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**Panel on Education**

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat  
for the meeting on 11 April 2011**

**Public examination fees**

**Purpose**

This paper provides background information on the Examination Fee Remission Scheme ("EFRS") administered by the Student Financial Assistance Agency ("SFAA") and summarizes the concerns of the Panel on Education ("the Panel") about the increase of public examination fees.

**Background**

2. It is the Government's policy to ensure that no student in Hong Kong will be denied access to education because of lack of means. To achieve this objective, SFAA provides publicly-funded financial assistance in the form of grants and loans to students of different study levels and administers publicly-funded and privately-donated scholarship schemes.

3. EFRS is one of the financial assistance schemes administered by SFAA to provide fee waivers to needy Secondary 5 and Secondary 7 students taking public examinations conducted by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority ("HKEAA"). It is a means-tested scheme. In the 2009-2010 school year, SFAA processed a total of 12 052 EFRS applications and the disbursed funds amounted to some \$15.6 million. A summary of the number of successful applications and the total amount of fees remitted under EFRS from the 2006-2007 school year to the 2010-2011 school year (as at 30 March 2011) is in **Appendix I**.

4. With the implementation of the New Senior Secondary academic structure from the 2009-2010 school year, the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination ("HKDSE") will be introduced in 2012 with a view to replacing the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination ("HKCEE") and the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination ("HKALE"). As the last HKCEE for school candidates was held in 2010, only needy Secondary 7 school students sitting for HKALE will be eligible for EFRS in the 2010-2011 school year.

5. HKEAA, a statutory body established in 1977, is responsible for the administration of HKCEE and HKALE. It operates on a self-financing basis and does not receive any recurrent subvention from the Government. HKEAA's main funding source is the fees charged for administering the two public examinations, which constitute some 65% of its income. The examination fees relating to 2011 HKCEE (for private candidates only) and HKALE are set out in **Appendix II**.

### **Deliberations of the Panel**

6. Members had raised concern about the affordability of needy students in coping with the fee increase of HKCEE and HKALE in the context of discussions on development of HKEAA's examination systems and the running of HKCEE in 2011 and HKALE in 2013. Members had also expressed concern about the high examination fee of the General Certificate of Secondary Education ("GCSE") (Chinese) examination taken by non-Chinese speaking ("NCS") students as an alternative Chinese Language qualification. The concerns of members are summarized in the following paragraphs.

#### Increase of examination fees

7. When HKEAA sought the Panel's views on the proposed grant to support the modernization and development of HKEAA's examination systems at the meeting on 14 November 2005, members raised concern about increase of examination fees. Members stressed that HKEAA should provide a timetable for the progressive increases in examination fees in the years ahead and take into account the affordability of parents in its consideration of fee increase.

8. HKEAA informed members that it suffered an annual deficit of about \$6 million for administering HKCEE and HKALE. The deficit was normally offset by the revenue generated from running a range of

assessments and professional and international examinations. HKEAA's long-term policy was to recover the full costs of the two examinations by way of progressive increase of examination fees and to increase revenues by administering examinations on behalf of other educational bodies. The fees of the two public examinations would be increased by 5% in 2006 after a seven-year freeze since 1999. HKEAA undertook to improve cost-effectiveness of examination administration in order to maintain increase of examination fees at reasonable levels.

9. When HKEAA briefed the Panel on the development of the new HKDSE system at the meeting on 8 December 2008, members expressed concern on whether the development of the new system would lead to further increase of examination fees. Members noted that HKEAA's administration of HKCEE and HKALE had been on a deficit and the relevant examination fees had increased by 7% in 2008. Members pointed out that the examination fee of \$600 for the subjects of Chinese Language and Use of English in HKALE was not low. They expressed concern that HKEAA might increase examination fees for HKDSE Examination unless the Administration provided a subsidy in this regard.

10. HKEAA explained that the higher examination fees for language subjects in HKALE were necessary because of the need for double marking. HKEAA would try its best to reduce the costs of administering these examinations. The Administration advised that it would review the relevant financial assistance scheme for needy students for HKDSE where appropriate.

11. In the course of the discussion on the grant to support HKEAA for running HKCEE and HKALE for private candidates in 2011 and 2013 respectively at the meeting on 8 November 2010, members expressed concern that the considerable reduction in the candidature in the 2011 HKCEE and 2013 HKALE and subsequent reduction in income would lead to increase of examination fees for these examinations.

12. HKEAA assured members that the increase of examination fees, if any, would be kept to minimum and be affordable to students. The administration of the 2011 HKCEE and the 2013 HKALE was considered by the HKEAA and the Administration as a social responsibility and any deficit to be incurred from conducting the examinations would not be passed onto candidates. HKEAA further advised that it had been studying the cost structure for conducting HKDSE and would endeavour to keep the relevant examination fees within the fee limit of HKALE,

notwithstanding that HKDSE would have more subjects and would be more complex.

