

For discussion on
10 November 2008

Panel on Education

Progress of Promotion of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Qualification

Purpose

1. This paper reports on the progress in promoting the recognition of the new HKDSE qualification under of the New Senior Secondary (NSS) Academic Structure in the following areas:

- Benchmarking of NSS curricula
- Local recognition of the HKDSE qualification
- International recognition of the HKDSE qualification
- Communication strategy on the promotion of HKDSE qualification

Background

2. The NSS Academic Structure will be implemented at Secondary 4 in 2009. It will provide:

- (a) a broad and balanced curriculum (4 core subjects: English, Chinese, Mathematics and Liberal Studies + 2 to 3 elective subjects including Applied Learning courses and other languages + Other Learning Experiences) to suit the diversified needs of students;
- (b) multiple pathways for study and employment; and
- (c) better articulation with the academic systems of other countries, e.g. Mainland China and U.S.A.

3. The current Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) and Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) will be replaced by the new HKDSE examination at the end of Secondary 6. The first HKDSE examination will take place in 2012. Standards-referenced reporting (SRR) will be adopted where a candidate's attainment in a subject is reported against prescribed

standards. This is different from the current norm-referenced reporting which indicates a candidate's attainment relative to other candidates in the same examination. There is no fixed percentage of candidates being awarded a given level as under the current reporting system. SRR provides information about the actual achievement of students and enables monitoring of standards of attainment of students over time.

4. There will be five levels of results from Level 1 to 5 in the HKDSE. To facilitate selection decisions and to give appropriate recognition to outstanding students, candidates with top performance will be represented by 5** and next top performance by 5*. Achievements below level 1 will be designated as "unclassified". There is **no direct equivalence** between standards-referenced levels and norm-referenced grades (the six grades are A to F and achievements below "F" are designated as "unclassified"). Contrary to the previous reporting system that Grade E is a passing grade, there is no official pass level as such under the new reporting system.

Progress

Benchmarking of NSS curricula

5. During the second consultation on the curriculum and assessment frameworks of NSS subjects from June 2005 to January 2006, the Education Bureau (EDB) sent the 2nd draft of the curriculum and assessment frameworks of the 24 NSS subjects to various international organisations¹ for international benchmarking. Positive and encouraging feedback was received from these organisations. Their suggestions were then incorporated into our revised curriculum and assessment frameworks. This exercise helped to set the scene for the benchmarking of NSS assessment and pave the way for seeking international recognition of the new HKDSE qualification.

¹ These organisations include Cambridge Assessment, The Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development/ National Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO), National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO), Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research, School of Education, Waikato University (WMIER) and The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)

Local recognition of the HKDSE qualification

6. The HKDSE qualification was recognised by the Heads of Universities Committee (HUCOM) of Hong Kong on 18 May 2005 when HUCOM issued a statement confirming its support for all the four core subjects of the NSS curriculum to be considered as the mandatory minimum requirements for university entrance. It also stated that the level requirements are likely to be Level 3 for Chinese and English, and Level 2 for Mathematics and Liberal Studies.

7. Universities also announced on 5 July 2006 the specific requirements for admission to individual faculties /departments for early reference of all parties. In addition to the four core subjects of the NSS school curriculum, most universities will include one elective in their entrance requirements and in some cases, a second elective from a wider group of subjects.

8. HUCOM stressed that specification of entrance requirements for individual faculties/ departments by universities should encourage, as far as possible, a positive effect on student choice and school planning in the senior secondary curriculum.

9. To reaffirm universities' support of other learning experiences for students, HUCOM issued another statement on 21 October 2008 to confirm that the Student Learning Profile of NSS students will be a document with good reference value for consideration of university admission.

International recognition of the HKDSE qualification

10. The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) has been working closely with international agencies to secure the recognition of HKDSE qualification. HKEAA has been in touch with Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) in the United Kingdom (UK), National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) in UK, Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) in UK, the Australian Education International (AEI) in Australia and measures have been made for conducting research on the recognition of Hong Kong

public examination results. HKEAA plans to make further contacts with international bodies in other regions in the near future.

Cambridge International Examinations (CIE)

11. HKEAA has been working closely with CIE in international review of examination papers. The first round of review of HKDSE sample papers² was completed in mid 2008. Positive comments have been received and the CIE assessment experts found the papers making similar cognitive demands to the UK A-Level papers. The second and third rounds of moderation are expected to be completed by the end of 2008 and mid 2009 respectively.

National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC)

12. NARIC is the UK National Agency for providing information and expert opinion on qualifications attained from outside UK. It is the central reference point of information on qualifications serving education institutions, employers and government departments. It is also the representative agency in a wider network of European Network of Information Centres (ENICs). The study on the benchmarking of HKDSE against other international qualifications aims to provide a comparison of the HKDSE with other international systems (e.g. Australia and UK). There will be two parts in the study, the first on the comparison in terms of the learning content of the award, and the second in terms of standards of levels and grading. The study outcomes will focus on recognition of the HKDSE qualification with regard to general education and employment. NARIC will also undertake to disseminate the information to different stakeholders through their newsletters.

