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Panel on Education

Background paper prepared by Legislative Council Secretariat

New academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education

Purpose

This paper summarises the relevant deliberations of the Panel on Education on the proposed new academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education.

Background

2. In 2000, the Education Commission (EC) recommended the adoption of a three-year senior secondary academic system to facilitate the implementation of a more flexible, coherent and diversified senior secondary curriculum. In May 2003, EC set out the proposals for developing a new senior secondary and higher education academic structure (the “3+3+4” structure). In his 2004 Policy Address, the Chief Executive confirmed the policy direction of developing the new academic structure.

3. The Administration issued, in October 2004, a Consultation Paper entitled “Reforming the Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education” for public consultation on the design blueprint, timing of the implementation and financial arrangements of the proposed “3+3+4” academic structure. The three-month consultation exercise ended on 19 January 2005.

Deliberations of the Panel

4. The Panel on Education held three meetings on 29 October 2004, 20 December 2004 and 3 January 2005 to discuss the proposed “3+3+4” academic structure with the Administration. The Panel also receive views from deputations at one of the meetings. A summary of the views received was issued vide LC Paper No.

CB(2)511/04-05(01) dated 29 December 2004.

New academic structure

5. Members in general expressed support for the implementation of the “3+3+4” structure with a three-year junior secondary and three-year senior secondary education linking to four-year undergraduate university programmes. They, however, were of the view that the Administration should incorporate the provision of special education and integrated education in the new senior secondary academic structure. The Administration responded that the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) would solicit the views of the special education sector on provision of special education under the new academic structure in the next round of consultation. In principle, children with special educational needs should enjoy a six-year secondary education as their counterparts in mainstream schools.

Senior secondary curriculum

6. According to the Consultation Paper, a senior secondary curriculum would be re-designed. All students would be expected to take four core subjects, including Liberal Studies, two to three elective subjects and other learning experiences.

7. Some members considered that EMB should consult the school sector and the community in deciding the subjects to be retained or removed from the senior secondary curriculum. The Administration assured members that it would consult the school sector on the design of the new senior secondary school curriculum

8. Some members expressed concern about the curriculum design, assessment, pedagogies, and class size for teaching Liberal Studies as a core subject at senior secondary levels. They suggested that Liberal Studies should first be taught as an elective subject. These members considered that Liberal Studies should only be included as a core subject when sufficient experienced teachers were available, and appropriate pedagogies and assessment mechanisms, and support measures were put in place.

9. The Administration responded that on the basis of the views received during the public consultation exercise, it would decide the appropriate timing for implementing the “3+3+4” structure and incorporating Liberal Studies as a core subject in the senior secondary curriculum. The Administration also pointed out that Liberal Studies was currently taught at the Advanced Supplementary Level. Good practices developed and experiences gained from teaching Liberal Studies, Integrated Humanities, and Science and Technology under the existing curriculum would be used to support schools which had little experience in teaching the subject.

10. Some members expressed concern about the implementation of incorporating career-oriented studies in the new senior secondary curriculum. They also asked whether the breadth and depth of these studies would be sufficient to enhance

students' future ability to find employment and to pursue continuing education.

11. The Administration explained that students might select career-oriented studies as alternatives to the elective subjects in the light of their needs, aptitudes and interests. Students might pursue career-oriented studies by joining the programmes at the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (IVE) or Caritas. Alternatively, schools could invite tutors from IVE or Caritas to run the programmes at school. The Administration further explained that a "Senior Secondary Student Learning Profile" was proposed to record all the learning experiences and the achievements of a student throughout the years of senior secondary schooling. Employers and higher education institutions would then have a more complete picture of the achievements and qualities of their potential employees and students.

Assessment and certification

12. Members expressed concern as to how school-based assessment in different subjects could be fairly administered, and how the standards of students in different schools could be fairly assessed.

13. The Administration explained that the inclusion of a school-based component would help assess the set of generic competencies which could not be assessed in the context of a public written examination. To facilitate fair and consistent assessment, students' performance in school-based assessment among different schools would be statistically moderated with reference to their external examination results and other methods.

Interface between senior secondary education and higher education

14. Some members considered that universities should set out their admission criteria as early as practicable, in particular whether Liberal Studies should be a mandatory subject, for university admission under the "3+3+4" academic structure. They pointed out that the information was necessary for teachers and principals to plan their school curriculum in preparation for the implementation of the "3+3+4" academic structure in the 2008-09 school year. Parents would also need to know the future admission requirements for individual undergraduate programmes for selecting secondary schools for their children.

