





By Elizabeth Cheung and Lam Cho Wai

Six months before the New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum comes into force, some secondary school teachers are still uncertain about preparations for the four core subjects, of which Liberal Studies is considered the most challenging.

Ng Gene-bond, a Liberal Studies teacher of a direct subsidy scheme secondary school, said that the curriculum of this newly added core subject, on top of Chinese Language, English Language and Mathematics, is too broad for teachers to understand and fully familiarise.

According to the Liberal Studies Curriculum and Assessment Guide set by the Curriculum Development Council and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, there are three areas of study in this subject: Self and Personal Development, Society and Culture, and Science, Technology and the Environment.

Under these three areas, there are six modules covering a wide range of topics, including Personal Development and Interpersonal Relationships, Hong Kong Today, Modern China, Globalisation, Public Health, and Energy Technology and the Environment.

"It is impossible for teachers to get familiar with all the six modules equally well," said Mr Ng. "Since every teacher has their own specialised topics."

He added that there are insufficient teachers who are qualified to teach such a broad curriculum. However, most secondary schools do not employ extra Liberal Studies teachers.

Mr Ng also said that Liberal Studies teachers will be overstretched in supervising students for their

Independent Enquiry Study (IES), in which students are required to do individual projects on a topic related to the three areas of study.

“There are 200 IES projects in a form, but we have eight Liberal Studies teachers only. How can we follow such a large number of projects?” said Mr Ng.

He suggested that the government should increase fundings for schools to employ more teachers to alleviate the heavy workload.

Yip Lai-hung, a Liberal Studies teacher from another school in Yuen Long, said some students will be limited in their creativity in IES, which takes 20 percent of the total assessment, if teachers do not have enough teaching support.

She added that some teachers will impose certain limitations to students on their project, such as not allowing drama, and advising students not to choose some topics with which the teachers are not familiar with, in order to facilitate the supervision.

“It will limit students’ creativity and reduce their chances to learn more about some particular topics they are interested in. However, striking a balance about what can be achieved is necessary since teacher’s supervision on the projects is of great importance as well,” added Ms Yip.

Head of Liberal Studies panel of Po Leung Kuk Vicwood K. T. Chong Sixth Form College, Wallace Hui Chung-sing said that teachers with a science background may need some time to adapt to the different marking system of Liberal Studies.

Unlike science subjects in which marks are given on the basis of factual knowledge, marks are given based on whether students show their ability of critical thinking and common sense in the examination of Liberal Studies.

“Arts teachers are used to this kind of impression marking,” said Mr

Hui. “However, science teachers who are used to mark the answer point by point may need time to adapt.”

The Education Bureau (EDB) has provided secondary schools with grants to prepare for the new curriculum since the 2006/07 school year, for a period of three years.

Schools with 24 classes can receive an annual amount of HK\$86,000 which can be used for employing teacher assistants, purchasing teaching materials or equipments.

The authority is also organising workshops, courses and seminars for teachers and principals to familiarise with the curriculum of Liberal Studies, deploying teachers and course management, according to the former Chief Curriculum Development Officer (Liberal Studies Section) of the EDB, John Tan Kang.

Dr Tan said that the authority has a Liberal Studies Web Resources Platform which contains teaching materials prepared by other teachers and university academics. Chinese and English news clips from Television Broadcasts Limited are also provided for teachers to download.

Wong Hoi-kit, who will be the panel head of Liberal Studies of Baptist Lui Ming Choi Secondary School in the new academic year, said that the seminars and workshops offered by the EDB are useful.

However, he said that the website does not provide enough materials for teaching, probably because of the copyright problem.

Another senior official of the EDB Alice Ho Wong Shiu-fung, said the web resource platform will have a new interface next month with more updated television documentary programmes for viewing in class and downloadable newspaper articles.

In the new academic year, not only Liberal Studies teachers have to face new challenges, but also those who are teaching the other three

core subjects because of the changes in their curriculum.

English teacher Wendy Lau Wai-man said they will have to teach language in arts such as drama and poems. However, they received no trainings in undergraduate or education diploma programmes.

“The EDB offered a six-hour course for teachers on drama training, but afterwards teachers have to teach in total 50 hours in the whole curriculum,” said Ms Lau. “They do not have adequate skills and are tired of teaching and receiving intensive training at the same time.”



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1. Head of Liberal Studies panel of Po Leung Kuk Vicwood K. T. Chong Sixth Form College, Hui Chung-sing says science teachers may need some time to adapt to the different marking system of Liberal Studies.

2. Former Chief Curriculum Development Officer (Liberal Studies Section) of EDB, John Tan Kang says the authority is organising workshops and courses for teachers who are going to teach Liberal Studies.