

Views of the Curriculum and Assessment Task Group of the HKSSSC on Early Admission Scheme (EAS) and “5+1” Structure

Preamble

- In principle, we support the educational philosophy of the 3+3+4 academic structure and its implementation when all pre-conditions are being met i.e. development of an appropriate curriculum to cater for different interests and abilities of students, establishment of a corresponding public examination that has both local and overseas recognition, sufficient preparation of schools and teachers to meet with the change, and provision of first-degree and sub-degree programmes by universities and post-secondary institutes to cater for the increase in the number of S.7 graduates.
- Any change to be proposed as an interim measure should not derail the main thrust of the education reform, and it should facilitate and result in a smooth transition to the 3+3+4 system.
- Furthermore, any deliberation on student learning outcomes should base on a coherent structure / framework of a student’s developmental learning path from foundation education to post-secondary education. We cannot isolate any part of the learning in a piece-meal manner, nor can we consider the merits of individual stages of education / learning as if they are separate from each other.

Early Admission Scheme: We oppose the implementation of the EAS on the following ground:

1. HKCEE as a high stake selection examination
 - HKCEE was not designed and is not meant to serve a selection purpose for the general population of students at S.4 where we are aiming at a general education with broad coverage of curriculum and acquisition of basic knowledge and skills. The HKAL exam is different as it is meant to be a high-stake selection exam to be taken by 40% of the age population at an advanced age with a specific curriculum. It is a common belief that the lower the age, the less should be the stake of the examination / assessment.
 - External pressure may exert on the schools to push for good HKCEE results with different schools having different tactics e.g. schools with brighter students would offer more subjects and other schools offering less subjects, but all with the same goal of getting as many students to get e.g. 4As as possible. Or schools may close down subjects that do not produce good

HKCEE results or good number of As. And there is a high possibility that further streaming of students with special and intense drilling for examination would occur. The public would be interested in league tables to place schools in the rank order of the production of 4As or EAS students.

2. Adverse effect on student learning in S.4 - 5

- HKCEE as a high-stake selection examination for early admission into the universities would change the ecology of student learning life in S.4 – 5 (or may be even down to lower secondary) in such a way that the main purpose of study in S.4 and S.5 is to a large extent to get sufficient As in the HKCEE in order to get into Universities through EAS. As a result, extra-curricular activities / community services would be neglected and student whole-person development would be a slogan rather than a reality. This will affect not only those bright students but the vast population of S.4 students who are average but with the hope that if they just concentrate their effort to study for examination, they would stand a good chance of getting good results in the HKCEE. And once the ecology of student learning life in school is being changed, it would be very difficult, if not impossible to revert back.
- It is foreseeable that the number of repeaters would shoot up but this cohort of repeaters are those who may get as good a result as 2As or 4Bs in the HKCEE. This is totally un-desirable and a waste of society resources.

3. Adverse effect on student learning in S.6-7

- There will be two cohorts of students in the same class – one will surely get into universities by EAS irrespective of how they behave or perform in S.6 and they would have already been informed as early as in April, the other cohort of students are aware of the fact that their chance of getting into their best choice of programme of study is smaller as a considerable number of it is already being taken by the EAS students. It would be de-moralizing for this cohort of students who may rate themselves as second class or failure.
- There is a real danger and possibility that the EAS students would start to ease off and take their learning much less seriously as early as in April. Furthermore, what effective learning could be resulted from a curriculum designed for 2-year AL if one has only learned it for 9 months from September to May? Is this not a waste of resources?
- For the other cohort of students – they will refrain from participating in other extra-curricular activities as they will have to try even harder if they

want to get into their first choice of programme in the universities.

- In an AL course, collaborative learning is an important element whereby intellectual questions raised by outstanding students and interactive discussion in a mixed ability setting would stimulate thinking and help all students develop. With the top students gone in S.7, this would result in negative impact on student learning.

In conclusion:

If we are to allow EAS to take place, we are going against the educational philosophy advocated in the education reform and the educational philosophy espoused in the 3-year structure of senior secondary education. We do not see any significant benefit derived from this scheme, nor the urgency to implement the 4-year university programme for a minority of students if such a scheme would bring about a detrimental impact on the whole school population. Instead, we should concentrate all our energy on making a smooth and successful implementation of the “3+3+4” system but not expand any more effort than necessary to handle morale issues or learning problems rising from EAS that is short-lived but would be bringing irreversible damage to the school system.

“5+1” Structure: We oppose the implementation of “5+1”

1. If HKCEE largely determines the admission requirement, the same disadvantages on i) HKCEE as a high-stake selection examination and ii) adverse effect on student learning as in the EAS, would occur in the implementation of a “5+1” system.
2. Curriculum – it would be extremely difficult to design a meaningful curriculum that has only a duration of “1” year (10 months).
3. If there is another assessment at the end of S.6
 - i) if this is another public assessment, there will be 2 assessments within 1 year which goes against the vision of the education reform in decreasing the examination pressure in order that students would have more quality learning time, participation in leadership development, extra-curricular activities and community services,

- ii) if this is a school-based assessment with weighting comparable to the HKCEE – it is doubtful if a school-based measurement of such a high- stake nature can be acceptable to all schools, universities and stakeholders and it would take considerable amount of time and discussion, if at all such an assessment scheme could be worked out.
4. By the time an appropriate curriculum and assessment system for a “5+1” system could be designed, piloted and implemented, it would have taken a few years’ time (3-5 years). By then, the time gap between the implementation of the “5+1” system and the ultimate “3+3+4” system would be narrowed to a few years at most. And it is hard to envisage that schools and teachers have to go through two big changes within a few years’ time.

19 July 2003

Dear Fellow Principals,

Expanded Early Admission Scheme and “5+1” Structure

The Executive Committee together with its Curriculum and Assessment Task Group has held a discussion meeting on the captioned issue on 17 July.

I have summed up the outcome of our discussion in the following paper and views expressed in the paper will be conveyed to the EMB and the EC. I will keep you closely informed on any progress made.

With Best Regards,

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Anissa Chan
Chairman