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FOUNDATION
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Liberating Liberal Studies:

Cultivating Interdisciplinary Learning,
Thinking Skills and Appreciation of Diversity

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EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY

Purpose

Once hailed as the crown jewel of the New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum, Liberal Studies has been put in the limelight due to significant controversies in recent years. On the one hand, advocates applaud pioneering efforts to incorporate thinking skills, social awareness, and other '21st century competencies' in a rigid secondary school curriculum. On the other hand, dubious critics have raised questions about many aspects of its make-up.

At its 10-year juncture, this report examines whether Liberal Studies has achieved its aims and objectives as per the curriculum reform. This review is timely because there have been important secular changes in the past decade, with side effects of the information explosion in the digital age. This report further seeks to sharpen its core aims and offer practical measures to drive better learning outcomes. These measures cover five aspects: curriculum, assessment, teaching materials, teaching process, and articulation.

In preparation for this report, the research team has conducted a total of 25 expert interviews, and hosted roundtables with representatives from schools, the Government, and highly regarded education professionals. In addition, OHKF has commissioned Lingnan University's Public Governance Programme to carry out a territory-wide survey, which yielded responses from 484 Liberal Studies teachers and 71 principals.

Policy Directions

Teachers and students find Liberal Studies' **curriculum** overly broad, with teachers required to deliver 12 themes in only 168 teaching hours. Hong Kong's secondary schools do not have a unified articulation subject leading into NSS Liberal Studies; 68% of teachers surveyed perceive the arrangement as insufficient to lay a solid knowledge foundation and to prepare students for a challenging issue-enquiry approach. Moreover, Liberal Studies is biased towards humanities at the expense of science. This creates a curriculum imbalance, which has impacted Hong Kong's academic performances in science since the NSS' launch.

This report therefore recommends reconfiguring the curriculum by trimming the breadth of topics and deepening the analysis and discussion content, with key concepts clearly defined in the *Liberal Studies Curriculum and Assessment Guide*. In addition, to attain the aim of 'Arts for Science, Science for Arts', both humanities- and science-focused study options should be offered for students to strike a better balance in the overall NSS curriculum. Schools and institutions should facilitate experiential learning, enabling students to gain hands-on experience.

The **assessment** of Liberal Studies is inherently challenging, as it is difficult to quantify higher-order thinking skills and objectively map the results on a quantitative grading scale. Summative assessments tend to direct students' focus towards examination techniques, drills, and language ability, as opposed to the thinking process itself. As a result, examination frameworks have become a hindrance to thinking skills rather than a boost, undermining the pedagogical purpose.

This report recommends redesigning the assessment approach to maximise fairness and flexibility through a pass or fail system, while offering alternative modes of assessment. Relevant curriculum development and assessment committees should collaborate closely to align learning and assessment objectives.

Liberal Studies' **teaching materials** have raised concerns over their availability and quality. Our findings indicate that 87% of teachers surveyed rely on textbooks as a basis for teaching, and an astounding 39% of them use social media as one of their main teaching materials. However, textbooks were not vetted by authorities until recently, and online media has dominated how people receive information, severely affecting the accuracy and objectivity of content circulated in class. This report proposes outlining a set of transparent and practical vetting guidelines on teaching materials, which should ideally extend beyond textbooks to cover supplements such as workbooks and listening materials. Furthermore, the Education Bureau should compile and promote a publicly accessible directory of recommended e-learning resources, and review listings on a regular basis.

This report further investigates Liberal Studies' **teaching process**, which was cited to be another challenge for 56% of teachers surveyed who are required to teach multiple subjects concurrently. This is happening against a backdrop of declining enrolment in specialised university programmes. To uphold teaching quality, the Government should clearly define required competencies and offer support via Continuous Professional Development.

Finally, this report reviews the status of Liberal Studies as a mandatory **articulation** subject. Result-focused articulation, when applied to Liberal Studies, is at odds with an 'assessment for learning' ethos; it also hinders higher-order thinking skills and self-directed learning. It is therefore recommended to exclude Liberal Studies from the JUPAS scoring system – while students are still required to study the subject, a pass would be sufficient for university admission. This will ultimately allow students to reorient themselves and get the most out of the learning process.

Through 13 comprehensive policy recommendations listed below, this report seeks to refocus the role of Liberal Studies in fostering broad-based knowledge drawn from multiple disciplines, cultivating higher-order thinking skills, and appreciating and respecting differences. In line with this effort, the Government may rebrand Liberal Studies as 'Integrated Studies' to underscore its intended learning outcomes. Notwithstanding, Liberal Studies is one of a kind when it comes to achieving its stated learning goals, and remains crucial in nurturing our next generation of leaders vital to Hong Kong's continued prosperity in the 21st century.

Key Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1

Reconfigure the curriculum to facilitate in-depth learning and to cultivate critical thinking skills

- 1.1. Trim the curriculum to intensify analyses, evaluations, and discussions
- 1.2. Outline key learning concepts in the Curriculum and Assessment Guide
- 1.3. Offer humanities- and science-focused study options for students
- 1.4. Partner with organisations to develop module-specific experiential learning

RECOMMENDATION 2

Revamp the grading system, rejuvenate the assessment mechanism, and enhance the overall governance

- 2.1. Replace the seven-point grading scale with a pass or fail system
- 2.2. Incorporate alternative modes of assessment, such as concept mapping, word matching, and multiple choice
- 2.3. Strengthen the recruitment and feedback mechanisms of HKEAA subject and moderation committees, to better align assessment and curriculum development and to enhance transparency and accountability

RECOMMENDATION 3

Ensure fair and unbiased teaching materials to improve learning outcome

- 3.1. Publish clear and transparent vetting guidelines, covering teaching materials attached to textbooks (e.g. training exercises and supplementary tools)
- 3.2. Compile a publicly accessible online directory of recommended e-learning materials and supplements

RECOMMENDATION 4

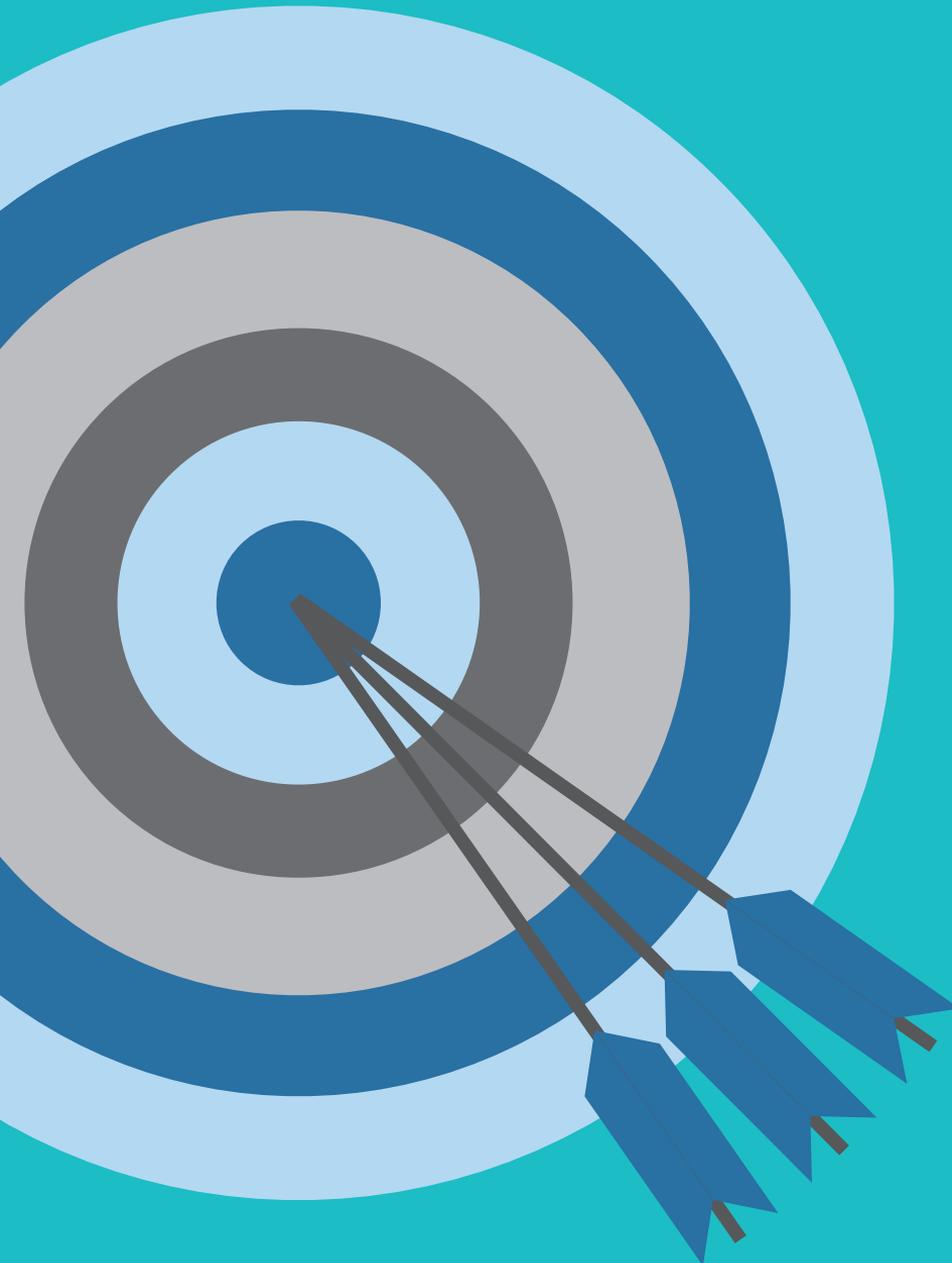
Furnish comprehensive and timely training in order to enhance teaching and learning quality

- 4.1. Publish a teaching manual outlining prerequisite knowledge and skills such as critical thinking theories
- 4.2. Reinforce Continuous Professional Development through learning communities and on-site school support

RECOMMENDATION 5

Adjust Liberal Studies' weight in further articulation, allowing students to refocus on learning rather than assessment

- 5.1. Maintain Liberal Studies as a mandatory HKDSE examination subject
- 5.2. Remove Liberal Studies from the JUPAS scoring system, such that only a pass is required for further articulation



1. INTRODUCTION: RECALIBRATING LIBERAL STUDIES' AIMS

Liberal Studies has been one of four core subjects in the New Senior Secondary (NSS) academic structure since 2009. This subject has played an integral part in the sweeping education reforms since the 2000s. At that time, policymakers had high hopes that the subject would create an educational-paradigm shift, transforming from a knowledge-transmission model to a student-centred ecosystem, while offering an ‘all-rounded education’ for students of the 21st century (Education Commission, 2000).

The objectives of Liberal Studies were summarised in 2005 as the ‘ABC’, namely **A**wareness, **B**roadening, and **C**ritical Thinking (Education Bureau, 2005). These were enshrined in Liberal Studies’ mandatory status, interdisciplinary design, and unorthodox learning and teaching approaches. The *Liberal Studies Curriculum and Assessment Guide* (C&A Guide) builds on the ABCs and lays out a new framework, with the aim of developing a wide array of values, skills, and knowledge in students (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1. Liberal Studies curriculum aims

	Curriculum Aims
Knowledge	To enhance students’ understanding of themselves, their society, their nation, the human world and the physical environment.
	To enable students to develop multiple perspectives on perennial and contemporary issues in different contexts (e.g. cultural, social, economic, political and technological contexts).
Skills	To help students become independent thinkers so that they can construct knowledge appropriate to changing personal and social circumstances.
	To develop in students a range of skills for life-long learning, including critical thinking skills, creativity, problem-solving skills, communication skills and information technology skills.
Values	To help students appreciate and respect diversity in cultures and views in a pluralistic society and handle conflicting values.
	To help students develop positive values and attitude towards life, so that they can become informed and responsible citizens of society, the country and the world.

Source: Education Bureau

Despite the well-intended reforms, Liberal Studies has received significant backlash over the years. Critics have cited disparate teaching standards, broad but vague curriculum content, inappropriate assessment methods, and biased teaching materials. All these issues cast doubts on Liberal Studies’ effectiveness in cultivating open minds, inculcating thinking skills, and instilling positive values, leading to discussion and debate over the subject’s value and purpose.

One of the issues stems from the fact that teachers and education professionals still have discordant understandings of what Liberal Studies' objectives should be and how best to deliver them. This is despite the fact that its multi-faceted objectives have already been stated in official documents and records **(Figure 2)**.

Moreover, the dissonance between the subject's aims and its role in university admissions has raised doubts over whether these broad policy objectives can be achieved merely through a single core subject, as parameters such as values and self-directed learning are too ambiguous to measure when assessing learning outcomes.

Figure 2. Recalibrating Liberal Studies' aims



Sources: Education Bureau, Education Commission, and Legislative Council

"[Learning resources] should not be treated as information and fact to be studied and memorised, but as artefacts to be analysed and evaluated critically."

Liberal Studies Curriculum and Assessment Guide (2015)

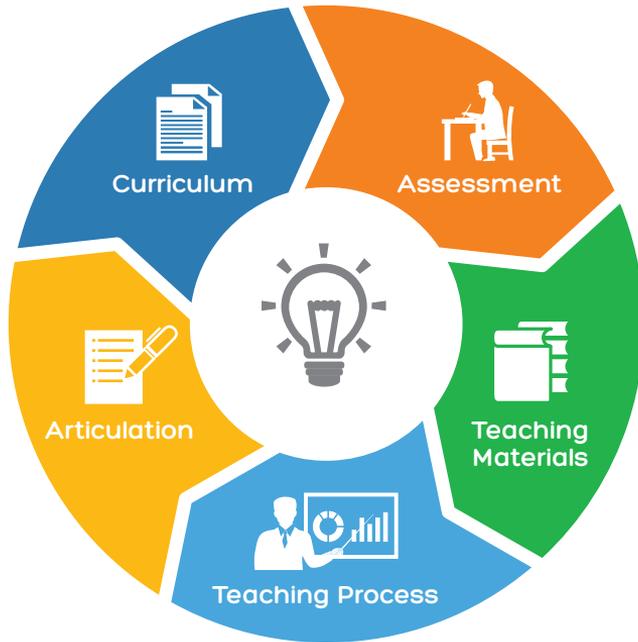
"Every senior secondary student should take Liberal Studies, so that they will be able to analyse practical problems from a wider perspective by applying cross-curricular concepts and knowledge."

Review of the Academic Structure of Senior Secondary Education (2003)

"The issue-enquiry approach aims to encourage students to develop self-learning capacity to pursue knowledge and to open up their minds to alternative views through discussion."

The New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education - Action Plan for Investing in the Future of Hong Kong (2005)

After a ten-year run, it is now timely to review Liberal Studies' relevance and effectiveness, and to assess the fulfilment of its goals. In our view, a comprehensive revamp of the subject is needed to recalibrate its significance in our education system. This report will evaluate Liberal Studies through five interwoven components: curriculum, assessment, teaching materials, teaching process, and articulation. A survey of school principals and Liberal Studies teachers was conducted to complement the report's analysis. This report will propose **five recommendations for enhancing Liberal Studies' learning outcomes**.



-  1. To what extent have the goals of Liberal Studies been fulfilled?
-  2. Are there other methods to achieve similar or better outcomes?

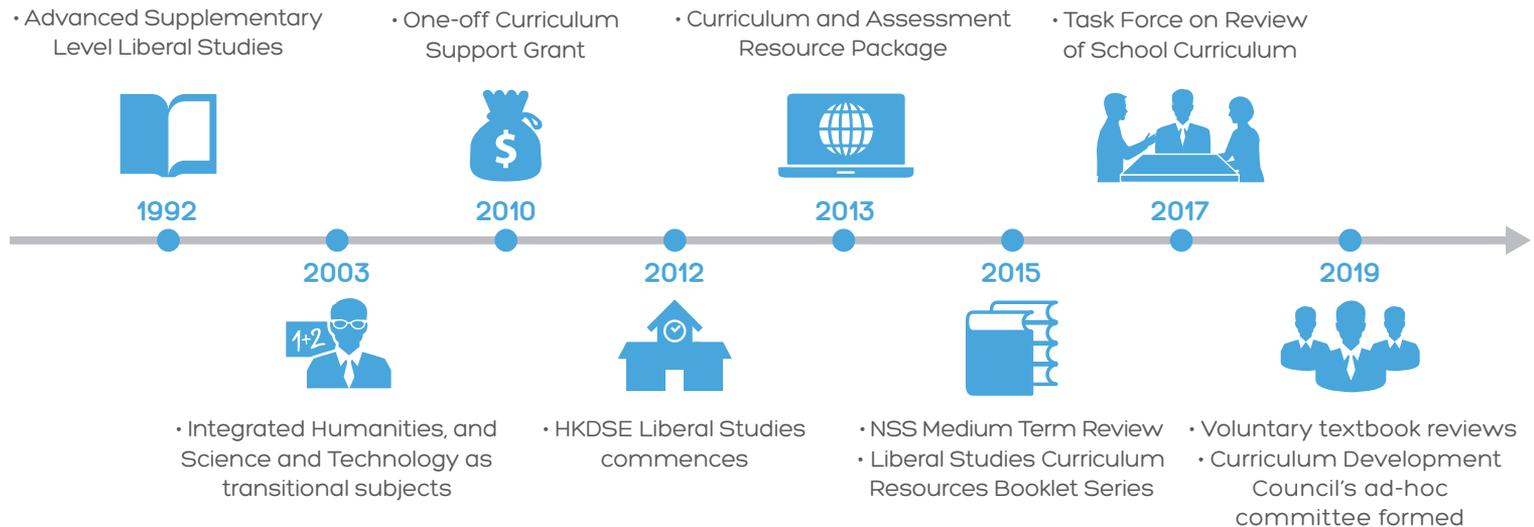


2. THE GLOBAL
CHALLENGE
TO CULTIVATE
THINKING SKILLS

The origins of Liberal Studies can be traced back to the education framework laid out in 1992 when Advanced Supplementary Level (ASL) Liberal Studies was first introduced (**Figure 3**). Though ASL and NSS share similar aims and approaches, the NSS curriculum is more extensive; transitional subjects, such as Integrated Humanities and Life and Society, were also introduced to ensure a smooth transition from the old to new curriculum (Education Bureau, 2006 and 2010).

