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Panel on Education

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 13 June 2011**

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 ("NAS").

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 his 2004 Policy Address, the Chief Executive confirmed the policy direction of developing NAS, i.e. three-year junior secondary, three-year senior secondary and four-year undergraduate education. The NAS has been implemented in all secondary schools at Secondary ("S") 4 with effect from September 2009.
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 take place for the first time in 2012. 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 NAS 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 subject on LS was discussed again at the Panel meeting held on 12 July 2010. The major concerns raised by members are summarized below.

Assessment

7. Members were concerned about the fairness and reliability of the public examination of LS. As the assessment of LS was based on the judgment of the markers and in the absence of uniform and transparent assessment criteria, teachers and parents were concerned about how LS examination papers would be marked and possible disputes on the assessment results. Some members commented that as the objective of LS was to develop students' critical thinking and analytical skills, merits should be given to innovative answers and personal contributions of students. Teachers should change their mentality and be more open-minded in LS assessment in order not to dampen students' creativity and interest in learning.

8. The Administration explained that the emphasis of assessment in the LS examination would be put on the skills the students applied in analyzing a situation, integrating the information and explaining their views in developing an answer. Examiners were required to respect individual responses and give credits to creativity and individual contributions which were very important elements in LS. The Administration would provide LS teachers with more information on the appropriate assessment of LS. Sample examination

questions and students' responses over a range of different levels of performance would be made available for teachers to have an idea of the standards of responses expected from students and how the questions would be marked. Examination scripts would be marked by two markers and when there were significant differences in the markers' opinions, a third marker would be called in to resolve the discrepancies. In case of a request for review of the results, the responses would be assessed by another two markers for a broader range of input. With the established guidelines, candidates would receive fair grades. In response to members' request, the Administration had provided supplementary information in March 2011 on how LS examination papers were marked and some sample LS examination papers with good or bad grades (LC Paper No. CB(2)1242/10-11(01)).

9. Members enquired whether the fairness of the public assessment of LS without school-based assessment ("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. According to the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority ("HKEAA"), many overseas bodies had accepted that SBA was an integral part of LS. Without SBA, the recognition of the qualification of HKDSE by overseas jurisdictions might be affected.

Support to LS teachers

11. Some members pointed out that the greatest dissatisfaction upon the implementation of NAS was the inadequate support given to LS teachers. According to the surveys conducted by the Hong Kong Professional Teachers Union and the Hong Kong Association of Heads of Secondary Schools, many LS teachers were under immense pressure and many schools were short of manpower for conducting SBA, teaching LS in small groups and catering for learning diversity. The Hong Kong Liberal Studies Teachers' Association had requested the Administration to provide more support to LS teachers including the provision of a three-year special allowance for teaching LS; the creation of one additional permanent LS teaching post in each school; the establishment of a network of LS teachers for mutual support; and the strengthening of support in relation to the assessment of students' performance in LS.

12. The Administration advised that a LS School Network Scheme comprising 25 district coordinators who were experienced in teaching LS and assessing LS examination papers was set up in November 2009 to provide support to both schools and teachers on the curriculum and assessment of LS. The Administration recognized the importance of school network building and would continue to strengthen the support to schools and teachers regarding LS. On the issue of special allowance for LS, the Administration would actively consider the feasibility of allocating non-recurrent funds to meet the imminent needs of schools.

Small class teaching

13. Members shared the view of many deputations on the importance of adopting small class for teaching LS as it would enhance interaction between teachers and students. Members noted that although additional resources had been provided to school for arranging small group teaching for LS, many schools had used the resources in language subjects rather than implementing small group teaching for LS. Members urged the Administration to take measures to ensure that all schools would allocate sufficient resources for teaching LS in small groups.

14. The Administration explained that in accordance with the principle of school-based management, schools should be given the autonomy and flexibility in managing their resources. As the situations in schools varied, it was inappropriate for the Administration to mandate the use of their resources in specific areas or subjects. For schools which had difficulties in adopting small group teaching for LS, the Administration would send professional teams to these schools to assist them in improving the learning and teaching of LS.

Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education

Recognition of HKDSE

15. According to the outcome of the study commissioned by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority ("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.

16. 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. 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, 4 and 5 in HKDSE results were broadly comparable to Grades E, C and A in GCE A Level Examination. 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.

17. As HKDSE was a new qualification, members considered it necessary for the Administration to expedite its promotion to obtain international recognition of the qualification. Noting that many of the 36 overseas universities which had indicated their recognition of the HKDSE qualification for admission purpose had a low ranking, members were gravely concerned that the HKDSE qualification was not recognized by many of the renowned overseas universities.

18. According to the Administration, the HKDSE standard had been included in the UCAS Tariff System and could be compared with points awarded to different types of accredited qualifications in UK and other international systems for university admission purpose. The Australian Government had already recognized HKDSE as being equivalent to the Australian Senior Secondary Certificate of Education. The Administration stressed that a lot of work had been done to promote the HKDSE qualification in many countries including the United States and Canada, and assured members that there was no doubt about the recognition of the HKDSE qualification.

