with the publishers in the development process and provided them with feedback sessions so that clarification was made and communication enhanced throughout the whole process. The recommended textbook list for NSS was uploaded on the EDB website in August 2008 for schools’ reference. The development of NSS learning and teaching materials is monitored quarterly. Approximately 110 resource development projects for NSS subjects are running smoothly according to pre-set targets.

Resource Support

14. To help schools well prepare for the implementation of NSS, the following grants have been / will be provided:

- Teacher Professional Development Grant (2005/06 – 2008/09 school years)
- NSS Curriculum Migration Grant (2006/07 – 2008/09 school years)
- Senior Secondary Curriculum Support Grant (2008/09 school year onward)
- Diversity Learning Grant (2009/10 school year onward, on application)

B. Interface with Schools, Post-secondary Institutions, International Agencies and Employers

Articulation to University Grants Committee (UGC)-Funded Institutions

15. The Heads of Universities Committee (HUCOM) announced on 5 July 2006 the specific requirements for admission to individual faculties / departments for early

reference of all parties. In addition to the four core subjects of the NSS school curriculum, most universities will include one elective in their entrance requirements and in some cases, a second elective from a wider group of subjects.

16. To reaffirm universities' support of other learning experiences for students, HUCOM issued another statement on 21 October 2008 to confirm that the Student Learning Profile of NSS students will be a document with good reference value for consideration of university admission.

International recognition of the HKDSE qualification

17. HKEAA has been working closely with international agencies to secure the recognition of HKDSE qualification. These agencies include Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) in the United Kingdom (UK), National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) in UK, Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) in UK and the Australian Education International (AEI) in Australia.

(a) Cambridge International Examinations (CIE)

The focus of the work with CIE is on international review of examination papers. The first two rounds of moderation of HKDSE sample papers were completed in 2008. Positive comments have been received and the CIE assessment experts found the papers making similar cognitive demands to the UK A-Level papers. The third round of moderation is expected to be completed by mid-2009.

(b) National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC)

NARIC is the UK National Agency for providing information and expert opinion on qualifications attained from outside UK. NARIC undertakes the study on the benchmarking of HKDSE against other international qualifications which aims to provide a comparison of the HKDSE with other international systems (e.g. Australia and UK). The study outcomes will focus on recognition of the HKDSE qualification with regard to general education and employment. NARIC will also undertake to disseminate the information to different stakeholders through their newsletters. The first part of the study has been completed and favourable comments were received. The second part of the study has started in December 2008. Further results are expected to be available by the last quarter of 2009.

(c) Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)

UCAS is the official agency to handle admission applications to higher education courses in the UK, similar to Joint University Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS) in Hong Kong. Applications are processed on a tariff system. It is planned to conduct a study with UCAS. The outcome of the study is to set up a

point system in the UCAS tariff for HKDSE results. The first round of results is expected to be available by the last quarter of 2009.

(d) Benchmarking study with the Australian Education International (AEI)

AEI is part of the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace relations. It advances the internalisation of Australian education, science and training. Australia's *Country Education Profile*, published by AEI in 2007, already assesses the HKDSE as comparable to an Australian senior secondary school certificate. HKEAA, together with AEI, will approach Australian universities for providing entry requirements for students with HKDSE after the level descriptors and exemplar materials for individual subjects are finalised in 2009.

Articulation to Other Post-secondary Institutions

18. EDB will discuss with post-secondary institutions the alignment of the new HKDSE with the admission requirements of associate degrees, Higher Diploma and Diploma courses. There will be further communication with post-secondary institutions on their programmes of studies to be offered in 2012, as well as recognition of ApL and the offering of English vocational course for ethnic minorities.

Safety Net for School Leavers

19. Project Yi Jin (PYJ) currently provides an alternative route for S5 students who have failed to attain five passes in HKCEE. In consultation with the Federation for Continuing Education in Tertiary Institutions which operates the PYJ Programme, the EDB is currently reviewing the long term development and positioning of PYJ under the NSS. The Vocational Training Council (VTC) is reviewing its curriculum planning for the small number of students who will not take HKDSE. The curriculum framework of VTC Higher Diploma programmes is being reviewed to better align with the NSS academic structure and the development of the Qualifications Framework.

