

For Discussion
on 12 November 2012

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Review on the Implementation of the New Senior Secondary Curriculum and Assessment

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the objectives, approaches, schedule and progress of the review of the New Senior Secondary curriculum and the delivery of the first Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination; and issues relating to examination questions of Liberal Studies under the New Academic Structure.

Background

Implementation of the New Academic Structure (NAS)

2. The 2000 Education Commission (EC) Report recommended the introduction of a NAS comprising a 3-year senior secondary curriculum and a 4-year undergraduate programme with a view to promoting whole-person and life-long learning capabilities of students, expanding learning opportunities and providing multiple progression pathways.

3. In September 2009, the New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum has started to be implemented from Secondary 4 after undergoing three stages of consultation and providing support to schools. **ALL** students can now receive 12 years' school education and will take only one public examination – the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination at the end of Secondary 6. The new structure allows students' equal access to multiple pathways, including higher education at degree or sub-degree levels, whereas under the old system, only about one third of the Secondary 5 student cohort were selected for sixth form in their pursuit of further studies.

4. The NSS curriculum aims to prepare students to be self-initiating and lifelong learners to rise to the challenges in the globalised world in the 21st Century. The broad and balanced curriculum is designed to provide a more flexible, coherent framework and diversified choices, including Applied Learning (ApL) subjects and other foreign languages, to cater to the different needs of students. Specific learning goals cover the development of broad

knowledge base, generic skills like language competency, critical and reflective thinking, information technology skills, etc. Liberal Studies (LS), as a core subject, widens students' horizons, and develops their thinking skills and multiple perspectives in tackling contemporary issues, which will enhance their capability as a life-long learner. Students' Other Learning Experiences (OLE) help develop qualities in non-academic areas or the whole-person, such as aesthetic appreciation, interpersonal skills, sense of responsibilities and career planning. The OLE and individual reflections were recorded in the Student Learning Profile (SLP). Students would be able to understand their own academic/career aspirations and develop positive attitudes towards learning and work as well as lead a healthy life style with active participation in aesthetic and physical activities.

The first HKDSE Examination

5. The first HKDSE Examination was conducted smoothly for over 70,000 candidates from March to May in 2012. School-based Assessment (SBA) was introduced in 12 subjects to offer a more comprehensive appraisal of student performance. Standards-referenced reporting was adopted to enable student performance to be graded and be recognised according to prescribed standards, hence there was no 'fail' grade. Over 90% of the school candidates registered for two to three subjects in addition to the four core subjects, namely Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics and LS.

6. The examination results were released on 20 July 2012. About 38% of the day school candidates have met the general entrance requirements for local four-year undergraduate programmes, obtaining level 3 or above in both Chinese Language and English Language, and level 2 or above in Mathematics and LS. This is higher than the percentage of students eligible for entrance to local three-year undergraduate programmes under the old academic system. About 69% of the day school candidates have obtained level 2 or above in at least five subjects, including Chinese Language and English Language. These candidates are eligible to apply for sub-degree courses and relevant civil service positions. This is higher than students eligible for meeting the general entrance requirements for sub-degree level under the old academic system. In general, all students' potentials could be developed by the full spectrum of learning opportunities. Students were able to use the HKDSE Examination results, supported by SLP, in making choices for further studies and employment.

Liberal Studies

7. With specific reference to the examination of LS as a core subject,

there were two written papers and an independent enquiry study (IES) which was the form of SBA. The written papers test candidates' ability to make appropriate responses to information related to issues within the LS curriculum framework with the help of analytical, critical and creative thinking, value judgement supported by knowledge, concepts, and their application. The IES assesses candidates' ability and independence in problem solving, data gathering and analysis and communication. The assessment criteria and examination questions for LS have been developed according to the LS Curriculum and Assessment Guide prepared by the Curriculum Development Council (CDC)-Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) Committee on LS, together with the subject moderation committee. Stringent guidelines and procedures in addition to an internal quality assurance mechanism are in place to ensure the quality and neutrality of the examination questions. Candidates' performance in LS in the 2012 HKDSE Examination reflected that in general the assessment objectives of the subject have been achieved, with more than 90% of the candidates obtaining level 2 or above. However, the breadth and depth of contextual analysis and the application of knowledge and concepts should be further strengthened.