19. Some members pointed out that two renowned universities in UK did not recognize the Combined Science and Integrated Science subjects under the NSS curriculum for admission purpose and were concerned about the adverse impact on the articulation to overseas universities of students who had chosen these subjects.

20. The Administration explained that the introduction of Combined Science and Integrated Science subjects had become a trend in the education sector

which attached increasing importance to the integration of subjects. Many overseas universities had a positive attitude to the recognition of the Combined Science and Integrated Science subjects. The NSS curriculum was well-received by the universities and governments in Europe, the United States, Canada and Australia which the Administration had approached and some of the UK universities had regarded all the 24 HKDSE subjects as elective subjects for admission.

21. Given that many local students intended to pursue tertiary education in the Mainland, the Administration was requested to explore the possibility of exempting local students from the Joint Entrance Examination for Universities in the People's Republic of China and accepting the HKDSE examination results for admission to Mainland universities.

22. The Administration advised that there were currently three ways for local students to gain admission to Mainland universities. Some universities only recognized the results of the joint admission examination in the Mainland; some universities required applicants to take the examination conducted by the universities; and some Mainland universities recognized the public examination results in Hong Kong and exempted students with good results from taking their admission examinations. As this admission system applied to Mainland candidates alike, giving preferential treatments to local students might be seen as unfair to other candidates. It was therefore difficult to accede to such a request. Nevertheless, the Administration had been discussing with the Ministry of Education on the recognition of HKDSE qualification and would follow up on the issue. In members' view, the Administration should convince the Mainland universities to grant the exemption to local students by phases, with the goal of accepting HKDSE qualifications for university admission.

Mathematics as a mandatory subject for university admission

23. 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. With the implementation of NSS structure, students had to attain Level 2 in Mathematics in HKDSE in order to apply for university admission. Members were concerned that such a requirement would deprive the chance of the students who excelled in subjects other than Mathematics for local university education. Some members requested the Administration to consider excluding Mathematics as a mandatory subject for university admission.

24. According to the Administration, local universities supported that Mathematics should be one of the core subjects as it could help students develop their analytical skills and logical thinking which were essential for all students

regardless of their study programmes. Local universities had agreed to exercise flexibility in considering the applications for admission on a case-by-case basis.

SRR

25. Members were concerned that the use of SRR might result in wide fluctuation in marks and increase in disputes over examination results. Concern was raised that candidates' results would be affected by the different levels of difficulty of the examination papers.

26. The Administration advised that SRR had been used for the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination English Language and Chinese Language examinations starting from 2007. It was a global trend to use SRR, which enabled employers and universities to understand the candidates' level of performance with reference to a set of standards rather than their relative ability among candidates taking part in the same public examination. It also provided a good basis for comparing the standards and performance of students who took the examination in different years. More importantly, SRR could facilitate teachers to adjust the pedagogy according to the ability of students.

Teachers' professional development

27. Members considered it necessary for the Administration to provide appropriate professional development programmes and sufficient support to teachers for the implementation of the NSS curriculum. The Administration advised that since the implementation of the NSS curriculum in September 2009, about 39,000 training places for NSS teachers had been offered. The total number of NSS programmes provided in the first nine months of the 2009-2010 school year was 270. A survey was conducted in April 2010 to collect data for better planning of NSS professional development programmes. Based on data collected, the Administration would continue to provide courses to meet the needs of teachers, especially for new teachers and serving teachers who would be deployed to teach NSS subjects as well as to provide new professional development programmes to address new learning and teaching emphases.

28. 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.

29. Members were concerned whether the revised teacher-to-class ratios for the implementation of NAS 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 NAS.

30. The Administration explained to members the transitional arrangements to facilitate schools to move smoothly to NAS. 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

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

**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

Committee	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)	Agenda Minutes CB(2)1721/04-05(01)
Panel on Education	20.12.2004 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Education	3.1.2005 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Legislative Council	5.1.2005	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 68 - 71 (Question)
Panel on Education	3.6.2005 (Items I - III)	Agenda Minutes
Finance Committee	24.6.2005	Minutes FCR(2005-06)24
Panel on Education	20.10.2005 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Education	13.2.2006 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Legislative Council	10.5.2006	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 86 - 91 (Question)
Panel on Education	12.6.2006 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes

Committee	Date of meeting/ issue date	Paper
Panel on Education	10.7.2006 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes 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)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Education	25.5.2007 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Education	9.7.2007	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Education	12.11.2007 (Item VII)	Agenda Minutes
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)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Education	10.11.2008 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Legislative Council	11.2.2009	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 86 - 91 (Question)
Panel on Education	30.3.2009 (Item II)	Agenda Minutes

Committee	Date of meeting/ issue date	Paper
Panel on Education	11.7.2009 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Legislative Council	21.10.2009	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 98 - 101 (Question)
Legislative Council	6.1.2010	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 118 - 127 (Question)
Panel on Education	30.4.2010 (Item II)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Education	12.7.2010 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes

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