

Part C. Project Details

10 (a) Background

Education and Curriculum Reform

In recent years, there have been calls from within the educational community for the reform of our senior secondary curriculum towards an emphasis on the development of self-learning skills and critical thinking rather than the rote learning of substantive contents. As the Education Commission's *Review of the Education System* points out, the education reform should "provide a broad senior secondary curriculum to enable students to acquire experiences in various key learning areas, construct a broad knowledge base and enhance their ability to analyze problems." Towards this end, "rigid streaming of arts and science curriculum should be abolished" and various generic skills (i.e. collaboration, communication, creativity, critical thinking, information technology, numeracy, problem-solving, self-management, and study skills) should be enhanced.

Similar messages have been echoed in the proposed school curriculum reform. In line with the aims of education to enhance students' capability of "life-long learning, critical and exploratory thinking"¹, the school curriculum aims to "help students to learn how to learn...through developing generic skills to acquire and construct knowledge."² The Curriculum Development Council had set out the learning goal of mastering independent learning skills and those skills include critical thinking skills, information technology skills, problem-solving, and study skills. Towards this end, the CDC recommended Four Key Tasks including Project Learning and Information Technology for Interactive Learning.³ Moreover, a variety of approaches, learning activities and resources (e.g. other than the textbook) will have to be employed.

Increasing Importance of ASL Liberal Studies (LS) and Project Learning

We believe that the Advanced Supplementary Level subject *Liberal Studies* (hereafter LS) is perfect for the realization of these ideals. It is designed precisely to broaden the intellectual horizons of senior secondary students and to facilitate their acquisition of critical thinking, problem solving and study skills. The fundamental aim of LS curriculum "would be to develop a wide range of skills and techniques concerned with the collection, organization, presentation, interpretation and evaluation of information about the world, so as to promote critical thinking and to make sound judgements on the part of the students." Furthermore, this subject "aims to provide the means by which students may learn to harmonize the different approaches found in sciences and humanities."⁴

¹ Education Commission. 2000. *Learning for Life, Learning through Life: Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong*.

² Curriculum Development Council. 2001. *Learning to Learn: The Way Forward in Curriculum Development*.

³ Curriculum Development Council. 2002. *Basic Education Curriculum Guide*.

⁴ Curriculum Development Council. 1991. *Syllabuses for Secondary Schools: Liberal Studies (Advanced Supplementary Level)*.

The LS curriculum also includes a Project Report component as part of the continuous assessment, which dovetails nicely with the current emphasis in the educational community on Project Learning. Indeed, in the proposed curriculum reform, the merits of LS have been singled out: "Firstly, it helps to broaden the existing sixth form curricula by providing a range of modules that could complement the subject streams.... Secondly, there is evidence in HKEA's public assessment that student projects can promote independent learning and critical thinking."⁵

Schools offering LS have shown a considerable increase in these few years and there is a rising need for the support of this subject accordingly. Based on our directory of schools offering LS, the number of schools offering LS increases from 60 at the year 2000 to 77 at the year 2002. Moreover, the government recognized the educational value of LS and proposed to make it compulsory (together with Chinese and English Language) at senior secondary level at the time when secondary education changes to 6 years. The emphasis on enquiry approach and self-learning capabilities in LS curriculum has also been echoed in the proposed school curriculum Integrated Humanities (Secondary 4-5). Integrated Humanities includes similar modules as LS and also adopts the enquiry approach instead of the transmission approach in its teaching and learning strategies.⁶

Obstacles and Needs in the Further Development of LS and Project Learning

The merits of LS notwithstanding, the development of this subject suffers from the lack of teaching resources and support. For example, the nature of LS requires constant updating of a wide range of issues discussed in classes and teachers are struggling to prepare various teaching materials and gather resources for their course uses. The emphasis on critical thinking, problem solving, and study skills also requires vigorous training in research skills that not all teachers possess. Frustrations and despairs are often heard among teachers and students. Therefore, the Department of Sociology has developed the support programme for the teaching and learning of Liberal Studies and Project Learning since 1997 and has persevered over the years in sustaining this programme.

