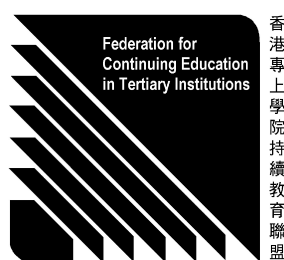


DRAFT

Associate Degree in Hong Kong
Final Report
of
A Consultancy Study
commissioned by the
Education and Manpower Bureau
and undertaken by
The Federation for Continuing Education in
Tertiary Institutions



2 May 2001

Executive Summary

Commissioned by Education and Manpower Bureau, the Federation for Continuing Education in Tertiary Institutions conducted a study on Associate Degree (AD) in Hong Kong. The objective of the present study is to elucidate the meaning of AD, and its position in the education system of Hong Kong. To this end, an overview was first undertaken on the AD programmes currently offered in other countries and regions. This was followed by a stock-taking exercise of all the AD programmes currently offered and to be launched in Hong Kong. The key findings and recommendations are summarised below.

Chapter 1: Introduction

- 1.1. Two major developments in the higher education sector of Hong Kong are: (1) the Government's new planning target of increasing the age participation for tertiary education from the current 30% to 60% by 2010/11; and (2) the development of a diversified, multi-channel, multi-layer higher education system. The Government will facilitate providers to offer options other than traditional sixth form education, such as professional diploma courses, higher diploma courses and AD programmes.
- 1.2. The present study seeks to (1) propose a common descriptor of AD in Hong Kong; (2) identify existing local programmes which fit the descriptor; (3) help build up a repository of information on local and overseas AD programmes; (4) identify problems to be resolved if AD is to be incorporated into a comprehensive qualifications framework to be developed in the future; and (5) map out the progression ladder leading to AD or equivalent qualifications.

Chapter 2: Associate Degree in Other Regions

- 2.1 AD grows out from the development of community colleges in USA in the 19th century. It is now offered in the US and Canada and, more recently, in Taiwan. On the other hand, higher diplomas/diplomas are the most common sub-degree level qualifications in the Commonwealth higher education system. Some countries (e.g. UK) are pioneering new qualification (e.g. Foundation Degree). There are few, if any, places with the co-existence of AD and Higher Diploma/Diploma programmes.
- 2.2 There is no international, national or state common descriptor of an AD, though institutions generally follow some common practices and recommendations of national or regional associations such as the American Association of Community Colleges in USA, and the Association of Canadian Community Colleges in Canada.
- 2.3 The meaning of AD has evolved over the years. A common descriptor will serve as a good starting point. At the same time, we need to keep an open mind to allow AD to evolve in the light of changing circumstances.

Chapter 3: Programmes offered in Hong Kong

- 3.1 AD was first launched in Hong Kong in 2000. The continuing education divisions of two local universities now offer self-financing programmes. A university has converted publicly-funded Higher Diploma programmes into AD programmes. It is expected that the number of providers, programmes and places will increase in 2001/02.
- 3.2 At present, there is no common descriptor for AD. This study has facilitated FCE in reaching consensus on a common descriptor in terms of programme structure, entrance requirements, teachers' qualifications, etc.
- 3.3 To ensure that the stakeholders fully understand the nature of AD, there is an urgent need for education sector to reach consensus on a common set of descriptors for AD.
- 3.4 Similar to AD, there is no common descriptor for Higher Diploma/diploma. However, it would be desirable to ascertain the similarities and differences between Higher Diploma/Diploma and AD, if Hong Kong is to develop a qualifications framework.

