

NSS Liberal Studies

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why is it necessary to study Liberal Studies? Why is it made a “compulsory subject”?

Different sectors of the community have been interpreting the term “Liberal Studies” differently and thus holding different expectations for the subject. These expectations, of which some are very far-reaching indeed, all revolve around the common goal of enabling students to become citizens with a broad knowledge base, high adaptability to change, independent thinking and life-long learning capabilities, so that they are able to see things from multiple perspectives and to establish their own views and values.

In fact, students need the aforementioned knowledge, skills and attitudes to face an ever-changing society and a knowledge-based economy. Therefore, the Education Bureau (EDB) has introduced Liberal Studies as a core subject under the NSS curriculum so that every student has the opportunities:

- A:** to enhance their **Awareness** of their society, their nation, the human world and the physical environment, as well as develop positive values;
- B:** to **Broaden** their knowledge base and expand their perspectives on things; and
- C:** to **Connect** knowledge across different disciplines and enhance their **Critical** thinking skills.

2. Is Liberal Studies a “brand-new” subject?

No.

- The precious and practical experiences gained through Liberal Studies (Advanced Supplementary Level) implemented in 1992 and Integrated Humanities (Secondary 4 - 5) as well as Science and Technology (Secondary 4 - 5) introduced in 2003 have provided a fertile ground for the implementation of the NSS Liberal Studies curriculum.
- The rationale, pedagogy and assessment modes for Liberal Studies share similarities with those of many other subjects.

- The design of Liberal Studies has taken into account overseas experiences in critical thinking training, life education, values education and civic education, with due consideration given to their relevance in the Hong Kong context so as to avoid direct “transplantation” of the foreign modes into local secondary schools.
- The knowledge and skills students have acquired from different Key Learning Areas and learning experiences in basic education provide the necessary foundation for studying the NSS Liberal Studies curriculum.

3. Does Liberal Studies really cover everything?

Liberal Studies takes up about 10% of the total lesson time in the overall three-year senior secondary curriculum (i.e. about 250 hours for three years). In order to provide all senior secondary students with a Liberal Studies curriculum of broad and balanced coverage, the subject was designed with practical considerations given to making good use of the knowledge and skills students have acquired in junior secondary education. Therefore, Liberal Studies has to have a manageable scope.

Limited by the amount of lesson time, Liberal Studies may not be able to fully meet the various expectations of all people. However, it is designed with clear areas and foci of study, and is of great use to students in understanding and handling different issues in the contemporary world.

4. What do students learn in Liberal Studies?

Liberal Studies provides many opportunities for students to use the knowledge they have acquired from different disciplines to explore things around them and issues which affect their lives. Therefore, it is not a subject for doing “news commentaries” only, nor is it merely for students to express their personal feelings.

The Liberal Studies curriculum comprises three Areas of Study. It aims to help students develop an understanding of themselves, their society, their nation, and the world. There are six modules under the three Areas of Study. For each module, there is a list of suggested “enquiry questions”. Teachers will guide students to explore these questions making use of controversial events and issues that arouses

heated discussion and debates among different sectors of the community. Please refer to the table on the next page for the outline of the curriculum.

Areas of Study	“Independent Enquiry Study” (IES)
<p>Self & Personal Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module 1: Personal Development & Interpersonal Relationships 	<p>Students are required to conduct an “Independent Enquiry Study” (IES) making use of the knowledge and perspectives gained from the three Areas of Study.</p>
<p>Society & Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module 2: Hong Kong Today • Module 3: Modern China • Module 4: Globalization 	
<p>Science, Technology & the Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module 5: Public Health • Module 6: Energy Technology & the Environment 	

It is worth noting that the three Areas of Study are by no means independent fields of knowledge or self-contained disciplines. In fact, the knowledge, skills and perspectives students developed through the three Areas of Study are interconnected and can be used to analyse a broad range of issues.

For details of the NSS Liberal Studies curriculum, please refer to Chapter 2 of the *Liberal Studies Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4 - 6)*.

5. Are our teachers ready for teaching Liberal Studies?

In Hong Kong, nearly all teachers have been professionally trained and are familiar with the basic classroom skills (such as discussion, evaluation and enquiry skills) and assessment skills. Liberal Studies (Advanced Supplementary Level) was introduced into the Hong Kong secondary schools in 1992. Over the past ten-odd years, a throng of teachers have gained experiences in teaching the subject and they can share their experiences to others in the field.

