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New Senior Secondary Academic Structure

(1) Why is the “334” academic structure better than the existing one?

- Under the New Senior Secondary (NSS) academic structure, all students will receive 6 years of secondary education to meet the needs of Hong Kong as a knowledge-based economy.

- The more diversified NSS curriculum will allow students of different aptitudes, needs and abilities to reach their full potential.

- One public examination will be eliminated under the “334” academic structure. This helps create more space and time for students to enrich their learning experience and contributes to enhance learning effectiveness.

- The 4-year university programmes will provide students with a more balanced and comprehensive education for whole-person development.

(2) Will all Secondary 3 (S3) students progress to Secondary 4 (S4) in their schools under the NSS academic structure? Will they be required to take any public examinations?

- Under the NSS academic structure, students wishing to pursue mainstream education should normally be able to complete 6 years of secondary education in the same school to ensure continuity of learning. S3 students will not be required to take any public examinations before they progress to S4. S3 students may all progress to S4 in the same school if the school has sufficient S4 places. If schools are unable to offer sufficient S4 places to accommodate all their S3 students, they should determine the order of priority in admitting their own students according to the availability of their S4 places and the internal academic performance of these students. S3 students who cannot obtain S4 places in their own school will be centrally allocated to S4 in other schools by the Education Bureau (EDB) Central Placement. EDB will arrange
S4 places for those students based on their S3 internal assessment results in schools, moderation of the scaling through a computerised procedure adopted by the Secondary School Places Allocation Standard Scores and parents’ choices.

(3) Under the new academic structure, will there be other pathways to further studies apart from studying at universities?

- Under the new academic structure, students will have the opportunity to study up to Secondary 6 (S6). The NSS curriculum, which includes Other Learning Experiences (OLE) and Applied Learning (ApL) courses, is very broad and diversified. It can cater for different needs, interests and abilities of students.

- Apart from studying at universities, students may take Associate Degree, Higher Diploma and Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education courses for further studies. The Vocational Training Council will also modify related courses to tie in with the new academic structure.
New Senior Secondary Subjects

Under the NSS academic structure, students are required to study 4 core subjects and 2 or 3 elective subjects. These elective subjects can be chosen from NSS elective subjects, ApL courses and/or other language courses. Schools will offer different NSS elective subjects depending on individual schools’ context and students’ needs. Some schools may also offer ApL courses and/or other language courses.
### Frequently Asked Questions on the New Senior Secondary (NSS) Academic Structure and Curriculum

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### Applied Learning

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(4) What subjects do students have to take under the NSS curriculum?

- Under the NSS curriculum, students have to take 4 core subjects, i.e. Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics and Liberal Studies. It aims to enable all students to enhance their language and mathematical abilities, broaden their knowledge base, and strengthen their multi-perspective and critical thinking skills and independent learning abilities. Moreover, students can take 2 to 3 elective subjects among a total of 20 NSS elective subjects or ApL courses according to their interests. Students can also take other languages (French, German, Japanese, Spanish, Hindu or Urdu) as elective subjects. In addition to the core and elective subjects, students also need to acquire OLE for whole-person development. These OLE include moral and civic education, community service, aesthetic development, physical development and career-related experiences.

(5) How can parents obtain information about the subjects that schools will offer under the NSS academic structure?

- Information about the NSS subjects that schools will offer will be made available on their websites. EDB will remind schools to upload the information onto their websites.

- Information about the NSS subjects that schools will offer will also be made available on the Secondary School Profile webpage, which is updated annually. Please visit http://chsc.edb.hkedcity.net/secondary/.

- The “334 Web Bulletin” of EDB also provides a one-stop service. Parents may visit NSS School Information Network at http://www.edb.hk/334map for relevant information.
(6) Will each school offer all of the 20 NSS elective subjects?

- On average, each school will offer about 10 to 12 NSS elective subjects depending on factors such as students’ interests, the human resources and space available in the school.

(7) How many elective subjects can students take under the NSS academic structure?