Measures were then introduced to improve and refine Liberal Studies, including the Task Force on Review of School Curriculum in 2017, which recommended that the Liberal Studies curriculum be trimmed down, while allowing students to opt out of the Independent Enquiry Study (IES) (Task Force on Review of School Curriculum, 2019). An ad-hoc committee was further established under the Curriculum Development Council in November 2019 for further review (Curriculum Development Council, n.d.).

Figure 3. Liberal Studies was first launched in Hong Kong in the 1990s



Sources: Hong Kong Education City, Education Bureau, and Legislative Council

Liberal Studies can hardly be described as a local development. It was part of a wider trend, as different countries increasingly emphasised on skills such as critical thinking, communication, active citizenship, and self-directed learning to meet 21st century challenges (**Figure 4**). However, societal developments continue to pose unprecedented challenges to the education system despite concerted reform efforts.

Figure 4. Goals and approaches converge as different regions develop ‘21st century competencies’

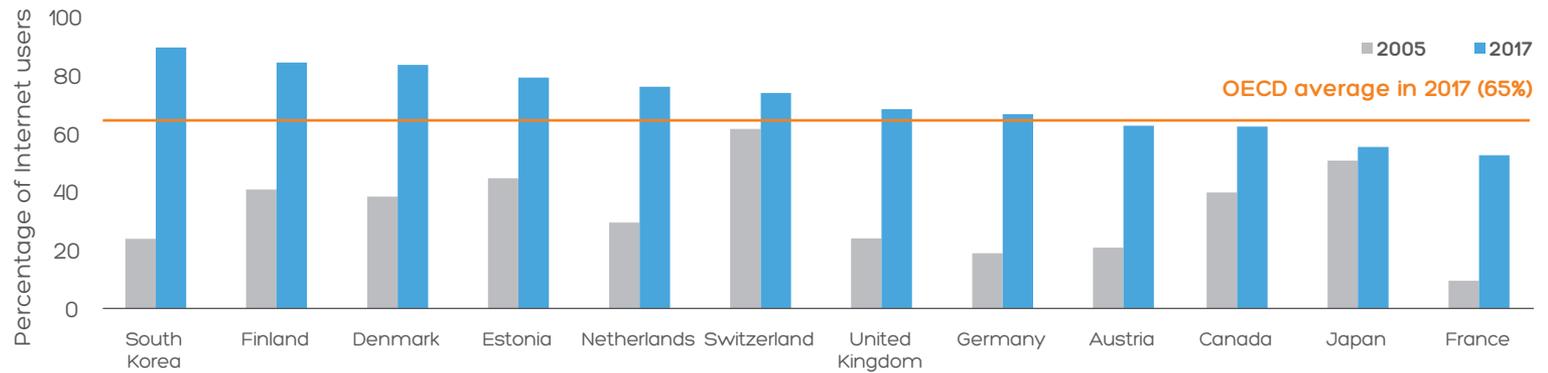


Singapore’s 1997 policy initiative, *Thinking Schools, Learning Nation* (TSLN), aims to foster a creative and critical-thinking culture (Chiam, Hong, Ning & Tay, 2014) through education. Capitalising on the initiative, the country developed the ‘21st Century Competencies’ (21CC) framework to equip students with ‘Civic Literacy, Global Awareness and Cross-Cultural Skills’, ‘Critical and Inventive Thinking’ and ‘Information and Communication Skills’ (Ministry of Education, Singapore, n.d.). A General Paper subject was made compulsory in the Singapore GCE A-Level in 2006, aiming to equip students with interdisciplinary knowledge and higher-order thinking skills (Bryer, 2008).

The United States Department of Education took a bottom-up approach by allying with private enterprises such as Apple, Cisco, Dell, and Microsoft in 2002 to form the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21). The organisation published the *Framework for 21st Century Learning* in 2007 which laid out the 4C’s principles of Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009). Community networks are made up of states and schools which jointly influence how schools realise 4C’s education goals.

With trillions of bytes of information flittering through the internet every second, fake news and rumours present significant challenges to all contemporary societies. Online news and social media platforms dominate and shape people’s understanding of the world. The proportion of people between 16 and 74 years old who consume news online had increased dramatically from 25% in 2005 to 65% in 2017 (**Figure 5**) (OECD, 2019). People have never been more exposed to misinformation, which poses difficulties for educators guiding young minds to process, evaluate, analyse information as well as generate informed opinions.

Figure 5. In 2017, 65% of people (16 to 74 years old) consumed news online, compared to only 25% in 2005

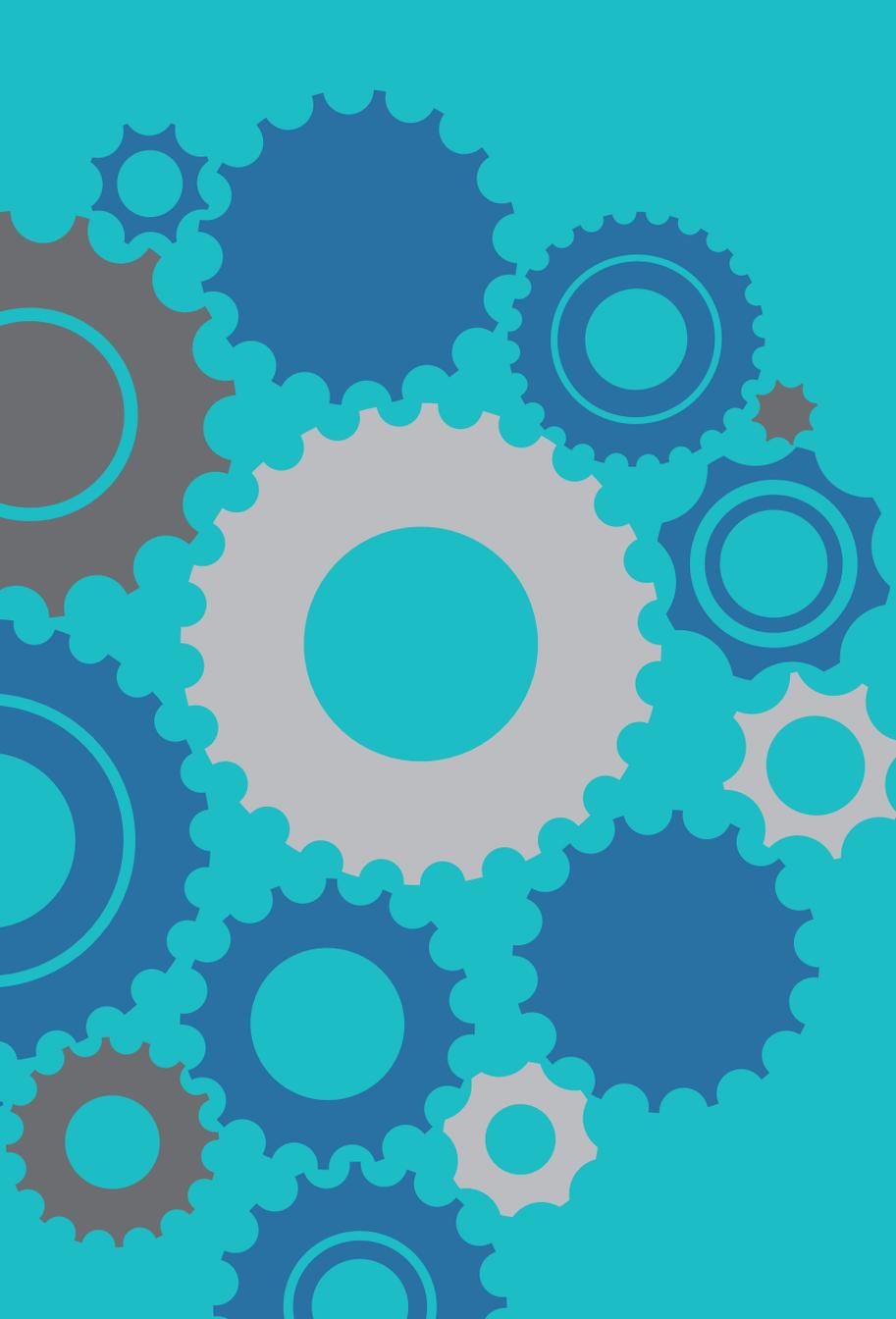


Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Scholars have been examining how the younger generation process online information for years. A 2016 Stanford University study of 7,804 secondary and tertiary students found that more than 80% of students could not differentiate between real and fake news, and most of them had difficulty determining whether a news story shared on social media was credible (Donald, 2016). A 2018 Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) study found that on Twitter, fake stories spread faster than real stories (Dizikes, 2018).

To think and analyse critically, one must first be able to have a clear grasp of facts. In response to global trends, governments have begun demanding that schools develop students’ media literacy—the ability to derive meaning from multiple media sources and to assess their credibility.

This phenomenon demonstrates just how important Liberal Studies is, as critical minds are needed more than ever.



3. METHODOLOGY

To survey the ground situation, 25 expert interviews were conducted to understand the challenges in teaching and assessing Liberal Studies. A roundtable meeting was held by Our Hong Kong Foundation (OHKF) in April 2020, inviting leaders and experts in the education field to identify areas of improvement.

A territory-wide online bilingual educator survey, commissioned by OHKF in partnership with Lingnan University's Public Governance Programme, has received 555 anonymous responses from secondary school principals and Liberal Studies teachers between May and July 2020. The survey posed 50 multiple-choice questions, and respondents either selected their choice, ranked several options, or indicated their level of agreement. Questions were set to capture views on Liberal Studies curriculum, assessment, teaching materials, teaching process, and articulation.

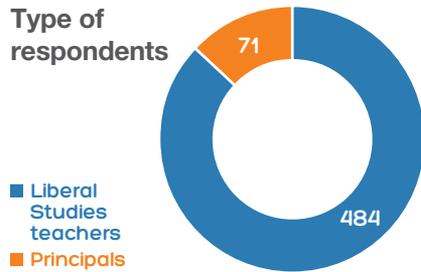
71 respondents were principals and 484 were Liberal Studies teachers, with over **50%** of the teachers having more than ten years of experience in Liberal Studies. **44%** of teachers surveyed specialised in Liberal Studies while the remaining **56%** taught other subjects simultaneously. The alternative type of subject most Liberal Studies teachers taught was arts, constituting **69%** of the group (**Figure 6**).

Survey questions are either designed for Liberal Studies teachers and/or school principals, depending on the subject matter. In particular, questions regarding teaching methods, materials, and students' abilities are targeted at teachers, while overall comments and impressions are targeted at both. Questions on strategic directions are targeted at principals.

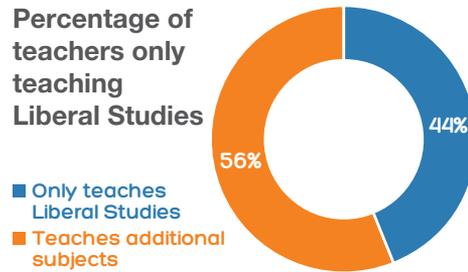
Survey results will be discussed in further detail in the following sections.

Figure 6. Liberal Studies survey respondent demographics

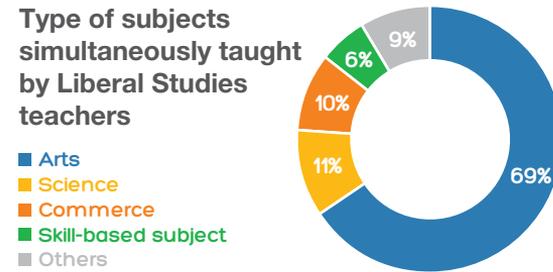
Type of respondents



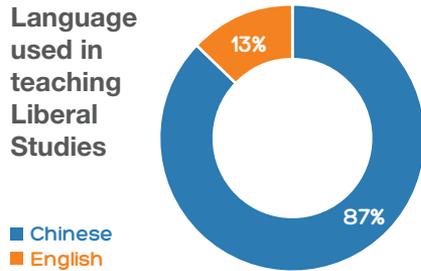
Percentage of teachers only teaching Liberal Studies



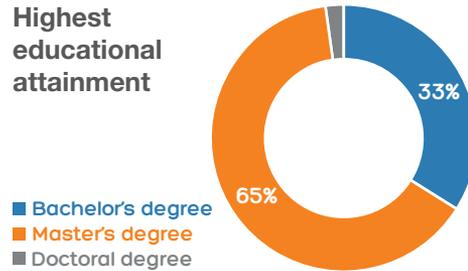
Type of subjects simultaneously taught by Liberal Studies teachers



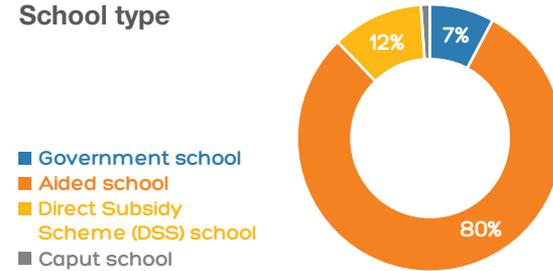
Language used in teaching Liberal Studies



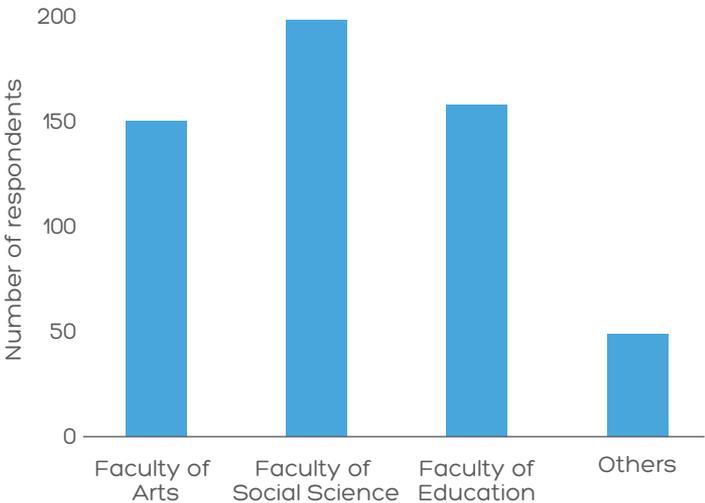
Highest educational attainment



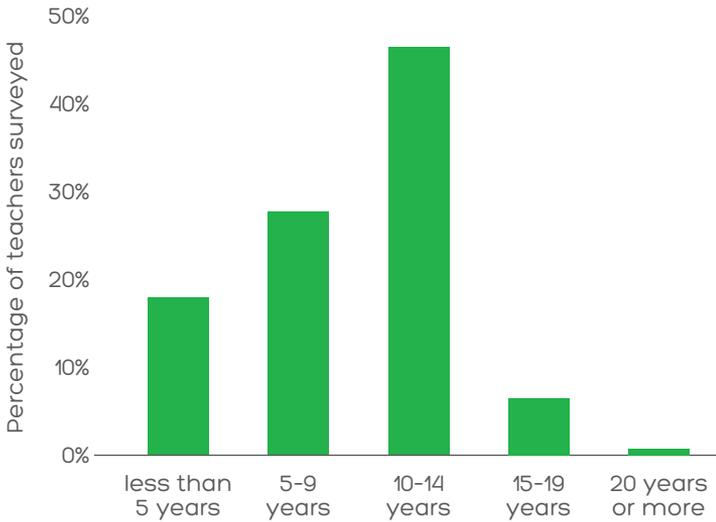
School type



Faculty from which the teachers and principals graduated



Years of experience teaching Liberal Studies



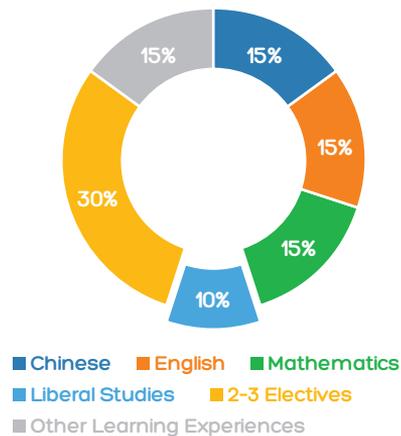


4. CURRICULUM

The Liberal Studies curriculum comprises three Areas of Study, covering six modules divided into 12 themes (**Figure 7**). Breadth is important for an interdisciplinary subject, but when does it become excessive? Are students equipped with a broad knowledge base that is sufficient to engage in interdisciplinary learning, with science and humanities subjects properly balanced?

Figure 7. Liberal Studies covers a diverse range of subjects, and takes up just 10 percent of the New Senior Secondary (NSS) Curriculum

NSS curriculum teaching hours breakdown



Liberal Studies Component	Teaching Hours
Modules	168
Independent Enquiry Study (IES)	82
Total	250

Area of Study	Modules	Themes
Self and Personal Development	1. Personal Development and Interpersonal Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding oneself • Interpersonal relationships
	2. Hong Kong Today	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of life • Rule of law and socio-political participation • Identity
Society and Culture	3. Modern China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China's reform and opening-up • Chinese culture and modernity
	4. Globalisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of globalisation and related responses
	5. Public Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding public health • Science, technology and public health
Science, Technology and the Environment	6. Energy Technology and the Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The influences of energy technology • The environment and sustainable development

Source: Education Bureau

4.1. Challenges

► CHALLENGE 1: Overly broad curriculum content

63% of teachers and **59%** of principals surveyed perceive the current curriculum as rather/too broad.

