

EDB clarification

In response to allegations made by the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union (PTU) today (August 19) that the professional consultancy service for senior secondary Liberal Studies "textbooks" was unprofessional and subject to political censorship, the Education Bureau (EDB) expressed deep regret over the allegations which were untrue.

A spokesman for the EDB explained that the provision of one-off professional consultancy service was triggered by the social incidents last year. In view of the escalating social incidents, the public has been very concerned about the hate speech on the Internet and suspected bullying cases as well as the biased teaching materials, including the learning materials of senior secondary Liberal Studies (LS). The public is worried that the improper contents of the teaching materials would mislead students who are mentally and psychologically immature, and even spread hatred and prejudice. People even doubted whether the EDB had abandoned monitoring the quality of the "textbooks". Both the EDB and publishers have received a considerable number of complaints.

Therefore, the EDB has introduced the special arrangement to provide professional consultancy service to the publishers of LS "textbooks" so as to improve the quality of these "textbooks" and to ensure that the "textbooks" are in line with the curriculum aims, objectives and learning focuses. The professional consultancy service was provided by a professional team, comprising subject inspectors, university academics and education professionals.

The spokesman said, "Since the implementation of the New Senior Secondary Academic Structure, LS has been a core subject for more than 10 years. The textbooks currently available on the market have never been reviewed by the EDB. They are entirely written according to the authors' own interpretation of the curriculum. The degree of rigour of content and expression is different from that of the formal textbooks."

"The publishers voluntarily participated in the professional consultancy service and refined the textbooks, with a view to sieving out the inaccurate parts from the rest. This is for ensuring that the information is correct, based on facts, keeping abreast of the times, as well as clear and easy to understand, while avoiding the possibility of exaggeration, inaccuracy or misleading students' understanding. These would help students construct knowledge and develop positive values. Their efforts and professionalism deserve recognition."

The spokesman said the feedback and justifications were made after interactions and discussions between the team and the publishers. The revisions, ranging from "textbook" content, the use of words and sentences, pictures, cartoons to the arrangement of layout, had been made entirely by the publishers themselves. The indiscreet allegation by the PTU that the professional consultancy service is akin to political censorship is totally

unfounded, based on twisted facts, and for deliberately smearing the service.

He stressed that the revised content must be compared in juxtaposition with the curriculum aims and objectives, and the content should be read thoroughly to understand the intention of the revisions made by the publishers. The revisions should not be taken out of the context for conjuring up pointless criticisms and triggering one-sided and politicised controversies. The PTU's claims that the professional consultancy service was unprofessional and was "a political censorship even more stringent than the formal review of textbooks" are totally unfounded. The EDB strongly condemns the PTU's attempts to judge the bureau's service through a politically-coloured lens and politicise the professional work of education again.

In addition, there were news reports which quoted people in the education sector as urging the authorities to review LS "textbooks" again as their contents may have breached the National Security Law. The spokesman stressed that publishers have the responsibility to review textbook contents regularly and to revise and improve textbook contents continuously as and when necessary.

He said, "Whether the National Security Law exists or not, textbooks should not have any contents which are against the law. With the implementation of the National Security Law, textbook contents should be reviewed in order to cover relevant materials of the subject and enable students to understand the law correctly. Meanwhile, the EDB has earlier issued preliminary guidelines to schools on the implementation of the National Security Law. We will also develop relevant teaching resources and teacher training courses to support schools and teachers."

The spokesman reiterated that the implementation of the LS subject has long been a matter of concern among different sectors of society and has even given rise to controversies of a political nature. As the department responsible for education affairs in Hong Kong, the EDB, upon discovering the problems with the implementation of the LS subject, has the obligation to act in the interest of students' well being by giving professional advice and taking follow-up actions to rectify mistakes and bring the LS subject back to the education profession.

The EDB will continue to maintain close contact with various stakeholders and work with them towards our goals in education, persevere in our mission, and provide students with quality learning materials so as to nurture them to be knowledgeable and responsible citizens and nationals.