



Teacher training on special educational needs in selected places

IN22/18-19

1. Introduction

1.1 In parallel with growing awareness of equal education opportunities, the number of students with special educational needs ("SEN") in Hong Kong has surged by 179% in 10 years to 49 100 in 2018, along with a tripling of their share in student population from 2.5% to 8.8%.¹ As these students with learning difficulties are attending ordinary classes for inclusive education, all teachers in ordinary schools need to be empathic and equipped with necessary skills to embrace diversity and create a positive classroom environment for them.² While many overseas studies conclude that "teachers are key to the success of inclusive education"³, most of local teachers expressed concerns that they do not have adequate SEN training. As a matter of fact, both the quantity and quality of SEN teacher training have been consistently highlighted as key issues in recent policy reviews conducted by the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Audit Commission and the Subcommittee of Integrated Education of the Legislative Council ("LegCo") during 2012-2018.⁴ Two Members further attempted to introduce a Member's bill to improve inclusive education, including SEN teaching in 2016.⁵

¹ Students with SEN are a highly diversified group of students with a number of learning difficulties, including (a) attention deficits/hyperactivity disorder; (b) autism spectrum disorders; (c) speech and language impairment; (d) hearing impairment; (e) visual impairment; (f) physical disability; (g) intellectual disability; (h) mental illness; and (i) other specific learning difficulties.

² In Hong Kong, the Government recommends "Whole School Approach" in inclusive education. All teachers especially class teachers need to adjust their teaching methods (e.g. small group teaching, pull-out programmes and teacher collaboration) to support students with SEN. For those with the highest needs, schools need to set up "Student Support Team" comprising school principal, class teachers and teachers with advanced SEN training to draw up individual teaching plans for them. See Education Bureau (2014).

³ European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2010).

⁴ Legislative Council Secretariat (2012 and 2014) and Audit Commission (2018).

⁵ In June 2016, Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung and Hon Dennis KWOK Wing-hang proposed to introduce a Member's bill on SEN. However, as EDB stated that the bill would lead to increased government expenditure and hence contravene the Basic Law, the proposed bill could not proceed further. In May 2019, the Panel on Education discussed the bill again, passing a motion urging the Government to introduce legislation on inclusive education. See Cheung and Kwok (2019).

1.2 At the request of Hon Dennis KWOK Wing-hang, the Research Office has undertaken a focused study on teacher training on SEN in selected places, without digressing into other policy issues of SEN covered in the earlier notes.⁶ Taiwan and England are selected for further study because (a) they are pioneers of inclusive education; and (b) they have special qualification requirements for SEN teachers, along with established training frameworks. This information note begins with a concise overview of the global trend of teacher training on SEN, followed by a discussion of respective developments in Hong Kong. It will then switch to the two selected places, outlining their pre-service and in-service training for SEN teachers, along with a concise table for easy reference (**Appendix**).

2. Global trends on teacher training on special educational needs

2.1 According to the World Health Organization, some 1 billion or 15% of global population lived with various kinds of disabilities in 2011, 150 million of whom were children aged 18 and below.⁷ Yet there is no universally agreed definition on students with SEN, with varying demarcation criteria across places and over time.⁸ For instance, a study of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development ("OECD") completed in 2012 pointed out that the proportion of students with SEN varied widely amongst its member states, from just 1% in South Korea to 5% in Ireland and 24% in Iceland.⁹ More recently, as a result of the revision of SEN identification by the government of the United Kingdom ("the UK") in 2010, the proportion of children with SEN in England has fallen significantly and steadily from 21% in 2010 to 12% in 2019.

⁶ Inclusive education covers many issues, such as (a) early identification; (b) arrangements of school placements; (c) early intervention and individual education plan; (d) parental education and support; and (e) resources and support provided to schools. For earlier research publications on SEN prepared by the Research Office, see Legislative Council Secretariat (2014a and 2019).

⁷ World Health Organization (2011) and United Nations Children's Fund (2013).

⁸ United Nations Children's Fund (2013).

⁹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2012).

