

立法會

Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(4)685/12-13(02)

Ref : CB4/PL/ED

Panel on Education

Meeting on 30 May 2013

Background brief on issues related to the review of the implementation of the new senior secondary curriculum and assessment

Purpose

This paper summarizes Members' deliberations on issues of concern about the implementation of the new senior secondary ("NSS") curriculum and assessment.

Background

The new senior secondary curriculum under the new academic structure

2. In 2000, the Education Commission recommended the introduction of a new academic structure ("NAS") comprising a three-year senior secondary curriculum and a four-year undergraduate programme. After a three-month consultation exercise which commenced in October 2004, the Administration published a Report entitled "The New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education – Action Plan for Investing in the Future of Hong Kong" on 18 May 2005. The NSS curriculum under NAS has been implemented in all secondary schools at Secondary ("S") 4 level with effect from September 2009.

3. The NSS curriculum is made up of three components, namely, four core subjects of Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics and Liberal Studies ("LS"), elective subjects¹ and other learning experiences². Starting from 2012, the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education ("HKDSE") Examination³, administered by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment

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

² These include moral and civic education, community service, aesthetic development etc.

³ The results of the first HKDSE Examination were released on 20 July 2012.

Authority ("HKEAA"), has replaced the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination and the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination. Students now receive 12 years' school education and will take only one public examination at the end of S6.

4. A standards-referenced reporting ("SRR") system is used in reporting student results in the HKDSE Examination. Instead of using grades A to F as in the past, the results of the NSS subjects in the HKDSE Examination will be reported in five levels, i.e. 1 to 5, with Level 5 being the highest. Candidates with top performance will be represented by Level 5** and next top performance by 5*. Achievement below Level 1 will be designated as "unclassified". Under SRR, the standards are held constant with no fixed proportion of students for each level. Unlike the previous reporting system under which Grade E is a passing grade, there is no official passing level under SRR. School-based Assessment ("SBA") was introduced in 12 subjects to offer a more comprehensive appraisal of student performance.

Review of the new academic structure

5. According to the Administration, the delivery of the first three-year cycle of the NSS curriculum and the inaugural HKDSE Examination in 2012 had been generally smooth. The Administration had also advised that as it took time for experiences to be consolidated, it would conduct a review of NAS in strategic stages. The short-term stage (from October 2012 to March 2013) would focus on refinements and concerns and issues that had already emerged from the implementation of the NSS curriculum and assessment, such as the workload of students and teachers, SBA and lesson time etc. A report on the findings and recommendations of the short-term stage of the review will be released in April 2013⁴.

Deliberations on issues of concern

6. Issues relating to the implementation of the NSS curriculum and assessment have received ongoing attention by the Panel on Education ("the Panel"). During the last legislative session, the subject was discussed at the Panel meetings held on 20 April, 11 June and 10 July 2012. After the commencement of the Fifth Legislative Council, the Panel was briefed on the Administration's review of the implementation of the NSS curriculum and assessment on 12 November 2012. Related questions were also raised by

⁴ See LC Paper No. CB(4)111/12-13(01) for the Panel meeting on 12 November 2012 and the document entitled "Introduction to New Academic Structure Review" dated October 2012 available on EDB's website at <http://www.edb.gov.hk>.

Members at various Council meetings. The views and concerns expressed by the Panel on major issues are summarized in the following paragraphs.

The objective of the review

7. At the meeting on 12 November 2012, the Panel was briefed on the objectives, approaches, schedule and progress of the review of the NSS curriculum and assessment. Some members considered that the review lacked clear objectives against which the success or otherwise of the NSS curriculum could be evaluated. The efficacy of the current review was questionable as its focus was on refinements rather than major improvements. Some members expressed concern about the heaving workload borne by teachers under NAS. They pointed out that issues such as the class size and the teacher-to-class ratio were pivotal to the implementation of the NSS curriculum and should be reviewed early. Another suggestion was that a thorough review of the NSS curriculum and assessment should include a critical review of the competence and proficiency of students in the NSS core subjects and elective subjects.

8. The stance of the Administration was that given the scale of the education reform, it would take time for experiences to be consolidated. Hence, a pragmatic approach had been adopted to conduct the review in stages, with the first stage focusing on the more immediate and practical concerns. According to the Administration, early recommendations would likely include, for example, streamlining the SBA arrangements, reducing curriculum contents, clarifying the breadth and depth of curriculum and assessment, providing more flexibility in lesson time etc. all for possible implementation in S4 in the 2013-2014 school year. It was expected that details about the medium/long-term stages of the review would be announced after completion of the first-stage review.

