

For discussion on
30 May 2013

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Class-to-Teacher Ratio in Secondary Schools

PURPOSE

This paper gives a brief account of the manpower resources provided for schools for the implementation of the New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum.

BACKGROUND

2. Under the existing policy and practices, public sector schools are provided with teaching staff resources through two major means, i.e. regular teacher establishment to be computed mainly according to the number of classes and class-to-teacher ratio as well as the cash grants for the appointment of teachers and/ or ancillary staff for meeting specific policy objectives. Also, there are different, time-limited relief measures that are conducive to increasing and stabilizing the teaching force in secondary schools.

Class-to-teacher ratio and teaching staff establishment

3. All along, each approved class in a public sector school is provided with a certain number of teachers based on pre-set criteria. In 2004, when planning for the New Academic Structure (NAS), we proposed to integrate the staff resources and to rationalize the basic class-to-teacher ratios for the implementation of the NAS in order to streamline administrative procedures and facilitate schools to plan and deploy resources more flexibly and in a more holistic manner. After extensive consultations with the education sector, an understanding on the class-to-teacher ratios was reached and the details were set out in the report *The New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education – Action Plan for Investing in the Future of Hong Kong* published in May 2005. It was also proposed that after the double cohort year, i.e. from the 2012/13

school year, the class-to-teacher ratio for Secondary 4 (S4) to Secondary 6 (S6) would be improved from 1.9 teachers per class to 2.0 teachers per class. For details of the revised class-to-teacher ratios, please refer to **Annex 1**.

4. The teacher manpower of public sector secondary schools also include a number of additional teachers for implementing various education initiatives, e.g. additional teachers for adopting more Chinese as the medium of instruction, additional teachers for supporting academic low achievers, additional teachers for “Whole School Approach to Integrated Education” and teachers for the Enhanced Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme. In the 2012/13 school year, we have provided about 1 200 additional regular teaching posts for public sector secondary schools for adopting more Chinese as the medium of instruction and supporting academic low achievers.

Cash grants

5. Besides revising the class-to-teacher ratios, we also disburse to schools on a recurrent basis various cash grants for the appointment of teachers and/ or ancillary staff. The cash grants include: Senior Secondary Curriculum Support Grant (SSCSG) which is equivalent to 0.1 teacher per new senior secondary class calculated on the basis of the mid-point salary of teachers at Graduate Master (GM) rank (an enhanced rate equivalent to 0.15 GM per new senior secondary class was provided for the 4-year transitional period from 2008/09 to 2011/12); Diversity Learning Grant which aims at supporting schools in offering a broad and balanced NSS curriculum; the Capacity Enhancement Grant which can be used flexibly to employ teachers and/ or teaching assistants, etc. so as to facilitate flexible grouping in NSS subjects and hence reduce workload of teachers. There is also the one-off Liberal Studies Curriculum Support Grant that helps teachers to prepare at initial implementation stage. For details of these grants, please refer to **Annex 2**.

6. Among the above cash grants, it is worthy to highlight the intended objectives, development and special features of the following three Grants:

- (a) the Senior Secondary Curriculum Support Grant (SSCSG): it was originally designated to support the implementation of Liberal Studies, with due consideration given to the special

characteristics of the subject such as the need to prepare and constantly update school-based materials, but was later extended its usages to other subjects/areas under the NSS curriculum at the suggestion of the school sector to give schools greater flexibility. Bearing in mind factors such as their specific situations and the learning needs of students, schools should first consult their teachers and then seek the approval of their School Management Committees or Incorporated Management Committees on the flexible use of the SSCSG to support the implementation of Liberal Studies, including, among others, deploying additional manpower and resources to alleviate teachers' workload, and conducting group teaching.

