

LCQ 15: Professional conduct of members of Moderation Committees

Following is a question by the Hon Holden Chow and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (June 10):

Question:

One of the questions in Paper 1 of the History subject of this year's Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination requested candidates to make reference to the information provided in the question and then answer whether they agreed to the following statement: "Japan did more good than harm to China in the period 1900-45". There have been public comments that since the invasion of China and atrocities committed by Japan in that period were too numerous to list, causing indelible pain to the country and nation, the statement obviously confounds right and wrong. The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) has responded that, as in the case of other HKDSE subject examinations, a moderation committee (MC) is responsible for setting questions and drafting marking guidelines for the History subject. The MC of the History subject comprises a chief examiner, a setter or co-setters, moderators and an assessment development manager of HKEAA. It has been reported that the manager concerned has repeatedly made biased remarks on social media. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows if HKEAA will initiate an investigation into the aforesaid incident, including whether any MC member has, having been affected by his or her personal political stance, set questions which confound right and wrong; if HKEAA will, of the relevant mechanisms for investigation and penalty;

(2) of the measures put in place by the Education Bureau (EDB) to prevent the recurrence of similar incidents, and whether the EDB will make improvement recommendations on the composition and operation of MCs; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it knows the number of MC members punished in the past five years for having violated the established mechanism or codes of professional conduct, and the details of the punishments; whether HKEAA will never appoint such persons as MC members again?

Reply:

President,

Question 2(c) of History Paper 1 of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination this year has aroused great controversy in society. When there are problems in the implementation of curriculum and

assessment, especially those involving education and examination and assessment organisations, the Education Bureau (EDB) has the responsibility to safeguard the education profession, take corresponding rectifying actions in the interests of students and the public, as well as address the public concern. The EDB has already explained the relevant reasoning in its statement dated May 14, at the press conference on May 15 and in the paper for the Legislative Council Panel on Education on May 25. Currently, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) takes full responsibility for the work of the Moderation Committee (MC). The EDB has no knowledge of the relevant duties (including the list of members) as they are confidential. The EDB has referred Parts (1) and (3) of the question which involve confidential information on MC to the HKEAA. The related information is consolidated as follows:

(1) The EDB has asked the HKEAA to conduct an internal investigation on why there was the problematic History examination question in the HKDSE Examination this year. According to the existing information provided by the HKEAA, regardless of their background and personal belief, MC members have to comply with the HKEAA's established procedures and follow the curriculum and assessment requirements when setting examination questions to ensure that candidates are assessed by the examination papers in an effective and fair manner. MC will set questions and marking guidelines in accordance with the subject's Curriculum and Assessment Guide and Assessment Framework. The HKEAA has mechanisms in place for checking and proofreading the contents of examination papers at various stages of question setting to ensure the quality of examination questions.

Concerning the controversies caused by recent media's disclosure of messages posted by HKEAA staff in their personal social media accounts, the HKEAA reiterates that employees are bound by the HKEAA's relevant regulations, procedures, rules and policies when performing their duties. The HKEAA has a mechanism to follow up staff discipline issues. It will follow up the incident fairly and impartially having regard to the relevant facts, and its Employee Code of Conduct and regulations. An employee who is found to have committed negligence when performing his duties or compromised professional ethics, integrity and professionalism will be subject to disciplinary actions in accordance with the gravity of the case and the responsibility to be borne. For the sake of procedural justice, the HKEAA will not make further comment at this stage.

(2) In view of the grave public concern over the History examination question in the HKDSE Examination, the EDB will assign a team of officers who are familiar with the curriculum and quality assurance to the HKEAA to study the question setting, vetting and approval mechanism under the HKDSE Examination and whether the mechanism has been strictly complied with in the process of question setting and question moderation of the History examination paper this year. In addition to the EDB officers, members of the education sector and representatives of the HKEAA will also participate in the review. The EDB will also review the existing mechanism and fulfil its monitoring role in the HKDSE Examination, with a view to ensuring the sustained quality of the HKDSE Examination and examination questions. Upon completion of the review, the

task force will recommend follow up actions and improvement measures.

(3) According to the information provided by the HKEAA, no MC member was penalised in the last five years for violation of the established mechanism or codes of professional conduct.