Vietnam high schools to switch to multiple-choice tests

High school graduation exams will be entirely in the form of multiple-choice tests in the next few years, according to education officials.

Nguyen An Ninh, head of the Ministry of Education and Training’s Department of Examining and Education Quality Assessment (DEEQA) said at a meeting Friday in Hanoi that the ministry would pilot the new format on mock foreign language high school exams in January 2006. Candidates will take the actual exams in June and July.

Ninh added that all other subjects would be tested in multiple-choice mode by 2008, including physics, biology, history, and mathematics.

However, due to its unique nature, literature would be tested in both multiple-choice and essay modes.

Besides, the ministry planned to combine high school graduation and university entrance exams in 2009, relying on the “two in one” test to select eligible candidates for universities, Ninh said at the meeting, which was organized by the ministry to discuss introduction of multiple-choice tests.

Professor Archie Lapointe, executive director of the US-headquartered English Testing Services (ETS), who is in Vietnam to facilitate the launch of the new format, said the tests, with its premium on accuracy and security, could be widely applied in the country and would reduce marking costs.

However, he warned “the tests are designed for mass assessment of student proficiency, not to pick up gifted ones”, adding the format worked best for countries with the huge number of students like Vietnam.

During his five-day trip ending today, Lapointe worked with the DEEQA to assess current testing systems, draft plans for exam reforms in 2006-09 and set up question banks, materials, and training for proctors and examiners.

ETS will also offer training to the DEEQA staff and help compose test questions under an agreement with the Ministry of Education and Training.

“With the new format, it takes only one or two days to complete marking so there is no need for students to wait for their results for a long time as they do now”, Ninh said in an interview October.

Multiple-choice tests, considered the most objective, have so far been held in 14 cities and provinces across Vietnam in foreign languages.

Reported by Thu Hong – Translated by Hoang Bao