

**立法會**  
**Legislative Council**

LC Paper No. CB(2)3088/02-03  
(These minutes have been seen  
by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

**Panel on Education**

**Minutes of special meeting**  
**held on Wednesday, 20 August 2003 at 10:45 am**  
**in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Dr Hon YEUNG Sum (Chairman)  
Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung, BBS (Deputy Chairman)  
Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP  
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong  
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung  
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP  
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP  
Hon SZETO Wah  
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP  
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok, JP  
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
- Members absent** : Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan  
Dr Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, GBS, JP  
Hon CHOY So-yuk  
Hon WONG Sing-chi  
Hon MA Fung-kwok, JP
- Public Officers attending** : Mrs Betty IP  
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and  
Manpower (School Administration and Support)
- Mrs Ruth LAU  
Acting Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and  
Manpower (School Development)

**Attendance by invitation** : Aided School Laboratory Technician Group

Miss HUI Yuk-yin  
Co-ordinator

Mr YIM Chi-fai  
Member

Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union

Mr HON Lin-shan  
Deputy Director, Organization Department

Hong Kong Laboratory Technicians' Association

Mr CHUI Yun-woon  
President

Mr FUNG Hau-kwan  
Treasurer

Hong Kong School Clerks & Janitors General Union

Mr CHAN Check-wah  
Vice-President

Mr TAM Chun-yin  
General Executive

**Clerk in attendance** : Miss Flora TAI  
Chief Assistant Secretary (2)2

**Staff in attendance** : Miss Lolita SHEK  
Senior Assistant Secretary (2)7

---

Action

**I. Arrangements for surplus laboratory technicians of aided secondary schools and related issues**

The Chairman welcomed representatives of the Administration and the deputations to the meeting.

Action

Meeting with deputation

2. At the invitation of the Chairman, representatives of the deputations presented their views as summarized in paragraphs 3 to 6.

*Aided School Laboratory Technician Group*

*[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2998/02-03(01) and CB(2)3001/02-03(01)]*

3. Miss HUI Yuk-yin introduced the submissions of the Aided School Laboratory Technician Group (the Group). She stressed that the number of laboratory technicians in an aided school should be sufficient for the purpose of ensuring a high level of safety for students to practise laboratory tests. She considered that if the manning scale of laboratory technician in a school with five laboratories was reduced from three to two, the safety of students would be put in jeopardy when practical lessons were held concurrently in different laboratories located at different floors of the school premises. She stressed that the safety of students would be at risk in case an accident occurred in the course of a practical lesson which was not attended by a laboratory technician. She added that reduction of a laboratory technician in an aided school would inevitably increase the number of practical lessons not attended by laboratory technicians. The teachers might therefore be discouraged to organize more practical lessons for students. As a result, students' learning in practical subjects would be affected.

*Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union*

*[LC Paper No. CB(2)2986/02-03(01)]*

4. Mr HON Lin-shan presented the views of the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union (HKPTU) as detailed in the submission. He stressed that HKPTU considered that the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) should freeze the implementation of the arrangements for surplus laboratory technicians of aided secondary schools in the 2003-04 school year. HKPTU also held a strong view that EMB should review the establishment of laboratory technicians for aided secondary schools in the light of their workload and the importance of laboratory safety and quality of education. He considered that the "job-sharing" arrangement proposed by EMB was in practice a salary deduction for serving laboratory technicians. He informed members that some schools had determined the surplus laboratory technician to be laid off by drawing lots.

*Hong Kong Laboratory Technicians' Association*

*[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)3001/02-03(02) and CB(2)3002/02-03(01)]*

5. Mr CHUI Yun-woon presented the views of the Hong Kong Laboratory Technicians' Association (the Association) as detailed in the submissions. He highlighted that the Association objected to resolving the problem of surplus

Action

laboratory technicians by way of "job-sharing", and considered that laboratory safety and quality of education would be sacrificed in the name of the need to reduce the number of classes in aided secondary schools. The Association requested that EMB should freeze the implementation of the arrangements for resolving the problem of surplus laboratory technicians for one year, and discuss with the Association workable options to resolve the problem without affecting the employment and morale of the workforce.

