

Information Paper

Education Commission Framework for Education Reform Background Papers for Topical Seminars

In September, the Education Commission (EC) launched a consultation exercise on the second stage of the review of education system. During the consultation period, the EC organised a series of six topical seminars to exchange views with the public on different areas of the review. To facilitate discussion, the relevant sub-groups under the EC have published the following background papers for public reference. The papers are at the Appendices.

<u>Topical Seminars</u>	<u>Background Papers</u>
Adult and Continuing Education	Background Paper for Seminar on Adult and Continuing Education (Appendix I)
Higher Education	Background Paper for Seminar on Higher Education (Appendix II)
Curriculum Reform And Life-wide Learning	1. A Holistic Review of the Hong Kong School Curriculum – Proposed Reforms (Appendix III) 2. Teaching beyond the Confines of Classrooms with the Community's Support (Appendix IV)
Public Examinations, Performance Assessments and Admission systems for Primary and Secondary Education	1. Secondary School Places Allocation (Appendix V) 2. Proposed Core Competency Assessments (Appendix VI) 3. Review of Public Examinations (Appendix VII)
New Culture for Early Childhood Education: Curriculum, Academic Structure, Teaching Profession	Building up a New Culture for Quality Early Childhood Education (Appendix VIII)
Teachers' Role and Professional Development	Background Paper for Seminar on Teachers' Role and Professional Development (Appendix IX)

Seminar on Adult and Continuing Education Background Paper

The Significance of Lifelong Learning

We live in a rapidly changing world in terms of technological, economic, political and social transformations. The overall direction of change is towards an increasingly knowledge-based society. The accelerating pace of change means that the cycle of knowledge/skill renewal is shortening. As a result, the formal education received during the early part of life is inadequate to support career development throughout a working career and beyond.

Lifelong learning thus become a central feature of our lives and a necessity for everyone. Both individuals and organisations have to constantly update themselves with the latest knowledge and skills in order to adapt, compete and excel in a highly competitive and globalised economy. Information on the development of lifelong learning in various parts of the world is at Annex I.

In the context of Hong Kong, which is devoid of natural resources, human resources are undoubtedly the most important factor contributing to our competitive edge. To exploit this resource to the full lifelong learning is a necessity, not a luxury. Lifelong learning can thus be seen as an essential social investment, which is vital for human resources development, continuous economic growth, improved quality of life, as well as the enhancement of Hong Kong's long-term international competitiveness.

Rising Demand for Continuing Education in Hong Kong

Over the past years, the demand for continuing education in Hong Kong has increased dramatically. Many continuing education institutions have been established and these institutions often have continuing professional development initiatives closely linked with the employers of various industries. As a result, courses can be developed or adapted quickly to provide employees with new knowledge and skills. The HKSAR Government has been supportive of the development of lifelong learning in Hong Kong. Information on the existing support and measures for continuing education is at Annex II. The major providers of lifelong learning opportunities for adults in Hong Kong is at Annex III. The University Grants Committee (UGC) estimated in 1996 that the number of students attending higher level continuing and professional education (CPE) courses were 320,000. The scale of this education sector is continuously on the rise. Despite the economic downturn since the latter part of 1997, enrolment figures in most CPE institutions over the past year have in fact increased testifying to the importance of re-education in a period of economic transformation. It is evident that continuing education has become a significant part of the educational scene in Hong Kong.

Unlike the provision of formal higher education which is heavily subsidised by taxpayers' money via the UGC, the continuing education sector in Hong Kong is largely self-financed.

Aims of Continuing Education

The Education Commission (EC) issued the “Aims of Education” consultation document in January 1999, outlining the overall aims of education, the aims of early childhood education, school education as well as the tertiary education for Hong Kong in the 21st century. The Ad-hoc Sub-Group on Continuing Education now proposes to add the following section on “Continuing Education” to the “Aims of Education”:

Continuing Education

Continuing education is an important stage in the process of lifelong learning.

(A) Vision

- To establish a learning society and promote lifelong learning as an important means to enhancing quality of life and pursuing professional excellence in a fast-changing and increasingly knowledge-based society.

(B) Aims

- to promote a culture of lifelong learning among all people in Hong Kong;
- to empower learners to develop their potential and attain self actualization; and
- to equip learners with updated knowledge and skills to adapt, compete and excel in a fast-changing and increasingly globalised economy.

The Way Forward

Moving into the new millennium, continuing education in Hong Kong faces the following challenges:

Maintaining a High-calibre Workforce

Hong Kong is undergoing structural economic changes – transforming from a manufacturing-based economy into an increasingly knowledge-based economy. This results in a significant mismatch between the supply of and demand for manpower. There is an urgent need to assist the displaced labour to equip themselves with the necessary skills and knowledge to adapt to these structural changes. How to achieve this in the most effective and efficient manner is a challenge for all continuing education providers in Hong Kong. A supportive Government policy is helpful in this aspect.

Professionalisation

As Hong Kong becomes a knowledge-based society, the social demand for *professionalisation* is constantly on the rise. In addition to the traditional professionals such as physicians, engineers and lawyers, accreditation is now required for an increasing array of

professionals ranging from plumbers, interior designers, beauticians, dietitians, real estate agents, social counsellors, to physicians in traditional Chinese medicine etc. An important area of development for continuing education providers in Hong Kong is to work closely with the various professional associations to set up programmes to meet this huge societal demand.

A Comprehensive Academic Qualifications Framework

Another important area is the establishment of a comprehensive framework for qualification accreditation and recognition, especially at the sub-degree levels. With this framework, achievement made by learners through different channels and different modes could be properly recognized. It will provide linkage among different continuing education courses run by different course providers at different levels, so that individual learners could choose a learning path which best suits their interest, abilities and personal plan. Such a framework will also help to assure quality of the courses it covers.

The Government has recently set up a working group to draw up a preliminary proposal for a qualifications framework for the Vocational Training Council's programmes and the Employees' Retraining Board's retraining programmes. Some of the major issues that have to be addressed include the scope, structure, benchmarking, administration and funding of the framework. The proposed framework may form a basis upon which a comprehensive qualifications framework can be further built up to cover other continuing education programmes such as those at sub-degree and degree levels.

Continuing Professional Development in the Workplace

The workplace is also a fertile ground for in situ continuing professional development (CPD). In some overseas countries, this concept has already led to the development of a new type of continuing education - *work based studies (WBS) programmes* - which involves the close liaison and co-operation between employers and the tertiary institutions. This is an area worth exploring by the continuing education sector in Hong Kong, as a recent survey reveals that one of the major deterrents to the pursuit of continuing education is the lack of time or the inconvenient timing of classes.

Education for leisure and Third Age Learning

Continuing education is not only about career development. It is also about the quality of life. Learning is one of the most rewarding forms of past-times - whether it is learning to paint, to make pottery, to sail a yacht and to recognise the birds of Hong Kong. "Education for leisure" is therefore a huge market waiting to be developed.

Another major area of development is "third age" learning. As in other industrialised countries, the population of Hong Kong is getting older, meaning that more people in our society are leading much longer and healthier lives than before. Pre-retirement education for the management of one's financial assets, physical fitness, and mental health etc., has been relatively neglected in Hong Kong until now. Closer liaison between the continuing education providers and the social service sector of Hong Kong would be beneficial in this respect.

Strengthening of the ties between the Continuing Education Sector and the Hong Kong Government

The liaison between the continuing education providers and the Government has to be strengthened. The former should provide more information and advice to policy makers, while the latter should provide policy guidance and infrastructural support for continuing education.

Consideration may be given to establishing an information database to provide learners with easy access to information about continuing education programmes available in Hong Kong. At present, the Education Department (ED) has maintained a register of non-local higher education and professional courses in Hong Kong. It can be accessed by the public through the internet. Learners may also approach the Further Studies Resources Centre of ED for information and advice on continuing learning opportunities in Hong Kong. In this connection, the Government is conducting a stock-taking survey on all continuing education courses available in Hong Kong, to provide a basis for constructing a comprehensive database on continuing education. This information could also be made available to the public through the internet.

Regarding facilities for promoting lifelong learning, there is room for more fully utilizing the resources of the existing institutions and public bodies, such as schools, community halls, tertiary institutions, language institutions and public libraries. For example, schools and other education institutions may be encouraged to allow continuing education institutions and learners to use their classrooms, lecture rooms and libraries at a charge that can cover their overheads. Social service bodies may also consider assuming the functions of giving advice or counselling to potential learners, particularly those lack the capabilities or initiatives to explore continuing learning opportunities such as those of lower educational levels.

Maintaining the Cosmopolitan Nature of Continuing Education

It is also important to maintain the cosmopolitan nature of continuing education in Hong Kong. Cooperation with distinguished tertiary institutions overseas would not only provide specialised courses not available in Hong Kong, but could also allow us to benefit from the valuable experience and expertise of other successful practitioners in the field.

At present, all non-local higher education and professional courses should be registered or exempted under the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance before they can be conducted in Hong Kong. This is to ensure that the institution offering the course is a recognized body, and that the courses offered locally and the qualifications obtained are comparable to those offered in the home country. At present, about 450 non-local courses are registered or exempted under this Ordinance.

Riding the Online Revolution

The rise of the Internet and *online education* is posing an enormous challenge to the world of higher education and continuing education worldwide. It is imperative that continuing education providers in Hong Kong should rise to the challenge and utilise this new

technology to further the cause of lifelong learning. They would make use of the technology to export their services to places overseas, most notably into Mainland China and various places in Southeast Asia. By seizing this opportunity, Hong Kong may conceivably become an important exporter of educational services in the East Asian region and beyond in the coming century.

Issues for Further Consideration

There are four key issues that have to be addressed in order to foster an open and comprehensive continuing education system in Hong Kong:

- ***Portability and transferability of credits*** – How can a comprehensive accreditation mechanism be established to facilitate the portability and transferability of credit units?
- ***Infrastructural changes*** – How can the collaboration among various stakeholders like the continuing education providers, learners, government and employers, etc. be enhanced?
- ***Facilitating mechanism*** – What mechanism should be put in place to encourage learners at all levels to pursue lifelong learning?
- ***Resources*** – How can the existing public resources allocated to education and the community resources be utilised more effectively to promote and support continuing education ? Should a redistribution of resources be made to enhance effectiveness?

(Acknowledgement: We are grateful for the information and ideas contributed to this paper by the Federation for Continuing Education in Tertiary Institutions.)

Ad-hoc Sub-Group on Continuing Education
Education Commission

October 1999

List of References:

1. “Promoting Lifelong Learning in Hong Kong” by Mr Andrew Ma
2. “International Perspectives on lifelong learning” by Mr Albert Tuijnman
3. “Roles of Continuing Education in a Rapidly Changing Society” by Mr Charles Wong

Worldwide Developments in Lifelong Learning

The lifelong learning developments have taken place in different parts of the world in the past few decades. These worldwide innovations can be highlighted as follows:

1957	Mainland China	Incorporation of adult education in the Education Act
1969	West Germany	Incorporation of lifelong education in the Basic Law
1972	UNESCO	Faure's Report on 'Learning to be': laid out a comprehensive architecture for lifelong education
1976	USA	Lifelong Learning Act
1985	Macau	Adult Education Act
1987	Mainland China	Continuing education as one of the main objectives in educational policy
1990	Japan	Lifelong Learning Law; Lifelong Learning Council
1994	UNESCO	'Lifelong Learning for all' as mid-term strategy
1995	Mainland China	A lifelong learning mechanism established in the Education Act
1996	European Union	European Year of Lifelong Learning
	OECD	'Lifelong learning a reality for all' be priority for the member states
	South Korea	Lifelong Learning Act
1997	UNESCO	Hamburg World Adult Education Conference
1998	Taiwan	Lifelong Learning Year; White Paper on 'Towards the Learning Society'
	UK	Green Paper on Lifelong Learning
1999	Hong Kong	Lifelong Learning Festival

Existing Support and Measures for Continuing Education

Support for Continuing Education

- (1) The Open Learning Institute was established in 1989. With the support of the Government, the Institute has within a short span of nine years become the seventh university in Hong Kong. To date, the Open University of Hong Kong has over 8 000 graduates and some 24 000 students. The Government has so far provided about \$500 million of grant to the University.
- (2) Apart from offering all kinds of education courses from primary to secondary six level for adults in 42 centres, the Education Department also provides grants for voluntary agencies to organise adult education courses.
- (3) Five institutions funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC) have each set up a special department to run continuing professional education courses on a self-financing basis.
- (4) Vocational Training Council offers a wide range of educational courses.
- (5) With continued injection of funds from the Government, the Employees Retraining Board provides financial support for a number of training bodies.

Ensuring Quality of Courses

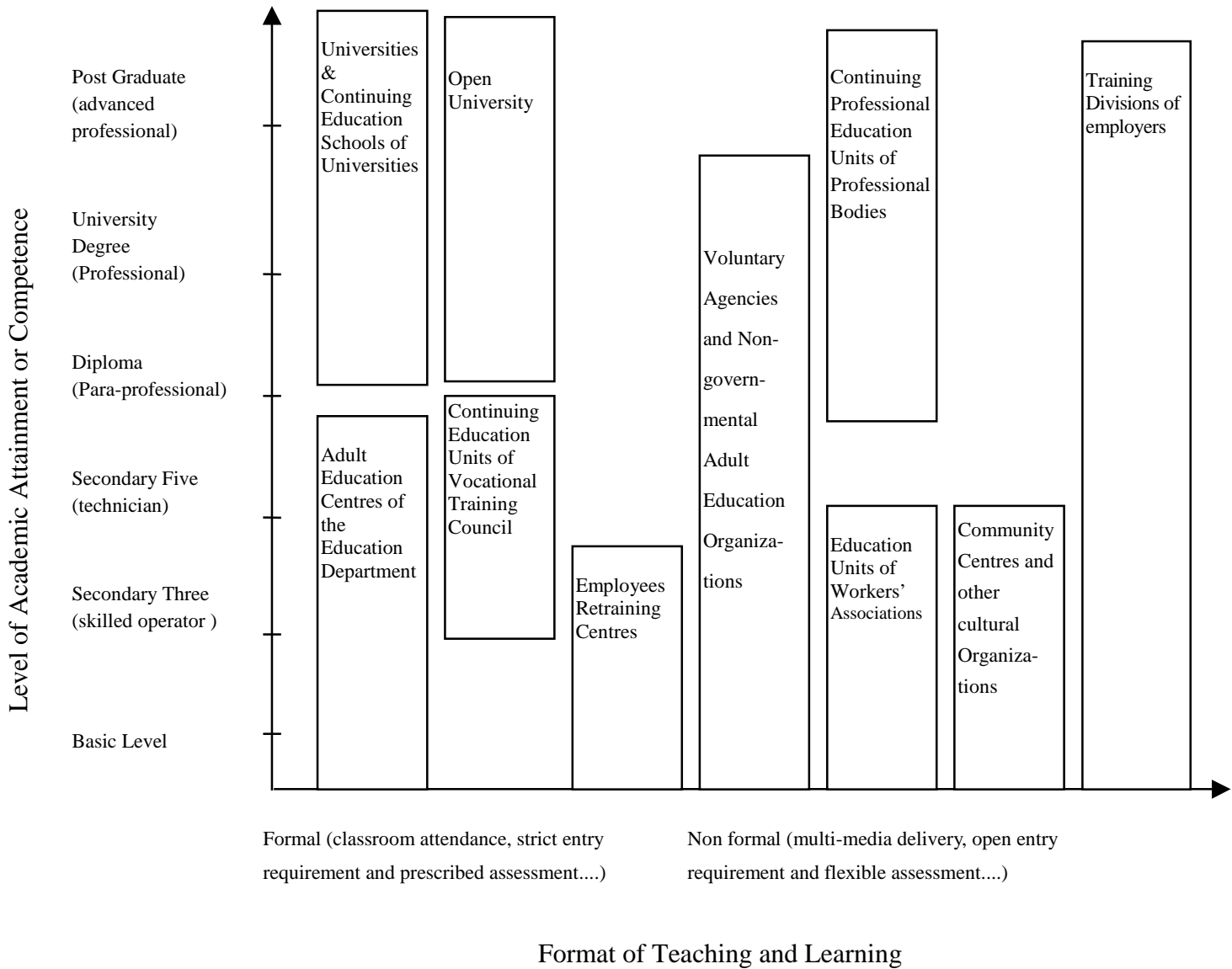
To ensure the quality of non-local education courses, the Government has enacted the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance so as to provide a legal basis for regulating the quality of courses organised in Hong Kong by non-local higher and professional education bodies.