- (b) the one-off Liberal Studies Curriculum Support Grant: for facilitating schools to lay a sound foundation for the subject's development, a total of \$320,000 was provided to each publicly-funded secondary school in the 2010/11 school year for use for a period of two years, to create, at the initial stage of implementing the new academic structure, favorable conditions for the introduction of Liberal Studies. After considering the utilization of the grant in schools, EDB extended the tenure of that Grant for one more year, and disbursed additional Grant in the amount of \$160,000 or \$71,800 to each needy school in the 2012/13 school year. Schools are required to make good use of the one-off Grant for the preparatory work and the surplus, if any, will be clawed back at the end of the 2012/13 school year.
- (c) the Diversity Learning Grant: the provision of the Grant aims to support schools in offering a diversified curriculum to meet the interests of students in the NSS academic structure. One of the common programmes is Applied Learning programmes. Each school is entitled to subsidies for a maximum of 120 enrolments per cohort. Schools with 20 students applying for this Grant would receive around \$0.1 million per school year. Even though a school may have more than one class of students taking Applied Learning programmes offered by course providers instead of taking electives offered by the school itself and receives the additional subsidies, there will not be a corresponding reduction in teaching posts.

Relief measures that help increase and stabilize the teaching force

7. There are other relief measures that are conducive to increasing and stabilizing the teaching force in secondary schools. We launched the Voluntary Optimization of Class Structure Scheme and its enhanced measures in 2010, benefiting about 220 schools. In general, schools participating in the scheme are provided with additional teaching post quota to retain their teachers for a period of six to nine years. Also, we will implement the Extended Retention Period for Surplus Teachers Scheme effective September 2013, under which surplus teachers on the establishment arising from class reduction due to under-enrolment at Secondary 1 (S1) level in the three school years from 2013/14 to 2015/16 will be allowed to extend the retention period from one school year to three school years.

8. To sum up, teaching staff in a school originate from different sources and basis. While the regular teacher establishment to be computed mainly according to the number of classes and class-to-teacher ratio will form the core portion of the teaching force of a school, it is a tradition and prevailing policy that schools will plan and deploy all teaching staff provisions they are entitled for under different circumstances in a holistic manner in the delivery of services to their students.

LATEST DEVELOPMENT

Improved class-to-teacher ratio

9. As from the 2012/13 school year, the class-to-teacher ratio for senior secondary levels from S4 to S6 has been improved from 1.9 teachers per class to 2.0 teachers per class. In other words, each approved senior secondary class will be eligible for the provision of two teachers.

Present situation of student-to-teacher ratio

10. Also, most schools will be benefited from a reduced student-to-class ratio commencing the 2012/13 school year. Specifically, to address the issue of S1 student population drop in recent years, we have put in force various relief measures for public sector secondary schools including, among

others, the reduction of the number of students allocated to each S1 class from 38 in the 2008/09 school year to the prevailing 34 to reduce the student-to-teacher ratio in the long run. Starting from the 2012/13 school year, we have also further relaxed the criteria for approving S1 classes. The basis for calculating the number of approved S1 classes has been adjusted downward to 25 students per class. For the three school years starting from 2013/14, we will adopt a district/school-based approach to reducing the number of students allocated to each S1 class progressively and on a temporary basis. We expect that the number of students allocated to each S1 class will reduce to 30 in the school year of 2015/16 for the majority of schools.

11. The overall student-to-teacher ratio in public sector secondary schools has been improving significantly in the past few years. The ratio has improved gradually from 18.0:1 in the 2005/06 school year (i.e. the school year after the release of the report *The New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education – Action Plan for Investing in the Future of Hong Kong*) to 14.5:1 in the 2012/13 school year. When the series of relief measures as detailed in paragraphs 7 and 10 are implemented on a year-on-year basis and at higher levels progressively, the student-to-teacher ratio will be further lowered.

12. It is noteworthy that under the NSS curriculum, subjects are generally taught in groups, with the size of grouping adjusted according to the learning objectives, students' choice of electives and other pedagogical considerations. We have taken into account such change of teaching mode in NSS curriculum and included the additional teachers required for the subject grouping arrangements in the class-to-teacher ratio when it was revised in 2005. The provision of two teachers for each approved class together with the cash grants as detailed in paragraphs 5 and 6 give schools greater flexibility in making teaching plans, e.g. subjects to be offered and grouping arrangements.