EDB has been offering professional development programmes for teachers who are going to teach Liberal Studies. EDB will continue to provide training courses for new Liberal Studies teachers and organising advanced courses with practical components for serving Liberal Studies teachers. EDB and the Hong Kong

Education City have jointly developed the “Web-based Resource Platform for Liberal Studies” (<http://ls.edb.hkedcity.net>) to provide learning and teaching resources relevant to NSS Liberal Studies.

6. How should schools plan their three-year Liberal Studies curriculum?

The total lesson time allocated to Liberal Studies in the three-year senior secondary curriculum is approximately 250 hours. Schools may arrange the lesson time flexibly throughout the three years, and they may also work in coordination with other curricula (e.g. Languages, Moral and Civic Education, etc.) to achieve the objectives of the subject.

The issues to be explored in Liberal Studies often concern more than a single module (e.g. human swine flu or Influenza A H1N1 can be discussed under both modules of “Public Health” and “Hong Kong Today”). However, it is common for schools to arrange students to study certain modules earlier, so that they can make effective use of the knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired from these modules to enquire into the others at a later time.

In planning their Liberal Studies curriculum, schools will consider the abilities, interests and habits of their students, the expertise of their teachers, and the curriculum characteristics of the school, and draw up teaching plans and work schedules for each form, including the deadlines for the submission of assignments for each of the three stages of IES.

7. What support measures are available for schools?

EDB will continue to organise different types of professional development programmes for Liberal Studies teachers and update the content of the “Web-based Resource Platform for Liberal Studies” regularly to support the teaching of the subject. In addition, the “Liberal Studies School Network Scheme” implemented by EDB will continue to provide opportunities for teachers to share their experiences and learn from each other.

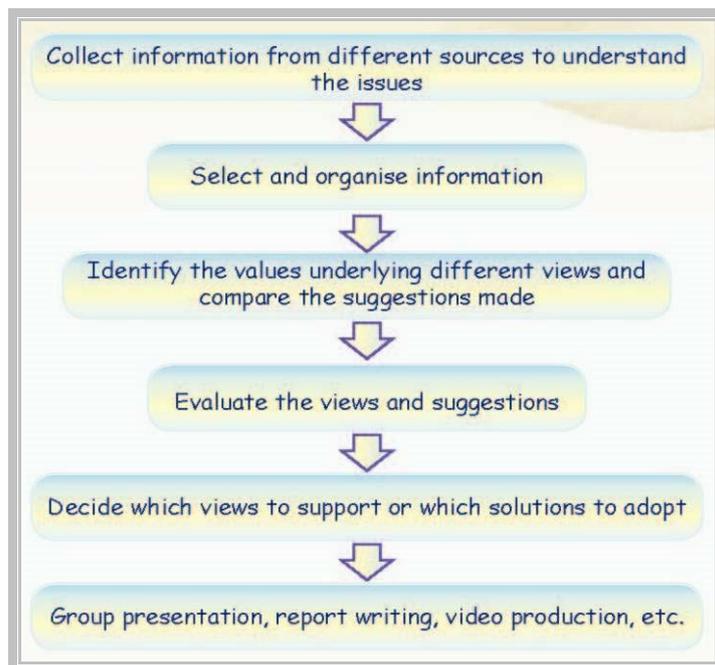
8. How do students study Liberal Studies?

Issues explored in Liberal Studies are often those that are widely discussed in society (e.g. should certain historic buildings be demolished?). These issues

involve a number of controversies (e.g. Should we pursue “urban development” or “cultural conservation?”), and no consensus on them has yet been reached in the community.

The “issue-enquiry” approach adopted for Liberal Studies is a process in which students take the initiatives in raising questions, consult a range of references and opinions and then reflect on their own views, make suggestions or propose solutions to problems. Throughout the entire issue-enquiry process, students may learn to understand the views of different stakeholders (such as the government, non-governmental organisations, parents, young people, etc.) on the issues explored, and understand the issues from a variety of perspectives (such as economic, cultural, scientific, etc.). They will also learn to respect evidence, stay open-minded to different viewpoints and formulate their own stance on different issues.