Teachers struggle to complete course content within allotted class times. The NSS curriculum devotes only 10% of total teaching hours to Liberal Studies, which equates to 168 hours in total to finish all six modules or around 14 hours for each theme (Education Bureau, 2017).

Is it realistic to expect students to master broad themes such as science, technology and public health, or Chinese culture and modernity in only 14 hours? How in-depth can students' learning be given the curriculum's vast breadth and time constraint?

65% of teachers surveyed report difficulty in delivering the key concepts underlying curriculum modules within the prescribed time frames.

► CHALLENGE 2: Inability to build a solid knowledge foundation

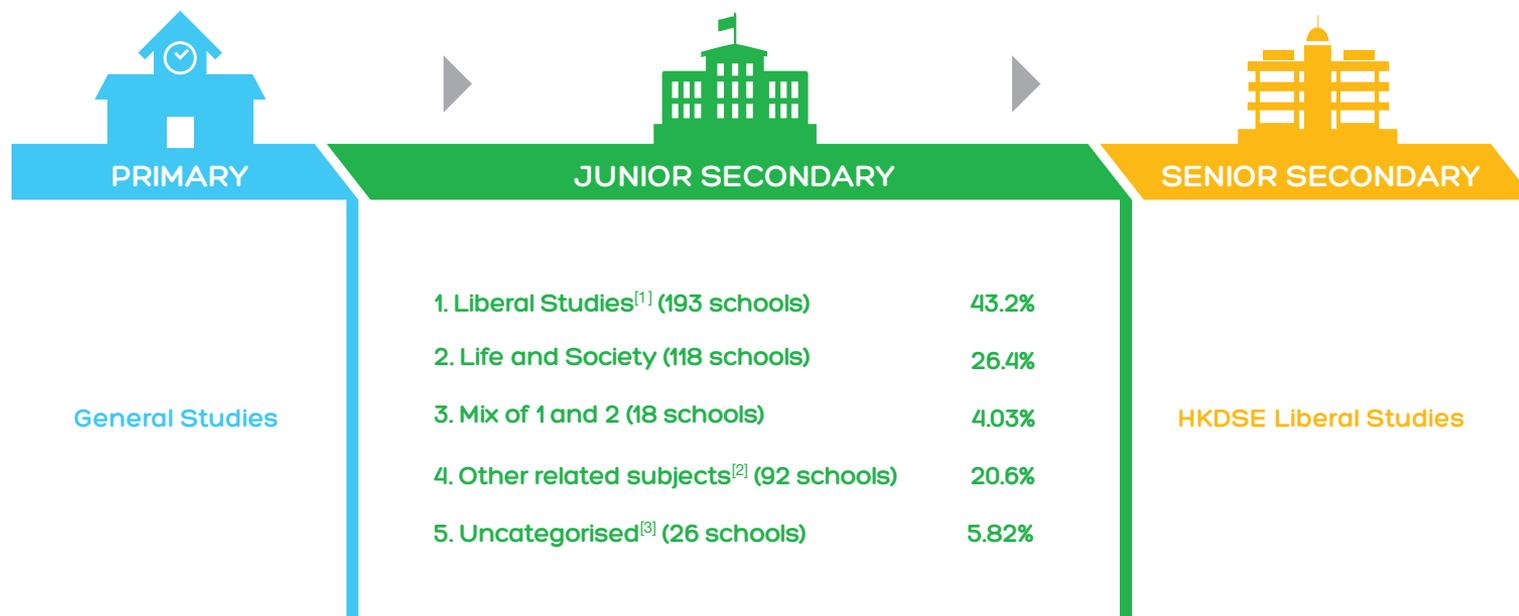
Solid foundation knowledge buttresses informed discussions, evaluations, and reflections. The C&A Guide (2015) suggests that foundation knowledge for Liberal Studies should begin to be sown in primary and junior secondary levels.

Under the school-based management policy, Hong Kong's secondary schools are free to make their own junior secondary curriculum arrangements, resulting in students reaching senior secondary level with uneven levels of preparation, knowledge, and experience.

68% of teachers surveyed perceive students' knowledge base (from junior secondary level) as inadequate for a vigorous issue-enquiry approach in Liberal Studies.

Among 447 secondary schools, 193 offered Liberal Studies at the junior secondary level, while 118 other schools offered Life and Society; the remaining 136 offered Integrated Humanities, Social Studies, or similar subjects, according to the Committee on Home-School Co-operation's *Secondary School Profiles 2019/2020* (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Under Hong Kong's school-based management, there is no single approach for curriculum alignment



Sources: *Secondary School Profiles 2019/2020*, and 447 school websites

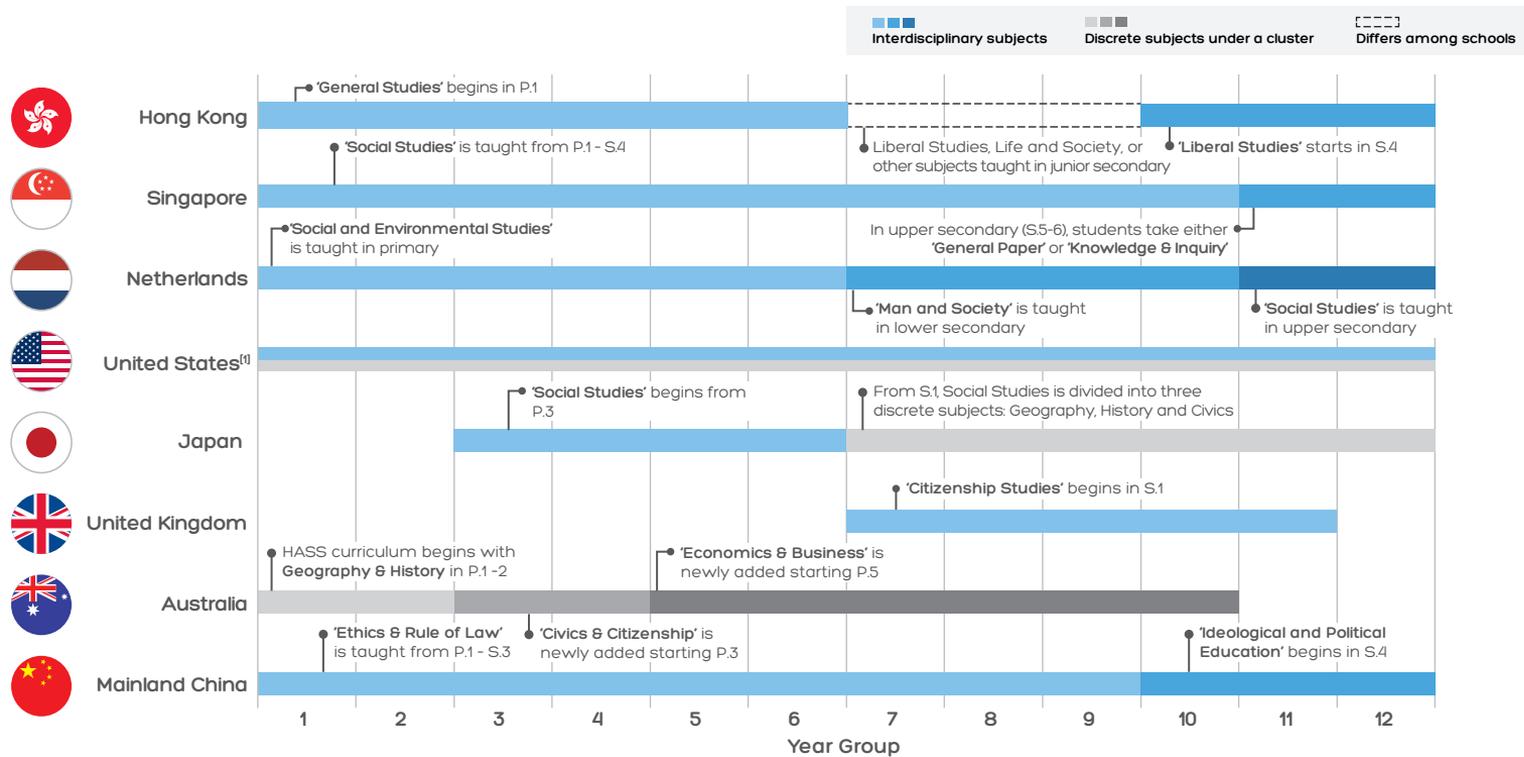
Notes: [1] Some schools use course titles 'Liberal Studies' and 'Life and Society' interchangeably

[2] Subjects include Integrated Humanities, Economy & Society, Social Studies, and Moral & Civic Education

[3] Schools not explicitly offering Liberal Studies courses / courses mentioned above

This curriculum alignment differs from overseas practices (**Figure 9**). Countries which deliver curricula emphasising higher-order thinking skills and in-depth learning begin with a solid knowledge base by ensuring smooth transitions between different education stages. Singapore, the Netherlands, and mainland China structure interdisciplinary subjects into multiple stages, while Australia and Japan ease transitions by clustering subjects in a progressive order.

Figure 9. Uneven junior secondary curriculum by Hong Kong schools differs from more unified international approaches



Sources: National Centre On Education and the Economy, Ministry of Education (Singapore), GOV.UK, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Japan), Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, People.cn, National Council for the Social Studies, Government of the Netherlands, Education Bureau (Hong Kong), and Education Commission of the States

Note: [1] Curriculum standards design and course delivery varies across states, where schools either teach content through Social Studies or other discrete subjects

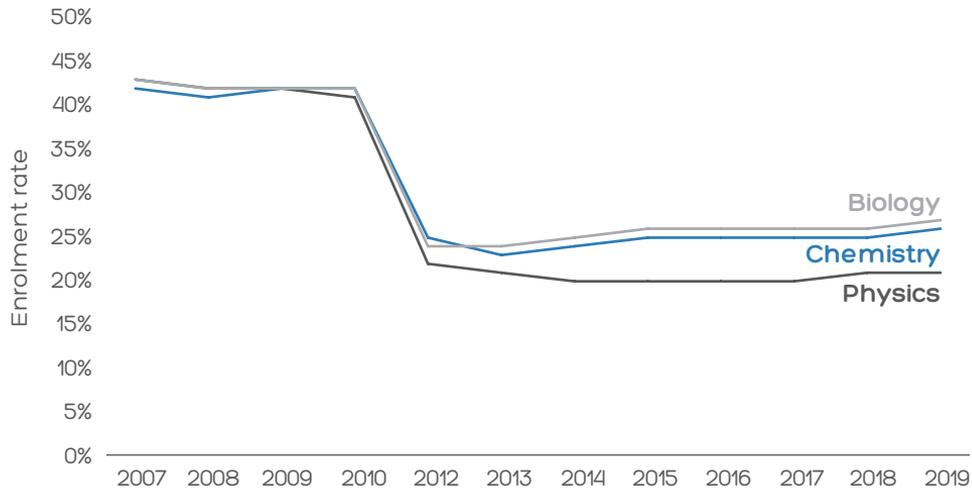
► CHALLENGE 3: Imbalance of science and humanities content

Liberal Studies was initially designed to provide a comprehensive learning experience, “ensuring that students, irrespective of whether they are in the science or arts streams, would gain exposure to the discipline of the other stream.” (Education Commission, 2003, p.16)

The principle of academic cross-pollination in Liberal Studies’ context is described as ‘Arts for Science, Science for Arts’ (文中有理，理中有文). However, the current curriculum skews heavily towards humanities, only two out of six modules are science-related.

This bias jeopardises the curriculum’s overall balance. In fact, Hong Kong has seen declining enrolment rates for Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) science electives since the launch of the NSS academic structure (**Figure 10**).

Figure 10. Local science course enrolment has nearly halved after NSS curriculum began ^[1]

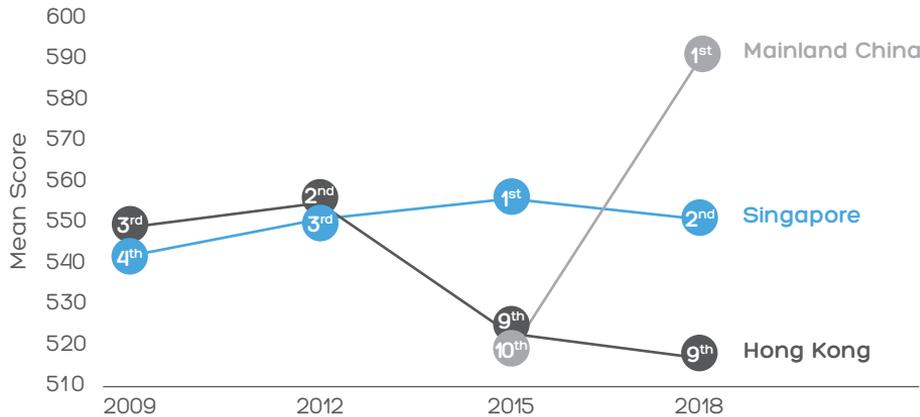


Source: Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority

Note: [1] 2010 was the last HKCEE while 2012 was the year HKDSE commenced. Hence, no data is available for 2011

The academic performance in science has also been affected. Hong Kong students' average science scores had dropped from third in 2009 to ninth in 2018, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report. Singapore and China led the 2018 PISA rankings, taking the second and first places respectively (**Figure 11**).

Figure 11. PISA mean science scores for 2009–2018



Source: Programme for International Student Assessment

Liberal Studies' emphasis on pure science understandably cannot match traditional science subjects; it should instead focus on Socio-scientific issues (SSI). These complex societal topics reference the sciences and immerse students in interdisciplinary and issue-based discussions (Zeidler & Kahn, 2014). Lessons revolve around hot topics such as global warming, genetic testing, and nutrition, teaching students to apply scientific principles to real world scenarios. Proper enquiry of scientific issues, however, still requires a solid understanding of science fundamentals, of which Hong Kong's Liberal Studies curriculum falls short.

26 states in the US jointly developed the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) in 2013 to provide an internationally benchmarked science education for K-12 students. One of their key teaching approaches is to introduce core scientific ideas rather than specific facts within each content area (NGSS Lead States, 2013; Zeidler & Kahn, 2014). Students apply their knowledge to novel situations and new information, which parallels the SSI approach. The Education Bureau should explore ways to improve science literacy through SSI in Liberal Studies.

4.2. Recommendation 1: Reconfigure the curriculum to facilitate in-depth learning and to cultivate critical thinking skills

To better attain curriculum goals, the government should reorganise the curriculum by trimming the breadth of topics and deepening the analysis and discussion content, with key concepts clearly defined. Liberal Studies should help to strike a balance between science and humanities content in the overall NSS curriculum. This will also create much-needed space for experiential learning.

RECOMMENDATION 1.1

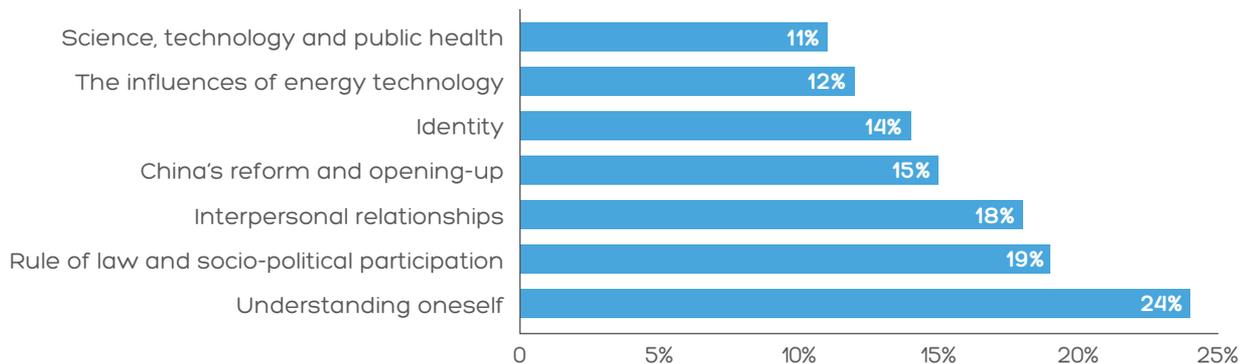
Trim the curriculum to intensify analyses, evaluations, and discussions

Time constraint on Liberal Studies' broad curriculum imperils learning goals. Problems in achieving uniform degrees of in-depth learning and facilitating informed discussion are further exacerbated by deficient curriculum progression.

Teachers delivering course content are backing calls for the Education Bureau to trim Liberal Studies' curriculum. The themes that respondents want to trim are demonstrated in **Figure 12**.

Trimming the curriculum creates space for teachers and students to spend more time on each subject area and to develop multiple and more engaging teaching methods aside from classroom lectures, such as experiential learning.

Figure 12. Themes that teachers want to trim ^[1]



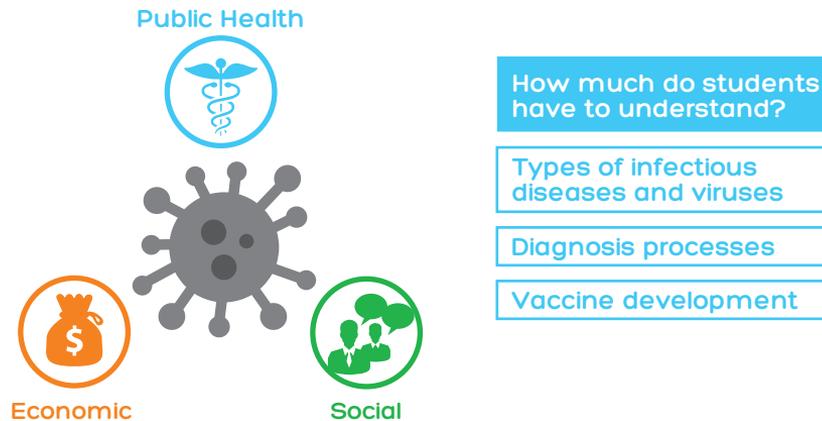
Note: [1] Only themes selected by more than 10% of teachers are shown

RECOMMENDATION 1.2

Outline key learning concepts in the Curriculum and Assessment Guide

Liberal Studies' broad coverage can lead to ambiguous definitions of its scope and key concepts. Enquiry questions are listed in the Curriculum and Assessment Guide, but merely serve as guideposts and fail to detail the skills and concepts that students need to grasp.