The new senior secondary curriculum

Liberal Studies

9. Members had different views over the subject of Liberal Studies ("LS") under the NSS curriculum. Some members disagreed that LS should be a mandatory subject for university admission. They considered that the absence of structured curricular content and the lack of clear objective assessment criteria had made it difficult for many students to grasp the subject. There was also concern about possible bias and subjectivity arising from the political stance, if any, of the teachers teaching the subject. Some other members however agreed that LS should be a mandatory subject in the NSS curriculum as it was important for students to acquire a broad base of knowledge and develop critical thinking skills. They considered that certain hiccups in the initial stage should not become impediments to implementing the LS subject.

10. According to the Administration, the objective of LS was to develop students' critical thinking and analytical skills, which were essential for students of all disciplines. Moreover, an attainment at Level 2 for LS would suffice as part of the minimum university entrance requirement. Regarding the curriculum design of LS, the Administration had advised that it had taken into account overseas experiences in drawing up the LS curriculum with a view to encouraging students to draw knowledge from different disciplines.

11. Some members raised concern about the fairness and reliability of the assessment of students' performance in LS as they considered that such assessment was based on the judgment of the examination script markers. The design and setting of LS examination questions was another issue of concern. As informed by the Administration, the assessment criteria and examination questions for LS had been developed according to the LS Curriculum and Assessment Guide. Stringent guidelines and procedures in addition to an internal quality assurance mechanism were in place to ensure the quality and neutrality of the examination questions. According to HKEAA, candidates were assessed on their ability to understand the questions and state their views clearly with justifications. The political stance of candidates as indicated in their answers was not a key factor in the assessment. As reported by the Administration, more than 90% of the candidates had obtained Level 2 or above in LS in the 2012 HKDSE Examination. However, the breadth and depth of contextual analysis and the application of knowledge and concepts should be further strengthened⁵.

12. Owing to the special nature of LS and the need for teachers to give individual attention to students in undertaking independent enquiry study, members called on the Administration to provide the necessary support to teachers. Given that LS was a mandatory subject, concern was raised at the Panel meeting and at the special meetings of the Finance Committee ("FC") to examine the Estimates of Expenditure 2013-14 about the resources available to schools, in particular the disbursement of the one-off Liberal Studies Curriculum Support Grant ("LSCSG") which would cease after the 2012-2013 school year⁶.

13. On strengthening the support to schools in teaching LS, the Administration said that it would further enrich the resources available on the Web-based Resource Platform for LS. It would also assist and coordinate the sharing of experience among teachers to help consolidate their experience. As regards LSCSG, it was a time-limited grant provided to publicly-funded

⁵ See LC Paper No. CB(4)111/12-13(01) for the Panel meeting on 12 November 2012.

⁶ LSCSG in the amount of \$320,000 was disbursed to each publicly-funded secondary school for use in the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years. With the approval of FC, the tenure of LSCSG was extended for one more year and the remaining amount in the commitment was disbursed to schools on application in the 2012-2013 school year.

secondary schools to create, at the initial stage of implementing NAS, favourable conditions for the introduction of LS. In tandem, schools had been provided with the Senior Secondary Curriculum Support Grant ("SSCSG") since the 2008-2009 school year. According to EDB, schools could flexibly deploy SSCSG for facilitating a smooth implementation of the NSS curriculum, including LS. Other support measures provided by EDB included professional development programmes for teachers and on-site support services.

Other subjects

14. Some members said that according to their understanding, the student withdrawal rate for the subject of Business, Accounting and Financial Studies ("BAFS") exceeded 25%. They shared the concern expressed by teachers about the depth and breadth of the curriculum of subjects like BAFS. As BAFS was a new subject under the NSS curriculum which had combined and replaced several different subjects in the past curriculum, teachers and students had encountered great difficulties in teaching and learning this new subject. Members therefore considered that adequate support should be provided to schools. They also noted from the Administration that in its review, consideration would be given to how the curricular contents of the subject should be streamlined.

15. There was concern about the drop of over 30% in the number of candidates taking the subject of Visual Arts in the 2012 HKDSE Examination as compared to the number before the implementation of NAS. Some members stressed the importance of encouraging students to take Arts-related subjects so as to nurture talents for the development of the creative industry in Hong Kong. According to EDB, elements of visual arts were also found in the Creative Studies subjects under the category of Applied Learning ("ApL") courses. According to the statistics of HKEAA, over 4 500 candidates had sat for the examination on Visual Arts in the 2012 HKDSE Examination, compared to about 240 candidates taking the Music examination. The number of candidates for the Visual Arts examination was comparable to those taking subjects such as Tourism and Hospitality Studies, Health Management and Social Care, although it was lower than those taking other academic subjects like Geography and Economics. Moreover, under the NSS curriculum, there was a diversified range of elective subjects and possible combinations available for students' choice.