15. The Administration responded that a working group comprising staff of EMB and university staff had been set up to work out the detailed arrangements for university admission. The Administration envisaged that universities would be able to publish their general admission criteria and specific admission requirements for individual faculties in 2005.

16. Some members considered that the "3+3+4" academic structure should provide different pathways for sub-degree holders and students who were less successful at junior secondary school to pursue university education. The Administration pointed

out that the current policy was to enable 18% of the population with the 17 to 20 age cohort to enrol in first-year-first-degree programmes in UGC-funded institutions and 60% of secondary school leavers to have access to post-secondary education.

Supporting measures

17. Members in general considered that the Administration should provide appropriate professional development programmes and sufficient support for teachers to prepare for the implementation of the new senior secondary curriculum. Some of them considered that even a 100-hour development programme was not sufficient for a teacher to become competent in teaching a new subject such as Liberal Studies.

18. The Administration responded that the 35-hour professional development programme for teaching a new subject under the new senior secondary curriculum was proposed after consulting the teaching profession. Depending on individual needs, the duration of professional development programmes for a teacher could range from 35 to 100 hours. The Administration would consult teachers thoroughly for the design of appropriate development programmes for different subjects,

19. Some members expressed concern that the proposed revision of teacher-to-class ratios for implementation of the “3+3+4” academic structure would lead to more surplus teachers in secondary schools. The Administration responded that transitional arrangements were proposed to facilitate schools to move smoothly to the “3+3+4” academic structure and a five-year transition period was provided for schools to phase out the surplus teachers by natural wastage after the “double-cohort” year.

Funding

20. The Administration proposed a shared funding model to meet the costs for implementing the new academic structure. Some members suggested that the Administration should re-consider the proposed funding arrangements and reduce the share of parents in contributing to the additional costs. They considered that the proposed increase in tuition fees to about \$7,200 and \$50,000 per annum for senior secondary classes and undergraduate programmes respectively would add substantial financial burden to low-income families and needy students. These members also observed that the proposed increase in university tuition fees did not follow the existing cost-recovery ratio of 18% of the average student unit cost.

21. The Administration responded that apart from the capital and non-recurrent costs of about \$6.7 billion which would be funded from the public purse, the Government and the parents would contribute about \$1.1 billion and \$750 million respectively of the additional recurrent cost on full implementation of the new academic structure. The Administration considered it reasonable for financially capable parents to share part of the costs incurred, and would consider ways to improve the student financial assistance schemes to assist needy students.

22. On the cost-recovery rate for undergraduate programmes, the Administration confirmed that the proposed increase would change the cost recovery rate from the current 18% to about 24%. The Administration, however, pointed out that the cost recovery rates in neighbouring region and some overseas countries were above 24% and the community should determine the appropriate cost-recovery rate for higher education under the “3+3+4” academic structure.

Recent Developments

23. The Secretary for Education and Manpower (SEM) made a statement at the Council meeting on 18 May 2005 on the Government’s way forward for implementing the reform. The statement is in the **Appendix** for members’ easy reference. SEM announced that –

- (a) the Government decided to introduce the new academic structure in the 2009-10 school year in order to allow one more year for professional preparation of schools and teachers;
- (b) the Government decided to reduce the number of core units in the curriculum design of Liberal Studies from nine to six; and
- (c) the Government planned to invest \$7.9 billion, compared to \$6.7 billion as originally proposed, to meet the preparation costs for the new academic structure.

24. The Administration also published another report on “The New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education – Action Plan for Investing in the Future of Hong Kong” for further public consultation.

Relevant papers

25. Members are invited to access the Legislative Council website (<http://www.legco.gov.hk>) to view the minutes of meetings of the Panel on Education held on 29 October 2004, 20 December 2004, 3 January 2005, the papers provided by the Administration and the submissions received.

**Statement by Professor Arthur KC Li
Secretary for Education and Manpower
at the Legislative Council Meeting on 18 May 2005**

**The New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary and Higher
Education – Action Plan for Investing in the Future of Hong Kong**

Madam President,

All our educators share a common goal, that is, to provide the best quality education to our students. We are all willing to take on and work hard towards this goal.

2. All sectors in our community place great importance on the quality of human resources in Hong Kong, and are willing to invest in our future.