- Under the NSS academic structure, most students can take 2 to 3 elective subjects in addition to the 4 core subjects.

- To enable students to achieve whole-person development, the NSS curriculum also includes OLE, which accounts for a fair share of the total lesson time. Therefore, under normal circumstances, it is difficult for schools to arrange lesson time for students to take a fourth elective subject. Only in very special cases can a small number of students who have higher abilities and a wider range of interests take a fourth elective subject from Visual Arts, Music, Physical Education (PE), Ethics and Religious Studies, ApL courses and other language courses to meet the overall objective of OLE.

- The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) has announced that students may take a maximum of 8 subjects, i.e. the 4 core subjects and 4 elective subjects, in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination provided that the fourth elective subject is one of the subjects listed above.
(8) Can students change their choice of NSS elective subjects?

- EDB encourages schools to offer more NSS elective subjects at S4 for students to explore their interests. Students may consider dropping one of the elective subjects at Secondary 5 (S5) provided that they take at least 2 elective subjects.
- Students may request to change their choice of elective subjects at S5 if their schools can make arrangements accordingly.

(9) If students are greatly interested in science but do not want to confine themselves to study solely Science subjects, what NSS subject combinations should they choose?

- Students who have a great interest in science but do not want to study solely Science subjects may take either Biology, Chemistry or Physics as a specialised science subject as well as Combined Science, which offers different combinations of science subjects for study. Under this approach, students are not only exposed to various scientific areas but are also able to study the elective subjects of other Key Learning Areas (KLAs) to broaden their knowledge base. An example of such subject combinations is Physics + Combined Science (Biology and Chemistry) + Visual Arts.
- As for students who have a wide range of interests, they may consider studying Integrated Science, which covers important scientific concepts in Biology, Chemistry and Physics. By studying this subject, students will have the opportunity to learn life-related science. This, in addition to the one or two subjects they might like to take from other KLAs, will help broaden their horizons for whole-person development.
- Students should also discuss with their parents and teachers (e.g. career guidance teachers) to decide on the elective subjects that best suit their interests, aptitudes and abilities.
(10) Can students take other languages?

- Under the NSS academic structure, students can take other languages as elective subjects and sit for the international examinations on these languages (French, German, Japanese, Spanish, Hindu or Urdu) jointly administered by the HKEAA and overseas examination bodies. Results obtained by students in international examinations on other languages will be indicated in their HKDSE certificates.

(11) What should parents do if the subjects that students are interested in are not offered in the school?

- Parents can reflect this to the school management so that the school may explore the possibility of offering the subjects.
The school can make use of the Diversity Learning Grant (DLG) to network with other schools (e.g. those in the same district or under the same sponsoring body) to jointly offer elective subjects which are less popular. The Arts and Technology Education Centre of EDB will continue to provide courses on Technology, Visual Arts, etc. for students who study in schools that do not offer these subjects.

Liberal Studies

(12) Why do all students have to take Liberal Studies (LS) under the NSS academic structure? Will there be any overlap in the contents of LS and other subjects?

- LS aims to broaden students’ knowledge base, enhance their social, national and global awareness, as well as develop their multi-perspective and critical thinking skills through the study of a wide range of issues. When taking the subject, students need to make use of the content and perspectives of other subjects to study contemporary issues so as to connect knowledge and concepts across different disciplines and broaden their views. Since the issues, perspectives and abilities involved may not be exhausted by a single discipline or several disciplines, there is no question of content overlap.

(13) Will schools offering LS at the junior secondary level affect its articulation with the senior secondary curriculum?

- When studying LS, students should have a solid knowledge base before they can analyse issues with the knowledge required. Therefore, students should acquire a solid knowledge base at the primary and junior secondary levels in order to pursue the learning of LS at the senior secondary level.
Frequently Asked Questions on the New Senior Secondary (NSS) Academic Structure and Curriculum

- Whether schools choose to offer additional individual subjects, junior secondary LS or other integrated subjects, they should ensure that the learning hours and contents of various KLAs/subjects will not be affected, otherwise articulation with senior secondary LS and other elective subjects will be hindered.

