

For discussion on 30 April 2010

## **Legislative Council Panel on Education**

### **The Progress of Local and International Recognition and Promotion of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education**

#### **Purpose**

This paper aims at updating members on the progress of the recognition and promotion of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) qualification under the New Academic Structure.

#### **Background**

2. The New Academic Structure (NAS) for Senior Secondary and Higher Education has been implemented at Secondary 4 since September 2009. The NAS aims at preparing students better for the globalised world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to continue to enhance the competitiveness of Hong Kong as an international city. Following 9-year basic education, the current structure of senior secondary education (Secondary 4-5 and Secondary 6-7) would be replaced by a 3-year senior secondary curriculum for all students including students with special needs. The current normative 3-year undergraduate programmes would be replaced by a 4-year undergraduate programme. All secondary 4-6 students would undertake a broad and balanced curriculum by studying four core subjects, namely Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics, Liberal Studies, as well as two to three electives selected from a range of new senior secondary (NSS) subjects, Applied Learning Courses, and other foreign languages. Students would sit for the HKDSE Examination on the subjects studied in 2012, and decide their choice of language medium for the examination (See [Appendix 1](#) for details.) The HKDSE would replace the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) and the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE).

3. The NAS aims to prepare students better for the globalised world and enhance the competitiveness of Hong Kong as an international city. The main benefit is that all students now have the opportunity to receive 12 years of free education and need to take only one public examination at the end. Moreover, a broader and more

balanced curriculum in NSS education is provided to all students to promote whole-person development, lifelong learning capabilities including communication, creativity and critical thinking skills. The new system will also provide smoother multiple pathways to higher education and the workplace so that every student has an opportunity to succeed in life.

4. The HKDSE would be the qualification which students could use to demonstrate what they have achieved to apply for further studies and to work according to their aspirations. In order to recognize the achievements of every student, the HKDSE is adopting Standards-referenced reporting (SRR) where a candidate's attainment in a subject is reported against prescribed standards. SRR also enables the monitoring of standards of student attainment over time. Instead of using Grades A to F as in the current public examinations, the achievement of students in the HKDSE Examination will be reported in five levels, namely Levels 1 to 5 (with 5 being the highest). To facilitate selection decision and to give appropriate recognition to outstanding students, Level 5 candidates with the best performance will be represented by 5\*\* and the next top group by 5\*. Achievements below Level 1 will be designated as "unclassified". As the basis of grading in HKDSE in future and the current HKCEE & HKALE are different, there is no direct conversion between the grades of HKDSE and HKCEE/HKALE. Contrary to the current reporting system that Grade E is a passing grade, there is no pass/fail level as such under the new reporting system. Users of information in the HKDSE could refer to the descriptors of what students could do in order to decide on the level required for different purposes such as admission to further education and recruitment of staff. At the same time, each student would develop a Student Learning Profile (SLP) that record his/her participation in community service, aesthetic and physical learning experiences, moral and civic education, career-related experiences as well as reflections on what he/she has learned in personal and social development, such as inter-personal skills, sense of responsibilities and leadership.

## **Local Recognition of the HKDSE Qualification**

### ***Degree Programmes***

5. The Heads of Universities Committee (HUCOM) confirmed its support for all the four core subjects of the NSS curriculum to be considered as the mandatory requirements for university entrance in May 2005. In January 2010, HUCOM

reaffirmed that the UGC-funded institutions would consider the application of students who have attained Level 3 for Chinese Language and English Language and Level 2 for Mathematics and Liberal Studies in the HKDSE Examination for admission to the new four-year undergraduate programmes in 2012. In addition, the institutions will, as in the prevailing practice, determine the attainment needed in the required one or two elective subjects, and may, as in the prevailing practice, stipulate further admission requirements.

6. To reaffirm universities' support of Other Learning Experiences (OLE) as an essential component of whole-person development for students, HUCOM has also confirmed that the SLP of NSS students would be a document with good reference value in the admission process.

### ***Sub-degree Programmes***

7. The Federation for Continuing Education in Tertiary Institutions (FCE) has suggested that the minimum requirement for sub-degree programmes (including Associate Degree and Higher Diploma programmes) be set at attaining Level 2 in five HKDSE subjects (including Chinese Language and English Language) or equivalent. Post-secondary institutions are revising their curriculum to facilitate better interface with the NSS curriculum. The Vocational Training Council has already announced that the admission requirement for its Higher Diploma courses under NAS is five Level 2 including Chinese Language and English Language.

### ***Employment***

8. The Government will take the lead to recognise the new HKDSE qualification in civil service appointment. Under the NAS, the Government will continue to welcome holders of different qualifications to apply for government positions to serve the community. Detailed arrangements would be promulgated in the latter half of 2010.

