

Submission of Our Hong Kong Foundation’s Views and Comments on the ‘Consultation Document of Task Force on Task Force on Review of School Curriculum’

We would like to offer our views on the preliminary observations and recommendations set forth in the Consultation Document, which have covered the relevant issues in the field of School Curriculum planning.

Our Hong Kong Foundation published a report titled “Applied Education: A Holistic and Flexible Education System for the Digital Age” in August, which is closely linked to the Task Force. We hope to highlight several points and recommendations referenced in our report as part of our response.

Our recommendations to the Consultation Document are presented below on 6 main areas:

- Whole-Person Development
- Values Education
- Creating Space and Catering for Learner Diversity
- Applied Learning
- University Admissions
- STEM Education

1. Whole-Person Development

[Chapter 3 Paragraph 3.1.1](#) of the Consultation Document suggests the government to ensure **adequate space to be created for secondary school students to participate in life-wide learning experiences, and explore further study options and career opportunities in the traditional and new economies.**

OHKF agrees with the Task Force’s recommendation of enhancing curriculum planning at the system and school levels, to create more space to foster student’s balanced development of attributes in multiple domains. In order to realize this goal, we strongly recommend promoting career education and outside school experiential learning experiences in junior secondary schools, as well as the primary level:

1.1. Allocating compulsory teaching and learning component for career education

Career education should be made a compulsory teaching component with designated teaching and learning hours in secondary schools. Nowadays, more countries put greater emphasis on students’ career planning and development,

and have established statutory frameworks that set out career education provision standards (e.g. curriculum content and quality of guidance). For instance, in Austria, careers education (known as “Berufsorientierung” or “BO”) is a mandatory subject, totaling 32 hours per year. Lessons are provided to 7th and 8th-grade students (age 12-14). In the UK, although career education is currently not a compulsory subject, schools start teaching it as a course to children since primary school years. *(Please refer to recommendation 6.1 in OHKF’s Applied Education report)*

1.2. Implementing intensive career experience programmes

Schools can consider implementing intensive career experience programmes to facilitate student’s career exposure. It is important for schools to cultivate a good learning environment with less academic burden, so students can have adequate space to explore their interests and career opportunities. In South Korea, for example, all middle schools since 2016 have implemented the “Free Learning Semester” (FMS). During school term, students are exempted from taking exams and test assessments; they only take subject classes in the morning, and engage in career exploration activities in the afternoon. *(Please refer to recommendation 6.2 in OHKF’s Applied Education report)*

2. Values Education

*Chapter 3 Paragraph 3.2.1 & 3.1.2 of the Consultation Document highlights the need for **strengthening life education and its articulation in primary and secondary schooling**. It is also encouraged that the Education Bureau should **start Life Planning Education (LPE) early as young students, their parents and schools should develop an understanding and appreciation of students’ interests, abilities, needs and aspirations early**.*

2.1. Stepping up parental engagement

More emphasis should be placed on parental engagement in students’ career counselling process. Parents play an important role in a child’s career development, and several countries have already established career counselling systems to provide guidance to parents. For instance, the government in Germany established agencies and centres across the country for students and parents to gain access to career guidance services. Career counsellors provide details of possible learning pathways, in addition to updated labour market information and psychological counselling services to parents in order for them to better

understand their children’s possible future development paths. *(Please refer to recommendation 6.3 in OHKF’s Applied Education report)*

Chapter 3 Paragraph 3.2.2 of the Consultation Document propose increasing professional training to enhance principals’ and teachers’ understanding of and exposure to the workplace, to better implement LPE in primary and junior secondary schools.

