

Survey on The Implementation of New Sixth Form Curriculum

**Education Department
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Abstract

Background

The new Sixth Form curriculum with 22 revised Advanced Level (AL) subjects and 18 newly-created Advanced Supplementary (AS) level subjects, was first introduced in September 1992. The first batch of students taking this new curriculum took their public examinations in April/May 1994.

To ascertain to what extent school would introduce the new AS level subjects and what problems schools might have in implementing the new curriculum, the Educational Research Section was entrusted with the task of conducting a survey on the implementation of the new Sixth Form curriculum. A Working Group was then formed in June 1992 with the following terms of reference:

- (a) to advise on the conduct of the survey;
- (b) to advise on the construction of survey questionnaires; and
- (c) to monitor progress of the whole project.

Subsequently in October 1992 the first phase of the survey was conducted. The findings were presented in an Interim Report prepared in April 1993. The present report is the final report of the whole project.

Objectives

The survey is aimed at answering the following questions:

- (a) How many AL and AS level subjects are being offered in schools?
- (b) How far do the S6/S7 teachers know the AL and AS level subject syllabuses?
- (c) What difficulties do the school principals, S6/S7 teachers and S6/S7 students perceive in operating, teaching and taking the AL and AS level subjects?
- (d) What measures have been proposed by school principals, teachers and students to resolve problems with the AL and AS level subjects?
- (e) What difficulties do the school principals, teachers and students perceive in adopting Chinese in public examinations of AL and AS subjects?
- (f) How far has the new Sixth Form curriculum been successful?

Method of Study

Three separate questionnaires for school principals, teachers and S6 students were mailed to schools in October 1992 to collect their views on the new curriculum. The identical questionnaires were mailed again in October 1993 together with an additional questionnaire for S7 students. This was done so that any change in the attitude of the respondents towards the new curriculum could be gauged and monitored.

Sampling Method

All government, aided, caput and bought-place private secondary (day) schools operating S6/S7 classes were invited to participate in this survey. English Foundation Schools, Direct Subsidy schools and non-bought-place private schools were excluded.

Each school was requested to nominate three teachers (for 92/93, teachers teaching S6 classes and for 93/94, teachers teaching S6/S7 classes) to complete the teacher questionnaire.

For S6 and S7 students, each school was asked to nominate one student from each stream (Arts, Science, Commerce or Engineering) to complete the student questionnaire.

No. of Questionnaires Returned

A total of 354 questionnaires were returned by school principals in November 1993, representing 97% of all public sector secondary schools operating S6/S7 classes in 1993/94 school year. Similarly 1055 teacher questionnaires were received, representing some 7.9% of all graduate teachers in secondary schools. A total 790 and 732 questionnaires were received from S6 and S7 students respectively, representing some 2.9% and 3.2% of the corresponding student population in 1993/94.

Initial Findings

The most popular course patterns (in terms of the number of students taking that pattern) in both 92/93 and 93/94 are the following:

	Streams offered	Most popular pattern	% of S6 Students (93/94)	% of S7 Students (93/94)
Anglo-Chinese Schools	Arts	2AL 1AS	45.6	49.1
	Science	3AL	62.9	63.4
	Commerce	3AL	47.5	46.3
Chinese Middle Schools	Arts	2AL 1AS	68.0	83.3
	Science	3AL	58.3	45.0
Prevocational Schools	Commerce	2AL 1AS	100.0	91.7
	Engineering	2AL 1AS	88.9	81.8

(The two language subjects “Use of English” and “Chinese Language and Culture” at AS Level have not been included in this table).

From the survey the five most popular AL and AS Level subject (in terms of the number of students taking the subject) for both S6 and S7 students in 93/94 are the following:

AL Subjects

Physics

Chemistry

Economics

Pure Mathematics

Geography

AS Subjects

Mathematics and Statistics

History

Chinese History

Applied Mathematics

Physics

These five subjects are exactly the top 5 most popular AL and AS subjects taken by all school candidates in the 1994 Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination. This shows that the student samples are truly representative samples.

