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Panel on Education

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 12 July 2010**

Implementation of the new academic structure

Purpose

This paper summarizes the issues of concern raised by the Panel on Education ("the Panel") concerning the implementation of the new academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education.

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"). The 334 structure has been implemented with effect from the 2009-2010 school year.

3. Under the new senior secondary ("NSS") curriculum, there are four core subjects, namely, Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics and Liberal Studies ("LS"). A new Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education ("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"). HKDSE examination comprises three categories of subjects, namely the NSS subjects, Applied Learning ("ApL") subjects and Other Language subjects.

4. 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

5. Over the past few years, the Panel held a number of meetings to discuss the 334 structure and to receive views from educational bodies and student organizations. The major issues of concern raised by members are set out in the following paragraphs.

Liberal Studies

6. Members were concerned about the NSS curriculum, in particular the curriculum design, assessment, pedagogies, and class size for teaching LS. Members received views from five deputations on LS at the Panel meeting held on 11 July 2009. The issues of concern raised by members are summarized below.

Assessment

7. Members were concerned about the reliability and fairness of the public examination of LS, in particular about school-based assessment ("SBA"). Members were given to understand that the Administration was considering reverting to the norms-referencing reporting system on the assessment of students' performance in LS and there would be model answers to examination questions. Members considered that this would defeat the purpose of implementing the NSS curriculum to develop students' critical thinking and analytical skills. According to the sample assessment of LS examination papers, the marking of assessors varied greatly. Members were worried that the smartest candidates with the highest critical thinking skills might possibly get the lowest scores in LS examination.

8. The Administration clarified that there would not be any model answers to examination questions in LS. The assessment of students' performance in LS involved a professional judgment of the markers who would be guided by detailed marking guidelines, and the results would be balanced through double marking of examination scripts. Before marking, qualified markers would discuss among themselves with a view to reaching a consensus on the ways for marking the examination scripts.

9. Members enquired whether the fairness of the public assessment of LS without SBA would be jeopardized. There was a view that schools should be allowed to decide whether or not to adopt SBA within three years after the implementation of the

NSS structure. Thereafter, the Administration should conduct a review to decide whether SBA should be an integral part of LS for adoption by all schools.

10. The Administration explained that SBA was an integral part of LS and was not designed as an option for schools and students. The findings of a survey on schools' attitude towards LS had shown that a majority of schools had confidence in the structure and design of the subject and more than 80% of the respondents supported the assessment model. Schools' confidence about undertaking LS was on a par with other NSS subjects. According to the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority ("HKEAA"), many overseas bodies had accepted that SBA was an integral part of LS and the LS assessment framework should comprise SBA and public examination. Without SBA, the recognition of the qualification of HKDSE by overseas jurisdictions might be affected.

Course design

11. Members sought information on whether the Administration had made reference to the experiences of other jurisdictions in the design of LS. It was suggested that different approaches should be adopted for teaching LS, including providing non-classroom learning experiences such as students' participation in the production of school newsletters, etc. Members considered it important to enhance interaction between teachers and students in the teaching of LS.

12. The Administration pointed out that it had taken into account overseas experiences in coming up with the design of LS. Reference had been made to similar subjects in General Certificate of Secondary Education and Australian Council for Educational Research, as well as the Theory of Knowledge of International Baccalaureate Organization. The design of LS was to broaden the knowledge base of students by encouraging them to draw knowledge from different disciplines.

13. Some members considered it irrelevant to refer to the Theory of Knowledge of International Baccalaureate Organization because it was not a mandatory subject. They opined that all along, dissemination of knowledge had not been the desired approach for effective teaching of conventional subjects such as History and English Literature. Since textbooks were not recommended for LS, concern had been raised that the teaching of LS might become empty talks. Without the requisite resources for implementing small class teaching for LS, it was doubtful how teachers could achieve the objective of the subject.

14. The Administration stressed that the teaching of LS did not aim to deliver knowledge to students but to facilitate them to make connections across knowledge areas and to expand their knowledge. By ways of discussion and enquiry into a range of issues, students would be guided by teachers to explore the issues and form their own knowledge. In view of the evolving and ever-changing nature of issues to be studied in LS, teaching of the subject should not rely on textbooks. Students should have access to a wide range of materials so that they would not be bound by a small number of perspectives as well as static knowledge. The Administration had

made available different types of resources including the teaching and learning materials on the web-based resource platform for LS in the Hong Kong Education City website.

Small class teaching

15. Members shared the view of many deputations on the importance of adopting small class for teaching LS. Members noted the consensus among stakeholders that teaching LS in small class settings would enhance interaction between teachers and students. They called on the Administration to provide additional resources to schools so that they could employ teaching assistants for the adoption of small class teaching for LS.

16. The Administration replied that additional resources had been allocated to schools for implementing the NSS curriculum. Under the principle of school-based management, schools were allowed full autonomy in the deployment of resources according to their needs. Some schools had allocated resources to LS while others had deployed resources to other areas having regard to their practical needs. Noting the concerns of members and deputations, the Administration undertook to discuss with the stakeholders on whether certain resources could be earmarked for LS.

Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education

17. According to the outcome of the study commissioned by HKEAA and conducted by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service ("UCAS") of the United Kingdom ("UK") for setting up a point system in the UCAS Tariff for HKDSE results, HKDSE results lacked those levels which were comparable to Grades B and D in the current General Certificate Education ("GCE") A Level Examination. Members expressed grave concern on its impact on local students who wished to apply for admission to UK universities. Most of the renowned UK universities required a candidate to obtain a grade equivalent to Grade B or above in GCE A Level Examination. Without a level equivalent to Grade B in GCE A Level Examination, Hong Kong students would need to obtain Level 5 in HKDSE examination (equivalent to Grade A in GCE A Level Examination) in order to gain admission to these renowned UK universities. Given the wide range between Level 4 (tariff 80) and Level 5 (tariff 120) in HKDSE results, members suggested adding a Level 4* in HKDSE which was comparable to Grade B in GCE A Level Examination to tackle the problem.

18. The explanation given by the Administration was that there was normally no direct grade by grade comparison between two qualifications unless the design of a system was modelled on another system such as the modelling of the HKALE on GCE A Level Examination. There were no direct grade by grade comparisons of International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement Program with GCE A Level Examination. Each qualification was unique in its design. In the initial stage of designing the HKDSE levels, more levels had been suggested. Having gone through extensive consultations in the past 10 years, HKEAA did not recommend too many

levels to avoid labelling effect. Some UK universities had indicated that they would not compare the grades in GCE A Level Examination directly with the levels in HKDSE and understood that Levels 3 to 5* in HKDSE results were comparable to Grades A to E in GCE A Level Examination. UK had modified the grading structure of GCE A Level earlier this year and further changes would be expected. Both the Administration and UCAS would review the HKDSE levels after the first HKDSE examination in 2012 and would make adjustments to the levels if necessary.

19. Members also discussed the implications of including Mathematics as a mandatory subject for university admission. Currently, Mathematics was not a mandatory subject for university admission. Students who excelled in arts subjects but were weak in Mathematics could be admitted by local universities. However, after the implementation of NSS structure, students had to attain Level 2 in Mathematics in HKDSE in order to apply for university admission. Members considered it necessary for the UGC-funded institutions to exercise flexibility in considering applications for university admission. According to HKEAA, local universities had agreed to exercise flexibility in considering the applications for admission on a case-by-case basis. HKEAA agreed to relay members' suggestion to the 334 Liaison Committee.

Recognition of Applied Learning courses

20. 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 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 S6. 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 JUPAS.

21. The Administration explained that 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. 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.

22. After liaising with the JUPAS office regarding members' concern, EDB informed members that if the 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. Members considered it necessary to further discuss the recognition of

ApL courses by local universities for admission purpose.

Teachers' professional development

23. Members considered it necessary for the Administration to provide appropriate professional development programmes and sufficient support for teachers 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.

24. Members noted that the existing basic teacher-to-class ratios for senior secondary classes were 1.3:1 for 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 for Chinese Language, school librarians, additional teachers for remedial teaching, and additional non-graduate teachers. Under the NSS structure, the top-up provisions in existing staff establishment were subsumed into a revised teacher-to-class ratio.

25. Members were concerned whether the revised 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.

26. The Administration explained to members the 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 decision of the Administration to reduce the number of S1 students allocated under the Secondary School Places Allocation system from 38 to 36 students in 2009 and further to 34 students in 2010. From 2012-2013, the revised teacher-to-class ratios would be 1.7 teachers per junior secondary class and 2.0 teachers per senior secondary class. Additional resources including the Senior Secondary Curriculum Support Grant ("SSCSG") would be provided for all schools. The SSCSG was a recurrent provision equivalent to 0.1 teacher per senior secondary class. The projected changes in the provision of teachers in 2012-2013 after the adoption of the revised teacher-to-class ratios and the provision of the SSCSG, as compared with that in 2008-2009, is in **Appendix I**.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
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**Projected changes in the provision of teachers in 2012-2013
as compared with that in 2008-2009**

Provision of Teachers	Number of Schools* (Percentage)
Increased (> 0.5 teacher)	About 280 (about 80%)
Non significant change (= 0.5 teacher)	About 50 (about 14%)
Reduced (> 0.5 teacher)	About 20 (about 6%)

* The above projections are calculated on the basis of aided secondary schools operating three classes or more at each level.

Source : Extracted from LC Paper No. CB(2)561/08-09(01) provided by Education Bureau in December 2008.

Relevant papers on implementation of the new academic structure

Meeting	Date of meeting/ issue date	Paper
Legislative Council	15.10.2003	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 10 - 18 (Question)
Panel on Education	29.10.2004 (Item I)	Minutes Agenda CB(2)1721/04-05(01)
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	12.6.2006 (Item IV)	Minutes Agenda

Meeting	Date of meeting/ issue date	Paper
Panel on Education	10.7.2006 (Item IV)	Minutes Agenda CB(2)2680/05-06(01) CB(2)2680/05-06(02) CB(2)2680/05-06(03) 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
Panel on Education	9.7.2007	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	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 77 - 78 (Question)
Panel on Education	12.6.2008 (Item V)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	10.11.2008 (Item V)	Minutes Agenda
Legislative Council	11.2.2009	[Question : 16] Asked by : Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong Shortage of classrooms after the implementation of the new senior secondary academic structure Reply
Panel on Education	30.3.2009 (Item II)	Minutes Agenda

Meeting	Date of meeting/ issue date	Paper
Panel on Education	11.7.2009 (Item I)	Minutes Agenda
Legislative Council	21.10.2009	[Question : 20] Asked by : Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong Further education opportunities for students in the transition to the New Senior Secondary Academic Structure Reply
Legislative Council	6.1.2010	[Question : 15] Asked by : Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong Elective subjects taken by students under the New Senior Secondary Academic Structure Reply
Panel on Education	30.4.2010 (Item II)	Minutes Agenda

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