One example to understand the issue of scope can be gleaned from dissecting the current COVID-19 pandemic. To what extent should students understand the biochemical properties of infectious diseases, diagnosis processes, and vaccine development in addition to the socio-economic impacts of social distancing, as well as conflicts between public health, economic, and social perspectives?



Students cannot be expected to conceptualise and intelligently navigate this case study through recalling facts alone. Such an approach defeats the entire purpose of Liberal Studies. Only by properly applying contextualised knowledge can students achieve a well-rounded and informed discussion.

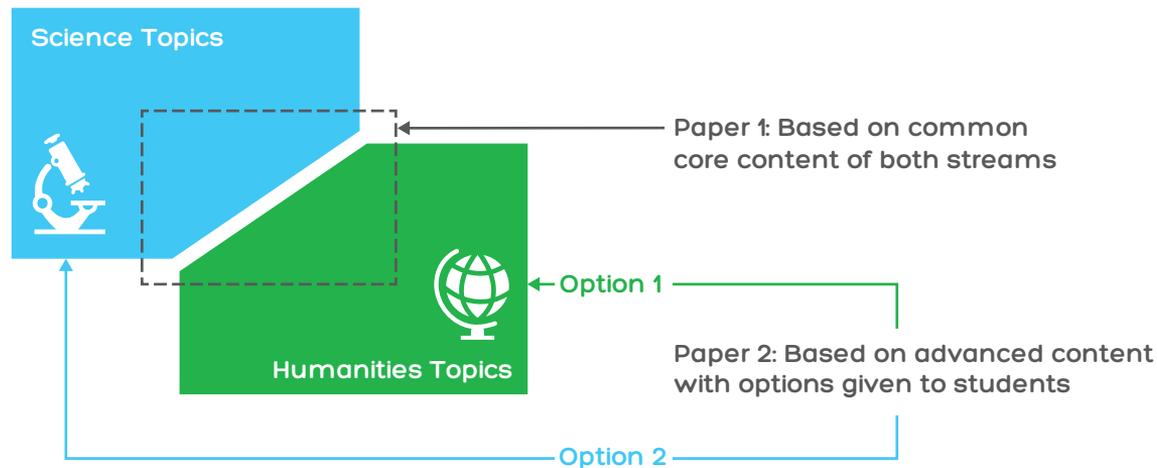
86% of teachers and principals surveyed concur that the C&A Guide should clearly state Liberal Studies' key concepts. A key concept list was incorporated into the Liberal Studies Curriculum Resources Booklet Series, but its effect on teaching and assessment processes remains unclear. Greater clarity on required competencies will influence classroom learning and create a more holistic learning experience.

RECOMMENDATION 1.3

Offer humanities- and science-focused study options for students

Study options should be offered for students to ensure a balanced but sufficiently in-depth study of both disciplines. Students who study mostly science subjects as electives should be required to take the humanities option, while students taking humanities should opt for the science option. Cluster-based selection provides an opportunity for schools to assign teachers with matching expertise to focus on their competitive advantages, which will reduce teachers' overall workload. It must be emphasised that offering multiple study options should not lead to an increase in the overall curriculum coverage; instead, this re-organisation targets a better balance of contents covered.

Figure 13. Liberal Studies should help rebalance science and humanities in the NSS curriculum



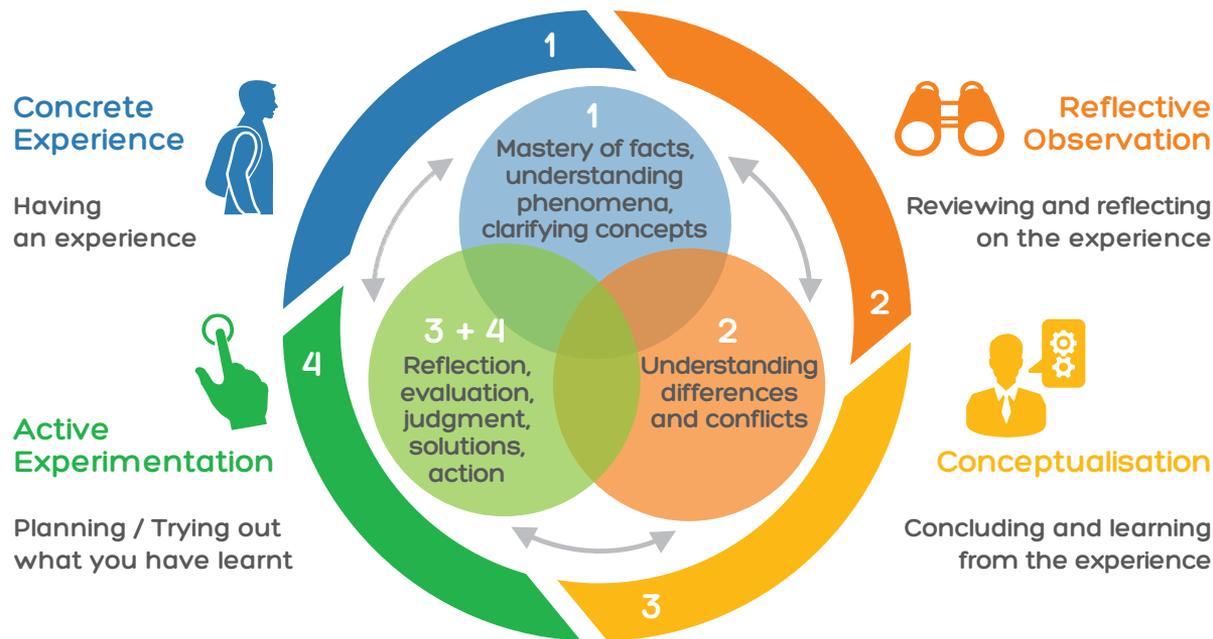
Multiple exam options generate challenges in rationalising different scoring scales. The Education Bureau should maintain a logic- and data-centric common Paper 1, which will be weighed against a cluster-focused Paper 2 (**Figure 13**).

RECOMMENDATION 1.4

Partner with organisations to develop module-specific experiential learning

Experiential learning has gained global traction and encourages students to learn through experience and reflection. The approach dovetails well with Liberal Studies' requirement for students to observe and master facts through experimentation, evaluation, and reflection while they learn (Education Bureau, 2015). Kolb's (1984) well-known Experiential Learning Cycle theory coincides with the values of Liberal Studies (**Figure 14**) while its effectiveness in enhancing learning outcomes is well-regarded among educators, with **74%** of teachers and **68%** of principals surveyed favouring the experiential learning approach.

Figure 14. Liberal Studies' issue-enquiry process exemplifies the role of experiential learning



Sources: Education Bureau and Kolb

The current jam-packed curriculum is difficult for teachers and students to complete and it precludes incorporating experiential learning elements. **86%** of teachers surveyed agree that there is insufficient space for experiential learning in the current Liberal Studies curriculum.

Reducing and refocusing curriculum content will create space for experiential learning while the Education Bureau could further galvanise the approach by seeking partnerships to develop curriculum-specific experiential learning programmes.

For example, in Singapore, students across all education levels have participated in Learning Journeys or ‘experiential and multi-disciplinary learning trips,’ since the initiative’s 1998 launch (Ministry of Education, Singapore, 1998). Learning Journeys forms an important aspect of teaching and learning in Singapore’s schools through visits to heritage sites and to public and private institutions while incorporating history, geography, and social studies (**Figure 15**). Schools are free to form partnerships while the Ministry of Education has a curated list of participating government agencies and non-governmental institutions keen to provide curriculum-focused learning experiences. Singapore’s Maritime and Port Authority, the Singapore Stock Exchange, and the Public Utilities Board are amongst the participating partners (Hatch, 2018).

Figure 15. In Singapore, outdoor experiential activities (e.g. field trips) have become mainstream school activities



Learning Journeys

Ministry of Education has a partnership list of organisations offering 'experiential and multi-disciplinary learning programmes'

Incorporated into different subjects; mostly history, geography, and social studies



Source: Ministry of Education, Singapore

Despite similar measures by the Education Bureau, such as school-based support services (see Recommendation 4.2) and ‘Life-wide learning’ activities, there is still room for improvement to achieve a curriculum-linked programme with territory-wide impact.

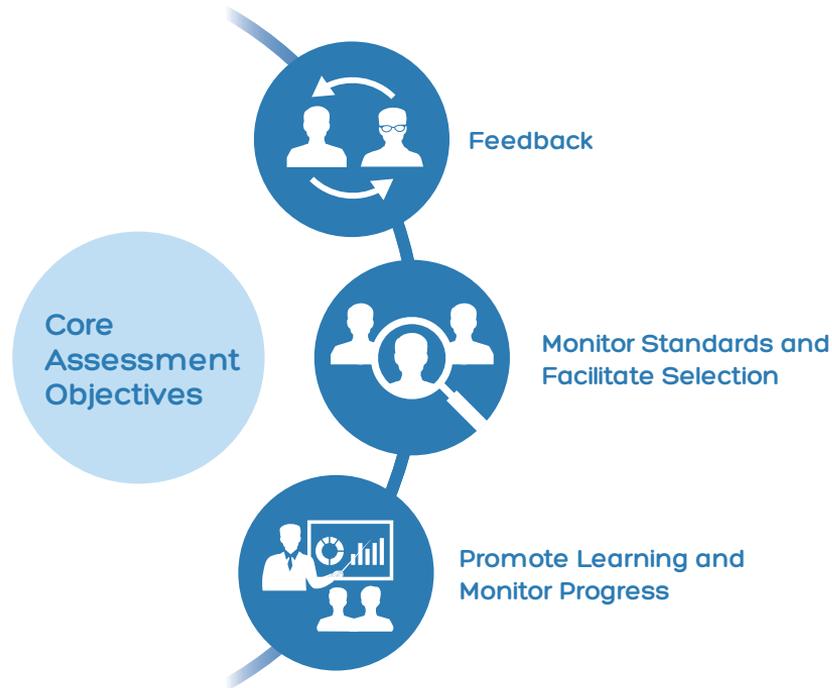


5. ASSESSMENT

According to the C&A Guide (2015), assessment should fulfil three main objectives:

1. Give feedback to students, teachers, schools, and parents on the effectiveness of teaching and on students' strengths and weaknesses in learning;
2. Provide information to schools, school systems, the Government, tertiary institutions, and employers to enable them to monitor standards and to facilitate selection decisions; and
3. Promote learning and monitor students' progress.

Is Liberal Studies' assessment system fulfilling its objectives, and is it flexible enough to keep up with emerging trends?



5.1. Challenges

► CHALLENGE 1: A fixation on results rather than the learning process

There are two main ways of assessment in pedagogical terms: ‘assessment of learning’ and ‘assessment for learning’. Assessment of learning is concerned with determining progress in learning and is referred to as summative assessment, because it is all about summarising how much learning has taken place. Assessment for learning focuses on learning with teaching feedback utilised to make learning more effective through calibrated teaching strategies. This is also known as formative assessment due to the focus on forming and shaping learning and teaching processes.

The current Liberal Studies assessment system fixates on results rather than ‘for learning’ processes.

Liberal Studies intrinsically requires a greater focus on assessment for learning rather than assessment of learning vis-à-vis traditional subjects. A shift towards ‘for learning’ assessment can better serve the development of analytical skills rather than focusing on rote-learned facts.

“There are good educational reasons why formative assessment should be given more attention and accorded a higher status than summative assessment,” according to the C&A Guide (2015, p.122).

► CHALLENGE 2: Difficulty in separating assessment of thinking skills and language skills

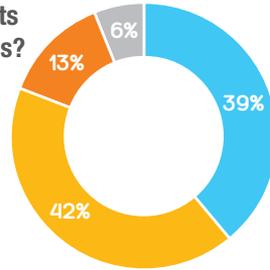
Assessing Liberal Studies is a complex process, and there are difficulties in effectively evaluating and awarding grade points for how well-imbued a student is with critical and higher-order thinking skills. But what is the best means to shoehorn qualitative skills into a quantitative scoring system? How should the critical thinking skills of a Level 5** student compare to a Level 3 student? Is there an attestable correlation between thinking skills and language skills?

Teachers and principals are at odds over whether current assessment results reflect students’ thinking abilities. **69%** of teachers surveyed believe that Liberal Studies exam results reflect students’ thinking skills while **55%** of school principals disagree (**Figure 16**).

Figure 16. No consensus over whether Liberal Studies exam results reflect students' thinking skills

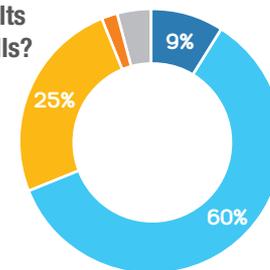
Do Liberal Studies exam results reflect students' thinking skills? (Principals)

- Largely reflect
- Do not reflect much
- Do not reflect at all
- No comment



Do Liberal Studies exam results reflect students' thinking skills? (Teachers)

- Reflect perfectly
- Largely reflect
- Do not reflect much
- Do not reflect at all
- No comment



"Looking across different countries, we have yet to discover an effective method to assess higher-order thinking skills, and it's unlikely to [happen] in the next 8 to 10 years."

Anonymous university professor

A lack of well-developed assessments to measure thinking skills is not unique to Hong Kong and remains elusive in other countries. Constructing tests to measure rote retention of facts is easier than designing an assessment which evaluates critical thinking skills (Haynes et al, 2016).

Current assessment frameworks do not accurately reflect students' true abilities, but rather incentivise teaching for exams over thinking skills. They privilege students with stronger language skills who are more capable of regurgitating phrases under time constraints.

Is it reasonable to expect students to holistically answer complex questions such as the Paper 2 past paper questions below **(Figure 17)** within one hour and fifteen minutes? What are the best practices for an impartial and objective evaluation of answers?

Figure 17. Answering in-depth questions within the exam time frame favours candidates with greater writing proficiency



'Soft power is the most effective way for governments to increase their influence in the world.'
Do you agree with this view? ^[1]



'China's increasing participation in international affairs will facilitate world stability.'
To what extent do you agree with this view? ^[2]

Source: Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority

Notes: [1] 2015 HKDSE Liberal Studies Paper 2 Question 3b

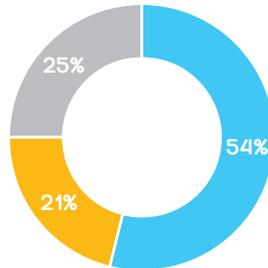
[2] 2014 HKDSE Liberal Studies Paper 2 Question 1a

Our survey sheds some light on the complications of the current exam structure. **54%** of school principals surveyed believe that Liberal Studies examinations are subjectively assessed, while **56%** of the teachers disagree, again displaying a disparity in views **(Figure 18)**. Additionally, the assessment framework, based on short answers and essays, does not lend itself to equal consideration of students' skills. An overwhelming **97%** of teachers and principals surveyed believe that the Liberal Studies exam favours students with better language skills **(Figure 19)**.

Figure 18: Subjective judgment may colour the marking of Liberal Studies exams

Does the process of marking Liberal Studies examinations involve subjective judgment on the part of the markers?
(Principals)

■ Yes
■ No
■ No comment



Does the process of marking Liberal Studies examinations involve subjective judgment on the part of the markers?
(Teachers)

■ Yes
■ No
■ No comment

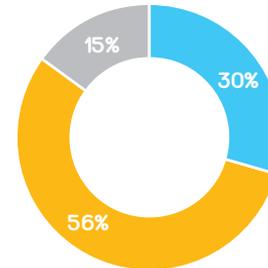
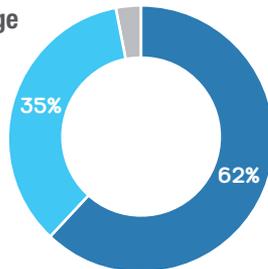


Figure 19: Language skills have a marked effect on Liberal Studies exam performance

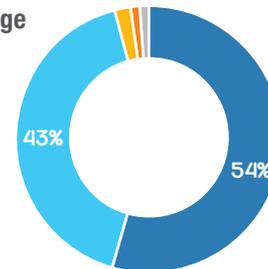
Do students with better language skills have an advantage when taking Liberal Studies exams?
(Principals)

■ Strongly agree
■ Agree
■ No comment



Do students with better language skills have an advantage when taking Liberal Studies exams?
(Teachers)

■ Strongly agree
■ Agree
■ Disagree
■ Strongly disagree
■ No comment



► CHALLENGE 3: Driving students to rely on exam techniques

Liberal Studies' current assessment framework has a strong focus on public examinations (**Figure 20**).

Figure 20. Liberal Studies has a strong emphasis on public examinations

Component		Weighting	Time limit
Public examination	Paper 1: Data-response questions	50%	2 hours
	Paper 2: Extended-response questions	30%	1 hour and 15 minutes
School-based Assessment (SBA)	Independent Enquiry Study (IES)	20%	—

Source: Education Bureau

A focus on examinations is a global norm, but part of Liberal Studies' issues stems from the binary exam assessment framework and its impact on student learning.

This is best exemplified in the marking guidelines for Paper 2, which has deteriorated into a pros and cons listing exercise. The emphasis on pros and cons helps students consider both sides of an argument, but the downside may be an over-reliance on this framework. This pigeonholing leaves little room to consider arguments from more holistic angles, such as how socio-economic viewpoints interact with political perspectives, as well as critical evaluations of the question itself.