Financial Support for Persons Pursuing Further Studies

The Government at present offers the following financial support for people who pursue further studies:

- (1) To provide funds for the Open University to set up a Student Loan Fund to enable students with financial difficulties to study at the Open University.
- (2) Students who are taking qualified courses, including students of the UGC-funded institutions, the Hong Kong Institute of Education, the Hong Kong Shue Yan College and Open University, are eligible to apply for loans under the non-means tested loan scheme.
- (3) Tax paying learners may claim tax deduction for expenses up to a maximum of \$30,000 incurred for continuing education, including tuition and examination fees, related to their employment.

Providers of Lifelong Learning Opportunities for Adults



Seminar on Higher Education

Background Paper

Introduction

As Hong Kong is transforming into a knowledge-based society, lifelong learning is essential to everyone. To cope with the challenges of the changing world, every individual needs to pursue learning across the entire life span, from cradle to grave, to continuously update his/her knowledge, skills and perspectives. To promote and facilitate lifelong learning, we need to review the whole education system, including the higher education sector, and to make necessary changes as soon as possible.

Vision

Everyone who aspires to higher education should be given opportunities to attend programmes appropriate to his/her abilities, as a first step towards self-motivated lifelong learning. The higher education sector should embrace a higher degree of flexibility and diversity so that individual learners can choose among different institutions and modes and determine their own pace of study in pursuing higher education.

Key Issues for discussion

- Should the *university admission system* be reformed to give due consideration to students' achievements in the non-academic aspects ? How should this be implemented ?
- Should a *fully transferable credit unit system* be established among various tertiary institutions, and eventually among different modes of higher education ? How can this be achieved ?
- How should we define "*first degree*" ? What should first-degree students learn ?

Structure of Higher Education

The higher education sector consists of the following components:

- University education
- Post-secondary college education
- Continuing education

(I) University Education

(a) *University admission*

The University admission system has a strong signalling effect on teaching and learning in primary and secondary education. If university admissions can give due consideration to students' achievements in all aspects (i.e. including both academic and non-academic areas such as sports, arts and social services), it will encourage schools, teachers, parents and students to put more emphasis on all-round development.

We suggest that the following **principles** should be adopted in developing the future admission framework:

- objectivity, transparency and cost-effectiveness;
- maintaining the requirement for high academic standards, in particular for language proficiency; and
- sufficient lead time for schools and students to prepare for the new admission system.

Issues to consider:

- Would the conducting of *interviews* help to achieve the above objective? What would be the practical difficulties/problems involved? How should interviews be conducted in order to fulfil the above principles?

- Should universities take into account **students' whole profile** (e.g. record of schools' internal assessment on the students' academic and non-academic performance and record of the students' participation in social service and organization activities) ? What would be the practical difficulties/ problems involved ? How to overcome such problems/ difficulties ? How should it be implemented to ensure objectivity, transparency and cost-effectiveness ?
- In some other countries, students applying for admission to universities are required to take aptitude tests (e.g. SAT in US). The Singaporean Government has also decided to introduce such a test with effect from 2003. Would it be desirable to introduce **aptitude tests** in Hong Kong as one of the entry requirements for university admission ?
- What other mechanisms could be designed to give due consideration to students' achievements in all aspects while maintaining high standards for graduation ?

(b) Credit unit system

A portable and transferable credit unit system should be put in place within and among the universities so that students may choose to take modules across different disciplines and in different universities. They can also pursue their studies at a pace which best suits their abilities and personal plans. There should be flexible entry and exit points such that the students can accumulate the credits earned, suspend and resume their studies according to their personal plans.

The establishment of such a system among the universities would pave the way for the development of a comprehensive qualifications recognition system among universities, post-secondary colleges and continuing education institutions. With such a system, access to higher education would be greatly widened as the qualifications attained by learners through different channels and different modes could be duly recognised, accumulated and transferred among different institutions.

Issues to be further considered:

- How could universities, post-secondary colleges and continuing education institutions progress towards the establishment of such a system ?
- What are the practical difficulties/problems involved ? For example, does the current funding methodology of tertiary institutions facilitate the establishment of a portable and transferable credit unit system ?
- How can the difficulties and problems be overcome ?

(c) First-degree programmes

Problem-solving in our daily lives and work often requires knowledge across different disciplines as well as generic skills and abilities such as analytical skills, creativity, communication skills and ability for teamwork. Thus, instead of confining each first degree student's study to modules within a certain discipline, we suggest that all first degree students should be allowed to take modules across multiple disciplines. Besides, university education should also embody elements which could help the students develop their values, attitudes and global outlook.

Issues to be further considered:

- While moving towards greater generalization, should first-year degree students pursue a certain degree of specialisation to help them lay the foundation for undertaking specialized studies at higher levels ? For example, for law students, should they be required to obtain a certain percentage of credit units in the law discipline while they are allowed to undertake modules in other disciplines such as social sciences and arts ?
- Should there be different degrees of generalization/specialization in different faculties ?
- Could the double –degree system be implemented in more universities in Hong Kong (i.e. students undertake studies for two different degrees in

parallel) ?

- Could the system of ordinary degrees and honours degrees be implemented in Hong Kong ? (For example, for the first part of the programme, the students undertake more general studies and obtain ordinary degrees upon graduation. For those who would like to proceed to pursue more specialized studies and meet the requirements prescribed by the universities or certain employers, they may study for one more year and obtain honours degrees upon graduation).

(d) Enriched campus life

Campus life is an important part of university education. A comprehensive and rich campus life will help students develop their character and life-skills. It serves to:

- develop students' all-round capabilities, including communication and leadership skills;
- inspire their passion for life; and
- instill a sense of commitment.

Suggestions on how to enrich university students' campus life:

- Should university students be provided with more opportunities to live in residential halls ?
- Should student organizations be allowed to achieve higher degree of self-governance to nurture leadership ?
- Should the relative balance of campus activities be re-adjusted to allow more room for non-academic activities ?
- Should teaching staff devote more time to make personal contacts with and provide guidance for students ?
- Should all freshmen be required to undertake community services for a prescribed period of time ?
- Should universities provide students with more practical working experience through closer liaison with the business sector or by recruiting their own students to undertake part-time work in the universities (such as in libraries, helpdesks, cafeteria or conducting researches) ?

Post-secondary College Education

Post-secondary Colleges refer to institutions which perform one or more of the following roles:

(a) Roles

- ***Alternative route to higher education:*** to encourage and facilitate lifelong learning by widening the access to higher education and providing flexible progression routes for individual learners to pursue higher education at their own pace.
- ***Second chance for academic certification:*** to provide a second chance for those who have yet to attain qualifications at secondary level; and
- ***Providing opportunities to acquire skills/qualifications recognized by employers:*** to provide a variety of learning opportunities to assist individual learners to acquire skills/ qualifications which are recognized by employers.

Existing post-secondary colleges include institutions such as Shue Yan College, Institute of Vocational Education, Hang Seng School of Commerce, Chu Hai College and sub-degree programmes of tertiary institutions, etc.

(b) Operating Principles

Should the following principles be adopted by post-secondary colleges ?

- “lenient entry, stringent graduation”;
- market-driven;
- flexible duration of study;
- flexible mode of study; and
- providing a diversity of choice for learners.

Issues to be further considered:

- How could this alternative route to higher education be enhanced ? How could we promote the development of post-secondary colleges, building on the existing institutions ?
- How to establish the interface between post-secondary colleges and universities ? Is it necessary to establish a quality assurance mechanism and a comprehensive qualifications accreditation system to promote recognition and transferability of qualifications awarded by post-secondary colleges ? How can Government, post-secondary colleges, universities, accrediting bodies and employers cooperate to establish such systems ?
- How should different stakeholders share the responsibility of funding these programmes ?

Continuing Education

Continuing education provides another channel for pursuing higher education. Existing major providers of continuing education programmes at higher education level include the Open University of Hong Kong, continuing and professional education sections of UGC-funded institutions, Institute of Vocational Education and professional bodies. For more information on this education sector, please refer to the background paper for the Seminar on Adult and Continuing Education in the EC website (<http://www.e-c.edu.hk>).

Education Commission Sub-group on Higher Education

October 1999

A Holistic Review of the Hong Kong School Curriculum Proposed Reforms

Content	Page
Why reform the school curriculum?	1
Reflections on the school curriculum – from now to future	1
Gathering views from the public, piloting recommendations and implementing the curriculum in schools	1
Our beliefs: education, curriculum, our future generation	2
Proposals for curriculum reform	2
Broad reform measures	3
I. Curriculum as learning experiences for whole person development	3
<i>1. Providing lifelong learning experiences which are essential to students' whole person development</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>2. Emphasis on development of generic elements for lifelong learning</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>3. From compartmentalized and overcrowded school subjects to Key Learning Areas for a broad and balanced curriculum</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>4. Open and flexible framework for different organisations/courses rather than 'teaching syllabus'</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>5. Continuity, progression and coherence to bridge gaps at interfaces and reinforce links</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>6. From early specialization in grammar, technical and prevocational school curricula to whole-person development throughout schooling</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>7. Complementary formal, informal and non-formal curricula</i>	<i>4</i>
II. Enhancement of quality teaching and learning	5
<i>1. Keeping the school as the centre of student learning</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>2. Constructing a conceptual road map for lifelong learning at various stages of schooling</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>3. Accommodating new needs of society, strengthening relevant elements of learning and providing alternatives</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>4. Improving the quality of teaching and learning, and catering for student potential, abilities and needs</i>	<i>5</i>

5. <i>Using feedback from assessment to improve teaching and learning</i>	6
III. Flexible use of learning resources	6
1. <i>From textbooks to diversified learning resources</i>	6
2. <i>Changing conception of learning time and time-tabling</i>	6
IV. Implementation of effective curriculum initiatives	6
V. Research agenda and priority	7
Student entitlement of learning opportunities	7
1. <i>Early childhood education</i>	7
2. <i>9-year basic education</i>	8
3. <i>Post-basic/senior secondary Education</i>	8
Initial proposals in Key Learning Areas	8
Chinese language	8
English language	9
Mathematics	9
Science	9
Technology education	10
Personal, social and humanities education (PSHE)	10
Art education	11
Physical education	11
Enablement measures	11
1. <i>Coordination and collaboration</i>	11
2. <i>System adjustment and management</i>	11
3. <i>Professional development</i>	12
Factors leading to success of curriculum reforms	12
Advice sought	12

A Holistic Review of the Hong Kong School Curriculum Proposed Reforms

Why do we have to reform the school curriculum?

We have to

- provide students with a school curriculum which enables them to construct knowledge and develop a global outlook to cope with the changing and interdependent world in the 21st century;
- develop students' lifelong learning skills as stipulated in the aims of education (to enjoy learning, to enhance effectiveness in communication, to develop creativity, and to have a sense of commitment) in readiness for a knowledge-based economy and society;
- set the directions for developing an open, flexible and coherent framework for Curriculum 2000 in order to improve the quality of students through effective teaching and learning.

Reflections on the school curriculum – Present and future

To achieve the aims of curriculum reform, we need to seriously review the existing curriculum. The proposed reforms are based on answers to the following questions asked in the review process:

1. What is worth learning?
2. How can students learn more effectively?
3. What have we learnt from curriculum development experiences in Hong Kong in the past?
4. What are the recommendations for curriculum reform?

Gathering views from the public, piloting recommendations and implementing the curriculum in schools

We believe that the most effective way to develop the curriculum is to collaborate with our partners. We hope that eventually a widely accepted curriculum will be developed through our concerted effort. In this connection, we have worked out an agenda for the review of the curriculum.

The agenda for the review is as follows:

Schedule	Stages	Key tasks
Dec 1998 – Sep 1999	1 st stage review initiated by CDC, synchronized with EC's Aims of Education and Academic Structure Review	Core group, working group (making up of teachers, school heads, professionals from tertiary, etc.) meetings, seminars, informal Networking
Sep – Dec 1999	(1) Consultation on broad reform directions (2) Discussion on specific changes in school curriculum	Public forum on 28 Oct and multiple consultative strategies Public forums from Nov 1999 to April 2000, on-going meetings
Jan – Jun 2000	2 nd stage review and development of framework for Curriculum 2000, synchronized with finalised recommendations of EC re academic structure review	On-going meetings, piloting
Jun 2000	Final report/proposals for public consultation	Submission of final report to CDC and co-ordination with EC
Sep 2000 – Aug 2002	Piloting of alternative models	Tripartite development of curriculum planning-practice-resources

Note: At the end of the current stage of consultation by end of December 1999, a co-ordinated agenda, strategy and schedule of related reforms will be jointly made by the Education Department (ED), Curriculum Development Council (CDC), Hong Kong Examinations Authority (HKEA), Education Commission (EC) and Board of Education (BoE).

Our beliefs: education, curriculum, our future generation

We strongly believe that our future generation will learn better than us. A comprehensive curriculum reform is proposed with our commitment to the following core values:

- A learner-focussed curriculum is developed in the best interest of students;
- A belief in all students' ability to learn and their having multiple-intelligences and different potentials, resulting in a firm commitment to provide equal opportunities for students to have access to essential learning, as manifested in the entitlements of students;
- Diversity and flexibility in curriculum development to suit the needs of students and different school contexts;
- Partnership in curriculum development with all sectors of society through a participative, interactive, and collaborative approach.

Proposals for curriculum reform

The purpose of the following proposals is to suggest the general directions for curriculum development in Hong Kong in harmony with the vision for lifelong learning, which would ultimately contribute to improving the

quality of teaching/learning, and the quality of Hong Kong people.