2.2 Since the 1990s, there has been a shift in global education trend for integrating children with SEN in ordinary schools, from segregated education in special schools before. As a matter of fact, inclusive education for students with SEN is recognized as a basic human right, as manifested in the Salamanca Statement advocated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and ratified by some 92 places in 1994. More recently, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ("UNCRPD") acknowledging the need to improve inclusive education came into effect in 2008, with 161 government signatories.¹⁰

2.3 For students with SEN attending ordinary schools, they require a host of supportive policies, otherwise it may create more problems for them (e.g. lagging behind in overall study or becoming victims in school bullying).¹¹ Well-trained teachers play a vital role in inclusive education, because they can (a) identify students with SEN and intervene early enough; (b) understand and empathize the needs of such students; (c) provide differentiated teaching in view of diversity of students; (d) create an inclusive classroom environment; and (e) collaborate effectively with parents and professionals.¹² Many empirical studies have also confirmed that teachers with certified SEN training could effectively enhance the learning outcome of students with SEN.¹³

2.4 Regarding the global trends of SEN teacher training, 62% of teachers in the world indicated that they have received certain pre-service SEN training, according to OECD. While pre-service training can create positive perception on inclusive education for trainee teachers at the start of their careers, such pre-service training may not be in-depth enough for effective teaching in practice. As such, many serving teachers still need to deepen their understanding of SEN, fuelling the demand for in-service training. About 43% of global teachers received in-service SEN training in 2018, up from 32% in 2013.¹⁴

¹⁰ After China signed UNCRPD in 2007, UNCRPD also applies to Hong Kong as from 2008. See Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2018b and 2018c).

¹¹ National Disability Authority (2014), Yang et al. (2015) and Lei et al. (2017).

¹² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2018c) and Tyagi (2016).

¹³ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2018c) and Feng and Sass (2013).

¹⁴ Lee et al. (2014) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2013 and 2018).

3. Teacher training on special educational needs in Hong Kong

3.1 In Hong Kong, **inclusive education in public sector ordinary schools ("public schools") has been fast developing since the 1990s**, especially after the Salamanca Statement in 1994 and UNCRPD in 2008.¹⁵ Coupled with additional resources for early identification and intervention, the number of students with SEN in public schools leaped by 179% to 49 100 during 2008-2018, while its share in overall student population tripled from 2.5% to 8.8% (**Figure 1**).¹⁶ Since students with SEN are now centrally allocated to all public schools, both class and subject teachers in ordinary schools play a vital role in inclusive education for them, such as (a) adjusting their teaching methods; (b) drawing up specific individual learning plans for students concerned; and (c) following up their learning progress.¹⁷

3.2 **Yet supply of SEN teachers lags behind service demand.** During 2008-2017, the number of teachers with 30 hours of basic SEN training has grown by 149% to 15 630, representing only 36% of overall teacher workforce in 2017. At present, there are two channels for local teachers to receive SEN training, as summarized below:

- (a) **Pre-service education for undergraduates:** There is no prerequisite requirement for SEN teachers to receive specialized qualifications beforehand. Yet trainee teachers can acquire some basic knowledge of SEN through a compulsory module on SEN in their undergraduate study offered by five local universities, upon the encouragement of the Government. This compulsory SEN module designed by universities usually bears only 2-3 credits (60-90 learning hours). Trainee teachers may enrol more elective modules on SEN if they wish to have a

¹⁵ Under the "dual-track" policy, only those children with severe or multiple disabilities attend special schools provided with more intensive support services, whereas other students with SEN attend ordinary schools. In 2018-2019 school year, about 8 000 students studied in 61 special schools and about 49 100 students with SEN studied in 844 ordinary public schools.

¹⁶ Government's expenditure on additional support and services for students with SEN in public schools has increased by 65% in five years to around HK\$2 billion in 2018-2019 school year. See Education Bureau (2019b).

¹⁷ Identification of SEN students is mainly diagnosed by professionals in Education Bureau or Health Department. However, there are no specific guidelines for grading the seriousness of each type of SEN and the required support services. It results in inconsistent standards adopted among public schools.

minoring degree in special education.¹⁸ Yet these modules are usually taught in the form of lectures and assessed by assignments (e.g. essays and presentations), without specific practicum sessions under inclusive setting; and

- (b) **In-service training for existing teaching workforce:** Most of local SEN training is of in-service nature, as school principals can recommend their teaching staff to attend such on-the-job classes to meet the staffing requirements specified by EDB. The Education University of Hong Kong is now the sole provider for Government's SEN teacher training in Hong Kong, offering three types of courses with varying depth set out by the Government, namely **Basic Course** (30 training hours), **Advanced Course** (102 training hours) and **Thematic Courses** (90-120 training hours), or collectively named as **BAT**.¹⁹

Figure 1 — Selected indicators of local teacher training on SEN, 2008-2018

	2008	2013	2018
1. Number of students with SEN in public schools	17 582	33 830	49 080
- As a share of student population	2.5%	5.8%	8.8%
2. Number of teachers with basic SEN training (30 hours)	6 280	12 813	15 627 ^(a)
- As a share of total teacher supply	15%	31%	36% ^(a)
3. Number of teachers completing different levels of BAT Courses in that year ^(b)	1 963 ^(c)	1 285	1 579
4. Expenditure on BAT Courses (HK\$ million)	40.2 ^(c)	43.1	55.2

Notes: (a) Figure for 2017.