Exam techniques and frameworks exist in every subject, but its legacy forms are particularly undesirable in the context of Liberal Studies. Knowledge-based subjects' examinations, such as history and biology, inevitably require students to structure memorised or rehearsed content based on preset frameworks. When applied to Liberal Studies, however, students are following exam frameworks in their thinking process rather than learning how to think.

Students are given rigid frameworks for defining issues in Paper 2, with exam tips (**Figure 21**) which detail how to formulate main arguments and position introductory and concluding sections. This has led to teachers and students drilling past papers using this inflexible framework and memorising set lists of arguments based on past exam questions, which is detrimental to regular teaching and exam preparation. **93%** of teachers surveyed believe that past exam questions and assessment criteria have significantly affected teaching methods.

Instead of motivating students to create the most suitable framework for presenting their arguments, they are encouraged to decide on a framework before creating arguments to suit; as such, the subject may become a hindrance to thinking skills rather than a boost.

Figure 21. Sample exam tips for students based on assessment framework



5.2. Recommendation 2: Revamp the grading system, rejuvenate the assessment mechanism, and enhance the overall governance

The Government should revamp the assessment mechanism to address challenges through three measures: replace the current grading scale with a pass or fail system, embed alternative modes of assessment, and enhance the transparency and accountability of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA)'s subject and moderation committees.

RECOMMENDATION 2.1

Replace the seven-point grading scale with a pass or fail system

Assessment should shift from 'of learning' to 'for learning' under a pass or fail system, which would allow for greater focus on the learning process rather than the minutiae of how final assessments are tabulated.

Students then would be able to find motivation beyond a readily quantifiable and subjective grade to engage in self-directed learning, self-assessment, and self-regulation—the very qualities which form the core of Liberal Studies' learning objectives, but are often buried under public examination pressure.

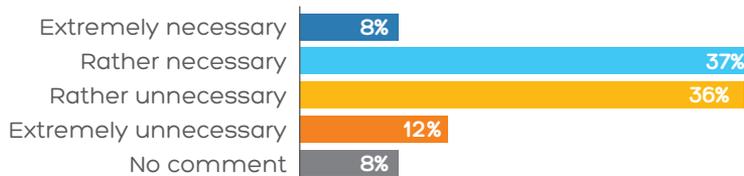
RECOMMENDATION 2.2

Incorporate alternative modes of assessment, such as concept mapping, word matching, and multiple choice

Diversifying the modes of assessment is another way to ensure a more flexible and robust framework. The Government should consider embedding alternative modes of assessment such as concept mapping, word matching, multiple choice, or even through experiential learning activities. According to our survey, there is an even split of teachers in favour of and against such updates, signifying that this is an option worth exploring (**Figure 22**).

Figure 22. Split views on embedding alternative modes of assessments

Should Liberal Studies embed alternative modes of assessment, e.g. multiple choice? (Teachers)



Variable assessment methods have already been implemented around the globe (**Figure 23**). The Netherlands' *Maatschappijleer* (Social Studies) eschews country-wide assessments in favour of school-based exams administered in oral, practical, written, and combined forms. The US General Educational Development (GED) exam (n.d.) includes different modes of assessment such as multiple choice, drag and drop, and fill in the blank.

Figure 23. International comparison—modes of assessment

	Hong Kong	Singapore	Netherlands	United States	United Kingdom	Mainland China
Subject	Liberal Studies	General Paper	Social Studies	Social Studies	Citizenship Studies	Ideological and Political Education
Name of Examination Qualification	HKDSE	Singapore-Cambridge GCE Advanced Level	VWO	GED	GCSE	National College Entrance Examination
Mode of assessment	<p>Public exam</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source-based questions • Extended response <p>Coursework</p>	<p>Public exam</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source-based questions • Extended response 	<p>School-based exam^[1]</p> <p>Coursework</p>	<p>Public exam</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple Choice • Source-based questions • Drag and drop • Fill in the blank • Select an area • Drop down 	<p>Public exam</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple Choice • Source-based questions • Short response <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended response 	<p>Public exam</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple Choice • Source-based questions • Short response <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended response
Grade Weighting	80% Public Exam 20% School-based	100% Public Exam	100% School-based	100% Public Exam	100% Public Exam	100% Public Exam

Sources: Education Bureau (Hong Kong), College voor Toetsen en Examens, Welzenis (2014), Edexcel, AQA, Gaokao, China Youth On Line, Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, General Educational Development, and Ministry of Education (Singapore)

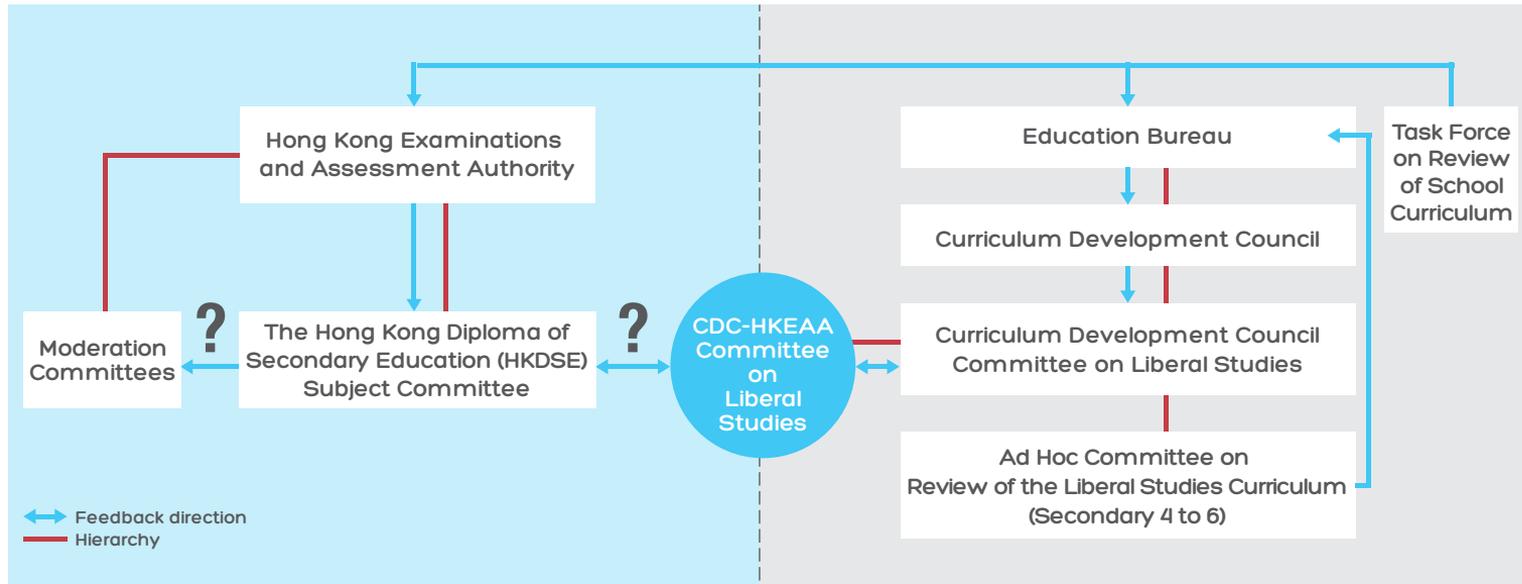
Note: [1] School-based exams may be administered in oral, practical, or written form

RECOMMENDATION 2.3

Strengthen the recruitment and feedback mechanisms of HKEAA subject and moderation committees, to better align assessment and curriculum development and to enhance transparency and accountability

Liberal Studies' curriculum development and assessment is currently overseen by a split governance structure. The HKEAA is an independent statutory organisation responsible for the administration of public examinations and related assessments, while the Education Bureau governs all matters relating to curriculum development through the Curriculum Development Council (CDC) (Figure 24).

Figure 24. Split governance oversight for Liberal Studies curriculum and assessment development



Sources: Curriculum Development Council, Education Bureau, and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority

There is a lack of transparency in terms of fair representation within HKEAA subject and moderation committees due to undefined eligibility criteria and term-limit rules. According to interviewed experts, the subject manager of the HKEAA bears the responsibility to nominate members of the moderation and subject committees, as well as exam markers. Nomination powers centralised in the hands of the subject manager can potentially undermine the checks and balances needed to maintain the HKEAA's professionalism, fairness, and impartiality in conducting exam operations.

Split governance potentially leads to disconnection between assessment outcomes and curriculum objectives. Curriculum development should be incorporated into the assessment process, but the extent to which HKEAA subject and moderation committees reference CDC guidelines is opaque, and it is unknown how the feedback from curriculum development is incorporated by exam authorities.

A CDC-HKEAA Committee on Liberal Studies meant to bridge the CDC and HKEAA and to improve coordination between the two governing bodies has yet to comprehensively fulfil its purpose. Based on the meeting records uploaded in the CDC website, the committee held only seven meetings in the past five years, demonstrating low efforts in coordinating curriculum revisions and assessment processes.

Subject committees evaluate and give feedback on examination papers, and carry out secondary functions such as relaying comments on curriculum development. However, its evaluation process, results, and subsequent follow-ups are also not publicised.

The Government should enhance the transparency and accountability of HKEAA subject and moderation committees by clarifying committee recruitment processes, introducing term limits, and empowering feedback mechanisms. It should improve the integrity of the assessment process by aligning assessment and curriculum development going forward, addressing the challenges on a macro level.

Besides, marking quality correlates positively with the effectiveness of communication between markers during the moderation and marking processes, as well as markers' understanding of the assessment goals. Hence, enhancing the alignment between assessment and curriculum will in turn benefit marking quality.



6. TEACHING MATERIALS

Liberal Studies' unique subject nature requires more specialised and varied teaching materials compared to traditional subjects. What are teachers relying on for teaching materials and is the quality up to standard?

6.1. Challenges

► CHALLENGE 1: Teachers rely on textbooks despite the fact that Liberal Studies requires a wide array of resources to teach

Textbook content is inherently static, which stands at odds with Liberal Studies' fast-evolving subject matter. Textbooks' position as an essential guide for instruction is no longer dominant as teachers around the globe increasingly utilise information technology and online resources for instruction (OECD, 2019).

The Education Bureau does not recommend a reliance on textbooks. As the C&A Guide (2015) states, "In view of the evolving and ever-changing nature of issues to be studied in Liberal Studies, it is inconceivable that the learning and teaching of Liberal Studies should rely on textbooks." (p.138)

Despite the Education Bureau's guidance, **90%** of teachers surveyed expressed that their schools require students to buy or use specific reference books and textbooks, while **87%** claim that they rely on textbooks as one of their main teaching materials. This reliance is misaligned with the Education Bureau's direction and complicates teachers' preparation for Liberal Studies classes, the median time needed for which was reported at **50%** more than other subjects.

► CHALLENGE 2: The quality of textbooks varies, with significant controversies

Reliance on textbooks has proliferated under a lack of official oversight and support. Liberal Studies is unique among school courses for its lack of an up-and-running textbook quality assurance system. Teaching and support materials have been cited by some media as potentially biased, with instances where the information could be factually wrong (**Annex 1**).

The Education Bureau introduced professional consultancy services to publishers in 2019, offering voluntary textbook reviews and recommendations as a measure to better realise curriculum objectives.

Seven major Liberal Studies textbook publishers have submitted ten sets of textbooks to the Education Bureau. These publishers already account for the bulk of Liberal Studies textbooks while the Education Bureau is considering to upgrade the voluntary consultancy service into a mandatory process.

That said, the review process has also attracted public concerns that textbooks may be outdated by the time these lengthy reviews are completed, or that the review is equivalent to political censorship, giving rise to the need for higher transparency.

6.2. Recommendation 3: Ensure fair and unbiased teaching materials to improve learning outcome

The Government should take a two-pronged approach to improve existing teaching materials: publish clear and transparent vetting guidelines with reference to the C&A Guide's concept list and expand vetting guidelines to cover teaching materials attached to textbooks.

RECOMMENDATION 3.1

Publish clear and transparent vetting guidelines, covering teaching materials attached to textbooks (e.g. training exercises and supplementary tools)

The textbook consultancy service is a timely and welcoming move, but more transparency is needed to clarify the review process' inner workings. **83%** of school principals surveyed believe that the Education Bureau should ensure the objectivity and fairness of Liberal Studies textbooks through a review process, despite **50%** of teachers and **11%** of principals surveyed assessing that Liberal Studies textbooks on the market do not have problems with impartiality.

Government publication of clear and transparent vetting guidelines with reference to the C&A Guide key concept list (suggested in Recommendation 1.2) will alleviate censorship concerns. Candidness will clarify the review process' aim to improve teaching material quality while adhering to C&A Guide key concepts and freedom of information principles.

The Government should also expand vetting guidelines to cover teaching materials attached to textbooks, including training exercises and supplementary tools, as they provide for more holistic learning beyond basic textbook concepts.

Currently, the Education Bureau does not accept workbooks for review except for practical work of science subjects. Listening and phonics practices do not need to be vetted besides Chinese, Putonghua, and English language subjects (Education Bureau, 2020). That said, for a subject as broad and multi-pronged as Liberal Studies, such materials should be included to ensure teaching and learning quality (**Figure 25**).

Figure 25. Liberal Studies supplementary materials are currently not accepted by the Education Bureau for review

Supplementary materials	Subjects required for vetting
 <p>Workbooks</p>	<p>✔ Science</p>
 <p>Listening Practices</p>  <p>Phonics Practices</p>	<p>✔ English Language</p> <p>✔ Chinese Language</p> <p>✔ Putonghua</p>

Source: Education Bureau

RECOMMENDATION 3.2

Compile a publicly accessible online directory of recommended e-learning materials and supplements

39% of teachers surveyed claim that they use social media as one of their primary teaching materials, illustrating a serious lapse of quality assurance with the content being delivered to students. Liberal Studies' online resources have been denounced over inconsistent content quality and subjectivity, attracting even greater criticism than textbooks at times.

The Education Bureau does not review and vet Liberal Studies-related web resources, as this would be an unreasonable task given the vast expanse of the Internet, where a simple news article can be considered teaching materials for Liberal Studies.

The more realistic way is for the Government to play a curatorial role and compile a publicly accessible directory of recommended online teaching materials. The Education Bureau can invite interested parties to submit online resources for review and vetting before inclusion in an online directory for reference.

This is especially pertinent because teachers have little time to compile their own reference database and need support: **89%** claim that they do not have sufficient time to design or update their own teaching materials.

The HKEdCity Liberal Studies Web-based Resource Platform is one such government-backed internet resource, and most of its content is created internally. However, the utility and attraction of its resources have been much maligned among teachers: **84%** of teachers surveyed do not find existing online resource databases from the Education Bureau (such as HKEdCity) useful (**Figure 26**).

As documented above, it is infeasible for the Education Bureau to bear the full burden of producing online teaching resources. However, the Government can still recommend third-party sources to facilitate teaching and learning, with **62%** of teachers surveyed agreeing to the idea (**Figure 27**).

Figure 26. Existing online resources from the Education Bureau do not help teachers

How helpful has the teaching material provided by the Education Bureau via HKEdCity been?

- Very helpful
- Rather helpful
- Rather unhelpful
- Not helpful at all
- No comment

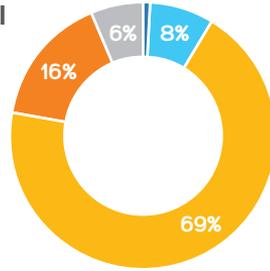
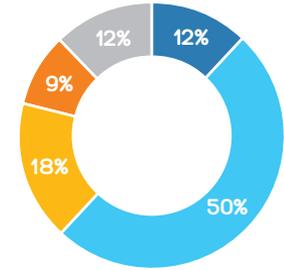


Figure 27. Teachers welcome recommendations of online teaching materials

Should the Education Bureau recommend third-party online reference materials to teachers?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- No comment





7. TEACHING PROCESS

The C&A Guide provides guidance on how teachers should teach their respective subjects. But are educators adequately trained and supported?

7.1. Challenges

► CHALLENGE 1: Teachers are often required to handle other subjects and lack support in Liberal Studies-specific skills

Liberal Studies teachers are often burdened with concurrent courses. Our survey found that **56%** of teachers surveyed have to juggle multiple courses. This balancing act is the result of how Liberal Studies was introduced in the 2009/10 academic year, which enlisted teachers from other subjects to form the first cohort of frontline Liberal Studies educators.



"During the policy reform phase, many teachers specialised in different subjects transitioned to teaching Liberal Studies..."

Anonymous secondary school principal

With the broad curriculum, teachers need to grasp a wide array of topics and concepts. They are expected to help students gain a number of skills in order to achieve desired learning outcomes, which include thinking skills, presentation skills, and self-directed learning.