No. of AL and AS Subjects Offered

The survey revealed the following average number of subjects offered in each school (including the two language subjects at AS level):

School Type	92/93		93/94	
	AL	AS	AL	AS
Anglo-Chinese Schools	8.0	4.1	8.3	4.3
Chinese Middle Schools	5.8	4.6	6.6	5.2
Prevocational Schools	3.9	4.1	3.8	4.1
All Schools	7.7	4.1	7.9	4.4

There is a tendency for schools to offer more AS level subjects in 93/94 than in 92/93. In 92/93, 83 schools (24.4%) did not offer any AS level subject apart from the two language subjects. This number dropped to 68 schools (19.2%) in 93/94.

Teachers' Understanding of the AL/AS Subject Syllabuses

In both 92/93 and 93/94 and for both AL and AS subjects, the aspect which teachers felt most unsure was "readiness of tertiary institutions to accept these subjects" (as fulfilling the requirements for admission) and the aspect which they felt most confident was "content of the syllabuses".

Difficulties Perceived by Principals, Teachers and Students

The single most difficult factor which school principals perceived in operating both AL and AS subjects was "Whether there are suitable teachers among the existing teaching staff".

On the other hand the S6/S7 teachers of both 93/94 and 92/93 perceived an identical set of 3 most difficult factors in teaching AL and AS subjects:

- To teach the syllabuses to an appropriate depth
- To select suitable textbooks
- How to match students' academic standard (with syllabus requirements)

The factor “Lack of understanding about the contents of the AS subjects chosen” was a common difficult factor which both S6 and S7 students faced in taking the new curriculum.

Measures Proposed by Principals, Teachers and Students

School principals of both 93/94 and 92/93 proposed the identical set of 3 most effective measures to resolve problems with both AL and AS subjects:

- Increase the no. of teachers for split-class teaching
- Offer more training courses for teachers
- Provide more resources to schools to improve the teaching facilities

School teachers of both 93/94 and 92/93 identified the following two measures as the top two most effective measures to resolve problems with both AL and AS subjects:

- Offer more training courses for teachers
- Provide sufficient textbooks and reference books for the new subjects

Both S6 and S7 students in both 93/94 and 92/93 years proposed the following measures as the 3 most effective measures in resolving problems in taking the new S6 curriculum:

- Publish sufficient textbooks and reference books for the new subjects
- Request universities/tertiary institutions to list out more clearly their admission requirements of various departments
- Offer more subject choices

Use of Chinese in Public Examinations

This survey revealed that both school principals and teachers perceived the following two factors as the two most difficult factors in using Chinese in AL/AS subject examinations (para. 7.4, para. 7.12):

- Insufficient textbooks written in Chinese
- May not be acceptable to parent

Both S6 and S7 students of 93/94 and 92/93 years perceived the following as the top 3 most difficult factors in using Chinese in examinations:

- May not be acceptable to universities/tertiary institutions
- Unfamiliar with special terms in Chinese
- English standard may be affected by coming into less contact with English

General Impression of the New Sixth Form Curriculum

The open question in the survey questionnaires seemed to suggest that the New Sixth Form Curriculum was most warmly received by S6/S7 students and least by school teachers. The S6/S7 students found that the syllabuses were not detailed enough and they were not clear about the requirements on the scope or depth of the syllabuses. The principals, on the other hand, requested that more support be given to schools.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this survey, the Working Group made the following recommendations:

- Continue to offer more training courses for teachers, particularly on the new subjects
- Provide more support to school teachers in the form of model answers, sample examination papers, teaching kits to facilitate their sixth form teaching
- Publish more reference books written in Chinese, particularly on Mathematics and Statistics (AS level), Biology (AL) and Engineering Science (AL)
- Clarification of entry requirements by tertiary institutions
- Consider the operation of some new subjects such as Practical Electricity, Economics, Geography at AS level.