

LCQ13: Liberal Studies subject under the senior secondary education

Following is a question by the Hon Cheung Kwok-kwan and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (November 13):

Question:

In September this year, the Education Bureau (EDB) introduced professional consultancy services under which publishers may voluntarily submit their textbooks for the Liberal Studies (LS) subject under the senior secondary education to the EDB for a professional team to offer professional advice and recommendations on the contents of the textbooks in the light of the curriculum objectives and goals of the subject. The EDB will upload onto the EDB webpage a list of LS textbooks which have undergone the professional consultancy procedure and completed the follow-up actions on the recommendations received. On the other hand, it has been reported that some LS teachers have earlier been alleged to have distinct political stances, have made hostile remarks against the Police on the Internet, and have compiled for their schools LS teaching materials (self-compiled teaching materials) and examination questions with obviously biased views. Regarding the LS subject under the senior secondary education, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the names, number and proportion of the publishers which have so far indicated that they will use the professional consultancy services, and how such proportion compares with that anticipated by the EDB;

(2) of the following details of the professional consultancy services: (i) whether publishers are required to submit the full contents of their textbooks (if not, which parts or chapters are required to be submitted), (ii) the background of the members of the professional team, and (iii) the bases on which the team offers advice or recommendations to publishers;

(3) in relation to the LS textbooks which have not undergone the professional consultation procedure or have not been amended in the light of the advice or recommendations offered by the professional team, whether there will be other impacts on such textbooks, apart from their exclusion from the list of LS textbooks on the EDB webpage;

(4) whether publishers are required to pay for the professional consultancy services; if so, of the amount of money involved, and whether the EDB has assessed the impact of such an expense on textbook prices;

(5) whether the EDB will require or encourage schools to adopt only those textbooks which have undergone the professional consultation procedure as the main LS teaching materials;

(6) whether the EDB has plans to change the nature of the professional consultancy services from voluntary to mandatory;

(7) given that nowadays quite a number of schools use self-compiled teaching materials for the LS subject, how the EDB ensures that such self-compiled teaching materials meet the criteria of objectiveness, fairness and impartiality; whether the EDB has considered extending the professional consultancy services to self-compiled teaching materials;

(8) whether the EDB will study establishing channels for teachers, parents or students to make enquiries or complaints as to whether the contents of their schools' self-compiled LS teaching materials are biased or untrue;

(9) as it has been reported that the EDB has earlier appointed all the 11 Curriculum Development Officers of the Liberal Studies Section under the Curriculum Development Institute as inspectors and authorized them to visit schools for the purpose of inspecting LS teaching, of the details of such inspections; how the EDB will follow up the situation where the inspectors have found that there is room for improvement or improvement must be made in LS teaching of a certain school; and

(10) whether the EDB has formulated measures to ensure that LS teachers are of good characters and uphold professionalism and impartiality in teaching?

Reply:

President,

The Liberal Studies (LS) subject under the senior secondary curriculum aims at helping students enhance their awareness of personal, social, national and global developments as well as scientific and technological advancement; broaden their knowledge base; connect knowledge acquired from different subjects; and consider issues from multiple perspectives. It also seeks to develop students' positive values and attitudes towards life so that they can become informed and responsible citizens. Teachers should teach the subject in accordance with the curriculum aims and objectives in a serious and professional manner. A wide range of learning and teaching resources, including those developed by the Education Bureau (EDB), should be adopted flexibly. In view of the above features of the LS, and the evolving nature of most contemporary issues involved in the curriculum, there is no mechanism for submitting LS "textbooks" for review at the moment. Nor is there any Recommended Textbook List for this subject. However, books published in the form of "textbooks" are made available for sale in the market, and adopted by quite a number of schools.

In view of the social incidents in recent months, some members of the community, alleging some teaching materials used in lessons as containing biased views, are concerned that such materials may cause negative impacts on students. They are particularly concerned that classroom teaching and learning materials for senior secondary LS which are not objective and

impartial will mislead students who are mentally immature. The EDB fully understands such public concerns and, to safeguard the well-being of students, has introduced a special measure to provide a free professional consultancy service to publishers with the aim of reviewing the quality of published senior secondary LS "textbooks" to achieve the curriculum aims and objectives.

Our reply to the questions raised by the Hon Cheung Kwok-kwan is as follows:

(1) to (6) The special measure of providing a one-off professional consultancy service to publishers in ensuring the quality of the published senior secondary LS "textbook" is a consensus reached after discussion between the EDB and the Hong Kong Association of Professional Education Publishing Limited. It is generally supported by publishers. The publishers participate in the service on a voluntary basis and are not required to pay any fees to the EDB. They shall undertake to duly follow our professional advice and make amendments to enhance the quality of their LS "textbooks" as early as possible. As at mid-October 2019, seven major publishers of LS "textbooks" participating in the consultancy service have submitted a total of ten sets of all the latest versions of LS "textbooks" (including the English versions) to the EDB. According to our understanding, the senior secondary LS "textbooks" commonly used in schools are published by these seven publishers.

