

The HKDSE has been postponed to 24 April by the EDB and HKEAA due to the outbreak of COVID-19 epidemic. Since then, there has been considerable discussion among the public and the education sector whether HKDSE should be further postponed or even cancelled if the spread of the coronavirus shows no signs of dying down in the coming two weeks. As a professional body that has been working closely with career teachers and guidance personnel of some 400 member schools in Hong Kong in providing supporting multiple-pathway information and career guidance and student guidance, the Hong Kong Association of Careers Masters and Guidance Masters (HKACMGM) would like to make the following 5 suggestions in response to the unprecedented crisis in the history of local education:

- 1. The HKDSE should NOT be cancelled:** Unlike the curriculum and assessment framework of IB, local secondary schools working on the HKDSE do not have a system as sophisticated and empirical-based to generate school-based 'predicted results' that could be used as a reliable benchmark for local university admission. There are also discrepancies between the assessment literacy and experience among teachers of different schools. On the other hand, many schools were not able to finish their S6 mock examinations due to the outbreak of epidemic in late January. Schools will face huge difficulty of not having enough reliable data even if they try to work on their school-based predicted HKDSE levels. It is predictable that students and their parents would have doubts on the fairness of reliability of those results, while it could also leave a negative impact on the further studies opportunities and employment of this batch of secondary school graduates. People will also doubt whether local universities would favour students from elite schools. Worse still, given the two important benchmarks for further studies being "33222" and "22222", the impact will be devastating if students receive 23223 or 21222 out of a premature mechanism in generating predicted HKDSE levels from their schools. Then the whole assessment system could come under heavy criticism.
- 2.** It is unfortunate that some members of the public do not possess thorough understanding of the HKDSE and its school-based assessment (SBA) mechanism, and misunderstand that our current system could be substituted totally by SBA marks like some other international examinations. This claim not just cannot address the problem at root, but also has created a lot of anxiety and pressure among candidates who are fighting to prepare for HKDSE, which could mean 'life or death' for them. We sincerely urge the EDB and HKEAA to come to a decision as early as possible, so that S6 students and the education sector could be given a peace of mind.
- 3. If further postponed, the HKDSE should take place in July, instead of being pushed back by 3 weeks again and again.** If further postponement must be made in order to guarantee the health and safety of all Hong Kong citizens, the revised date of this further postponement should be supported by concrete public health data and evidence. We believe July, which is widely believed by public health experts as a period when COVID-19 should come under control, would be a suitable time. Students and their parents could be spared with a continuous status of uncertainty and worries.
- 4. The announcement of such a postponement of HKDSE should be in line with the arrangements of JUPAS and various tertiary institutes. There should be a joint announcement that how this cohort of admission will be done in exceptional arrangements which accord top priority to the further studies**

**opportunity of students.** A possible timeline is: HKDSE results release by late August; school term of local tertiary institutes for the same cohort can be pushed to January of next year (similar to the Spring semester of Australia, Japan and South Korea). Summer semesters can be offered to this cohort in the first two school years. It can allow students to choose whether they wish to finish their undergraduate studies in June 4 years later, or one year after that. No matter how these tertiary institutes roll out their enrolment and curriculum, it is important to allow students and their parents to compare different options and choose the ones that bring them the less negative impact. We believe that this can help win the understanding and acceptance of different stakeholders.

As for the enrollment of overseas universities, we strongly hope that EDB and HKEAA can communicate with official bodies and various institutes overseas. For example, it is hoped that UK and Taiwan can consider allowing students from Hong Kong to start their studies by late September or early October.

- 5. All arrangements related to the HKDSE, apart from administrative and disease-prevention considerations, should be made with ample communication with the education sector (especially frontline guidance personnel). The concerns and anxiety of students and their parents should be carefully assessed and evaluated. Foreseeable crisis should also be dealt with early preventive and support measures.** From social unrest to the COVID-19 epidemic, the teaching and learning progress has been seriously affected. HKDSE candidates this year have been undergoing immense pressure that stemmed from numerous uncertainties brought by the coronavirus outbreak. It was already extremely difficult for school teachers to comfort the emotions of DSE candidates in face of the undecided status between 'Plan A' and 'Plan B'. The sudden postponement just made one week before the original commencement has been difficult for candidates to handle. Some of them have expressed to teachers that they are going to give up on the exam. Parents also show worrying signs of anxiety. These negative emotions must be addressed properly.

The HKACMGM welcome further communication with EDB, HKEAA and related parties so as to further explain our concerns and suggestions. For enquiries, please contact:

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