The proposed reforms are grouped under the following categories:

- **Broad reform measures**
- **Student entitlements of learning opportunities**
- **Suggested agenda for more specific changes**
- **Enablement measures**

Broad reform measures

In order to develop a school curriculum for the 21st century, we will adopt the following broad reform measures: (Please refer to the Appendix “Concepts of the school curriculum”)

I. Curriculum as learning experiences for whole person development

1. Providing lifelong learning experiences which are essential to students’ whole person development

To meet the needs of students and society, it is necessary to provide lifelong learning experiences through the school curriculum. Five types of learning experiences are regarded as essential to school students for whole person development:

- ※ intellectual development (e.g. academic studies)
- ※ life experiences (e.g. moral & sex education, character formation)
- ※ work-related/vocational experiences (knowledge of links between school curriculum and job opportunities,)
- ※ contributions to community service (e.g. civic education)
- ※ physical and aesthetic development (e.g. recreational sports, fitness training, art activities)

2. Emphasis on development of generic elements for lifelong learning

Positive values and attitudes (e.g. moral, civic, environmental, sex, etc.), studying skills, critical thinking, information technology, creativity and interpersonal relationships (especially respect for others), are regarded as paramount for lifelong learning in a world where knowledge is ever changing. The generic elements stated above would be developed throughout all stages of schooling and across the Key Learning Areas (KLAs).

3. From compartmentalized and overcrowded school subjects to Key Learning Areas for a broad and balanced curriculum

The generic elements for lifelong learning are intertwined with the five types of essential learning experiences. To meet the needs of students, and to strengthen lateral coherence among subjects, the existing subject-bound curriculum is reorganized into eight KLAs (Chinese, English, Mathematics, Science, Technology education, Personal, social & humanities education, Arts education, and Physical education). The KLAs provide contexts for the development of attitudes/values, concepts/knowledge,

and skills as elements of learning specific to each KLA or common among them.

4. Open and flexible framework for different curriculum organisations/courses rather than 'teaching syllabus'

The existing practice of defining the curricula recommended by CDC through a set of 'teaching syllabuses' of school subjects with detailed prescription of contents serving also the examination purpose would not be an effective way to achieve the new aims of education. An open and flexible curriculum framework which specifies key concepts, issues, skills, values and attitudes broadly in KLAs and generic elements of learning across them will form the basis for diversified curriculum organisations (e.g. subjects/courses, modules, permeated studies, integrated studies, projects) to suit the needs, interests and abilities of students, contexts of schools, and also non-examinable and examinable curricula/courses. To meet the changing needs of society, the curriculum has to be renewed flexibly at appropriate intervals to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

5. Continuity, progression and coherence to bridge gaps at interfaces and to reinforce links

The new framework should ensure vertical continuity and smooth progression to bridge curriculum and learning gaps at interfaces such as kindergarten/primary, primary/secondary, and junior secondary/senior secondary. Lateral coherence is developed across KLAs throughout all levels of education to promote multi-perspective approach, enhance effective teaching/learning and facilitate development of alternative curriculum and delivery models. Links between attitudes/values, concepts/knowledge, and skills would also be reinforced.

6. From early specialization in grammar, technical and prevocational school curricula to whole-person development throughout schooling

Early specialisation/streaming in grammar, technical and prevocational school curricula will be eliminated while a whole-person, broad and balanced curriculum is promoted for all stages of schooling. Yet allowance for some specialised studies (e.g. vocational studies, sciences, technology, humanities, art) at senior secondary level will be given to cater for different interests and potentials of students.

7. Complementary formal, informal and non-formal curricula

Learning experiences are to be gained from learning in the classroom as well as actual environments in the community and work places. Learning experiences in the different environments complement each other. Therefore, traditional boundaries between the formal (classroom), informal (extra-curricular activities), and non-formal (outside school as a social institution) curricula are not to be stressed; instead, they form integral parts of the school curriculum.

II. Enhancement of quality teaching and learning

1. Keeping the school as the centre of student learning

The school as a social institution will remain the centre of student learning. It will organise the necessary learning situations for students. The curriculum also facilitates a linkage between formal, informal and non-formal curricula in personal, social and humanities education.

2. Constructing a conceptual road map for lifelong learning at various stages of schooling

A conceptual road map of lifelong learning to be supported by curriculum evolution at various stages of schooling will require:

- ✧ opportunities for learning in real and relevant contexts and appreciation of interconnectedness of knowledge through inquiring and conceptualising in basic education; and more opportunities in applying concepts and abstract learning with gradual formulation of conceptual structure of disciplines or specialised areas at senior secondary level;
- ✧ opportunities for life experiences outside the classroom, mainly organised by schools or agencies, for personal and social development, independence in handling life situations, cultivation of positive values and attitudes and development of responsible citizenship;
- ✧ opportunities to offer community service at every stage of schooling, and to recognise one's contribution for the development of confidence, civic consciousness and creativity;
- ✧ opportunities to gain exposure to and experience in jobs related with studies in school, so as to cultivate a positive work attitude and career aspirations; and
- ✧ opportunities to acquire a sense of aesthetic appreciation and an awareness of physical fitness leading to the development of personal values for aesthetics and choice for physical activities for quality and healthy life.

3. Accommodating new needs of society, strengthening relevant elements of learning and providing alternatives

In the new curriculum, cross-curricular elements and socially and economically relevant new elements are to be strengthened or added (such as information technology, science & technology, personal and social education, thinking skills, creativity). In the open and flexible framework, the organisation of courses around the elements of learning is made on the basis of the following: a) accommodating new needs, especially those relevant to daily life, society, economy; b) minimising interruption in schools, and c) providing alternatives for transition to the new vision at the schools' own pace.

4. Improving the quality of teaching and learning, and catering for student potential, abilities and needs

All curriculum reforms are geared towards improving the quality of teaching and learning. The effectiveness of teaching and learning has to be enhanced by focusing on the students, teaching and learning processes and their interaction, opportunities and constraints, as well as the learning outcomes.

The following are some of the major suggestions:-

- ✧ Diversified teaching/learning styles, strategies, contexts and resources are to be encouraged for different purposes and needs of teaching and learning.
- ✧ Based on our conviction that all students including those with special educational needs can

learn, we consider possible ways to cater for students with different learning potentials, abilities and needs such as alternative curriculum models in KLAs, suggestions on pedagogical approaches, resources and school-based support.

- ✧ The strengths of a learning culture in family, schools, and society should be preserved, reinforced and effectively used to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

5. Using feedback from assessment to improve teaching and learning

Assessment is an integral part of the school curriculum. The feedback from assessment should be effectively used to improve teaching and learning. The different purposes and modes of assessment (e.g. objective tests, projects, portfolios) need to be distinguished and made clear to schools so that they are consistent with different curriculum aims, teaching/learning processes and contents.

III. Flexible use of learning resources

1. From textbooks to diversified learning resources

The culture of over-reliance on textbooks as the main teaching/learning resources will be changed through greater emphasis on inquiry learning and the introduction of diversified learning resources. The change is essential for providing the appropriate contexts for learning as well as meeting the changing needs of society and nature of knowledge for real lifelong learning.

2. Changing conception of learning time and time-tabling

The conventional practice of defining and allocating teaching time for each subject in terms of number of periods per week/cycle for formal teaching/learning in the classroom should be revamped. In line with the development mentioned above and subject to completion of the framework for Curriculum 2000, flexible time-tabling arrangements would be suggested for formal learning in each KLA and other types of learning experiences to meet the needs of students and schools. However, measures have to be taken to ensure that school-time or learning time is appropriately distributed and well used.

IV. Implementation of effective curriculum initiatives

The key curriculum concepts embodied in past curriculum initiatives are considered together with other reform measures and used in different curriculum processes. These include, for instance:

- ✧ Learning targets in Target Oriented Curriculum (TOC)
- ✧ Use of integration in an open and flexible curriculum framework to develop diversified organisations and models
- ✧ The student-focussed spirit as a common and overriding principle for teaching/learning e.g. the Activity Approach, Mastery Learning
- ✧ Effective use of contextualised teaching and learning strategies e.g. task-based learning in TOC
- ✧ Modular Curriculum as a form of curriculum organisation
- ✧ Information technology as learning tool and resources

- ◇ Criterion-referenced and formative assessment in Target Oriented Assessment for informing and improving teaching/learning

V. Research agenda and priority

Theory directs practice and practice informs theory. It is important to strike a balance between theory and practice through developing an agenda for curriculum research. Priority will be given to research on learning effectiveness including the use of information technology, how students learn better, and catering for learner differences as means to improve teaching/learning quality. Effort is also needed to promote an ethos of action research in schools so that school principals, teachers and other practitioners can contribute as partners for informing the improvement of teaching/learning. Emphasis should also be put on evaluation research that will inform processes, possibilities and constraints of curriculum change (including teaching/learning) related to the new curriculum at various levels of analysis (e.g. systemic, schools, departments, teachers, classrooms, pupils, other learning environments).

Student entitlement of learning opportunities

It is believed that students are entitled to a range of learning opportunities that contribute to the achievement of the aims of education. The student entitlements at each stage of schooling imply a social contract in which different sectors of society have a role to play to realise them. Through different curriculum designs at different stages of schooling, students are entitled to receive:

1. Early childhood education

- ◇ Balanced development in communication, cognition, physique, emotion, ethics, social skills, and aesthetics
- ◇ A safe and healthy environment
- ◇ Developing own potentiality
- ◇ Practising good learning and living habits
- ◇ Developing into caring, responsible, co-operative, and self-disciplined members of the community

2. 9-year basic education

- ◇ A broad and balanced school curriculum comprising different learning experiences and all key learning areas
- ◇ Development of core competencies in the KLAs of English, Chinese, Mathematics, Science, Technology education, Personal, social and humanities education, Arts education and Physical education; and enhancement of interpersonal relationships for work appropriate for the junior secondary exit point, and mastery of lifelong learning skills
- ◇ Opportunities for appreciating a multi-perspective approach to life issues (e.g. through integrated activities, projects)
- ◇ Opportunities for life experiences, social services, physical and aesthetic development using the community environment and facilities
- ◇ Exposure to career relevance and opportunities linked to KLAs

- ✧ Sufficiently wide range of learning targets, learning content, learning strategies and assessment to be suggested in each KLA to cater for the individual differences in potentials, abilities and needs
- ✧ Diversified teaching/learning approaches and styles suitable for different purposes of learning, and different potentials, abilities and needs of students; giving appropriate and effective consolidation, avoiding meaningless and mechanical drills for homework
- ✧ Diversified learning environments and resources suitable for different purposes of learning and learning situations

3. Post-basic/senior secondary Education

- ✧ A broad and balanced senior secondary curriculum comprising all essential learning experiences and KLAs; a core curriculum appropriate for the senior secondary exit point and for lifelong learning (including learning how to learn); provision of diversified options for some specialisation
- ✧ Opportunities for more independent and active participation in community services to make personal contributions
- ✧ Opportunities for more contacts with career-related activities to develop positive attitude towards work as well as to explore personal career aspirations
- ✧ Opportunities for pursuing sport and art activities, so as to improve the quality of life
- ✧ Diversified teaching/learning approaches and styles suitable for different purposes of learning, and different potentials, abilities and needs of students
- ✧ Diversified learning environments and resources suitable for different purposes of learning and learning situations

Initial proposals in Key Learning Areas

The following proposals and their related views will be discussed in a series of open curriculum forums and consultations for the development of the new curriculum.

Chinese language

Short term:

- ✧ To enrich students' balanced and integrated learning experience of the four macro-skills of language learning, i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing
- ✧ To incorporate Chinese Literature elements, aiming at the cultivation of students' sense of aesthetic appreciation
- ✧ To strengthen moral and value education, aiming at enhancing students' ethic quality; to strengthen the learning of Chinese culture, aiming at nurturing students' cultural identity;
- ✧ To strengthen critical thinking abilities and the abilities to make personal judgement through learning Chinese language in a large variety of contexts

Long term:

- ✧ To incorporate Putonghua learning elements into the Chinese Language Education Curriculum as one entity and in the long term to adopt Putonghua as medium of instruction in the Chinese Language Education

English language

- ✧ To promote learner autonomy and lifelong learning through the introduction of language development strategies and attitudes in the English curriculum on top of knowledge and skills which also include

using information technology for language learning

- ✧ To enhance knowledge and skills in ways of using the English language to respond and give expression to real and imaginative experience (i.e. through the “Experience Dimension”) for personal development in addition to the cognitive (Knowledge Dimension) and communicative (Interpersonal Dimension) purposes
- ✧ To give greater emphasis to the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills and creativity
- ✧ To foster an open-minded attitude towards different cultures, values, points of view, and ways of life of other countries and people

Mathematics

- ✧ To boost the use of information technology for more effective teaching and learning mathematics
- ✧ To strengthen high-order thinking skills such as problem-solving, reasoning, communicating, inquiring and conceptualizing skills in particular
- ✧ To introduce a continuous mathematics curriculum for 9-year basic education
- ✧ To re-structure the mathematics curriculum at the senior secondary and sixth form levels to suit the different needs of students

Science

- ✧ To enhance students’ scientific thinking and strengthen their investigative and problem-solving skills
- ✧ To enhance science and technology elements in the primary school curriculum in order to nurture students’ curiosity and develop their inquiring mind
- ✧ To better the coordination of fundamental science and technology courses at junior secondary level with a view to promoting scientific and technology literacy
- ✧ To develop among senior secondary students a solid foundation in science and technology for empowering them to cope with a dynamically changing environment and to make informed judgements in a technological society
- ✧ To offer science disciplines as optional courses to prepare senior secondary students for specialization in their further studies and to prepare them for future workplace

Technology education

- ✧ To offer real, relevant and purposeful learning experiences to enhance students’ understanding and capability in response to the rapid changing technological society and challenges of the future
- ✧ To formulate learning experiences with interfaces for integration with or modularization among other areas of learning experiences such as languages, humanities, mathematics and science at basic education level
- ✧ To enhance focus on technology by integrating or modularizing subjects, for example, Business Fundamentals, Design Fundamentals, Graphical Communication, Automobile Technology, and Computer Literacy
- ✧ To enhance the unique contribution of vocational elements at senior secondary levels and diversify/broaden choices in quick response to changing economic needs
- ✧ To develop optional courses to prepare students for specialization in higher education if necessary
- ✧ To strengthen such elements that nurture a concern for a healthy lifestyle, and a caring attitude for others and the environment
- ✧ To strengthen the component of information technology through individual subjects (e.g. Design and Technology, Computer Literacy) and cross-curricular links to interface with the digitized world
- ✧ To boost the elements of enterprising education, financial capability, consumer education and management as personal skills as part of personal and social education

Personal, social and humanities education (PSHE)

- ✧ To develop a holistic framework for Personal and Social Education for the strengthening of students' personal and social developments
- ✧ To explore different approaches in providing a balanced curriculum at primary level in order to enhance students' thinking and problem-solving skills, creativity, cultural understanding and global perspective
- ✧ To reduce overlapping and curriculum overcrowdedness by reviewing the number, content and continuity of the existing Humanities subjects at different levels
- ✧ To explore possible alternatives in curriculum organization within school contexts at secondary level to cater for different student needs. Examples include developing a modularized Social Studies/General Studies course at S1-3 level with an issue-inquiry approach and a foundation course of Integrated Humanities for students at senior secondary level
- ✧ To align formal, informal and non-formal curriculum with a view to providing more curriculum space, enhancing vocational skills and making learning more relevant to daily life. Possible measures include extending students' learning experience to the workplace, and making service learning a part of the curriculum
- ✧ To strengthen interdisciplinary and multi-perspective studies through projects which encourage students to construct or generate knowledge on their own