A professional team, comprising subject inspectors, university academics and education professionals, has been set up to provide feedback and advice professionally in accordance with the curriculum aims and objectives of the LS. The team will provide feedback and advice without any political considerations. The EDB will scrutinise the "textbooks" in phases and the publishers are expected to complete the refinements of their "textbooks" by the end of this school year. Where necessary, the EDB will exchange professional views with the publishers to further enhance the quality of LS "textbooks".

We have uploaded the list of voluntary publisher participants onto our webpage (www.edb.gov.hk/tc/curriculum-development/resource-support/textbook-info/ls.html). The list of LS "textbooks" and the relevant volumes which have undergone the professional consultation will be published on the EDB's webpage stepwisely in due course for schools and public's information. The EDB will also explain the consultancy service to schools and teachers continually through channels such as seminars for teachers, meetings with school councils/school heads associations and curriculum development visits. Schools may make reference to the relevant list of "textbooks" when selecting learning and teaching materials for the new school year.

The EDB will continue to develop learning and teaching resources for senior secondary LS, such as the LS Curriculum Resources Booklet Series covering all the modules of the curriculum, and develop the LS Web-based Resource Platform (ls.edb.hkedcity.net) with a broad diversity of contents,

for free use by schools. In addition, the EDB has disseminated, through circulars, to schools the requirements and criteria for selecting learning and teaching resources. Various kinds of professional training programmes have also been organised for teachers for this purpose. Teachers are required to select quality learning and teaching resources which are in line with the curriculum aims and objectives. Also, they should remain open-minded and impartial in teaching so as to enhance the effectiveness of learning and teaching and develop students' positive values and attitudes. Taking into account the experience of the professional consultancy service, the EDB will consider the long-term quality assurance measures for the subject, including the feasibility of extending the existing textbook review mechanism to cover LS "textbooks".

(7), (8) and (10) On school-based resource materials as well as learning and teaching, the school management has the responsibility for ensuring that school-based materials of various subjects, including the LS, are in line with the respective curriculum aims and objectives. Also, they should remind teachers to adopt suitable learning and teaching strategies, guide students in an objective, rational and impartial manner, respect different views and refrain from promoting their political views.

The EDB attaches great importance to teachers' professional conduct. Teachers should adopt a neutral stance and analyse issues using diversified resources from multiple perspectives. Teachers should guide students to express their views in a peaceful and rational manner. Teachers serve as students' role models through teaching by words and examples. Their words and actions must be in compliance with the professional conduct and meet the standard as expected by the public. If any complaints relating to suspected professional misconduct are received, the EDB will investigate each case, monitor the conduct of teachers in accordance with the Education Ordinance, and follow up on all suspected cases seriously. For serious cases, the registration of the teacher concerned may be cancelled. As employers, schools are responsible for managing their staff and monitoring their performance, including matters relating to teachers' conduct and discipline. For suspected cases of teachers' professional misconduct, the EDB will keep close contact with schools and urge the schools to follow up seriously. Should members of the public have any views on the teaching materials or teachers' professional conduct of individual schools, they may approach the schools concerned or the EDB.

(9) EDB officers have been monitoring the quality of learning and teaching through external school reviews, focus inspections on different subjects and curriculum development visits. The EDB has recently appointed officers from the LS Section of the Curriculum Development Institute (CDI) to double as inspectors. The purpose of engaging these officers is to sustain the professionalism in curriculum development through the collaborative efforts with inspectors from the Quality Assurance Sections (QAS) in conducting curriculum development visits-cum-focus inspections. The procedures, requirements and follow-up actions of focus inspections, including the focus inspections on the LS carried out jointly by the CDI and QAS, are consistent among all subjects. Through scrutiny of relevant documents (such as

curriculum documents, student assignments and examination papers), discussions with school personnel as well as observation of lessons and activities in relation to the subject concerned, inspectors get to understand the implementation of the curriculum in schools. Based on the school context, inspectors evaluate the subject performance and provide schools with specific professional advice for their continuous improvement in the implementation of the subject curriculum.

The synergy achieved from curriculum development visits-cum-focus inspections conducted jointly by Curriculum Development Officers of the LS Section and QAS inspectors can help schools continue to enhance the effectiveness of learning and teaching of the LS based on findings of focus inspections. Also, the CDI can improve the curriculum design and develop more suitable teaching resources with reference to the learning and teaching situation observed during inspection for promoting continuous development in learning and teaching. Should the quality of learning and teaching of a school fall short of satisfaction, the EDB will take follow-up actions in accordance with the established mechanism, such as urging the incorporated management committee/school management committee to make improvement based on the inspection report, encouraging the school to seek school-based support services from us, and, if necessary, arranging a follow-up inspection to ensure that the school has taken appropriate follow-up actions to address the recommendations made in the focus inspection for improving the learning and teaching effectiveness of the subject.