Articulation to Other Pathways for Last Cohort of S5 and S7 Students

20. There are multiple articulation pathways provided for students in the transition to NSS. HKEAA will organise one more HKCEE and Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) in 2011 and 2013 respectively for some subjects for S5 and S7 repeaters.

21. S5 students graduating in 2010 may repeat in the 2011 HKCEE, which will be the last HKCEE. However, as there will be no more S6 admission exercise in 2011, students are encouraged to repeat in S5 under NSS instead and to sit for HKDSE in 2012 since there is sufficient curriculum continuity between HKCEE and

NSS subjects and the post-school pathways will be smoother. Students will do what the S5 leavers do now such as repeating in school or as private candidates, studying overseas, work, or join the PYJ or other post-school pathways.

22. The last cohort of S7 students graduating in 2012 may repeat as private candidates in 2013 HKALE, which will be the last HKALE. Students might choose to study sub-degree programmes instead as there will be no 3-year undergraduate programmes offered from 2013 onwards.

Articulation to Employment

23. EDB has set up an agreed process to discuss with the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) and HKEAA on benchmarking / drawing comparability of HKDSE qualifications with other qualifications currently recognised by different Civil Service grades. We expect the announcement of requirements of Civil Service grades would serve very good reference for other employers in considering the new HKDSE qualifications. Announcements on requirements for different grades will be made progressively from 2009.

C. Communication Channels with Different Stakeholders

24. To ensure better public understanding and support in the development of the new academic structure, EDB is maintaining close communication with different stakeholders through the following means:

Face-to-face

- Task Group on 334 Communication Strategies (members include representatives from EDB, HKEAA, tertiary & secondary sectors, parents and employers) to identify the concerns of different stakeholders and to realign communication strategies for regular dissemination of key messages on the new academic structure and the promotion of the new HKDSE qualification.
- Principals' Liaison Group Meeting (members include representatives from EDB and schools councils) to consult school heads on issues related to NSS such as class structure, NSS curriculum and assessment, as well as to convey the latest development of the new academic structure to school heads.
- Briefing sessions for each subject to update teachers on the proposed arrangement for the 2012 HKDSE examination (completed). Information packages on SRR for HKDSE subjects, containing sample papers, level descriptors and exemplars, will be disseminated to schools in mid-2009.

- Liaison Group on 334 Interface Issues (members include representatives from EDB, HKEAA, UGC Secretariat and 8 UGC-funded institutions) to discuss regularly the admission requirements under the new academic structure and interface between the senior secondary and 4-year undergraduate curriculum.
- Communication with the Board of Management of JUPAS to explore the effective ways of promoting the JUPAS application system under NSS to students and parents.
- Interactive district-based parent seminars to disseminate the latest development of the new academic structure and address the concerns of parents.
- Meetings with different employer sectors (including CSB) on the standards of the new HKDSE levels and their possible application to different job positions.
- Meetings with various post-secondary institutions to provide update on the development of NSS curriculum and maintain close communication with them for smooth interface of the NSS with different post secondary courses.

Information

- Bi-annual Newsletter in electronic form by HKEAA to promulgate the development work for HKDSE.
- Communication with public including parents through “334” articles on a monthly basis, “334” Web Bulletin, parent pamphlets (issued every 6 months), Frequently Asked Questions booklet, DVDs, Announcements of Public Interest, roving exhibitions.

Issues Related to Gender

25. Every measure has been adopted to ensure that ALL students will have the same opportunities to gain access to the new NSS curriculum, including the ApL courses and other learning experiences irrespective of students’ ability, race and gender. For instance, students with Special Educational Needs and non-Chinese speaking students will also receive six years free secondary education.

