

**For information on
7 February 2005**

LegCo Panel on Education

Reforming the Academic Structure of Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education

Purpose

This paper reports the initial feedback the Administration has obtained on the “Reforming the Academic Structure of Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education – Actions for Investing in the Future” document (the Document).

Background

2. In 2000, the Education Commission recommended the adoption of a 3-year senior secondary academic system to facilitate the implementation of a more flexible, coherent and diversified senior secondary curriculum. The Chief Executive in his 2004 Policy Address endorsed the direction and undertook to consult the public on the implementation details.

3. The Administration therefore launched the Document on 20 October 2004 to solicit community feedback on the implementation details including the design blueprint, timetable and financing arrangements for the proposed changes. The consultation ended on 19 January 2005.

4. Since the launch of the Document, the Administration has conducted about 200 consultation events with school heads and teachers, school sponsoring bodies, students, parents, as well as other community organisations including District Councilors, educational and professional associations. Over 29,000 people from various groups and organisations had participated. The Administration has received over 3,200 written submissions from school councils, tertiary institutions, individual school heads, teachers, students, parents (including related associations), members of the general public and community groups, as well as from organisations in the education sector. The

response rate to the questionnaires sent to all secondary schools in Hong Kong is over 95%.

Major Views and Questions Raised

General feedback

5. There is overwhelmingly support for the direction of change from the community and across all key stakeholder groups. There is also strong support that the academic structure and curriculum and assessment changes should go together. However views differ on the proposed implementation timeline for introducing the new Senior Secondary One.

Curriculum

6. There is general support for broadening the curriculum and changes that aim at infusing a new culture of learning and learning to learn. Generally speaking, schools accept that the proposed overall student programme of *Chinese + English + Mathematics + Liberal Studies + 2-3 Elective Subjects/Career-oriented studies + Other Learning experiences* will achieve a good balance between breadth and depth of knowledge domains, skills and values. The 8 heads of universities have already indicated that the 4 core subjects of Chinese, English, Mathematics and Liberal Studies would be considered as requirements for entrance into universities. However some respondents ask whether more able students could be encouraged to study extra subjects that are not necessarily examined and this idea is welcome by some universities. Some are concerned whether the subject combinations will fit in well with university admission criteria. Some tend to think that the number of subjects offered under the new system is smaller and therefore limit choice. There have been concerns raised in the special education sector about how the principles of the new academic structure might be applied to students with different learning needs. However, it is generally accepted that students with special educational needs should have the same entitlement of 6 years secondary schooling as students in the mainstream.

7. There is general support, particularly from teachers, for the overall aims and objectives and the curriculum framework for the individual

subjects. On individual subjects, there are views on the language standards and provision of other languages (like French and German) apart from Chinese and English. Some suggest making the proposed two extension modules of Mathematics elective subjects. Other subjects where concerns were raised included those under Technology Education, in which a number of the existing subjects are proposed to be reorganised, and Arts Education, mainly being whether the new system will allow sufficient space for schools to offer Arts subjects to students.

8. The proposed core subject Liberal Studies has attracted most attention. There is general support for introducing Liberal Studies as a core subject with assessment but views differ on whether the assessment should be a public examination, a public examination with less standard levels reported or a school-based assessment. There are also concerns about the adequate supply of teachers in teaching Liberal Studies and the quantity and quality of training for teachers in teaching the subject. Some suggest that the subject content should be made clearer and number of modules be reduced. The school sector suggests smaller class groups to allow the inquiry approaches to be fully realized. In consultation sessions held for all the subjects, many teachers have indicated a willingness to participate in teaching the subject.

9. On career-oriented studies, there is general support to introduce such studies in senior secondary so students can enjoy a wider choice of learning and benefit from more diversified and better-connected learning paths. Many hold the view that career-oriented studies need to be duly recognised as comparable elective subjects, and properly accredited to ensure they have real status for those students undertaking them. It is also suggested that schools which offer more diversified subjects including career-oriented studies need to be given more financial incentives to facilitate their provision.

Assessment and certification

10. The proposed single examination for a new Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education to replace the current two high stake examinations enjoys widespread community support. The survey results from secondary schools show general consensus that school-based assessment can help to bring about a change in assessment culture conducive to improving student learning. Nevertheless, fairness, comparability and consistency of

school-based assessment are main concerns of the school sector. Some suggest applying a smaller weighting or adopting a phase-in approach. There are also concerns about the workload of school-based assessment on students and teachers if it is not properly implemented.

11. There is general support for the proposed standard-referenced approach which will provide more information on students' achievement and complement further norm-referenced information available for various users. There are requests for more details on how a standard-referenced approach works and how it provides good indicators for university admission or other selective purposes.

Support measures

12. Views on support measures are mainly from the school sector on how the new system will impact on the teacher establishment and class structure of schools, and whether schools will have enough capacity to bring about the proposed changes. Some suggest smaller class size (mainly for Liberal Studies). Schools in general welcome the idea of more flexible groupings of students to cater for different learning needs of different subjects, and receive positively additional support and resources that may be provided for Liberal Studies and for schools to offer diversified choices to students. Some suggest that adequate professional development opportunities must be available to enable teachers to cope with changes and that teacher education programmes should keep abreast with the change. There is also demand for capacity enhancement so that schools can release serving teachers to undertake the necessary training.

Funding

13. There is general agreement that further discussion should proceed on how different parties should contribute to the shared funding model outlined in the Document. Some responses suggest it is not the time to consider increases in tuition fees and that if this is to be considered at all it should be after all the professional and other implementation details are settled.

Way Forward

14. All feedback is being analyzed and a report will be issued in the second quarter of 2005. The report will settle some critical issues like the year of implementation and the broad curriculum and assessment framework to allow us to move forward on those issues which will need continuous consultation, especially curriculum and assessment of different subjects and to allow schools and universities to plan successfully for implementation.

15. Although the consultation period has ended, the Administration will continue professional dialogue with key stakeholders and seek feedback through focus group discussion and other channels on curriculum and assessment details as well as undertake further consultation on particular issues the details of which are being developed, such as applied learning and special education. A systematic analysis of all the feedback together with the constructive dialogue underway with the key stakeholder groups will assist the Administration to accommodate and revise where necessary the implementation details for reforming the academic structure for senior secondary and higher education. We shall maintain a continual dialogue with the key stakeholders which is critical for bringing about the success of the reform.

Education and Manpower Bureau
February 2005