(14) Are there enough experienced teachers to teach LS in Hong Kong? What kinds of support are provided by EDB for LS teachers?

- Since the introduction of LS in the Advanced Supplementary Level (AS Level) Examination in 1992, there have been more than 200 schools offering LS at the AS Level as well as Integrated Humanities and Science and Technology at the Certificate of Education Level. Experiences gained by teachers of these subjects not only help them in the teaching of LS in the NSS curriculum, but also in providing support to other new LS teachers. A lot of well-experienced LS teachers have formed networks and, through the professional development programmes organised by EDB and other means, helped nurture new teachers in grasping the basic knowledge and skills required for teaching the subject.

- EDB has already provided no less than 100 hours of professional development programmes to all LS teachers to help them acquire the basic knowledge and skills required for teaching the subject.

- EDB has also launched a web-based resource platform for LS in collaboration with the HKEdCity to provide learning and teaching resources including teaching materials, teaching plans and question banks for teachers’ reference.
EDB has launched school-based programmes to support LS in recent years. In addition to educational professionals from EDB, scholars from universities and schools with good practices have also provided individual schools with focused on-site support services for the preparation and implementation of the LS curriculum with a view to building a professional community of LS teachers.

(15) How does EDB assess the qualifications of LS teachers?

• In general, teachers with degree qualifications and having completed the core professional development programmes for LS teachers are deemed to have acquired adequate professional knowledge for teaching the subject. EDB has not set any benchmarking for LS teachers. Principals of the respective schools have to determine whether individual teachers are suitable for teaching the subject.

• EDB will carry out External School Reviews on a regular basis to ensure the quality of learning and teaching.
(16) Will EDB examine LS textbooks?

- As the teaching materials of LS should focus on appropriate social issues, and its learning and teaching resources have to be updated regularly, EDB has set up the Web-based Resource Platform for Liberal Studies to provide LS teachers with a supportive resource bank. On this platform, they can find relevant teaching materials within a short time, e.g. up-to-date learning and teaching materials, exemplary learning and teaching practices for use in class. The resources on the platform are much more diversified than the information provided in one or two textbooks. These electronic teaching materials also facilitate adaptation by teachers according to students’ needs. Therefore, EDB will neither consider establishing a textbook review mechanism for textbooks published by publishers nor include such textbooks in the Recommended Textbook List.
(17) How can parents help their children learn the subject LS?

- LS focuses on developing multi-perspective thinking skills. With the use of resources from daily life such as those from news, life experiences and radio programmes, parents can discuss with their children, and encourage them to express their views and raise questions with a view to developing their critical thinking skills. Besides, parents can encourage their children to engage in various kinds of activities and read different kinds of books and magazines. They can also accompany their children to visit museums in order to expand their life experiences and enhance their abilities to connect knowledge across different disciplines.

- The study of LS can enhance students’ awareness of the society, the country, the world and the environment. It can also foster positive values and raise concerns towards the things that happen around them. Parents should set a good example for their children and help them become responsible and conscientious citizens by showing concern for the neighbourhood and the community.

- Independent Enquiry Studies in LS help students develop various kinds of skills such as self-learning and self-management. Parents should take care not to render unnecessary or excessive assistance to their children, such as in doing project learning tasks, at the primary and junior secondary levels to avoid undermining their self-learning and self-management skills.

- EDB has recommended in the web-based resource platform for LS (http://www.ls.hkedcity.net —> References) a series of books, periodicals and websites for students’ reference and use. Parents can encourage their children to visit the resource platform.
(18) What are the courses offered in Applied Learning (ApL)? What can students learn?

- In order to provide a more diversified NSS curriculum to better suit the needs, aptitudes and interests of students, EDB is offering ApL courses in the NSS curriculum for students to learn through application and practice. Students can choose ApL elective courses from the following 6 areas, namely, (1) Creative Studies; (2) Media and Communication; (3) Business, Management and Law; (4) Services; (5) Applied Science; and (6) Engineering and Production in order to develop the foundation skills, thinking skills, interpersonal skills, values, attitudes and career-related competencies necessary to prepare themselves for further studies, employment and lifelong learning in the future.