Over the past five years, we have been organizing related activities for secondary schools offering LS. We have forged a good working relationship with secondary schools and LS teachers and also developed close collaborative relationship with the Curriculum Development Institute (hereafter CDI) of Education and Manpower Bureau (hereafter EMB) since 2001. We have also conducted extensive interviews and group discussions with teachers to ascertain their needs and opinions.⁷ Based on our five years' experiences of working with secondary schools on LS and those opinions from teachers, we recognize the following obstacles and needs in the further development of Liberal Studies and Project Learning specifically, and that of Personal, Social and Humanities Education (PSHE) Key Learning Area in the broader sense:

⁵ Curriculum Development Council. 2000. *Learning to Learn: The Way Forward in Curriculum Development*.

⁶ Curriculum Development Council. 2002. *Integrated Humanities (S4-5) Curriculum Framework Second Consultation*.

⁷ We have conducted school visits and had interviews and discussions with teachers. Roundtable discussions and sharing sessions with teachers have also taken place each year.

(i) Insufficient Teaching and Learning Resources

The lack of teaching resources has been a problem dragging the development of this fledgling subject, and is particularly so given its wide scope and open-ended nature. Moreover, the issue-based materials of each module requires constant updating of a wide range of up-to-date issues and teachers are struggling to prepare various teaching materials and gather resources for their course uses. Teachers are therefore frustrated with the time and effort they have to invest in gathering primary material.⁸ It is necessary to have a clearinghouse to coordinate, centralize, and update the resources so that teachers could save time for locating them and focus more on organizing the material and developing their school-based curricula.

Students also encounter problems in both identifying and locating useful learning materials. Most students have to rely on Internet resources when they conduct their student research projects while the vast amount of online materials is at times overwhelming, and some sort of guidance is necessary to help them screen those resources.

(ii) Insufficient Training in Teaching and Generic Skills among Teachers and Students

Teaching Liberal Studies requires skills in social research, project learning, and interactive teaching. Unlike conventional subjects that pass on substantive content, LS curriculum and its Project Report component focus on critical thinking, information technology (i.e. searching, evaluating, and analysing information by using IT tools), and study and research skills. This calls for a different set of skills and also a different mode of teaching approach (i.e. from teacher-centred to student-centred), which many teachers realize they lack. Many teachers admit that they are learning on the job, and that assistance in this regard is very much necessary.

Students encounter even more difficulties with this subject. Some of the recurrent difficulties and weaknesses identified by teachers are: (a) logical and critical thinking, (b) research and problem-solving skills (i.e. ways to approach the problem), (c) study skills (i.e. acquiring, evaluating, organizing, and presenting information), and (d) personal management skills (i.e. planning and managing their projects). Activities designed around these areas would definitely help develop the independent learning capabilities of students. Teacher workshops would also help teachers acquire concepts and methods in teaching these skills.

(iii) Necessity for the Professional Community Building

Not only do teachers need to acquire the requisite subject knowledge, it is also essential to foster professional development amongst LS teachers to ensure higher quality teaching in the long run. Peer support is critical for the induction of new teachers into this relatively new subject and teaching approach, and for helping teachers overcome the frustration and difficulties they encounter in the course of teaching.

⁸ Discussion regarding the problems teachers and students encounter is based on our interviews with Liberal Studies teachers from over 20 schools.

Due to the diverse background of LS teachers, there has been considerable discrepancy amongst teachers in terms of how they approach this subject. For example, even the apparently simple matter of assessing students' coursework and projects is a matter of considerable divergence and controversy among teachers. Teachers are generally ignorant about what other teachers are doing and they are anxious about whether they are on the right track, given the relatively unstructured and open-ended design of LS. Even a directory of schools and teachers offering different modules does not exist and there is a long way to go to foster better collaboration among teachers.

Based on our encounters and discussions with LS teachers, we believe that the healthy and robust development of this subject hinges not only on top-down directives from the authorities. Bottom-up initiatives are equally crucial, and the development of consensual understanding regarding the diverse goals and teaching approaches undertaken by other colleagues is pivotal to the institutionalization of LS curriculum. Moreover, as Project Learning is still a fledgling teaching approach, the good practices of Project Learning (such as how to use formative assessment to improve teaching and learning) can also be established and disseminated through the professional community building. To conclude, the establishment of a professional association is crucial to the implementation of Liberal Studies and Project Learning in the Personal, Social and Humanities (PSHE) Education in the long run.

Our Achievement in Supporting the Development of Liberal Studies and Project Learning

Given the lack of teaching resources and support in the development of LS and Project Learning, the Department of Sociology initiated the "Support Programme for the Teaching and Learning of Liberal Studies" since 1997 and has persevered over the years in sustaining this programme. Our Department draws upon the in-house expertise that conducts ongoing researches on a wide range of social issues related to Hong Kong, China and global developmental issues. All these fit in nicely with issued-based modules within the LS curriculum. We also draw upon the strongest and well-balanced faculty that specializes in a range of social research methods (i.e. qualitative and quantitative research methods) and teaches and uses a variety of research methods ranging from sample surveys to in-depth interviews. All these match perfectly with the cultivation of research skills and independent learning capabilities that the Project Report component aims at. Moreover, we have a large graduate programme and a pool of teaching assistants. This will allow us to organize small-group activities (e.g. discussion sessions and workshops) to facilitate more interactive and personalized communication between our teaching staff and LS students, thereby enhancing the learning experience of participants.

Over the past five years, we have organized related activities for LS teachers and students, forged a good working relationship with LS teachers, and developed a close collaborative relationship with the Curriculum Development Institute of EMB. Our work has received positive feedbacks from LS teachers, students, and other concerned parties, which is already evident in the phenomenal rate of response to the activities we have hosted so far. Moreover, our effort has also received recognition and support. We obtained the kind permission from the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups to extract materials from its Youth Poll Series to produce teaching and learning materials pertinent to LS curriculum. Over the past years, we have successfully obtained funding from the CDI of Education

Department (Education & Manpower Bureau by now) and University Grants Committee for this project, and we have organized and developed the following activities and resources:

(i) Internet Portal for AS Level Liberal Studies

The Department of Sociology has launched a one-stop Internet portal *Liberal Studies Online* (hereafter LSO) where teachers and students could gather relevant and up-to-date online resources for this subject. The LSO has been launched since October 2000 and could be reached via <http://liberalstudies.hk.st>. It has the following features:

Teaching Experience Sharing Platform:

There is a "Teachers' Corner" at LSO. Teachers could participate in the Teachers' Forum and share their teaching experience. The Webmaster also posted teaching ideas, useful teaching resources, and information about ongoing events pertinent to the teaching of LS and Project Learning. This electronic platform provides a favourable environment for more intensive interaction and collaboration among LS teachers from different schools. This would enhance the communication amongst LS teachers, generate consensual understandings about the teaching approaches, and collect ideas and resources for sharing and support.

Substantive Subject-specific Resources:

Most of the resources at the LSO are organized around different modules and topics within the LS curriculum. We have prepared specific hyperlinks to organizations, online documents, and online research. We have also developed a reference list for offline materials to help teachers and students to locate relevant and important publications offline on a limited scale.

One distinctive feature of our website is *Online Database of Youth Poll Series* which excerpted relevant statistical tables on various topics of the module "Human Relationships" in the LS curriculum. We have obtained the kind permission from the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups to extract materials from its Youth Poll Series. The Youth Poll Series have been conducted since 1993 and this Database constitutes an enormous source of LS teaching and learning materials. Teachers find that reports from this Series extremely useful for their teaching purposes. In a teacher workshop conducted by our Department and CDI of EMB recently, the speaker also demonstrated how to use statistical tables in these reports to produce exercises and tests.

Self-learning Packages in Generic Skills:

In addition to the information organized around modules, LSO also provides a series of self-learning resources on critical thinking skills, various social research methods, and simple IT tools for data analysis. These self-learning packages provide step-by-step instructions to students and help students conduct their own student projects, which is a part of the LS curriculum. Students can therefore develop their independent learning capabilities, critical thinking skills, and information technology skills.

Interactive Teaching & Learning:

There is a “Students’ Forum” at LSO that allows students to exchange their opinions on particular controversial social issues. This web-based discussion forum provides a favourable environment for more intensive interaction and collaboration outside classrooms. Students can discuss, comment views of others, share, and construct knowledge with counterparts from other schools. Moreover, our tutors provide online tutorials to students that participate the Social Research Project Competition. Through this electronic platform, students can seek advice and guidance and we can provide continuous feedback to guide their learning in every stage of project learning.

(ii) Offline Face-to-face Activities

Lectures and Workshops:

We have been organizing student lectures and teacher workshops in various formats since 1997. The number of participants has risen consistently over the past five years. The student lectures adopted an interactive and lively approach to teach basic concepts of social research by using examples from everyday life and involving students through “Question and Answer” session. After each lecture, we edited presentation materials and uploaded them to LSO for students and teachers to read and download. Last academic year (2001-02) we have a total of 1,360 students attended our series of 4 student lectures on social research. This academic year (2002-03) we have almost 900 students attended our first two lectures.

Since the academic year 2000-01, we have also organized teacher workshops to equip teachers with social research skills and teaching techniques of LS and project learning. Last year (2001-2002), we provided 4 teacher workshops on: (i) formulation of research questions, (ii) survey research method, (iii) qualitative research method, and (iv) assessment of project reports. A total of 132 teachers participated in these workshops. This academic year (2002-2003) we collaborated with CDI of EMB in organizing workshops on the teaching of LS and project learning. We have 71 teachers participated our first two workshops.

Social Research Project Competition:

Another activity we have been hosting during the last five years is the Social Research Project Competition. The format of this Competition is similar to the Project Report component required by AS Level LS syllabus, and the Competition is open to all Form 6 LS students. It provides a valuable opportunity for students to practice their social research skills before they work on their Projects that have to be submitted to the Hong Kong Examination and Assessment Authority in Form 7. It is also our primary vehicle to sharpen students’ skills in project learning and critical thinking.

Online resources will be provided, and both online and offline tutorials will also be arranged between January and April so that our tutors could offer intensive guidance throughout the learning process. The continuous feedback during the learning process helps students to improve in every step and also informs us the further development of our programme. Instead of just giving grades on the completed projects, we offered a concluding tutorial to each team to review their projects and offering suggestions for improvement. The award-winning competition projects and detailed commentary on them will also be uploaded onto the LSO for teaching and learning purposes. The

educational value of this Competition is recognized and the Sino United Publishing (Holdings) Limited has sponsored the competition prizes since 1997. In the last year (2001-2002), 204 students forming 44 teams enrolled in this Competition. The enrollment of this year (2002-2002) increases to 220 students forming 45 teams.

(iii) Liberal Studies Teachers' Informal Network

We have fostered an informal network and consensual understandings among LS teachers through the following means: Firstly, the sharing sessions in teacher workshops and the "Teachers' Forum" in LSO provide valuable opportunities for teachers to share and discuss their teaching experiences and ideas. Secondly, with extra funding from the CDI of Education Department, we published a CD-ROM collection of all kinds of teaching resources voluntarily submitted by LS teachers, including past examination papers, tests, exercises, and lesson plans. Every LS teacher has a free copy of this "*LS Teaching Resources Archive*" and would benefit from others' experience and resources.

(iv) Publications and Deliverables

We have published a textbook *Social Research: A Primer* (in Chinese) and it is already available in bookstores by July 2002. It provides the basic concepts and the implementation of social research and project learning. As aforementioned, we have also published "*LS Teaching Resources Archive*" (CD) and distributed to all LS teachers since 2001.

Please refer to Annex 6 and 7 for the snapshots of *Liberal Studies Online* and *Social Research: A Primer*.

Most of what we have already implemented could serve the needs for the further development of LS and Project Learning. We have attempted some of them on a limited scale and new external funding from QEF is necessary to sustain and expand them. Capitalizing on five years' experiences of working with secondary schools, our in-house expertise on social issues and research skills, we therefore propose to renew our work with one year programme geared towards providing more diversified support and resources regarding the Liberal Studies and Project Learning at the Secondary Six and Seven levels. We believe that our programme would greatly stimulate the interest in LS curriculum and Project Learning, facilitate the acquisition of critical thinking skills and independent learning capabilities, and lay the foundation of a formal Association to support LS teachers and students, which are increasing constantly.

10 (b) Goals and Objectives

Goals:

Our short-term goals are to foster the development of AS-level Liberal Studies and Project Learning, support the teaching and learning of social research skills and independent learning capabilities, and enhance the professional development and foster the professional network building among LS teachers and other stakeholders.

In the long run, we aim to establish a formal Association that will sustain and organize professional activities on its own. Moreover, the teaching and learning materials we developed will serve as an excellent exemplar of Project Learning and generic skills training within the context of Personal, Social and Humanities Education (PSHE), through the extensive dissemination by our Internal portal and other offline publications.

Objectives:

(i) Providing teaching and learning resources to LS teachers and students

We will continue to update constantly a wide range of issue-based resources of modules and disseminate them through our Internet portal LSO. We act as a clearinghouse to coordinate, centralize, and update those resources so that teachers can save time and effort for locating them and focus more on organizing the materials for their course uses. As most of students have to rely on Internet resources when doing their research projects, we will provide guidance and useful hyperlinks to help them screen and locate useful learning materials.

(ii) Providing training in a variety of generic skills, including critical thinking skills, information technology skills, and project-based learning skills

As LS curriculum and its Project Report component focus on critical thinking, information technology (i.e. searching, evaluating, and analysing information by using IT tools), and research and interactive teaching skills that many teachers realize they lack, we will continue to collaborate with CDI of EMB to organize teacher workshops around these areas to help teachers acquire concepts and methods of these generic skills and teaching techniques. We also provide those trainings to students through organizing student lectures, developing online self-learning resources and uploading award-winning competition projects and detailed commentary on LSO. Moreover, we continue to host Social Research Project Competition and offer online and face-to-face tutorials to sharpen students' skills in project learning and critical thinking.

(iii) Building a viable and organic professional community among LS teachers

We propose to promote professional development and institutionalise the professional community by pooling together teaching resources from different schools, establishing an online archive of teaching resources, and holding teacher workshops, sharing sessions, and teachers' forum. These will provide valuable opportunities for teachers to share and discuss their teaching experiences and ideas, disseminate good practices, and generate consensual understandings on the teaching and assessment of LS and Project Learning. An informal network among teachers and other stakeholders (CDI of EMB, Examination and Assessment Authority, and other professional bodies) will then be developed, with the long-term goal of establishing a formal Association. The establishment of this professional association will facilitate the development of Liberal Studies and Project Learning within the context of Personal, Social and Humanities (PSHE) Education in the long run.

10 (c) Targets and Expected Number of Direct and Indirect Beneficiaries

(i) Direct Beneficiaries

This project will target directly the entire population of LS students and teachers. The projection of direct beneficiaries is based on the enrolment of our activities, our database of LS students and teachers, and the increasing trend of LS schools and students over the past five years:

Students:

With the help of our Internet portal LSO, we should be able to disseminate our services (i.e. learning resources) to most of LS students. There is about 1,400 students attended the AS level LS examination every year. Therefore, when taking Secondary 6 and 7 students together we expect the number of direct beneficiaries would reach about 2,800 in the project period. As the number of schools offering this subject is increasing, the number of direct beneficiaries is expected to increase accordingly.

We will organize 4 student lectures and we expect that we will serve 1,800 students (there are repeating attendants) in the project period. Regarding the Social Research Project Competition, we expect the number of participants will reach 220 in the project period. Presentation materials in students lectures, award-winning competition projects, and detailed commentary on them will be uploaded on LSO and thereby benefiting all LS students.

Teachers:

Likewise, we aim at disseminating our services (i.e. teaching resources and teachers' forum) to the entire population of LS teachers. We expect the number of beneficiaries will be 150 LS teachers in the project period. Due to the immediate utility of an existing and growing pool of teaching resources, we expect a high participation rate from Liberal Studies teachers. Both current and new teachers would benefit from the cumulated experience of other colleagues. New teachers, in particular, would find the online teaching resource archive to be a valuable resource center to socialize themselves into the practices of their profession in Liberal Studies. We will organize 4 teacher workshop and we expect that we will serve 140 teachers (there are repeating attendants) in the project period.

(ii) Indirect Beneficiaries

With the increasing emphasis on Project Learning and Critical Thinking Skills in curriculum reform, we expect that the number of schools adopting project learning and planning to develop students' critical thinking and independent learning skills will increase. Learning materials in our Internet portal LSO will benefit secondary students who conduct their student projects and learn critical thinking and project-based learning skills. Teaching materials in the LSO and the formulation of LS Teachers' Network will also benefit secondary teachers who plan to adopt project learning and develop students' critical thinking and project-based learning abilities.

Please refer to Table 1 for the summary of expected number of beneficiaries over the project period.

10 (d) Action Plan with Time-line

(i) Internet Portal for AS Level Liberal Studies

We will continue to maintain and expand our services in our Internet portal LSO throughout the project period:

Substantive Subject-specific Resources:

We will continue to update constantly the issue-based materials of different modules within the LS curriculum throughout the project period, including hyperlinks to organizations, online documents, online research reports, and reference lists of offline materials for learning and teaching purposes.

There are six modules in the LS curriculum, namely, Hong Kong Studies, Human Relationships, The Modern World, China Today, Science, Technology and Society, and Environmental Studies. Students are expected to sit for the examination of two modules and so far the most popular modules are Hong Kong Studies and Human Relationships. While our support will focus on these two modules, we will also expand the resources on modules "The Modern World" and "China Today". We will further expand our *Online Database of Youth Poll Series* and excerpt relevant statistical tables from the latest reports on various topics of the module "Human Relationships".

Self-learning Packages in Generic Skills:

We will develop more self-learning packages on critical thinking skills, social research methods, and online research skills. Apart from skills required by project learning, we will also focus on developing learning resources on information technology skills to guide students and teachers how to search, evaluate, and analyse information by IT tools. These self-learning packages provide detailed guidance to students and help students conduct their own student projects.

Interactive Teaching & Learning:

We will offer tutors to provide online tutorials to students that participate the Social Research Project Competition. Through this electronic platform, students can seek guidance and we can provide continuous feedback to guide their learning in every stage of project learning.

Teaching Experience Sharing Platform:

We will continue to operate "Teachers' Forum" at LSO that allows teachers to share their teaching experience. The Webmaster also posted information regarding teaching ideas, useful teaching resources, and information about ongoing events pertinent to the teaching of LS and Project Learning. This electronic platform provides a favourable environment for more intensive interaction and collaboration among LS teachers from different schools. This would enhance the communication amongst LS teachers,

generate consensual understandings about the teaching approaches, and collect ideas and resources for sharing and support.

Teaching Resources Archive:

We propose to set up an online resource archive where teachers can share their own resources and benefit from each other's experience and resources. We act as a clearinghouse to coordinate, collect, and edit teaching materials from teachers, including past examination questions, lesson plans, and teaching tips etc. We would then digitize and post them online for teachers' reference.

(ii) Offline Face-to-face Activities

Lectures and Workshops:

We will continue to organize 4 student lectures and 4 teacher workshops between October and March. The student lectures adopt an interactive and lively approach to teach basic concepts of social research by using examples from everyday life and involving students through "Question and Answer" session. After each lecture, we edited presentation materials and uploaded them to LSO for students and teachers to read and download. In addition to topics we covered in the past five years, topic suggestions from teachers include: (a) approaching social issues critically, (b) developing a survey questionnaire, (c) interview techniques, (d) case study, (e) using Excel spreadsheet for data analysis, and (f) writing-up project reports.

We will collaborate with CDI of EMB in organizing a series of teacher workshops on research skills, teaching techniques, and assessment of LS curriculum and project learning. Moreover, we will also arrange sharing sessions in teacher workshops to provide valuable opportunities to share and discuss their teaching experiences and ideas, disseminate good practices, and generate consensual understandings on the teaching and assessment of LS and Project Learning.

Social Research Project Competition:

We will continue to host the Social Research Project Competition to provide a valuable opportunity for students to practice their social research skills and sharpen their skills of project learning and critical thinking. Apart from the substantive subject-specific resources in LSO, we will also arrange online and offline tutorials to offer intensive guidance throughout the learning process. Moreover, we will offer a concluding tutorial to each team to review their projects and offering suggestions for improvement. The award-winning competition projects and detailed commentary on them will also be uploaded onto the LSO for teaching and learning purposes.

3. Liberal Studies Teachers' Network

To enhance the professional development among LS teachers, we propose to develop the Teachers' Network by pooling together teaching resources from different schools in the Teaching Resource Archive in LSO, and holding teacher workshops, sharing sessions, and teachers' forum in LSO. This will help to develop an informal network among LS teachers and other stakeholders (CDI of EMB, Examination and Assessment Authority, and other professional bodies), provide opportunities for sharing and

discussing teaching experiences, establish consensual understandings about teaching and assessment of LS and Project Learning, and disseminate good practices of Project Learning.

In the long run, we wish this informal teachers' network would consolidate and lay the foundation of a formal *Liberal Studies Teachers' Association* that will sustain and organize activities on its own. The Association could help network teachers and provide administrative and social support. Such institutionalized support would be invaluable to new teachers, and would help facilitate the development of Liberal Studies and Project Learning within the context of the Personal, Social and Humanities (PSHE) Education.

Please refer to Figure 1 for the time-line of this project throughout the project period.

10 (e) Expected Deliverables and Outcome

Table 2 is a summary breakdown of the proposed activities, deliverables, and schedule. Figure 2 is a flowchart of the proposed objectives and activities for this project.

10 (f) Evaluation Parameters and Method

Advisory Board:

Our advisory board, which comprises LS teachers from secondary schools and officers from Curriculum Development Institute of EMB and HKEAA, acts as an independent external body that constantly monitor and comment on the effectiveness of our programme. We will seek their opinion through regular consultation, questionnaires, and interviews regarding (i) current needs and weaknesses of students and teachers in the learning and teaching of LS and Project Learning, (ii) utility of our programme in improving teaching and learning abilities (e.g. subject knowledge, generic skills, and teaching techniques etc.) and (iii) suggestions for our future activities. Since the Board members are frontline experts in their teaching profession, all these feedback can further the improvement and development of our programme.

Internet Portal LSO:

As far as our online services are concerned, regular homepage hits are immediate indicators of the popularity of our Internet portal. Moreover, visitors at the website could easily send email to the Webmaster or post their opinion on the forum for response. Through the above channels, we would ask for comments regarding: (i) utility of our subject-specific resources and self-learning packages of generic skills and (ii) suggestions for the development of learning resources in the future.

Routine Evaluation:

After student lectures, teacher workshops and the Competition, we will distribute and collect evaluation forms from participating schools. Occasionally, mass review sessions will be held to gather feedback. These feedbacks provide information about (i) utility of our programme in improving learning and teaching capabilities and (ii)

suggestions for our activities in the future. Internal evaluation will also be made among the project team members and student helpers on a regular basis to improve the organization and administration of work.

Social Research Project Competition:

Our tutors of this Competition would be asked to fill out progress reports for the Competition participants. These continuous feedbacks will be based on their written input and discussion during face-to-face and online tutorials. They will help students to improve in every step and also inform us the effectiveness and further improvement of our programme. Secondary school students would also be asked to evaluate their learning experience at the end of the Competition.

All these practices would help to provide ongoing and timely feedback to allow us to assess the needs of our beneficiaries and evaluate the effectiveness of our programme, so as to improve our programme design and activities.

10 (g) Budget

Please refer to Annex 1 for a breakdown of the budget.

10 (h) Other Information

(i) Extent of Teachers' Involvement in this Project

Teachers will be involved in this project on many levels and at various points. First, a group of teachers and officers from CDI of EMB and HKEAA will be invited to be our advisory board members. They will be involved in the planning stage through assessing students' and teachers' needs and giving us broad directions about the kind of activities we should organize. Moreover, they will evaluate the impact of our project on students' performance and provide suggestions on further development. This will empower the teachers, endow them with a sense of participation in this project, and enhance their professional competence.

Second, it enriches teachers' subject knowledge and facilitates lesson planning through providing up-to-date issue-based resources, as well as helping them acquire a range of rigorous social scientific research skills. Third, teachers' participation and intense collaboration (through online and face-to-face interaction) are critical to the development of a professional community among subject teachers. This will foster a sense of consensual understanding among subject teachers and contribute to the enhancement of professional competence in the long run.

Please refer to Annex 4 for a list of our Advisory Board Members and Proposal Endorsers.

(ii) Value-addedness of this Project by the Department of Sociology, CUHK

The Department of Sociology is uniquely positioned for the successful implementation of this project. We have in-house expertise that conducts ongoing researches on a wide range of social issues related to Hong Kong, China, and global developmental issues. All these fit in nicely with the contour of the LS curriculum. We also have the strongest and well-balanced faculty that teaches a range of social research methods that are applicable in Project Learning. For instance, we have faculty members who specialize in qualitative and quantitative research methods, and who use a variety of methods ranging from sample surveys to intensive interviews.

Moreover, with a large graduate programme and a pool of teaching assistants, we are also in a good position to organize small-group activities (e.g. discussion sessions and workshops) to supplement mass lectures. This will allow more interactive and personalized communication between our teaching staff and LS students, thereby enhancing the learning experience of participants.