During the enquiry process, students have the opportunity to think, discuss, collaborate with their peers, and collect information after class. Generally speaking, the issue-enquiry process involves the following steps:



9. What is “Independent Enquiry Study” (IES)

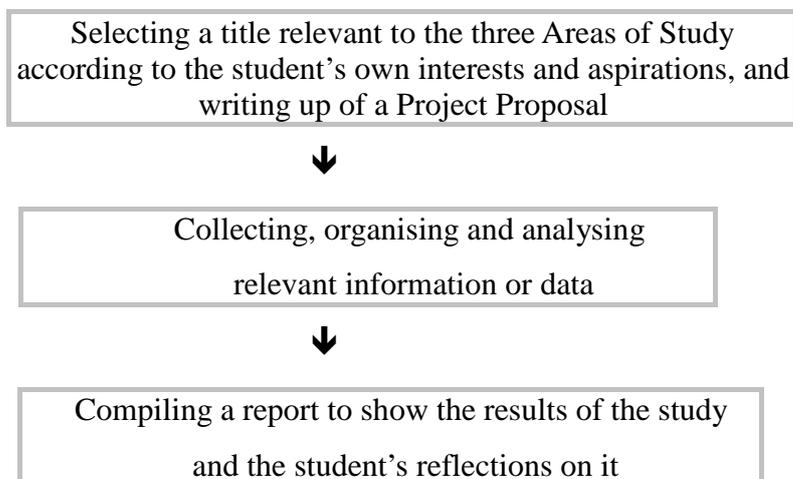
“IES” allows students to choose their own study titles which suit their interests. It provides an opportunity for students to conduct a self-directed study and demonstrate various skills (such as problem-solving skills and self-management skills). These skills provide a useful foundation for students’ further studies and future careers.

As students have already experienced different modes of project learning in different subjects during primary and junior secondary education, they should have acquired some understanding of the basic project skills (such as skills in collecting and organising information, and in presenting the products). However, as an important component of a senior secondary subject, the “IES” requires students to demonstrate more advanced thinking skills.

Nature: It is not only an assignment, but also an integral part of classroom learning and an essential learning experience in the Liberal Studies curriculum. It provides students with a good opportunity for self-directed learning.

Aim: It aims to provide an opportunity for students to learn to become self-directed learners. Throughout the enquiry process, students are required to take the initiatives in raising questions and finding answers, and to be responsible for their plans and decisions.

The enquiry process:



Product: The main body of the report can be in written or non-written forms (e.g. a video programme). The former should be between 1,500 and 4,000 words while the latter should be accompanied by a short written text (of 300 - 1,000 words) explaining the main idea of the project and showing the student’s reflections on it.

Teachers’ role: To supervise and guide their students in the study process so that the students can carry out their study independently.

For details about “Independent Enquiry Study”, please refer to Section 2.8, Chapter 2 of the *Liberal Studies Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4 – 6)*.

10. Are “textbooks” necessary to students’ learning in Liberal Studies?

During their study of Liberal Studies, students often have to access up-to-date information sources of current affairs. Therefore, the learning and teaching resources selected for this subject must often be kept updated. They should also provide background and basic knowledge related to the issues explored, and bring out the views, suggestions and values of different groups in society.

For effective learning of the subject, students do not have to rely on a single “textbook” as a major learning resource. On the contrary, they should refer to a wider range of information sources such as books, newspapers, magazines, television programmes, web-based learning materials, and even their own experiences.

11. What if schools have already adopted certain “textbooks” for NSS Liberal Studies?

Some schools may use “textbooks” to provide a starting point for teachers and students to adapt to the learning and teaching of Liberal Studies. “Textbooks” selected by schools should only be treated as supplementary resources for the study of certain issues. Teachers should not be expected to cover everything in the textbooks.

Owing to the ever-changing nature of issues to be explored in Liberal Studies, teachers will provide students with diverse learning materials relevant to these issues and adapt the content of the “textbooks” to cater for the different learning needs of students. Students should also participate in the collection and analysis of information so as to enjoy fruitful learning outcomes.

12. Do students need to study “Liberal Studies” at the junior secondary level?

Liberal Studies is a senior secondary subject which is built on the foundation knowledge students have acquired from different Key Learning Areas (KLAs) in their junior secondary education, where they developed systematically foundation

knowledge to relevant areas. Some secondary schools offer “Liberal Studies” in the junior forms, which comprises mainly of learning activities such as project learning and thinking skills training, and occasionally discussions on cross-disciplinary issues. These school-based curricula are designed to suit the needs of the students of different schools, and are conducive to developing their “learning to learn” capacity.

However, it is not necessary for schools to offer “Liberal Studies” in the junior forms. Students in their junior forms do not have to prematurely deal with the enquiry questions of the six modules in NSS Liberal Studies. In fact, in conducting an issue-enquiry, it is important that students possess the relevant knowledge base, otherwise the enquiry would become superficial. To prepare students in the junior forms for their learning in NSS Liberal Studies, schools should:

1. strengthen students’ knowledge gained through the eight KLAs in the junior forms and ensure that students have a sound development of the generic skills (such as critical thinking skills, creativity and communication skills), and positive values and attitudes;
2. implement the Four Key Tasks (i.e., Reading to Learn, Project Learning, Moral and Civic Education, and Information Technology for Interactive Learning) as part of the strategies to develop students’ learning to learn capacity and provide them with a cross-curricular or cross-disciplinary learning opportunity.