16. Some members pointed out due to the relatively small operating scale of some special schools, these schools could only provide a limited choice of ApL courses to their students, resulting in some students having to go to another school to attend lessons of their choice. Members also referred to the findings of a study conducted by the Hong Kong Blind Union and the University of Hong Kong, which revealed that about 55% of the visually impaired students

had been refused to join physical development activities which were part of the requirements of Other Learning Experiences ("OLE"). Members noted from the Administration that learner diversity and students with special educational needs were among the pressing issues identified by EDB and HKEAA, and that consideration would be given to implementing support measures such as the use of assistive devices and allowing more time for SBA.

17. As regards students' choice of elective subjects from a range of ApL courses, some members pointed out that some students had refrained from selecting courses of interest to them because they could not afford the expenses of travelling from their resident district to the teaching venues, such as the Chinese Cuisine Training Institute of the Vocational Training Council in Pokfulam. On whether financial assistance was available to needy students under such circumstances, EDB referred to the flat-rate grant⁷ under the School Textbook Assistance Scheme which aimed at assisting students to meet various school-related expenses.

School-based Assessment and lesson time

18. Members noted that EDB and HKEAA had identified some pressing issues, and that suggestions on how to tackle them would be made. One of these was the need to review SBA in view of its workload exerted on teachers and students. According to the Administration, SBA would need to be reviewed holistically. This might involve a necessary alignment of SBA among some subjects and further reduction of overlap of the curriculum content in different subjects.

19. Another issue was the insufficiency of lesson time to cover the curricular contents in different subjects. The Administration reckoned that learner diversity including special educational needs was an important factor that had an impact on lesson time. While considering the need to maintain international benchmarks of curricular and HKDSE standards, the Administration indicated that appropriate measures would be taken to cater for diverse student needs and school contexts.

Issues related to the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination

20. Noting that under the SRR system adopted in the HKDSE Examination, there was no "fail" grade, concern was expressed by some members that this might deprive teachers of a benchmark according to which they might adjust their teaching to cater for the needs of under-performing students. As advised by HKEAA, it had provided clear description and samples of students' work that

⁷ Starting from the 2011-2012 school year, the flat-rate grant under the School Textbook Assistance Scheme is \$1,000 per year per student for full-grant students and \$500 for half-grant students.

corresponded to different levels of performance for reference by teachers and students.

21. It was noted that among the 70 000 candidates who had sat for the 2012 HKDSE Examination, about 26 300 had attained results that could meet the general requirements for admission to local undergraduate programmes. However, there were only 15 150 publicly-funded local undergraduate places. Members had drawn the Administration's attention to the frustration experienced by these students under NAS who could not gain admission to universities. They also urged the Administration to take action to increase the number of publicly-funded undergraduate places for S6 graduates.

22. The Administration had advised the Panel that in addition to publicly-funded undergraduate programmes, students could consider other pathways for further studies such as local private universities and higher education institutions in the Mainland and overseas countries. According to EDB's information, in the double cohort year of 2012, some 100 000 students had completed their senior secondary education. Of the 75 000 places offered under locally accredited post-secondary programmes, about 38 000 places were for first-year-first-degree programmes. Among them, about 30 300 places were publicly-funded while the other 7 700 were self-financed. In addition, about 7% of the students pursued further studies outside Hong Kong.

Latest position

23. The Administration will report the findings and recommendations of its review of the NSS curriculum and assessment to the Panel at its meeting on 30 May 2013.

Relevant papers

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

Appendix

List of relevant papers

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Education	30.4.2010 (Item II)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Education	12.7.2010 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Education	13.6.2011 (Item VII)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Education	12.3.2012 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes CB(2)1681/11-12(01)
Panel on Education	20.4.2012 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Legislative Council	9.5.2012	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 48 – 55 (Question 6)
Panel on Education	11.6.2012 (Item VI)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Education	10.7.2012 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Education	12.11.2012 (Item VI)	Agenda Minutes CB(4)385/12-13(01)
Panel on Education	25.1.2013	CB(4)318/12-13(01)
Finance Committee	12.4.2013	Administration's replies to members' initial written questions in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2013-2014 (Reply serial number: EDB008)

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Legislative Council	17.4.2013	<u>Administration's answer to a written question raised by Hon MA Fung-kwok (Question 10)</u>
Legislative Council	24.4.2013	<u>Administration's answer to a written question raised by Hon CHAN Chi-chuen (Question 1)</u>

Council Business Division 4
Legislative Council Secretariat
24 May 2013