

For discussion on  
25 May 2007

## **Panel on Education**

### **An update on the progress of preparation for the New Senior Secondary Academic Structure (the 334)**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to update members on the progress in preparing for 334 with reference to the milestones set out in the report *The New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education – Action Plan for Investing in the Future of Hong Kong* (the 334 Report), published in May 2005.

#### **Background**

2. Since October 2004, the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) has conducted a series of consultations on various matters necessary for the smooth implementation of 334. A key feature of 334 is the development of 24 Curriculum and Assessment (C&A) Guides for the four core and 20 elective New Senior Secondary (NSS) subjects. The process has been overseen by the joint committees on the various NSS subjects under the Curriculum Development Council (CDC) and the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA). All curricula were also benchmarked against relevant subject curricula in Europe, Australia, United States and Asia through international agencies.

3. The report *Action for the Future – Career-oriented Studies and the New Senior Secondary Academic Structure for Special Schools* was released in August 2006 after a three-month consultation launched in January 2006. This report charts the way forward for students wanting access to a curriculum with stronger elements of applied learning and for students with special educational needs (SEN).

## **Progress**

### *Curriculum and Assessment Framework*

4. Three rounds of consultation had been conducted on the NSS curriculum and assessment framework. The first consultation (October 2004 – January 2005) focused on the design blueprints for the 24 NSS subject curricula, while the second consultation (June 2005 – January 2006) concentrated on the curriculum aspects of the C&A Guides for each subject. The third consultation (September – November 2006) focused on the assessment aspects of the C&A Guides, including the design and implementation plans for School-based Assessment (SBA). Final versions of the C&A Guides were published and uploaded onto the “334” Web Bulletin on 26 March 2007 while printed copies were sent to schools at the end of April 2007.

5. The completion of the 24 NSS C&A Guides represents an important milestone in implementing the new academic structure. The different 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. The Guides are essential to help schools prepare for the implementation of the NSS academic structure in the 2009/10 school year.

### *Assessment*

6. During the third consultation, which focused primarily on assessment issues, the sector was generally supportive of the curriculum and how it will be examined. In the case of SBA, there was good support in most subjects for the design and weighting given to the SBA and also the proposed timeline for implementation. Nevertheless, there was general concern from schools that SBA might require extra teacher and student effort and some teachers had concerns regarding the authentication of student work.

7. To enable schools and teachers to familiarise themselves with the NSS curriculum and to relieve them of the extra burden resulting from teachers who might have to prepare students for both the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) and the new Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination in the double cohort year (i.e. 2011/12 school year), a strategic approach to implement SBA was endorsed by the CDC and the Public Examinations Board of the HKEAA after consulting the sector. The

implementation timeline was finalised in March 2007. In brief, SBA for 12 subjects (including those with SBA currently in the HKCEE, Liberal Studies and the four science subjects (laboratory work only)) will be implemented in 2012, while SBA for the other 12 subjects will be deferred for two to four years.

8. The curricula of the above subjects will be unchanged during the transitional years and schools will be expected to conduct, as part of the learning and teaching process, the assessment activities as suggested in the C&A Guides. Over the coming two years, the HKEAA will devise the assessment criteria, exemplars and guidelines to enable teachers to mark SBA consistently. It will also organize training courses to enhance teachers' understanding of SBA.

#### *Recognition of HKDSE*

9. The HKEAA has been focusing on three areas of work to establish international recognition of the HKDSE. The first started in April 2005 when the Authority contacted universities in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States to : (a) update admissions officers on the standards of HKCEE and HKALE; and (b) inform them of the 334 reform with special emphasis on the curriculum, the standards and the proposed assessment plans. The HKEAA will continue to liaise with overseas universities and update the above information regularly.

10. The second area of work will commence in the third quarter of 2007 and will focus on updating overseas universities on the finalized NSS C&A framework with special reference to standards of the HKDSE. Sample examination papers and level descriptors of subjects will be sent to universities to demonstrate the standards of the HKDSE once they have been finalized.

11. The third area of work will focus on collaborating with the Cambridge International Examinations in UK on a methodology to establish the comparability of the HKDSE with UK qualifications. Its aim is to ensure advanced recognition by UK authorities of the HKDSE when it is first administered in 2012.

12. With the above three areas of work completed smoothly, we have confidence that overseas universities will be more than ready to accept qualified HKDSE graduates for admission to their undergraduate programs.

