

Chapter IV – Education for students with SEN under the new academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education

Introduction

4.1 Under the new academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education to be implemented in the 2009-2010 school year, there will be three-year junior secondary and three-year senior secondary education linking to four-year undergraduate programmes. In the consultation document entitled "*Action for the Future - Further Consultation on Career-oriented Studies and the New Senior Secondary Academic Structure for Special Schools*" (the consultation document) published in January 2006, it is proposed that all students, including those with SEN, will be provided with six years of secondary education under the new senior secondary (NSS) structure. After a three-month consultation, the final report "*Action for the Future - Career-oriented Studies and the New Senior Secondary Academic Structure for Special Schools*" was released in August 2006 to advise on the future direction and arrangements of the NSS academic structure for special schools and Applied Learning (ApL) (formerly known as Career-oriented Studies).

Years of basic education for ID students

4.2 Members express support for the incorporation of the provision of special education and integrated education in the NSS structure. They, however, note with concern that under the new academic structure, physically disabled students (PD students) and hearing impaired students (HI students) will be provided with 10 years of basic education (six-year primary and four-year junior secondary), but ID students only nine years (six-year primary and three-year junior secondary). Members have queried the reasons for the disparity of treatment between students with different disabilities.

4.3 According to the Administration, it has adopted the broad principle that students with SEN who are intellectually capable of pursuing the ordinary curriculum will follow the ordinary curriculum and be assessed with appropriate accommodation in the same way as other students in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination under the NSS academic structure. HI students with normal intelligence but severe to profound hearing impairment may have difficulty in language acquisition and development as well as in auditory reception and oral expression, and PD students of normal intelligence may have severe or multiple physical disabilities. The learning of these students is regularly and frequently disrupted by hospitalization and the need to receive therapies. As these students are capable of following the ordinary curriculum and attending the public examinations, the Administration considers it appropriate to follow the existing practice to provide them with an additional year of study in order to prepare them better for the three-year senior secondary education, leading to HKDSE.

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4.4 As for the ID students, the Administration has advised that they will be provided with individualized education programme tailored by teachers in special schools. ID students who are unable to pursue the ordinary curriculum will not go through ordinary NSS assessments and examinations leading to HKDSE. They will therefore be provided with three years of junior secondary education and three years of senior secondary education. The Administration has undertaken that for those ID students who are absent from school for a long period of time due to health or other justifiable reasons, they can apply for repeating class as is the current practice.

4.5 Members are concerned whether the provision of different years of junior secondary education to PD, HI and ID students may contravene the provisions of DDO. The Subcommittee has sought the advice of EOC in this regard.

4.6 In its written reply to the Subcommittee, EOC has indicated that it has discussed with EDB. According to EDB, PD students and HI students will undergo the ordinary NSS leading to HKDSE. Their learning patterns suffer from delays and disruptions because of their impairment. In order to compensate for the delays and disruptions, PD and HI students in special schools will be provided with 10 years of basic education to better prepare for NSS education. ID students who are unable to pursue the ordinary curriculum will not go through ordinary NSS assessments and examinations leading to HKDSE. On the basis of EDB's explanation, EOC considers that there does appear to be a material difference between ID students and PD students or HI students in terms of whether they are to undergo the ordinary NSS leading to HKDSE, and it does not appear that the special school academic structure involves a contravention of DDO.

4.7 Notwithstanding the advice of EOC, members maintain the view that there will indeed be a disparity of treatment. Members find it unacceptable that given their intellectual limitation, ID students should receive lesser years of basic education than students of normal intelligence.

Curriculum and assessment frameworks

Curriculum for SEN students

4.8 Members support the principle of "one curriculum framework for all" with adaptations to suit the different learning needs and capabilities of students with SEN. Students with SEN but not ID should aim at achieving the same curricular objective for NSS. They will be assessed on the same criteria but with special accommodation. Members note that at present, the great majority of special

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schools operate only one class per level. They are concerned that the small school size and the small number of senior secondary classes in special schools will limit the choice and combination of NSS subjects to be offered. Members appreciate that some parents will prefer completion by their children with SEN of primary and secondary education in the same school. Although resources have been earmarked to cater for the potential demand for additional classes in special schools, members consider that EDB should encourage special schools to collaborate and share resources with other special schools and/or ordinary schools in the vicinity in order to provide a wider range of NSS subjects.

