

Ref: DSE/94-4
30 April 2009

Dear Principal

2012 Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination

The new senior secondary curriculum (NSS) will be implemented in September 2009, with the first administration of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) examination taking place in 2012. This letter aims to help schools understand better the assessment requirements and standards of the new examination and to update schools on the progress made in securing international recognition.

The grading standards

In the current HKCEE and HKALE, the performance of candidates is reported in terms of six grades (A – F), of which A is the highest and F the lowest. For NSS subjects, results will be reported in five levels (1-5), with Level 1 being the lowest and Level 5 the highest. Achievements below Level 1 will be designated as “unclassified”. Top candidates within Level 5 will be awarded Level 5* and Level 5** as appropriate.

The HKDSE Examination is designed to assess the full range of achievement of candidates with different abilities. The grading standards at the higher end have to be clearly articulated to facilitate tertiary selection. As documented in the subject curriculum and assessment guides, levels 4 and 5 in the HKDSE examination will be set with reference to the standards achieved by candidates awarded grades A – D in the current HKALE in order to maintain continuity of standards from the old system to the new. This is important for facilitating tertiary selection and for maintaining international recognition.

The above principle has been guiding the development of sample papers and level descriptors. Standards-referenced Reporting (SRR) Information Packages for the 24 NSS subjects, which include the assessment frameworks, sample papers, level descriptors and exemplar materials, have been produced. These will be released to schools from April to June this year.

International recognition

As the HKDSE standards at the higher end are benchmarked at the standards of performance typically exhibited by candidates obtaining various grades in the HKALE, candidates who secure good results in the HKDSE should be able to use the results for admission to overseas tertiary institutions.

We have been working closely with Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) on the review of HKDSE sample papers. The review ensures that HKDSE examination papers are up to A-level standards to facilitate selection by tertiary institutions. The

first two rounds of review of HKDSE sample papers were completed in 2008. The final round of review will be completed in mid-2009. So far, the comments from CIE have been positive.

We have also been working closely with international agencies to secure advanced recognition of the HKDSE, including the National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) and the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) in the UK. Measures are underway to conduct benchmarking exercises on the recognition of the HKDSE standards. NARIC is the National Agency for the UK Government responsible for providing information and expert opinion on qualifications attained from over 180 countries worldwide. The NARIC study outcomes will focus on recognition of the HKDSE for the purpose of general education and employment. UCAS is the official agency for admission to higher education institutions in the UK. The outcome of the UCAS study is the allocation of UCAS tariff points to HKDSE Examination results so that they are linked to other international qualifications in the UCAS Tariff system. Recently, we met with the UCAS and the response is positive. The HKEAA will make a first stage announcement by the end of 2009. After meeting the requirements of the necessary procedures, the final benchmarking results will be available before the first administration of the HKDSE Examination.

Follow-up actions

We hope the above information will help schools understand better the standards of the new examination and the progress made in securing international recognition. You are invited to pass the above information to your teaching staff, including those who are responsible for counseling students in the selection of NSS subjects. You may also wish to share the information with parents as appropriate. Future updates on international recognition can be found on the HKEAA website www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/hkdse/. If you have any enquiries, please contact our Public Examinations Information Centre at 3628 8860.

Yours faithfully



CHEUNG Kwong Yuen
Director – Development and Educational Assessment

c.c.: Dr. KWAN Siu Kam, Principal Education Officer (New Senior Secondary),
Education Bureau