

Q&A on NSS Curriculum and Assessment Framework

English Language

1. Will the NSS English Language Curriculum bring about a fall in language standards?

No. The three-year NSS English Language Curriculum is just as comprehensive and rigorous as the existing Sixth Form Use of English curriculum, covering a wide range of knowledge, skills, and positive values and attitudes to enhance students' proficiency and creativity in the use of English and to cater for a variety of interests. In the international benchmarking exercise conducted in 2005, the NSS English Language Curriculum has been found to be highly competitive in terms of both breadth and depth, when compared to the senior secondary English Language curricula of overseas countries such as Australia and the UK.

To maintain standards as well as to cater for diversity, public assessment will align closely with the curriculum. While there are questions or tasks in the public examination which less advanced students will be able to handle, there will also be questions or tasks that seek to challenge the more advanced students. Further, by adopting standards-referenced reporting, which provides descriptors of student performance and examples of student work for different levels, teachers can have a better idea of how their students do compared to the prescribed standards and provide appropriate guidance to assist them to get better results. In this way, standards-referenced reporting serves to enhance the effectiveness of learning and teaching, thus helping to raise standards.

2. Is the NSS English Language curriculum too demanding for the less advanced students?

The NSS English Language curriculum is designed to cater for a wide range of student ability. The Compulsory Part is basically a continuation of what is being practised in the existing senior secondary curriculum. That is, students will be provided with opportunities to acquire language skills, vocabulary and grammar forms and communicative functions and are exposed to a range of text-types through exploration of themes in varied contexts. To help students achieve these learning objectives, teachers would select or develop purposeful materials and activities appropriate to their needs, interests and abilities.

The Elective Part is introduced with the aim of extending students' language learning experience and catering for their diverse needs and interests. It provides students with choice on a variety of modules. For each module, a wide range of learning activities and materials are suggested to cater for students of different abilities.

The Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) examination also takes into account the need to cater for a wide student ability range. Apart from the School-based Assessment (SBA) component, a graded approach is adopted in the design of both Paper 1 - Reading and Paper 3 - Listening and Integrated Skills. Both papers will consist of two parts. All students must attempt the first part. They may choose to answer questions from either the easier or the more difficult section in the second part, according to their abilities and needs.

3. Will there be international recognition of the NSS English Language Curriculum and the HKDSE?

In designing the NSS English Language Curriculum, reference was made to the requirements and standards of the curricula in other countries. The NSS English Language Curriculum has also been benchmarked by curriculum and assessment agencies in different countries, such as the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) and the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES). It has been found to be highly competitive when compared with the senior secondary English Language curricula of such countries.

Standards in the new HKDSE will be benchmarked against key overseas examinations in the same way that currently applies to the HKCEE and HKALE. The HKEAA has commenced discussions with overseas universities to ensure continuity of international recognition following the introduction of HKDSE, and all universities consulted thus far anticipate no problems. The HKEAA is also working with assessment bodies in the UK, Australia, Canada, mainland China and the USA to seek recognition of the HKDSE exam for English Language.

4. How are the Compulsory and Elective Parts related?

The two parts share the same learning objectives and complement each other. The Compulsory Part focusses on the learning and use of language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), grammar structures and communicative functions,

vocabulary, and text-types through exploring different themes in different contexts by means of a wide variety of approaches and activities. The Elective Part aims to broaden students' learning experience through providing a range of modules and contexts for students to reinforce and apply the English language skills and knowledge they have acquired in the Compulsory Part. Teachers have the flexibility to work out the best form of integration of the two parts for their students' benefit.

5. How should schools decide on which and how many elective modules to offer and when to offer them?

The purpose of the Elective Part is to provide students with a variety of modules so that they can select the ones they are interested in. As a start, schools are encouraged to offer three to four modules for student choice, and as they accumulate more experience over the years, they may opt to offer the full range of modules to cater for diversity. In any event, schools should take into consideration factors such as students' interests and needs, teachers' readiness, and availability of resources, before deciding on which and how many modules to offer to students.

As to when the elective modules should be offered, schools are encouraged to start offering them in S5. This will allow schools to focus on the Compulsory Part in S4 to lay the necessary language groundwork for the elective modules. It will also fit in with the SBA schedule, which requires schools to submit marks near the end of S5. Nonetheless, schools might like to exercise their discretion and start to offer the modules in S4, should both teachers and students feel ready for them.

6. How can the EDB make sure that schools follow the suggested time allocation for the Compulsory Part and Elective Part rather than devoting most of the lesson time to prepare students for public examination?

Schools are expected to have a clear plan on a macro level to see which modules in the Elective Part to offer and when to offer them, how the Compulsory Part and Elective Part could be implemented with reference to their own context and how the Compulsory Part could be integrated with the Elective Part to facilitate learning.

