

# 立法會

## *Legislative Council*

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### **Panel on Education**

**Meeting on 8 June 2015**

### **Background brief on issues related to the Liberal Studies subject under the New Senior Secondary curriculum**

#### **Purpose**

This paper summarizes the deliberations of Members on issues related to the implementation of the Liberal Studies ("LS") subject under the New Senior Secondary ("NSS") curriculum of the New Academic Structure ("NAS").

#### **Background**

##### The NSS curriculum

2. The NAS comprises a three-year senior secondary curriculum and a four-year undergraduate programme. The NSS curriculum has been implemented in all secondary schools at Secondary ("S") 4 level since September 2009.

3. The NSS curriculum is made up of three components, namely, (i) four core subjects of Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics and LS; (ii) elective subjects<sup>1</sup> and (iii) Other Learning Experiences<sup>2</sup>. Starting from 2012, the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education ("HKDSE") Examination, administered by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority ("HKEAA"), has replaced the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination and the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination. Students now receive 12 years' school education and will take only one public examination upon completion of S6.

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<sup>1</sup> Students may choose two or three subjects from 20 elective subjects, a range of Applied Learning courses and other languages.

<sup>2</sup> These include moral and civic education, community service, aesthetic development etc.

4. A standards-referenced reporting ("SRR") system is used in reporting student results in the HKDSE Examination. Instead of using grades A to F as in the past, the results of the NSS subjects in the HKDSE Examination are reported in five levels, i.e. 1 to 5. 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. Unlike the previous reporting system under which Grade E is a passing grade, there is no official passing level under SRR.

### The LS subject

5. The LS subject is a new core subject under the NSS curriculum framework. It is of an interdisciplinary nature with the following components<sup>3</sup>-

<b>Areas of Study</b>	<b>Modules</b>	<b>Independent Enquiry Study ("IES")</b>
Self and Personal Development	Module 1 : Personal Development and Interpersonal relationships	Students are required to conduct an IES making use of the knowledge and perspectives gained from the three Areas of Study.
Society and Culture	Module 2 : Hong Kong Today Module 3 : Modern China Module 4 : Globalization	
Science, Technology and the Environment	Module 5 : Public Health Module 6 : Energy Technology and the Environment	

6. The assessment of LS consists of a public examination component and a school-based assessment component<sup>4</sup> –

<sup>3</sup> See Education Bureau "New Academic Structure Web Bulletin" <http://334.edb.hkedcity.net/EN/>

<sup>4</sup> See Education Bureau "New Academic Structure Web Bulletin" <http://334.edb.hkedcity.net/EN/>

<b>Component</b>	<b>Part</b>	<b>Weighting</b>	<b>Duration</b>
Public Examination	Paper 1 : Data-response questions (all of which will have to be answered)	50%	2 hours
	Paper 2 : Extended-response questions (consists of three questions. Candidates will be required to answer one question only.)	30%	1 hour and 15 minutes
School-based Assessment	IES	20%	-----

### **Deliberations on issues of concern**

7. The implementation of the LS subject under the NSS curriculum has been an issue of ongoing concern. After commencement of the Fifth Legislative Council, the Panel on Education ("the Panel") had held meetings to discuss the NSS curriculum and the LS subject was a major issue under deliberation. Questions about the LS subject were also raised at Council meetings and during the examination of Estimates of Expenditure.

#### LS as a core NSS subject

8. Some members were of the view that LS should not be a mandatory NSS subject for admission to local undergraduate programmes. They considered that the absence of structured curricular content and the lack of clear objective assessment criteria had made it difficult for many teachers and students to grasp the subject. There was a view that the LS subject focused too heavily on local political issues. Concern was expressed about possible bias and subjectivity arising from the political stance, if any, of the teachers teaching the subject. Some other members however agreed that LS should be a mandatory subject in the NSS curriculum as it was important for students to acquire a broad base of knowledge and develop analytical and critical thinking skills. They considered that certain hiccups in the initial stage should not become impediments to implementing the LS subject.