(b) The total number of teachers completing all levels of BAT Courses is not available.

(c) Figure for 2009.

Sources: Education Bureau and Census and Statistics Department.

¹⁸ For instance, undergraduate students of the Education University of Hong Kong minoring in inclusive education need to take 5 modules (15 credits) on SEN. See Education University of Hong Kong (2019b) and Education Bureau (2012).

¹⁹ BAT Courses are operated in a full-time block-release mode, under which participating teachers will be granted paid leave and supply teachers. Courses are mainly delivered through lectures. Of these, Advanced Course and Thematic Course provide four half-day (12 hours in total) sessions of supervised group practicum in schools.

3.3 Local teacher training on SEN is closely related to the operational requirement of EDB. For instance, EDB requires each public school to meet three key training targets by the end of 2019-2020 school year: (a) 15%-25% of their staff completing Basic Course; (b) at least 6-9 teachers completing Advanced Course; and (c) at least 6-9 teachers completing Thematic Courses.²⁰ BAT Courses aim at providing a critical mass of teachers equipped with various levels of SEN training so that they can guide their colleagues to teach in classes with SEN students. Based on the past trends, most of local schools can meet such targets upon the end of the training cycle, though the significance of such targets is in doubt as the training hours are deemed to be too short.²¹ More recently in the 2017 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced that a new post named as Special Educational Needs Coordinator ("SENCO") would be created in each primary and secondary school, with a dedicated responsibility to support integrated education.²² All SENCOs need to complete all BAT Courses (with 240 training hours) within two years of assumption of the post.²³ Separately, in order to incentivize teachers to receive SEN in-service training, completion of at least 90 hours of BAT Courses is made one of the promotion prerequisites. EDB also organizes seminars and workshops on SEN teaching, along with provision of an online resource centre.

3.4 On school monitoring, "professional training on SEN" has been one of the 22 key indicators in the self-evaluation of performance of each public school, as required by EDB as from 2015-2016 school year.²⁴ This is also one of the areas of regular school inspection conducted by EDB.

3.5 In spite of the above initiatives, there are issues of concerns on SEN teacher training. *First on pre-service training,* there is only one module which is deemed to be too short for trainee teachers to acquire necessary skills

²⁰ EDB stated that it is a "must" for school to arrange BAT training for teachers and "strive to achieve the above training targets". See Education Bureau (2015b).

²¹ For instance, in the earlier training cycle during 2012-2014, over 90% of schools could meet the training targets. There are suggestions that the Government should resume a two-year full-time teacher training programme specializing in special education once offered in the 1990s, instead of relying on BAT Courses with much shorter learning hours.

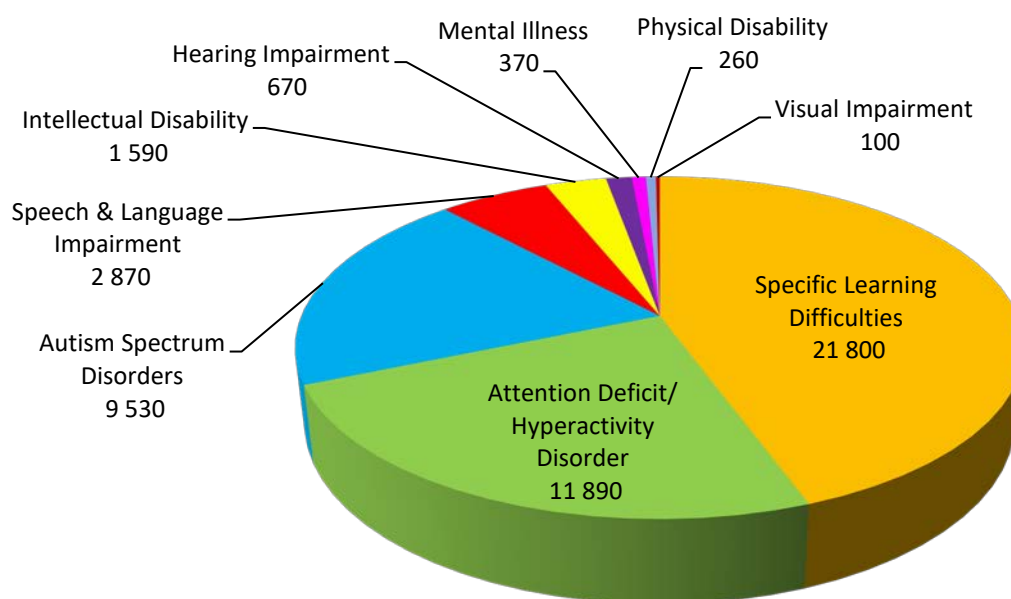
²² SENCO is tasked with coordinating support measures for students with SEN. In 2018-2019 school year, EDB provided 544 or 65% of public schools with SENCO. The Government aims at having one SENCO in each public school by 2019-2020 school year. See Education Bureau (2019b).