Note: General Studies in Primary Curriculum

The present General Studies curriculum needs to be slimmed in factual contents, and elements of learning in Science and Technology education have to be included:

- ✧ To strengthen students' ability in learning how to learn and their IT skills
- ✧ To provide opportunities for students to inquire and solve problems through a multi-perspective approach
- ✧ To strengthen the development of personal and social values/attitudes through contexts pertaining to civic, moral, sex, environmental, consumer education and other cross-curricular areas
- ✧ To include more elements relevant to daily life

Art education

- ✧ To introduce a broad based art curriculum which include different art forms for 9-year basic education
- ✧ To emphasize the unique contribution of a balanced art education to the development of students' creativity, imagination and aesthetic perception
- ✧ To make good use of cross-curricular links to promote the use of artistic senses, e.g. musical activities for the learning of languages, drama for simulating life situations

Physical education

- ✧ To develop a broad and balanced PE curriculum in order to expand students' experiences in affective, psychomotor and cognitive domains in physical education
- ✧ To adopt a modular approach in designing the PE curriculum, so as to speed up PE curriculum renewal
- ✧ To set clear targets on regular participation in physical activities and to provide opportunities for students to achieve them

Enablement measures

It is believed that coordinated effort from all parties concerned is necessary to carry the proposed reforms forward. The following three categories of enablement measures have been identified to achieve the purpose:

1. Coordination and collaboration

- ✧ Partnership with all sectors (parents, employers, schools, teacher education institutions, etc.)
- ✧ Maximising use of community and work environments, local and overseas if possible
- ✧ Convergence between systemic and bottom-up initiatives (e.g. useful QEF experiences) for the best benefit of students
- ✧ Connecting on-going curriculum change to the new vision (e.g. New Technical Curriculum)
- ✧ Tripartite partnership in development-practice-resource building
- ✧ On-site school-based support to help teachers and principals
- ✧ Promoting a sharing culture of curriculum experiences (e.g. website, e-mail, informal networking)

2. System adjustment and management

- ✧ Interactive, evolutionary system feedback and adjustment at policy level
- ✧ Provision for transition and alternatives
- ✧ Alignment with other educational initiatives: school-based management, quality assurance, school building design
- ✧ Leadership in school
- ✧ Resources including information technology and other school facilities
- ✧ Evidence-based development and research priority and refocussing

3. Professional development

- ✧ Informing and reforming pre-service and in-service teacher education/continuing teacher education
- ✧ Teacher development through participation in school-based curriculum development and on-going curriculum development processes
- ✧ Participation in action and applied research to generate knowledge and use knowledge in research
- ✧ Dissemination of good practices (e.g. websites, informal networking, conference participation)

Factors leading to success of curriculum reforms

The success of the proposed reform directions hinges on several crucial factors:

- Removing high-stake assessment from basic Education
- Reform of existing university admission requirements so that a wide range of learning experiences would be considered
- Reform of existing public examination system

Advice sought

We sincerely invite your valuable views on the proposed reforms. Your concern over education and curriculum development in the 21st century for the betterment of our next generation is greatly appreciated. Please send in your views by mail, fax or e-mail to the Secretariat of the Curriculum Development Council before 22 December

1999.

Address: The Secretariat of the Curriculum Development Council

Room 1329, Wu Chung House

213 Queen's Road East,

Wan Chai

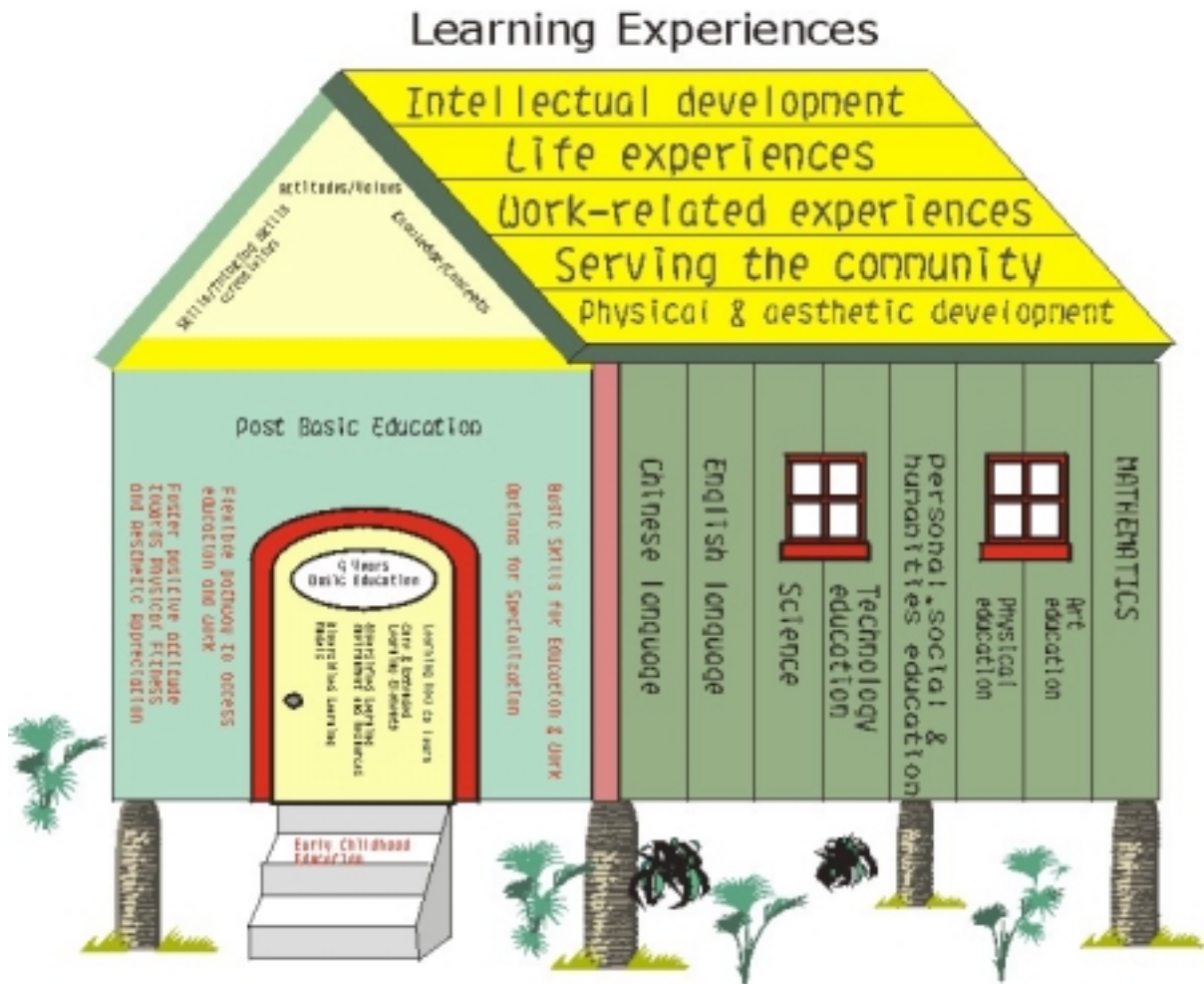
Hong Kong

Fax No.: 2573 5299 / 2575 4318

E-mail Address: cdchk@glink.net.hk

At the end of the current stage of consultation by end of December 1999, a co-ordinated agenda, strategy and schedule of related reforms will be jointly made by ED, CDC, HKEA, EC and BoE.

Concepts of the school curriculum



Curriculum Development Council

October 1999

Background Paper
Seminar on Curriculum Reform and Life-wide Learning

Teaching Beyond the Confines of Classrooms
with the Community's Support

Objective

This paper aims to put forward some recommendations on the co-ordination of formal, informal and non-formal education for public consultation.

Background

2. During the public consultation on the proposed aims of education conducted early this year, one very important view brought up by members of the public is that the formal school curriculum is too academic and overly examination-oriented, and cannot cover some of the areas which are conducive to the all-round development of students. At present, learning in such areas is pursued mainly through informal and non-formal programmes which supplement the formal curriculum in enhancing the students' personal development.

3. We consider that students need to have all-round and balanced development in order to cope with the new challenges of the next millenium. Therefore, the school curriculum should include informal and non-formal education with emphasis on the students' moral, intellectual, physical, social and aesthetic development. It should help to nurture people with a broad knowledge base and generic skills as well as a positive attitude and a sense of commitment.

Definition and Characteristics of Formal, Informal and Non-Formal Education

4. There are three types of education, and their definitions¹ are:

Formal education	a hierarchically structured educational system running from primary to tertiary levels.
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Informal education the process in which an individual develops attitudes, values, skills and knowledge through daily experience, such as influence from family, friends, peer groups, the media and other environmental influence.

Non-formal education organized educational activities outside formal education, intended to serve specified target groups with specified objectives. (for example, activities organized by uniformed groups)

5. The characteristics of informal and non-formal education include:
- Compatibility with the growth and development of young people
 - Flexibility in the design of the curriculum, taking into account the ability, motive and interests of the participants
 - Implementation in small groups, stressing the importance of communication and mutual influence amongst peers
 - Placing importance on young people's participation so that they may learn and grow from actual experience
 - Attaching importance to schools' participation and recognition

Roles of Informal and Non-formal Education in Achieving the Aims of Education

6. Informal and non-formal education have all along been considered as extra-curricular activities. The Sub-group considers that it underestimates the importance of these two types of education. In fact, the Sub-group notes that at present many schools have already been working with various cultural, arts, sports and social service organizations to provide students with comprehensive learning experience. Informal and non-formal education have a role to play in achieving the overall aims of education in the following five aspects:

- To foster self-esteem and self-confidence
- To facilitate full development of potentials
- To develop a sense of responsibility towards the community and encourage active participation in community building
- To establish one's role in the society and a sense of belonging to the mother country

- To broaden one's horizons and develop one's creativity and ability to master modern information technology

Therefore, informal and non-formal education should not be just complementary to formal education but should be well co-ordinated with formal education to enable students to attain all-round development.

7. Co-ordination among formal, informal and non-formal education means :

- the students' comprehensive and balanced learning experience is accumulated from formal, informal and non-formal education; and
- the function and value of various social service agencies in promoting informal and non-formal education should be duly recognized.

Specific Proposals

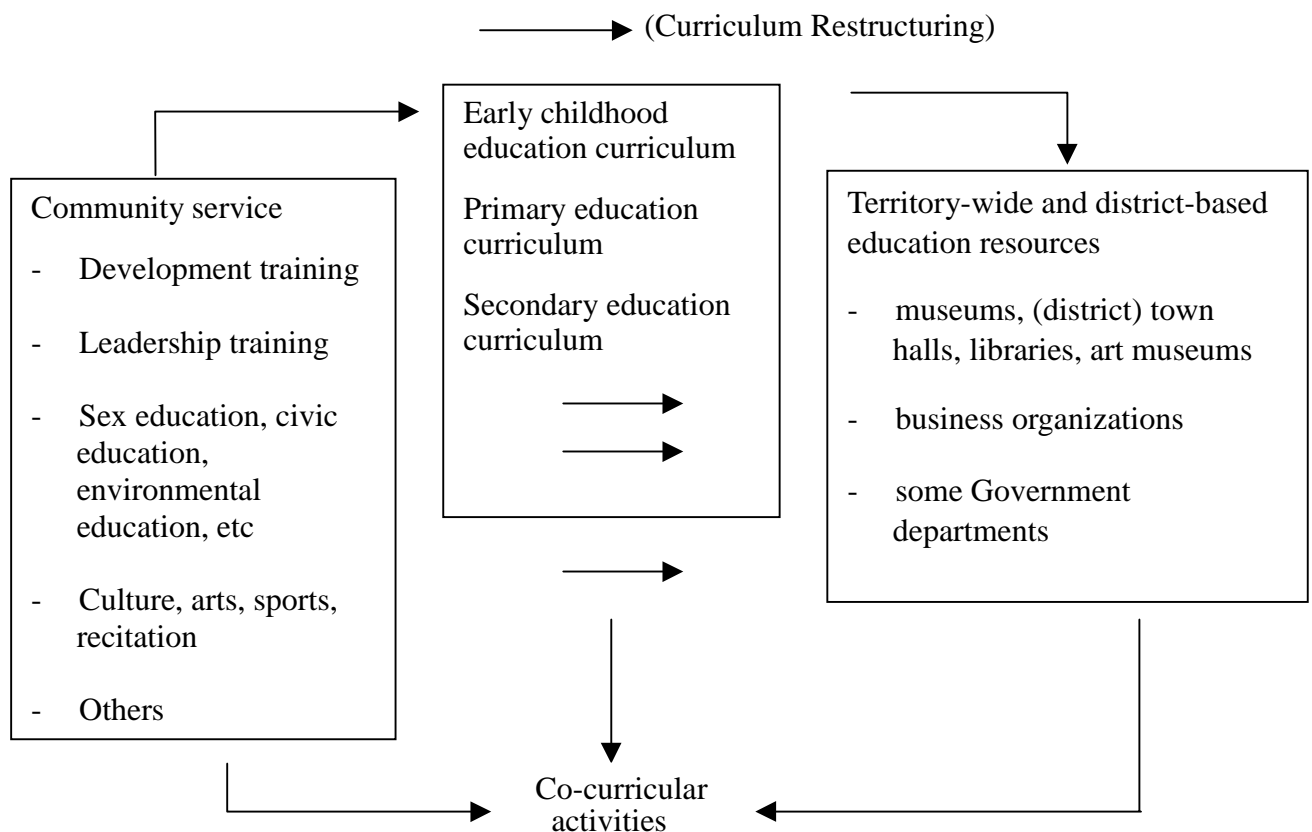
(A) Co-ordination between schools and community youth services and the district coordinating mechanism

8. Many reports published by social and educational organizations in recent years urged that due importance should be attached to informal and non-formal education and that the role of community support to education should be strengthened. For example, according to the report of the "Survey on Parents' Views of their Children's Participation in Extra-curricular Activities" conducted by the Caritas Children and Youth Centre – Tak Tin in July 1999, schools and community centres are the most popular venues for the surveyed parents' children to participate in extra-curricular activities. Moreover, a questionnaire survey conducted jointly by the Hong Kong Council of Social Services and the Education Convergence in April 1999 pointed out that schools and youth service agencies may jointly develop "tailor-made" services according to the needs of students. The survey also found that both primary and secondary schools want to cooperate with youth service organizations in promoting "life education". It proposed that youth service agencies should pay more attention to the needs of schools and provide appropriate services.