13. The first part of the study has been completed and favourable comments were received:

The completion of Part A has found the development of the HKDSE to be thorough and rigorous. Each of the subjects selected has been devised carefully, and each provides detailed specifications for the implementation of the HKDSE programme in Hong Kong schools. Furthermore, the HKDSE programme changes have been consistent from subject to subject. The curriculum and assessment guides highlight overarching changes to each subject, and thus demonstrate a consistency of purpose,

² These include sample papers of Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Integrated Science.

aims, and assessment.

In terms of the international comparison, the HKDSE compares favourably with the alternative systems, with features especially noticeable in relation to the programmes offered in Australia and England. Changes within Hong Kong mirror closely some of the developments that have taken place in the senior secondary systems of these two countries. Furthermore, the HKDSE emphasises personal and career progression, as well as academic development, indicating a more practical and wider-reaching education programme.

14. The second part of the study is expected to start in December 2008. Further results are expected to be available by the last quarter of 2009.

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)

15. UCAS is the official agency to handle admission applications to higher education courses in the UK, similar to Joint University Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS) in Hong Kong. Applications are processed on a tariff system. It is planned to conduct a study with UCAS, based on the following materials: the curriculum and assessment guides, the sample assessment materials and pilot scripts of candidates. Expert groups for selected subjects will be formed to study the standards of attainment at different HKDSE levels. The outcome of the study is to set up a point system in the UCAS tariff for HKDSE results. The first round of results is expected to be available by the last quarter of 2009.

Benchmarking study with the Australian Education International

16. HKEAA has also been working closely with the AEI, which is part of the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace relations. It advances the internalisation of Australian education, science and training. Australia's *Country Education Profile*, published by AEI in 2007, already assesses the HKDSE as comparable to an Australian senior secondary school certificate. HKEAA, together with AEI, will approach Australian universities for providing entry requirements for students with HKDSE after the level descriptors and exemplar materials for individual subjects are finalised in 2009.

International tertiary institutions

17. HKEAA will approach other international tertiary institutions on their admission policies with respect to the HKDSE qualification as soon as the benchmarking studies with NARIC and UCAS are completed.

Communication Strategy on the Promotion of HKDSE Qualification

18. To ensure better public understanding and support of the new HKDSE qualification, EDB is maintaining close communication with different stakeholders through the following channels:

Integrated communication plan

19. An integrated communication plan in the run up to 2012 has been prepared to ensure that communication is done through appropriate channels, in a co-ordinated manner so that the needs and concerns of different stakeholders could be addressed. The plan would be duly updated and revised in response to changing needs.

The HKDSE Newsletter

20. HKEAA has maintained close contacts with overseas universities and will promulgate the development work for HKDSE in the form of a bi-annual Newsletter in electronic form. The plans for the first two issues are as follows:

Issue	Date	Theme
1	November 2008	Inaugural issue - Introducing HKDSE
2	May 2009	Initial findings of benchmarking studies

21. Updates on the progress of the HKDSE development work will also be promulgated locally through announcement of public interest (API) on an annual basis, starting late 2009.

University Grants Committee (UGC) - funded institutions & post-secondary institutions

22. EDB has stepped up communication with UGC-funded institutions on issues relating to entrance requirements under NSS and interface between the senior secondary and 4-year undergraduate curriculum through the Liaison Group on 334 Interface Issues set up in 2004 which includes representatives from EDB, HKEAA, UGC Secretariat and 8 UGC-funded institutions.

23. Regular talks/briefings on the development of NSS were delivered by EDB and supported by HKEAA at different institutions to familiarise them with the new curriculum and HKDSE qualification.

24. The “334” Web Bulletin (<http://www.edb.gov.hk/334>) established by EDB also helps facilitate the dissemination of information on university entrance requirements to schools, parents and the public. Hyperlinks are also provided in the “334” Web Bulletin to HKEAA and local university websites for school information on recognition of the HKDSE qualification and university entrance requirements.

25. EDB will also update various post-secondary institutions on the development of NSS curriculum and maintain close communication with them on issues relating to entrance requirements under NSS.

School leaders and teachers

26. EDB conveys the latest development of “334” to school leaders and teachers and collect their concerns and feedback through the principals liaison meeting, principals forum, school leaders workshops, middle managers workshops, briefings, seminars, etc. in order to enhance the smooth implementation of NSS.

Parents and the public

27. “334” related messages are currently conveyed to the public through means such as “334” articles published in newspapers on a monthly basis, “334” Web Bulletin, parent pamphlets (issued every 6

months), FAQ booklet, DVDs, APIs, roving exhibitions as well as interactive district-based parent seminars. Up till October 2008, a total of 28 parent seminars were held and about 18,000 parents attended the seminars so far.

Employers

28. EDB will work jointly with HKEAA to update and explain to different employer sectors the standards of the new HKDSE levels and their possible application to different job positions. An initial work plan has already been drafted by Civil Service Bureau (CSB) which is the largest employer in Hong Kong. It is expected that the first announcement of relevant requirements will be made in 2010.

Advice Sought

29. Members are requested to note the progress of promotion of the HKDSE qualification as reported in this paper.

Education Bureau
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