²³ Some 23% of SENCOs had yet completed the required BAT Courses in 2018. Separately, SENCO also needs to attend Certificate in Professional Development Programme for Teachers, lasting for another 120 hours. See Audit Commission (2018) and 教育局 (2019).

²⁴ Education Bureau (2015a).

to teach students with SEN displaying a wide spectrum of disabilities (**Figure 2**).²⁵ **Secondly on in-service training**, although most of local schools can meet the training targets on BAT, the 240 training hours are considered to be insufficient for effective SEN teaching. Moreover, BAT Courses are conducted in the form of lectures mostly on theoretical discussion, with limited coverage on actual teaching practice.²⁶ **Thirdly on qualification requirements**, some advanced places (e.g. the United States ("the US"), France and Japan) require SEN teachers to have SEN degree or qualification as prerequisites, while some even require a long practice period in inclusive setting of up to 225 hours.²⁷ But there is no such requirement in Hong Kong. **Fourthly on local school culture**, SEN training is accorded a lower priority in the examination-oriented education system, particularly so for those schools admitting very few students with SEN. Serving teachers may prefer subjects other than SEN as their areas of further study for career progression.²⁸

Figure 2 — Distribution of students with SEN by type in Hong Kong, 2018



Source: Education Bureau.

²⁵ Legislative Council Secretariat (2014b) and Cheung and Kwok (2019).

²⁶ Legislative Council Secretariat (2012), 黃錦良 (2018) and 香港 01 (2017 and 2018).

²⁷ Teaching practicum under inclusive setting in the US, France and Japan lasts for 90 hours, 152 hours and 225 hours respectively, as compared with 12 hours of practicum for some BAT Courses in Hong Kong.

²⁸ Legislative Council Secretariat (2014b).

4. Teacher training on special educational needs in Taiwan

4.1 Taiwan has a very long development history on inclusive education. In 1984, **Special Education Act** was passed, providing a comprehensive categorization of SEN students, laying down qualification for SEN teachers for better support to such students in mainstream schools. Since the 2000s, a number of related laws on disabilities and teacher education (e.g. **People with Disabilities Rights Protection Act** in 2007, **Special Education Act** in 2009 and **Teacher Education Act** in 2017) were amended to enhance inclusive education in Taiwan, including teaching quality of SEN teachers.²⁹

4.2 The relative proportion of students with SEN in Taiwan is smaller than that in Hong Kong, as the Taiwanese identification system is based on medical science or neuropsychology (instead of educational perspective in Hong Kong).³⁰ During 2007-2017, the number of disabled students with SEN in Taiwan has increased by 19% to 87 400, with its share in total student population rising from 2.0% to 3.4% (**Figure 3**). Unlike Hong Kong where students with SEN are centrally allocated to all public schools, students with SEN in Taiwan are admitted to mainstream schools with SEN classes adjacent to their home, in accordance with the arrangement of local governments.³¹

4.3 As regards SEN teachers in Taiwan, they generally need to meet professional qualifications before teaching SEN students. During 2007-2017, the number of qualified SEN teachers in Taiwan has gone up by 14% to 9 900, representing 90% of all SEN teachers in 2017.³² More than half (57%) of these

²⁹ Inclusive education in Taiwan covers both disabled and gifted students stretching from preschool to tertiary levels. For broad comparison across places, this study focuses on those disabled students in primary and secondary schools in Taiwan.

³⁰ Over the past decade or so, the Taiwanese government has enhanced professional knowledge for both teachers and professionals in SEN identification, in view of relatively low proportion of SEN students compared with other places. See 張昇鵬 (2003), 王天苗、黃俊榮 (2011) and 胡永崇 (2013).

³¹ SEN students in Taiwan may attend both normal classes and SEN classes depending on the severity of SEN. The workload of normal class teachers teaching SEN students is balanced by (a) a ceiling of admitting SEN students per class; and (b) reducing 3 students in each class for each SEN student admitted. See 教育部 (2015).