(19) Can all students take the NSS ApL courses?

- If a school offers ApL courses, all students can enrol in those courses through the school. Schools may consider offering NSS ApL courses in the light of their missions and students’ preferences. The performance of students in ApL courses will be recorded in the HKDSE transcript.
(20) Will the qualification of ApL courses be recognised?

- The performance of students in ApL courses will be recorded in the HKDSE transcript. Students’ performance will be classified into two levels: “Attained” and “Attained with distinction”. Assessment will be conducted by individual course providers and moderated by the HKEAA to maintain the standard of the courses at a level comparable with that of NSS subjects in the HKDSE.
Frequently Asked Questions on the New Senior Secondary (NSS) Academic Structure and Curriculum

Other Learning Experiences

(21) How to assess Other Learning Experiences (OLE)? Will this affect admission to university? When should students start to collect their OLE data?

● As OLE emphasise student participation and learning experiences, there will not be any examinations. All OLE acquired by students will be recorded in the Student Learning Profile (SLP). In general, universities will make reference to information on students’ achievements in various aspects, such as the SLP which provides students with the opportunity to demonstrate their competencies and personal qualities. Schools will help students develop an SLP that will be comprehensive enough to reflect their performance in various areas.

New Senior Secondary Assessment System

(22) How are the levels of performance for various subjects in the HKDSE developed?

● Standards-referenced reporting (SRR) will be adopted in the HKDSE for reporting student performance. There will be five levels (1 to 5) with Levels 5* and 5** representing the best performance. Each level will be accompanied by descriptors depicting the performance of a typical student at a given level. The HKEAA will make reference to the experiences of other countries and take measures such as conducting studies, designing exemplars and setting levels according to student performance with a view to establishing objective standards.
For each subject, the standards of each performance level in SRR will be determined by a team of experts. Based on the course objectives, the team will conduct tests and studies to collect relevant data for developing a set of descriptors and exemplars for each level in order to illustrate the standards it represents.

The HKEAA will inform teachers, students, parents and the public of the latest developments regarding the levels of performance for all subjects through various channels such as school circulars, seminars and the website of the HKEAA.

(23) Why are HKDSE candidates with better performance at Level 5 classified into Level 5* and Level 5**?

To facilitate selection by employers and universities, the HKDSE candidates with top performance at Level 5 are classified into Level 5* and Level 5**.

(24) Currently, candidates are required to obtain at least 5 passes in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) when applying for some civil service vacancies. With the introduction of HKDSE, are there any changes in the requirements of application for civil service vacancies?

With the introduction of the HKDSE, the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) will review and revise the requirements of application for civil service vacancies accordingly. Further details will be announced in 2010.
(25) How will fairness and objectivity be ensured in School-based Assessment (SBA)?

- The HKEAA has years of experience in implementing SBA and has established mechanisms and procedures to ensure that SBA can be conducted in an impartial manner and students’ abilities and performance can be reflected accurately.

- The design of SBA requires students to complete most of their tasks under their teachers’ supervision; this will enable teachers to verify that they are the students’ own work.

- The HKEAA will draw up marking criteria, exemplars and detailed guidelines to ensure consistency among teachers in marking.

- The HKEAA will organise SBA training courses to enhance teachers’ understanding of SBA.

- In general, teachers are well aware of the ability of their students, but they may not be familiar with the standard of students in other schools. Thus, for subjects with a large number of candidates, the HKEAA will adjust the SBA marks by means of statistical moderation to eliminate assessment discrepancies among schools. With statistical moderation, the SBA marks submitted by schools will be adjusted with reference to the performance of their students in public examinations.

- For subjects with fewer candidates, and subjects whose SBA contents are greatly different from that of the public examinations, the SBA marks will be adjusted by means of non-statistical methods.
(26) Will there be any marking discrepancies in assessing the answer scripts of LS by markers because of candidates’ different opinions or viewpoints?