#### Examination fee of GCSE (Chinese)

13. NCS students' attainment of higher education has been an ongoing concern for members. Members noted that since 2007, HKEAA had been administering in Hong Kong the GCSE (Chinese) examination as some NCS students, in particular those who had a late start in learning Chinese or had not been given ample opportunity to study the local Chinese curriculum, might prefer to attain alternative Chinese Language qualifications. Starting from 2008, NCS students might apply for admission to local universities using the results of GCSE (Chinese).

14. At the Panel meeting on 12 January 2009, members expressed concern that NCS students were required to pay \$965 for taking the GCSE (Chinese) examination, while students were subsidized to take the International General Certificate of Secondary Education ("IGCSE") (French) under HKCEE.

15. The Administration explained that the IGCSE (French) examination was by virtue an examination subject under HKCEE as HKEAA had adopted the IGCSE (French) paper in HKCEE (French). As such, the examination fee was in line with those for other subjects in HKCEE. On the other hand, as GCSE (Chinese) was an overseas examination, HKEAA had to administer it on a full-cost recovery basis. HKEAA had undertaken to consider the fee of GCSE (Chinese) in its annual review of examination fees of non-local examinations.

16. In its response to the motion passed at the Council meeting on 18 November 2009 concerning "Strengthening and continuously supporting the teaching and learning of Chinese for non-Chinese speaking students", the Administration advised that in order to support NCS students to attain Chinese Language proficiency, it had, starting from 2010, subsidized the GCSE (Chinese) Examination to the effect that eligible school candidates sitting for the examination were charged at an examination fee level on par with their local counterparts taking the Chinese Language paper in HKCEE or the future HKDSE (Chinese).

**Relevant papers**

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

Council Business Division 2  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
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## Appendix I

### Examination Fee Remission Scheme Summary of Statistics

	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011 (as at 30.03.2011) (Note 3)
<b>No. of successful applications</b>	<b>12 438</b>	<b>12 455</b>	<b>11 355</b>	<b>11 835</b>	<b>3 306</b>
HKCEE (Note 1)	8 619	8 777	7 952	8 427	-
HKALE (Note 2)	3 819	3 678	3 403	3 408	3 306
<b>Total amount of fee remitted</b>	<b>\$14.7m</b>	<b>\$15.5m</b>	<b>\$15.2m</b>	<b>\$15.6m</b>	<b>\$7.5m</b>
HKCEE	\$7.2m	\$7.9m	\$7.6m	\$8.0m	-
HKALE	\$7.5m	\$7.6m	\$7.6m	\$7.6m	\$7.5m

Note 1 – HKCEE = Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination

Note 2 – HKALE = Hong Kong Advanced Level of Examination

Note 3 – The last HKCEE for school candidates has taken in the 2009/2010 school year. In the 2010/2011 school year, only needy Secondary 7 school candidates sitting for the HKALE will be eligible for the Examination Fee Remission Scheme.

Source : Extracted from the official website of Student Financial Assistance Agency

## 考試費用

### Examination Fees

## 附錄 II Appendix II

2011 年香港中學會考 Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination 2011	
每名考生 / 每科 Per Candidate / Per Subject	
報名費 (只適用於自修生) Initial fee (For private candidates only)	
- 網上報名 Online Registration*	\$354
- 郵遞報名 / 到報名處報名 Registration by post / Registration at registration centre	\$404
英國語文 / 中國語文 / 普通話科目考試費 Subject fees for English Language / Chinese Language / Putonghua	\$198
其他科目考試費 Subject fees for other subjects	\$114

2011 年香港高級程度會考 Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination 2011	
每名考生 / 每科 Per Candidate / Per Subject	
報名費 (只適用於自修生) Initial fee (For private candidates only)	
- 網上報名 Online Registration*	\$374
- 郵遞報名 / 到報名處報名 Registration by post / Registration at registration centre	\$424
高級補充程度英語運用 / 中國語文及文化科目考試費 Subjects fees for AS-level Use of English / Chinese Language and Culture	\$612
其他科目考試費 Subject fees for other subjects	
- 高級程度 A-level	\$408
- 高級補充程度 AS-level	\$204
實驗考試費 Practical examination fees	
- A-level 生物 Biology	\$408
- A-level 化學 Chemistry	\$301
- A/AS-level 物理 Physics	\$153

\* 自修生如經網上報名，其報名費可獲扣減 50 元。

The initial fee of private candidates using online registration will be deducted by \$50 per candidate.

資料來源：摘錄自香港考試及評核局的官方網站

Source: Extracted from the official website of Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority

## Relevant papers on public examination fees

Committee	Date of meeting/ issue date	Paper
Panel on Education	14.11.2005 (Item IV)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Education	8.1.2007 (Item V)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Education	29.2.2008 (Item VI)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Education	12.6.2008 (Item IV)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Education	8.12.2008 (Item V)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Legislative Council	18.11.2009	<a href="#">Official Record of Proceedings</a> <a href="#">Pages 239 - 289 (Motion)</a>
Panel on Education	12.1.2009 (Item V)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Education	8.11.2010 (Item IV)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>