26. As regards the issue of gender in particular, the NSS curriculum is designed to be gender neutral. In fact, we have developed balanced views regarding the roles, functions and contributions of the two different sexes in the NSS curriculum. Gender awareness is enhanced in NSS subjects like Liberal Studies, subjects under

Personal, Social and Humanities Education (PSHE) and Technology Education KLAs. PD programmes / learning and teaching materials are also organized / developed to help enhance teachers' gender awareness. The following shows some examples.

Liberal Studies

27. The Liberal Studies curriculum provides sufficient space for examining gender issues. In fact, nurturing positive values and attitudes is one of the objectives of the curriculum. This includes the cultivation of virtues such as piety, respect for the elderly and maintaining a harmonious family. As stipulated in the NSS Liberal Studies C&A Guide, teachers are encouraged to examine various social issues including family from multi-perspectives with their students, and the gender perspective could be one of those. This could be done through the study of Module 1: *Personal Development and Interpersonal Relationships*; Module 2: *Hong Kong Today* and Module 5: *Public Health*. Students could be invited to explore and assess the significance of gender differences on the areas such as perceived importance of personal autonomy, interpersonal relationships and personal performance, etc. They could also examine the sources and impact of gender differences in the formation of self-image and self-esteem. Family issues could also be dealt with in the study of Module 3: *Modern China* through investigation of the evolution of the traditional concepts of the family in modern life. Students' preliminary understanding of the gender issue are built upon their understanding of the '*uniqueness of an individual, similarities and differences between the two sexes, sex role, personal identity and self-esteem, self-image and self-awareness*', during the early stage of basic education which could be further elaborated in various modules of the curriculum in their senior secondary education.

Subjects under PSHE KLA

28. To foster a balanced view of both genders in cultural, social and political development, the following modules / themes / key points are included in the curriculum of some PSHE subjects:

Subject	Module / Theme / Key Points
Ethics and Religious Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Human rights - Sex, companionship and family - (Bioethics) gender selection - (Media Ethics) impact of stereotyping on society
Tourism and Hospitality Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social impact of tourism development (exploitation of women in the development of sex tourism)
Chinese History	Module 6 of Elective Part <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The role of female in the Community: Tradition and

Subject	Module / Theme / Key Points
	Transformation
History	Elective Part - Issue-based studies: the struggle for gender equality

29. Relevant professional development programmes were also organized in the past few years to arouse teachers' gender awareness like "Social Status of Women: Tradition and Transformation" (Chinese History) in 2006, "Sex, Companionship and Family" (ERS) in 2008.

Subjects under Technology Education KLA

30. The NSS Design and Applied Technology (DAT) curriculum 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 other words, the curriculum 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. Teachers are also encouraged to develop learning activities that cater for the gifted, the underachievers and students of both genders in the C&A Guide.

31. In the subject of Health Management and Social Care, "gender" is explicitly mentioned in the learning target to arouse teachers' awareness – "Respect the dignity of individuals and recognise both differences and similarities among individuals and groups in terms of age, **gender**, culture, ethnicity, (dis-)ability, and socio-economic background". In fact, gender is an issue for discussion in the compulsory part of the curriculum.

Textbooks and Learning & Teaching Materials

32. In recent years, EDB has paid greater attention to gender awareness in our vetting process of textbooks. The Guiding Principles of Quality Textbooks developed by EDB clearly states that "the content and illustrations do not carry any form of discrimination on the grounds of gender, age, race, religion, culture and disability etc, nor do they suggest exclusion". In the textbook review, textbook reviewers are required to make assessment on the set criteria to ensure that there is not any form of discrimination in the content or illustrations. With the joint efforts of EDB and the publishers, gender awareness in newly-published textbooks has been improved, and the use of sensitive words, phrases or sentences about gender, family status, ethnicity, disability, etc. has been avoided.

33. Learning and teaching resources such as “The role of female in the Community: Tradition and Transformation” (“女性社會地位：傳統與變遷”) for Chinese History, and “Human Rights – Equal Opportunities and Discrimination” for ERS are also developed to help enhance the gender awareness.

Advice Sought

34. Members are requested to note the progress of the new academic structure as reported in this paper and provide suggestions.

Education Bureau

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