

Q&A on Senior Secondary Curriculum and Assessment Framework English Language

1. Is the senior secondary English Language curriculum too demanding for the less advanced students?

The senior secondary English Language curriculum is designed to cater for a wide range of student abilities. The learning objectives for English Language at the senior secondary level are built on those for KS3.

The Elective Part aims to broaden students' language learning experience and cater for learner diversity. Based on students' diverse needs and interests, schools can choose to offer two to three elective modules with at least one module from both the Language Arts and Non-language Arts groups. For each module, a wide range of learning activities and materials are suggested to cater for students of different abilities and interests.

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, the Graded Approach is adopted in the design of both Paper 1 (Reading) and Paper 3 (Listening and Integrated Skills). Both papers consist of two parts. All students must attempt the first part. For the second part, they may choose to answer questions from either the easier or the more difficult section according to their abilities. This design ensures that while there are questions or tasks which less advanced students will be able to handle, there are also questions or tasks that seek to challenge the more advanced students.

2. Are the senior secondary English Language curriculum and the HKDSE English Language Examination internationally recognised?

In designing the senior secondary English Language curriculum, reference was made to the requirements and standards of the English Language curricula in other countries. The senior secondary 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) the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) and the Cambridge International Examinations (CIE). It has been found to be comparable to other senior secondary English Language curricula.

Standards in the HKDSE Examination are benchmarked against key overseas examinations in the same way that previously applied to the HKCEE and HKALE. The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) in the UK has included the HKDSE in the UCAS Tariff system with tariff points awarded to the 24 HKDSE subjects, including English Language. The qualification is recognised as comparable to the UK GCE A-Level. In addition, the HKEAA has been working closely with overseas universities in the UK, Australia, Canada, Mainland China, the USA, New Zealand and Taiwan to promote the HKDSE qualification. So far, more than 250 tertiary institutions worldwide have indicated their acceptance of students with HKDSE qualification and overseas universities/institutions will continue to provide feedback.

3. How are the Compulsory and Elective Parts related?

The two parts share the same learning objectives and complement each other. The Compulsory Part focuses on the learning and teaching of the four language skills, vocabulary, grammar, communicative functions and text types. Through exploring themes in varied contexts and engaging in purposeful and meaningful activities, students develop adequate English knowledge and skills for communication. The Elective Part aims to broaden students' learning experience through providing a range of modules and contexts for students of different abilities and interests 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 integrating the two parts for their students' benefit.

4. 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 two to three (at least one module from each of the Language Arts and Non-Language Arts groups) they are interested in. 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 conduct assessment tasks based on the Elective Part in the second term of S5 or any time during S6. Nonetheless, schools may

like to exercise their discretion and start to offer the modules in S4, should both teachers and students feel ready for them.

5. Are schools required to adhere to the suggested time allocation for the Compulsory Part and the Elective Part (i.e. 75% and 25% of the lesson time respectively)?

The suggested time allocation for the Compulsory Part and the Elective Part should only serve as a reference for schools. Taking into consideration their own contexts, schools can flexibly decide on how the Compulsory Part and the Elective Part are implemented and the time allocated to the two components. They are also encouraged to explore ways of integrating the Compulsory Part and the Elective Part in order to make effective use of lesson time and to facilitate learning and teaching.

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 documents, such as annual plans and schemes of work that reflect planning and the way the modules are implemented, should be in place to facilitate learning and self-evaluation.

6. 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 senior secondary curriculum. They should also exercise careful planning, making sure that important groundwork is laid in the junior secondary curriculum in terms of incorporating key learning elements (e.g. developing students' language skills and grammar knowledge, encouraging critical thinking and creative use of language and exposure to a wide variety of text types, including those related to both language arts and non-language arts) that will facilitate transition to the senior secondary level. Teachers are also encouraged to refer to the supplementary notes on *Building a strong interface between the junior and senior secondary curricula: Focusing on the development of literacy skills* (available at http://334.edb.hkedcity.net/doc/eng/ELE/SN1_Interface.pdf) when planning the school-based secondary English Language curriculum.

7. What measures can teachers take to cater for learner diversity?

Teachers should work closely as a team to share ideas and devise a plan on how to meet their students' diverse needs. Teachers may refer to the *English Language Curriculum*

and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4-6) (CDC and HKEAA, 2007) (with updates in November 2015) (available at <http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/kla/eng-edu/index.html>) for suggestions on catering for learner diversity, such as adapting the school curriculum, making use of graded tasks and activities and employing a variety of teaching techniques to cater for students' different needs. As for the Elective Part, teachers may consult the *Suggested Schemes of Work for the Elective Part of the Three-year Senior Secondary English Language Curriculum (Secondary 4-6)* (CDI, 2007) (which can also be accessed through the URL above) for ideas and offer modules that suit the abilities and interests of their students. Teachers are also encouraged to take part in the related professional development programmes organised by the EDB and refer to the supplementary notes on *Catering for learner diversity in the senior secondary English classroom* (available at http://334.edb.hkedcity.net/doc/eng/ELE/SN2_Catering.pdf) to gain insights into strategies to cater for students' different learning styles, needs and abilities.