Curriculum for ID students

4.9 Members note that as ID students will not follow the curriculum for mainstream schools, the development of NSS(ID) curriculum framework and the learning outcome frameworks for ID students is necessary. The Administration has adopted the approach of trying out the development of the curriculum framework through research and development (R&D) projects. Phase I of the project, which started in the 2006-2007 school year and involved 11 special schools, focuses on the core subjects, namely, Chinese Language, Mathematics and Independent Living. The curriculum frameworks for these subjects will be ready for dissemination to all special schools before the 2009-2010 school year. The development of curriculum frameworks for the two elective subjects, i.e. Physical Education and Visual Arts, which are popular in special schools, has started in the 2007-2008 school year with Curriculum and Assessment Guides to be completed in 2009. In the 2008-2009 school year, the curriculum frameworks for two more elective subjects, namely, Information and Communication Technology and Technology and Living will be drafted with the support of subject experts and seconded teachers. The Committee on Special Educational Needs of Curriculum Development Council is also involved in the development of the various subject curriculum frameworks.

4.10 Members also note that based on the experience gained from the R&D projects, the development of learning outcome frameworks has started in the 2007-2008 school year. The learning outcome frameworks for the core subjects will be ready for consultation with schools in the 2008-2009 school year. With reference to the data collected through the development of the learning outcome frameworks, EDB will work in collaboration with HKEAA in the development of a systematic assessment mechanism starting from 2012.

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Applied Learning

4.11 One of the features of NSS is the provision of ApL courses. The ApL curriculum is an integral part of the NSS curriculum, and is intended to provide choices to meet the diverse learning needs of students, including those with SEN. Members are concerned that while students with SEN who follow the ordinary school curriculum and are interested in ApL can join the same pilot ApL courses as other students, they are provided with a limited choice of ApL courses, such as cleansing services, and food preparation and servicing. Moreover, students with SEN have to attend ApL courses at venues provided by course providers.

4.12 According to the Administration, to ensure quality and consistency of standards, the number of ApL courses is kept within a manageable limit at the initial stage. When relevant parties, including schools, parents and the relevant industries, have built up sufficient experience, ApL courses will be expanded to provide a wider range of choices for students. In the 2007-2008 cohorts, 56 students with SEN but not ID are studying the same pilot ApL courses as other students with appropriate support provided.

4.13 ApL courses are adapted for ID students. Members note that the first pilot of adapted ApL courses for ID students started in September 2006. Two course providers, Hong Chi Association and Vocational Training Council (VTC), have offered four courses. These include Hotel Housekeeping, Food Preparation, General Duties, and Western Bakery and Pastry for the mild grade and higher-end moderate grade ID students. A total of 82 students in 18 special schools are attending these courses. While agreeing that ApL courses offered to ID students will not be as diverse as those to students in mainstream schools, members urge EDB to collaborate with service providers to explore the possibility of offering a wider range of ApL courses for ID students.

Age limit

4.14 At present, ID students aged between 16 and 17 years and 11 months attending ID schools may participate in the Extension of Years of Education (EYE) Programme of their schools on a voluntary basis to facilitate the smooth transition from completing S3 to work, post-school placement and adult life. Enrolment to the EYE Programme is subject to an age limit of 18. Students who reach the age of 18 during the school year can stay in their special schools until the end of the school year. Members note that under the Code of Aid for Special Schools, except with the approval of the Permanent Secretary for Education, students with SEN are not allowed to remain in special schools after the end of the school year during which they reach their 20th birthday. Students with SEN in California are allowed

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to complete six years of junior school and six years of high school education up to the age of 22, while students in England will be allowed to stay in school until they reach the age of 19. Members are concerned whether the age limit under the Code of Aid for Special Schools will still apply for students in special schools under the new academic structure, in particular with the announcement of the Chief Executive in his 2007 Policy Address to provide 12-year free education starting from the 2008-2009 school year.