13. Data collected by the Education Bureau (EDB) since the 2009/10 school year indicated that the average size of teaching groups for the majority of NSS subjects was maintained at 25 or below, with a general downward trend. The latest figures for the current school year show that 16 out of the 24 NSS subjects have an average group size of 25 or below, suggesting that schools are able to deploy their resources flexibly to lower

the student-to-teacher ratio in teaching the NSS subjects.

Review of the NSS curriculum and assessment

14. We understand the concerns raised by the school sector about school-based assessment (SBA), lesson time of the NSS subjects, learner diversity, and their respective impact on teachers' workload. The EDB, the Curriculum Development Council (CDC) and the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) have launched a joint review of the NSS curriculum and assessment since mid-2012 after the completion of the first Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination. The review aims at improving and fine-tuning the delivery of the NAS with recognition of its positive impact and smooth implementation while also addressing the major concerns expressed by schools and front-line teachers which include the teachers' workload. Based on the valuable feedback of the stakeholders, short-term recommendations, mid and long-term improvement plans are formulated. The relevant recommendations and improvement plans in general help reduce the workload of both teachers and students and the pressure on them.

15. Measures will be taken promptly to address the concern about teachers' workload (these will be implemented starting at S4 in the 2013/14 school year). Short-term recommendations at the system/ school and subject levels have been made on lesson time, Other Learning Experiences & Student Learning Profile, Applied Learning, qualifications and pathways, as well as support to schools aiming to alleviate the workload of teachers and cater for students' learning diversity. We will update and refine the curriculum contents, streamline the SBA and moderate the total curriculum time from 2,700 hours to 2,400 hours. Schools can flexibly increase or decrease 200 hours (i.e. $2,400 \pm 200$) based on their own needs. These measures after implementation can significantly relieve the workload of teachers and students and the pressure on them.

16. All along, the EDB has been providing various supporting measures to enhance learning and teaching efficacy and strengthen the curriculum leadership at schools for the effective implementation of the NSS curriculum. These support measures include conducting professional development programmes for school leaders and middle managers, and subject-based professional development programmes, providing learning and teaching

resources, collecting and sharing of good practices, developing district networks, providing school-based support, etc. When schools gain more experience and teachers further enhance their capacity, the NSS curriculum will be carried out more smoothly and steadily.

CONCLUSION

17. Before the implementation of the NAS, we have reviewed the class-to-teacher ratio for the NSS curriculum and examine cautiously the lesson time and the extra manpower of teachers required. We have also introduced an additional cash provision of the SSCSG for schools to facilitate group teaching in these classes and to implement the new core subject of Liberal Studies.

18. Based on the data collected in the NSS curriculum and assessment review and *without compromising the curriculum objectives and international benchmarking/ standards*, we have put in efforts to fine-tune the curriculum, lesson time and assessment requirement (including SBA) of the NSS subjects. Moreover, we have been deploying a lot of resources over the years to reduce the number of students allocated to each S1 class, as well as to reduce the impact brought about by the declining S1 student population. The relevant measures can help lower the student-to-teacher ratio continuously and will further help relieve the workload of teachers.

19. As for the deployment of the financial and human resources, to meet the curriculum and assessment needs of students, we should take a holistic approach, under which a systematic whole-school curriculum planning together with the flexible deployment of various resources, including those provided through the class-to-teacher ratios and by individual grants, will facilitate schools' optimal use of resources and effectively support the implementation of the NSS curriculum.

WAY FORWARD

20. The 3-year NSS curriculum has been implemented for four years since its launch in 2009/10 school year. So far, we have only two cohorts of graduates. For a system-change on such a scale, it naturally takes time to

consolidate experiences and for teachers to get familiar with and master the requirements of the curriculum and assessment. We will continue to collect feedback and data from stakeholders with an aim to further improve learning and teaching, and continue to communicate with schools regarding the provision of resources especially when the curriculum and assessment framework as well as the school-based systems have been getting more stable. We will also keep in view the usage of the cash provision of SSCSG among schools and identify good practices for optimizing its deployment so that the curriculum support needs of schools can be better addressed.