Chapter 4: Associate Degree Programmes in Hong Kong

- 4.1 This report proposes a set of common descriptors. This includes, *inter alia*, (1) programme objectives, (2) entry requirements, (3) programme structure, (4) curriculum design, (5) learning outcomes, (6) teacher qualifications, (5) quality assurance, (6) exit qualifications, (7) progression and articulation routes, etc. Details are set out in Chapter 4.
- 4.2 *Programme objectives and learning outcome:* Generally, AD should provide an enriched education at post-secondary level that prepares the students for work, leisure, further study and active citizenship. Specifically, AD should equip students with generic skills as well as specialised knowledge/skills that are sufficient to perform effectively at associate professional level, further their studies in universities or pursue professional development.
- 4.3 *Entry requirements:* As a norm, the proposed minimum entry requirements are: (1) satisfactory completion of S6, plus 5 passes in HKCEE (including English and Chinese); (2) satisfactory completion of a Higher Education Foundation Certificate (HEFC) (or pre-AD) programme; or (3) aged 21 or above.
- 4.4 *Programme structure:* As a norm, AD should be a 2-year programme if offered in full-time mode.
- 4.5 *Curriculum design:* AD should be a combination of broad-based, generic knowledge/skills and specialised/vocational knowledge/skills. Non-specialist contents should constitute not less than 20% of total curriculum.
- 4.6 *Teacher qualifications:* At least 70% of the teaching staff should possess a Master's degree or equivalent qualification, and should preferably have teaching or equivalent working experience in relevant fields.

- 4.7 *Quality assurance:* For self-accrediting universities, AD programmes have all been endorsed by the Senate of respective institutions. For providers who are non-self-accrediting, involvement of external quality assurance agencies is recommended.
- 4.8 *Recognition and articulation:* AD is designed as a programme with multiple-entry and multiple-exit. Completion of AD should enable students to articulate to Year 3 of North American universities or Year 2 of UK universities.
- 4.9 *AD and Higher Diploma:* As an exit qualification for employment purposes, the level of AD should be considered as equivalent to that of the Higher Diploma.
- 4.10 The progression ladder of AD and HEFC is shown in Figure One.

Chapter 5: The Higher Education Foundation Certificate

- 5.1 This report proposes the introduction of a HEFC programme. This programme will widen the access for Secondary 5 school leavers to pursue AD programmes other than through the Secondary 6 route. This programme can be viewed as either a standalone programme or an integral part of a 3-year programme admitting Secondary 5 graduates and leading to an AD qualification.
- 5.2 This report also proposes a common descriptor for this programme in terms of, *inter alia*, (1) programme objectives, (2) entry requirements, (3) programme structure, (4) curriculum design, (5) teacher qualifications, (6) quality assurance, (7) exit qualifications and progression routes. Details are set out in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Recommendation

- 6.1 To ensure that society at large understand fully the nature and meaning of AD, and in particular its position and role in the current education system of Hong Kong, there is an urgent need for the education sector and course providers to adopt and announce a set of common descriptors for AD programme.
- 6.2 As a starting point, the descriptions in Chapter 4 could be used as a model template for such a set of common descriptors. Consultation should then be carried out, preferably by the government, with all stakeholders concerned, and the descriptors further refined and modified. The revised descriptors should then be promulgated for reference by (and possibly regulation of) current as well as would-be providers of AD programmes. However, we should keep an open mind and modify these descriptors in the light of changing circumstances.
- 6.3 To cater for providers who do not have self-accrediting status, there is a need for the government to formulate a clear policy for the accreditation and quality assurance of the AD programmes to be offered.
- 6.4 Subject to the above conditions being met, the government should recognise AD by
- offering financial assistance to the AD students;

- announcing a range/level of government posts for which the AD graduates are eligible to apply; and
 - stipulating an entry salary point in the Master Pay Scale which is somewhere between the existing entry points for matriculants and degree holders.
- 6.5 As an access programme to AD, HEFC programme students should be eligible to apply for
- student financial assistance; and
 - the same posts with the same entry salary points in the civil service as currently enjoyed by S 6 students or matriculants.
- 6.6 For benchmarking purposes, the government may also consider adopting a set of common descriptors for the HEFC programme.
- 6.7 Concerted efforts should be made by the tertiary institutions and the major course providers in the setting up a credit accumulation and transfer system for all AD (and possibly HEFC) programmes.

Figure One: Progression Ladder of Associate Degree Programme

