

For discussion on
8 June 2015

Panel on Education
Discussion on
The Liberal Studies Subject under the New Senior Secondary Curriculum

Purpose

This paper aims to:

- (a) outline the rationale and nature of Liberal Studies as a core subject in the Senior Secondary Curriculum;
- (b) explain some of the concerns about the implementation of Liberal Studies and the support measures; and
- (c) report on the progress of the review on the curriculum and assessment of Liberal Studies.

The rationale and nature of the Senior Secondary Curriculum

2. Under the New Senior Secondary (NSS) Curriculum implemented since 2009, students study four core subjects (Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics and Liberal Studies), two to three (a maximum of four) elective subjects and ‘Other Learning Experiences’ (OLE). As a core and examination subject in the SS curriculum, Liberal Studies is complementary to the other core subjects, elective subjects and OLE in ensuring a broad and balanced education for students at the senior secondary level. Generally speaking, Liberal Studies aims to enhance students’ awareness of oneself, society, the nation, the world and the physical environment; to broaden students’ knowledge base and expand their perspectives; and to connect knowledge across different disciplines and enhance their critical thinking skills; develop their positive values and attitudes so that they become informed and responsible citizens. As a core subject, Liberal Studies serves irreplaceable functions as it

echoes and interconnects with the other core and elective subjects as well as OLE (Please refer to Appendix 1 ‘Liberal Studies and the Three-year Senior Secondary Curriculum’). The above concept is generally supported by the education field and general public. The review of Liberal Studies is premised on maintaining this subject as a core subject in the NSS curriculum, which has gone through the short-term and medium-term reviews since 2012.

3. The Liberal Studies curriculum comprises six modules, namely ‘Personal Development and Interpersonal Relationships’, ‘Hong Kong Today’, ‘Modern China’, ‘Globalization’, ‘Public Health’ and ‘Energy Technology and the Environment’. The design of the contents of these modules is based on the foundation of the essential knowledge and skills that students have acquired from different Key Learning Areas at the primary and junior secondary levels. Important contemporary issues from the six modules are also taken as entry points for students to connect different disciplines of knowledge (such as science, technology, history, geography, etc.), look at things from various perspectives and continue to construct knowledge through the enquiry learning process, so that students broaden their knowledge base and extend the breadth and depth of their learning. The modules in the *Curriculum and Assessment Guide* for Liberal Studies are all theme-based. There are also questions listed under each theme to indicate the focus and pathways of enquiry, and to provide specific contexts to facilitate students’ learning. There is a public concern that the subject may be lopsided to the discussion of current affairs, and is very likely to result in engaging students in empty talk without any basis. In fact, the curriculum design of this subject emphasises developing in students a balanced knowledge base and the capacity to apply knowledge and concepts accurately. Therefore, while it is unnecessary to avoid the discussion of current affairs and political issues in the learning of Liberal Studies, we expect students to have

much broader and more balanced knowledge and perspectives through Liberal Studies, rather than to be narrowly concerned about current affairs and politics.

4. Liberal Studies also emphasises supporting students' development of higher order thinking skills based on the foundation of their learning at the junior secondary level, and providing the context for an integrated application of different generic skills to construct knowledge. When students are engaged in the issue enquiry process, they need to grasp the objective facts and evidence, identify views stated or implied in the information, analyse issues using appropriate thinking skills, and apply multiple perspectives in making judgments and decisions. Students are never encouraged to criticise for criticism's sake in Liberal Studies. On the contrary, when students are stating their own views, they are expected to present arguments clearly and demonstrate respect for evidence, open-mindedness and tolerance towards views and values held by others, so that they become life-long learners with sound critical thinking.

5. As a core subject in the NSS Curriculum, Liberal Studies ensures laying a sound foundation of life-long learning for students, regardless of the subject combination at the senior secondary level and whether they will pursue further studies or enter into the workplace, to interface smoothly to vocational education, post-secondary education and the foundation year of university education, to equip them with related self-learning skills, and to develop positive values to cope with the ever changing contexts and issues in daily life and the workplace.