9. Schools and youth service agencies may consider the following coordinating modes for better co-operation :

- Matching system between schools and youth services
Schools may contact the organizations concerned proactively to discuss ways of co-operation. On the other hand, the organizations concerned may contact schools to understand their needs for the purpose of formulating the broad direction of their support services to schools. Meanwhile, schools and the organizations concerned may publicize their needs and services on the internet to facilitate communication by both sides. The Education Department may discuss with the organizations concerned regarding the mode of co-operation and the type of activities to be organised according to the students' educational needs, and then supply the information to schools and provide appropriate support when necessary
- System of having a contact agent for district youth services
- District meeting for youth services and schools
- Joint newsletter on district youth services

(B) The flow chart of co-ordination among formal, informal and non-formal education and social service agencies



10 The Sub-group considers it necessary to put in place a mechanism for schools and social service agencies to forge their partnership and co-operate with each other in providing school-based services to students to promote their personal development. The contents of these services may include:

- personal development
- leadership training
- sex education, civic and environmental education
- culture, arts, sports and recitation
- others

(The above services can be organised in the form of traditional extra-curricular activities)

In the provision of the above services, the relevant organizations cannot replace the role of school teachers. School teachers will still be responsible for the main co-ordination to cater for the situation of individual schools and the needs of students. At the same time, the Education Department has to re-structure the curriculum to allow schools more flexibility in designing the curriculum and timetabling to make the best use of the support and services provided by the social organizations.

11. At present, there are many territory-wide and district-based facilities which can meet the needs of the school curriculum and provide support to teaching. These facilities include:

- Museums
- City halls and civic centres
- Libraries
- Art museums
- Business organizations
- Some government departments (such as Agriculture and Fisheries Department and Fire Services Department, etc.)

(The above activities can take the form of traditional extra-curricular activities)

12. However, many schools do not have adequate information on the services available which can assist them in their teaching while the service providers have no knowledge of the needs of schools or other clients. Therefore, the Sub-group suggests that it is necessary to establish a mechanism/organization to co-ordinate the work of relevant Government departments, social services organizations (such as arts

museums, arts organizations, museums and libraries) and commercial establishments so as to expand the support network for teaching.

13. The objectives of this mechanism/organization may include the following points:

- pool the scattered resources on cultural, arts, recreational and sports education
- enable all parties concerned to have a clearer picture of the availability of existing resources through the exchange of information so that they may think of ways to complement and supplement each other
- provide a channel of communication to facilitate better understanding and better co-operation

14. To achieve the above objectives, the mechanism/organization needs to:

- serve as an information centre, develop a website, a database and members' guide
- conduct researches on cultural, arts, recreational and sports education, report the findings of the researches; translate foreign books and analyze overseas experience for reference
- advise the policy bureaux concerned
- set up a support group to provide resource assistance and advisory service
- compile teaching materials and develop teaching aids
- organize seminars and training programmes to train up professionals in the fields of cultural, arts, recreational and sports education
- encourage direct participation of and provision of resources by the business sector

15. Apart from the setting up of a coordinating mechanism/organization, consideration should also be given to the following proposals :

- To include music, arts, dance and sports etc. as elective subjects, in addition to the core curriculum
- To allow students to take part in curriculum design and the planning of the related activities to enhance their understanding of the rationale behind their learning

- To allow students to participate in cultural, arts, recreational and sports activities such as visiting museums, libraries, history museums and arts museums during school hours.
- To encourage schools to open their venues and facilities to educators in the cultural and arts field for organizing related activities and providing more opportunities for students and teachers to be exposed to cultural and arts activities.

Evaluation of the Informal and Non-formal Education

16. The Sub-Group considers it necessary to evaluate the usefulness of informal and non-formal education to students. However, it is noted that informal and non-formal education emphasize freedom of choice and personal development of students. Therefore, evaluation mechanisms should not be used as benchmarks for comparison with other people, but should instead be based on the participation and progress of individual students. In other words, students of different levels will have to fulfil some stipulated requirements for them to choose and take part in certain types of activities within the specified timeframe.

17. We can consider allowing schools, parents and teachers to discuss how to set the standards for assessing the students' performance. The assessment can cover activities outside the school curriculum which facilitate the students' all-round development.

Implementation of Informal and Non-formal Education

18. The aim of the above proposals is to encourage and assist schools in promoting informal and non-formal education so as to enrich the students' learning experience. The Education Department need not implement administrative measures to make it compulsory for schools to provide informal and non-formal programmes for students. The most important thing is to provide various channels to inform schools of the direction of curriculum development, which is to integrate formal, informal and non-formal education into a complete curriculum. It serves to effectively equip the students to meet the challenges of the 21st Century.

19. Views and comments on the above proposals are welcome. Please send them on or before 15 December 1999 to the Education Commission Secretariat, Room 714, Main Wing, Central Government Offices, Hong Kong (Fax no: 2537 4591), by voice mail (Tel No: 1833133 in Chinese or 1833122 in English) or by email to div3@emb.gcn.gov.hk.

EC Subgroup on Aims of Informal and Non-formal Education
October 1999

Reference

- ¹ Coombs, Philip H.; Prosser, Roy C.; Ahmed, Manzoor. New paths to learning form rural children and youth. New York, International Council for Educational Development, 1973, P.9-13.

Background Paper
Seminar on Public Examinations, Performance Assessments
and Admission Systems for Primary and Secondary Education

Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA)

Purpose

This paper sets out the vision for secondary school places allocation (SSPA), the pre-conditions for realizing the vision, the steps which will have to be taken for the progressive implementation of the vision, as well as interim arrangements to mitigate the deleterious effects of the present system.

Background

2. The SSPA was introduced in 1978 to replace the Secondary School Entrance Examination (SSEE) which had been criticized for determining a pupil's fate with one examination, distorting the curriculum for primary schools, and allocating the best pupils to a handful of elite schools.

3. In the SSPA system, which was designed to overcome the shortcomings of SSEE, allocation of S1 places is based on pupils' aggregate result of school's internal assessments in the final examination of Primary 5, and the mid-term and final examinations of Primary 6, scaled by the Academic Aptitude Test (AAT). The AAT comprises two parts, viz, Verbal Reasoning and Numerical Reasoning Tests. The intention was that drilling would not be necessary for the AAT, and that pupils' performance would not be based on a single high-stake examination.

Shortcomings of the present SSPA system

4. The SSPA system had served the intended purpose well for a number of years until recent years when schools started to drill their pupils heavily to prepare for the AAT. The Sub-group on SSPA is conscious of the deleterious effect of AAT drilling and the undesirable labeling effect of SSPA banding.

The Vision

5. The Sub-group deliberated and agreed on a long-term vision, as follows -

- (a) There should be a 9-year or 11-year “through road (大直路)” of foundation education in one continuous stage. There should be no need for pupils to take any high-stake public examinations during this foundation stage.
- (b) To eliminate any undesirable labelling effect on schools and pupils, there should not be any banding for allocating secondary school places.
- (c) As all high-stake public tests would invariably lead to drilling, there should not be any public assessment for the purpose of allocating secondary school places.

Pre-conditions for the Vision

6. The Sub-group envisaged that fulfilment of the above vision hinges on the gradual realisation of the following six pre-conditions:-

- (a) It has been criticized in the “through road” concept that people would still scramble for places in the ‘elite’ schools, and the pressure point would be brought forward to Primary One Admission. The competition for places in a few prestigious schools would be less acute if the standards of under-performing schools were raised to a level more comparable with the ‘elite’ schools.
- (b) A quality assurance mechanism for both schools and pupils would need to be in place as an effective way to raise the standards of schools.
- (c) As the ultimate aim of most parents is for their children to receive university education, it would help to reduce the competition for elite school places if there could be more alternative routes towards higher education.
- (d) There should also be measures to ensure that the top pupils would develop their full potential and the weaker pupils would be given appropriate assistance to attain the minimum standards.

- (e) Teachers should be trained and supported in handling pupils of mixed abilities and not to give up on any pupils.
- (f) The Primary One Admission (POA) System should be adjusted to provide more equal accessibility for pupils of different backgrounds, and the Junior Secondary Education Assessment (JSEA) System should also be appropriately modified.

The ED can facilitate the provision of “through roads” by allocating pairs of new primary and secondary schools in the same district to the same sponsoring body. In addition, a “private road” has been created under the Direct Subsidy Scheme so that there are more choices for parents other than aided schools.

Long-term Solution

7. As a long term solution, the Sub-group proposed the following two complementary models of S.1 places allocation which are in line with the vision mentioned in paragraph 5 above.

The Primary One Admission (POA) Model

8. This model is similar to the POA mechanism. The allocation system will involve two stages. During the first stage, individual secondary schools will select applicant Primary 6 pupils to fill discretionary places which are calculated at a certain percentage, say 50%, of the total number of Secondary 1 places in the school. This stage should not apply to secondary schools with feeder links. In principle, these schools should admit all of their feeder primary school's pupils who choose the feeder school as their first choice. Each Primary 6 pupil can only apply to one secondary school for a discretionary place. In the second stage, the remaining and any unfilled discretionary places will be centrally allocated at random by the ED on a net basis and according to parental choices.

9. This model fulfils the conditions of the long term vision outlined in paragraph 5 above. There will be no need to conduct any form of public tests for the purpose of school place allocation, thereby eliminating the deleterious effects of drilling and banding. Although the ‘elite’ schools are likely to cream off the better pupils to fill these places, they can only do so for the discretionary portion,

as the other half of their intake is allocated at random. For the same reason, there will also be less segregation of pupils by ability. Possible disadvantages are that teachers will need to teach a wider spectrum of pupils; and schools will need to conduct their own admission. A set of fair and open guidelines for selection will need to be put in place to ensure that schools do not devise a new screening system for which students can prepare themselves through drilling.

“Through Train (一條龍)” Model

10. This model is one way to accomplish the concept of a “through road”. The fundamental idea of this model is that pupils can enjoy their 9-year or 11-year education in a continuous stage without the need to go through any high-stake examinations. Under this model, a primary school may be ‘linked’ with a secondary school to which the primary school students can be promoted directly without going through any high-stake examinations. The secondary school concerned has to admit all the P.6 leavers of the linked primary school if they so choose and as far as the secondary school can accommodate.

11. There can be a number of variations under this model. For example, one or more primary schools may be ‘linked’ with one or more secondary schools to form a consortium so that pupils in the primary school(s) concerned could be allocated to secondary schools in the consortium according to a set of agreed rules. This model will also fulfil the vision in paragraph 5 and will make for better continuity in teaching and learning as well as student support in the transition from primary to secondary education.

12. The Sub-group envisages that these two models need not be mutually exclusive. It is highly unlikely that all secondary and primary schools will be able to voluntarily pair up with one another, even in the long run. It is envisaged that whilst an increasing number of schools will be able to do so, some will opt to turn private or opt for the Direct Subsidy Scheme route, and the rest will be covered by the POA-like mechanism.

Interim Measures

13. It is very unlikely for all the pre-conditions mentioned in paragraph 6 to be fully accomplished within at least the next ten years. Interim measures, which lead ultimately to the long-term goals embodied in the vision, have to be developed.

The Sub-group is of the view that these measures should introduce as few changes as possible to the existing system. For allocation of S1 places in the interim, two models are proposed in paragraphs 15 to 19 below.

14. In the meantime, a number of primary schools and secondary schools have already linked together to form a “through train” so that their pupils can complete their 9-year or 11-year fundamental education in a continuous stage. As it is envisaged that more of such alliances will be formed on a voluntary basis in the years to come, the “through train” model will co-exist with one of the two models proposed below during the interim period.

“Minor adjustment” model

15. Pupils’ Internal assessments of a primary school will be scaled based on the performance of the school’s P.6 pupils in the scaling test (i.e. AAT) in the past few years, say, 5 years. Records show that a school’s scaling curve remains largely stable over a period of a few years. In order to ascertain the validity of the scaling curve for the current batch of P.6 pupils, a random sample of 20% of the current P.6 pupils will be selected to take part in the scaling test each year to see if any minor adjustment needs to be made to the scaling curve. Adjustments will be made only if there is a significant difference in the pupils’ performance from the past trend. An alternative is to require all the P6 pupils of a primary school to participate in the scaling test once in a period of, say, three to five years on a random basis, making minor adjustment to the scaling curve where necessary. Primary 6 pupils will be grouped into two or three bands according to the scaled internal assessment for the purpose of central allocation of S1 places.

16. Every secondary school will continue to be allowed to keep a certain percentage (up to, say, 10%) of its Secondary 1 places as discretionary places. Pupils are free to apply to one secondary school for a place. A pupil accepted by a secondary school will not be allocated another place in the central allocation.

17. This model may relieve the drilling pressure on some pupils. As the scaling test will aim to make only minor adjustment (if any) to the scaling curve of a school rather than directly scaling the internal school results of the pupils, the pressure for drilling is expected to be much less. The reduction of the number of bands from 5 to 3 will help to minimize the labeling effect. It will also increase the ability spectrum of secondary schools’ intake to a certain extent, but this could be

partly offset by reducing the number of school nets.

18. On the other hand, however, there could be even greater pressure for those students chosen to sit for the assessment. Although the scaling test will affect the pupils in a more indirect way than under the present system, some schools and parents may still perceive it as a high-stake test and hence continue with the drilling. The allocation bands will still remain, albeit to a lesser extent.

The POA model

19. The Sub-group proposes that the long-term model described in paragraph 8 could be brought forward to be implemented as soon as possible with a slight modification. As an interim measure, to allow time for schools and teachers to get used to managing students of a wider range of abilities, pupils who have not yet secured a place in the first stage will be grouped into two or three “bands” according to their school’s internal assessment. The remaining and any unfilled discretionary places will then be centrally allocated by band, by net and parental choice as in the present system. After a period of time, say, five years, the banding of pupils will be discontinued and the central allocation for the second stage will be done at random, by net and in accordance with parental choice.

20. This model makes it possible to abolish any public assessment for the secondary school places allocation when a set of open and fair guidelines for allocation of the discretionary places have been worked out. It will also be necessary to guard against the possibility of abuse in any system to be devised.

Equal Opportunities considerations

21. The design for the new SSPA model needs to have regard to the Equal Opportunities Commission’s criticism of the existing system, i.e. that it places girls, who generally perform better than boys academically, in a disadvantaged position, as boys and girls are scaled separately. The question is how to find a balance between upholding equity strictly on the basis of examination results, and giving boys and girls the same opportunity to get a S1 place of their choice. Any future model that is based on academic results, whether internal or external, will inevitably involve this question.

Views and Comments

22. Views and comments are welcome. Please send them on or before 15 December 1999 to Education Commission Secretariat, Room 714, Main Wing, Central Government Offices, Hong Kong (Fax no: 25374591), by voice mail (Tel No. 1833133 in Chinese or 1833122 in English) or by email to div3@emb.gcn.gov.hk.

EC Sub-group on SSPA
October 1999

Background Paper
Seminar on Public Examinations, Performance Assessments
and Admission Systems for Primary and Secondary Education

Proposed Core Competency Assessments

Purpose

This paper proposes the following issues regarding the core competency assessments (the Assessments) and sets out a framework for the Assessment of Chinese, English and Mathematics from Primary 1 to Secondary 3 for public consultation:

- ◆ What are the purposes of the Assessments?
- ◆ How will the results be used and who will use them?
- ◆ What are the formats and content of the Assessments and who will take these Assessments?
- ◆ Who should be the testing agency?