*Hong Kong School Clerks and Janitors General Union  
[LC Paper No. CB(2)3001/02-03(03)]*

6. Mr CHAN Check-wah presented the views of the Hong Kong School Clerks and Janitors General Union as detailed in the submission. He highlighted that the Union was concerned about the adverse impact of the arrangements for resolving the problem of surplus laboratory technicians on the interests of serving laboratory technicians as well as the safety of students in practical lessons. The Union requested the Administration to withhold the implementation of any cost-saving proposals, including the arrangements for resolving the problem of surplus laboratory technicians, which would jeopardize the quality of education and to re-employ the laboratory technicians who had been laid off under the arrangements.

*The Administration's response to the concerns of deputations*

7. At the Chairman's invitation, Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower (School Administration and Support) (PAS(EM)SA&S) said that -

- (a) The manning scale of laboratory technicians in aided secondary schools was calculated in accordance with the conditions laid down in the "Codes of Aid for Secondary Schools". Its calculation was based on the number of practical periods in the school which was affected by the number of operating classes and the school curriculum. The rules for such calculation, including the principle of rounding up the decimal fraction of 0.5 or higher from such calculation for the provision of a laboratory technician post, had been adopted for years;
- (b) EMB had set up a Task Force with the Hong Kong Subsidized Secondary Schools Council (HKSSSC) to work out the future arrangements for handling surplus staff in aided secondary schools, including the calculation of the manning scale of laboratory technicians. The suggestion that any fraction derived from such calculations should be rounded up as one laboratory technician post would also be explored;

Action

- (c) EMB had all along emphasized the importance of laboratory safety for students in aided schools. Apart from requiring aided secondary schools to establish a laboratory safety team and a crisis management team, EMB also provided guidelines and training to teachers who were assigned to conduct practical lessons. According to the survey covering a five-year period from the 1995-96 to 1999-2000 school years, laboratory safety in aided secondary schools had been maintained at a very satisfactory level;
- (d) The salaries of laboratory technicians within the approved staff establishment should follow the relevant Codes of Aid;
- (e) About 90% of the existing 368 aided secondary schools had no reduction in the number of operating classes and hence no surplus laboratory technicians. Only around 10% of these schools had a reduced number of operating classes as a result of a drop in student enrolment or a change in the school curriculum, which would in turn reduce the number of practical periods and give rise to surplus laboratory technicians; and
- (f) In May 2003, 41 aided secondary schools were expected to have surplus laboratory technicians in the 2003-04 school year. Through the temporary relief measures proposed by EMB, 24 affected schools had been able to absorb the surplus laboratory technicians. EMB would continue to liaise with the remaining 17 schools and the sponsoring bodies concerned on measures to resolve the surplus staff situation in the 2003-04 school year.

8. Acting Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower (School Development) supplemented that the affected schools had been very co-operative in resolving the problem of surplus laboratory technicians arising as a result of a reduction in classes. Dependent on individual needs and circumstances, some of them had increased the number of practical lessons, deployed other subventions or adopted the "job-sharing" arrangements to absorb the surplus laboratory technicians. However, for the interests of students or other reasons, some schools could not revise their curriculum, arrange internal deployment or adopt the "job-sharing" arrangement to resolve the problem. In such circumstances, these schools would have to resort to terminating the service of the surplus laboratory technicians based on a set of objective, fair and open criteria such as the "last in, first out" principle.

Action

Discussion

*Laboratory safety*

9. Ms Audrey EU sought clarifications about the extent of the potential risks involved in a practical lesson held in the absence of a laboratory technician, given that the current calculation for the manning scale of laboratory technicians in secondary schools had been adopted for years. She considered that a qualified teacher should be familiar with the safety precautions and procedures for the conduct of a practical lesson and able to supervise the progress of practical tests carried out by students in a laboratory setting. She also asked about the current arrangements for conducting practical lessons without the attendance of a laboratory technician and how local secondary schools compared with their overseas counterparts in terms of laboratory accident rate.

10. Miss HUI Yuk-yin responded that many teachers were assigned to teach a science subject which they had not been specifically trained. She pointed out that Secondary 1 - 3 students were in general more accident-prone than their senior counterparts in practical lessons. Given a class size of 40 students, it was in practice very difficult for a teacher to ensure full compliance with the correct steps and procedures for carrying out the laboratory tests in a practical lesson. In light of this, laboratory technicians would normally give closer attention to junior secondary students in practical lessons. However, a laboratory technician would not be able to observe and assist students closely if he was required to provide assistance to two practical lessons concurrently held in different floors of the school building. In such circumstances, students would have to perform the laboratory tests under the sole supervision of the teachers concerned. Miss HUI also pointed out that there were around 800 - 900 accidents in aided secondary school laboratories in a year and cited examples to illustrate the need for immediate attendance of a laboratory technician to protect the safety of students in case of accidents.

11. Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked about the role of laboratory technicians in the prevention of accidents in school laboratories. Mr CHUI Yun-woon responded that laboratory technicians played a significant role in the prevention of laboratory accidents. They would teach and assist students in performing specific activities during practical lessons such as the correct methods for handling chemical acids and operating risky heating tools, etc. He considered that the Administration should maintain updated statistics on the number and causes of laboratory accidents on a yearly basis.

*“Job-sharing” arrangement*

12. Ms Emily LAU considered that "job-sharing" was a strategy adopted by many overseas jurisdictions to improve unemployment. She requested

Action

representatives of deputations to explain why some schools had determined the surplus laboratory technicians by drawing lots for submission to EMB instead of adopting the "job-sharing" arrangement to resolve the problem of surplus staff.

13. Mr CHUI Yun-woon responded that EMB had not consulted the Association before proposing the arrangements for handling surplus laboratory technicians stipulated in its letter to schools dated 29 April 2003. He also pointed out that no representatives of laboratory technicians were invited to join the Task Force set up by EMB with HKSSSC. He explained that teachers and laboratory technicians in a practical lesson served different roles and functions which were not transferable. While teachers would teach students on the academic knowledge and practical skills for performing the laboratory tests, laboratory technicians would concentrate on the technical issues which would enhance safe completion of the tests by students in a practical lesson. Given the small budget incurred for retaining the surplus laboratory technicians, Mr CHUI queried why the Administration needed to set a deadline for resolving the problem of surplus laboratory technician in the 2003-04 school year.

14. Mr HON Lin-shan said that unlike the "job-sharing" arrangement proposed by EMB which was involuntary and would in effect mean a reduction in salaries, "job-sharing" was adopted by some overseas jurisdictions to reduce employees' working hours without reducing their salaries. He considered that the "job-sharing" arrangement should be thoroughly consulted and discussed before implementation. He pointed out that schools were notified on 29 April 2003 that they should resolve the problem of surplus laboratory technician and reported to EMB in a month's time. Given the short notice or for other reasons, some schools having a surplus laboratory technician could not opt for the "job-sharing" arrangement and had determined the surplus laboratory technician by drawing lots.

15. Ms Emily LAU was of the view that an extensive consultation with the affected stakeholders should be conducted before implementing the "job-sharing" arrangement. She asked how the six schools had agreed to adopt the "job-sharing" arrangement for their laboratory technicians.

16. Miss HUI Yuk-yin said that the six schools had adopted the "job-sharing" arrangement in order to avoid the unpleasant scene that one of their serving laboratory technicians would be made redundant. She pointed out that the "job-sharing" arrangement adopted by some schools was unfair to the laboratory technicians because their work hours remained unchanged.

Action

Meeting with the Administration  
[LC Paper No. CB(2)2993/02-03(01)]

*The current surplus situation*

17. The Chairman asked about the current situation of surplus laboratory technicians in aided secondary schools and the number of affected schools which had adopted the "job-sharing" arrangement to resolve their problem of surplus laboratory technicians.

18. PAS(EM)SA&S replied that as at present, 24 of the 41 aided secondary schools expected to have surplus laboratory technicians had, upon EMB's request, absorbed the surplus laboratory technicians. Among them, eight schools had resolved the problem through adjustment of practical periods, six through "job-sharing", five through natural wastage and five through internal deployment. The Administration would continue to liaise with the remaining 17 schools which for various reasons had not resolved the surplus situation.

*Laboratory Safety*

19. Ms Audrey EU asked how the Administration would ensure the safety of students and whether the temporary arrangements for resolving the problem of surplus laboratory technicians would affect the safety of students during practical lessons.

20. In response, PAS(EM)SA&S said that a laboratory safety team comprising mainly teachers on science subjects should be set up in each school to oversee the safety matters in school laboratories. The team would monitor the school's and students' compliance with the safety requirements for attending practical lessons and conduct regular checking of the equipment and materials in school laboratories. Schools should also enhance the students' safety awareness to avoid accidents and devise safety procedures in case of an accident. She pointed out that according to past statistics, an average of five accidents were recorded in every 10 000 practical lessons, more than 90% of which were related to careless or improper handling of apparatuses or equipment. She stressed that teachers assigned to conduct practical lessons were responsible for students' safety and they should be familiar with the safety requirements for conducting practical lessons. To ensure laboratory safety, appropriate precaution measures and students' safety awareness were of paramount importance.

21. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that the safety of students during practical periods was crucial and should not be compromised for enhancing cost-effectiveness of laboratory technicians. He pointed out that there were around 200 accidents in school laboratories in a year which involved physical injuries of students. He stressed that the attendance of a laboratory technician



Action

throughout a practical lesson would help prevent the occurrence of accidents. He considered it insufficient to provide two laboratory technicians for a school with five laboratories. He asked whether apart from the number of practical periods, EMB would consider the number and locations of the laboratories in an aided school in calculating the manning scale of laboratory technicians.

22. PAS(EM)SA&S responded that the current calculation for provision of laboratory technicians was based on the number of practical periods in an aided secondary school and had been adopted for years. Under such manning scale, the laboratory safety had been maintained at a very satisfactory level in the past years. She pointed out that while teachers were responsible for the safety of students in practical lessons, laboratory technicians dealt mainly with the preparation of laboratory settings to facilitate smooth and safe completion of the practical lessons.

23. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung pointed out that with increased resources, school students in practical lessons normally formed groups to carry out the laboratory tests themselves. He considered that the attendance of a laboratory technician throughout a practical lesson would definitely enhance the safety of students in their hands-on operation in laboratory tests. He suggested that the Administration should review the formulae for calculating the provision of laboratory technicians to aided secondary schools with a view to incorporating the number of laboratories as a criterion. Responding to the Chairman, PAS(EM)SA&S said that the Administration would consider Mr LEUNG's suggestion in its review of the future arrangements for handling surplus staff in aided secondary schools.

24. Mr Tommy CHEUNG expressed reservations about freezing the implementation of the temporary arrangements for resolving surplus laboratory technicians in aided secondary schools in the 2003-04 school year. He considered that although the anticipated saving was only around \$4 million, EMB should aim to reduce surplus laboratory technicians in aided secondary schools without jeopardizing the safety of students in school laboratories. He asked whether there was statistical evidence supporting the claim that the occurrence of accidents in school laboratories had a direct bearing with the number of laboratory technicians in aided secondary schools. He considered that if statistics proved that the accidents involving students' physical injuries were related to the absence of laboratory technicians in practical lessons, EMB should freeze implementation of the temporary arrangements for resolving the problem. Mr SZETO Wah considered that an average of five accidents in every 10 000 lessons was already a significant rate. He pointed out that any injuries arising from mishandling of apparatus or equipment in a laboratory setting could lead to very serious consequences such as the loss of a student's eyesight.

Action

25. PAS(EM)SA&S responded that short-term statistics covering a period of one to two years could not reflect an accurate correlation between the occurrence of accidents and the attendance of a laboratory technician in practical lessons. She pointed out that other factors, including preparation for practical lessons, efforts of the laboratory safety teams and students' awareness of laboratory safety, etc, would also play major roles in the prevention of accidents in school laboratories. According to feedback from teachers, good preparation for practical lessons and correct students' attitude towards laboratory safety were most essential for prevention of accidents.

Adm 26. The Chairman suggested that EMB should conduct regular surveys on laboratory accidents. PAS(EM)SA&S undertook to check whether the survey on laboratory accidents was conducted on the basis of a regular or five-year cycle.

*Arrangements for surplus laboratory technicians*

27. Ms Audrey EU asked why the arrangements for resolving the problem of surplus laboratory technicians of aided secondary schools were proposed and implemented in such a hasty manner. Ms Emily LAU also asked how the Administration had resolved the problem in previous school years, in particular the 60-odd surplus laboratory technicians identified in the 2002-03 school year.

28. PAS(EM)SA&S explained that surplus laboratory technicians identified in the past had all along been absorbed through various means such as natural wastage and redeployment within the school or schools under the same sponsoring body. Most of the surplus laboratory technicians identified in the 2002-03 school year were absorbed through vacancies arising from natural wastage and requirement in new schools. For the 2003-04 school year, EMB had notified schools of their approved staff establishment and guidelines on handling surplus laboratory technicians one month earlier than the normal schedule. Besides the various measures adopted in the past, EMB also encouraged schools and laboratory technicians to opt for the "job-sharing" arrangement to alleviate the surplus staff situation. She added that some schools had also made use of the Capacity Enhancement Grant to absorb their surplus laboratory technicians.

29. Mr SZETO Wah said that it was difficult for aided secondary schools to adopt and implement "job-sharing" for resolving the problem of surplus laboratory technicians in a harmonious manner. He pointed out that the implementation of "job-sharing" would often give rise to staff conflicts in the affected schools. Ms Emily LAU also considered it unreasonable that the work hours of laboratory technicians in an aided secondary school would remain unchanged after implementation of the "job-sharing" arrangement.

Action

30. PAS(EM)SA&S explained that the "job-sharing" arrangement was not an entirely new arrangement. It had already been practised by some 70 teachers. The specific terms and conditions of employment under such arrangements would depend on individual circumstances and should be agreed between the employers and the employees concerned.

31. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that the problem of surplus laboratory technician should be attributed to the overall policy of reducing the education budget. He considered it understandable that given EMB's short notice, some schools had no other alternative but to determine the surplus laboratory technician by drawing lots. He informed the meeting that five of the surplus laboratory technicians of the remaining 17 schools had already found an employment in other schools. In other words, only around 12 surplus laboratory technicians would need to be redeployed.

32. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong suggested that EMB should continue to collaborate with the schools concerned to increase the number of their practical periods and new schools in need of laboratory technicians for provision of employment opportunities to some 12 surplus laboratory technicians. As an interim measure, EMB should consider the provision of a laboratory technician to serve two secondary schools which, based on the current calculation for provision of a laboratory technician post, had a decimal fraction slightly less than 0.5. Mr CHEUNG further suggested that as a last resort, EMB should consider freezing the present laboratory technician entitlement in schools where the problem of surplus staff remained after trying out the above alternatives. He believed that the number of such schools was small and expressed confidence that EMB would be able to resolve the problem. He suggested that the Administration should work out the long-term policies for resolving surplus teachers and laboratory technicians after the Task Force had completed its review of the current policies later in the year.

33. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung expressed appreciation of EMB's efforts in resolving the problem of surplus laboratory technicians in aided secondary schools. He also expressed support for the suggestion that the Administration should freeze the measures for resolving the problem of surplus laboratory technicians pending the outcome of the Task Force's policy review on surplus staff in aided secondary schools.

34. PAS(EM)SA&S responded that EMB would continue to assist schools in resolving the problem of surplus laboratory technicians, taking into consideration Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong's suggestion. She, however, said that since the surplus situation in these schools might continue in the years to come, she could not guarantee that the current laboratory technician entitlement of the schools concerned would be frozen.

Action

35. Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked about the practical arrangements for one laboratory technician to serve two aided secondary schools. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong explained that the arrangement was proposed as a transitional measure. Sharing the use of a laboratory technician, the school management concerned should agree on a duty roster for the laboratory technician to work in their schools. For instance, the laboratory technician might work from Monday to Wednesday in one school and from Thursday to Friday in another. He added that similar practice had been adopted for workers in the teaching and the social welfare professions.

36. Mr SZETO Wah asked how EMB would coordinate the provision of employment opportunities in new schools for the remaining 12 surplus laboratory technicians. PAS(EM)SA&S responded that EMB had all along maintained close liaison with the related sponsoring bodies for provision of employment opportunities to surplus laboratory technicians in the past two months. In the light of members' concerns, EMB staff would reinforce its co-ordination efforts.

37. Ms Emily LAU expressed support for EMB to collaborate with the affected schools and sponsoring bodies to resolve the problem of surplus laboratory technicians. She asked whether EMB had consulted the laboratory technicians and other stakeholders before proposing the arrangements for handling surplus laboratory technicians to the affected schools on 29 April 2003.

38. PAS(EM)SA&S responded that the temporary measures in paragraph 5 of the Administration's paper were proposed after consultation with HKSSSC, the schools and the sponsoring bodies concerned. To resolve the problem in the long run, the Task Force would work out the future arrangements for handling surplus staff in aided secondary schools, including the calculation of the manning scale of laboratory technicians.

39. The Chairman asked whether the Administration would consider inviting representatives of laboratory technicians to join the Task Force so that the voices of the workforce would be directly heard.

40. PAS(EM)SA&S explained that the Task Force was set up between EMB and HKSSSC to work out the future arrangements for handling surplus staff in aided secondary schools. Initially, it would focus discussion on the major issues arising from reduction of classes in aided secondary schools. She assured members that EMB would consult the affected parties including the laboratory technicians on proposals relevant to their interests. She added that EMB had actually met a group of laboratory technicians in the course of implementing the temporary arrangements for resolving the problem of surplus laboratory technicians.

Action

41. Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung considered that the Administration should continue to allow aided secondary schools to retain surplus laboratory technicians and resolve the problem through natural wastage and redeployment among schools under the same sponsoring body in the 2003-04 school year. Given the small budget incurred for retaining the remaining surplus laboratory technicians, he saw no reason to insist on resolving the problem in the 2003-04 school year whilst a policy review of surplus staff including laboratory technicians was in progress.

42. Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked whether EMB had advised schools that the arrangements for schools with surplus laboratory technicians in the 2002-03 school year would not apply for the 2003-04 school year. He also asked how many of the surplus laboratory technicians in the 2002-03 year had not been resolved and were included in the 41 schools which had surplus laboratory technicians in the 2003-04 school year.

Adm 43. PAS(EM)SA&S responded that EMB had made it clear that surplus laboratory technicians in aided secondary schools in the 2002-03 school year were tolerated for that particular school year under specific conditions. She reckoned that some schools with surplus laboratory technicians in the 2002-03 school year had the problem remained in the 2003-04 school year. At the Chairman's request, she undertook to provide an accurate figure after the meeting.

Adm 44. In concluding the discussion, the Chairman requested the Administration to provide an information paper on the results of its efforts in assisting the remaining 12 surplus laboratory technicians to find an employment and the execution of "job-sharing" arrangements in the affected schools. PAS(EM)SA&S agreed.

**II. Any other business**

45. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:40 pm.

Council Business Division 2  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
25 September 2003