Some concerns for implementing Liberal Studies

Learning and teaching resources

6. The general public often expresses concerns over the coverage of the teaching content and the learning materials for Liberal Studies. It is even proposed that a reviewing mechanism should be established for submitting the subject's 'textbooks' for review. For Liberal Studies, the focus and direction of enquiry are indicated by a 'relatively open' curriculum framework composed of different Areas of Study, modules, themes and questions for enquiry. It encourages students to explore the evolving and ever-changing contemporary issues from multiple perspectives and with critical thinking, and put forward personal views, judgement and suggestions based on valid and reliable evidence and information. Teachers should flexibly adopt a wide range of learning and teaching materials, and students should also explore varied and the latest information in the course of learning so that they can make sensible judgements through using valid and reliable evidence and information for analysis. Therefore, using conventional textbooks may not be the best option for the learning and teaching of Liberal Studies, and the submission of Liberal Studies 'textbooks' for review is also not accepted at the present stage. A wide variety of practical curriculum resources, learning and teaching materials as well as assessment items have been provided by the EDB for teachers on the Web-based Resource Platform for Liberal Studies (ls.edb.hkedcity.net). These resources and materials are in line with the various parts of the curriculum, and suitable for the different teaching contexts and students' abilities and interests. They are also updated and enriched regularly in order to reduce teachers' workload. As at today, over 2,000 items have been uploaded to the Web-based Resource Platform; and the average monthly download rate for the current school year is over 3,800 times.

7. To enhance teachers' understanding of the breadth and depth of the curriculum and the requirements of the public examination of the subject, the Education Bureau (EDB) and the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment

Authority (HKEAA) jointly prepared the *Liberal Studies Curriculum and Assessment Resource Package* in 2013. Teachers generally agreed that the *Resource Package* was useful for curriculum planning and designing the scheme of work. The EDB will use this resource package as a basis to further illustrate the learning focuses of the curriculum. The EDB will also publish the *Liberal Studies Curriculum Resources Booklet Series*, which provides teachers and students with more ready-to-use learning and teaching resources for the six modules in the curriculum to alleviate teachers' workload. Each of the booklets will include the learning focuses as well as exemplars of the respective module, which include the essential basic knowledge and concepts to be covered in the three-year curriculum, to provide teachers and students with appropriate suggestions for effective learning and teaching materials, exemplars of issue enquiry, suggestions for school-based adaptation, extended reading, reference materials, etc. To cater for the needs of different schools, various follow-up support measures such as conducting seminars and workshops, inviting teachers to share learning and teaching experiences, and updating the exemplars and related learning and teaching resources on the Web-based Resource Platform for Liberal Studies will be introduced.

8. We believe that the above measures could help teachers of Liberal Studies to improve their teaching and reduce teachers' and students' reliance on the Liberal Studies 'textbooks' which have not been reviewed but available in the market. In the long run, the EDB will explore the feasibility of accepting Liberal Studies textbooks to be submitted for review. We will also formulate the review requirements and criteria specific to the learning requirements and contents of Liberal Studies for the purpose of quality assurance.

Other support measures

9. The workload of Liberal Studies teachers and the training provided by the EDB to these teachers are also of public concern. From 2005 to present,

over 5,500 teachers have received more than 30 hours of related teacher training organised by the EDB for Liberal Studies, among which 1,500 have accumulated over 100 hours of training. For this school year, the number of participants in the training programmes provided by the EDB for the subject has amounted to 10,000. The tertiary institutions have also been offering degree and post-graduate diploma courses for pre-service and in-service teacher training in the subject. Besides, the EDB organises teacher network activities and provides different types of school-based support services. As a matter of fact, as schools have accumulated more experiences and achieved positive outcomes since the implementation of Liberal Studies in the early years, teachers have not only shown enhanced confidence but also better understanding of the teaching content and assessment requirements. With the announced curriculum revision which will further streamline the content for each module, it is believed that the workload of teachers and students will be alleviated. Based on what has been collected through school visits and focus group interviews about the implementation of Liberal Studies since the launch of the review, the various recommendations and measures have helped to streamline the curriculum content and reduce the related workload from the School-based Assessment of the subject, enhanced teachers' understanding of the curriculum and assessment requirements, and thus boosted their confidence. The EDB will continue to provide an array of support measures for the implementation of Liberal Studies in schools, including curriculum resources, web-based resource platform, professional development programmes and network activities, as well as providing onsite support services for teachers. In addition, schools will continue to be entitled to the Senior Secondary Curriculum Support Grant, which is equivalent to the mid-point salary of 0.1 Graduate Master/Mistress (GM) per NSS class each year. Schools can utilise the Grant flexibly for a smooth implementation of the NSS curriculum, including Liberal Studies.