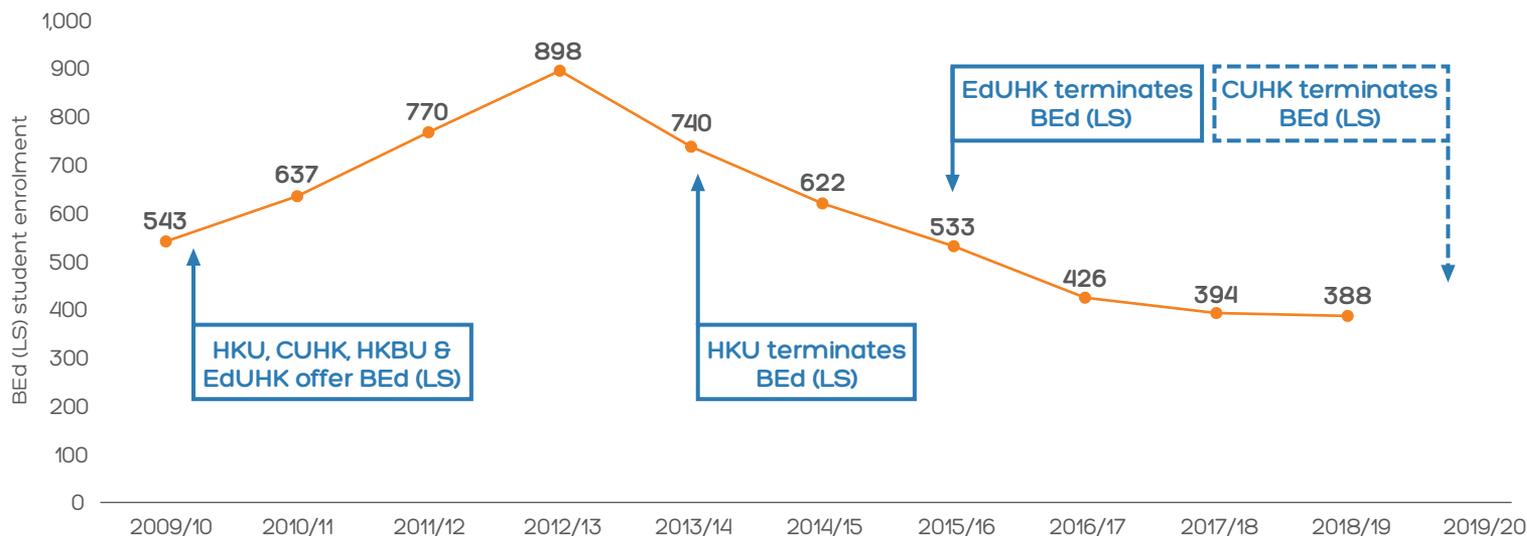
These demands are proving difficult for teachers, with **76%** of teachers surveyed finding that Liberal Studies holds them to inordinately high standards.

► **CHALLENGE 2: Specific courses to groom teachers for delivering Liberal Studies are on the decline**

It makes sense over time to have purposely trained Liberal Studies teachers, but specific courses designed to instruct Liberal Studies teachers are on the decline.

The Bachelor of Education (Liberal Studies) programme was offered by the University of Hong Kong (HKU), Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU) and Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK) in the 2013/14 school year, but only HKBU retains the programme as of the 2020/21 school year, according to University Grants Committee (UGC) statistics (**Figure 28**). In the 2019/20 academic year, HKU has terminated its Liberal Studies major in the Postgraduate Diploma in Education Programmes (PGDE).

Figure 28. Tertiary education degree programmes focusing on Liberal Studies, BEd (LS), have fallen from four to one since 2013/14



Source: University Grants Committee

7.2. Recommendation 4: Furnish comprehensive and timely training in order to enhance teaching and learning quality

The Government should improve Liberal Studies' teaching processes by publishing a prerequisite knowledge and skills teaching manual, and strengthening Continuous Professional Development (CPD) through learning communities and on-site support.

RECOMMENDATION 4.1

Publish a teaching manual outlining prerequisite knowledge and skills such as critical thinking theories

It is unclear which teachers possess the requisite knowledge and skills to teach Liberal Studies in the absence of specialised courses. Publishing a teaching manual with a list of prerequisite knowledge and skills, such as critical thinking theories, is a solution that will clarify requirements of what training teachers and schools need.

The manual could reference the T-Standard, established by the Committee on Professional Development of Teachers and Principals (COTAP). This “unified set of standards for the teaching profession” can be tailored for Liberal Studies to guide teacher and school management training as well as CPD.

The manual could reference and abridge general teaching resources listed in the C&A Guide, which already provides solid pedagogical know-how but may be too dense for time-poor teachers to absorb.

Teachers equipped with the manual can better shape their teaching methods while undertaking further training when needed.

RECOMMENDATION 4.2

Reinforce Continuous Professional Development through learning communities and on-site school support

Continuous Professional Development is particularly important for Liberal Studies because teachers tend to specialise in other courses and need continual training to remain up to date, especially with the constantly-evolving nature of Liberal Studies' body of knowledge and techniques.

The Education Bureau currently provides support for Liberal Studies teachers by sending school development officers to carry out focused support and foster learning communities (**Figure 29**).

Figure 29. School-based curriculum development support services (2019/20 academic year)

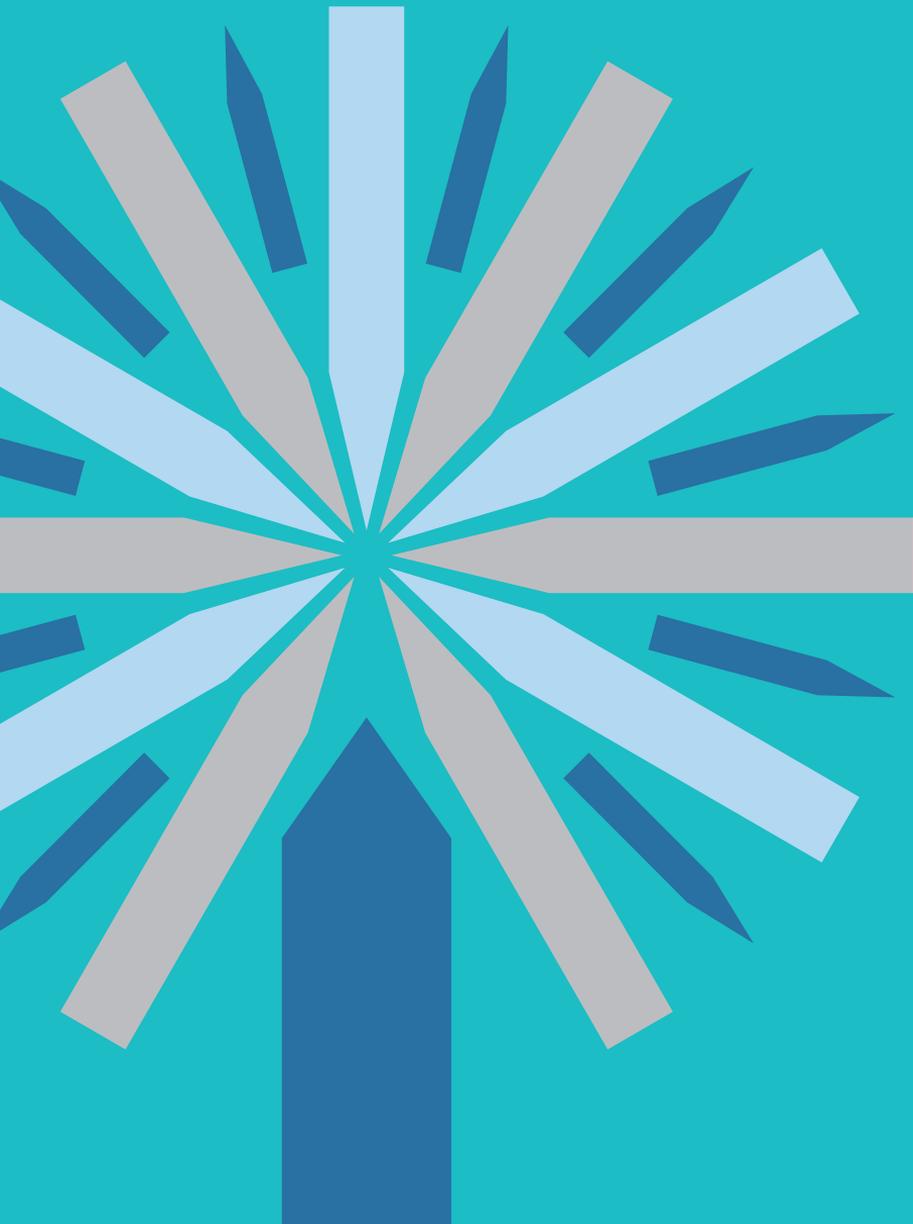
	<u>Support Service Type I</u> Liberal Studies	<u>Support Service Type II</u> Learning Community (Experiential Learning)
Focus of Development	Comprehensive support on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• School-based curriculum• Learning and teaching strategies• Assessment literacy	Provision of platforms promoting experiential learning in Liberal Studies; explore effective practices / strategies
Mode	Mainly on-site support	Mainly cross-school exchange (3-4 schools to form a learning community)
Examples of Experiential Learning Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collaboration in designing experiential learning activities• Learning Communities (e.g. workshops, and sharing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collaboration in developing pedagogical practices• Cross-school visits• Cross-school sharing

Source: Education Bureau

The efficacy of the Education Bureau's support for teacher development is open to debate. While **50%** of teachers surveyed find the CPD support from the Education Bureau adequate, **40%** are still dissatisfied with current arrangements, implying that there is still room for improvement.

The Government should strengthen CPD through enhanced learning communities and on-site support. Measures should include continual updates to teaching manuals (Recommendation 4.1) and the direct provision of experiential learning (Recommendation 1.4). The Government can also strengthen CPD by incorporating feedback from focus inspections to enhance synergies between schools, teachers, and government bureaux.

These collective measures can be integrated into the Education Bureau's recently mandated 90-hour training courses, which are slated to begin in the 2023/24 academic year and target teachers in their first three years of employment.



8. ARTICULATION

Teachers, students, and education experts concur on Liberal Studies' significance in achieving modern educational goals, but its current implementation and delivery is not up to the task. This raises questions about the course's role within our senior secondary academic structure and its status as a prerequisite for university entrance.

There is a need to shift from focusing on the result or 'assessment of learning' to focusing on the learning process or 'assessment for learning'. Assessment for learning develops students' higher-order thinking skills and self-directed learning habits, but how can this principle be applied in Liberal Studies' articulation pathway?

8.1. Challenges

Under current articulation arrangement, students must attain a minimum of Level 2 in Liberal Studies in order to enter university. Moreover, each grade beyond Level 2 amplifies the chance that a student can be admitted to their preferred programme. This result-focused articulation, when applied to Liberal Studies, is at odds with an assessment for learning ethos, and hinders higher-order thinking and self-directed learning. Can students better realise Liberal Studies' learning outcomes while having their university admissions-inflicted anxiety and stress reduced?

8.2. Recommendation 5: Adjust Liberal Studies' weight in further articulation, allowing students to refocus on learning rather than assessment

The Government should incentivise learners to refocus on the learning process rather than exams; while keeping its mandatory status would serve to affirm its value and purpose in pedagogical advancement, university articulation should merely depend on a passing requirement.

Our survey indicates that school principals trend towards two extremes regarding the future of Liberal Studies: **21%** think that it is best to retain the status quo of its compulsory nature, mandatory public exams, and the current grading system, while **17%** believe that it should be converted into an elective with no public exam (**Figure 30**).

Figure 30. Surveyed principals' varied thoughts on a Liberal Studies revamp

			% of school principals
Compulsory subject	Compulsory public examination	Retain seven-point grading scale	21
		Change to pass / fail	6
	Optional public examination	Retain seven-point grading scale	1
		Change to pass / fail	4
	No public examination		6
Elective subject	Public examination	Retain seven-point grading scale	18
		Change to pass / fail	10
	No public examination		17
No comment			17

More systematic

↑

● **Current approach**

● **Recommended approach**

↓

More flexible

In our view, reducing Liberal Studies to an elective subject risks jeopardising the aims of Liberal Studies, which should ideally be applicable to all students. Eliminating the exam in its entirety may see some students opting not to study at all under Hong Kong’s examination-driven environment. As a result, after balancing various views and interests, we have chosen a compromise between these options to preserve Liberal Studies’ educational aims and position within the NSS curriculum, while tackling existing drawbacks and reducing students’ burden.

RECOMMENDATION 5.1

Maintain Liberal Studies as a mandatory HKDSE examination subject

Liberal Studies connects multiple disciplines and bridges core and elective subjects. Bearing in mind its significance and pedagogical purposes, it is crucial that Liberal Studies maintains its status as a mandatory NSS curriculum core subject. While exams should remain as a core part of assessment, it should be revamped into a pass or fail system (Recommendation 2.1).

It is also worth reviewing whether examination is the most appropriate assessment method for Liberal Studies in the long run, since the subject focuses so much on learning processes and experiences.

RECOMMENDATION 5.2

Remove Liberal Studies from the JUPAS scoring system, such that only a pass is required for further articulation

HKDSE Liberal Studies results should not be considered in students’ articulation to university via the Joint University Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS) beyond a required pass.

It is already well-established that Hong Kong’s university admission standards are rigid, demanding a minimum of Level 3 for Chinese and English languages and Level 2 for mathematics and Liberal Studies under the HKDSE’s so-called ‘3322’ entry requirements for undergraduate study.

The inclusion of Liberal Studies as a make or break university entry requirement stands in contrast to global practices, which rarely includes subjects similar to Liberal Studies in university admission criterion (**Figure 31**).

Figure 31. Even Hong Kong's closest analogue, Singapore, allows university and faculty-based exceptions

	Hong Kong	Singapore	Netherlands	United States	Japan	United Kingdom	Australia	Mainland China
Subject	Liberal Studies	General Paper	Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies	Citizenship Studies	Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS)	Ideological and Political Education
Compulsory Subject ^[1]	✓	✓	✓	✓ (Only in some states)	✓	✗ (Only in year 7–11)	✗ (Until junior secondary)	✓
Mandatory subject for examination	✓	✓	✓	✓ (Only in some states)	✓ ^[2]	✗	✗	✗ ^[3]
Subject as part of university admission criteria	✓	✗	✗	✗ (Only in some states)	✓ ✗ (Depending on type of university and degree)	✗	✗	✗

Sources: Education Bureau (Hong Kong), GOV.UK, Government of the Netherlands, Ministry of Education (Singapore), Australian College of Educators, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, China Youth On Line, National Council for the Social Studies, and Shironavi (Japan)

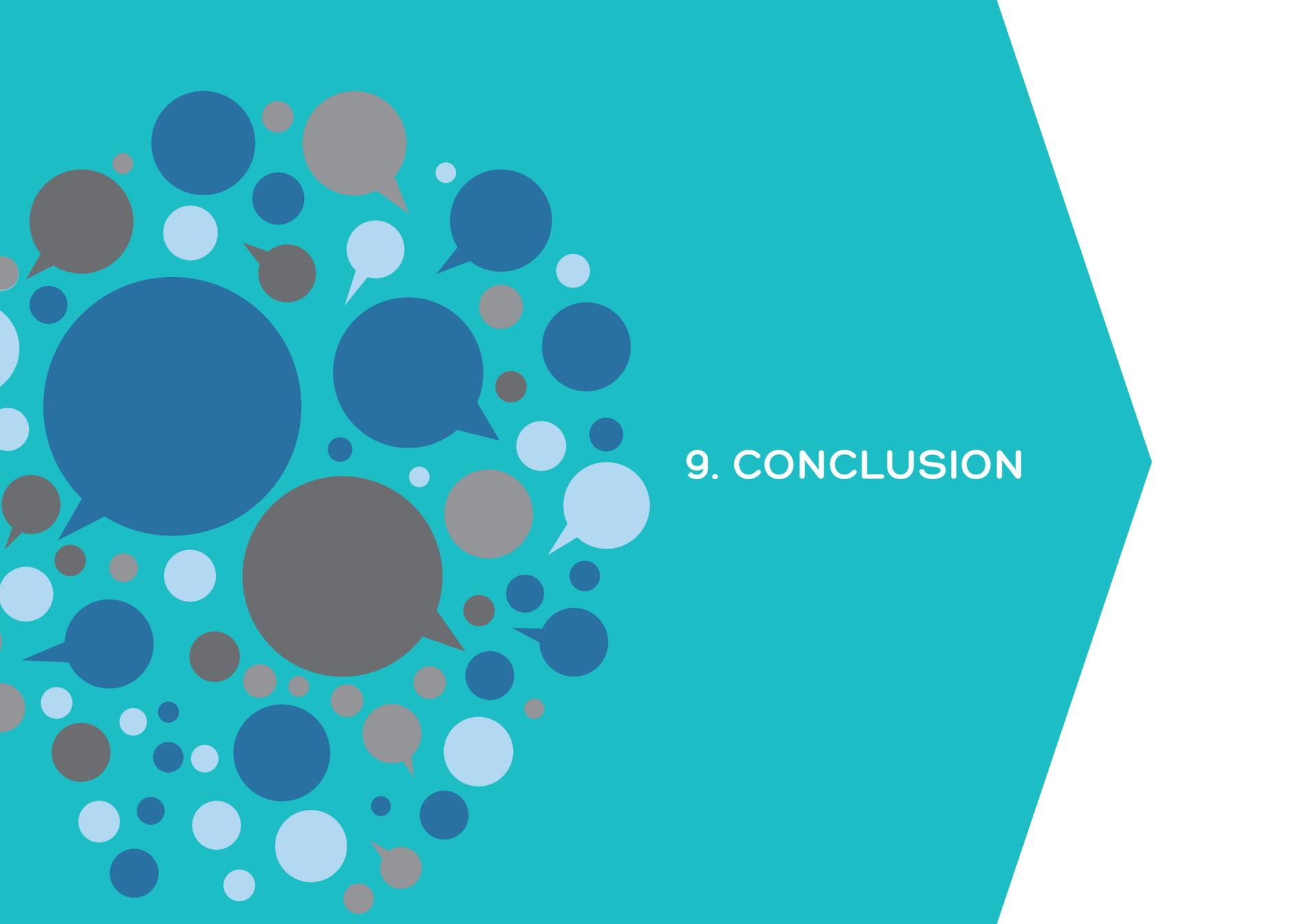
Notes: [1] Compulsory subject refers to the level immediately preceding university entrance

[2] Social Studies in Japan is compulsory for the National Centre Test for University Admissions, but a limited number of universities and programmes do not require this prerequisite

[3] 'Ideological and Political Education' is a mandatory subject for examination in certain areas within mainland China such as Shanghai

Singapore's General Paper shares many similar features with Liberal Studies, but individual universities, faculty, and programmes enjoy greater flexibility in fixing their own admission criteria. A Singaporean student who fails the General Paper exam can still apply for certain university programmes, such as science-related ones (Ministry of Education, Singapore, n.d.; Tan, 2019).