### **International Recognition of the HKDSE Qualification**

9. The NSS curriculum has secured very good international benchmarking results at the end of 2005 from overseas curriculum agencies such as the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, National Foundation for Education

Research, Australian Council of Educational Research, International Baccalaureate Organisation and Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development/National Institute for Curriculum Development. The results generally reflected that the development of the NSS curriculum is in line with the international trend and that the learning experiences for our students under the new NSS curriculum will prepare them for the global challenges in the years to come. Such benchmarking has provided a firm foundation for the international recognition of HKDSE submitted by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) to various assessment agencies. The different benchmarking exercises of the HKDSE Examination are intended to serve different purposes. The details of these exercises are as follows:

***Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) – examination paper review***

10. The HKEAA has worked closely with CIE in international peer review of sample examination papers. Three rounds of review were completed in mid-2009. Positive comments have been received and the CIE assessment experts found the papers making similar cognitive demands to the A Level papers of the United Kingdom (UK). The sample papers were then used in the administration of research tests. Answer scripts collected in the research tests were used in the development of level descriptors and exemplar materials in the SRR packages which were finalized after consultation with university academics and teachers.

***National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) – for general education and employment***

11. The HKEAA has commissioned the NARIC<sup>1</sup> of UK to work on a study on the benchmarking of HKDSE against other international qualifications which aims to provide a comparison of the HKDSE with other international systems (e.g. Australia and UK). The study outcomes focus on recognition of the HKDSE qualification with regard to general education and employment. The report reveals that the HKDSE compares favourably with alternative qualifications in the UK (General Certificate of Education A Level), Australia (Senior Secondary Certificate of Education), and the United States (Advanced Placement). HKEAA is now working with NARIC to disseminate the findings to members of its international network, including higher education institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

## *Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) – for university admission*

12. The HKEAA has also commissioned the UCAS<sup>2</sup> of UK to work on a study of which the outcome is to set up a point system in the UCAS Tariff for HKDSE results that can be compared with points awarded to different types of accredited qualifications in UK and other international systems for university admission purpose.

13. In brief, an overall subject point score is recommended for the HKDSE subjects except for Mathematics which carries a unique structure. For example, Level 3 of an HKDSE subject is awarded 40 points, which is comparable to a Grade E in a GCE A level subject. For Mathematics, candidates' attainments in the Compulsory and Extended Parts are reported independently and hence tariff points are awarded separately to the two parts of the subject. Their attainment and subsequent tariff points gained in both parts will be considered together when they apply for university admission. Tariff points for the highest level of achievement, i.e. Level 5\*\*, will be allocated based on further evidence gathered after the first administration of the HKDSE Examination in 2012. Details of the tariff points are at the [Appendix 2](#).

14. It should be noted that the UCAS tariff system aims to provide a common platform for UK universities to understand broadly the relative strength of qualifications, hence to develop their own admissions policy. Since the GCE A level and HKDSE are two different assessment systems, the UCAS study cannot offer a direct grade by grade comparison between the two systems. Similar practice is adopted for comparing GCE A level with other international qualifications like the Advanced Placement Program and the International Baccalaureate.

15. British universities are very experienced in assessing students holding various academic awards all over the world. The UCAS tariff is one of the factors considered in the formulation of admissions policy. British universities have always placed importance on the overall performance of students. In this respect, the SLP can provide useful reference. As universities will take into consideration a variety of factors, they will not rely on a grade by grade conversion table for formulating admissions requirements. According to the recent meetings with universities in UK,

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<sup>2</sup> UCAS is the official agency which handles admission applications to higher education courses in UK, similar to the Joint University Programmes Admissions System in Hong Kong. The UCAS Tariff is a point system to indicate the standards of various qualifications recognised for applications to higher education institutions. With reference to the tariff points awarded, universities and higher education institutions in the UK are able to compare the different types of accredited qualifications available. Hence the tariff is used as a common scale for universities in the UK to develop admission policies of different courses and programmes.

universities indicated that the standards of the levels as illustrated by the curriculum outcomes, the sample examination paper and the exemplars will be important for them in formulating their admissions policy in handling applications from regions outside UK.

### ***Benchmarking study with the Australian Education International (AEI)***

16. HKEAA also worked with the AEI, which is part of the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. It advances the internationalisation of Australian education, science and training. Australia's *Country Education Profile*, published by AEI in 2007, has already assessed the HKDSE as comparable to the Senior Secondary Certificate of Education in Australia. HKEAA and the Education Bureau (EDB), together with AEI, will approach Australian universities for providing information on entry requirements for students with HKDSE based on the finalised level descriptors and exemplar materials for individual subjects.

### ***Overseas Tertiary Institutions***

17. We have been explaining to overseas governments and tertiary institutions the benefits and characteristics of NAS. In parallel, we encourage two-way student mobility and exchange, and promote NAS overseas targeting at students who wish to study elsewhere for international exposure. What they are looking for are what HK could offer, that is, the East-meets-West environment, world-class tertiary institutions, and from 2012, smooth articulation to four-year undergraduate programmes. In view of the lead time for applications for inbound/outbound studies, our focus this year is to secure wider understanding of NAS, its benefits and recognition of the HKDSE qualification strengthened by the favourable outcomes of the benchmarking studies, and to facilitate early decision-making as far as possible. We have been contacting overseas institutions in different countries and regions to give them a better understanding of the levels of the HKDSE and the purpose of SLP, and to request them to indicate their admissions requirements. The details of overseas communications with various parties are listed in paragraphs 27 to 30.

### **Promotion of the HKDSE qualification**

18. In collaboration with HKEAA, we have worked out a set of principles of communications such as stakeholder-based, effectiveness of channels, selection of key

messages to develop the strategies and a rolling integrated communication plan at different implementation stages. This is to ensure that communication is done in a co-ordinated and effective manner to address the needs and concerns of different stakeholders. A Task Group on 334 Communication Strategies comprising representatives from EDB, HKEAA, tertiary and secondary sector, parents and employers, media expert has also been set up to improve the communication strategies and receive feedback on the progress of implementation of NAS and the promotion of the new HKDSE qualification.

### ***Communication with schools and teachers***

19. HKEAA has enhanced the communication with schools and teachers. Briefing sessions on each subject were organized by HKEAA in the last quarter of 2008 to update teachers on the proposed arrangements for the 2012 HKDSE Examination, including sample papers, level descriptors, exemplars and School Based Assessment arrangements. Information packages on SRR for HKDSE subjects, containing sample papers, level descriptors and exemplars, were published and disseminated to schools in mid-2009.

### ***Communication with UGC-funded institutions and JUPAS***

20. EDB has stepped up communication with UGC-funded institutions on issues relating to admission requirements under NAS and interface between the senior secondary and four-year undergraduate curriculum through the Liaison Group on 334 Interface Issues set up in 2004. The Liaison Group includes representatives from EDB, HKEAA, UGC Secretariat and UGC-funded institutions. Separately, the UGC has a dedicated “3+3+4 Group” which provides a platform for supporting and overseeing institutions’ preparatory work for the NAS. The UGC has been sponsoring a series of idea-sharing symposia, organised by the UGC-funded institutions, since December 2008 to bring together relevant stakeholders and sectors representatives to discuss NAS topics such as interface issues, admissions, co-curricular activities, etc.

21. Communication was also initiated with the Board of Management of JUPAS to explore effective ways of promoting the new JUPAS application system to students and parents. EDB will work in collaboration with JUPAS in carrying out promotion activities on regional or school basis. In particular, JUPAS will work closely with EDB and school councils to firm up the future arrangement of submitting SLP and OLE information from schools in 2010.

### ***Communication with self-financing post-secondary institutions***

22. EDB has been closely liaising with FCE, self-financing degree awarding institutions, Joint Quality Review Committee (JQRC) and Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) on matters related to smooth transition to the NAS. EDB will continue to enhance the communication with self-financing post-secondary institutions on matters such as preparing for the gap year in 2011 and the double cohort year in 2012.

### ***Communication with parents and the wider community***

23. Important messages of NAS including progress of recognition of HKDSE are conveyed to parents through means such as New Academic Structure “334” Web Bulletin, parent pamphlets (issued every 6 months), FAQ booklet, DVDs, Announcement of Public Interest (API), roving exhibitions as well as interactive district-based parent seminars. Up till 13 March 2010, a total of 54 parent seminars were held and about 40,000 parents attended the seminars so far.

24. We have launched a series of APIs including the latest one broadcast from late January this year promoting the HKDSE Examination (recognition and the timing of the first examination in 2012) and another one launched in September last year promoting the smooth launch of NSS with endorsement by celebrities from university, secondary school, employer and parent sectors. The next one would focus on the employer sector’s recognition of HKDSE and the Government’s lead to recognise the qualification in civil service appointment.

### ***Communication with Employers***

25. EDB will continue to work jointly with HKEAA to meet with or brief the employer sector on NAS, especially in demonstrating the meaning of descriptors in HKDSE Examination’s SRR for trades/industries of major employment share in Hong Kong. We have started to meet them by categories, namely major business chambers/associations, human resources function, trades/industries, and also by size (i.e. the small and medium enterprises). A working group has been set up to steer and advise on planning and providing feedback. We will also continue to hold employer focus group interviews to gather feedback from various industries/trades.