We trust that schools and teachers will devise a balanced and suitable curriculum plan that could achieve the learning objectives and cater for their students' needs and interests. Instead of compromising learning opportunities for exam drilling, schools are advised to focus on the Compulsory and Elective Parts of the curriculum to

increase students' exposure and language proficiency, which is a more effective way of preparing them for public assessment

While no particular measures will be imposed to monitor how the modules are actually implemented, including the time to be allocated to each of the modules, relevant internal documents reflecting planning and the way the modules are implemented should be in place to facilitate learning and self-evaluation.

7. How can the interface between the Junior Secondary and Senior Secondary English Language curricula be facilitated?

The entire English panel should be kept updated about the latest developments with regard to the new senior secondary curriculum. They should also exercise careful planning, making sure that the important groundwork is laid in the junior secondary curriculum in terms of incorporating key learning elements (e.g. encouraging critical thinking and creative use of language, exposure to a wide variety of text-types, including those related to language arts) that will facilitate transition to the senior secondary level.

8. What measures can teachers take to cater for learning diversity?

Teachers should work closely as a team to share ideas and devise a plan on how to suit their students' diverse needs. Teachers may refer to the *English Language Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4-6)* (available at <http://cd.edb.gov.hk/eng>) for suggestions on catering for learning diversity, such as adapting the school curriculum, making use of graded tasks and activities and employing a variety of teaching techniques to cater for the students' different needs. As for the Elective Part, teachers may consult the SoWs, i.e. the *Suggested Schemes of Work for the Elective Part of the Three-year Senior Secondary English Language Curriculum (Secondary 4-6)* (which can also be accessed through the web link above) for ideas and offer modules that suit the abilities and interest of their students. Teachers are also encouraged to take part in the professional development programmes organised by the EDB, e.g. the "Workshops on Catering for Learner Diversity in the English Language Curriculum" to develop insights and strategies on how to cater for students' different learning styles, needs and abilities.

9. Will the relatively big class size be a problem for teachers to deliver the Elective Part effectively?

Class size should not be a major problem because teachers will continue to make use of carefully designed group work, which they are currently doing with the language learning tasks and projects in the existing curriculum. There are suggestions in the Suggested Schemes of Work for the Elective Part (SoWs) as to when and how teachers can make use of group work to facilitate learning and teaching. Alternatively, block timetabling, split-class mode or other flexible grouping arrangement may be adopted, where appropriate, to address the issue of class size when delivering the elective modules.

10. Since teachers are not entirely familiar with the modules in the Elective Part, will there be sufficient learning and teaching resources to support their implementation?

It is envisioned that publishers will produce learning materials to support the teaching of the Elective Part prior to the implementation of the NSS curriculum. The EDB has already developed web resource materials for all the eight elective modules, which can be accessed at the EDB website (<http://cd.edb.gov.hk/eng>). Further, print-based resource packages for each of the modules will be produced, so there will not be a lack of resource materials for the Elective Part. Nevertheless, teachers are encouraged to make use of community resources as well as other print or electronic materials to develop school-based materials to suit the needs and interest of their students.

11. When will the details of the HKDSE English Language examination (including SBA) be available?

The HKEAA conducted briefing sessions for teachers which focussed on Standards-referenced Reporting (SRR) for HKDSE English Language in December 2008. According to the HKEAA, the SRR level descriptors and annotated examples as well as draft sample papers will be available on the HKEAA website (<http://hkeaa.edu.hk>) by late December 2008. The SRR booklet and the School-based Assessment (SBA) handbook with assessment criteria and guidelines for teachers in conducting SBA will be disseminated to schools by May 2009.

12. Are there sufficient professional development programmes in support of the implementation of the new curriculum to cater for teachers' training needs?

We are fully aware of the high demand for teacher development and thus have been

offering most of the NSS English Language professional development (pd) programmes since 2005/06 or 2006/07. Taking into account the findings of the latest NSS pd survey the EDB conducted among secondary schools in Hong Kong, we managed to negotiate with the service providers for a much higher number of training places to be offered in the current (2008/09) school year. For example, apart from increasing the number of the face-to-face workshops for the Language Arts elective modules, web-based workshops which are identical in content will be offered starting March 2009 to ease demand. Save for the occasions where there is a concentration of teacher demand for a certain programme over a particular month or period, there should be enough professional development opportunities to cater for teachers' needs.

13. Are the professional development programmes “Understanding and Interpretation the New Senior Secondary Curriculum - English Language” and “Assessing Student Learning” “compulsory” for teachers teaching NSS English language (i.e. Must teachers attend the programmes to become qualified for teaching NSS English Language)?

Teachers are strongly encouraged to take part in the professional development programmes “Understanding and Interpretation the New Senior Secondary Curriculum - English Language (UNISS)”, which gives them an overall picture of the design, features and requirements of the new curriculum, and “Assessing Student Learning”, which aims at enhancing teachers' capacity to use assessment to facilitate student learning in the new curriculum. However, completion of the two programmes is by no means a must, nor is it a pre-requisite for teaching NSS English Language. Teachers may teach NSS English language as long as they feel confident and ready.