Hong Kong should provide more flexible arrangements for university admission. Excluding Liberal Studies from the JUPAS scoring system would provide more freedom for university faculties to admit suitable candidates, while providing space for educators to explore alternative assessment methods to better monitor and evaluate students' performance.



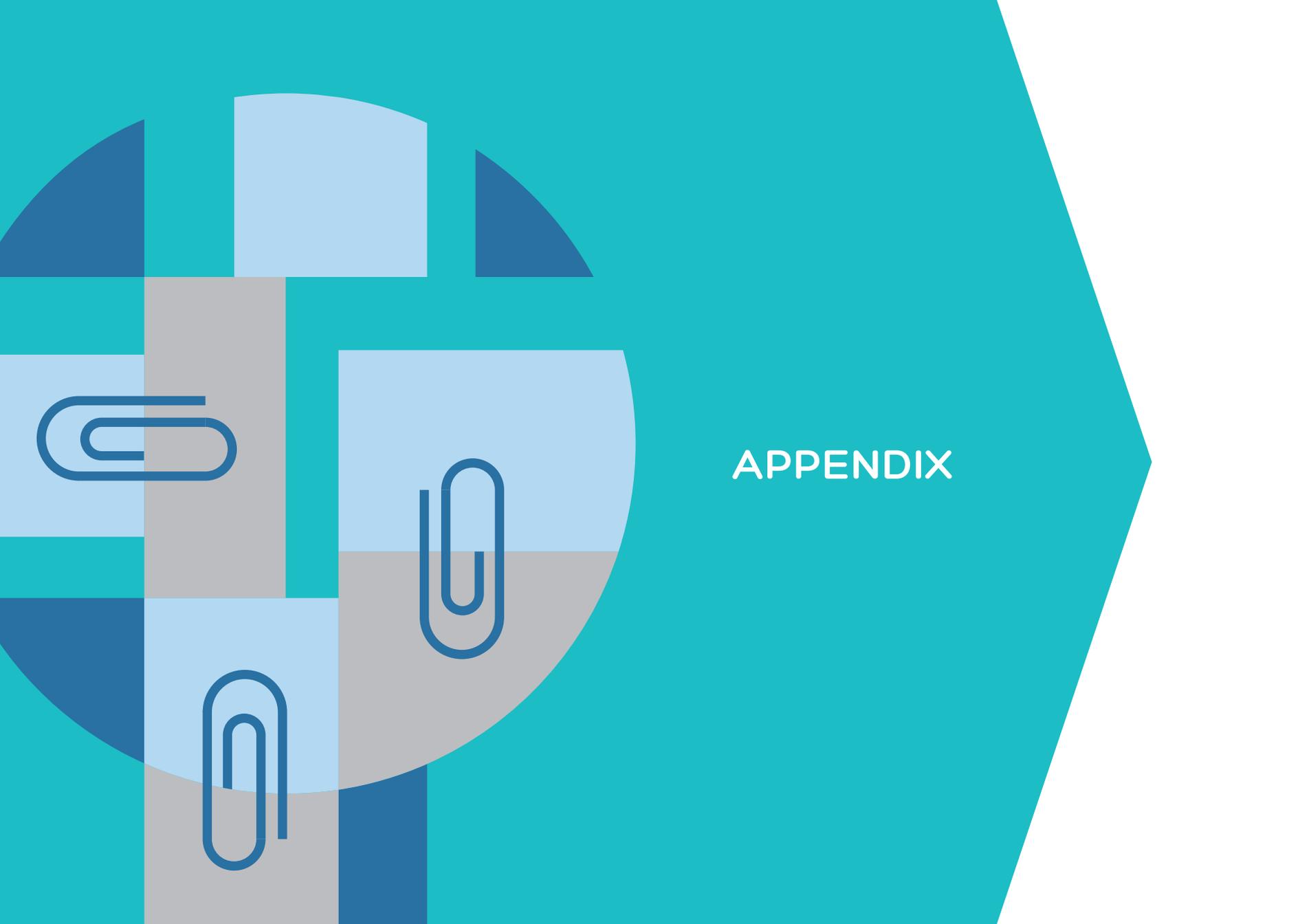
9. CONCLUSION

Liberal Studies is a complex subject. Hong Kong's Liberal Studies was globally recognised as cutting-edge in its originality when it was first conceived, but unfortunately it has not lived up to its well-meant intentions.

Our analysis confirms this viewpoint and identifies challenges in its curriculum, assessment, teaching materials, teaching process, and articulation. However, the failings of Hong Kong's Liberal Studies do not detract from its worth or warrant its scuttling.

Liberal Studies requires a comprehensive revamp to meet its objectives, and possibly, a new subject name that better corresponds to the learning goals as stated in the curriculum. In our view, 'Integrated Studies' would be a name that better captures the core objectives and vision of this subject. Moreover, the Government should consider ways to integrate the objectives of Liberal Studies (such as thinking skills) into each and every subject. As for Liberal Studies in its current form, the overly extensive curriculum should be trimmed, the assessment mechanism needs to be revamped to refocus on the learning process rather than summative results through a pass or fail arrangement, and measures should be taken to ensure the quality of teaching materials and processes.

In line with this spirit, the 13 policy recommendations outlined in this report will hopefully propel Liberal Studies to realise its full potential, to cultivate new generations of interdisciplinary thinkers capable of thinking independently and appreciating diversity.



APPENDIX

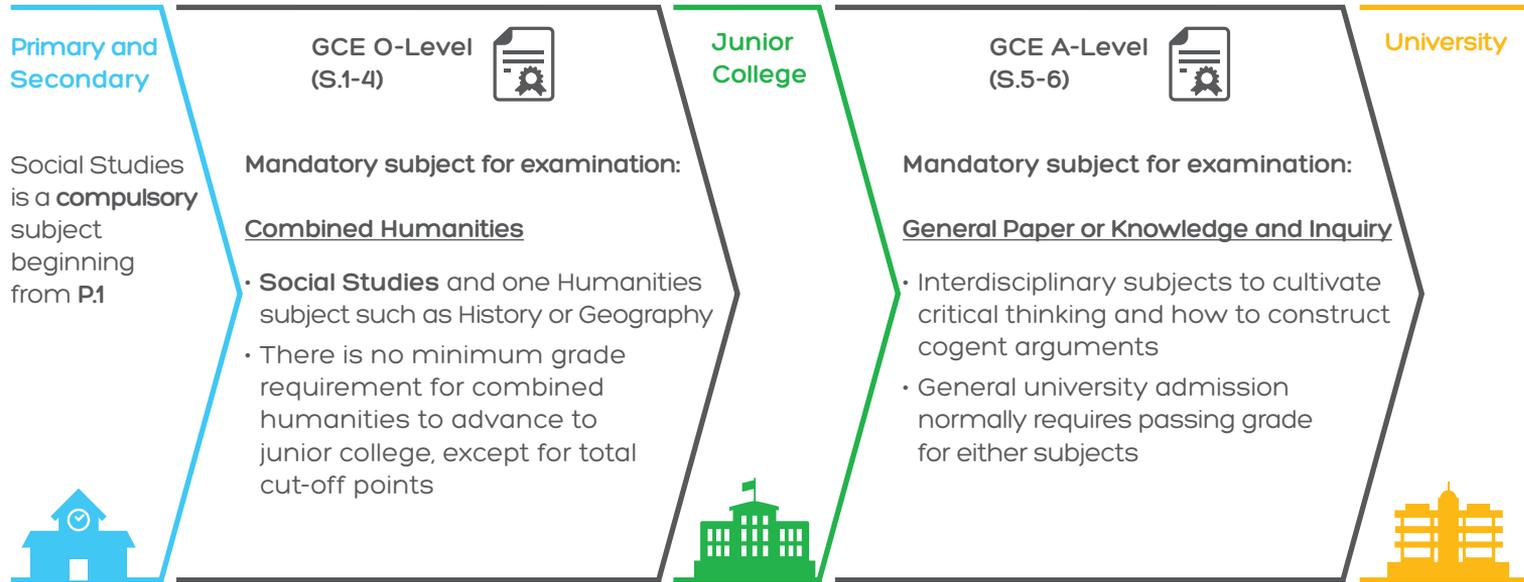
Annex 1. Selected media reports on Liberal Studies

Date	Media	Title
2016-11-26	Ta Kung Pao	通識應合乎中庸之道
2017-12-05	HK01	【DSE通識科·來稿】邏輯錯誤、違反常識的考評局試題評改準則
2017-12-07	HK01	【DSE通識科·來稿】鼓勵學生罔顧事實 偽裝理性的反教育
2017-12-18	Ta Kung Pao	通識科應改變機械式學習/鄭美嫦
2017-12-19	HK01	考評局回應：對通識科試題的批評有欠中肯，不應斷章取義
2017-12-27	HK01	【DSE通識·來稿】回應考評局的回應：通識科偽論述的完美示範
2018-09-11	Ming Pao	通識科不適合考試
2018-09-21	Sing Tao Daily	請勿作繭自縛：回應通識答卷框架質疑
2018-10-05	Sing Tao Daily	誤用框架有違通識考評要求：再論作繭自縛
2019-01-04	Orange News	試題咬文嚼字改善勿再遲疑
2019-06-14	Master Insight	為什麼通識科要全面檢討？
2019-07-12	HKET	通識教育科應否保留？
2019-09-25	HK01	【逃犯條例】李國章：通識科執行有問題教壞學生 首先要教好老師

Note: Titles only available in Chinese

Annex 2. Singapore: Social Studies, General Paper, and Knowledge and Inquiry

Express stream: common articulation pathway to university



Annex 3. Netherlands: *Maatschappijleer* (Social Studies)

The teaching and learning approach for Social Studies



Sources: Government of the Netherlands; Dutch Inspectorate of Education

Mandatory subject but only school exams

Schools, monitored by the Dutch Inspectorate of Education, are responsible for designing internal examinations



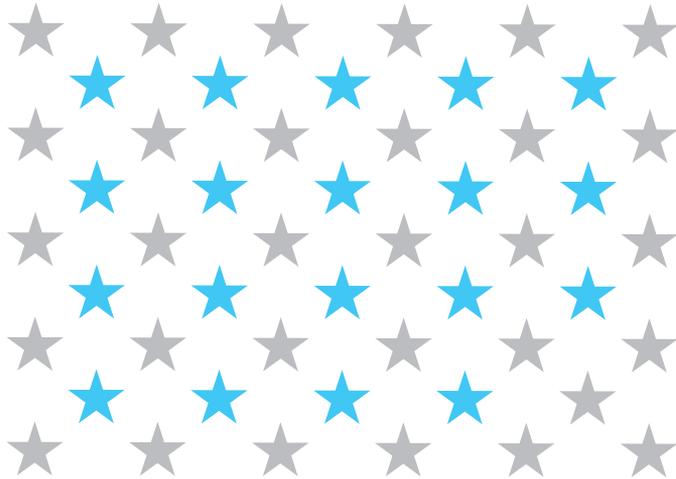
The central Ministry of Education publishes subject guidelines at the start of each year, and announces which topics should be covered in the exam



Common themes being taught

- Mass Media • Work and Unemployment
- Political Decision-making
- Environmental Problems
- Multicultural Society • Crime and Security

Annex 4. United States: Social Studies



19
STATES mandate students to complete
Civics or Social Studies tests to
attain high school diploma

Curriculum content

Content varies from state to state, but learning areas covered normally include:

- World history
- U.S. history
- Geography
- Economics
- Civics / Government



Learning and teaching approach

- Some states have incorporated proven practices for effective civics / social studies learning
- Examples include service-learning linked to classroom content, experiential and project based learning, etc.



Sources: National Council for the Social Studies, Education Commission of the States, and Center for American Progress

Annex 5. Japan: Social Studies

Duration of study

Compulsory from Primary 3 to Upper Secondary
Subject streams include:

- Geography
- History
- Civics
(Modern Society, Politics & Economy, Ethics)



Mandatory subject for examination

- ✓ National Center Test for University Admissions
- ✗ Secondary exam administered by individual universities



Articulation to university

Type of university:



PUBLIC

Most universities' admissions require students to pass the National Test and Secondary Exam

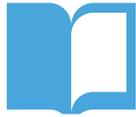
PRIVATE

Some universities require completion of National Test depending on the type of degree or course, while others only need students to pass the secondary exam

Sources: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan; Shironavi

Annex 6. United Kingdom: Citizenship Studies

STATUTORY NATIONAL CURRICULUM SUBJECT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS



Key learning concepts

- Democracy
- Identities and diversity
- Rights and responsibilities
- Justice



Length of study

Secondary school students
(Aged 11 - 16)



Non-statutory
In primary level

NO MANDATORY EXAMS

Elective in GCSEs



Available from the three
Awarding Organisations
including AQA, Edexcel
and OCR

Sources: GOV.UK and Association for Citizenship Teaching

Annex 7. Australia: Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS)

Statutory subject (year 1-10)

Made up of 4 discrete subjects:

- Civics and citizenship
- Economics and business
- Geography
- History



Advocates inquiry-based learning approach

AIM: "To support students to develop the ability to question, think critically, solve problems, communicate effectively, make decisions and adapt to change as active and informed citizens."



Electives in senior secondary level

Subject options:

- Ancient history
- Modern history
- Geography



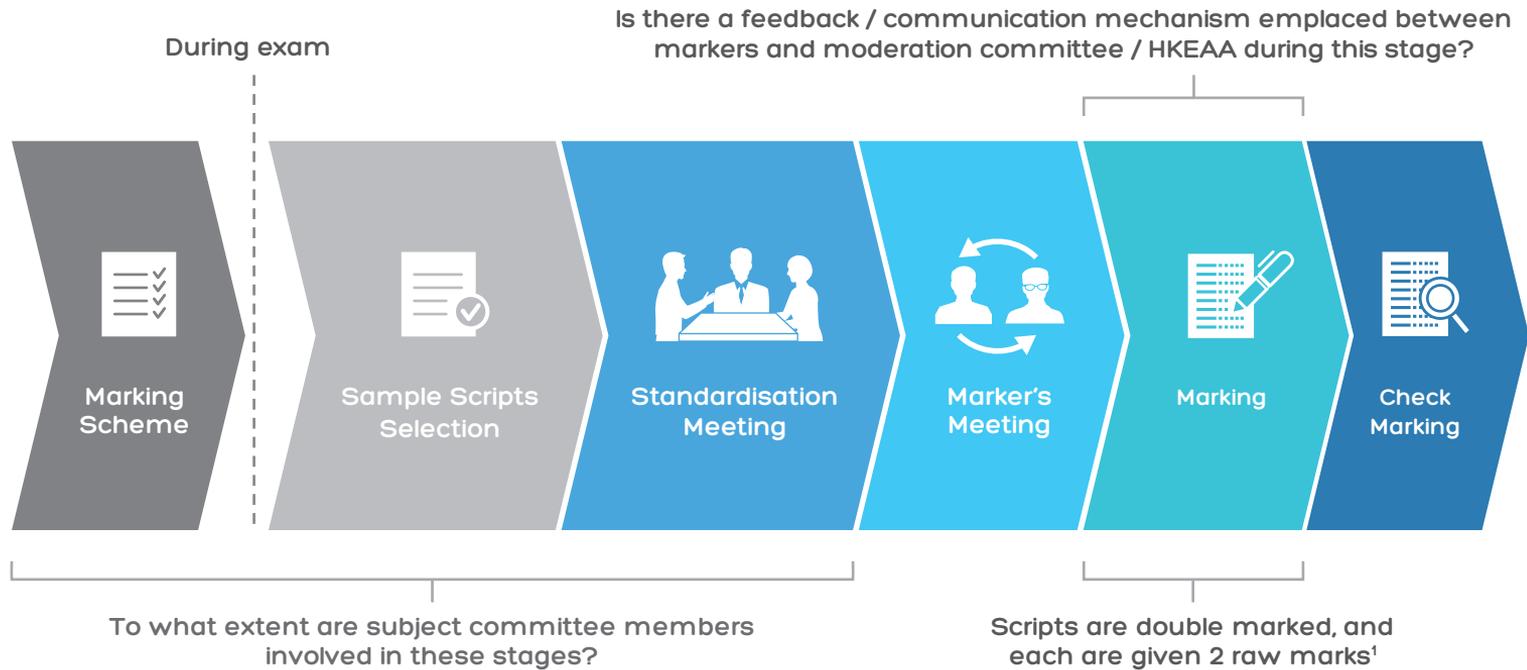
Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

Annex 8. Comparison between Advanced Supplementary Level (ASL) and NSS Liberal Studies

	ASL Liberal Studies	NSS Liberal Studies	Comparable comments
Choice of enrolment	Elective	Compulsory	
Modules studied	Select two modules out of six 1. Hong Kong Studies 2. Environmental Studies 3. Human Relationships 4. The Modern World 5. Science, Technology and Society 6. China Today	Three Areas of Study consists of Self and Personal Development; Society and Culture; and Science, Technology and the Environment, which are delivered through six modules with a total of 12 themes.	ASL Liberal Studies and NSS Liberal Studies have similar contents. NSS Liberal Studies provides more comprehensive content for study and looks for a higher degree of connection across the three Areas of Study
Curriculum structure and organisation	Modular approach	Student-oriented design uses knowledge and perspectives from other subjects to study contemporary issues	NSS Liberal Studies looks for stronger connection across disciplines and stresses on understanding multiple perspectives
Teaching and learning approach	Issue-enquiry approach	Issue-enquiry approach	ASL Liberal Studies and NSS Liberal Studies both encourage student-centred active inquiry learning rather than didactic teaching and learning
Student profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around top 40% of students selected from the HKCEE • Age group around 17 to 19 years old 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All students of the Senior Secondary Education under NSS academic structure • Age group around 15 to 18 years old 	
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written exam (80%) • One project report on one of two modules selected (20%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written exam (80%) • Independent Enquiry Study (IES) making use of the knowledge and perspectives gained from the Three Areas of Study and extending them to new issues or contexts (School-based assessment – 20%) 	NSS IES demands a higher degree of knowledge integration, skills and perspectives learned from the three Areas of Study, applied to a new topic of research

Source: Education Bureau

Annex 9. HKEAA's marking procedure for written papers (Category A subjects)



Source: Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority

Note: [1] If there is a large discrepancy between marks, additional marker(s) will review the script. In most cases the closest-matching highest-pair of marks is combined to form a raw mark for the script.

