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Panel on Education

Meeting on 13 February 2017

Updated background brief on issues related to the Liberal Studies subject under the New Senior Secondary curriculum

Purpose

This paper summarizes the views and concerns of the Panel on Education ("the Panel") on issues related to the Liberal Studies ("LS") subject under the New Senior Secondary ("NSS") curriculum.

Background

2. Since September 2009, the NSS curriculum has been implemented in all secondary schools at Secondary 4 level. The LS subject, which is one of the four core subjects¹ under the NSS curriculum, is of an interdisciplinary nature with the following components:

Areas of Study	Independent Enquiry Study ("IES")
Self & 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 and extending them to new issues or contexts. To help students develop their IES titles, the following themes are suggested: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Media● Education● Religion● Sports● Art● Information and Communication Technology
Society & Culture Module 2: Hong Kong Today Module 3: Modern China Module 4: Globalization	
Science, Technology & the Environment Module 5: Public Health Module 6: Energy Technology and the Environment	

¹ The four core subjects are Chinese language, English Language, Mathematics and LS.

3. The assessment of LS consists of a public examination component and a school-based assessment component:

Component	Part	Weighting	Duration
Public Examination	Paper 1: Data-response questions (all questions compulsory)	50%	2 hours
	Paper 2: Extended-response questions (answer one question only)	30%	1 hour and 15 minutes
School-based Assessment	IES (compulsory for all candidates)	20%	-

4. After the completion of the first Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education ("HKDSE") Examination in mid-2012, the Education Bureau ("EDB"), the Curriculum Development Council and the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority ("HKEAA") have jointly taken forward a review on the New Academic Structure, including the LS subject, with an aim to improve its implementation in multiple stages. According to the information provided by EDB in June 2015, the Administration had put in place short- and medium- term recommendations to fine-tune the LS subject. A summary of the review of curriculum and assessment of LS is in **Appendix I**.

Major views and concerns

5. During the Fifth Legislative Council, the Panel held a number of meetings to discuss the NSS curriculum while the LS subject was a major issue under deliberation. The LS subject was last discussed at the Panel meeting on 8 June 2015. The major views and concerns expressed by members are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

LS as a core subject

6. There was a view that LS should not be a mandatory subject for university admission. It was pointed out that given the absence of structured curriculum content and the lack of clear objective assessment criteria, many students had difficulties in grasping the subject. However, some members agreed that LS should be a mandatory NSS subject as it was important for students to acquire a broad knowledge base and develop analytical and critical thinking skills.

7. According to the Administration, the objective of LS was to develop students' critical thinking and analytical skills, which were essential for students of all disciplines. As a core subject, LS served irreplaceable functions as it interconnected the knowledge across different disciplines and subjects in the NSS curriculum.

Handling of controversial issues

8. Some members queried the appropriateness of EDB's appeal to stakeholders for not allowing political controversies in society to infuse curriculum development. They considered it not possible to evade the discussion of controversial issues as they could be found in all modules of the LS curriculum. The Administration should defer to the professionalism of teachers and schools in assisting their students in analysing controversial topics. In the meantime, a member reflected the concerns expressed by some quarters of the community that some teachers might have sought to impose their political stance and viewpoints on their students when teaching LS.

9. Concern was also raised over the Administration's use of "明辨性思考" rather than "批判性思考" as the Chinese rendition of "critical thinking", and questioned whether the Administration was trying to downplay the importance of students' ability to criticize inadequate policies and practices.

10. As explained by the Administration, EDB had made the appeal to stakeholders in response to concerns expressed by the school sector that learning and teaching should be conducted in a professional manner, free from any outside pressure or political interference. The Administration had no intention to impose any restriction on the choice of discussion topics. While the expression of personal opinions on controversial issues should be respected, students should be encouraged to grasp the objective facts and evidence, analyze issues from multiple perspectives and then make their own judgments and criticism.

Learning and teaching resources

11. Concern was raised about the lack of learning and teaching resources for the LS subject, and EDB currently did not accept the submission of LS textbooks for review. As a result, schools and teachers often had to prepare their own teaching materials. Also, they might rely on LS textbooks which had not been reviewed but were available in the market.

12. The Administration explained that over 2 000 items of learning and teaching materials and assessment items were provided for teachers on the Web-based Resource Platform for Liberal Studies. EDB would also publish the Liberal Studies Curriculum Resources Booklet Series providing ready-to-use learning and teaching resources for each of the six modules in the LS curriculum. In the longer run, it would also explore the feasibility of accepting LS textbooks to be submitted for review.

Support for students with special education needs

13. Certain members were gravely concerned about the difficulties faced by students with special education needs ("SEN") 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. Members considered it important to put in place adaptation measures to ensure that SEN students could be equitably assessed without having an unfair advantage over other candidates.

14. The Administration advised 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, starting from 2015-2016, eligible SEN candidates could apply to use speech-to-text software in taking the LS Examination in the 2017 HKDSE Examination.

Relevant Council questions and Members' motion

15. Members expressed concerns about the curriculum review, assessment guide and teaching resources of the LS subject in the questions raised at the Council meetings of 20 November, 3 and 17 December 2014, and 25 February 2015.

16. At the Council meeting of 25 March 2015, a motion was moved urging the Administration to, amongst others, review the LS subject under the NSS curriculum, but the motion was negated.

Latest position

17. The Panel will discuss with the Administration the implementation and review of the LS curriculum and assessment under the NSS curriculum, as well as the measures to enhance the learning and teaching of the LS subject at the meeting on 13 February 2017.

Relevant papers

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

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 Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination, etc.
<p><u>School-based Assessment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - IES 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.

List of relevant papers

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Education	12.11.2012 (Item VI)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Education	25.1.2013	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Education	30.5.2013 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Education	9.6.2014 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Legislative Council	20.11.2014	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 40-52 (Question 2)
Legislative Council	3.12.2014	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 148-155 (Question 19)
Legislative Council	17.12.2014	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 76-80 (Question 9)
Legislative Council	25.2.2015	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 63-66 (Question 12)
Legislative Council	25.3.2015	Official Record of Proceedings Page 6-40 (Members' Motion) Official Record of Proceedings Page 98-146 (Members' Motion)
Panel on Education	8.6.2015 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes