

Brief Guide to Elder Academy Scheme

Background

Launched by the Elderly Commission (EC) and the Labour and Welfare Bureau in early 2007, the Elder Academy Scheme (the Scheme) aims to encourage the elderly to achieve active ageing and lead a fruitful life through lifelong learning. Under the Scheme, elder academies are set up in primary and secondary schools by school sponsoring bodies in collaboration with welfare organisations or bodies registered under section 88 of the Inland Revenue Ordinance, or registered parent-teacher associations. By optimising the use of existing resources and basic facilities, the schools offer courses which the elderly may take in a school setting. Students of the schools may also serve as volunteer instructors to foster inter-generational harmony. Collaborating welfare organisations/bodies/parent-teacher associations can recruit participants through their elderly networks in the community and support the schools in organising courses and activities for the elder academies. To address the elderly people's aspirations for university education, the Elder Academy Scheme has been extended to tertiary level to enable elderly participants to pursue studies at higher academic levels.

Modes of Operation

Elder academies in primary and secondary schools

The Scheme is a territory-wide learning programme for the elderly which operates on the principles of inter-generational harmony and cross-sectoral collaboration.

(1) District-based

The EC hopes that a number of elder academies can be set up in each district so that elderly people may take courses in the districts they live.

(2) School-based

In setting up elder academies, use of existing school resources in various districts can be optimised, as schools are generally equipped with the resources and basic facilities (e.g. students, teachers, alumni, retired teachers, parents' associations, assembly halls and special facilities such as computer room and library) for

running learning programmes. If schools can offer their campuses for running courses of elder academies after school hours (e.g. from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. during weekdays) or at the weekend, the administrative cost of such courses can be reduced.

(3) Cross-sectoral collaboration

The Social Welfare Department will co-ordinate elderly service units at district levels to assist those schools interested in setting up elder academies in recruiting participants. Charitable institutions/organisations of a public character recognised under section 88 of the Inland Revenue Ordinance with no less than two years' experience in organising elderly-related activities and registered parent-teacher associations can also set up elder academies in collaboration with schools and support the academies in recruiting elderly participants. Post-secondary institutions, welfare organisations and retirees from all sectors may assist in recruiting volunteers to undertake administration or teaching duties for the elder academics and help compile teaching materials. Organisations and enterprises interested in promoting elderly learning are welcome to provide sponsorships (e.g. in the form of scholarships) for the elder academies. The EC will serve as a co-ordinator in this respect.

(4) Curricula

The EC has prepared the curricula for elder academies based on the courses developed by the Radio Television Hong Kong, Department of Health (DH) and Lingnan University. The curricula comprise both compulsory and elective courses (see [Annex 1](#)). A newly set up elder academy is required to offer at least two courses (one compulsory and one elective) within six months after its application is approved. The compulsory one must be one of the health education courses developed by the DH for the Scheme (see [Annex 1](#)). An elder academy may take into account the demand of local communities, interests of the elderly and the availability of facilities in the schools concerned, and refer to the course syllabus at [Annex 1](#), in designing its own elective courses.

Courses offered by the elder academies cover a wide range of subjects. Some are practical courses aiming to enhance elderly people's abilities to take care of themselves and adapt to the life in old age. There are also academic courses and others relating to art, crafts and sports.

There should be no academic requirements for enrolling on the courses offered, and the courses should provide opportunities for the elderly to develop their social network and pursue an enriched life.

A newly set up elder academy is required to offer at least 12 courses within three years from a specified date after obtaining approval for the proposed programme. Of these courses, at least two must be health courses and each course must have an enrolment of at least eight elderly participants. An elder academy already in operation which has submitted a “Two-year Programme” is required to offer at least eight courses within two years from a specified date after obtaining approval for the programme. Of these courses, at least one must be a health course and each course must have an enrolment of at least eight elderly participants.

(5) Elder academy management committee

Elder academies are encouraged to form their own management committees comprising elderly members. The objective is to foster active ageing by engaging the elderly in the administration and planning of courses and activities for the academies. Funding will be provided for the elder academies in this regard. When a management committee is newly formed, the elder academy concerned should provide the elderly committee members with appropriate training so that they will be able to contribute to the operation of the academy.

(6) Elder academy webpage

To enhance publicity and facilitate elderly people’s access to course information provided by various elder academies, collaborating schools and welfare organisations/bodies/parent-teacher associations are encouraged to create a dedicated elder academy webpage on their websites, where general information about their elder academies and course information can be posted for easy reference by the elderly. The EC will use hyperlinks to connect the webpages of various elder academies with the Elder Academy website (If necessary, reference can be made to the webpage of the Queen Elizabeth Old Students' Association Education Centre Elder Academy at <http://gesosaea.blogspot.hk/>).

(7) Extra-curricular activities conducive to inter-generational harmony

Apart from providing learning opportunities for the elderly, an elder academy may further develop into a community support platform. For example, elderly participants and student instructors taking part in elder academy courses may develop friendship and mutual support. They may also participate in extra-curricular activities and local volunteer services together. This will allow them to maintain close contact with the community while helping the disadvantaged. Examples of extra-curricular activities which promote inter-generational harmony are at [Annex 2](#).

(8) Course completion

The EC will award certificates (see sample at [Annex 3](#)) to the elderly who have completed a specified number of course hours.

Elder academies in post-secondary institutions

Elder academies set up in post-secondary institutions may adopt a variety of modes in their operation, which include but are not limited to the following:

(1) Organising thematic study courses which suit the interests of the elderly

Post-secondary institutions may design short-term thematic study courses (lasting for a few weeks to several months) which suit the interests and abilities of the elderly in appropriate time slots (such as summer holidays or other holidays). Post-secondary institutions may invite their teaching staff to serve as course tutors and ask their students to act as tutors for some courses or assist in teaching. These courses may also be open for enrolment by interested young students. In such a way, the courses will provide an additional platform for communication between the elderly and the young to achieve the objective of fostering inter-generational harmony. If circumstances permit, post-secondary institutions may consider allowing the elderly to live in student dormitories during the course period. This will give them a first-hand experience of college life.

(2) Allowing the elderly to attend undergraduate or regular courses as sit-in students

With the consent and support of the teaching staff concerned, post-secondary institutions may consider allowing the elderly to attend some undergraduate or regular courses as sit-in students. The subjects selected may include those which better suit the elderly people's interests and can be easily handled by them (such as those related to social science), and those in which the elderly people's participation can effectively enhance the interactivity of the class (such as subjects related to modern history and social development). Subjects with surplus places may also be considered. Post-secondary institutions may set a quota for the sit-in places for the elderly. The post-secondary institutions may, after taking into account views of the teaching staff concerned and other considerations, decide whether elderly sit-in students are required to hand in assignments, or take tests or examinations. As the elderly attend the courses as sit-in students, the EC does not recommend that the post-secondary institutions award credits to those who have completed the courses. However, certificates of attendance may be issued to the elderly as an encouragement.

(3) Allowing the elderly to attend thematic talks

Post-secondary institutions may consider reserving quota of some thematic talks for the elderly. It is believed that the extra burden placed by such an arrangement on the teaching and administration work of the post-secondary institutions will be minimal. The arrangement will, however, offer opportunities for the elderly to engage in academic and in-depth learning in the post-secondary institutions.

(4) Offering tuition fee concessions for the elderly

To attract and encourage more elderly people to study in a systematic manner, post-secondary institutions may consider offering fee concessions for some selected subjects which better suit the elderly people's interests and can be easily handled by them. A quota system may be put in place for the concessions in this regard.

Other categories

Elder Academies Cluster

The establishment of elder academies cluster (EAC) is to promote the Scheme and to provide support to elder academies in different districts, including building communication platforms; standardising records of students, courses, instructors and course grades; standardising the types, levels and progression arrangements for advanced courses; and putting in place a course credit transfer system to enable the elderly to take up courses at different levels systematically and encourage their active participation in activities organised by the elder academies in the district. Five regional EACs (i.e. Hong Kong Island, Kowloon East, Kowloon West, New Territories East and New Territories West) have been established successively since 2011. Please visit the following webpages for more information:

Webpage of New Territories West Elder Academies Cluster (<http://ntweac.edu.hk/>)

Webpage of New Territories East Elder Academies Cluster (<http://nteeac.edu.hk/>)

Webpage of Hong Kong Island Elder Academies Cluster (<http://hkieac.edu.hk/>)

Webpage of Kowloon West Elder Academies Cluster (<http://klneac.edu.hk/>)

Webpage of Kowloon East Elder Academies Cluster (<http://keac.edu.hk/>)

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