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**Legislative Council**

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**Panel on Education**

**Background paper prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat  
for the meeting on 12 June 2006**

**New academic structure for  
senior secondary education and higher education**

**Purpose**

This paper summarises the 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” (the Consultation Paper) for public consultation on the design blueprint, timing of the implementation and financial arrangements of the proposed “3+3+4” academic structure. The consultation exercise ended on 19 January 2005.

4. On 18 May 2005, the Administration published the Report entitled “The New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education – Action Plan for Investing in the Future of Hong Kong”. The Report summarised the results of the consultation exercise and set out the road map for implementing the new academic structure in 2009-10.

## **Deliberations of the Panel**

### Relevant meetings

5. The Panel on Education held four meetings on 29 October 2004, 20 December 2004, 3 January 2005 and 3 June 2005 to discuss the proposed “3+3+4” academic structure with the Administration. The Panel also received views from educational and student organisations 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. The concerns expressed by members are summarised in the following paragraphs.

### New academic structure

6. Members in general expressed support for the implementation of the “3+3+4” structure with 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 (NSS) 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 six-year secondary education as their counterparts in mainstream schools.

7. In January 2006, the Administration published a consultation paper entitled “Action for the Future – Further Consultation on Career-oriented Studies and the New Senior Secondary Academic Structure for Special Schools”. The consultation paper proposed that under the NSS structure, all students, including those with special educational needs, would be provided with six years of secondary education.

### Senior secondary curriculum

#### *Liberal Studies*

8. 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.

9. 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, as well as appropriate pedagogies, assessment mechanisms, and support measures were put in place.

10. The Administration 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. Schools were encouraged to start teaching Integrated Humanities and Science and Technology in senior secondary classes so that their teachers could start teaching topics covered by Liberal Studies at an early opportunity. A web-based resource platform was launched in mid-2005 to provide the basic knowledge which underpinned the Liberal Studies curriculum for teachers' reference. An association of Liberal Studies teachers, comprising some 300 serving teachers with experience in teaching Liberal Studies, had been established to form professional networks. The Administration had also decided to reduce the number of core units of Liberal Studies from nine to six, so that students would have sufficient time to thoroughly study the relevant issues.

#### *Career-oriented studies*

11. Some members expressed concern about the incorporation of career-oriented studies in the new senior secondary curriculum, in particular whether the breadth and depth of these studies would be sufficient to enhance students' future ability to find employment or pursue continuing education.

12. The Administration explained that students could select career-oriented studies as alternatives to the elective subjects in the light of their needs, aptitudes and interests. Students could 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. A "Senior Secondary Student Learning Profile" would be compiled 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 complete picture of the achievements and qualities of their potential employees and students. EMB would also 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.

#### Assessment and certification

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

14. 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

15. Some members considered that universities should set out their admission criteria as early as practicable, in particular whether Liberal Studies would 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. Parents would also need to know the future admission requirements for individual undergraduate programmes in selecting secondary schools for their children.

16. 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 University Grants Committee (UGC) and the Heads of Universities Committee had expressed support for the new academic structure and had indicated that the four subjects of Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics and Liberal Studies would be considered as mandatory requirements for university entrance. The Administration envisaged that universities would be able to publish their general admission criteria in mid-2005 and specific admission requirements for individual faculties by mid-2006.

17. 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. These members were concerned whether the provision of articulation places in publicly-funded undergraduate programmes for sub-degree holders would affect the provision of 14 500 first-year-first-degree places in UGC-funded institutions.

18. The Administration pointed out that the current policy was to enable 18% of the population at 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. The provision of articulation places in publicly-funded undergraduate programmes for sub-degree holders would not affect the provision of first-year-first-degree places in UGC-funded institutions.

### Support measures

#### *Teachers’ professional development*

19. 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.

20. 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. The Administration would also provide a Teacher Professional Preparation Grant during the four school years from September 2005 onwards for schools. The Grant would provide relief for serving teachers to receive professional training and support for schools to engage services to enhance the professional capacity of teachers.

#### *Teacher-to-class ratios*

21. Members noted that the existing basic teacher-to-class ratios for senior secondary classes were 1.3:1 for Secondary 4 (S4) and S5 and 2:1 for S6 and S7. In addition, split-class teaching entitlement, additional teacher of Chinese, school librarian, additional teachers for remedial teaching, and additional non-graduate teachers under the Education Commission Report No. 5 were provided as top-up provisions. Under the NSS structure, the top-up provisions in existing staff establishment would be subsumed into a revised teacher-to-class ratio.