What are the purposes of the Assessments?

2. The purposes of an assessment determine its overall design and, more importantly, the different purposes it serves may not always be compatible. It is therefore necessary to agree on the purposes of the proposed Assessments and to understand the pros and cons of each of the approaches of assessment. “Fitness for purpose” principle will then be used to consider issues such as the formats of the assessments, target students and frequency of testing.

3. One major purpose of an assessment is to provide feedback to teachers and students in the teaching and learning process. Through assessments, students’ strengths and weaknesses could be identified; enhancement programmes could be given to the brighter students and remedial support to the needy ones; and teaching strategies could be improved.

4. An important issue to be considered is accountability. With the implementation of school-based management and the devolution of responsibilities to schools, an accountability framework has to be put in place. In terms of transparency, the public, especially the parents, may wish to have information about individual schools. The issue of whether the assessment results should or can be used to hold schools, school management committee (SMC), sponsoring bodies or other related parties accountable for their students’ achievements has to be fully addressed.

Issues relating to accountability

5. The first issue arising from accountability is that an assessment will become high-stake if schools perceive there are sanctions associated with it, because the assessment results could be used to rank or evaluate schools in terms of their students' performance. The higher the stakes, the more time and attention schools will devote to preparing for the assessments. If the assessments do not measure important and meaningful content, skills and knowledge, then precious time and resources will be wasted. As such, negative washback on instructional practices in schools, such as narrowing/distorting the curriculum, the adoption of a particular model of teaching and undesirable drilling, may arise.

6. Recent studies in the US have highlighted the extent of the problem of the invalidation of assessment results when instruction focuses on boosting scores on a particular assessment. Raising assessment scores without increasing learning has proven to be a possible danger. The studies have revealed that national assessment should be protected from the possibility of test corruption or assessment score pollution that seems to accompany high-stake tests.

7. Another important issue is comparison among schools. Measures have to be introduced to ensure that comparison between schools is made on a fair and accurate basis. That is, the value-addedness of schools has to be taken account of. To this end, data such as students' socio-economic status, prior attainments as well as baseline assessments are needed to enable comparison on a like-with-like basis, and such factors are extremely difficult to ascertain equitably.

8. Assessment results can also provide an objective and genuine account of the students' learning outcome. In other words, the accountability mechanism can also be used to support schools in the process of self-evaluation and periodical reporting. This will help schools monitor progress in achieving territory-wide and school priorities and make improvements, if necessary, to enhance teaching and learning.

How will the results be used and who will use them?

At System Level

9. The Assessments are, by nature, attempts to describe the current territory-wide status with respect to educational development. They aim to answer questions such as:

- How much are students learning? What are their strengths and weaknesses?

- Is the territory-wide standard in the learning areas concerned rising or falling? Are students learning more today than they were five, ten years ago?
- How does the performance of students in a certain type of schools compare with that of students in another type of schools, e.g. government schools versus aided schools?
- To what extent is the education system meeting its goals?

At School Level

10. At the school level, the Assessments may aim to gauge students' progress in learning so as to provide schools with objective assessment data for improving teaching and learning effectiveness through a self-evaluation process. They serve to answer the following questions:

- How does a school compare with itself over time?
- How does a school compare with other schools of similar background or intake?
- How does a school compare with all other schools in the territory?

Moreover, the data at the school level may also be used for the purpose of holding schools accountable or signalling to schools/teachers the need to raise the standard of teaching. In the UK and France, some sort of league tables are published. In the US and the Victoria State of Australia, the national assessment data at school level are open to the public. Hence, the data at school level can be sensitive and the issues outlined in paragraphs 4 and 7 above will come into play.

At Student Level

11. As to the diagnostic purpose, the Assessments may aim to integrate assessment with learning in order to provide feedback to help define objectives and encourage learners to take responsibility of their own learning. The information so gathered will also be used to assist students who are not performing to their potential. The assessment data help to answer questions like:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of a school; a class or a student in the learning areas?
- Which students have learning difficulties and need remedial support?
- Which areas of the teaching programmes or schedule of work need modification and what teaching strategies and practices have to be improved?

Users of the Assessment

12. The potential users of the Assessments may include the following:

- *Teachers* may use the results to improve their teaching and to help individual students (student and school level data).
- *Principals* may use the results to assist individual teachers and to work with teachers to plan how to improve teaching and learning at the school (student and school level data).
- *Policymakers* may use the results to identify strengths and weaknesses in the system or in part of the system, and to guide efforts to improve teaching and learning (system and school level data).
- *Inspectors and officers of the Education Department* may use the assessment results to guide the nature of the technical assistance and the support they give to schools and teachers (system, school and student level data).
- *Curriculum developers and textbook writers* may use the results to help identify strengths and weaknesses in the instructional materials and in the curricula (system level data).
- *Teacher trainers* may use the results to identify strengths and weaknesses in the teacher training program and to make due improvements (system level data).
- *Test developers* may use the results to improve the assessments and to provide reports of changes in student achievement over time (system, school and student level data).
- *Parents* may use the information to help with their children's learning (student level data).

The Assessments provide important information to the process of SBM, the self-evaluation in QAI and the Curriculum Review. It is therefore desirable to set up an interface between them to ensure a sensible use of the assessment results.

Access to the data

13. It is generally agreed that the data at system level can be open to all concerned and data at student level are not to be revealed publicly. The following questions relating to the school level data are, however, debatable:

- Should the public and parents have access to school level data?
- To what extent is it possible for the SMCs to rely on the school level data to judge the effectiveness of principals, and for the principals to use the data to evaluate the performance of teachers or identify ineffective teachers?
- Should the data be used to rank individual schools?
- Should schools be allowed to publish information which allows comparison between individual students or which allows schools to be compared or ranked in any publication?

14. In relation to the above questions, the following issues have to be considered:-

- (a) The right to knowledge about the performance of schools versus the responsibility to protect schools and students from unfair comparisons;
- (b) The principle of unwarranted harm (i.e. the publication, or communication by other means of the results should cause no unwarranted harm to those who are identified) versus the principle of the right to information (information available should be accurate and relevant);
- (c) At what level(s) should information be available? (e.g. school level data be confined to schools; data of classes and teachers and students be never published etc);
- (d) Who should collect and provide the information?
- (e) To what extent is misuse of information likely?
- (f) To what extent will performance information be useful in improving the effectiveness of teaching and learning?

Some general caveats

15. It is of paramount importance that misuse of assessment results should be avoided. In this connection, users should bear in mind the limitations of assessment data:

- they are only as good as what they are based on;
- they do not identify the causes of effectiveness or ineffectiveness;
- they may tell us nothing about desirable future performance;
- they are only one instrument of evaluation, and must be used alongside other qualitative and quantitative data;
- they provide no quick fixes or right answers to the problems of school improvement.

As such, the assessment data, in particular those at school and student levels, should be considered in conjunction with other sources of qualitative and quantitative evidence such as the context, history and intake of a school; the physical and psychological conditions of a student etc. More importantly, to balance undue attention on academic performance, indicators in affective/social domains should be developed to provide a more comprehensive picture of education outcomes.

What are the formats and content of the Assessments, and who will take these Assessments?

16. There are two general categories of test-item types: constructed-response items and selected-response items. Constructed-response test items ask students to construct a response (such as essay tests or performance tasks). Selected-response items provide several response options to the student who selects from among the options (such as multiple-choice, matching, or true-false items).

17. It has been widely argued that assessment must take account of higher order skills and competencies such as problem solving, investigation and analysis, and thus must involve far more “authentic” or realistic tasks than have traditionally been employed in the field. It is very difficult to assess these sorts of higher order skills using selected-response items. The widely used multiple-choice format in standardized tests has been harshly criticised. However, in national assessment systems such as that in the UK where performance assessments are used, great difficulties in standardization of administration and making judgements about students’ performance have been encountered. As a result, the quality of the assessment data is in doubt. There are, on the other hand, systems adopting solely or mainly selected-response type in national or state-wide assessments (e.g. Basic Skills Test in New South Wales and Learning Assessment Project in Victoria of Australia, National Program for Quality Assessment of Basic Chilean Education in Chile etc).

18. Each format has its own advantages and disadvantages (Please see [Appendix I](#)), and often there are trade-offs between the types of items or tasks. This issue has to be considered with regard to the impact of the tests on teaching and learning, fiscal implications, issue of reliability and validity.

19. Based on the assumption that there are three levels of data (viz, system, school and student), their possible item types, target students and frequency of testing may be summarised as follows:

System level data		
Item Type	Target Students	Frequency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> preferably selected-response type (less time-consuming, less costly, more objective, allow more questions to be asked) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a representative sample, e.g. 1/30 per level (about 2500 subjects a level in HK) assessments are seldom administered at every grade or class but instead once or twice at the primary levels, and once at the secondary level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> assessments are often conducted every 2 to 3 years rather than every year may adopt a matrix design
School level data		
Item Type	Target Students	Frequency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> both constructed- and selected-response types 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> all students in a school OR a representative student sample of each school end of certain key stages, e.g. P3, P5 and S3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> basically every year for all key stages may take say 1/3 of schools each year OR all samples each year OR 1/3 samples for 3 year and then a

Student level data

Item Type	Target Students	Frequency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> both constructed- and selected-response types 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> all students of all levels (P1 to S3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> every year or twice a year

20. Apparently having items of both types in the national assessment (perhaps administered in separate sessions) sounds more desirable if resource implications are not the main concern. To conclude, test formats are subject to the tests' purposes, technical feasibility such as number of target testees, frequency, as well as the financial implications.

Content and standard

21. The Assessments for monitoring (at student, school and system levels), which are curriculum-related, need to be comprehensive in terms of their content coverage. They should cover all the important aspects of the intended curriculum rather than just a small sample as in the case of traditional examinations. Test specifications made up of a list of topics and types of skills covered by the Assessment are essential. In this connection, a very important pre-requisite for the Assessments is the availability of a set of core/fundamental elements of basic competency, as well as lower-order and higher-order abilities in the learning areas concerned. Content standards (setting out what is to be taught and when) and associated targets (targets defining which students the standards relate to, the proportion of students who will meet the standards and in what time frame) are required. In the long run, performance standards defining levels of performance, with graded text available, have to be developed.

Who should be the testing agency?

22. Who should be assigned the responsibility to conduct the proposed Assessment? Should it be an internal agency, an external agency, or some other entity? The respective advantages and disadvantages of the options are at [Appendix II](#).

23. The Education Department has the expertise and experience on the development of standardized tests such as the Hong Kong Attainment Test (HKAT) which covers the learning areas of Chinese, English and Mathematics for the levels of Primary 1 up to Secondary 3. For years the HKAT has been widely used by schools as a diagnostic tools to provide feedback on teaching and learning.

24. Entrusting the development of the Assessments to an established assessment agency, such as HKEA, with outside technical and curriculum experts is also a workable option. Such an arrangement can capitalize on the strengths of both groups, and may increase the general acceptance and the credibility of the Assessments. Furthermore, where the necessary professional competence is not available locally, foreign experts may have to be hired. In Chile, the national assessment (SIMCE) was implemented as a joint venture between its Ministry of Education and the Pontificia Universidad Catolica in a three-stage mode in three to four years' time. The three stages were the implementation stage conducted by the University, the transfer of the SIMCE to the Ministry, and the management of the SIMCE by the Ministry itself.

25. Irrespective of which type of agency it will be, the implementation agency must have a reputation for competence, i.e. quality work, technical skills, credibility and integrity. The agency will need expertise in project management, research design, curriculum analyses, test and questionnaire development, sampling, printing and distribution, data collection, processing and analyses, and report writing.

Proposed Framework of the Core Competency Assessment

26. After much deliberation, the Sub-group on Core Competency Assessment of the EC (the Sub-group) proposes that as a first step, core competency assessment for the learning areas of Chinese, English and Mathematics (the Core Assessments) should be developed. The Core Assessments will comprise:

- (a) Web-based tests for all levels from Primary 1 to Secondary 3, which are computer-assisted: The web-based tests are designed
 - ◆ to assess students' achievement in the learning areas of Chinese, English and Mathematics from Primary 1 to Secondary 3;
 - ◆ to diagnose students' strengths and weaknesses in these learning areas;
 - ◆ to identify the less able students for remedial treatment and the brighter students for enhancement programmes;
 - ◆ to enable schools to monitor the standards of the three learning areas across years and levels.

The web-based tests will be interactive and adaptive. The computer will vary the level of difficulty of the items based on a student's ability. A large data bank of objective-type, curriculum-related items will be developed to support the tests. In parallel, schools will be encouraged to develop task-type items to supplement the tests.

Ample exemplars will be provided to schools for reference and adaptation.

- (b) A centrally administered secure pencil-and-paper test at the key stages of education such as Primary 3, Primary 5, Secondary 1 and Secondary 3: These tests are curriculum-related, and aim at monitoring performance of students at the system and school levels. Thus, only a sample of students will be required to take the tests (please refer to paragraph 19).

27. Minimum attainment standards for the learning areas of Chinese, English and Mathematics will be set once the Core Assessments are ready. In the long run, performance standards for these learning areas will also be developed.

28. The Sub-group envisions that in the longer term core competency assessments for other learning areas/domains such as science and technology, and the affective and social domain, etc, should also be developed.

Objectives of the Core Assessments

29. The Core Assessments will not be related to school places allocation and will not be high-stake. They serve to monitor the attainment of students in the three learning areas of Chinese, English and Mathematics at the system level and to diagnose students' strengths and weaknesses so that schools could adjust their teaching strategies for improvement purposes. The Sub-group did not come to any consensus on whether assessment at school level should be made available and would put forward its final recommendation in this respect after hearing the public's view. Should assessment at school level be conducted in future, the Sub-group is of the view that such data should only be made available to the government which would consider giving additional resources for the needy schools to make improvement.

Implementation Strategy

30. In Hong Kong, the culture of using assessment data for improving teaching and learning effectiveness has yet to be cultivated. A strategic implementation plan with ultimate goals and targets to be achieved by stages to promote the culture is required in order to ensure that different stakeholders like teachers, principals, parents are ready to use the assessment data properly when the Assessments are in place.

31. The web-based tests will initially be developed at Primary 3 level, but will eventually be extended to all levels from Primary 1 to Secondary 3 in 5 years' time. Meanwhile, the web-based tests for Primary 3, in the form of a

pilot run, could be ready by 2001. At the secondary level, the web-based tests for Secondary 1 could be ready by 2004. Pending the development of the web-based tests, the Hong Kong Attainment Tests (HKAT) will continue to be used by primary and secondary schools. In the long run, it will take about 8 to 10 years to fully develop and implement the full set of Assessments.

Views and Comments

32. Views and comments are welcome. Please send them on or before 15 December 1999 to Education Commission Secretariat, Room 714, Main Wing, Central Government Offices, Hong Kong (Fax no. 25374591), by voice mail (Tel No. 1833133 in Chinese or 1833122 in English) or by email to div3@emb.gcn.gov.hk.