26. EDB is working closely with the Civil Service Bureau (CSB), HKEAA and



HKCAAVQ on the acceptance of HKDSE Examination results for civil service recruitment. Detailed arrangements would be promulgated in the latter half of 2010.

***Communication with Overseas Governments, Education Institutions and Councils, and Related Parties***

27. The purpose of communicating with overseas countries is to facilitate Hong Kong students under NAS and holding HKDSE to study overseas and to facilitate overseas students to come to study in higher education under NAS. A briefing for Consul-Generals in Hong Kong was held recently to enhance their understanding of the NAS and the HKDSE qualification, and to solicit their assistance in promoting in their respective countries the benefits and features of the NAS, and to collect feedback on matters requiring attention in facilitating student mobilities between Hong Kong and their countries. The briefing was well received and responses were positive. We would also partner local offices and representatives of overseas countries and institutions to scale up the strategies.

28. EDB and HKEAA have already paid visits to Canada, UK and Australia this year. Responses to NAS were positive and supportive, and there were useful discussions as well as suggestions/follow up actions arising from these visits. The higher education institutions visited have all indicated acceptance of the HKDSE qualification as a credential for application to higher education institutions in Canada and UK. EDB will continue to lead a series of delegations overseas (with HKEAA) to promote the benefits and international recognition of NAS, in particular the HKDSE qualification. A series of upcoming delegations have been planned from now to the first quarter of 2011 to promote the NAS. These include US, Canada, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and various Asian countries.

29. Different channels such as website and publications, and DVD/CD ROM are also developed to communicate with and reach out to overseas stakeholders and counterparts. EDB has launched the Overseas Visitors' Corner hosted in the New Academic Structure "334" Web Bulletin, which provides the latest and tailor-made information to overseas governments, education institutions and students. The information would be regularly updated in the light of latest developments. The HKEAA provides substantial information on overseas universities' entrance requirements on its website as well as a biannual e-Newsletter to maintain close communication with overseas universities and promulgate the development work of HKDSE. Publications such as the NAS Booklet (overseas edition) and HKEAA's

HKDSE Examination factsheets have also been dispatched to relevant overseas parties.

30. HKEAA would send all the information regarding the HKDSE to overseas institutions, together with a questionnaire to collect information on admissions requirements of HK students holding HKDSE qualification and the SLP. It is hoped that institutions would respond by the first quarter of 2011. HKEAA would also send relevant information on HKDSE to credential agencies so that they have a good understanding of the HKDSE when they are approached by different institutions, employers and other parties.

### **Way forward**

31. We will focus on securing wider understanding and use of the HKDSE qualification this year alongside the continuous promotion of HKDSE locally. To ensure smooth implementation of the NAS, we will continue to use appropriate and effective communication channels to solicit feedback, listen to issues and concerns, and take all these into account when improving our support measures and working with our stakeholders in the best interests of students.

### **Advice sought**

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

Education Bureau  
April 2010

### **The choice of language medium in public examinations**

Candidates' choice of language medium for sitting the public examinations is independent of the medium of instruction in their schools and will not be recorded on results notices and certificates.

Normally, the question papers (except language related subjects) of public examinations are available in both Chinese and English. Same as the current public examinations, candidates sitting the HKDSE Examination have to indicate the language medium at the time of registration. During the examination, only question papers of the language medium chosen will be provided to candidates. The contents of the question papers of the Chinese Language version and the English Language version are identical. Scripts in both language versions will be marked with the same marking scheme and the performance of candidates will be graded on the same standards.

**The UCAS Tariff Points for HKDSE**

*UCAS Tariff points for 23 HKDSE subjects, except Mathematics:*

Grade	Tariff	Remarks
5**	NA	To be allocated after the first administration of the HKDSE Examination in 2012.
5*	130	Higher than grade A in the current GCE A level Examination
5	120	Comparable to grade A in the current GCE A level Examination
4	80	Comparable to grade C in the current GCE A level Examination
3	40	Comparable to grade E in the current GCE A level Examination

*UCAS Tariff points for Mathematics:*

Grade	Compulsory	Extension	Remarks
5**	NA	NA	To be allocated after the first administration of HKDSE Examination in 2012.
5*	60	70	Combined tariff points. Achievement of 5* in both the Compulsory and Extended Parts will result in 130 points (60+70).
5	45	60	Same method of combination as above
4	35	50	Same method of combination as above
3	25	40	Same method of combination as above

For reference, the Tariff Points for the GCE Advanced and Advanced Supplementary Levels are produced below:

*GCE Advanced & AS Levels:*

AL Grade	UCAS Tariff Points	AS Grade	UCAS Tariff Points
A*	140	-	-
A	120	A	60
B	100	B	50
C	80	C	40
D	60	D	30
E	40	E	20