- The marking process of HKEAA is stringent. The marking scheme for each paper will clearly state the marking criteria and requirements that markers should follow. As a result, inappropriate marking because of different viewpoints from individual candidates is not anticipated. Markers are required to undergo relevant training which includes attending markers’ meetings and marking sample scripts to ensure that they have a thorough understanding of the marking requirements and candidate differences in performance. Strict quality control measures are also in place to guarantee markers’ marking standards.

- The HKEAA will adopt a double marking system to ensure fairness in assessing the answer scripts in LS. Under the double marking system, there will be two individual markers assessing the same answer script. If there are obvious discrepancies in the marking results, a third marker will be brought in. In the existing HKCEE, the double marking system has already been adopted in some subjects, namely the writing paper and oral examination of Chinese Language and English Language.

(27) How is the SBA of private candidates and repeaters dealt with?

- Private candidates or repeaters can sit for the HKDSE Examination. In general, where it is not possible for them to have SBA, their final result will be based entirely on their public examination results. For certain subjects, an alternative mode of assessment will be set to replace SBA. If repeaters want to participate in the HKDSE Examination as a school candidate, they have to complete their S6 assessment tasks in accordance with the requirements of their school.
(28) Is the HKDSE recognised by overseas countries, such as the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States?

- At present, the results of the HKCEE and the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) are recognised by the University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate (UCLES) as equivalent to the relevant qualifications in UK, and such an arrangement facilitates our students to continue their studies in UK. The HKEAA will continue to work closely with the UCLES to ensure that the academic qualifications of the HKDSE would be recognised as the relevant qualifications in UK.

- Since the 2007/08 school year, the HKEAA has been working closely with two accreditation bodies, viz. the National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) and the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), to secure international recognition of the HKDSE. The NARIC is the UK National Agency providing information and expert opinion on qualifications attained outside UK. The UCAS is the official agency handling admission applications to higher education programmes in UK. It is expected that the benchmarking exercises will be completed by the end of September 2009. Local students may enrol for admission to overseas universities with HKDSE qualification.
Pathways for the Last Cohort of Graduates in the Existing Academic Structure

(29) Is there any chance for the last cohort of HKCEE and HKALE candidates to repeat their studies?

- The last HKCEE and HKALE will be held in 2010 and 2012 respectively. The HKEAA has committed itself to conducting an additional HKCEE and HKALE for individual subjects as necessary for the S5 repeaters and the Secondary 7 (S7) private candidates in 2011 and 2013 respectively, so that they can have another chance to obtain better results in individual subjects.

(30) What are the pathways available to the last cohort of S5 graduates?

- Students who perform well in the 2010 HKCEE may pursue further studies at S6 and S7 levels, and sit for the last 2012 HKALE.
Frequently Asked Questions on the New Senior Secondary (NSS) Academic Structure and Curriculum

● Students who do not perform well in the 2010 HKCEE may re-sit the 2011 HKCEE (which will offer only a few subjects). However, as there will be no S6 admission exercise in 2011, students who wish to pursue further studies locally may consider taking the NSS curriculum at S5 and S6 levels because most NSS subjects have covered the relevant contents of the HKCEE subjects and there should not be much difficulty in curriculum articulation.

● Students may also consider other pathways, such as attending courses offered by the Vocational Training Council, joining Project Yi Jin, studying overseas or working.

(31) What are the pathways available to the last cohort of S7 graduates?

● Students who perform well in the 2012 HKALE may pursue further studies in the local 3-year Undergraduate programmes, Associate Degree programmes or Higher Diploma courses.

● Students who do not perform well in the 2012 HKALE may re-sit the 2013 HKALE (which will offer only a few subjects). If students obtain good results for admission to university, they will take the 4-year (instead of 3-year) Undergraduate programmes.

● Students may also consider other pathways, such as attending local Associate Degree programmes, Higher Diploma courses, Vocational Education and Training courses, studying overseas or working.
(32) In the double cohort year, what arrangements will the authorities make to prevent the competition for university places between students under the existing academic structure and those under the NSS academic structure?

