

EDB Task Force completes investigation of mechanism of HKDSE Examination question paper setting of History subject

Arising from a problematic question of the History paper of the 2020 Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination, the Education Bureau (EDB) set up a Task Force in June 2020 to understand the HKDSE examination question setting, moderation and approval mechanism, the compliance of the 2020 History examination question paper development process with the mechanism as well as to make recommendations for improvement. Members of the Task Force include officers from the EDB, representatives from the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA), and former HKEAA Council members (including a retired school principal and an academic from the tertiary sector). The Task Force has completed the investigation, and presented the findings and recommendations to the HKEAA Council in its meeting this evening (November 19), with a view to preventing similar incidents from arising again.

A spokesman for the EDB said, "After a careful review, the Task Force noted that the HKEAA had put in place certain quality assurance measures for all stages of the question paper development and had provided to its staff members a comprehensive set of internal rules and regulations. These measures serve to ensure that the Moderation Committee for each subject will draw on the collective responsibility from its members in the question paper development process, and safeguard against having the process dominated by one or a few individuals.

"The effective implementation of these quality assurance measures, however, requires all personnel concerned to carry out their designated duties appropriately under strict compliance with relevant rules and regulations. Yet, the Task Force observed that among the causes of the incident, an HKEAA officer did not comply with some of the HKEAA rules and regulations, and did not adhere to the quality assurance measures in the development of the question papers. There were also inadequacies in the existing HKEAA quality assurance measures that might have hampered the monitoring of the question paper development process."

The spokesman said that the Task Force found that in the different stages of the question paper development process including pre-setting, moderation, checking and proofreading, the HKEAA officer concerned did not strictly comply with the HKEAA rules and regulations. For example, only parts of the draft questions and materials discussed in the pre-setting stage were provided to the Moderation Committee for information or discussion, the set of guidelines on handling sensitive issues was not provided to the Moderation Committee nor were members reminded to observe such guidelines, and comments

received in the checking and proofreading stage were not provided to the Moderation Committee or the Chief Examiner for information and consideration. This has hampered the effective implementation of the principle of collective responsibility of the Moderation Committee in the question paper development process, and may result in the problems not being detected early and addressed in time.

The spokesman said the Task Force had made recommendations to the HKEAA, including the enhancement of the monitoring of compliance with quality assurance measures through strengthening the involvement of senior staff members of the HKEAA, providing all Moderation Committee members with information on all meetings (including pre-setting meetings and moderation meetings) as well as all feedback received at the different stages of the question paper development process to prevent similar incidents from arising again, thereby ensuring the sustained quality of the HKDSE Examination and examination questions.

The spokesman said the EDB will continue to work closely with the HKEAA to put in place measures to implement the recommendations with a view to ensuring the close alignment between curriculum and assessment of the HKDSE Examination, as well as upholding the high recognition of the HKEAA as a professional assessment organisation.

The recommendations of the Task Force are as follows:

1. Strengthen the involvement of senior staff members of the HKEAA in monitoring the quality assurance measures through introducing a new reporting channel for all Moderation Committee members to relay their feedback regarding the entire question paper development process to one or more designated senior staff members of the HKEAA, who in turn should review and report any unresolved divergent views/disputes documented in the records of meetings of the Moderation Committee to a designated committee under the HKEAA Council, which comprises senior staff members of the HKEAA and experts nominated by the EDB, for timely handling and follow up;
2. Enhance the guidelines in the HKEAA internal manual for question paper development work governing the conduct of all meetings in the question paper development process (including pre-setting meetings and moderation meetings), such that all Moderation Committee members would be informed of every meeting to safeguard the principle of collective responsibility for the question paper development process;
3. Ensure proper documentation and reporting of meetings throughout the entire question paper development process, including the compilation of summaries of moderation meetings for record-keeping purposes and the logging of crucial issues discussed and decisions made, to be endorsed by the Moderation Committee;
4. Ensure that the feedback gathered in the entire question paper development process is appropriately provided to the Moderation Committee for attention and consideration in a concluding meeting, in which the final version of the question papers should be provided for collective endorsement and signing

off;

5. Enhance the nomination process of Moderation Committee members and expand the pool of potential candidates from the school and tertiary sectors, require concrete evidence of qualifications and suitability of the nominated candidates with clear justifications for selection and rejection, as well as appoint curriculum officers from the EDB as ex-officio members;

6. Strengthen the professional development for the staff members of the HKEAA on the latest knowledge and technology in setting high quality questions and examinations, and the pre-service briefing for Moderation Committee members and other question paper development personnel to familiarise them with their roles and functions, as well as the procedures of each step of the question paper development process so that all personnel concerned would be able to offer professional views, especially on the alignment between curriculum and assessment;

7. Strike a balance between confidentiality and transparency of the question paper development process by strengthening communication between the Moderation Committee and relevant committees under the Curriculum Development Council and the HKEAA, such as the Subject Committee, to ensure better alignment between curriculum and assessment; and

8. Examine the relevance of the findings and recommendations and consider whether they are applicable to other HKDSE Category A subjects, and collaborate with the EDB to formulate and implement relevant improvement measures promptly and effectively.

The EDB has uploaded the Task Force's major findings and recommendations to the EDB webpage

(www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/sch-admin/sch-quality-assurance/reports/others/EDB_Task_Force_Findings_And_Recommendations_EN.pdf

) for public information.