

## Ghana Growth and Development Platform

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### STRESS-TESTING DOUBLE-TRACK SHS: 16-WEEK TWO-SEMESTER ACADEMIC CALENDAR HAS STRUCTURAL DESIGN DEFECTS

The recent announcement by Government to introduce a 16-week two-semester double-track enrolment programme for Senior High Schools (SHS) has generated a lot of heated discussions in the public space. There are those who believe it is an excellent initiative which will improve access to secondary education in the country while there are others who have expressed concerns that it may dilute the quality of education. The Ghana Growth and Development Platform (GGDP), in line with our mission to offer qualitative analysis on public policies (and offer alternative policy options where applicable), has taken interest in the ongoing debate and we wish to chip in our contribution.

Our independent analysis of the 16-week double-track system shows that, as per its current configuration, its implementation will pose a major challenge after a maximum period of 18 months. Thus, it may not be able to last for the five-to-seven-year period that the Ministry of Education (MoE) has proposed unless there are immediate remedial actions to address its structural design defects. We arrived at our conclusion applying a stress-testing methodology where we analysed how the system will function beyond the first two years of implementation.

Our findings reveal that the schema/chart which the MoE has advertised for the rollout of the new policy appears feasible ONLY because it takes advantage of the vacations of the Form 2s who are currently on a single track. Our projection is that, in 18 months time, when the two single tracks leave the system, the double track for the 2020/2021 academic year will run into a *cul de sac* and the essential features of the policy, as announced by the MoE, will end up being redundant. The basis of this assertion is the fact that, in the scenario of the 2020/2021 academic year, there will be six streams of SHS students and, without any single track in the system, they will not be able to take advantage of any vacation space.

In the above scenario, there will be five options available and each has implications.

- a. The first option will be to shorten the entire academic calendar to last for 81 school days instead of 162 school days. If this happens, the students will lose valuable teaching days and contact hours that will affect their ability to complete their syllabus.
- b. The second option will be to extend the entire academic calendar to last for 324 school days instead of 162 school days. If this happens, the SHS years will exceed three (3) years and it will also delay the entry of new streams.

- c. The third option would be to provide enough infrastructures to accommodate at least two streams within the next 18 months. If this happens, it will temporarily resolve the challenge but it will lead to congestion on the various campuses.
- d. The fourth option would be to provide enough infrastructures to accommodate three streams within the next 18 months. If this happens, it will completely resolve the challenge but it will also render the whole idea of a double track moot.
- e. The fifth option would be for MoE to review the 16-week period into an appropriate duration to forestall unforeseeable challenges.

In conclusion we wish to state that we have no opposition, whatsoever, towards the implementation of the double track SHS programme. We are in agreement with Government that it will lead to an increase in enrolment figures, reduce class size and, more importantly, make efficient use of infrastructure. The only problem, presently, is with the 16 weeks. We, therefore, wish to add our voice to the calls for the MoE to engage more extensively with all relevant stakeholders and solicit inputs to smoothen implementation of the policy.

Signed:

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