8. Is the relatively big class size a problem for teachers to deliver the Elective Part effectively?

Class size should not be a major problem when carefully designed group work is used to engage students in language learning tasks and projects. Teachers may refer to the *Suggested Schemes of Work for the Elective Part of the Three-year Senior Secondary English Language Curriculum (Secondary 4-6)* (CDI, 2007) (available at <http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/kla/eng-edu/index.html>), which provide suggestions on when and how group work can be used to facilitate learning and teaching. Alternatively, block timetabling, split-class mode or other flexible grouping arrangements may be adopted, where appropriate, to address the issue of class size when delivering the elective modules.

9. Are there sufficient learning and teaching resources to support the implementation of the Elective Part?

The EDB has published the *Suggested Schemes of Work for the Elective Part of the Three-year Senior Secondary English Language Curriculum (Secondary 4-6)* (CDI, 2007) (SoWs), and resource packages on the eight elective modules to provide detailed guidelines and teaching ideas to help teachers to plan and implement the Elective Part in their own schools. The print-based SoWs and the resource packages were disseminated to schools previously, and their electronic versions, together with some web-based learning and teaching resources, are available at the English Language Education Section's website (<http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum->

development/kla/eng-edu/references-resources.html) as well as the EDB's One Stop Portal (<http://minisite.proj.hkedcity.net/edbosp-eng/cht/home.html>). On top of the said learning and teaching resources, assessment tasks related to the elective modules can also be downloaded from the "Assessment Tasks Bank" on the One Stop Portal (see the URL above) for teachers' adaptation and use. Further, teachers can make use of community resources as well as other print or electronic materials to develop school-based materials to suit the needs and interests of their students.

10. Although the design of the eight questions in Part B of Paper 2 (Writing) in the HKDSE Examination for English Language is based on the elective modules, the content knowledge of these modules is not assessed. Why should students still spend approximately a quarter of their lesson time on the learning of the Elective Part?

The Elective Part covers a range of modules which reinforce different aspects of English Language learning. It should not be regarded as a means to only enhance students' writing skills. Instead, the modules help enrich students' learning experience and provide opportunities for them to consolidate and apply the language skills and knowledge which they have acquired in the Compulsory Part. As for the Paper 2 (Writing) of the HKDSE Examination for English Language, the design of the paper is to assess students' writing proficiency rather than the specific knowledge of the elective modules. When delivering the elective modules, teachers are advised to enhance students' writing skills by enriching their learning experiences, and enhancing their understanding of the topics and the features of related text types.

11. Since 2007, school-based assessment has been implemented in the subject of English Language. Why is there still a need to moderate SBA scores through the moderation mechanism? Does it imply that the EDB and the HKEAA regard the scores awarded by teachers as unreliable?

Moderation is a common practice of assessment authorities in different countries. The HKEAA carries out moderation based on the raw SBA scores submitted by teachers to ensure fairness and consistency of assessment standards across schools.

12. Where can teachers have access to information about the HKDSE English Language Examination?

Information about the HKDSE English Language Examination (e.g. Assessment Framework, *English Language Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4-6)*, samples of candidates' performance, level descriptors and other resources) can be

accessed at the HKEAA's website (http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/hkdse/assessment/subject_information/category_a_subjects/hkdse_subj.html?A1&1&2). The HKEAA also disseminates details about the HKDSE English Language Examination results, including feedback on individual papers with reference to the statistical data, the examiners' comments, the live scripts and the level descriptors at briefing sessions for teachers. The HKDSE Examination papers for this subject, the marking scheme, the report on students' performance and the conversion tables for papers adopting the Graded Approach (i.e. Paper 1 Reading and Paper 3 Listening & Integrated Skills) are included in the *Examination Report and Question Papers* for the subject, which is made available to schools by the end of the examination year.

13. Are there any professional development programmes in support of the implementation of the senior secondary English Language curriculum to cater for teachers' training needs?

The EDB organises professional development programmes and networking activities to enhance teachers' subject knowledge (e.g. the learning and teaching of grammar) and teaching skills (e.g. strategies for catering for learner diversity), equip them with strategies for effective curriculum implementation (e.g. developing students' higher order thinking skills through elective modules), as well as facilitate sharing on effective teaching practices. The HKEAA also offers professional development programmes to enhance teachers' capacity to prepare students for the School-based Assessment of the HKDSE English Language Examination. Details of these programmes are disseminated to schools and teachers through the Training Calendar System (<https://tcs.edb.gov.hk/tcs/publicCalendar/start.htm>).

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