4.15 According to the Administration, under the new academic structure, all students with SEN will be provided with six years of primary education and six years of secondary education. Normally, students with SEN will reach the age of 18 after completion of these 12 years of education. Students with SEN who follow the curriculum in ordinary schools will normally be allowed to complete their secondary education in order to participate in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination. Furthermore, students in special schools will be allowed to repeat a year of study if their schooling has been adversely interrupted by hospitalization. With the implementation of the NSS academic structure, there will no longer be any need to operate the EYE Programme. In the Administration's view, there is no need to revise the age-related arrangement as detailed in the Code of Aid for Special Schools. However, EDB will allow flexibility in the age limit for students attending special schools.

Post-secondary and continuing education

Admission to post-secondary institutions

4.16 Members consider that like other students, students with SEN should have equal right and access to post-secondary and continuing education. They are disappointed with the current provision of post-secondary education and continuing education opportunities for students with SEN. As shown in **Appendix VII**, the total number of students with SEN enrolled in the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded undergraduate and sub-degree programmes has remained at less than 200 over the past few years. To enhance the opportunities for students with SEN for pursuing post-secondary education, members are of the view that the Administration should formulate policies and devise special measures to encourage the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (IVE) and the UGC-funded institutions to admit students with SEN. IVE and the UGC-funded institutions should set aside certain places for students with SEN. Given that students with SEN are weak in certain aspects, members have suggested exempting them from fulfilling certain entry requirements, taking into account their specific disabilities.

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4.17 The Administration has conveyed members' views to the UGC-funded institutions for consideration. The Administration has stressed that all UGC-funded institutions are autonomous statutory bodies. Admission to the UGC-funded institutions is based on merits. The UGC-funded institutions welcome all eligible applicants, including students with SEN, to apply for admission. There is a sub-system under the Joint University Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS) for applicants with SEN to enable them to find out as early as possible the special assistance and facilities provided by institutions on their admission.

4.18 Members remain of the view that the Administration should coordinate efforts from various fronts to work out innovative approach to assist students with SEN to pursue post-secondary and continuing education. Participation of parents, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and post-secondary institutions is necessary.

Support

4.19 Members share the view of many organizations on the need to provide support for students with SEN to pursue post-secondary education and resources for tertiary institutions in this respect. The existing services and assistance include the provision of specific equipment to facilitate students' learning, designation of a counselor/staff to assist students with SEN, priority allocation of student hostels to students with SEN, etc. Members consider it necessary to expand the scope of the support services. Having considered the various proposals put forth by the organizations, members support the setting up of a task group to coordinate the provision of support for students with SEN in post-secondary institutions and the establishment of a dedicated fund for tertiary institutions to procure equipment and services to support students with SEN in learning.

Continuing education for ID students

4.20 Currently, three NGOs provide continuing education in the form of community colleges for ID students. They are 智齡社區大學 of The Neighbourhood Advice-Action Council, 啟藝學苑 of St. James' Settlement, and "Creativity to Independence" of Arts with the Disabled Association Hong Kong Arts School. Members have called on the Administration to be more proactive in the provision of resources and support to facilitate the operation of community colleges.

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Resources

4.21 Members note that \$115 million has been earmarked for supporting the operation of the pilot ApL programmes and senior secondary classes in special schools during the transition period leading up to 2009. They have expressed concern about the adequacy of resources to support the implementation of special education under the new academic structure.

4.22 The Administration has pointed out that the \$115 million is intended to encourage the growth of diversity of curriculum, assessment and pathways in senior secondary schools. The allocation is sufficient for piloting the ApL courses and the NSS(ID) curriculum in conjunction with the draft subject curriculum framework for students with ID in special schools. The appropriate level of resources for special schools will be determined when details of the NSS(ID) curriculum, the learning outcome, and assessment standards have been worked out with the consensus of key stakeholders.