³² Taiwanese students with SEN are categorized into three broad types in terms of severity of disability for inclusive education. In descending order of needs, they are (a) centralized special education class; (b) decentralized resource room; and (c) Itinerant resource programme providing SEN teachers to remote areas on rotational basis. SEN teachers are required to acquire SEN teacher qualification or to have done so within three years in post. See 郭又方等 (2016), Wu (2007) and Huang and Chen (2017).

qualified SEN teachers were actually teaching disabled SEN students studying in normal classes of mainstream schools in 2017. These SEN teachers will collaborate with other normal class teachers for tailoring teaching method and curriculum for SEN students over time.³³

Figure 3 — Selected indicators of teacher training on SEN in Taiwan, 2007-2017

	2007	2012	2017
1. Total number of students with SEN ^(a)	73 418	85 911	87 444
- As a share of total student population ^(b)	2.0%	2.8%	3.4%
2. Total number of qualified SEN teachers ^(c)	8 661	9 656	9 885
- As a share of teachers teaching SEN students	73%	87%	90%
3. Number of mainstream schools with SEN classes	2 068	2 351	2 488
- As a share of total mainstream schools	54%	60%	64%

Notes: (a) Excluding public primary and secondary schools for gifted students.

(b) Scholars earlier indicated the low proportion may be related to the different standards and mechanisms of SEN identification system adopted in Taiwan.

(c) Including public primary school and secondary schools for disabled and gifted students.

Sources: 教育部, 張昇鵬 (2003) and 王天苗、黃俊榮 (2011).

4.4 Here are the salient features of SEN teacher training in Taiwan:

(a) **Statutory qualification for SEN teachers:** Unlike Hong Kong, SEN teachers in Taiwan are statutorily required to have relevant SEN qualification before teaching, after the People with Disabilities Rights Protection Act and Special Education Act were amended in 2007 and 2009 respectively. All SEN trainee teachers are assessed by a centralized teacher certification examination upon completion of their pre-service training;³⁴

³³ This figure excludes those qualified SEN teachers in centralized special education classes where SEN students are mostly segregated from other students. In Taiwan, each of the three aforementioned types of SEN classes is usually provided with two to three teachers. See 全國法規資料庫 (2018) and 教育部 (2018a).

³⁴ 全國法規資料庫 (2017).

- (b) **Regulated pre-service inclusive education:** Both the curriculum and credit hours in inclusive education are regulated by the Taiwanese government under the Teacher Education Act, with a compulsory six-month practicum for trainee teachers.³⁵ After the amendment of the Act in 2017, pre-service SEN programme should include 48 credits (some 684 hours of lectures and 800 hours of practicum), covering both theories and practical teaching methods (e.g. curriculum adaptation, multi-assessment, classroom management and skills of understanding special needs of students).³⁶ In 2017, 65% of SEN teachers in Taiwan have received pre-service SEN training before teaching.³⁷ As regards normal class teachers specializing in other subjects, they need to study a 3-credit (54 hours) introductory course on special education;³⁸
- (c) **Diversified in-service SEN training for teachers:** Special Education Credit programmes (at least 30 credits) are launched to enable those teachers not majoring in special education to obtain expertise in SEN.³⁹ In addition, SEN knowledge is integrated into in-service training courses for normal class teachers (with 19 categories on SEN).

Meanwhile, Taiwanese schools need to fulfil the annual training hours on special education for SEN teachers (at least 18 hours) and normal class teachers (at least 3 hours) as regulated by local governments;

³⁵ Curriculum of pre-service training on SEN is regulated by the Guidelines of Teachers' Professional Competence on Standards of Teacher Education Pre-service Programmes. Under the Guidelines, universities may freely design their pre-service programmes in accordance with the credits and learning outcome listed in the Guidelines, while they should also report course details and enrolment quotas to the government for reference. See 立法院法律系統 (2017).

³⁶ In Taiwan's tertiary education, one credit equals to 18 hours for courses and a maximum of 80 hours for practicum. See 教育部 (2018b).

³⁷ A considerable number of teachers received their second qualification in special education on-the-job before the 2000s.

³⁸ This is a 6-day introductory programme organized by universities for normal class teachers and is mainly delivered by lectures. Contents include basic knowledge on theories of special education, types of SEN, identification of and support to SEN students.

³⁹ In 2017, 23% of SEN workshops was about professional knowledge of different types of SEN, followed by 18% on SEN curriculum, 8% on gifted education, 7% on teaching in SEN classes, 5% each on Individual Learning Plan, professional team collaboration, and E-assignment for SEN. See 教育部 (2012 and 2018a) and 教育部國民及學前教育署 (2016).