Creating a Better Education System

3. In October last year, I made a statement in this Council to introduce the consultation exercise on Reforming the Academic Structure for Senior Secondary and Higher Education (3+3+4). During the consultation period, we received about 3,300 written submissions and also listened to and exchanged views through various channels. We are deeply encouraged by the clear and overwhelming support for the new academic structure and for the broad direction of changes in curriculum and assessment. This reflects the consensus among the Hong Kong community to continuously invest in our young people through providing them with a better education system.

4. The “3+3+4” academic structure that we are going to implement is a major development in the history of education in Hong Kong. The new academic structure provides opportunities for all students to receive six-year secondary education and promises to infuse our students with a broadened knowledge base, balanced development, sound language and other generic skills and a propensity for life-long learning. We hope we can cater for diversified learning needs of all students through curriculum and assessment changes, allowing students with different aptitudes, interests and competencies to excel. Moreover, the new academic structure will provide smoother articulation for further studies or work in Hong Kong and be better connected with other major education systems in the world. For university education, the four-year undergraduate programme will allow more balanced and comprehensive development of our university students.

Setting the Future Direction of Education Development

5. The changes in the academic structure will involve extensive human resource and financial investment. The resource commitment is nonetheless essential for investing in our future. We are pleased to see that after years of preparation and discussion, most people now have stopped asking why we need the new academic structure. They are now focusing more on what we need to do, when and how and at what pace we can put the new academic structure smoothly in place.

6. I must express my deepest appreciation and thanks for the support and valuable views from the education sector and the wider community. Their feedback has helped us decide how to implement the new academic structure. Having considered the views expressed by various sectors, we have modified the original proposals. Today, we will publish the Report titled "The New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education – Action Plan for Investing in the Future of Hong Kong". The Report not only summarises the results of the consultation, but also consolidates the consensus reached on the broad direction and the roadmap for proceeding with the new senior secondary and higher education arrangements.

Implementing the New Academic Structure in 2009

7. Many stakeholders, including those from the university sector, want to see early implementation of the new academic structure. However, we also hear voices from some stakeholders, particularly those from the school heads and teachers, who wanted more time to get fully prepared for the changes. Building the new academic structure involves substantial and far-reaching changes. To ensure a smooth transition, we see the need for schools, teachers and concerned parties to be professionally and psychologically prepared for the changes. Taking into account the views of all parties and having balanced various considerations, we have now decided to introduce the new academic structure in September 2009. Current Primary Five students will be the first cohort to benefit from the new senior secondary education. The first cohort of Senior Secondary Three students will enter the four years' undergraduate programme in September 2012.

Developing the Full Potential of Students and Catering for Learning Diversity

8. On curriculum changes, a great majority of views support the curriculum framework for the new senior secondary academic structure, which includes four core subjects and two to three electives or career-oriented studies, as well as other learning experiences. **The vision and curriculum objectives of the Liberal Studies subject are also generally agreed by all sectors.** However, having taken into account concerns and views from the educators, we have decided to reduce the number of core units of Liberal Studies from nine to six, so that students will have ample time to study thoroughly the relevant issues. We will also provide additional resource and support measures to schools, including a Senior Secondary Curriculum Support Grant which schools can use to arrange small group teaching for Liberal Studies, and a **web-based resource support platform** to be launched in mid-2005 for reference of teachers. We also plan to provide all Liberal Studies teachers with training of no less than 100 hours, according to their needs.

9. In order to take due care of the different learning needs and interests of students, we will **develop the career-oriented studies alongside the elective subjects to provide students with more diversified learning experiences and choices.** Career-oriented studies will also be connected to pathways for further studies and work. The Education and Manpower Bureau will establish a quality assurance mechanism in collaboration with the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation to ensure the credibility and recognition of career-oriented studies qualifications. Moreover, we will provide a Diversity Learning Grant for schools to offer diversified curriculum.

10. We are **committed to caring for students with special educational needs**, and to ensure that these students will have the opportunity to receive six years of secondary education like other students. Since the competencies of students with special educational needs are very diverse, the Education and Manpower Bureau will cater for their different abilities in the curriculum and assessment arrangements. We have taken into account views already given to us, and will continue to consult the stakeholders with a view to finalising future arrangements and details by the end of this year.

Assessment and Examinations

11. On the assessment and examination front, there is significant support for a single examination leading to a new Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE). **School-based assessment will be adopted flexibly with changes made in scope, weighting, and timetable** in accordance with feedback from frontline teachers.