Annex 10. Textbook arrangements: An international comparison

	Hong Kong	Singapore	Netherlands	United States	Japan	United Kingdom	Australia	Mainland China
Subject of Comparison	Liberal Studies	General Paper	Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies	Citizenship Studies	Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS)	Ideological and Political Education
Textbook list approved by the state?								
Production of textbooks	Commercial	Commercial or state produced	Commercial	Commercial	Commercial or state produced	Commercial	Mostly Commercial	State produced
Choice of books for use in class	Teachers	Teachers	Teachers	Teachers	Local boards or Teachers	Teachers	Teachers	Local education departments or boards

Sources: Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and International Review of Curriculum and Assessment (INCA)

Note: [1] Since 2019, textbook publishers can voluntarily submit Liberal Studies textbooks for the EDB's review

Annex 11. Overview of survey results

1. Currently, you are a:

	Count
School principal	71
Liberal Studies teacher; teaching Liberal Studies only	211
Liberal Studies teacher; also teaching other subjects	273
Total	555

2. Currently, the Liberal Studies curriculum coverage is:

	School Principals (%)	Teachers (%)
Too narrow	0.0	0.0
Rather narrow	1.4	1.2
Just right	29.6	33.7
Rather broad	23.9	39.7
Too broad	35.2	23.3
No comment	9.9	2.1

3. Among Liberal Studies' existing 12 themes, which one(s)' contents can be trimmed down?

	School Principals (%)	Teachers (%)
Understanding oneself	22.5	24.4
Interpersonal relationships	14.1	18.0
Quality of life	11.3	0.6
Rule of law and socio-political participation	18.3	18.6
Identity	11.3	13.6
China's reform and opening-up	8.5	15.3
Chinese culture and modern life	14.1	11.4
Impact of globalisation and related responses	1.4	5.4
Understanding public health	4.2	7.6
Science, technology and public health	5.6	11.4
The influences of energy technology	12.7	12.4
The environment and sustainable development	1.4	3.1
No theme(s) with any content can be trimmed down	25.4	25.2
Specific contents to be deleted	7.0	1.9
No comment	22.5	12.4

Note: As school principals and teachers could indicate more than one answer, the sum of the frequency and the percentage of each item exceeds the total number of samples and 100% respectively.

4. Is/Are there any new theme(s) to be added in addition to Liberal Studies' existing 12 themes; among the existing themes, which one(s) can be expanded?

	School Principals (%)	Teachers (%)
Understanding oneself	0.0	2.1
Interpersonal relationships	0.0	0.4
Quality of life	1.4	3.3
Rule of law and socio-political participation	1.4	2.9
Identity	0.0	1.7
China's reform and opening-up	1.4	0.4
Chinese culture and modern life	1.4	2.9
Impact of globalisation and related responses	0.0	3.7
Understanding public health	0.0	1.7
Science, technology and public health	0.0	1.2
The influences of energy technology	0.0	0.6
The environment and sustainable development	0.0	3.7
No theme(s) to be added and no theme with contents to be expanded	46.5	53.5
New theme(s) to be added	7.0	6.2
Specific contents to be added	1.4	2.1
No comment	42.3	26.2

Note: As school principals and teachers could indicate more than one answer, the sum of the frequency and the percentage of each item exceeds the total number of samples and 100% respectively.

5. Is the coverage of natural science in the existing Liberal Studies curriculum adequate?

	School Principals (%)	Teachers (%)
Very adequate	7.0	10.3
Rather adequate	52.1	57.9
Rather inadequate	21.1	18.2
Very inadequate	4.2	1.9
No comment	15.5	11.8

6. Is students' knowledge base developed in S1-S3 adequate to support them to launch issue enquiry in Liberal Studies?

	Teachers (%)
Very adequate	1.9
Rather adequate	26.4
Rather inadequate	55.6
Very inadequate	12.6
No comment	3.5

7. Is the time allocated to Liberal Studies adequate to allow teachers and students to go deeply into the key concepts underlying the themes?

	Teachers (%)
Very adequate	1.7
Rather adequate	31.8
Rather inadequate	49.8
Very inadequate	14.9
No comment	1.9

8. Do you agree that the Curriculum and Assessment Guide should list out Liberal Studies' key concepts?

	School Principals (%)	Teachers (%)
Strongly agree	15.5	26.2
Agree	70.4	59.9
Disagree	1.4	7.9
Strongly disagree very much	0.0	0.2
No comment	12.7	5.8

9. Can experiential learning enhance Liberal Studies' learning efficiency?

	School Principals (%)	Teachers (%)
Enhances significantly	5.6	13.0
Largely enhances	62.0	60.5
Does not enhance much	12.7	14.0
Does not enhance at all	1.4	1.0
No comment	18.3	11.4

10. Is the room for experiential learning in Liberal Studies adequate?

	Teachers (%)
Very adequate	0.2
Rather adequate	8.3
Rather inadequate	56.6
Very inadequate	29.8
No comment	5.2

11. Do Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE henceforth) Liberal Studies examination results reflect students' thinking ability?

	School Principals (%)	Teachers (%)
Reflect perfectly	0.0	8.5
Largely reflect	39.4	60.1
Does not reflect much	42.3	25.2
Does not reflect at all	12.7	2.1
No comment	5.6	4.1

12. Is the mode of HKDSE Liberal Studies examination consistent with the curriculum aims as outlined in the Curriculum and Assessment Guide?

	School Principals (%)	Teachers (%)
Perfectly consistent	2.8	6.6
Largely consistent	42.3	63.8
Not very consistent	28.2	16.7
Totally inconsistent	2.8	1.4
No comment	23.9	11.4

13. Liberal Studies' assessment objectives as outlined in the Curriculum and Assessment Guide are:

	School Principals (%)	Teachers (%)
Very clear	9.9	7.0
Relatively clear	43.7	54.3
Relatively unclear	21.1	25.4
Very unclear	7.0	2.5
No comment	18.3	10.7

14. Does the process of marking Liberal Studies examinations involve subjective judgment on the part of the markers?

	School Principals (%)	Teachers (%)
Yes	53.5	29.8
No	21.1	55.6
No comment	25.4	14.7

15. Subjective marking in Liberal Studies examinations is:
[For principals and teachers who answered “Yes” in Q.14]

	School Principals (%)	Teachers (%)
Very common	26.3	6.9
Rather common	50.0	48.6
Rather uncommon	15.8	34.7
Very uncommon	0.0	4.9
No comment	7.9	4.9

16. Do you agree that students with good language ability are more advantageous in taking Liberal Studies examinations?

	School Principals (%)	Teachers (%)
Strongly agree	62.0	53.7
Agree	35.2	43.0
Disagree	0.0	1.9
Strongly disagree	0.0	0.6
No comment	2.8	0.8

17. Is it necessary to introduce other question types (e.g. multiple-choice questions, oral exams, concept diagrams) in Liberal Studies examinations besides essay-type questions?

	School Principals (%)	Teachers (%)
Extremely necessary	4.2	7.9
Relatively necessary	22.5	36.8
Relatively unnecessary	35.2	35.5
Extremely unnecessary	15.5	12.2
No comment	22.5	7.6

18. To what extent do Liberal Studies examination past papers affect the foci of teaching?

	Teachers (%)
A lot	41.9
Quite a bit	51.4
Very little	4.8
Not at all	0.6
No comment	1.2

19. Is there adequate time for Liberal Studies teachers to prepare or update a set of teaching materials?

	Teachers (%)
Very adequate	0.4
Rather adequate	8.3
Rather inadequate	55.4
Very inadequate	33.5
No comment	2.5

20. How helpful to the teachers are the teaching materials provided by Education Bureau (through Hong Kong Education City, etc.)?

	Teachers (%)
Very helpful	1.0
Rather helpful	8.1
Rather unhelpful	68.6
Not helpful at all	15.7
No comment	6.6

21. The main sources of your Liberal Studies teaching materials are:

	Teachers (%)
Textbooks or reference books	87.2
Newspapers and magazines	78.9
Social media	39.0
Information provided by Education Bureau (e.g. Liberal Studies Web-based Resource Platform)	32.4
Research papers	22.1
Others	3.5
Total	484

Note: As school principals and teachers could indicate more than one answer, the sum of the frequency and the percentage of each item exceeds the total number of samples and 100% respectively.

22. Currently, does your school assign required Liberal Studies textbook(s) or reference book(s)?

	School Principals (%)	Teachers (%)
Yes	71.8	90.5
No	28.2	9.5

23. Do you think there is a problem of views being not neutral and unbalanced in Liberal Studies textbooks?

	School Principals (%)	Teachers (%)
Yes	33.8	21.9
No	11.3	49.8
No comment	54.9	28.3

24. The problem of views being not neutral and unbalanced in Liberal Studies textbooks is: [For principals and teachers who answered “Yes” in Q.23]

	School Principals (%)	Teachers (%)
Very common	25.0	7.5
Rather common	25.0	28.3
Rather uncommon	41.7	61.3
Very uncommon	4.2	0.9
No comment	4.2	1.9

25. Do you agree that the Education Bureau should examine Liberal Studies textbooks to ensure that the views expressed are neutral and balanced?

	School Principals (%)	Teachers (%)
Strongly agree	25.4	8.7
Agree	57.7	30.6
Disagree	4.2	22.7
Strongly disagree	5.6	21.1
No comment	7.0	16.9

26. Do you agree that the Education Bureau should examine Liberal Studies textbooks to ensure that they include all the key concepts of the curriculum?

	School Principals (%)	Teachers (%)
Strongly agree	19.7	10.7
Agree	63.4	41.9
Disagree	7.0	20.5
Strongly disagree	2.8	13.6
No comment	7.0	13.2

27. Do you agree that the Education Bureau should recommend a series of web-based Liberal Studies teaching materials prepared by third-party sources?

	School Principals (%)	Teachers (%)
Strongly agree	8.5	12.0
Agree	63.4	49.6
Disagree	7.0	17.6
Strongly disagree	1.4	8.7
No comment	19.7	12.2

28. The Continuing Professional Development provided to Liberal Studies teachers by the Education Bureau is:

	Teachers (%)
Very adequate	3.1
Rather adequate	47.3
Rather inadequate	32.4
Very inadequate	7.6
No comment	9.5

29–34.

Using the 0–10 scale, please indicate how confident you are when teaching different modules, with 0 = completely unconfident and 10 = completely confident:

Teachers (%)	Personal Development and Interpersonal relationships	Hong Kong Today	Modern China	Globalisation	Public Health	Energy, Technology and the Environment
0 point	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.2
1 point	0.0	0.4	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
2 points	0.0	0.6	2.3	0.2	0.2	0.0
3 points	0.4	2.1	3.1	1.2	1.0	1.0
4 points	1.2	1.9	5.0	1.2	2.1	1.7
5 points	2.3	3.9	11.8	6.4	4.1	2.1
6 points	6.2	9.5	14.7	14.5	11.4	10.3
7 points	15.9	17.6	20.9	22.1	24.6	21.9
8 points	34.3	32.6	23.3	29.1	28.7	33.9
9 points	22.1	19.4	9.7	16.3	18.8	18.6
10 points	17.1	11.6	7.4	8.7	8.9	10.3
Average score	8.1	7.7	6.8	7.5	7.6	7.8
Standard deviation	1.4	1.7	2.0	1.5	1.5	1.4

35. A Liberal Studies teacher may not be familiar with some of the themes.
Do you agree that schools can arrange more than one Liberal Studies teacher to teach the same class?

	School Principals (%)	Teachers (%)
Strongly agree	9.9	8.5
Agree	33.8	27.5
Disagree	33.8	38.2
Strongly disagree	7.0	15.9
No comment	15.5	9.9

36. Overall speaking, the demand on Liberal Studies teachers is:

	School Principals (%)	Teachers (%)
Very high	11.3	32.2
Rather high	45.1	44.2
Not too high, not too low	19.7	17.6
Rather low	9.9	1.4
Very low	4.2	0.8
No comment	9.9	3.7

37. The time of preparing for Liberal Studies classes as a percentage of the average time spent on preparing for other classes is:
[For those who answered “Liberal Studies teachers; also teaching other subjects” in Q.1]

	Teachers (%)
1–40%	4.0
41–80%	17.2
81–120%	14.3
121–160%	21.6
161–200%	26.4
201%+	16.5

38–40. In the future, Liberal Studies should be:

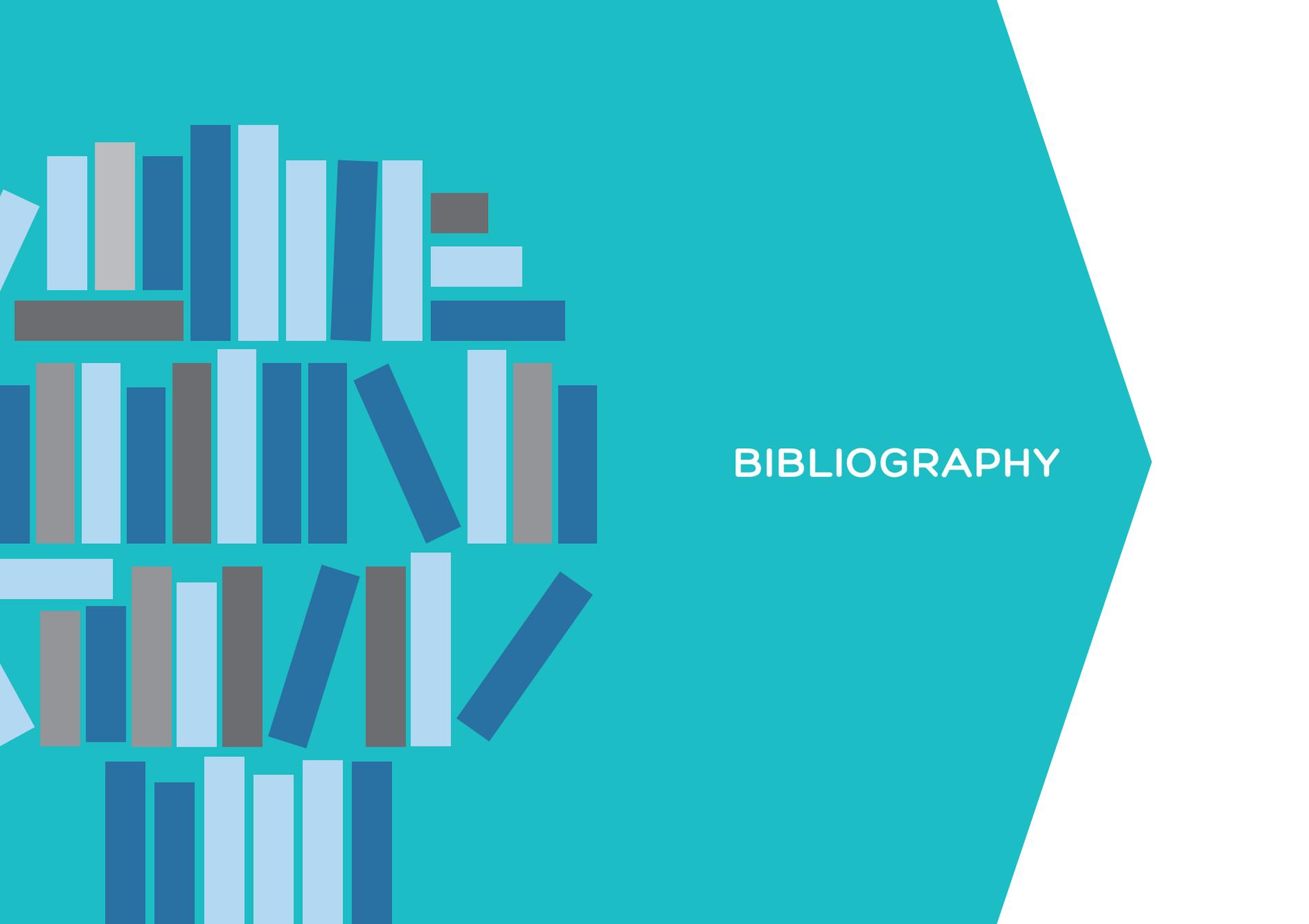
		School Principals (%)	
A compulsory subject	Have a public exam and all students need to take it	7-grade system	21.1
		Pass/Fail system	5.6
	Have a public exam and students can decide whether to take it	7-grade system	1.4
		Pass/Fail system	4.2
	Not have a public exam		5.6
An elective subject	Have a public exam and all students need to take it	7-grade system	2.8
		Pass/Fail system	1.4
	Have a public exam and students can decide whether to take it	7-grade system	15.5
		Pass/Fail system	8.5
	Not have a public exam		16.9
Total		83.1	

41. Should students be required to obtain a minimum of Grade 2 upon university admission?
[For principals who chose '7-grade system' in Q.40]

	School principals (%)
Yes	60.0
No	26.7
No comment	13.3

42. Should students be required to obtain a Pass grade upon university admission?
[For principals who chose '2-grade system' in Q.40]

	School Principals (%)
Yes	78.6
No	7.1
No comment	14.3



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