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Panel on Education

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the special meeting on 30 April 2010**

Recognition and articulation of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education qualification

Purpose

This paper summarizes the discussions of the Panel on Education ("the Panel") on the recognition and articulation of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education ("HKDSE") qualification under the new senior secondary ("NSS") academic structure.

Background

2. In 2000, the Education Commission 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, the Education Commission set out the proposals for developing a new senior secondary and higher education academic structure. In his 2004 Policy Address, the Chief Executive confirmed the policy direction of developing the new academic structure, i.e. three-year junior secondary, three-year senior secondary and four-year undergraduate education ("the 334 structure").
3. Under the 334 structure, a new HKDSE examination will be implemented in 2012 to replace the two existing public examinations, namely, the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination ("HKCEE") and the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination ("HKALE").
4. HKDSE examination comprises three categories of subjects, namely the NSS subjects, Applied Learning ("ApL") subjects and Other Language subjects.
5. A standards-referenced reporting ("SRR") system will be used in reporting student results in HKDSE examination. Instead of using grades A to F as in the current reporting system, the results of the NSS subject examination

will be reported in five levels, i.e. 1 to 5, with Level 5 being the highest. Candidates with top performance will be represented by Level 5** and next top performance by 5*. Achievement below Level 1 will be designated as "unclassified". Under SRR, the standards are held constant with no fixed proportion of students for each level. Contrary to the previous reporting system under which Grade E is a passing grade, there is no official passing level under SRR.

Deliberations of the Panel

6. Since October 2004, the Panel had held a number of meetings to discuss the 334 structure and had received views of educational bodies and student organizations. The discussions of the Panel on the recognition and articulation of HKDSE are summarized in the following paragraphs.

International recognition of HKDSE

7. Members were concerned about the international recognition of HKDSE, in particular by overseas universities in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States and the United Kingdom ("UK") where most Hong Kong students pursued further studies. Members noted that senior secondary education would be reduced from four to three years, leading to four-year local undergraduate programmes under the new academic structure. However, most UK universities adopted three-year undergraduate programmes. Members were worried that students completing local senior secondary education would have difficulty in articulating to overseas three-year undergraduate programmes.

8. According to the Administration, since April 2005, Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority ("HKEAA") had been contacting the universities in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, UK and the United States to promote international recognition of HKDSE. Updated NSS curriculum, assessment framework as well as sample examination papers and level descriptors of subjects had been sent to universities to demonstrate the standards of HKDSE. Efforts had been made to collaborate with the Cambridge International Examinations in UK on a methodology to establish the comparability of HKDSE with UK qualifications. HKEAA had been working closely with international agencies, including the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service ("UCAS"), the National Recognition Information Centre ("NARIC") in UK, and the Australian Education International in Australia, to secure advanced recognition of HKDSE.

9. The Administration also advised that a study had been conducted in 2009 in collaboration with UCAS to benchmark the standards of HKDSE with the GCE A Level. Upon the completion of a comparability study on HKDSE and GCE A Level, the UCAS Board endorsed the recommendations of an Expert Group to include HKDSE in the UCAS Tariff System with tariff points awarded to HKDSE subjects. The UCAS Tariff was a point system developed and used

by the UCAS to indicate the standards of various qualifications recognized for applications to higher education institutions. With reference to the tariff points awarded, universities and higher education institutions in UK would be able to compare the different types of accredited qualifications available. The inclusion of HKDSE in the UCAS Tariff system would allow the comparison of standards between the HKDSE and other international qualifications such as the Advanced Placement Programme and the International Baccalaureate and facilitate application for admission to UK universities.

Grading system

10. Some members enquired about the rationale for adopting the SRR system for reporting the results of HKDSE examination instead of following the existing grading system in HKCEE and HKALE which was adopted by international examination bodies.

11. According to the Administration, unlike the existing HKALE which was taken by about one-third of the secondary school graduates, HKDSE would be attended by all senior secondary school graduates with a wider diversity in learning outcomes. It was therefore necessary to design a broad grading system in HKDSE to provide information about the actual achievement of students and enable monitoring of standards of attainment of students over time.

Articulation to local post-secondary institutions

12. Members noted that the Heads of Universities Committee ("HUCOM") announced on 5 July 2006 the general admission requirements and programme specific requirements of the eight University Grants Committee ("UGC")-funded institutions under the new undergraduate programme structure. The level requirements were likely to be Level 3 for Chinese Language and English Language, and Level 2 for Mathematics and Liberal Studies.

13. The universities also announced the specific requirements for admission to individual faculties/departments for early reference by all parties. In addition to the four core subjects of the NSS curriculum, most universities would include one elective in their entrance requirements and in some cases, a second elective from a wider group of subjects. To reaffirm university support of Other Learning Experiences for students, HUCOM issued another statement on 21 October 2008 to confirm that the Student Learning Profile would be a document with good reference value for consideration of university admission.

14. The Education Bureau ("EDB") assured members that it would continue to discuss with post-secondary institutions the alignment of HKDSE with the admission requirements of associate degrees, higher diploma and diploma courses.