13. Why is public assessment needed for Liberal Studies?

Public assessment is conducted for this subject so that students’ efforts and achievements in this important subject are properly assessed, recognised and reported. Public assessment also allows students’ learning outcomes in this subject to be recognised by both local and overseas educational institutions. In fact, Liberal Studies has been made an admission criterion by all local universities.

14. What are included in the public assessment of Liberal Studies?

The public assessment of NSS Liberal Studies consists of a public examination component and a School-based Assessment (SBA) component:

Component	Part	Weighting	Duration
Public Examination	Paper 1: Data-response questions (answer all questions)	50%	2 hours
	Paper 2: Extended-response questions (answer one of the questions only)	30%	1 hour & 15 minutes
School-based Assessment (SBA)	“Independent Enquiry Study” (IES)	20%	

15. Do students need to memorise a lot of information when preparing for the public examination of Liberal Studies?

Assessment in Liberal Studies requires candidates to study and master a range of issues in different contexts. They should be able to integrate as well as apply what they have learnt to enquire into and reflect upon different issues. The question format used in Liberal Studies is not designed to test whether candidates could provide certain “correct answers”; and there will not be any “model answers” to the examination questions. Candidates are required to demonstrate a sound understanding of the issues reflected in the given data, show a proper understanding of the requirements of the questions, and express their own opinions on the issues.

The two papers aim to assess abilities such as identification, application and analysis of given information. They provide a wide context for students to demonstrate various higher-order skills (e.g. drawing critically on relevant experience and the views of others) and skills in communicating their views systematically.

To secure good results in Liberal Studies, students do not have to memorise certain theories or information. Rather, they should work at deepening their understanding of the enquiry questions for the six modules and enhance the various abilities stressed in the assessment of this subject through the process of issue-enquiry. For Liberal Studies, “model answers” and detailed notes would help neither the learning of the subject nor the taking of examination. Study methods that are overly examination-oriented and emphasise too much on drilling

of answering techniques will only dampen students' motivation and deprive them of the opportunity for self-directed learning.

16. Without any “model answers”, how will students' examination answer scripts be marked in Liberal Studies?

The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) has adopted a rigorous monitoring mechanism to ensure fairness in marking:

- Experienced secondary school teachers are appointed as markers;
- For each question, markers are provided with clear marking guidelines comprising level descriptors according to the candidates' different standards of performance;
- Before the marking work starts, a Markers' Meeting will be held to arrive at professional consensus on the marking criteria and standards for each question;
- Markers are required to go through training and pass a qualifying test before they are allowed to mark the live scripts;
- Qualified markers are required to follow the marking guidelines instead of their personal and subjective views or preferences;
- The Chief and Assistant Examiners will supervise markers' work through systematic checkmarking; and
- “Double-marking”, i.e. the independent marking of each script by two markers, will be adopted. If there is a significant discrepancy in the marks awarded by the two markers, the HKEAA will take further action to ensure the reliability of the marking.

For details about public assessment for Liberal Studies, please refer to Chapter 5 of the *Liberal Studies Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4 - 6)* and the following HKEAA website:

http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/tc/HKDSE/Subject_Information/lib_st/.

17. How will the School-based Assessment be administered?

The School-based Assessment (SBA) component of Liberal Studies (i.e. in the form of an IES) is assessed in three stages by the students' own teachers. The HKEAA has published a *School-based Assessment Teachers' Handbook*. Schools will work according to the guidelines in the *Handbook* so that teachers will decide on a set of professional, fair, practical and feasible criteria for awarding marks through various means.

To ensure fairness in SBA, the *School-based Assessment Teachers' Handbook* sets out the ways of authenticating students' work (Section 3.3) and handling malpractice (e.g. copying others' work) (Chapter 6). The *Handbook* can be obtained from the HKEAA's website.

