

Information Paper

Arrangements for Surplus Laboratory Technicians of Aided Secondary Schools

Purpose

This paper briefs Members of the provision of laboratory technicians in aided secondary schools in the 2003/04 school year and outlines the arrangements for handling surplus laboratory technicians and other related issues.

Background

2. The manning scale of laboratory technicians in aided secondary schools is calculated in accordance with the conditions laid down in the “Code of Aid for Secondary Schools”. Its calculation is based on the number of practical periods in the school, which in turn is affected by the number of operating classes and the curriculum offered.

3. On the whole, there is no drop in the population of secondary school students in Hong Kong in the 2003/04 school year. At present there are 368 aided secondary schools. Of these schools, about 90% have no reduction in the number of operating classes, hence there is no surplus staff. Only around 10% of these schools have a reduced number of operating classes as a result of a drop in the enrolment or a change in the school curriculum. These changes will in turn reduce the number of practical periods, resulting in the school’s having surplus laboratory technicians.

Present Situation

4. When issuing the notices of 2003/04 Staff Establishment to all aided secondary schools in April 2003, the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) provided guidelines on handling surplus teachers and laboratory technicians to those schools that might have surplus teachers and / or laboratory technicians. The guidelines required schools to make every effort to absorb their surplus staff through redeployment within the school or schools under the same sponsoring body when there was natural wastage. The School Management Committees (SMCs) are required to work out a set of “school-based criteria” that meet schools’ needs in identifying the surplus staff. The criteria adopted must be objective, fair and open. Besides, the SMCs should also set up an appeal mechanism to ensure that every surplus staff is

fairly treated. The school sponsoring bodies also have the responsibility to ensure that all schools under their sponsorship have applied consistently the criteria and the appeal mechanism as far as possible.

5. To alleviate the surplus staff situation, the EMB, after consultation with the Hong Kong Subsidized Secondary Schools Council (HKSSSC), the schools and the sponsoring bodies concerned, decided to adopt the following temporary measures in schools with surplus teachers and laboratory technicians in the 2003/04 school year :

- using 35 as the basis for calculating the number of operating classes at S2 and S3 levels (e.g. 4 classes for 106-140 students and 5 classes for 141-175 students), with a class size between 26 and 35. For these cases, no additional teachers on top of the existing establishment will be approved;
- allowing flexibility in calculating the split class staff entitlement as in previous years;
- allowing suitable schools to operate additional S4 classes and S5 classes for repeaters based on the planned number of senior secondary classes for the 2003/04 school year;
- allowing individual schools to operate, at marginal costs, non-subsidized S5 classes for repeaters or fee charging classes; and
- allowing schools with the capacity to run special programmes for dropouts, youths who have not secured a job or newly arrived young adults. These may include basic competency (e.g. language, computer, personal growth) and career oriented curriculum courses.

Apart from the above, the EMB also requested schools to critically review their number of practical periods in order to further alleviate the problem of surplus laboratory technicians.

6. Furthermore, the EMB also encouraged the affected schools and staff to consider “job-sharing” as one of the alternatives to resolve the surplus staff problem. Schools adopting the “job-sharing” arrangement are allowed to recruit more laboratory technicians than that approved in the staff establishment. However, these schools are required to follow the terms and conditions of appointment stipulated in the relevant Codes of Aid and Guides to Appointment currently in force in the recruitment process. The laboratory technicians appointed on “job-sharing” basis are regarded as part-time staff on the approved staff establishment. Like their regular full-time counterparts, these regular part-time laboratory technicians are eligible to join the relevant Provident Fund schemes and enjoy the various types of leave entitlement

(such as paid sick leave). Their relevant part-time experience will be recognized on a pro-rata basis for incremental and promotion purposes. For schools opting the “job-sharing” arrangement, it is advisable for them to work out all the arrangement details and confirm with the staff concerned.

7. In May 2003, 41 aided secondary schools were expected to have surplus laboratory technicians in the 2003/04 school year. The EMB requested the SMCs to seriously consider all relief measures, including revising the school curriculum, increasing the number of practical periods and deploying other subventions to absorb the surplus laboratory technicians. As at present, 24 of the affected schools, upon our request, have absorbed the surplus laboratory technicians through the various measures described. Among them, 8 schools have the surplus resolved through adjustment of practical periods, 6 through “job-sharing”, 5 through natural wastage and another 5 through internal deployment. Due to the interests of their students and various other considerations, the remaining 17 schools could not revise their school curriculum or make arrangement for internal deployment to resolve the surplus situation. They finally have to resort to terminating the service of the surplus laboratory technicians.

8. All along, the EMB has followed the existing policy and practice in the provision and management of laboratory technicians in aided secondary schools. We also offered assistance to schools to help resolve the surplus situation according to the needs of the individual schools. We understand that some laboratory technicians requested to freeze the present laboratory technician entitlement of the affected schools. However, such a request cannot be acceded to as the surplus situation in these schools will continue in the years to come.

Way Forward

9. The EMB has set up a Task Force with the 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 earlier proposals made by some Legislative Councillors will also be considered by the Task Force. These include retaining the laboratory technician entitlement up to one decimal place, setting a minimum laboratory technician entitlement and implementing the “Two schools Sharing One Post” policy, and so forth.