- (d) **Regular monitoring of quality of SEN teaching:** The Taiwanese government conducts quadrennial evaluation on the effectiveness of special education in individual schools. Teaching quality of SEN and support to SEN students are assessed by a panel of experts, academics, parental groups and government officials in accordance with the Special Education Act. Schools with good results will be rewarded (e.g. extra funding);⁴⁰
- (e) **Joint-school SEN learning clusters:** In view of complexity and diversity in SEN teaching, there are calls for increasing exchanges of SEN teaching experiences across schools. In response, five Special Education Guidance Groups funded by the government have been deployed for most schools across Taiwan since 2016.⁴¹ These groups provide support services on psychological and behavioural issues of disabled students, best practice sharing, consultancy services and school visits for teacher training, and joint production of reference materials on SEN;⁴² and
- (f) **Online SEN training resource platforms:** The Ministry of Education has two online training resource platforms for SEN teachers and disabled students respectively, with database of teaching materials, practical experiences for SEN teaching, along with updates of SEN related laws and regulations.⁴³

4.5 The above measures seem to have enhanced the quality of inclusive education in Taiwan. **First**, 67% of the local governments in Taiwan achieved Grade A in implementation of special education in 2016, on the back of improved quality of SEN teaching.⁴⁴ **Secondly**, the pass rate of the teacher certification examination in special education has almost doubled from 30% in

⁴⁰ The evaluations adopt a 5-grade scale. Low achievers will be under compulsory guidance by the Ministry of Education. See 全國法規資料庫(2011 and 2012).

⁴¹ Under the Special Education 5-Year Plan, the Guidance Groups will cover all schools by 2020. Each group consists of government officials, researchers, and experienced school principals and teachers taught in schools with outstanding performance in SEN.

⁴² 國家教育研究院(2014) and 教育部國民及學前教育署(2019).

⁴³ These online platforms are State Department Special Education Network Center and National Special Education Information Network.

⁴⁴ The 5-grade scale ranges from Grade Excellent to Grade D. A dedicated panel consisting of experts, scholars, parental groups, schools and SEN concern groups is responsible for the assessment. See 國家教育研究院(2017).

2007 to 56% in 2017, upon tighter oversight of pre-service education by the government.⁴⁵ **Thirdly**, about 56% of Taiwanese trainee teachers felt ready for teaching students with SEN after completion of pre-service SEN training in 2018, higher than the global average of 50%. Moreover, 91% of teachers in Taiwan found in-service SEN training useful in 2018, one of the highest globally.⁴⁶

5. Teacher training on special educational needs in England

5.1 In 1978, Mrs Warnock of the University of Oxford submitted the "Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People" to the UK government, marking the first comprehensive official review of SEN in Europe and inspiring policy changes in neighbouring countries.⁴⁷ Following the Salamanca Statement in 1994 and the UNCRPD in 2008, the UK government has frequently reviewed its statutory framework and policies with respect to SEN in order to meet the requirements of these treaties. In implementation, England has been one of the places with the highest proportion of high-need SEN schools (with more than 10% of SEN students admitted in a school) globally, while its SEN policies have also become a reference model for other places. This note thus focuses on SEN teacher policy in England, instead of other countries in the UK.

5.2 In England, the number of students with SEN has been sharply reduced by 27% over the past decade to 1.08 million in 2019, mainly due to tightening in demarcation criteria of SEN after a policy review in 2010.⁴⁸ The proportion of students with SEN in student population has thus declined from 18% to 12% over the past decade, so did the share of schools with SEN classes from 9.6% in 2014 to 8.3% in 2019. Notwithstanding this decline, the government has increased the SEN funding by 22% over the past five years to £6.3 billion (HK\$61 billion) in 2019

⁴⁵ 師資培育及藝術教育司 (2007 and 2017).

⁴⁶ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2018a).

⁴⁷ The Warnock Report recommended effective usage of resources to prepare disabled young people for employment, with extensive policy review on students with SEN. The term "special educational needs" was coined in this context, triggering policy reviews in Europe in the following decades. See Smyth et al. (2014) and Webster (2018).

⁴⁸ In a report prepared by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills ("Ofsted") in 2010, it was noted that half of schools may over-identify SEN students. The government subsequently started to tighten the identification and assessment system of SEN leading to a steady drop of the number of students with SEN. See Ofsted (2010).

(Figure 4). By and large, almost all SEN students are educated in normal classes in mainstream schools rather than specialist settings or units, and allocated a place via the annual admission process. For SEN students with higher needs, they will be arranged by local authorities to study in mainstream schools with SEN classes mostly near their living area.⁴⁹

Figure 4 — Selected indicators on inclusive education in England, 2009-2019

	2009	2014	2019
1. Total number of students with SEN in mainstream state-funded schools ('000) ^(a)	1 495	1 300	1 084
- As a share of total student population	18%	16%	12%
2. Total number of schools with SEN classes	-	1 937	1 685
- As a share of total state-funded schools	-	9.6%	8.3%
3. Proportion of teachers indicated teaching in high-need schools (admitted more than 10% students with SEN)	-	67% ^(b)	54% ^(b)
4. Funding allocations for SEN provision (£ millions)	-	5,184	6,269 ^(c)

Notes: (a) Including state-funded primary and secondary schools.