Articulation to local and overseas study pathways and workplaces

8. The local tertiary institutions, vocational training council and Mainland higher education institutions have admitted the first cohort of HKDSE students according to the general entrance requirements announced earlier.

9. As at end October 2012 of data collected from 394 schools (out of 476), out of the 53,138 Secondary 6 graduates who responded, 88% (46,768) are pursuing full-time studies and 7% (3,827) start to work full-time. Majority (81%) of the students are studying in degree and sub-degree courses locally while some 7% have chosen to study outside Hong Kong.

Objectives of the review

10. The delivery of the first 3-year cycle of the NSS curriculum and the inaugural HKDSE Examination in 2012 has been generally smooth. Students have gained fruitful learning experiences and encouraging results in the HKDSE and progressed to flexible multiple pathways. Schools have exhibited enhanced distributed leadership, collaborative learning among teachers and schools as well as other positive changes. Also gratifying to note is the local and international recognition of our HKDSE results, notwithstanding the significant change to the assessment and grading approach implied in the HKDSE. Safeguarding the credibility of the HKDSE is not only crucial to

sustaining confidence in the Hong Kong education system, it is also the cornerstone of safeguarding students' articulation interests.

11. Given the scale of the education reform, it takes time for experiences to be consolidated. Thus, the review being conducted should focus on refinements and concerns and issues that have already emerged, such as the workload of students and teachers, SBA and lesson time, etc.

Approaches of the review

Stakeholder participation/engagement

12. An engagement and communication plan for each stakeholder group has been drawn up by the Education Bureau (EDB), CDC and HKEAA to collect feedback and opinions extensively from all education stakeholders through various channels and extending over the period from August 2012 to February/March 2013. These include the regular liaison meetings with stakeholder groups to discuss relevant issues and recommendations.

13. A series of seminars, liaison meetings and focus group meetings have already started to solicit feedback. HKEAA, CDC and joint meetings on whole-school curriculum as well as specific subjects are conducted concurrently to consider the feedback and make appropriate proposals. A holistic and principled approach is adopted to ensure that the considerations and recommendations are professional, centering on the interest of students, addressing the concerns of teachers and schools, and are also practicable. Regular reports are made to the Education Commission and advice sought.

Evidence-based

14. The review would build on relevant quantitative data and qualitative information collected in meetings, the November survey, submissions by different organisations as well as those received during the first cycle of implementation. In addition, reference will be made to local and international studies. Advice from local and international experts would also be sought.

Strategic with multiple stages

15. As the NAS has involved large scale systemic changes, the scope of the review is wide and it takes time to consolidate its experiences before new or

fundamental changes are made. Hence, the review would be conducted in strategic stages. The short-term stage (from now to March 2013), without jeopardizing local and international recognition already gained, would aim at addressing the more practical concerns of schools and fine-tuning and enhancing the implementation of the curriculum and assessment so as to facilitate student learning, and collecting information that helps advise further studies/career planning. Early recommendations would likely include, for example, streamlining the SBA arrangements further, reducing curriculum contents, clarifying the breadth and depth of curriculum and assessment, providing more flexibility in lesson time, balancing the interest of tertiary institutions and schools in setting the public examination timetable and results release schedule, etc., all for possible implementation in Secondary 4 in the 2013/14 school year.

16. In the light of the feedback received, matters requiring more data collection and deliberation further would be identified as appropriate.

Recommendations, reporting and dissemination

17. A report on the findings and recommendations of the short-term stage of the review would be released in April 2013. It would be disseminated widely to the school sector, tertiary institutions, parents and stakeholders concerned so that the fullest support could be given to schools and students. Recommendations requiring actions on the part of the government or other stakeholders would also be followed up.

18. In the meantime, good practices, lessons learnt and useful findings would be continuously disseminated through relevant professional development programmes and sharing networks for teachers, middle managers, principals; meetings with stakeholders; publications, e-resource platforms, and the media, etc.

Schedule and progress

19. A schedule of the review and engagement process for the short-term stage is in place. These include meetings and forums for the 24 NSS subjects, ApL and OLE; seminars for school curriculum leaders; surveys and studies; focus group meetings; as well as liaison meetings with principals, education bodies, professional organisations and parent representatives. To provide

updated information and events related to the review and further development, a designated website has been launched (<http://www.edb.gov.hk/nas/review>).

