White paper

How too many "Singletons" will impose limits on student choices and restrict staffing flexibility.

Definition:
"Singletons" is the term we use to describe the existence of only one class of a particular subject type. Generally speaking, singletons will impose limits on student choices and restrict staffing flexibility.

If there are seven lines, as soon as there are more than seven subjects that run on only one line, there is the potential for conflict. In small schools, singletons can be unavoidable but as a school grows, the path chosen for growth can have a significant impact on future success.

To explore the impact of singletons we will look at how two different schools handle the same curriculum requirement.

Curriculum Constraint Required:
In Yr9 this year, students choose 2 electives from Computing, Art, Food Tech, and Music.

School A: Less of More
The method used here is to run less classes of more subject types. This means there are several "Singleton" subjects. The school decides to offer more subjects. Web Design, Programming, Ceramics, Drawing, Asian Food, European Food, Instrumental Music and Band. Between 6 and 15 students choose every subject.

This creates several issues for the school to address. Can the school afford to run all of these classes? They might be able to wear the extra cost as a once off, however what do they do if the same situation occurs in the following years. This is the easiest way for a school to go bankrupt. Alternatively, which subjects do they drop? This can be a difficult decision when there are staff, students and parents excited about the different topics. Staff may have already spent time preparing for the different courses. The courses may have been promoted extensively to the general public to encourage new students to the school. Timetabling singleton subjects can be more complicated particularly if staffing becomes even more specialised. For example, the same teacher is not able to teach Asian Food and European Food.

For a school to use this method make sure staff, students and parents are aware that they will not necessarily get the subjects they wanted. Reserve preferences are essential, which not only saves time in the re-counselling process, but assists in deciding which subjects will run. The realistic expectation that a student may not get their first preference is re-inforced by doing this.

School B: More of Less
The method used here is to run more classes of less subject types. This means there are very few "Singleton" subjects. The school decides to continue with the existing subjects and run more classes. Between 18 and 30 students choose every subject.

There is minimal counselling required as there is a greater chance for students to get the subjects they want because the classes exist on more than one line. The school can justify running these classes with reasonable class sizes and the expectation of staff, students and parents is achieved easily. Timetabling this structure gives greater staffing flexibility as there are more classes of the same subject making staffing swaps more possible. We recommend the use of reserve preferences with this method to save time if any re-counselling is necessary.

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