EC Sub-group on Core Competency Assessment
October 1999

Advantages and Disadvantages of Different Test Formats

Constructed-response type: performance tasks as an example

Advantages

- the tasks require students to integrate a variety of skills, concepts and knowledge and apply these to real-life situations
- more interesting and motivating and can make learning engaging
- lead to clear academic benefits
- rich performance tasks can capture a student's depth of understanding
- encourage teachers to use similar types of activities in the classroom to engage students in learning

Disadvantages

- time consuming; workload to teachers
- costly
- complex to administer and score
- tend to be limited in the breadth or scope of content they assess
- their use in examinations will be somewhat limited

Remarks

- Although it may not be feasible to use performance tasks in national examinations, it may be possible to use them in national assessments because only a small sample of students take the tests
- The introduction of performance tasks into the testing system is likely to require that teachers be provided with additional training and assistance in learning how to teach using such tasks

Selected-response type: multiple choice items as an example

Advantages

- take very little time to answer and score and thus a test can measure a broader range of content than is possible with a test that relies solely on essay items or performance tasks
- less costly to score. If specially prepared forms are used, they can be machine scored, allowing thousands of answer sheets to be scored in a short time by fewer staff
- an efficient way to measure recall of factual knowledge and some skills
- cheating is easier to detect through the use of computer programs designed for this purpose

Disadvantages

- more difficult to design multiple choice items that measure higher levels of thinking and problem solving
- more difficult to design items that measure more complex, real-life types of skills and thinking
- take more time to develop because of the need to construct four or five response choices
- multiple-choice tests promote multiple-choice teaching - memorizing the one, right answer
- a high chance to get the correct answer by guessing, which is not the case with performance tasks or essays

Essay test: constructed-response

Advantages

- Essay tests are superior to multiple-choice tests in measuring students' ability to synthesize, organize and analyse subject-matter knowledge,
- they are the most appropriate and direct way to measure writing competence

Disadvantages

- require more time to mark, or score
- less objective than multiple-choice tests

Advantages and Disadvantages of Internal and External Testing Agency

Advantages of an internal agency

- ED personnel would have ready access to up-to-date information for sampling purposes.
- Inspectors and officers of ED have considerable insights into key aspects of the system.

Disadvantages of an internal agency

- Depending on the government's educational and political priorities, it is possible that officers responsible for the test may be assigned some additional duties, and this could affect progress.
- Compared to an external agency, ED might be a less 'disinterested' party, particularly when handling data which show serious or potentially embarrassing weaknesses at the system or governmental level.

Advantages of an external agency (such as HKEA)

- Information gleaned from a respected non-governmental agency may be considered more objective, and thus more acceptable to other major stakeholders in education.
- Technical expertise, especially in instrument development, sampling, psychometrics, and data processing, is more likely to be found within university departments and independent research institutes than in ED.
- If penalty clauses are written into contracts with external agencies, they may be more likely to complete the tests on time.

Disadvantages of an external agency

- In some instances competent researchers who are denied the conventional right to publish may decide not to participate in the tests.
- University personnel may tend to adopt an overly academic approach in the treatment of the data and issues.
- Hong Kong Examination Authority, a possible candidate, does not have experience in tests for students in the primary and lower secondary levels.

Background Paper
Seminar on Public Examinations, Performance Assessments
and Admission Systems for Primary and Secondary Education

Review of Public Examinations

Objectives

Last year, the Hong Kong Examinations Authority commissioned a panel of consultants to review the public examination system in Hong Kong. After carefully studying the consultants' recommendations, the Authority has decided to introduce certain changes to the existing examination systems principally targeted at the following objectives:

- Ask teachers to assess their students on skills that are not normally tested under public examination settings and incorporate the moderated teacher assessment in public examination results so as to complement the paper-and-pencil tests and avoid judging students based on their performance in one single examination.
- While maintaining the standards of examinations, provide adequate opportunity for students to demonstrate their mastery of core-competence in HKCEE subjects so as to strike a better balance between the certification and selection functions of the HKCEE.
- Introduce flexibility in examination regulations so as to allow academically able students to take examinations at a pace commensurate with their developments.
- Enhance the linkage between what students learn at school and what they pursue in society with a view to facilitating the younger generation's entry to the workplace.

Major changes

Development of school-based assessment in the HKALE

2. At present there are a number of HKALE subjects with a Teacher Assessment Scheme (TAS) component. Teachers actually assess their own students in certain curriculum objectives, for example, practical skills in Biology and Chemistry, reading programme of Chinese Language & Culture and projects in Engineering Science and Liberal Studies. There are merits in this scheme of assessment:

- Make students' assessment more comprehensive thereby enhancing the validity of public examinations and giving better support to teaching and

learning;

- Teachers are the most appropriate candidates to assess their own students.

The Authority intends to develop this assessment scheme to other subjects. The Authority shall implement this policy for the HKALE and, pending readiness of schools, gradually extend this policy to the HKCEE.

3. The Authority understands that commitment of schools, in particular teachers, is crucial for the successful implementation of this policy. Although assessment is part of teaching, it is understood that when students' marks contribute towards summative examinations, the time and efforts put in by teachers are much greater compared with formative assessments. In this respect, it must not be overlooked that teachers need more resources and support to cope with the additional workload.

4. The Authority appreciates the following public concerns regarding teacher assessment:

- Differences in marking standards among schools;
- Authenticity of students' work.

The Authority will endeavour to address these two very important issues, taking into consideration relevant recommendations by the consultants. On the other hand, it appreciates that no system is perfect. It will not give up this assessment scheme, which is beneficial to teaching, learning and assessment, merely because of the lack of a perfect system.

Core-competence approach to HKCEE subjects

5. It is acknowledged that a considerable number of secondary 5 students are not up to HKCEE standards. They are not able to cope with the CE courses. This phenomenon must not be ignored.

6. The Authority will identify, with the help of subject experts, the part of the syllabus of a subject, which is considered essential for a secondary 5 student. A candidate attaining the specified standard in this core-competence part will be awarded a grade E in this subject. Criterion-referencing principles will be adopted for grading candidates' performance in this part. Candidates need not compete with others. This hopefully will motivate students to learn. Also, by focussing on a prescribed part of the syllabus before tackling the remaining part, students are more likely to learn better overall.

7. Candidates who have mastered the core-competence part (grade E standard attained) may get higher grades (A to D) if they perform well in the subject as a whole. The grading at levels A to D will be the same as at present so as to preserve the selection function of the HKCEE.

8. Grade descriptions at the grade E level will be compiled to reflect what a typical grade E candidate knows and can do. This will add a new dimension to grade E, enabling the HKCEE to perform better the certification function. The Authority realises this is a daunting task but firmly believes that this is the right direction.

9. Under this proposal, all candidates take the same question papers and there is no question of generating a labelling effect.

- ***Making public examinations more flexible***

Student-centred learning is world trend. Students differ in potential, aptitude and pace of learning. Society should facilitate the development of individuals and cater for their developmental needs. Where possible, the straitjacket of examinations should be removed.

The initial idea is to permit academically strong secondary 6 students, with permission from their schools, to take the HKALE or part of it, without waiting for two years. For many years, students must wait for two years after obtaining the HKCEE qualifications before they can sit for the HKALE. Clearly, an element of flexibility should be built into the present system to cater for the needs of the more able students.

- ***Enhancing the linkage between schools and the community***

Apart from preparing students for further education, schools also play an important role in preparing students to join the workplace. The HKEA is committed to doing whatever it can for students.

At present, a number of HKCEE and HKALE subjects are business-oriented. In future, relevant employer associations and professional organizations will be consulted on syllabus changes to these subjects. This move will enhance the relevance of these subjects to the business community. Hopefully, this will lead to these bodies according suitable recognition to students awarded certain grades in these subjects, such as granting them provisional membership or even exemption from certain papers in the professional examinations. This will be helpful to students concerned when they join the professions after leaving school.

A candid view on examinations

10. Public examinations have merits as well as limitations. Despite being a rigorous operation, examinations cannot be freed from measurement errors. Examining is not an exact science. Therefore it is not appropriate for high-stakes decisions on individuals to be made solely on the evidence of examination results. If society continues to use examination results as the only yardstick to measure the value of an individual (which constitutes the primary source of examination pressure on

students), the evils of an examination-driven education will never disappear, and all examination reforms will be futile.

Consultation

11. The Authority will consult the public before coming to a final decision.

Hong Kong Examinations Authority
October 1999

Background Paper

Seminar on New Culture for Early Childhood Education: Curriculum, Academic Structure, Teaching Profession

Building up a new culture for quality early childhood education

Purpose

This paper seeks to consult the public on the way forward in respect of early childhood education in Hong Kong

Background

2. Early childhood education is the foundation of lifelong learning. In Hong Kong, up to 95% children are receiving early childhood education. In other words, the quality of early childhood education has an important bearing on our younger generation.

3. The Education Commission (EC) is conducting a comprehensive review of the overall education system in Hong Kong. At the first stage of the review, the EC consulted the public on the proposed aims of education for Hong Kong in the 21st century early this year and has revised the proposed aims in the light of the comments received. The revised proposed aims of early childhood education in Hong Kong are at Annex I.

4. The EC is now embarking on the second stage of the review which is to develop a framework for the blueprint of education reform, in particular the structure, curriculum and assessment mechanism. As regards early childhood education, the EC will examine the future development with a view to building up a new culture for quality early childhood education in Hong Kong in the next century.

5. The Government has provided much support to promote the development of quality early childhood education. For example, assistance to needy parents in the form of remission of school fees through the kindergarten fee remission scheme; and assistance to kindergartens through the kindergarten subsidy scheme and the rent and rates reimbursement scheme. For details, please see Annex II.

Review of early childhood education in Hong Kong

6. The Sub-group on Early Childhood Education of the EC is reviewing early childhood education in Hong Kong, covering the academic structure, curriculum, the teaching profession, monitoring mechanism, modes of financial assistance, the interface between early childhood education and primary education, integration education, the partnership between parents and kindergartens, etc. and now puts forward in this paper some preliminary recommendations.

Academic Structure

7. According to the characteristics of the growth of young children, it is best for them to start participating in social activities at the age of three. By the time they proceed to primary schools, they would become mature enough to adapt to the environment of school education. Therefore, the Sub-group proposes that young children should receive early childhood education between the age of three and six and the admission age be set at three. The Sub-group had once considered making the recommendation that only those children who have reached the age of three as of 1 September should be admitted to kindergartens. However, would such requirement be rather inflexible? The Sub-group considers that the public have to be further consulted on this.

8. To avoid confusion, the Sub-group proposes that the existing unisessional and bi-sessional kindergartens (幼稚園) and child care centres (幼兒園) should be collectively known as kindergartens (幼兒園).

Parents can make their choices according to the needs of their own families and children. The Sub-group also recommends that the Government should further consider unifying the respective ordinances which govern the existing kindergartens and nurseries.

Monitoring Mechanisms

9. Apart from facilitating effective deployment of resources, unifying the ordinances and centralizing the management will also ensure and standardize the basic level of early childhood education. In view of this, the Sub-group proposes that the regulation of early childhood education be governed by one government set-up. This set-up should include professionals of various kinds of early childhood education services and

set up quality assurance units to oversee different kinds of services, such as uni-sessional and bi-sessional early childhood education services, so as to ensure effective administrative management and enhancement of quality. This monitoring set-up should also oversee the curriculum, teaching environment, facilities, teachers' quality and teacher-pupil ratio of kindergartens (幼兒園) to safeguard the interests of young children.

10. In the long run, every kindergarten (幼兒園) should put in place a quality assurance mechanism to provide reference for parents. In the short term, kindergartens (幼兒園) should devise quality indicators to increase transparency.

Curriculum

11. Curriculum of early childhood education should be designed systematically according to the physical and psychological development of young children, and their specific characteristics and needs at different stages to enable children to have balanced development in ethics, intellect, physique, social skills and aesthetics. A children-centred, school-based and diversified curriculum can better meet the needs of young children and cultivate their learning interests. Conversely, some kindergartens just try to please the parents by adopting curricula far too difficult for children of that age. This hampers the development of young children. Therefore, we suggest that kindergartens (幼兒園) should provide a diversified curriculum for young children based on the "Aims of Hong Kong Early Childhood Education". The curriculum should focus on developing children's potential, catering for their physical and psychological growth, and fostering the co-ordination of their hands and eyes. Through different kinds of teaching activities, the curriculum should foster children's physical and language development, cultivate their creativity, develop their curiosity, enrich their knowledge and arouse their interest in learning.

12. In order to enhance the teaching quality of kindergartens (幼兒園), the regulatory body should provide more professional support to

kindergartens (幼稚園) so that they could keep pace with the latest trend, theories and practice of early childhood education. To achieve the overall aims of early childhood education, the curriculum should cover all aspects of development of young children and should not over-emphasize the transmission of factual knowledge so as to avoid drilling.

Qualifications of Teachers

13. As pre-service training will ensure the professional standard of teachers and enhance the quality of early childhood education, we propose to raise the entry requirement of kindergarten teachers. We also propose to draw up a timetable for pre-service professional training so that the teaching profession in early childhood education as a whole could be properly trained.

14. Educators should themselves also pursue life-long learning so as to continue to enhance the standard of the teaching profession in early childhood education. Thus, kindergarten teachers should pursue continuous learning such as receiving higher level training or degree courses in order to enhance their professional competence. They should also take refresher courses and short courses on various subjects to update their teaching skills.

15. In order to save resources, we should foster the recognition and transferability of courses offered by different training bodies. To ensure the quality of training provided by these bodies and set benchmarks for qualified teachers, the Sub-group proposes that a common registration and vetting system be established so as to ensure that all early childhood teachers meet the basic requirement.

16. In the long-run, we consider it necessary to strengthen the training for kindergarten principals, so as to enhance their management skills and professional knowledge.

Form of Financial Assistance

17. Early childhood education lays the foundation of life-long learning. With the enrolment rate as high as 95% in Hong Kong, more resources are needed for the provision of quality early childhood education and enhancement of the teachers' quality. In this connection, the

Administration and the community at large should share the responsibility for the additional resources required. For the needy families, the Government should provide them with suitable assistance. The form of assistance should be considered carefully so as to ensure cost-effectiveness.

Interface and Linkage between Kindergartens (幼兒園) and Primary Schools

18. Sense of security and sense of belonging are the basic psychological needs of human beings. We must be aware of the needs of young children and the pattern of their physical and psychological development to ensure that they progress from early childhood education to another stage of education smoothly. As such, the junior primary curriculum should be designed in accordance with the developmental stages of young children and match that of kindergartens (幼兒園). We believe that if the curriculum and teaching methods are based on the physical and psychological development of young children, the children will be able to adapt to primary education at a gradual pace. The Sub-group proposes that before enrolment, young children should be allowed to participate in activities organized by their future primary schools, so that they can get to know their teachers and the new environment.

19. The training of primary school teachers should cover some basic knowledge of early childhood education. For better co-ordination and communication, visits to and short-term teaching practice in kindergartens should be arranged so that school heads and teachers of primary schools could have a better understanding of the curriculum and teaching methods of the upper classes of kindergartens (幼兒園).

Moreover, curriculum for kindergartens (幼兒園) should avoid being dictated by the primary school requirements. A set of comprehensive “orientation strategy” should also be put in place by primary schools to familiarize parents and young children with the teachers, the environment, facilities, regulations, school programmes, curriculum, teaching methods and homework arrangements, etc.