4.23 According to the findings of the "*Study of the Effectiveness of Special Schools*" (the Study) conducted by the then Education and Manpower Bureau in 2005, the overall resource allocation to Hong Kong's special schools in terms of human, financial and capital, is good by world standards, and the real challenge lies in resource management in special schools. Members are concerned whether the Administration intends to justify the provision of the current level of resources for special education, on the basis of the findings of the Study.

4.24 The Administration has clarified the objective of the Study to assess the effectiveness of resource utilization in special schools in support of student learning and to identify the elements for successful school management as well as the areas for management improvement. The conclusion of the Study should apply to all public sector schools in terms of cost-effective deployment of scarce public resources. The Administration has assured members that it is committed to implementing the NSS academic structure and has earmarked resources to cater for the potential demand for additional classes in special schools.

4.25 Members have urged the Administration to plan the necessary conversion works for existing special schools so that they will have sufficient classrooms, facilities and boarding places for providing the new NSS(ID) curriculum from the 2009-2010 school year onwards.

4.26 The Administration has assured members that resources have been earmarked for capital works, including conversion works for ordinary and special schools for the implementation of the new academic structure. EDB is aware of the need for additional facilities in some special schools, and has already

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commenced discussion with these schools on the necessary conversion and improvement works that should be carried out in connection with NSS.

Tuition fees

4.27 At present, senior secondary students in both ordinary and special schools pay the same level of tuition fees. Members note the Administration's proposed shared funding model to meet the costs for implementing the new academic structure and its original intention to increase tuition fees to about \$7,200 and \$50,000 per annum for senior secondary classes and undergraduate programmes respectively. With the implementation of 12-year free education starting from the 2008-2009 school year as announced in the 2007 Policy Address, senior secondary education will be free. The shared funding model will apply to undergraduate education only. Members are given to understand that the proposed increase of tuition fee for undergraduate programmes will raise the cost recovery rate from 18% to 24%. They are concerned about its financial impact on low-income families. Given the fiscal surplus, members have called on the Administration to review the need for increasing the tuition fee for undergraduate programmes under the new academic structure.

4.28 According to the Administration, it will 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 will spend about \$2 billion on a recurrent basis on its full implementation. Parents' contributions will be about \$750 million. The Administration considers it reasonable for financially capable parents to share part of the costs to be incurred. The Government policy is to bring gradually the tuition fees back to the target recovery level of 18%. The cost recovery rate aims to provide an overall indicator for measuring and benchmarking students/parents' contribution to tertiary education. It may change from time to time, depending on the level of recurrent funding required by the institutions and the level of indicative tuition fee. Owing to the differences in cost structure, the same tuition fee will give different cost-recovery rates among institutions, level of studies and among disciplines. As the level of recurrent subventions to be provided to the UGC-funded sector under the four-year undergraduate study is yet to be fixed, the Administration considers it too early to determine the cost recovery rate under the new academic structure. The Administration has also pointed out that the cost recovery rates in the United Kingdom and the United States range from 30% to 60%.

Source : Extracted from the Report of the Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to the Provision of Boarding Places, Senior Secondary Education and Employment Opportunities for Children with Special Educational Needs

Appendix VII

**Number of students with SEN enrolled in UGC-funded sub-degree/undergraduate programmes
from 2003-2004 to 2007-2008 academic years**

Level of study	Institution	Academic year				
		2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008
Sub-degree	City University of Hong Kong	12	10	6	5	3
	The Hong Kong Polytechnic University	3	2	6	7	7
	Sub-total	15	12	12	12	10
Undergraduate	City University of Hong Kong	9	11	10	5	4
	Hong Kong Baptist University	10	14	10	18	21
	Lingnan University	6	2	4	7	10
	The Chinese University of Hong Kong	20	16	12	17	23
	The Hong Kong Institute of Education	1	2	2	2	2
	The Hong Kong Polytechnic University	11	8	5	8	11
	The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology	25	23	29	39	45
	The University of Hong Kong	27	33	37	40	47
	Sub-total	109	109	109	136	163
Total		124	121	121	148	173

Source: Statistical returns to the University Grants Committee