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Panel on Education

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 12 June 2008**

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

Purpose

This paper summarizes 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 summarized 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. Over the past few years, the Panel held a number of meetings to discuss the new 334 structure and to 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 the 334 structure are set out in the following paragraphs.

Curriculum and assessment framework

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 Bureau (EDB) had not provided sufficient professional development and support for teachers to teach Liberal Studies.

8. The Administration pointed out that the subject of Liberal Studies was currently taught at the Advanced Supplementary Level. Good practices developed and experience 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 implementation of three-year professional development programmes for serving teachers who would teach Liberal Studies was progressing as scheduled, and on-site professional support on the design of school-based curriculum and teaching pedagogies for teaching Liberal Studies would also be arranged. Currently, some 100 secondary schools were offering Liberal Studies or Integrated Humanities at senior levels, and a few hundred teachers were teaching the relevant subjects.

9. Regarding the assessment of student performance on Liberal Studies, the Administration pointed out that the assessment would involve a professional element of the assessor that would be guided by detailed marking guidelines and balanced through double marking of examination scripts. The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) would develop the level descriptors and sample examination papers for Liberal Studies to facilitate teachers' and students' understanding of the standards expected and the format of questions that would be set in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) examination.

Applied Learning courses (formerly the Career-oriented studies)

10. Members noted strong support for the purpose, positioning, design principles, areas of studies and quality assurance framework of Applied Learning (ApL) courses, based on the results of consultation. Members stressed the importance of the breadth and depth of ApL courses in enhancing students' ability to find employment or pursue continuing education.

11. The Administration explained that ApL courses were not intended to be a pre-vocational curriculum. Students could select ApL 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 experience 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. EDB would also establish a quality assurance mechanism in collaboration with the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications to ensure the credibility and recognition of ApL qualifications.

12. Members considered it necessary to attract the professionals in the relevant trades to contribute and participate in the delivery of ApL courses. They suggested that the Administration should make reference to the experience gained from the operation of Project Yi Jin (PYJ) over the past few years.

13. The Administration explained that the progress of developments in preparation for the implementation of ApL under the 334 structure was according to schedule. A number of teachers had indicated interest to be engaged in teaching ApL courses alongside and in collaboration with other professionals delivering the courses. The Administration had made reference to the experience gained from PYJ and involved the professionals in the relevant trades who had indicated an intention to contribute or participate in the development and delivery of ApL courses. Professional development programmes for teachers who wished to be engaged in ApL courses were in progress.

School-based assessment

14. 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 fairly assessed.

15. The Administration advised that the inclusion of a school-based component would help assess the set of generic competency 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.

16. To address members' concern about the readiness of teachers to implement SBA, the Administration proposed a strategic implementation schedule. SBA would be implemented in 2012 in respect of subjects with SBA in the current public examinations (e.g. Chinese History and Physics) and subjects with no SBA currently but with a strong practical component (e.g. Music). For subjects with no SBA in the current public examinations and with new mode of assessment (such as Mathematics and Economics), a phased-in approach would be adopted. The Administration assured members that the overall impact on the workload on teachers and 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.

New Senior Secondary Curriculum and Assessment Guides (NSS C&A Guides)

17. Members noted that the final versions of the 24 NSS C&A Guides had been distributed to schools at the end of April 2007. They sought information on the feedback from schools on the Guides.

18. According to the Administration, the Guides had already incorporated the feedback on successive consultations from teachers, schools and academics, as well as the results of international benchmarking of the subject curricula. The Administration envisaged that principals and teachers would study and follow the 24 NSS C&A Guides in their design of the school-based curriculum and assessment mechanisms. The Guides set out the teaching and learning pedagogies and resources

including a list of recommended text and reference books. The University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions found them useful for preparation of their four-year undergraduate curriculum. The Administration would solicit feedback from principals and teachers in the course of conducting the professional development seminars and workshops for school leaders.

Preparation for the double cohort year

19. Members considered that the smooth implementation of the NSS academic structure, the NSS C&A framework, and the new HKDSE Examination in the first three years leading to the double cohort year for university enrolment in the 2012-2013 academic year was critical to the success of the 334 structure. They were concerned about the pressure on schools in coping with the reforms in academic structure, curriculum and assessment, and public examination systems simultaneously. They suggested that the Administration should withhold the implementation of school self-evaluation (SSE) and external school reviews (ESR) and defer the implementation of SBA for subjects currently without a component of SBA.