- There will not be competition between the two cohorts in the double cohort year in 2012, as the provision for university places will be doubled. Both S7 students under the existing academic structure and S6 students under the NSS academic structure will each be allocated 14,500 places for 3-year and 4-year degree programmes respectively.
(33) Do the universities have adequate space and support facilities for the double cohort year?

- In the 2012/13 school year, the year-one students in the universities will include those taking the 3-year programme as well as those taking the 4-year programme. Currently, the universities are actively engaged in curriculum planning, review of their admission criteria, arrangements of recruiting teaching staff and capital works, as well as drawing up the action plans.

- The Government has made provisions to support the development of universities and the implementation of the new curriculum. It has also provided capital works funding for tertiary institutions to enhance their learning and teaching space including hostels, libraries and canteens, to accommodate the additional students.
(34) What are the entrance requirements of universities under the new academic structure?

- In July 2006, the Heads of Universities Committee announced that the four core subjects are prerequisites for admission to universities.

- The 4 core subjects and 1 specified (or unspecified) elective subject are required for admission to most university programmes. Some programmes require 4 core subjects plus 2 elective subjects (unspecified or one specified elective subject).

- Hyperlinks to various universities for information regarding developments related to the new academic structure will be provided on the “334 Web Bulletin” of EDB (http://www.edb.gov.hk/334) for public access.

(35) Can students under the new academic structure be admitted via the Early Admission Scheme (EAS)?

- Under the new academic structure, there will not be EAS. All students will have to sit for the HKDSE Examination after completing S6. The universities will refer to the HKDSE Examination results for student admission.
(36) What are the arrangements for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) under the NSS academic structure?

- Apart from making appropriate curriculum adaptations, schools may make use of the advisory visits services provided by EDB to work out how to support students with SEN in their schools.

- Students with SEN who pursue the regular curriculum may sit for the HKDSE Examination. Their performance will be assessed on the same criteria as those for students following the regular curriculum. EDB and HKEAA will cater for the special needs of these students with appropriate assessment arrangements, such as time allowance, facilities and seating arrangement.

- With the implementation of the NSS academic structure in the 2009/10 school year, students with intellectual disabilities (ID), like other students in ordinary schools, will receive six years of secondary education. They will take the adapted NSS curriculum for students with ID, which will include Chinese Language, Mathematics and LS/Independent Living as the core of learning complemented by elective subjects (such as PE, Visual Arts) and OLE with a view to consolidating and broadening the knowledge they have acquired, enhancing their skills, fostering their positive values and attitudes in order to achieve a balanced growth.
(38) How will the public (including parents) be informed of the latest development and relevant information of the new academic structure?

- EDB will enhance communication with the public, in particular parents and employers, and continuously update the "334 Web Bulletin" so that the public can obtain the most up-to-date information of the new academic structure. Besides, through parents seminars held in districts, roving exhibitions, Announcements in the Public Interest, compact discs and Frequently Asked Question booklets, etc., parents will understand how to facilitate their children in selecting suitable NSS subjects based on interests, strengths and aptitudes, and how to support their learning.

- EDB will work in collaboration with HKEAA as well as maintain a close liaison with universities, tertiary institutions, employer groups (including CSB) and overseas educational institutions to introduce the new HKDSE qualification and to facilitate their drawing up of new requirements for admission and employment.
Related Websites

Education Bureau
http://www.edb.gov.hk/

“334 Web Bulletin”
http://www.edb.gov.hk/334

 NSS School Information Network
http://cd.edb.gov.hk/334map

 NSS Information Kit

Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority
http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/

University Entrance Requirements
http://www.edb.gov.hk/334/UER

NSS Curriculum and Assessment Guides

Web-based Resource Platform for Liberal Studies
http://www.ls.hkedcity.net

Applied Learning
http://www.edb.gov.hk/apl

Other Learning Experiences
http://www.edb.gov.hk/cd/ole

Student Learning Profile
http://www.edb.gov.hk/cd/slp