12. The status of the new HKDSE has attracted considerable attention. The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority is already making progress in negotiating with overseas universities for direct recognition of both the current examinations and the HKDSE. The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority will continue to work on **ensuring international recognition of the new HKDSE.**

13. The University Grant Committee and Heads of Universities Committee have expressed support for the new academic structure and curriculum changes, and have indicated that the four subjects of Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics and Liberal Studies will be considered as mandatory requirements for university entrance. I am confident that the higher education institutions will be ready to announce the general admission criteria in mid-2005 as well as detailed requirements at the faculty/programme level by mid-2006. This will provide a clear picture of university admission criteria for schools and parents.

Enhanced Resources, Strengthened Support

14. We fully appreciate that sufficient support and detailed planning is the key to successful implementation of the new academic structure. Having taken into account views from all quarters, we recommend allocating more resources to create space for teachers and school leaders, improve teacher provision, provide more diversified professional development opportunities, and strengthen support for schools, so that schools would be fully equipped for the implementation of the new senior secondary curriculum and assessment framework.

15. In our previous consultation document, we recommended allocating \$6.7 billion to meet the capital and other non-recurrent costs for the implementation of the new academic structure in the school and university sectors. The Government is now prepared to increase the investment to

\$7.9 billion, of which \$3.5 billion is for the capital costs for schools and the universities, and the remainder \$4.4 billion for meeting other non-recurrent costs. On the non-recurrent funding, the Government plans to provide \$1.7 billion to support schools for the implementation of the new senior secondary curriculum in the run up to 2009. For the university sector, it is estimated that \$550 million will be provided for the development of the new undergraduate programme.

16. Moreover, we last estimated in the consultation document that we would need an additional recurrent funding of \$1.1 billion. In order to further strengthen the support for schools, we now estimate that **upon full implementation of the new academic structure, we have to spend \$2 billion on a recurrent basis**. About \$1.1 billion of the recurrent cost is to meet with the additional funding requirements for implementing the four-year undergraduate programmes. For the school sector, when the new senior secondary academic structure is in full operation, we will provide schools with the Senior Secondary Curriculum Support Grant, the Diversity Learning Grant, support for students with special educational needs, and enhanced teacher provision for senior secondary classes after the double cohort year, involving altogether a recurrent expenditure of \$900 million.

17. The Government will review the student financial assistance schemes, including the assistance level, and the loan and repayment arrangements, to ensure that no student will be deprived of the opportunity of education due to lack of means.

18. **Detailed support measures** we plan to provide to schools include those in the following areas –

(a) provision of a **Teacher Professional Preparation Grant** during the four school years from September 2005 onwards, for schools to provide teacher relief for serving teachers to receive professional training, and to get fully prepared for the new curriculum and assessment changes;

(b) **provision of recurrent cash grants** including the Diversity Learning Grant and Senior Secondary Curriculum Support Grant to enable schools to offer more diversified learning opportunities including career-oriented studies, programmes for gifted students and for students with special educational needs, and to enable schools to arrange flexible groupings of students in Liberal Studies or in other subjects as needed; and

(c) **improvement to the teacher provision for senior secondary classes from 1.9 to 2.0 teachers per class when the new senior secondary academic structure is fully implemented.** In addition, the Senior Secondary Curriculum Support Grant equivalent to the salary of 0.1 teacher per class will be disbursed in the form of a cash grant to provide schools with more flexibility in making appropriate arrangements for implementation of the new academic structure.

Join Hands for a Common Future

19. Madam President, the outcomes of the consultation have shown a high degree of community consensus on the new academic structure. We have also set the roadmap and direction of work for the future development of senior secondary and higher education. We will proceed shortly to a second round consultation on the detailed design of the curriculum and assessment frameworks for the new senior secondary subjects. Besides, we will continue our dialogue with the relevant sectors on a number of areas where we need future investigation and development. Implementing this reform will inevitably bring about many challenges, and it involves complicated issues that will have lasting implications. Successful implementation will hinge on the close cooperation among all the key stakeholders.

20. Before us is a major and important step forward in refining our education system. The proposed academic structure will provide a landmark development opportunity for upgrading the quality of our education as well as our people, especially the younger generation. The proposal has secured widespread support from our community which demonstrated a common vision for bringing forward the changes. For our goals to be accomplished, we need the partnership of teachers and the education profession. We need the full understanding and support of students and parents in order to have a curriculum that will bring our children more joy and benefits of learning. We need to further the consensus of the wider community in bringing forward the necessary reform that would nurture the talents that make Hong Kong a world city. Last but not the least, we need the support and funding approval of this Council for the Administration to join hands with our stakeholders in smoothly implementing the new academic structure.

21. Thank you, Madam President.