9. According to the Administration, LS aims to broaden students' knowledge base and enhance their social awareness through the study of a wide

range of issues. As stated in the reply of the Secretary for Education ("SED") to a question raised by Hon IP Kin-yuen at the Council meeting of 20 November 2014<sup>5</sup>, the Administration's stance was that LS was interdisciplinary in nature and was indispensable to the NSS curriculum as a core subject. The deliberation on whether to set an NSS subject as a core subject or an elective subject should be evidence-based, having regard to the education aims, the need to maintain international standard and recognition, as well as the articulation to study and career pathways.

10. Regarding concerns about the fairness and reliability of the assessment of students' performance in LS as such assessment might be based on the judgment of the examination script markers, HKEAA confirmed that the assessment design for individual subjects had followed the Curriculum and Assessment Guide. The assessment of the LS subject covered all the modules of the subject instead of focusing on a particular module only.

#### Curriculum and review of the LS subject

11. Some members expressed grave concerns about the implementation of the LS subject under the NSS curriculum, such as the curricular contents, teaching methods, teaching materials etc. For instance, in his question raised at the Council meeting on 20 November 2014<sup>6</sup>, Hon IP Kin-yuen sought EDB's clarification on whether there were plans to amend the LS curriculum to remove the topics relating to the politics of Hong Kong and to beef up the contents in areas such as the Basic Law. In the course of examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2015-2016, Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG sought information on the progress of the review of the LS curriculum<sup>7</sup>.

12. The Administration confirmed that the curriculum review of LS was part of the NAS Review which had been taken forward by EDB, the Curriculum Development Council and HKEAA since August 2012 in multiple stages. The recommendations arising from the short-term review were announced in April 2013. The LS subject was fine-tuned based on the feedbacks received, with clearer guidelines provided on IES and adjustments made to the length and complexity of the public examination. The medium-term review was launched in October 2013. As a result of the first stage of the medium-term review, measures relating to the school-based assessment of LS were announced, including the adoption of a structured enquiry approach in the conduct of IES and related modifications of the IES assessment framework at S4 in the 2014-2015 school year.

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<sup>5</sup> See Question No. 2 at the Council meeting of 20 November 2014.

<sup>6</sup> See Question No. 2 at the Council meeting of 20 November 2014.

<sup>7</sup> See Controlling Officer's Reply Serial No. EDB150 in the Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2015-2016.

13. As informed by EDB, in the second stage of the medium-term review, views of teachers on various issues relating to the curriculum implementation, further recommendations to enhance student learning and the direction for the future development of LS would be collected. School surveys were conducted from November 2014 to January 2015 to solicit views from school principals and teachers on the initial recommendations. The final medium-term recommendations on LS would be announced by July 2015.

#### LS textbooks

14. The frequent revision of LS textbooks by publishers and the oversight, if any, by EDB was the subject of a question raised by Dr Hon Helena WONG at the Council meeting of 17 December 2014<sup>8</sup>. At the Council meeting on 25 February 2015, Hon Mrs Regina IP sought explanation on whether EDB would consider requiring publishers of LS textbooks to submit their textbooks to EDB for review, so as to ensure that the textbooks were up to a basic academic standard<sup>9</sup>.

15. In his replies, SED explained that given the evolving and ever-changing nature of contemporary issues, teachers should flexibly adopt a wide range of learning and teaching materials instead of relying solely on the contents provided by textbooks. Students should also explore on their own varied and latest materials in the course of learning. For the time being, the Administration did not consider it the best option to use conventional textbooks for the learning and teaching of LS, and hence, would not accept submission of LS textbooks for review.

16. To mitigate reliance of teachers and students on LS textbooks which have not been reviewed, SED referred to the wide array of practical curriculum resources, learning and teaching materials as well as assessment items provided to teachers through the Web-based Resource Platform for LS. Meanwhile, EDB would continue to share and promote good practices regarding the use and management of learning and teaching resources through school visits and professional networks. It would also develop more "fit-for-purpose" learning and teaching resources for teachers and students. On frequent revisions of LS textbooks, EDB would encourage publishers to supplement or update existing textbooks through reprinting with minor amendments in order to increase the chance of re-using textbooks of older versions. Nevertheless, SED indicated in the long run, the Administration would study the viability of accepting the submission of LS textbooks for review. It would also formulate textbook review

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<sup>8</sup> See Question No. 9 at the Council meeting of 17 December 2014.