20. The 23 CDC-HKEAA Committees (with membership drawn from about 250 professional/tertiary institutions and with over 400 members from the school sector) have already held two meetings to discuss the concerns and recommendations. In total, there are more than 300 CDC, HKEAA, CDC-HKEAA committee and working group meetings on the review from June 2012 to March 2013. To engage teachers, the first round of consultation forums for 24 NSS subject teachers, ApL and OLE were held in August 2012, followed by the second round from October to December 2012, and there would be over 150 seminars or forums to collect feedback from the school sector. Besides, over 400 large- or small-scale focus group meetings with different stakeholders groups would be held. More importantly, students and parents are our key stakeholders and we take their concerns to heart. EDB would also meet them through focus group interviews to collect feedback and suggestions to inform our support measures for them.

21. To inform future planning and the review, EDB and HKEAA have also been conducting studies or surveys since 2009 such as subject choices, School Survey on the Assessment Frameworks and Examination Papers of the 2012 HKDSE Examination in August 2012. A major survey for school leaders and teachers on the proposals is scheduled for late November 2012. EDB would also seek advice from tertiary institutions on soliciting feedback from the first NSS cohort on their earlier experiences in further studies.

22. A press release was issued on 5 October 2012 announcing the launch of the NAS review to the public, and a document “Introduction to New Academic Structure Review” was uploaded on the website to facilitate public understanding. Furthermore, findings and recommendations of the review will be disseminated through reports, seminars, professional development programmes and the designated website.

23. Based on the feedback gathered so far, EDB and HKEAA have identified some pressing issues, and suggestions on how to tackle them will be made. They include the following:

- There is a need to review SBA in view of its workload exerted on teachers and students. The workload of both individual students and schools and the overall impact of the curriculum and assessment have

to be considered. SBA needs to be reviewed holistically, and this may involve a necessary alignment of SBA among some subjects and further reduction of overlap of the curriculum content in different subjects. All subjects will work out the rationale for handling SBA or not doing SBA, based on the principles underlying its review.

- The school sector has raised the issue on practicable provision and insufficiency of lesson time to cover the curricular contents in different subjects. Learner diversity including special educational needs, another great concern expressed by schools, is an important factor that has an impact on lesson time. While considering the need to maintain international benchmarks of curricular and HKDSE standards, appropriate measures would be taken to cater to diverse student needs and school contexts. Attention would also be paid to making fuller use of ApL courses.
- Teachers have expressed concern about the depth and breadth of the curriculum of the subjects they are teaching. The curriculum design of the NSS subjects would be reviewed, especially for subjects like Chinese Language and Business, Accounting and Financial Studies (BAFS). Consideration would also be given to revising the assessment design in a way that it would cater to student diversity and be implemented as soon as practicable without affecting learning and teaching that has started in schools at Secondary 4 or 5. Effective dissemination of changes and professional development programmes to help teachers understand and interpret the curriculum would be provided.

24. EDB and HKEAA will report on all issues raised by different stakeholders during the review and explain the recommendations made to stakeholders.

Way Forward

25. Stakeholders will continue to be invited to give their views and suggestions on the review. The feedback received through the different channels, together with information collected from other key studies and

surveys conducted by EDB, HKEAA, and different professional groups and school councils, will all be included or considered as reference in the review.

26. Though the review that has been kick-started focuses on refinements, curriculum and assessment review is by nature continuous and developmental. Hence, we expect the outcome of this first-stage review to form an integral element of a more holistic reflection of the new senior secondary curriculum and assessment in the future, whose broad objectives are to:

- (i) analyse the implementation of the NAS with special reference to the NSS curriculum and assessment and its impact on students and schools; the articulation of NSS and HKDSE to local and overseas study pathways and to workplaces; and the achievement of learning goals and policy intentions of NAS; and
- (ii) identify the strengths, good practices and challenges of NSS curriculum and assessment, and make viable recommendations with a view to ensuring the smooth implementation of NSS (e.g. lesson time, curriculum design, SBA), improving student learning (e.g. support measures) and achieving the learning goals and policy intentions of NAS.

27. Although the scale of the review is very large, it is supported by the committees and expanded working groups as well as representatives of various liaison groups who always provide quality views and constructive suggestions. EDB and HKEAA will continue to manage the review by adopting a strategy with multiple stages as well as handling the different issues for the short-term, medium and longer term stages.

Advice Sought

28. Members are invited to give their views on the development of the review and the way forward.

Education Bureau
Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority
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