(b) Figures in 2013 or 2018.

(c) Provisional figure.

(-) Information not available.

Sources: National Statistics, Department for Education and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

5.3 More specifically on qualifications of SEN teachers in England, it is mandatory for SENCOs and three types of specialist teachers (i.e. of students with hearing impairment, vision impairment or multi-sensory impairment) to possess relevant SEN qualifications.⁵⁰ For teachers of other types of SEN students, they need not possess SEN qualifications in advance, but they need to receive in-service training. Over the past decade, a few policy reviews on SEN teaching have been conducted in England. For instance, after publication of a Green Paper on SEN teaching in 2011, the **Children and Families Act 2014**

⁴⁹ Students are mainly taught in normal classes along with support sessions of special education. Parents of SEN students with higher needs can request a specific school for their children. The local authority will consult the school and assess if the school is suitable to the student's needs. See Department for Education (2017) and Council for disabled children (undated).

⁵⁰ The Education (School Teachers' Qualifications) (England) Regulations 2003 requires such specialist teachers to hold a specialist Mandatory Qualification, or to gain the qualification within their first three years in post. See European Commission (2019).

established a legal framework for inclusive education in England including SEN training and teaching.⁵¹ It is followed by a Code of Practice on SEN with statutory backing of the Act, along with other SEN reforms including teacher training.⁵²

5.4 By and large, the current system of SEN teacher training in England displays the following salient features:

- (a) **Statutory SEN qualification for three types of specialist teachers and SENCOs:** As discussed above, certain types of SEN teachers in England need to possess specific qualifications, including SENCOs and those teaching students with hearing, vision or multi-sensory impairment;
- (b) **Mandatory core content of SEN in pre-service training:** After an independent review by Sir Andrew Carter on quality of pre-service teacher education in England in 2014, mandatory core content framework in the curriculum was introduced in 2016, with increased SEN elements to fill the knowledge gap identified in the review.⁵³ In short, universities need to equip trainee teachers with skills to: (a) identify the needs of all students; (b) analyse factors inhibiting learning of students and ways to overcome them; (c) fully understand the Code of Practice on SEN; and (d) adapt teaching strategies to cater for students with different types of SEN. An official review specifically focusing on SEN content in pre-service training is being conducted by experts and this will be completed by 2020.

By and large, SEN modules in pre-service teacher training in England are compulsory, taking 20-30 credits (200-300 training

⁵¹ The Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014, a subsidiary regulation of the Act, specifies the prescribed qualifications and experience of SENCO, paving the way for subsequent reforms in the statutory standards and guidelines for Code of Practice on SEN and the Teachers' Standards. See House of Commons (2013 and 2018) and IPSEA (2019).

⁵² Reforms included funding for all teachers and SENCOs undertaking postgraduate qualifications on SEN and more special school placements for trainee teachers. However, the funding was withdrawn after 2015 due to budget cuts. See Department for Education (2012).

⁵³ As an incentive for compliance, the implementation of the framework became one of the review criteria for allocation of student quotas and funding to the universities by Department for Education since 2018. See European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2015) and Department for Education (2016a).

hours), along with 24-32 weeks of practicum in at least two schools (with options of practising in schools with SEN classes);⁵⁴

- (c) **Quality control of teacher training on SEN:** As from 2003, mandatory in-service qualifications are required for specialist teachers in England, and so do SENCOs as from 2009. The list of qualified providers of such in-service training services are regularly assessed either by the Department for Education or National Association for Special Educational Needs ("nasen").⁵⁵ For pre-service teacher training providers, the regulatory authority will adopt a new inspection framework in 2020, with a focus on SEN teaching;⁵⁶
- (d) **Monitoring of SEN teaching in schools:** At the other end, the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills ("Ofsted") assesses the quality of inclusive education in primary and secondary schools, checking whether the curriculum best-suits the needs of students with SEN during school inspections. Low-performing schools will be granted a fund for further improvement. After the Children and Families Act 2014, Ofsted published an inspection framework and guidance specifically for SEN provision in local areas;⁵⁷
- (e) **Online SEN training resource platforms:** Funding was provided to nasen to develop an online platform (i.e. the SEND Gateway), with various training resources to equip teachers to deliver SEN reforms. Moreover, a free online training package for effective practices in all mainstream settings is provided;⁵⁸ and

⁵⁴ Unlike Taiwan, England does not prescribe an exhaustive list of content and course in pre-service teacher training providers, giving flexibility to universities to develop their own programmes. In fact, a compulsory curriculum of pre-service training was introduced in 1998, but it met with criticisms of excessive prescription in the curriculum. It was then replaced with more generic standards in 2012. See Department for Education (2016a) and House of Commons (2018).