<sup>9</sup> See Question No. 12 at the Council meeting of 25 February 2015.

requirements and criteria appropriate to the unique learning requirements and contents of LS for the purpose of quality assurance.

### Support for students with special educational needs (“SEN”)

17. Some members were gravely concerned about the difficulties faced by SEN students in studying the LS subject which placed heavy emphasis on language competency and analytical thinking, in which these students were relatively weak. Given the importance of LS as one of the core subjects, not attaining good results in the subject would become an impediment to SEN students' pursuit of higher education.

18. In the course of its study, the Subcommittee on Integrated Education set up under the Panel had sought information on the performance of SEN students in the four NSS core subjects in past HKDSE Examinations. It was noted that in the 2013 HKDSE Examination, the percentage of SEN students who had attained Level 2 or above in LS was 60%; while the corresponding percentage for regular students was about 89%<sup>10</sup>. Whilst the Subcommittee was fully aware that the performance of candidates in public examinations might be affected by many factors, members considered it important to put in place necessary adaptation measures to ensure that SEN students could be equitably assessed without having an unfair advantage over other candidates. In this regard, the Administration had highlighted that the IES project of the LS subject could be submitted in either written or non-written form to cater for students of different language abilities. According to HKEAA, it was examining the feasibility of allowing SEN students to answer questions by speech-to-text software or audio recording for the LS subject.

### Discontinuation of the LS Curriculum Support Grant (“LSCSG”)

19. The Administration had provided each public sector secondary school and each secondary school under the Direct Subsidy Scheme (“DSS”) with a non-recurrent LSCSG of \$320,000 for use in the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years. The Grant enabled schools to create, at the initial stage of implementing NAS, favourable conditions for the introduction of LS. In mid-2012, the tenure of LSCSG was extended for one more year and an additional \$160,000 was disbursed to some schools on application.

20. Noting that many schools had made use of LSCSG to employ additional teachers/teaching assistants for the new LS subject, some members were gravely concerned that the discontinuation of LSCGS had deprived schools of

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<sup>10</sup> See LC Paper Nos. CB(4)946/12-13(01) and CB(4)233/13-14(01).

purpose-specific funding to enhance the teaching and learning of LS. At the Panel meeting held on 22 June 2013, the Panel passed a motion urging, amongst others, that the Administration should continue to provide not less than \$160,000 a year to each school for implementing the LS subject.

21. According to the Administration, it had been made clear from the outset that LSCSG was a time-limited grant to facilitate the launch of the LS subject. Upon expiry of LSCSG, schools could continue to flexibly deploy other resources such as the recurrent Senior Secondary Curriculum Support Grant to support the NSS curriculum, including the implementation of LS. Besides, other support measures such as web-based learning and teaching materials and professional networks were available to assist schools to implement the LS subject. Hence, the Administration was of the view that there were insufficient justifications for the continuous disbursement of LSCSG.

### **Latest position**

22. The Panel will discuss issues related to the implementation of the LS subject with the Administration at the meeting to be held on 8 June 2015.

### **Relevant papers**

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

## List of relevant papers

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Education	12.11.2012 (Item VI)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a> <a href="#">CB(4)385/12-13(01)</a>
Panel on Education	25.1.2013	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a> <a href="#">CB(4)318/12-13(01)</a>
Panel on Education	30.5.2013 (Item IV)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">CB(4)685/12-13(01)</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Education	22.6.2013	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">CB(4)798/12-13(01)</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Education	9.6.2014 (Item V)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">CB(4)765/13-14(03)</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a> <a href="#">CB(4)803/14-15(01)</a>
Subcommittee on Integrated Education	30.9.2014*	<a href="#">Report of the Subcommittee on Integrated Education to the Panel on Education (Part VI)</a>
Legislative Council	20.11.2014	<a href="#">Official Record of Proceedings Pages 40-52 (Question 2)</a>
Legislative Council	17.12.2014	<a href="#">Official Record of Proceedings Pages 76-80 (Question 9)</a>
Legislative Council	25.2.2015	<a href="#">Official Record of Proceedings Pages 63-66 (Question 12)</a>
Finance Committee	1.4.2015	<a href="#">Administration's replies to members' initial written questions in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2015-2016 (Reply serial number: EDB150)</a>

\* Issue date