20. The Administration responded that it had all along considered it critical and fundamental to plan the necessary support and arrangements for schools to prepare for the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) and HKDSE examinations in the double cohort year. The Administration had conducted three rounds of consultation on the implementation of the 334 structure, with particular emphasis on tackling the challenges in the double cohort year. The Administration would provide the necessary resources and support for schools to implement the 334 structure and develop their articulation plans to tackle the challenges in the double cohort year.

21. The Administration also explained that SSE and ESR were part of the education reform to assist schools in preparation for the implementation of the 334 structure, and SBA was an integral part of the NSS C&A framework. Many school leaders and teachers had expressed support for the implementation of SSE, ESR and SBA in schools. The Administration would continue to consult the stakeholders and collect feedback from school leaders and teachers through seminars and workshops. The Administration had accepted the views of stakeholders and made substantial accommodations in the implementation of SSE, ESR and SBA under the assessment system for HKDSE examination. In particular, the second cycle of ESR would be completed in six years, and there would be no ESR for secondary schools in the second half of the 2011-2012 school year when teachers would be fully engaged in preparing students to sit for the HKALE and HKDSE examinations.

Recognition of HKDSE

22. Members were concerned about the recognition of HKDSE by overseas universities in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United State and the United Kingdom (UK), as compared with the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) and the HKALE.

23. The Administration pointed out that HKEAA maintained close dialogue with overseas educational authorities and universities, and updated them on the latest developments of the 334 structure and the NSS C&A framework with special reference to standards of HKDSE. HKEAA would provide them with the sample examination papers and level descriptors of the NSS subjects to demonstrate the standards of HKDSE. In particular, HKEAA would collaborate with the Cambridge International Examinations and major educational bodies in the UK on a methodology to establish the comparability of HKDSE with the UK qualifications to facilitate advanced recognition of HKDSE by the UK authorities. The psychometric model adopted by HKEAA to maintain the standards of achievements in HKDSE was well recognized by overseas examination authorities and institutions, and the NSS curriculum was more in line with the curriculum in most developed countries, including the UK. To facilitate parental choice and student enrolment, HKEAA had set up a website on admission requirements of overseas institutions for public access. HKEAA was confident that HKDSE would be comparable to HKCEE and HKALE in terms of recognition by overseas institutions for admission purpose.

Interface between senior secondary education and higher education

24. 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.

25. The Administration advised that a working group comprising staff of EDB and university staff had been set up to work out the detailed arrangements for university admission. 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.

Support measures

Teachers' professional development

26. 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

27. 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.

28. Members were concerned whether the proposed revision of teacher-to-class ratios for the implementation of the 334 structure would lead to more surplus secondary teachers. They called on the Administration to reduce the existing class size of 40 students to facilitate effective teaching and learning at senior secondary levels, and plan the necessary manpower for implementing the 334 structure.

29. 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. The Administration considered it not appropriate to have a single standard class size for schools with different circumstances, subjects with different contexts, and students with different needs and aptitudes. Schools were encouraged to exercise discretion to apply small group teaching for individual subjects or students as appropriate. Members noted the recent decision of the Administration to reduce the number of Secondary 1 students allocated under the Secondary School Places Allocation system from 38 to 36 students in 2009 and further to 34 students in 2010.

Funding for UGC-funded institutions

30. Members sought information on the criteria for the allocation of the additional funding of up to \$20 million to each of the eight UGC-funded institutions in support of their planning work for the development of undergraduate curriculum under the 334 structure. The Administration advised that to be eligible for funding, each institution had to submit a proposal outlining their plan and proposed usage. In deciding the funding allocation, UGC would take into account relevant factors such as institutions' needs, the merits of their proposals, and whether the requested funding was relevant to the preparation of the undergraduate curriculum under the new academic structure, etc.

Public education

31. Members urged the Administration to promote public awareness of the features and the implementation of the 334 structure. They called on the Administration to collaborate with schools to ensure parental awareness of the NSS C&A framework, the HKDSE examination and related arrangements under the 334 structure.

32. The Administration advised that it recognized the need to step up communication with parents to build up confidence in the 334 structure. It undertook to continue to enhance communication with stakeholders through various means, including the 334 web-bulletin, parent pamphlets, educational television programmes, interactive parent seminars, etc. The Administration would adopt a multi-faced and multi-level approach of communication to promote parental awareness of the NSS C&A framework.

Relevant papers

33. 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
Panel on Education	25.5.2007 (Item I)	Minutes Agenda

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Education	9.7.2007 (Item V)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	12.11.2007 (Item VII)	Minutes Agenda
Establishment Subcommittee	28.11.2007	Minutes EC(2007-08)10
Legislative Council	21.5.2008	Press release on LegCo Question on "Recurrent subsidies for direct subsidy schools"

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