

Chief Curriculum Development Officer
(Personal, Social and Humanities Education)
13/F Wu Chung House
213 Queen's Road East
Hong Kong

28 September 2005

Dear Chair of CDC-HKEAA Geography Committee,

Response to the Second Draft of the Proposed New Secondary Curriculum and Assessment Framework (Geography) from the Secondary Education Committee

After having reviewed the second draft of the Proposed New Secondary Curriculum and Assessment Framework (Geography) (thereafter referred to as “Framework”) released in May 2005, our Association would like to inform the joint CDC-HKEAA Committee about our comments and concerns. In general, we have noticed substantial improvement in the Second Draft, especially in the elective parts of the curriculum. We appreciate your efforts. Specially, we would like to draw your attention to the following issues and recommendations:

1. As stated in the Framework, the compulsory part of the curriculum will be organised around three major themes “Managing our natural environment”, “Managing changes in the human environment” and “Managing global challenges”. This classification highlights the role of human beings in managing their environment, and conveys the image that human can control and reshape their environment as they wish, no matter whether the phenomenon under study is a local or a global one. We are concerned with this concept of human superiority over their natural environment and similarly the image of human’s power in controlling and managing their socio-economic environment. We propose a less anthropocentric viewpoint that emphasises an understanding of (i) the operation of the natural and societal environment, and (ii) the need for a harmonious and sustainable relationship between people and nature.
2. The assessment of students’ fieldwork performance by their teachers in school is recommendable. As there are many practical problems in its planning and implementation, the Committee should conduct a careful and in-depth internal discussion and an extensive questionnaire survey and focus-group interviews collating teachers’ opinions before finalising the guidelines for teachers and students. An outline of the problems requiring attention is given as follows:
 - (a) Insufficient funding and resources – many fieldwork activities require expensive equipment (e.g. a conductivity meter for measuring the amount of solution load in river flow) or software (e.g. a computer programme to continuously record hourly information about air quality, emissions and weather conditions in an industrial district). Schools may not be able to afford a stock of these resources unless

sufficient funding from the EMB is available. Can the EMB provide these funds or at least institute a loan system for students wishing to use them? If not, there is a risk that only students in the richer schools (especially under the DSS) can have access to these resources. The principle of equal opportunity in learning may therefore be violated.

- (b) Lack of technical support in the field – We are concerned with the extra demand on supervision and support during fieldwork, especially when students are conducting their individual field studies. What can the EMB and the two field-study centres offer to overcome this problem? How can these units help students conduct their fieldwork and assist teachers to assess their students’ performance? Could EMB put additional resources to the two field studies centres to help teachers and students cope with the new SS curriculum?
 - (c) Fairness – How can comparison and standardisation across classes and across schools be conducted to ensure fairness in assessment? We urge that the assessment criteria (or the performance indicators according to the Framework) to be designed so that they are easy to interpret and adhere to exactly by teachers when marking their students’ fieldwork reports.
 - (d) Components of SBA – According to the Framework, SBA will only be based on a written report submitted by students. As listed in the four areas of assessment in the Framework (p. 45, section 5.14), neither the students’ performance in the fieldwork process, nor the affective aspects and skills obtained from fieldwork are emphasised. We suggest that the curriculum and assessment planners re-examine the components of SBA, so that the objective of the SBA will be reflected appropriately in the marking scheme.
3. Last but not at least, it is necessary to consider carefully the level of complexity and workload imposed by the new Geography curriculum as compared to other elective subjects like Chinese History, Economics and History. We are concerned that if the expectations are much higher than the other subjects, students might opt for other “less demanding” subjects.

We hope that the joint CDC-HKEAA Geography Committee will consider the issues and problems discussed in this letter seriously and that practical solutions can be found to ensure the smooth and effective implementation of the new curriculum. We trust that the new curriculum will improve the quality of geography teaching and learning in schools. As the professional association of geographers in Hong Kong, we would be more than happy to share our views with the Committee in greater details and contribute further to the design of the new curriculum.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Yours sincerely,

Hong Kong Geographical Association