⁵⁵ Nasen is the largest education professional group of SEN in the UK which helps the government maintain an online SEN resource platform and organize a variety of in-service training programmes on SEN for teachers. For the Master-level SENCOs Programmes (with 600 training hours), nasen is mainly responsible for quality assurance. See Nasen (2017) and GovUK (2016a).

⁵⁶ Ofsted (2019a) and Staufenberg (2019).

⁵⁷ House of Commons (2018) and Ofsted (2019b).

⁵⁸ In 2018, the government further awarded £3.4 million (HK\$33 million) to nasen for equipping the school workforce to deliver high quality teaching across all types of SEN during 2018-2020. See House of Commons (2018) and House of Lords (2019).

- (f) **Learning clusters for SEN:** Similar to Taiwan, joint school clusters are formed under the Teaching School Alliances and Specialist Leader of Education Programme, fostering exchange of experience and best practices, collaboration and in-school teacher training on SEN amongst schools.

5.5 While SEN teacher training in England is subject to less regulatory control than that in Taiwan, it is also deemed effective in inclusive education. For instance, 69% of trainee teachers in England reported that they are well-prepared for teaching students with SEN after pre-service education in 2018, far above the global average (50%).⁵⁹ Furthermore, 82% of teachers reported that in-service training had positive impact on their teaching practices, similar to the global average (83%).⁶⁰

6. Observations

6.1 In Hong Kong, while the relative proportion of students with SEN has tripled to 8.8% within a decade, there are concerns that local teachers are not well-equipped to embrace a more diverse mix of students and create a positive classroom environment. Recent policy reviews have pinpointed the inadequacy of local SEN teacher training, both in terms of quantity and quality.

6.2 In the three places under study (i.e. Hong Kong, Taiwan and England), they adopt different systems on SEN identification. Both Taiwan and England have taken a more active approach in SEN teacher training, including: (a) laying down statutory qualification requirements for all or certain SEN teachers; (b) strengthening the compulsory modules on SEN in pre-service training; (c) providing more practicum in inclusive setting in pre-service training; (d) providing longer in-service training hours for SEN teachers; and (e) providing more diversified support to SEN teachers.

⁵⁹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2018a).

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Teacher training on special educational needs in selected places

	Hong Kong	Taiwan	England
1. Total number of SEN students in public schools	49 080 (2018)	87 444 (2017)	1.08 million (2019)
2. Share in SEN students in public schools	8.8% (2018)	3.4% (2017)	12% (2019)
3. Total number of teachers with qualified SEN training in 2017	15 627	9 885	-
4. Share of SEN teachers in teaching workforce in 2017	36%	90% ⁽¹⁾	-
5. Major indicators of pre-service teacher training on SEN			
(a) Statutory qualification for SEN teachers	✗	✓	✗
(b) Curriculum regulated by government	✗	✓	✓
(c) Compulsory module on SEN	✓	✓	✓
(d) Estimated training hours (excluding practicum)	60-90	684 ⁽²⁾	200-300
(e) Duration of practicum in inclusive setting	✗	6 months	24-32 weeks
6. Major indicators of in-service teacher training on SEN			
(a) Statutory qualification for SEN teachers	✗ ⁽³⁾	✓	✓ ⁽⁴⁾
(b) Maximum training hours	240	540 ⁽⁵⁾	600
(c) Practicum in inclusive setting	✓ ⁽⁶⁾	✓	✓
(d) Incentives for training	Very few	Many	Few
(e) Specific assessment on SEN teaching	✗	✓	✓
(f) Learning clusters on SEN for schools	✗	✓	✓
(g) Structured SEN online platforms	✗	✓	✓

Notes: (1) Share of certified teachers teaching SEN students in Taiwan.

(2) While SEN teachers are trained in-class for 684 hours in special education, general teachers may be trained for some 54 hours in special education.

(3) SENCOs and certain share of teachers in Hong Kong are required to train with BAT Courses, but they are not statutory.

(4) Both SENCOs and certain specialist teachers in England need to possess statutory qualifications.

(5) General teachers are required to take a 3-credit (54 hours) introductory course on SEN. They could be further trained for 540 hours for statutory SEN teacher qualification.

(6) Only Advanced and Thematic Courses in BAT provide 12 hours of practicum in inclusive setting.

(-) Information is not available.

Sources: Education Bureau, Ministry of Education, Department for Education and various universities.

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