Integration education

20. To reap the fruit of integration education in the early childhood stage, there should be corresponding integration education places in primary schools. Moreover, more efforts should be devoted to improving the interface between early childhood and primary integration education. The Government should provide tailor-made curriculum for disabled children in integrated kindergartens (幼兒園) to prepare them for integration into ordinary schools in the future. When disabled children under the integration programme enter primary or special schools, the school and Government departments concerned should maintain close contact to keep in view the physical and mental development as well as learning progress of these children and provide appropriate support. As for those disabled children who may study in ordinary primary schools, professional support team, such as psychologists, of the monitoring department should conduct short-term follow-up at the initial stage to assist them in adapting to the new environment.

21. The Sub-group proposes that the Government should continue to develop the Pilot Project on Integration of Children with Special Needs in Ordinary Schools to expand the number and types of disabled children benefiting from the project.

Partnership between parents and kindergartens

22. Parents are children's first teachers and the most important partner in early childhood education. Successful parent education will enable early childhood education to yield better results with less effort. Some understanding of proper early childhood education concept will rectify parents' unsuitable expectations of their children. Therefore, we propose that the Government should promote and disseminate early childhood education concept as early as possible through maternal and child health centres.

23. Kindergartens (幼兒園) should strengthen their ties with parents. They may also consider organizing comprehensive family education programmes for parents to enhance their knowledge and understanding

about the development process of their children, proper education concepts and methodologies, and for them to share experiences. Kindergartens (幼兒園) should also encourage parents to establish support networks among themselves. Enhanced co-operation between parents and kindergartens (幼兒園) will facilitate the building up of a new culture for quality early childhood education.

Consultation

24. Views and comments on the above proposals are welcome. Please send them on or before 15 December 1999 to the Education Commission Secretariat, Room 714, Main Wing, Central Government Offices, Lower Albert Road, Central, Hong Kong (Fax no. : 2537 4591) or by voice mail (Tel No. 1833 133 in Chinese or 1833 122 in English) or by e-mail to div3@emb.gcn.gov.hk.

EC Sub-group on Early Childhood Education
November 1999

Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education is the foundation of life-long learning.

(A) Vision

- Cultivate in children a positive attitude towards learning and good living habits in a stimulating and happy environment.

(B) Aims

We wish our children to :

- be curious, have a thirst for knowledge, and enjoy learning;
- experience a rich and enjoyable group life in which a sense of responsibility and respect for others is fostered and a balanced development in the moral, intellectual, physical, social and aesthetic domains is achieved; and
- be willing to experiment and explore, learn to face up to problems and find solutions, and develop self-confidence and a healthy self-concept.

Specific Aims of Early Childhood Education

<p>(1) Intellectual development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To facilitate the development of divergent thinking, creativity, reasoning, and the ability to make judgements and to analyse and solve problems• To promote the development of self-regulation as a foundation for active and independent learning• To enhance the development of an inquisitive mind and the desire for learning• To help children develop initiative, persistence, attentiveness, and capacity for observation and imagination	<p>(5) Moral and social development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To help children acquire interpersonal skills• To help children learn to function well within a group and to acquire social problem solving skills• To nurture in children a sense of responsibility, civic-mindedness, a rule-abiding spirit, and acceptance of basic social values and norms• To foster in children respect for others and appreciation of differences and diversity• To cultivate in children an inclination to interact with and love their environment
<p>(2) Language development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To facilitate the acquisition of communicative competence• To help children acquire proficiency in expressing their ideas clearly and coherently in their mother tongue	<p>(6) Aesthetic and cultural development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To stimulate children's creativity and imagination• To cultivate in children the abilities to enjoy life and to appreciate various forms of beauty• To cultivate in children interest in aesthetic expression• To foster in children appreciation of their own culture and other cultures

<p>(3) Physical development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To enhance the development of gross motor and fine motor skills • To promote children's sensory and perceptual development • To ensure that children receive proper nutrition and health care for the development of a healthy body • To foster in children good habits, self-care skills and health awareness 	<p>(7) Basic knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To broaden children's view of the world • To lay the foundation for emergent literacy and numeracy skills • To cultivate in children a positive attitude towards acquiring knowledge and understanding the world around them
<p>(4) Personal and emotional development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To help children develop the ability to understand and to express appropriately their own feelings and needs, and to be sensitive to the feelings and needs of others • To nurture in children a positive self-concept and self-confidence • To help children acquire self-control 	

Guidelines for Implementation of Aims of Early Childhood Education

- (1) Though categorised separately into different domains for the sake of clarity, the aims of early childhood education in the different domains are inextricably linked. Development in one domain often influences and/or depends on development in other domains.
- (2) Attention should be given to the aims in all domains to allow for the balanced and full development of the whole child in, inter alia, intellectual, language, physical, personality, emotional, social, moral and aesthetic development.
- (3) Every child (irrespective of age, gender, disability, ethnicity or background) should be allowed to progress at a rate appropriate for his/her developmental characteristics and needs.
- (4) To achieve optimal development for every child, children should be given opportunities to discover, experiment and explore. They should be allowed to learn and construct their understanding of themselves, other people and the world around them through actual experiences.
- (5) Early childhood education should allow children to experience the joys of learning in meaningful contexts that promote positive dispositions and attitudes to learning and prepare children for future success in school learning and in life-long learning.
- (6) Play has an important role in children's development. A variety of play-oriented exploratory activities will help to enhance a balanced development in children.
- (7) The fostering of attitudes and values in children is dependent on good modelling by significant others in children's lives, such as parents, carers and teachers, who are able to project these attitudes and values in their interactions with children.
- (8) The critical importance of families and communities in children's development must not be overlooked. Families and communities

provide the context in which children grow, thus shaping children's most important early experiences and encounters with their environments. Early childhood institutions and educators should work in close collaboration with the family, the community and other professionals.

- (9) High quality early childhood education and care is provided by high quality staff who appreciate and respect children, who have the required understanding and skills to promote optimal development and learning, and who are committed to ongoing professional development. A high quality workforce in early childhood education is critical for the successful implementation of these aims.
- (10) The rights of all children, regardless of gender, ability, cultural differences or socio-economic status, to an inclusive early childhood education should be acknowledged and catered for. Early childhood education in Hong Kong should ensure the early identification of special gifts and talents, or special learning needs in children and provide early intervention in an inclusive environment.
- (11) Systematic and planned effort should be made to facilitate the transition from early childhood to school education for all children.

Government Assistance for Early Childhood Education

1. Education Department

The Government promotes the development of quality education in kindergartens through the following supporting measures:

- *Kindergarten Subsidy Scheme*
In 1999-2000, the Government has earmarked \$139 million for kindergartens to recruit qualified kindergarten teachers.
- *Kindergarten Fee Remission Scheme*
In 1999-2000, the Government has earmarked \$454 million to help needy parents to pay kindergarten school fees.
- *Rent and Rates Reimbursement Scheme*
The Government will continue to reimburse rent and rates to non-profit-making kindergartens. In 1999-2000, \$183.8 million has been reserved for this purpose.
- *Kindergartens in public housing estates*
The Government will provide school premises in public housing estates for sponsoring bodies to operate non-profit-making kindergartens.
- *Upgrading the training of kindergarten teachers and principals*
The Government requires that at least 50% of teachers in each kindergarten to be Qualified Kindergarten Teachers (QKTs) by September 1999; at least 60% QKTs in each kindergarten by September 2000; and by September 2002, all newly recruited kindergarten principals to have completed the Certificate in Kindergarten Education course.

In the middle of this year, the Education Department has published a pamphlet on how parents should choose kindergartens for their children. It has also issued a list of “do’s” and “don’ts” for kindergartens so that they can refer to them in planning their curriculum. The department will publish profiles on key information of kindergartens by the end of 1999 for public reference. In the mean time, the department is developing performance indicators with a view to upgrading the quality of early childhood education.

2. Social Welfare Department

Child Care Service

- Child care service aims to support and strengthen the family and to enhance the physical, intellectual, language, social and emotional development of the children under the age of 6 years. As at 31.3.99, there were 258 aided child care centres providing 28,637 places throughout the territory.

- Child Care Services include:
 - Day nursery provides care and education and looks after the developmental needs of children between aged between 2 and under 6 years. Day creche provides care and supervision to children below the age of 2 years. As at 31.3.99, there were 236 aided day nurseries and 22 aided day creches providing 27,212 and 1,425 places respectively.

 - All child care centres are subject to the registration, inspection and control providing under the Child Care Services Ordinance and Regulations, which is enforced by the Child Care Centres Advisory Inspectorate of the Department.

 - Aided day nurseries and day creches operating on a non-profit-making basis receive a subsidy equivalent to 5% of the maximum approved fees income, and full reimbursement of rent and rates.

 - Families are to contribute to the cost of the service, according to their means. Low-income families with a social need to place their children in full day care receive financial assistance through the fee Assistance Scheme.

 - Occasional Child Care Service is provided in full-day, half-day or at two hourly sessions in child care centres for children whose carers are unable to take care of them due to various commitments or sudden engagements. As at 31.3.99, 699 occasional child care places were provided in 224 child care centres.

 - Extended hour services are provided in some child care centres to

meet the social needs of families and working parents who need longer hours of child care assistance. As at 31.3.99, 70 places were provided in 5 aided day nurseries.

Teachers' Role and Professional Development

Background Paper

The Education Commission (EC) has launched an extensive public consultation exercise on the proposed aims of education early this year. From the comments received during the consultation, we noted that the public, including many from the education sector, expressed a strong desire for improvement in various aspects and at different levels of Hong Kong's education system in order to enable our students to really enjoy learning, cultivate positive values and a positive attitude towards life, develop the ability for independent thinking and judgement, and foster communication and social skills, team spirit and creativity so as to prepare them for future life, work and life-long learning.

We understand that many enthusiastic educators have already experimented, of their own accord, with different new initiatives with a view to providing students with a more enjoyable and enriched learning experience. We hope that these valuable teaching experiences can be widely disseminated to encourage more educators to explore and implement new teaching initiatives which are beneficial to students.

In its current review of the education system, EC hopes to identify what changes in the overall system are required to help teachers effectively improve their teaching and facilitate students in achieving whole-person development.

The review takes a holistic approach, covering the academic structure, the curricula and the assessment mechanisms of the entire education system. On academic structure, we propose to reform those existing mechanisms which hinder learning, while at the same time initiatives and mechanisms which enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning should be put in place to assist teachers in understanding the learning needs of students and adopting appropriate measures to help them.

On curriculum, we propose that schools and teachers should be given a freer hand to exercise their professional judgement so that they will have more flexibility in designing the curriculum and arranging lesson time according to students' characteristics and needs. Through the implementation of diversified teaching methods and activities, we could help other students pursue all-round learning. The walls between subjects will be broken down and overlapping parts of syllabuses will be removed. Students will be guided to analyze issues from different angles and apply what they have learnt in daily life.

On assessment mechanism, we consider that the main function of public examination is not for sifting, but rather to exert a positive signalling effect on teaching and learning to enable students to spend time and energy on useful and practical learning activities. There should not be too many public examinations so as not to compel students to spend most of their time on preparing for examinations at the expense of beneficial learning activities outside the examination syllabuses. Of course, schools

may still conduct suitable internal assessment in accordance with the practical needs of their students, to assess their progress in learning and needs so that teachers can render more effective support to them.

The main objective of this consultation exercise is to invite the public to contribute views on the the overall direction and principles of education reform. Comments from all sectors will form the basis for us to draw up specific proposals for the next stage of reform. Teachers, being frontline educators, are in the best position to provide professional advice on the appropriateness and feasibility of the proposals because their comments are based on their first hand experience in the classrooms and professional knowledge.

Reforms on education systems and improvements in teaching are complementary to each other. While the reform could help to enhance the effectiveness of teaching, it would not be successful without the support of teachers. Teachers are the key persons who guide the students directly in the learning process. Whether the reform measures could eventually enhance the effectiveness in learning depends very much on the cooperation of teachers in the classrooms. Thus, the role of teachers in facilitating the education reform is of utmost importance.

How can we facilitate teachers in fulfilling their role in the process of education reform? Let us attempt to examine this from the following perspectives:

(1) Professional Development of Teachers

(i) Professional Enhancement

In face of the ever-changing environment, teachers must constantly update their professional knowledge of teaching in order to provide, in the most effective manner, the best assistance for students. The Government, teachers' training providers and schools should join efforts in providing opportunities for teachers to continue to update their professional knowledge and skills, including the provision of training courses on different teaching domains and opportunities for sharing teaching experience, as well as making suitable arrangements to enable teachers to participate in these activities. Organizers of these courses and activities should gather more feedback from the participants to improve the courses and activities according to the actual needs of teachers.

(ii) Professional Support

The Government should provide appropriate support for teachers to help them enhance the effectiveness of teaching. The on-site support teams of the Education Department are providing professional advice and support directly to schools in need to help frontline educators develop school-based curriculum and make use of resources from various sectors of the community for the provision of all-round learning experiences for students. Many

teachers find these services very useful and worth strengthening and promoting.

Moreover, many tertiary institutions have conducted researches to improve teaching methods. The results of these researches provide valuable reference for educators and channels should be explored to facilitate the dissemination of this information.

(iii) Performance Appraisal Systems

Schools should introduce fair and transparent performance appraisal systems for their staff as bases for awarding promotion. An effective appraisal system will boost the morale of teachers, encourage them to actively improve their teaching and help them identify their strengths and weaknesses so that they can improve themselves as appropriate.

We understand that the Education Department has urged all public sector schools to put in place appraisal systems for their teachers by the end of 2001/2002 school year. We hope that they will embark on this work proactively so that effective appraisal systems could be implemented as soon as possible.

(iv) Establishment of a General Teaching Council

The establishment of a General Teaching Council will benefit the teaching profession through enhancing the professional standard, professional development and professional esteem. The

Preparatory Committee on the Establishment of General Teaching Council set up under the Education Commission is examining a number of issues relating to the setting up of the Council. In the course of this exercise, the education sector will be invited to take part in the discussion and give their comments.

(2) Provide more room for teachers to concentrate on teaching

We understand that in order to upgrade the quality of teaching, cater for different learning needs of students and provide students with a comprehensive and appropriate learning experience, we must allow teachers to devote their time and efforts on the work which are beneficial to students' learning.

There are many ways to achieve the above objective. First, schools may reduce the workload of teachers by re-examining all existing work procedures, contents and arrangements so as to eliminate the unnecessary chores, streamline the work procedures, or by using computers to process file records, as well as re-distributing duties. In addition, by re-structuring the curriculum and utilizing the teaching time flexibly, schools can remove the overlapping and unnecessary contents of the curriculum so that teachers can have more time to teach better.

Students are like seedlings. They need meticulous help them attain vigorous and healthy growth. Teachers are like growers. A grower

who is caring and who possesses rich and updated knowledge and skills will certainly reap a good harvest. Education is the foundation of our society. The efforts we put in today will bear fruits for Hong Kong in the future.

Preparatory Team for the Seminar on Teachers' Role and Professional
Development
Education Commission

November 1999