Recognition of Applied Learning courses

15. Some members expressed concern about the recognition of ApL courses for application under the Joint University Programmes Admissions System ("JUPAS"). It was reported that a student who had completed a pilot ApL course on tourism had been informed of the non-recognition of the course under the JUPAS. Members pointed out that successful completion of one quality-assured ApL piloting course was recognized as comparable to one HKCEE subject pass for admission to Secondary ("S") 6. Students who had been admitted to S6 on the basis of their attainments in ApL had been misled to believe that they could seek admission under the JUPAS.

16. According to the Administration, the ApL courses were first introduced in 2003 for S4 and S5 students as a pilot of alternative curricula to suit different aptitudes of students. It was intended to pitch at HKCEE and to pave the way for migrating to the NSS education. To ensure the healthy development of the pilot ApL, a progressive approach in developing, revising and improving the curriculum design according to the feedback from various stakeholders had to be adopted. Besides, a quality assurance ("QA") mechanism of the curriculum should cover delivery, assessment and moderation. As such, the Education Bureau ("EDB") had been working in collaboration with the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications and HKEAA to strengthen the QA mechanism so that the recognition of pilot ApL qualifications by different stakeholders could be pursued.

17. The Administration further advised that an announcement had been made on 25 February 2008 on the recognition of successful completion of one quality-assured ApL course by EDB, course providers, the Federation for Continuing Education in Tertiary Institutions, HKEAA and the Civil Service Bureau for purposes for further studies and employment as comparable to :

- one HKCEE subject pass, up to a maximum of two subjects, for admission to further studies in the respective institutions of the course providers;
- one HKCEE subject pass, each counted as one point and up to a maximum of two points, for admission to S6 and for entry to HKALE;
- one HKCEE subject pass, excluding Chinese Language and English Language, each counted as one point and up to a maximum of two subjects, for entry to Pre-Associate Degree Programmes;
- successful completion of two electives under Project Yi Jin ("PYJ") if the students who enrolled in PYJ had successfully completed one or two quality-assured ApL course(s) in a related study area. In other words, students would be required to study seven core modules plus one elective (instead of three electives) under PYJ; and

- a pass in HKCEE (excluding Chinese Language and English Language) for the purpose of appointment to civil service, subject to the counting of a maximum of two courses.

18. The Administration acknowledged that as ApL was a new concept in Hong Kong, it took time to evaluate the design, implementation, student performance and to explain progressively the details to different stakeholders. EDB had been communicating with tertiary institutions regularly on the development of ApL. The recognition of pilot ApL as relevant qualification for admission to post-secondary programmes and university programmes other than Pre-Associate Degree Programmes was still at the discretion of relevant institutions.

19. As regards application for university admission through JUPAS, the Administration pointed out that students were only required to provide their personal particulars, programme choices and other additional qualifications and information by the application deadline to JUPAS. There was no need for students to submit their HKCEE and HKALE results since these data would be sent by HKEAA to JUPAS directly at a later stage after the deadline of the application. The role of JUPAS was to collect information about students' application for the consideration of individual institutions. It was at the discretion of individual institutions to consider the qualifications submitted. Students who were interested in the non-JUPAS courses offered by post-secondary institutions such as Vocational Training Council and City University of Hong Kong (School of Continuing and Professional Education) could submit their applications with available ApL results to the respective institutions for consideration.

20. Members noted that EDB had liaised with the JUPAS Office regarding their concerns about the qualification of pilot ApL and submission of pilot ApL results to JUPAS. JUPAS Office had informed that if JUPAS Board of Management agreed to the submission of pilot ApL results to the institutions through JUPAS, HKEAA would send the results to JUPAS direct. Otherwise, EDB would attempt to approach individual interested institutions and discuss the possibility for HKEAA to send students' pilot ApL results direct to them.

Employment

21. Members noted that EDB had set up an agreed process to discuss with the Civil Service Bureau and HKEAA on benchmarking/drawing comparability of HKDSE qualification with other qualifications currently recognised by different Civil Service grades. The announcement of requirements of Civil Service grades would serve very good reference for other employers in considering the new HKDSE qualification. Announcements on requirements for different grades would be made in 2010.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
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**Relevant papers on recognition and articulation of the
Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education qualification**

| Meeting | Date of meeting | Paper |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Panel on Education | 29.10.2004 (Item I) | Minutes Agenda |
| Panel on Education | 3.6.2005 (Items I - III) | Agenda |
| Panel on Education | 12.6.2006 (Item IV) | Minutes |
| Panel on Education | 10.7.2006 (Item IV) | Minutes Agenda |
| Panel on Education | 25.5.2007 (Item I) | Minutes Agenda |
| Panel on Education | 9.7.2007 | Minutes |
| Panel on Education | 12.11.2007 (Item VII) | Minutes Agenda |
| Panel on Education | 12.6.2008 (Item V) | Minutes Agenda |
| Panel on Education | 10.11.2008 (Item V) | Minutes Agenda |