



Liberal studies: benefits and issues

There has been much discussion and debate regarding teaching and assessment methods since the implementation of a liberal studies curriculum in 2009. How useful is it?

In 2009, the New Academic Structure was implemented in Hong Kong. Liberal studies was also introduced at Secondary 4 level as one of four core subjects for the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination.¹ The objective of Liberal Studies is to broaden students' knowledge base and enhance their social awareness, through studying a wide range of issues².

Key points from respondents

94.4% of teachers believed that liberal studies nurtured thinking from multiple perspectives and 60%-70% of them said the subject could help students communicate, express themselves better, think independently and have better skills in connecting different disciplines.

83.3% of youth agreed that liberal studies helped them to think from multiple perspectives but only about 30-44% thought it could help improve the other skills mentioned above.

In-depth interviews with 12 young people thought that liberal studies issues were difficult and changed constantly. They said that non-stop practice with past exam papers was a major challenge.

Comments from Youth I.D.E.A.S. think tank members

David Wong, convener Both the teachers and students in this survey confirmed the value of liberal studies as a senior secondary school subject. Many students who had already left school thought it helped with further studies, training and employment.



Jay Chan & George Chan, group members There is a 7-point grading system but about 90% of candidates got grade 2 or above so simplifying the grading, while in the view of some teachers, it would reflect students' ability inaccurately, and might have adverse effects in the long run.

Daneil Cheung & Derren Lam, group members Implementing a new curriculum with matching teaching, learning and assessment strategies involves a heavy workload and is challenging for teachers. We recommend better collaboration, with liberal studies resource centres set up jointly by local universities and government. A handbook on concept building would also be useful. Annual subsidies of HK\$HK200,000 for liberal studies teaching assistants are also recommended.

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Respondents 126 liberal studies teachers and 861 HKFYG members aged 17-24

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1. The four core subjects are Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics (Compulsory Part) and Liberal Studies.

2. Curriculum Development Council and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (2007, updated November 2015). *Liberal Studies Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4 – 6)*. http://334.edb.hkedcitynet/new/doc/chi/curriculum2015/LS_CAGuide_e_2015.pdf