2.2. Creating space for teacher training to enhance career education

Exposure and knowledge of the landscape and development of industries build an important foundation for teachers to deliver career education. Teachers should be given space to receive mentorship and placement to learn future career opportunities, as well as latest market trends and developments. In the UK, a non-governmental organisation, called STEM Learning, organises the ENTHUSE placement program—a course providing STEM secondary school teachers with 1-2 week placements at universities and/or industries. Teachers receive mentorship and training to learn new STEM-related knowledge, future career opportunities, as well as latest market trends and developments. *(Please refer to recommendation 6.4 in OHKF’s Applied Education report)*

3. Creating Space and Catering Learner Diversity

Chapter 3 Paragraph 3.3.1 of the Consultation Document propose to keep intact the status of the four core subjects in the senior secondary curriculum

OHKF respects the Task Force’s decision to keep intact the status of the four core subjects in the senior secondary curriculum. That said, in order for Hong Kong’s education system to better cater for students’ diverse interests, abilities and unleash their potential, we believe solely focusing on delivering the four core subjects is not enough. In response to the rapid societal changes and increasing challenges, OHKF propose the Task Force to strengthen Applied Learning/Applied Education in the school system level, to equip students with applicable knowledge and practical skills, and also impose more flexible university admission requirements *(please refer to section 5 University Admissions for more details on recommendations)*.



3.1. Broadening the manifesto of the Committee of Applied Learning

In our view, Applied Education is an interdisciplinary concept that spans a spectrum of key learning areas, allowing secondary students to combine learning with hands-on practice, engage with the industry, and explore career interests. It should not be confined to any single subject.

Under the Curriculum Development Council (CDC), there is a functional committee for Applied Learning not only to “plan and coordinate Applied Learning curriculum development”, but also advise on “education policies and strategies related to Applied Learning” (Curriculum Development Council, 2019). In our view, the manifesto of this committee can be broadened into inter-disciplinary Applied Education such that learning components combining hands-on practice with theoretical learning can be applied across key learning areas, including but not limited to STEM. This helps tilt the curriculum development towards a model more aligned with the job market and future skills requirement, and better prepares our students for the future. *(Please refer to recommendation 5.2 in OHKF’s Applied Education report)*

Chapter 3 Paragraph 3.3.2 of the Consultation Document suggests that ***the design of the curricula and assessments of the four core subjects at the senior secondary level to be trimmed and differentiated, which allow more flexibility and create space to cater for learner diversity***

3.2. Creating space for career exploration

We agree with the Task Force’s recommendation of having the design of the curricula and assessments of the four core subjects trimmed and differentiated, in which more flexibility and space would be created for students to engage in career exploration activities and other learning opportunities.

4. Applied Learning

Chapter 3 Paragraph 3.4.1 & 3.4.2 of the Consultation Document details the need for ***the value of ApL in the senior secondary curriculum to be reinforced***. Moreover, the Education Bureau ***should increase students’ incentive to take ApL as an elective subject to dovetail with VPET as a means of catering for learner diversity and supporting students in multiple pathways and to enrich the learning experiences of the more academically-inclined students***.

4.1. **Increasing standard-based grading of Applied Learning to level 5**

ApL should not be a last resort for students to pick an easy-to-pass elective; instead, it is critical for long-term talent development, and therefore needs to be upgraded and made equal to Category A subjects for students to have more incentive to take it as an elective subject. This involves building more vigorous assessment methods and an extensive curriculum which justifies a higher grading, possibly with the involvement of international panels (*Please refer to recommendation 5.3 in OHKF's Applied Education report*).

5. **University Admissions**

*Chapter 3 Paragraph 3.5.1 of the Consultation Document recommends to **maintain the General Entrance Requirements (GER) of 3322 in the core subjects as the basic requirement for university admissions in principal.***

OHKF respects the Task Force's recommendation to maintain the GER of 3322 in the core subjects as the minimum requirement for university admission. However, we would like to address the need for more flexible admission requirements, and propose the Education Bureau to consider working towards that by:

5.1. **Raising self-financing institutions' (SFI) non-standard admission quota from 5 to 15%**

SFIs are subject to stringent requirements limiting non-standard admission to 5% of the programme cohort (Federation for Self-financing Tertiary Education, 2014). This creates a misalignment between admission requirements and targeted applicants. In Singapore, universities set aside 15% of the cohort intake for aptitude-based admission in order to reduce the reliance on scores; the ratio at their polytechnics is even higher (close to 20%). Relaxing this requirement allows schools to develop aptitude tests of their own and to admit fitting students, particularly for applied degree programmes aligned with future manpower needs. (*Please refer to recommendation 3.1 in OHKF's Applied Education report*)

5.2. **Allowing local direct admission to SSSDP simultaneously with JUPAS**

SSSDP-subsidised programmes are put under the Joint University Programmes Admission System (JUPAS). This is a constraint for aptitude-based admission, which often involves local students applying for direct admission based on alternative assessment methods, such as GCE A Level or the International

Baccalaureate. Programmes under the SSSDP are only allowed to consider these applicants after the JUPAS process is completed; these admissions are further limited to 10% of the subsidised places (Concourse for Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors, 2019). To seek talents with greater flexibility, the Government could allow these programmes to directly admit students whilst the JUPAS process is ongoing, on a relaxed or even removed quota.