The Review of Liberal Studies

Review Mechanism

10. The review of curriculum and assessment of Liberal Studies is part of the New Academic Structure (NAS) review jointly conducted by the EDB, the Curriculum Development Council (CDC), the HKEAA and related subject committees. This review is a process of continual renewal and refinement. We have been adopting an effective professional mechanism for conducting the review, consulting related professional organisations in the field, principals, frontline teachers and different stakeholders. Views collected from different sectors are taken into account and an in-depth review on the design and implementation of the subject is conducted. We aim to successfully achieve the rationale and curriculum aims of Liberal Studies by carefully summarising the experience gained from the implementation of the curriculum and assessment, exploring rooms for improvement and proposing effective recommendations and measures. (Please refer to Appendix 2 ‘Summary of the Review of Curriculum and Assessment of Liberal Studies’.)

Learning Effectiveness

11. As a matter of fact, schools have accumulated valuable experience and achieved success since the early years of implementing Liberal Studies, and their confidence has been enhanced. The effort expended by the education profession on Liberal Studies and the positive outcomes achieved deserves our recognition. According to the progress report of the NAS Review released in 2013, the majority of teachers and students agreed that the curriculum aims and learning outcomes of Liberal Studies had been achieved. Most teachers also agreed that the Independent Enquiry Study (IES) of Liberal Studies could nurture students’ problem-solving and independent thinking ability, and had a

positive impact on students' confidence in learning. The EDB has also conducted a sample study on the IES topics selected by students and found that they cover a diversified range of issues concerning the six modules of the subject. This reveals that IES can broaden students' learning experience. At the end of 2012 and 2013, the EDB conducted the 'Opinion Survey on NSS Graduates' Learning Experiences' on the first-year students admitted to universities/tertiary institutions with the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) qualifications. The survey revealed that over 70% of the respondents agreed that Liberal Studies had enhanced their knowledge base (77%), their ability to think from multiple perspectives (76.1%), their critical thinking skills (71%) and their social awareness (73.6%). From the results of a recently launched school survey, over 90% of the teacher respondents were of the view that students could achieve the curriculum aims of Liberal Studies after completing secondary education. According to a study of HKDSE candidates' live scripts commissioned by the EDB, the initial findings reveal that students were able to demonstrate critical thinking skills and the ability to think from multiple perspectives, which were positively correlated with the candidates' results in the public examination.

Short-term Review Recommendations

12. The short-term review recommendations, announced in 2013, which mainly addressed the workload of teachers and students, included the launch of the *Liberal Studies Curriculum and Assessment Resource Package* jointly prepared by the EDB and the HKEAA in June 2013. The *Resource Package* further explains the coverage of the curriculum, enables teachers to understand the breadth and depth of the curriculum better as well as the design of cross-module curriculum planning to facilitate knowledge transfer and the development of critical thinking skills, and develop a better understanding of

the requirements of the public examination. Teachers generally found the *Resource Package* useful for planning the curriculum and teaching progress.

Medium-term Review Recommendations

13. The medium-term review was launched in October 2013. We continue to review in a pragmatic and open manner the areas of concern of teachers and other stakeholders, such as the implementation of the curriculum, teachers' workload, the breadth and depth of the curriculum, the scope of knowledge of different modules, the balance of perspectives in the curriculum, the knowledge foundation of junior secondary students, whether there is bias in the past public examinations and the 'backwash effect' on curriculum as well as learning and teaching etc.

14. Regarding public assessment, during the first phase of the medium-term review on Liberal Studies, recommendations on streamlining the implementation and assessment of IES have been implemented at secondary four this school year.