Please refer to Annex 2 and 3 for a brief introduction of Department of Sociology, CUHK and a brief curriculum vita of the project leader.

(iii) Readiness for Undertaking this Project

All of the proposed activities have been conducted under the coordination of the Project Leader since 1997. While we have successfully obtained funding from the CDI of Education Department and University Grants Committee for this project in the past years, we need to solicit new source of funding to match our Department's internal commitment. Our Department is also highly supportive of this project, as it has pledged a total of HK\$112,500 in matching fund from the QEF grant and so should enable this project to operate on a sound financial ground, especially considering the relatively small amount of QEF grant. Given the budget squeeze on the tertiary sector, this is a major show of support on the development of LS and Project Learning.

As aforementioned, the Department of Sociology has been organizing related activities on a limited scale over the past five years. Extensive interviews and group discussions with teachers were also conducted to ascertain their needs and opinions. We have forged a good working relationship with schools and LS teachers over the years, and developed close collaborative relationship with CDI of Education Department since 2001. We will maintain close collaborative relationship with Curriculum Development Institute of EMB and co-organize teacher workshops in the coming year. Our work over the years has given us a higher level of visibility among teachers, students and other concerned parties, which is already evident in the support of Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups and the phenomenal rate of response to the activities we have hosted so far.

(v) Continuity of Activities after the Exhaustion of QEF Grant

If our project proves to be positively received and effective to the further development of LS and Project Learning within the context of PSHE, we intend to submit a second phase application for the QEF to renew funding for this project. In the second phase, however, we expect LS and Project Learning will have a much larger enrolment and be entitled to a larger share of public support and resources. If our proposal works out as planned, a

professional association among LS teachers should also be established by that time. This association should be mature enough by then to organize some professional activities on its own. Given the expected increase in enrolment and market for learning resources related to LS and Project Learning, alternative funding from other public sources, such as the Interface between Tertiary and Schools Sector of the University Grants Committee, could also be pursued. All these would help to ensure the continuity of activities after the completion of the current QEF application.

(vi) Dissemination Plan of this Project

Our Internet portal LSO will be the primary vehicle to disseminate all learning and teaching resources developed during the project period. Materials from the offline face-to-face activities like student lectures and the Project Competition will also be uploaded to this electronic platform for the wider dissemination and effective use of those learning and teaching resources.

Concluding Remarks

To conclude, our proposed project is desirable on several grounds:

- The project is *innovative* because it is the first and most comprehensive programme to support the development of Liberal Studies and Project Learning. By focusing on the provision of issue-based resources and self-learning packages of generic skills, this project sits on the cutting edge of new development in curriculum reform. The organic combination of online and offline activities and the emphasis on professional community building will also distinguish this project from other similar attempts in the past.
- The project will *enhance teachers' professional competence* in three critical respects. First, a group of teachers will be involved as active advisers. Second, it enriches teachers' subject knowledge and facilitates lesson planning through providing teaching materials and training in social research skills and teaching techniques. Third, it fosters the development of a professional community among subject teachers and encourages the emergence and convergence of tacit understanding and knowledge in the teaching of Liberal Studies and Project Learning.
- The project is *cost-effective* because it acts as a bridge between the secondary education community and our in-house reservoir of expertises on research methodologies and a variety of social issues central to LS and Project Learning. The application of information technology in the dissemination of our programme also enables us to reach a larger constituency than we could have otherwise.
- The project also has *potential for wider application and implementation*. Our deliverables on project research are definitely applicable to Project Learning and many other subject areas. Generic skills like critical thinking, research methods and information technology competence are highly transferable. The materials and activities we develop can be easily applied to other subjects and other levels. The learning and teaching resources developed fit in perfectly with the subjects and Project Learning within the Personal, Social and Humanities Education (PSHE) in the proposed curriculum reform. For examples, the modules of the LS curriculum are similar to that of Integrated Humanities and so our project can be widely utilized.

Annex 1: Budget Breakdown

Annex 2: Brief Introduction of Department of Sociology, CUHK

Annex 3: Brief CV of Project Leader

Annex 4: Advisory Board Members

Annex 5: Endorsers of this Proposal

Annex 6: Homepage of Liberal Studies Online

Annex 7: Cover of our Publication *Social Research: A Primer* (社會研究一本通)