### *Interface with University*

13. The Heads of Universities Committee announced on 5 July 2006 the general admission requirements and programme specific requirements of the eight University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions under the new undergraduate programme structure. The Committee has made clear its support for one of the key goals of the education reform, that is, encouraging a more broad-based curriculum for senior secondary students with more choice to suit individual aptitudes and interests. In line with that, most institutions require four core subjects (Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics & Liberal Studies) and one or two elective subject(s) (specified/unspecified) for admission to their undergraduate programmes. In general, universities keep an open mind on the development and recognition of Applied Learning (ApL) courses to be included in the HKDSE, and the Other Learning Experiences which will be incorporated in the Student Learning Profile.

14. The eight UGC-funded institutions have already submitted their broad plans on the development of a 4-year undergraduate programme to the UGC. Based on the broad plans, it is observed that they share certain common features, including:

- a more flexible admission system (e.g. admission to faculty/school);
- a fully integrated undergraduate curriculum;
- more flexibility to students in the timing of declaring majors; and
- increasing emphasis on all-round education, such as by enhancing the level of overseas exchange activities.

15. The UGC has also allocated recently an additional funding of up to \$20 million per institution to the eight UGC-funded institutions in support of their planning work for the development of undergraduate curriculum under the 334. This funding is provided on top of the \$550 million one-off grant earmarked for the UGC sector by the Administration.

### *Applied Learning*

16. Piloting of ApL was first introduced in 2003 to accumulate experiences to inform the future planning and enable effective implementation of ApL in NSS. The number of participating schools increased from 64 in the first cohort (2003-05) to 172 in the fourth cohort (2006-08) while the number of students from 588 to 4,490. The enrolment of the fifth cohort piloting (2007-09) is in progress and it is anticipated that more schools and students will participate.

17. A C&A framework with generic guidelines on the learning outcomes and the teaching and assessment that would apply to all ApL courses has been drafted and would be tested in the coming cohorts of piloting to prepare for the migration of ApL to 334.

18. A quality assurance mechanism is being tested with the collaboration of three institutions with the following focuses:

- (a) the Curriculum Development Institute of EMB on whether the courses are developed according to the guidelines set out in the C&A framework, complement NSS subjects, and can meet the interests and aspirations of students.
- (b) the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation on whether the curriculum is delivered as planned; and
- (c) the HKEAA on whether the learning outcomes of students can meet the standards which are set, and whether these learning outcomes are comparable within and across the six areas of studies<sup>1</sup> of ApL and comparable with the learning outcomes of other NSS subjects. This process will result in ApL being included in the HKDSE.

19. The EMB has earmarked additional funding to support the pilots. Students will not, for financial reasons, be deterred from taking the ApL courses. We are working out how the Diversity Learning Grant will support diversification of student programmes in NSS, including ApL, taking into account the feedback from schools on the piloting arrangements.

### *Special Schools*

20. The principle of “one curriculum framework for all” with adaptations to suit the different learning needs and capabilities of students with SEN is adopted. Students with SEN but not intellectually disabled (ID) should aim at achieving the same curricular objective for NSS and will be assessed on the same criteria but with special accommodation. Special schools concerned are advised to make reference to the NSS C&A Guides of the 24 core and elective subjects for their curriculum planning.

21. For students with ID, Research and Development (R&D) projects are

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<sup>1</sup> The six areas of studies of ApL are (1) Applied Science; (2) Business, Management and Law; (3) Creative Studies; (4) Engineering and Production; (5) Media and Communication; and (6) Services.

being conducted with the involvement of 11 schools to develop the NSS curriculum frameworks and the Learning Outcomes Frameworks (LOFs) for the core subjects (i.e. Chinese, Mathematics and Liberal Studies/Independent Living). Relevant C&A Guides will be completed by the end of 2008. The development of curriculum frameworks for the two elective subjects, Physical Education and Visual Arts, which are popular in special schools, will start in the 2007/08 school year with C&A Guides to be completed in 2009. Task exemplars of the core subjects are being collected and will be provided to schools for reference in the 2007/08 school year. The EMB will make reference to the data collected through the development of LOFs and work in collaboration with the HKEAA in the development of a systemic assessment mechanism starting from 2012. Extensive consultation with stakeholders will be conducted during the developmental process.

22. The first pilot (2006-08) of adapted ApL courses for students with ID started in October 2006, with the participation of a total of 82 mild grade and higher-end moderate grade ID students from 18 special schools. In the second pilot (2007-09) that will start in October 2007, more service providers have been invited to provide a wider choice of courses to cater for the different needs of students with ID. Students with SEN but not ID (56 in the 2006-08 cohort) are studying the same ApL courses as other students but with appropriate support provided (e.g. teachers of hearing impaired students attended the courses with them to serve as the sign language interpreters to facilitate communication between course instructors and students).