15. Regarding the curriculum, relevant committees of the Liberal Studies curriculum have seriously considered various views and suggestions on the curriculum design of the subject. After careful consideration, the committees affirmed that the existing curriculum framework was critical to maintaining Liberal Studies as a core subject of the Senior Secondary Curriculum. Therefore, in the second phase of the medium-term review, it is recommended that the curriculum framework of Liberal Studies should remain unchanged, so that students can continue to broaden their knowledge base, enhance their social awareness and deepen their understanding of oneself, society, the nation, the human world and the physical environment through studying the six modules. Apart from that, the relevant committees have proposed revisions to part of the content, serving the purposes of refining the scope and focus of the related areas

and updating the content and examples so as to keep abreast of the developments in knowledge and society. The CDC and the Public Examinations Board have jointly endorsed the recommendations to be implemented at secondary four in the 2015/16 school year. The endorsed changes to the curriculum will help ensure the healthy development of Liberal Studies, which keeps abreast of the latest development, while maintaining stability.

16. Earlier on, some members of the public expressed doubts and concerns about whether the review of Liberal Studies was under political interference. We had released a statement, explaining that the EDB, CDC and HKEAA have been conducting the NAS review according to a planned schedule while upholding the principle of professionalism and considering students' interest to be a priority. We also made an appeal to stakeholders from various sectors for not allowing 'political' controversies in society to infuse curriculum development, but respecting the professional spirit and existing mechanism of the curriculum development and assessment in Hong Kong. In fact, the recommendations on the modules proposed by the committees have gained general support from schools, which indicates that the review of Liberal Studies has earned the recognition from education professionals.

17. Meanwhile, we attach much importance to the knowledge and skills foundation of students at the primary and junior secondary levels, and enhancing the interface between the junior secondary curriculum and the senior secondary curriculum (including Liberal Studies). The CDC plans to update the Secondary Education Curriculum Guide and the curriculum guides for different Key Learning Areas this year, in order to sustain and deepen the achievements of curriculum reform in all key stages of learning. Relevant updating work is being undertaken in accordance with the established mechanism and procedures.

18. According to the consultation launched in November 2014, schools held diverse views on whether the public examinations of Liberal Studies over the past three years have reflected a balanced coverage of the six modules in the curriculum, and whether they have effectively catered for the diverse abilities and interests of senior secondary students. There were also quite a number of respondents expressing that the question types, the duration of the papers and the provision of optional questions in Paper 1 of the public examination should be reviewed for the sake of better alignment with the curriculum aims and design of Liberal Studies and catering for learner diversity. To further refine the design of the questions in the public examination of Liberal Studies, the CDC and the HKEAA launched an extended consultation from March to April, aiming to solicit schools' feedback and views to inform the professional discussion among the relevant committees of the CDC and HKEAA on refining recommendations on the senior secondary curriculum and assessment. The result will be announced in July.