For details about SBA, please visit the following websites:

- School-based Assessment: <http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/sba>
- School-based Assessment for Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE): http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/sba/sba_hkdse/
- School-based Assessment for Liberal Studies:
http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/sba/sba_hkdse_core/

18. How Can Parents Help Their Children Study Liberal Studies?

Schools provide students with a suitable environment and methods of learning so that students may master the subject. Since Liberal Studies aims to help students develop “independent” and “self-directed” learning capabilities, there is no need for parents to lend their hand for tasks that their children are able to complete on their own (e.g. assignments and the IES projects). Rather, it is important that parents give their children timely encouragement and care. To enhance their children's learning in Liberal Studies, parents do not need to “know everything”, but should work with the school to:

1. enhance their children's social awareness

Parents can make full use of the different media and online resources, including relevant web links to various organisations, government websites, newspaper and or magazine websites, TV news programmes, and daily-life activities, to cultivate in their children an awareness of their surroundings. For instance, parents can:

- discuss with their children what is happening around them;
- discuss current issues with their children from different angles; and
- set a role model by showing concern for the neighbourhood and the community.

2. enrich their children's life experiences

Parents can encourage and support their children to develop the habit of reading widely and engaging proactively in different kinds of activities. For example, parents can encourage their children to:

- subscribe to newspapers (especially those include a student section) and read a wide range of materials from academic writings, magazines and newspapers to online resources; and
- engage in different kinds of activities such as museum visits and community services to enhance their ability to integrate and synthesise knowledge in a holistic manner.

3) help their children develop critical thinking skills

In helping their children to develop critical thinking skills, parents should leave room for their children to think and discuss. They should also instil in their children qualities of respect for evidence and the views of others. For instance, parents can:

- encourage their children to raise questions and express their own views, ensure enough time for discussion and and give compliments constantly;
- listen to their children's views on a range of issues and avoid making premature judgment so that they have confidence in developing critical thinking skills; and
- let their children know when the children's views have successfully changed their parents'.

4) understand how their children's "IES" is progressing

The most important role parents play in facilitating their children's "IES" is to encourage their children to complete tasks that they are able to accomplish, so that their children can enjoy the pleasure and satisfaction of self-directed learning. They can also encourage their children to accomplish assignments within the required time at different stages of the IES. Besides, parents may communicate

with their children more frequently so as to understand their children's IES progress and recognise their children's efforts. However, extra support such as having a finger in their children's IES projects or collecting information for them is not necessary.

19. What are the arrangements for the medium of instruction and the language for examination for Liberal Studies?

Upon the implementation of the fine-tuning arrangements regarding the medium of instruction (MOI) for secondary schools, all schools can make professional judgements on the MOI for all non-language subjects (including Liberal Studies) at the senior secondary level in accordance with their students' abilities and needs, as well as the schools' circumstances. Should schools claim to adopt English as the MOI for any Liberal Studies, the medium for delivering the subject content in the lesson, the basic learning and teaching materials, assignments for learning reinforcement and assessment/evaluation for learning should primarily be in English. Similarly, for schools adopting Chinese as the MOI for the subject, the medium for delivering the subject content in the lesson, the basic textbooks, assignments for learning reinforcement and assessment/evaluation for learning should primarily be in Chinese.

The focus of the Liberal Studies curriculum is to develop students' ability to integrate and apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired. Questions in the HKDSE Liberal Studies examination are also set in a cross-modular manner, requiring candidates to analyze social issues from multiple perspectives. Taking the examination in one language is therefore in the best interests of candidates.

20. Liberal Studies help students to develop critical thinking skills. But will that make them criticise everything and turn defiant?

Critical thinking is different from "criticising everything" or deliberately raising opposing views to make oneself outstanding. Critical thinking is the process through which an individual makes a judgment after an in-depth reflection on the views, suggestions and values of himself / herself and those of other people or organisations, followed by continuous deliberation and reference to a wide range of evidence and data.

Liberal Studies aims to develop in students critical thinking skills through the study of a wide range of issues. Such skills include the ability to communicate opinions clearly and systematically, demonstrate respect for evidence and open-

mindedness and tolerance towards different views, as well as show empathy for other people's stances.

21. How can parents obtain the latest information on Liberal Studies?

In order to help parents understand the subject nature of Liberal Studies and its pedagogical approaches, the EDB has been putting in place various measures, including organising district-based parents' seminars, publishing pamphlets and this Parents' Handbook, and producing promotional videos. Parents may visit the EDB's website (<http://www.edb.gov.hk/parentstalks>) and look for more details about the parents' seminars.

EDB will continue to maintain a close contact with schools' Careers Groups and ensure that the Parent-Teacher Association in each school has proper access to the latest information on the subject, so that parents understand how Liberal Studies is implemented in schools and may better support their children to adjust to the modes of learning in Liberal Studies in a short time. Parents may also visit the "Parents' Corner" in the "Web-based Resource Platform for Liberal Studies" (<http://ls.edb.hkedcity.net>) for relevant information on the subject.

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