23. Students with SEN but not ID can pursue post-secondary education at tertiary institutions as their counterparts in ordinary schools. For students with ID, the EMB will continue to work in collaboration with relevant parties, e.g. Vocational Training Council, Health, Welfare and Food Bureau, to explore further opportunities in post-school continuous learning/vocational rehabilitation and employment support services that will be articulated with the learning outcomes of the NSS education.

#### *Professional Development*

24. A series of 40 three-day workshops on planning the 334 academic structure was organized for secondary school leaders. Over 520 schools (including special schools) participated in these workshops. Most participants welcomed the workshops which provided them with opportunities for sharing

experiences and enhanced their understanding of the NSS curriculum and their confidence in implementing the new academic structure.

25. Feedback from the School Leaders Workshops highlighted the important leadership role of middle management for the successful implementation of the NSS academic structure. EMB has therefore organised a series of one-day Middle Managers Workshops on Migration to 334 in the 2006/07 and 2007/08 school years to better equip the middle managers of secondary schools for the implementation of NSS academic structure. A total of 65 workshops are being offered in the 2006/07 school year. Participants' feedback indicated that the workshops not only helped them develop positive attitude towards changes but also enhanced their sense of collaboration and strengthened their management skills in leading their panels. The school leaders workshops have contributed to the development of a Senior Secondary Curriculum Guide which will assist schools in planning their approach to the 3 years senior secondary programme.

26. It is expected that all serving teachers should be provided with relevant professional development programmes on the 24 NSS subjects by September 2008. The focuses of professional development programmes are on (a) understanding and interpreting the curriculum; (b) assessing student learning; (c) learning and teaching strategies; (d) enriching knowledge; (e) sharpening of teachers' understanding and mastery of strategies to cater for learner diversity; and (f) managing change (e.g. managing interface issues, strengthening leadership and management for effective implementation). All these programmes are in progress as scheduled.

27. Professional development programmes on understanding and interpreting ApL for secondary school heads, members of the school management committee, careers teachers and teachers in charge of ApL were launched in December 2006. We are consolidating experiences from the pilots of ApL to facilitate systematic planning of the professional development programmes. For special schools, workshops and sharing sessions on the planning and teaching of the core subjects (i.e. Chinese, Mathematics and Liberal Studies/Independent Living), LOFs of the subjects and the development of Individualized Educational Programmes are being planned and conducted as scheduled.

28. A Teacher Professional Preparation Grant is provided over a period of 4 years, starting from the 2005/06 school year and up to the 2008/09 school year to public sector secondary schools and special schools that will offer NSS classes to help create space for teachers and school leaders to take part in various professional development opportunities that prepare them for the implementation

*Learning/teaching Materials (including textbooks)*

29. In teaching NSS subjects, teachers will use a wide range of learning and teaching resources, such as textbooks, audio-visual teaching aids, self-learning packages, reference books, and web-based materials. The EMB will work with publishers and other professional organizations to ensure development of a variety of learning and teaching materials for each NSS subject before September 2009.

30. For the publishing of textbooks, a special textbook review arrangement has been agreed by publishers' associations to ensure the supply and quality of NSS textbooks. All NSS textbooks (except several subjects that do not require textbooks, e.g. Liberal Studies) are required to submit for review by the end of January 2008. Those meeting the standards will be put on the Recommended Textbook List by July 2008 for teachers' selection and reference.

31. As supporting measures, the EMB has provided subject-specific textbook development guidelines to all publishers and feedback sessions are being arranged for interested publishers to enhance communication during the textbook development process.

32. An NSS Curriculum Migration Grant is provided over a period of three years, starting from the 2006/07 school year and up to the 2008/09 school year to public sector secondary schools and special schools to enable them to be prepared for migration to NSS. Schools can use the grant to procure learning and teaching materials and equipment relating to the NSS subjects to be offered and to cover start-up expenses (including minor conversion work, furniture as well as other necessary items) for migration to the NSS curriculum.

*Communication with the Public*

33. To ensure better public understanding and support in the development of NSS (especially parents and teachers who are concerned with curriculum and



assessment), EMB will continue to enhance communication with different stakeholders. The 334-related messages are currently introduced to the public through means such as 334 article published in newspapers, 334 Web Bulletin, parent pamphlets, Educational Television (ETV) Programmes, “334” Exhibition Hall at the Kowloon Tong Education Resource Centre, “334” exhibit for loan to schools, as well as interactive parent seminars.

34. The above measures would be continued and strengthened. In addition, a multi-facet and multi-level approach of communication with parents will be adopted. This includes the production of a DVD containing key messages about curriculum and assessment, frequently asked questions, tips for parents as well as an information kit to help individual school organise school-based parent seminars on the NSS.

### **Advice Sought**

35. Members are requested to give their views on the progress of 334 as reported in this paper.

Education and Manpower Bureau  
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