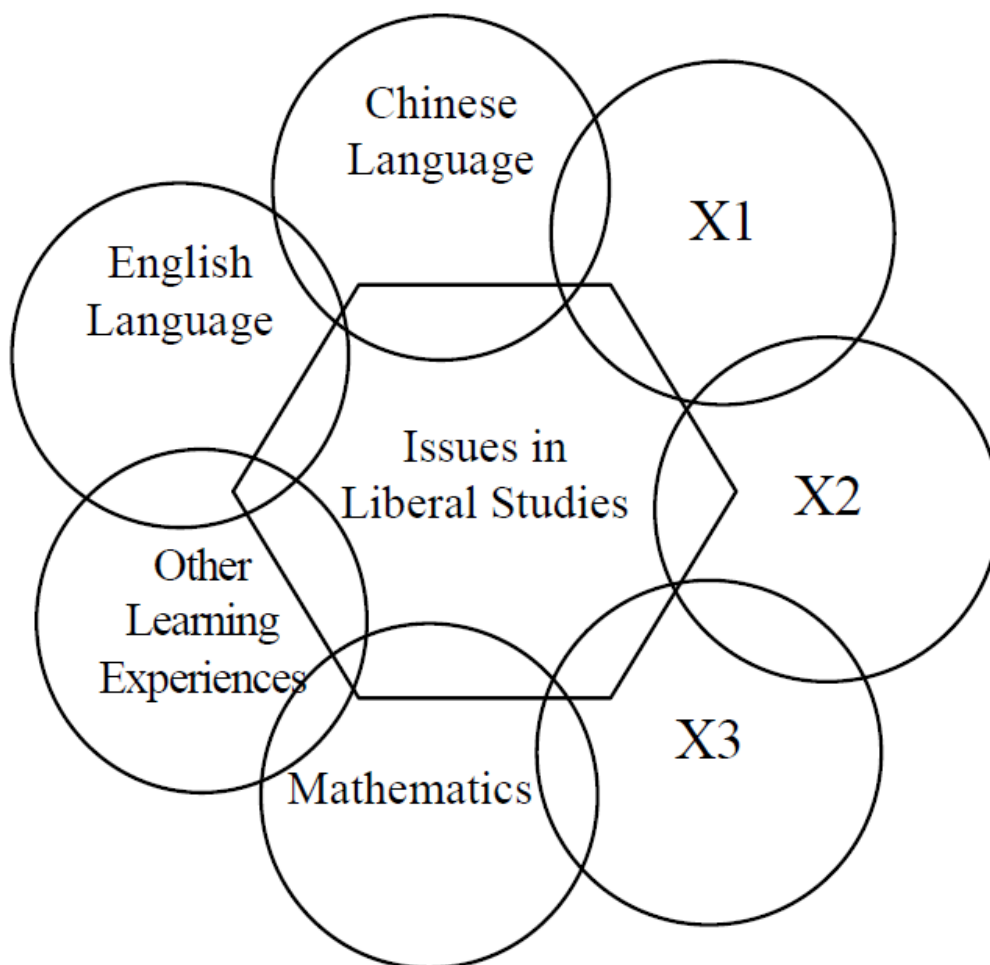
Education Bureau

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Liberal Studies and the Three-year Senior Secondary Curriculum

When studying Liberal Studies, students are required to apply the knowledge and perspectives from other subjects to investigate contemporary issues. The purpose is to provide opportunity for students to:

- connect knowledge and concepts across different disciplines
- expand their perspectives beyond a single discipline
- study contemporary events not covered in a single discipline



Summary of the Review of Curriculum and Assessment of Liberal Studies

Design of the Curriculum and Assessment	Recommendation	Justification
<p><u>Curriculum Aims</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance students' awareness of society, the nation, the world and the environment; broaden their knowledge base and perspectives towards issues; and connect knowledge across different disciplines and enhance their critical thinking skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remain unchanged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over 90% of schools agreed that the curriculum aims were achieved.
<p><u>Curriculum Framework</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprising six modules under three Areas of Study; an Independent Enquiry Study (IES) to be completed by students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short-term recommendation: Maintain the existing curriculum and provide the "<i>Curriculum and Assessment Resource Package</i>" to clarify the breadth and depth of the curriculum Medium-term recommendation: Maintain the existing curriculum framework; revise/update the "questions for enquiry" and "explanatory notes" of different modules to become more concrete, focused and to keep abreast of the developments in knowledge and society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As a core subject of inter-disciplinary by nature, Liberal Studies enables students to broaden their knowledge base, enhance their social awareness and deepen their understanding of oneself, society, the nation, the nature and the human world from multiple perspectives.

<p><u>Public Assessment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper 1 (Data-response questions, all questions compulsory) 50% • Paper 2 (Extended-response questions, answer one question only) 30% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-term recommendation: Adjust the length and the complexity of the public examination papers • Medium-term recommendation: Conduct extended consultation on public assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to collect views from schools to improve the assessment design including the coverage of the curriculum, catering for learner diversity, reviewing and improving the quality assurance mechanism of the HKDSE, etc.
<p><u>School-based Assessment (SBA)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent Enquiry Study 20% • Three stages of assessment, including the ‘Process’ and ‘Task’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-term recommendation: Implement the streamlined IES so that schools are not required to submit assessment records on the process • Medium-term recommendation: Adopt a structured enquiry approach and provide clear guidelines for conducting IES 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplify IES further, provide better guidance for the implementation of IES, encourage diversified enquiry methods and deal with issues related to workload and excessively lengthy reports.
<p><u>Support Measures</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development programme for teachers • Curriculum resources (Teachers’ handbooks, web-based resource platform) • School networks • School-based support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen and update various support measures • Short-term recommendation: Publish the <i>Curriculum and Assessment Resource Package</i> in June 2013 • Medium-term recommendation: Publish the <i>Liberal Studies Curriculum Resources Booklet Series</i> in 2015 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help teachers better understand the breadth and depth of the curriculum, strengthen the knowledge base and the interface with the junior secondary curriculum