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Panel on Education

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the special meeting on 25 May 2007**

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

Purpose

This paper summarises the issues of concern raised by the Panel on Education (the Panel) concerning the 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 334 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" which set out the design blueprint, the implementation timetable and the financial arrangements of the 334 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 334 structure in 2009-2010.

5. In January 2006, the Administration published a consultation document entitled "Action for the Future - Further Consultation on Career-oriented Studies and the New Senior Secondary Academic Structure for Special Schools". In August 2006, the Administration published another report entitled "Action for the Future - Career-oriented Studies and the New Senior Secondary Academic Structure for Special Schools".

Deliberations of the Panel

6. The Panel held a number of meetings to discuss the new 334 structure and receive views from educational bodies and student organizations. At its meeting on 13 February 2006, the Panel agreed that matters relating to special education under "334" should be followed up by the Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to the Provision of Boarding Places, Senior Secondary Education and Employment Opportunities for Children with Special Educational Needs. The issues of concern raised by members concerning ordinary education under "334" are set out in the following paragraphs.

New senior secondary curriculum

Liberal Studies

7. Members, in general, expressed support for the implementation of the 334 structure with three-year junior secondary and three-year senior secondary education linking to four-year undergraduate university programmes. They, however, were concerned about the new senior secondary (NSS) curriculum, in particular about the curriculum design, assessment, pedagogies, and class size for teaching Liberal Studies which would be one of the four core subjects at senior secondary levels. Members considered that Liberal Studies should only be included as a core subject when sufficient experienced teachers were available, and appropriate pedagogies, assessment mechanisms, and support measures had been put in place. According to a survey conducted by a political party, teachers, in general, considered that the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) had not provided sufficient professional development and support to teachers to teach Liberal Studies. Members suggested that the Administration should allow schools to teach Liberal Studies in small classes.

8. The Administration pointed out that the subject of 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. Professional development programmes for serving teachers who would teach Liberal Studies would be progressively implemented over a period of three years.

9. As regards the suggestion to teach Liberal Studies in small classes, the Administration responded that schools were encouraged to adopt small group teaching and strategies for teaching Liberal Studies. The provision of Diversity Learning Grant would help schools to organize individual subjects which normally attracted smaller groups of students. 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. Moreover, a four-year transition period would be provided for schools adopting English as the medium of instruction (EMI schools) to use Chinese to teach Liberal Studies. EMI schools could continue to use teaching materials in Chinese for individual topics, such as contemporary issues in the Mainland, after the transition period as and when appropriate.

Career-oriented studies

10. Members noted that based on the results of consultation, there was strong support to the purpose, positioning, design principles, areas of studies and quality assurance framework of career-oriented studies (COS). Members stressed the importance of the breadth and depth of COS in enhancing students' ability to find employment or pursue continuing education.

11. The Administration explained that COS courses were not intended to be a pre-vocational curriculum. Students could select COS as alternatives to the elective subjects in the light of their needs, aptitudes and interests 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 schools. 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 COS qualifications.

12. Members noted the diverse views expressed on the nomenclature of COS in the consultation. A new name "Applied Learning" was proposed by the Administration as a general reference to all COS courses.

Assessment

13. As the public assessment system to support the NSS would include a component of school-based assessment (SBA), members were concerned about how SBA of different subjects could be fairly administered, and how the standards of students in different schools could be fairly assessed.

14. According to the Administration, 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 SBA among different schools would be statistically moderated with reference to their external examination results and other methods.

15. As regards members' concern about the readiness of teachers to implement SBA, the Administration proposed a strategic implementation schedule. Subjects with SBA in the current public examinations of Hong Kong (e.g. Chinese History and Physics) and subjects with no SBA currently but with a strong practical component (e.g. Music) would implement SBA in 2012. On the other hand, subjects with no SBA in the current public examinations and with new mode of assessment (such as Mathematics and Economics) would adopt a phased-in approach. The overall impact on the workload of students had been carefully considered in the revised designs of SBA in the various subjects. The school sector would be consulted on the details of the assessment plan.

Interface between senior secondary education and higher education

16. Members considered that universities should draw up their admission criteria as early as practicable including, in particular, whether Liberal Studies would be a mandatory subject for university admission under the 334 structure. Such information was important to facilitate curriculum planning and preparation work at school levels, as well as selection of secondary schools by students.

17. The Administration advised 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 334 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.

18. Another concern of members was whether the 334 structure would provide different pathways for sub-degree holders and students who were less successful at junior secondary schools to pursue university education. Members stressed that the articulation of sub-degree programmes to university education should not affect the provision of 14 500 first-year-first-degree places in the UGC-funded institutions.

19. The Administration explained 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 the 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 the UGC-funded institutions.

Support measures

Teachers' professional development

20. Members considered it necessary for the Administration to provide appropriate professional development programmes and sufficient support for teachers to prepare for the implementation of the NSS curriculum. The Administration advised that after consulting the teaching profession, it had proposed a 35-hour professional development programme for teaching a new subject under the NSS curriculum. 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 on the design of appropriate development programmes for different subjects. The Administration also provided a Teacher Professional Preparation Grant for four school years as from September 2005. The Grant would provide relief for serving teachers to receive professional training and enable 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. Top-up provisions were provided in the form of split-class teaching entitlement, additional teachers of Chinese, school librarians, additional teachers for remedial teaching, and additional non-graduate teachers. Under the NSS structure, the top-up provisions in existing staff establishment would be subsumed into a revised teacher-to-class ratio.

22. Members were concerned whether the proposed revision of teacher-to-class ratios for the implementation of the 334 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 334 structure. A five-year transition period would be provided for schools to phase out the surplus teachers by natural wastage after the double-cohort year.

Funding

23. Members noted the proposed shared funding model to meet the costs for implementing the 334 structure. They were concerned 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. The proposed increase would raise the cost recovery rate for undergraduate programmes from 18% to 24%. Members called on the Administration to reconsider the proposed funding arrangements and reduce the share of parents in shouldering the additional costs.

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 334 structure. The Administration would spend about \$2 billion on a recurrent basis on its full implementation. Parents' contributions would be about \$750 million. The Administration considered it reasonable for financially capable parents to share part of the costs incurred. The Administration would gradually bring the tuition fees back to the target recovery level of 18%. As regards the cost-recovery rate for undergraduate programmes, 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 334 structure and consider ways to improve the student financial assistance schemes to assist needy students.

Relevant papers

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

**Relevant papers on
new academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education**

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Legislative Council	15.10.2003	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 10 - 18 (Question)
Panel on Education	29.10.2004 (Item I)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	20.12.2004 (Item I)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	3.1.2005 (Item I)	Minutes Agenda
Legislative Council	5.1.2005	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 68 - 71 (Question)
Panel on Education	3.6.2005 (Items I - III)	Minutes Agenda
Finance Committee	24.6.2005	Minutes FCR(2005-06)24
Panel on Education	20.10.2005 (Item I)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	13.2.2006 (Item IV)	Minutes Agenda
Legislative Council	10.5.2006	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 86 - 91 (Question)
Panel on Education	10.7.2006 (Item IV)	Minutes Agenda CB(2)2792/05-06(01)
Panel on Education	19.10.2006 (Item I)	Minutes Agenda