



教育局  
Education Bureau

本署檔號 Our ref: EDB(CD/NSS)/ADM/80/1/1(2)  
來函檔號 Your ref:  
電話 Tel. No. : 2892 5817  
圖文傳真 Fax No.: 2573 5299

20 November 2007

The Hong Kong Association of French Teachers  
25/F, Tower 2, Admiralty Centre  
Harcourt Road, Central  
Hong Kong

Dear French Language teachers,

Thank you for your email of 19 September 2007 to the Secretary for Education. He has asked me to reply on his behalf.

You have raised concerns that students who take French under the new senior secondary education curriculum may not have sufficient time to prepare for the AS level: French - Language paper (Code 8682) of the Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) if they are required to take the examination in November and that students who begin study of French at Secondary 4 may not reach the AS level. Your email contains some suggestions for our consideration.

The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) accords priority to the interest of students. At the same time, it has to come to terms with practical considerations in providing appropriate foreign language examinations for the purpose of the HKDSE Examination. In its letter to schools dated 30 November 2006, HKEAA has explained the following considerations for the arrangement of foreign language examinations:

- (a) The examinations should be internationally recognized.
- (b) The standard should be pitched at the AS level.
- (c) A unified approach is to be used across the different language subjects, i.e., each examination should, ideally, have a similar structure.
- (d) Agreement has to be reached with the examination boards concerned for the results to be recorded on the HKDSE certificate.
- (e) The examinations should be self-financing, i.e., the cost should be recovered from candidates.

Against the above background, our responses to the questions are as follows:

*Question (1) Has the plan for adopting CIE AS Level French for HKDSE been finalized? Has a comparison of the proposed English & Chinese syllabi to the French syllabus been undertaken?*

/2...

Adopting the CIE AS level: French - Language examination (Code 8682) in Hong Kong for the purpose of the HKDSE Certificate has been approved by the Public Examinations Board under the delegated authority of the HKEAA.

Before coming up with this finalized arrangement, HKEAA has explored various other options, including the DELF qualification awarded by the French Ministry of Education. However, different examination bodies have different specifications of examination levels and different systems of reporting results. For example, the European system reports results in grades from A1 to C2 while some other examination bodies do so in marks.

As there will be six foreign languages for the purpose of the HKDSE certificate, HKEAA strives to adopt a unified examination approach for all foreign languages to avoid unnecessary confusion to stakeholders. HKEAA adopts the CIE language examinations for HKDSE certification because they are offered on a unified approach, including the reporting system and examination format, which will not be confusing to the stakeholders. There are also other advantages including the CIE's capacity to offer more language subjects for HKDSE certification in future if there is a justified need, the stakeholders' familiarity with the UK grading system from A to E and the corresponding standards, and that the CIE examinations are designed for school candidates, with questions put in contexts familiar to them.

We do understand your concern that there may be insufficient teaching and learning (T&L) time for the November administration of CIE AS level French examination rather than objecting to the merits of adopting this examination as explained above. Hence, you suggest comparing the proposed Chinese and English Syllabi to the French syllabus to gauge if it is unfair for the French students in terms of the available T&L time. However, it is inappropriate to compare the French syllabus with the Chinese and English syllabi in this context as our students have been learning the two core languages since kindergarten.

*Question (2) and Suggestion (a) Will the EDB & the HKEAA reconsider the timing of the new French exam to be adopted?*

The CIE AS level French examination is administered only twice a year, namely, November and June. HKEAA does not opt for the June administration because there will not be sufficient processing time for recording the results on the HKDSE certificate. As regards asking CIE to make special arrangements to administer another examination specifically for Hong Kong students, the high additional cost involved will be borne by the candidates. This alternate timing proposal is therefore also considered not viable.

The only viable option is the November administration. We are aware that the T&L time for this administration will be seven months (26 months from September of Secondary 4 to November of Secondary 6) more than that for the current IGCSE French examination pitched at O-level (19 months from September of Secondary 4 to April of Secondary 5). Language learning is continuous and seven months more preparation time for the AS level French examination would not be unreasonable, not to mention the school's support and teaching arrangements to facilitate the preparation of their students for the examination.

/3...

*Question (3) and Suggestion (b) Will EDB and HKEAA consider the feasibility of retaining IGCSE French examination (Code 0520) for HKDSE?*

Based on the principle that the standard of the language examinations should be pitched at AS level, HKEAA cannot consider the IGCSE: French – Second Language paper (Code 0520) which prepares students for further progression to A and AS Level study. The IGCSE will be retained but the results will not be recorded in the HKDSE. Nevertheless, the IGCSE results, if a student were to sit for this examination, could be included in the school-based Student Learning Profile.

*Question (4) and Suggestion (c) Would EDB and HKEAA consider the use of DELF for the assessment of these students?*

As the HKDSE is pitched at the AS level and international recognition very much depends on our strong upholding of this standard, HKEAA cannot consider any examinations not comparable to the AS level. HKEAA therefore cannot include in HKDSE certification the DELF examination paper which is suitable for students who begin their French studies in Secondary 4. It is impossible for the HKDSE certificate to include an examination which caters to a diverse range of candidates from ABC beginners to students who master language fluency. Students not up to the AS level standard have the liberty to pursue other French qualifications, like DELF. HKEAA would consider administering the DELF examination in Hong Kong as a standalone examination, but not for the purpose of the HKDSE, if students in Hong Kong are interested in taking it.

*Question (5) If a decision could be made promptly, why not allow schools to begin Secondary 6 classes in French from the next academic year and allow these students to finalise their second language studies to Secondary 7?*

We may not fully understand your suggestion. For the existing arrangements, there are no foreign language subjects for the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE). There are also no restrictions on schools offering French for the students outside the mainstream school curriculum. The same will apply when the new senior secondary school curriculum is in place. We will be happy to clarify if we have misunderstood your question.

I am sorry that we have not been able to revert to you earlier as it has taken us some time to review the issues raised. I hope the above help clarify the matter.

Yours sincerely,



(Dr S K KWAN)  
for Secretary for Education

c.c. Secretary General, HKEAA