22. 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 there would be transitional arrangements to facilitate schools to move smoothly to the “3+3+4” academic structure. A five-year transition period would also be provided for schools to phase out the surplus teachers by natural wastage after the “double-cohort” year.

#### Funding

23. The Administration had 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. These members also observed that the proposed increase in university tuition fees did not follow the existing cost recovery rate of 18% of the average student unit cost. The proposed increase would raise the cost recovery rate in undergraduate programmes from 18% to 24%.

24. The Administration responded that it would increase the investment from \$6.7 billion to \$7.9 billion to meet the capital and non-recurrent costs for the implementation of the new academic structure. The Administration would spend about \$2 billion on a recurrent basis on full implementation of the “3+3+4” structure.

Parents' contribution in this respect was \$750 million. The Administration considered it reasonable for financially capable parents to share part of the costs incurred. The tuition fees for senior secondary education had been frozen since 1998 and the current levels were about 15% of the unit cost. The Administration would gradually bring the tuition fees back to the target recovery level of 18%.

25. As regards the cost recovery rate for undergraduate programmes, the Administration confirmed that the proposed increase would raise the cost recovery rate from 18% to about 24%. The Administration pointed out that the cost recovery rates in the United Kingdom and the United States ranged from 30% to 60%. The Administration would carefully examine the issue before the implementation of the new academic structure and consider ways to improve the student financial assistance schemes to assist needy students.

26. The Finance Committee approved, on 24 June 2005, a new non-recurrent commitment of \$2.4472 billion over the period from 2005-06 to 2011-12 for implementing measures to support the development of the "3+3+4" academic structure.

### **Relevant papers**

27. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in the **Appendix**.

**Relevant documents on  
New academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education**

Date of meeting	Meeting	Minutes/Paper	LC Paper No.
15.10.03	Council meeting	Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung raised an oral question on “Switching from 3-year to 4-year university education system”	<a href="#">Hansard</a> (page 10 – 18)
29.10.04	Panel on Education	Minutes of meeting	<a href="#">CB(2)350/04-05</a>
		The Administration’s paper entitled “Reforming the Academic Structure of Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education - Actions for Investing in the Future”	<a href="#">CB(2)90/04-05(01)</a>
		The Administration’s paper on “Provision of free education in Hong Kong and overseas countries”	<a href="#">CB(2)1721/04-05(01)</a>
		Consultation document on “Reforming the academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education - Actions for investing in the future”	<a href="#">Consultation document on “Reforming the academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education - Actions for investing in the future”</a>
20.12.04	Panel on Education	Minutes of meeting	<a href="#">CB(2)1430/04-05</a>
3.1.05	Panel on Education	Minutes of meeting	<a href="#">CB(2)1764/04-05</a>
5.1.05	Council meeting	Hon LAU Chin-shek raised a written question on “Arrangements for students with special education needs under the proposed senior secondary education system”	<a href="#">Hansard</a> (page 68 – 71)

<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Minutes/Paper</b>	<b>LC Paper No.</b>
3.6.05	Panel on Education	Minutes of meeting	<a href="#">CB(2)2583/04-05</a>
		The Administration's paper entitled "Measures to Support Development of the New Academic Structure of Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education"	<a href="#">CB(2)1716/04-05(02)</a>
		The Administration's paper entitled "Implementation of the New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education – Additional Staffing Support"	<a href="#">CB(2)1716/04-05(03)</a>
		Consultation report on the New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education - Action plan for investing in the future of Hong Kong	<a href="#">Consultation report on the New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education - Action plan for investing in the future of Hong Kong</a>
24.6.05	Finance Committee	Minutes of meeting	<a href="#">FC125/04-05</a>
		New Item "Measures to Support the Development of the New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education"	<a href="#">FCR(2005-06)24</a>
20.10.05	Panel on Education	Minutes of meeting	<a href="#">CB(2)429/05-06</a>
		The Administration's paper entitled "Policy Initiatives on Education in the Policy Agenda for the 2005-06 Policy Address"	<a href="#">CB(2)48/05-06(01)</a>



<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Minutes/Paper</b>	<b>LC Paper No.</b>
13.2.06	Panel on Education	Minutes of meeting	<a href="#">CB(2)1456/05-06</a>
		Consultation document entitled “Action for the Future - Further Consultation on Career-oriented Studies and the New Senior Secondary Academic Structure for Special Schools”	<a href="#">Consultation document entitled “Action for the Future - Further Consultation on Career-oriented Studies and the New Senior Secondary Academic Structure for Special Schools”</a>

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