

LCQ3: Elective subjects of the senior secondary curriculum

Following is a question by Hon Mrs Regina Ip and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (February 27):

Question:

Under the arrangements of the New Senior Secondary academic structure, apart from the four compulsory core subjects, schools may decide on their own to offer a certain number of elective subjects (with the average number of last school year being 11) out of 20 subjects which are Key Learning Area elective subjects, Applied Learning courses and six other language courses, and their students may choose to take two to three subjects among the subjects offered. It is learnt that in respect of some elective subjects (e.g. Combined Science, Integrated Science as well as Design and Applied Technology), the numbers of students taking and the numbers of schools offering such subjects have been persistently on the low side in recent years. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has assessed if there are faults in the curriculum designs of those subjects with persistently low student enrolments; if it has assessed and the outcome is in the affirmative, whether the Government will conduct a comprehensive review of the curriculum designs of such subjects; if it has not assessed, of the reasons for that; and

(2) whether it will consider consolidating those elective subjects which are offered by a small number of schools and have a low student enrolment, so that the schools concerned may concentrate their teaching resources on other elective subjects; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Our consolidated reply to the questions of Hon Mrs Regina Ip is as follows:

The primary aim of the senior secondary curriculum under the New Academic Structure (NAS) is to provide students with a broad and balanced curriculum under which they take two or three elective subjects (four at most) on top of four core subjects (i.e. Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics and Liberal Studies). The curriculum is also supplemented by a wide range of activities for "Other Learning Experiences" to broaden students' horizons and foster their whole-person development. Under the open curriculum framework, schools can offer students an appropriate and adequate choice of elective subjects from 20 senior secondary elective subjects, some 30 Applied Learning (ApL) courses and six Other Languages. This arrangement

not only caters for students' interests and needs, but also provides schools with sufficient flexibility to develop their school-based curricula in the light of their contexts as well as the needs of students.

Being an international city boasting a blend of Chinese and Western cultures, it is of the utmost importance for Hong Kong to nurture a pool of talent in various fields. The design of the senior secondary curriculum under the NAS is based on the development of both Hong Kong and the world, as well as local socio-cultural, economic and geographical factors, and reference has been made to the trends in curriculum development in other countries/regions. The senior secondary curriculum should also cater for students' diverse needs so as to enable them to choose suitable subjects according to their interests, aspirations and abilities. The student enrolment of each elective subject in every school year depends on an array of factors. In particular, the continuous decline in student population over the past few years has directly affected the student enrolment of elective subjects, while the requirements for admission to different departments of universities (e.g. prerequisite or non-prerequisite elective subjects) impact on the number of elective subjects taken by students. For instance, some universities or departments might set the order of admission priority based on the attainments in the best five or six subjects of candidates meeting the General Entrance Requirements. This might have led some candidates to focus on their strong subjects or even drop individual subjects in Secondary 5 or 6 in order to strive for better results. In this regard, the high or low student enrolment of an elective subject may not necessarily bear a relationship to whether there is room for improvement in its curriculum design.

We are aware that the numbers of students taking individual senior secondary elective subjects, such as Literature in English, Integrated Science, Technology and Living, Music and individual ApL courses (e.g. Applied Learning Chinese (for non-Chinese speaking students), Animal Care, Entrepreneurship for Small and Medium Enterprises), have been rather low. Yet, as stated above, in the context of the holistic design of school curriculum, we have to consider students' needs and school contexts from a professional angle to offer different senior secondary elective subjects including those with low student enrolments. In doing so, students with different aptitudes, abilities and backgrounds are provided with an adequate choice of subjects, hence catering for learner diversity and supporting students in multiple study and career pathways. Taking Combined Science and Integrated Science as examples, we provide two integrated science subjects, in addition to the traditional science subjects (including Physics, Chemistry and Biology), to not only meet students' need for taking science subjects to master essential scientific knowledge, but also give students space to consider acquiring the domains of knowledge in connection with subjects under other Key Learning Areas. In fact, given the increasingly diverse pathways to further studies, local tertiary institutions also offer bachelor's degree and diploma programmes of a cross-disciplinary/integrated nature which go beyond traditional subject learning.

At present, schools in general are offering about 11 elective subjects

at the senior secondary level. To give students a wider choice of subjects, the Education Bureau (EDB) has been providing schools with the Diversity Learning Grant (DLG) since the 2009/10 school year to encourage collaboration among schools on offering joint-school curricula of different senior secondary subjects (e.g. Music, Physical Education, Design and Applied Technology, Ethics and Religious Studies), hence optimising the use of resources across schools as well as catering for students' diverse interests. For now, over 150 secondary schools are involved in offering the joint-school curricula. The funding from the DLG can also be used to make arrangements for students to take Other Languages and/or ApL courses offered by course providers in order to cater for students' diverse learning needs. ApL courses cover six areas of studies, namely Creative Studies; Media and Communication; Business, Management and Law; Services; Applied Science; and Engineering and Production. Fewer than 5 000 students are enrolled in some 30 courses, each of which is taken by a fairly small number of students; however, taking into consideration the potential for broadening students' learning experiences and enabling them to learn fundamental theories and concepts through application and practice, ApL courses are meaningful subject choices.

The EDB has been monitoring the development of the senior secondary curriculum under the NAS since its launch in 2009. Regular meetings are also held by the committees on various senior secondary subjects under the Curriculum Development Council (CDC) to review the implementation of the subjects. Given that curriculum development is an ongoing process, the committees on various senior secondary subjects under the CDC will, in a timely manner, review and update the design of the curricula of senior secondary subjects as well as the examination and assessment arrangements in the light of the ongoing renewal of the school curriculum to respond to changes in society and students' needs.