Education Bureau
May 2013

Revised Class-to-Teacher Ratio

To meet the needs for implementation of the New Academic Structure, we have specified in the report *The New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education – Action Plan for Investing in the Future of Hong Kong* published by the EDB in May 2005 after extensive consultations and an understanding reached among the education sector that the revised class-to-teacher ratios in secondary schools starting from the 2009/10 school year are as follows:

Up to the double cohort year (i.e. 2011/12 school year)

- (a) 1.7 teachers per junior secondary class
- (b) 1.9 teachers per senior secondary class in the new system and S5 of the old system
- (c) 2.3 teachers per S6 and S7 class of the old system

After the double cohort year (i.e. starting from the 2012/13 school year)

- (a) 1.7 teachers per junior secondary class
- (b) 2.0 teachers per senior secondary class

The above revised class-to-teacher ratios have already included the top up provisions for all schools¹ before the 2009/10 school year. The additional teachers provided for specific schools/improvement programmes² will continue to be given to eligible schools.

¹ The top up provisions for all schools include the additional teachers for split-class teaching, school librarian, additional Chinese Language teachers, additional teachers for remedial teaching, counselling and extra-curricular activities, and additional non-graduate teachers provided under Education Commission Report No. 5.

² The additional teachers provided for specific schools/improvement programmes, e.g. additional teachers for adopting more Chinese as the medium of instruction, additional teachers for supporting academic low achievers, additional teachers for Whole School Approach to Integrated Education and teachers for Enhanced Native-speaking English Teacher (NET) Scheme.

Cash grants provided for schools to employ additional teaching / ancillary staff

Grant	Purpose and Ambit	Amount
Capacity Enhancement Grant (CEG) (Recurrent)	To hire outside services and/or employ personnel on a temporary basis outside the permanent staff establishment	The grant for a 24-class secondary school is about \$0.5 million.
Senior Secondary Curriculum Support Grant (SSCSG) (Recurrent)	To recruit teachers or teaching assistants, procure services and/or learning and teaching materials to facilitate the implementation of the NSS curriculum.	The grant is a cash provision equivalent to the mid-point salary of 0.1 GM per NSS class. The disbursement of the grant had been advanced for one year to 2008/09 and enhanced to 0.15 GM per NSS class for a 4-year transitional period from 2008/09 to 2011/12. Schools with 15 NSS classes would receive around \$1 million (enhanced rate) and \$0.7 million in 2011/12 and 2012/13 respectively.
Diversity Learning Grant (DLG) (Recurrent)	To support schools in offering a diversified curriculum to meet the interests of students in the NSS academic structure. The following programmes would be offered: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Applied Learning (ApL; includes adapted ApL courses for students with special educational needs) - Other Languages - Other Programmes (including programmes for gifted students and network programmes) 	Subsidies provided are as follows: ApL : Each school is entitled to subsidies for a maximum of 120 enrolments per cohort. Schools with 20 students applying for this grant would receive around \$0.1 million per school year. Other Languages : \$3,500 per NSS student per year. Schools with 30 students applying for this grant would receive around \$0.1 million per school year. Other Programmes : \$7,000 per NSS class per year. Schools with 15 NSS classes would receive \$0.1 million per school year.
Liberal Studies (LS) Curriculum Support Grant (LSCSG) (Non-recurrent)	To enable schools to create favourable conditions for the introduction of LS in the early stage of the new academic structure and to lay a sound foundation for its future development. Schools can recruit staff, hire services and/or purchase learning and teaching materials to assist in the implementation of LS curriculum	Each school is entitled to a subsidy of \$0.32 million in the 2010/11 school year. An additional LSCSG (not exceeding \$0.16 million) would be provided upon schools' application in the 2012/13 school year.