It is important to note that a relaxed direct admission quota reflects an ideology of flexible entrance but vigorous quality assurance; hence, it does not represent a compromise of quality for graduates from self-financing programmes (*Please refer to recommendation 3.2 in OHKF's Applied Education report*).

Chapter 3 Paragraph 3.5.2 of the Consultation Document encourage universities to expand the view on merit to give greater weight to the Student Learning Profile (SLP), Other Experiences and Achievements in Competitions/Activities (OEA), School Principal's Nominations (SPN), and the gifted students identifies by the Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education and other credible gifted programmes.

5.3. Maximising the flexibility of university admission mechanism by increasing principal nomination quota and allow unconditional offers to be made before the release of HKDSE results.

The School Principal Nomination (SPN) scheme in the JUPAS and other principal nomination schemes in the self-financing sector allow secondary schools to identify suitable students for specific programmes. Increasing the quota of these schemes can enhance the admission flexibility of degree-offering institutions by providing fresh, informed perspectives.

The Task Force on Review of School Curriculum discussed a revamped SPN scheme which allows for aptitude-based admission to be granted without being bounded by HKDSE results; we welcome this recommendation and believe that aptitude-based admission allows for a more holistic approach in the student selection process (*Please refer to recommendation 3.3 in OHKF's Applied Education report*).

5.4. **Accepting professional accreditations under the Qualification Framework as a part of degree admission criteria.**

For University of Applied Sciences, it is imperative to consider professional qualifications not only to better connect QF levels, but more importantly, to allow non-academic learners to take an alternative development pathway in the professional world before returning to school to supplement their practical knowledge with a theoretical or managerial perspective. Initiatives as mentioned above (VQP, RPL, RPQ) have laid down a foundation for schools to accept professional qualifications as part of their admission criteria (*Please refer to recommendation 3.4 in OHKF's Applied Education report*).

6. **STEM Education**

*Chapter 3 Paragraph 3.6.2 & 3.6.3 of the Consultation Document highlights the need for the government to **facilitate schools' planning and implementation of STEM Education**. Furthermore, **a designated committee with representatives from schools, the EDB, universities, professional bodies and private sector should be set up under the CDC to oversee the long-term development of STEM education in Hong Kong***

6.1. **Strengthen STEM Education and promote delivery of curriculum/materials with the adoption of Applied Education**

We agree with the Task Force's suggestion to strengthen STEM Education through the establishment of a set of learning framework or curriculum guides on STEM Education. It is highly recommended that the Education Bureau guide schools to adopt the concept of Applied Education when delivering STEM education, where students learn by hands-on practice. In addition, OHKF also supports the idea of setting up a committee to overlook the long-term development of STEM Education in Hong Kong.



7. Conclusion

The set of recommendations as mentioned in the preceding six sections summarises OHKF's views on Hong Kong's school curriculum and education system. That said, there needs to be a holistic plan for the education system evolution, and not just for any particular stage or school; a combination of curriculum, admission requirements, funding, and industry collaboration is required in order to truly build a flexible education system with multiple pathways for students. In this regard, we hope that our report lays out a blueprint for the future of education envisioned.

The e-copy of the report is as attached for your perusal.

Should you have any queries, please contact Victor Kwok, Head of Education and Youth by email at Victor.Kwok@ourhkfoundation.org.hk or Renee Ho, Researcher of Education and Youth at Renee.Ho@ourhkfoundation.org.hk.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Wong
Deputy Executive Director, Head of Public Policy Institute
Our Hong Kong Foundation

Victor Kwok
Head of Education and Youth
Our Hong Kong Foundation

Renee Ho
Researcher, Education and Youth
Our Hong Kong Foundation