

LCQ14: Language proficiency assessment for teachers

Following is a question by the Hon Mrs Regina Ip and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (July 7):

Question:

Since 2001, the authorities have held the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers once every year to assess if teachers and aspiring teachers have achieved the language proficiency needed for teaching the English Language subject or the Putonghua subject in schools. Candidates who have obtained Level 3 or above in all papers of the assessment are regarded as meeting the language proficiency requirement (LPR) for teaching the relevant subject in schools. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) in respect of the serving teachers who participated respectively in the (i) English Language and (ii) Putonghua assessments of this year, of (a) their number, (b) the percentage of that number in the total number of candidates, and (c) the percentage of them meeting LPR;

(2) given that as far as the English Language assessment is concerned, (i) on average 44.6 per cent of candidates obtained Level 3 or above in the paper on Writing from 2017 to 2021, and such a percentage was far lower than the relevant percentage for the other three papers (i.e. Reading, Listening and Speaking), and (ii) 73.1 per cent of this year's candidates obtained Level 3 or above in the paper on Reading, and such a percentage was a significant drop from the relevant average percentage of the previous four years (i.e. 85.7 per cent), whether it has assessed the causes for such performance of the candidates;

(3) whether the Education Bureau will encourage more serving teachers who are teaching other subjects to take part in such assessments; and

(4) of the new measures in place to enhance teachers' proficiency in English Language and Putonghua?

Reply:

President,

We endeavour to nurture students to be biliterate and trilingual. To attain this goal, the quality of teachers is of utmost importance. Since 2000, the Education Bureau (EDB) has implemented the Language Proficiency Requirement (LPR) policy, which is applicable to all teachers of English Language and Putonghua holding a regular post in local public sector schools,

schools participating in the Direct Subsidy Scheme, as well as private primary and secondary day schools offering a full curriculum. Teachers can meet the LPR through taking the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (LPAT) or applying for exemption. The LPAT is administered by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) as commissioned by the EDB. The assessments papers for English Language include Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking, whereas those for Putonghua include Listening and Recognition, Pinyin and Speaking. All new/newly deployed teachers of English Language/Putonghua holding a regular post should have met the LPR in all the aforesaid core language skills before taking up the teaching of the respective language subjects. They are required to pass the Classroom Language Assessment (CLA), which takes the form of lesson observation conducted by language specialists of the EDB to assess English Language/Putonghua teachers' ability of using classroom language, within the first year upon taking up the posts.

Meanwhile, English teachers with relevant degrees (e.g. majoring in English Language) and teacher training in teaching English Language, or a Bachelor of Education degree majoring in English Language, may apply for full exemption from the LPR and hence need not take the LPAT. For Putonghua teachers who hold the Certificate for the Test of Advanced Proficiency in Putonghua conducted by the HKEAA and have attained a pass or above in Listening, Transcription and Speaking (including Reading, Presentation and Conversation), they will be exempted from the papers of Listening and Recognition, Pinyin, and Speaking. Holders of the Certificate for the Test of Proficiency in Putonghua (Grade B, Level 2 or above) awarded by the State Language Commission will be exempted from the Speaking paper in the LPAT (Putonghua).

Our reply to the Hon Mrs Regina Ip's question is as follows:

(1) The targeted participants of the LPAT are people aspiring to be teachers of English Language or Putonghua who are unable to attain the LPR through exemption (please see the above for details). As teachers of English Language and Putonghua have to attain the LPR before taking up the teaching of respective subjects, candidates sitting for the LPAT are mainly teachers who are teaching subjects other than the two language subjects, and people who have not yet joined the profession but aspire to be English Language and Putonghua teachers, such as university students currently studying programmes not related to English Language. In other words, the assessment results of the LPAT do not reflect the language proficiency of serving English Language and Putonghua teachers.

As the LPAT is a public examination with no restrictions on the backgrounds of candidates, their backgrounds are not related to the assessment. Candidates may choose whether to provide information on their backgrounds (e.g. whether they are serving teachers) or not, and the HKEAA and the EDB will not verify their identities. In addition, as English Language and Putonghua teachers have to attain relevant LPR before joining the profession or taking up the teaching of the relevant subjects, serving teachers of these two language subjects are not required to sit for the LPAT.

Therefore, the performance of candidates in the assessment each year does not reflect the language proficiency of the serving teachers of the two language subjects. To avoid misunderstanding, we consider that it is more appropriate to provide the overall assessment results of the candidates. The overall assessment results of the LPAT in 2021 are as follows:

English Language papers:

	Number of candidates	Number and percentage of candidates meeting the LPR (Level 3 or above)
Reading	950	694 (73.1 per cent)
Writing	1 088	528 (48.5 per cent)
Listening	879	713 (81.1 per cent)
Speaking	957	679 (71.0 per cent)

Putonghua papers:

	Number of candidates	Number and percentage of candidates meeting the LPR (Level 3 or above)
Listening and Recognition	1 212	783 (64.6 per cent)
Pinyin	1 115	725 (65.0 per cent)
Speaking	569	435 (76.4 per cent)

(2) The LPAT is a standards-referenced assessment, meaning that the levels are awarded according to the performance of candidates against prescribed standards with no pre-set pass rate for each year. In terms of paper setting, moderation and marking, the HKEAA strictly adheres to the established, rigorous and standardised procedures every year to maintain the professionalism and stability of the personnel involved in each testing paper, in order to ensure the validity of the assessment. As the papers on the core language skills (for English Language, the papers include Reading, Listening, Writing and Speaking) are set for assessing different competencies, performance across papers is not comparable. Besides, as candidates' backgrounds vary from year to year and the candidature is not large, overall performance may be easily affected by the performance of individual candidates. Hence, comparing the attainment rates of different cohorts of candidates is also of limited significance. To enable the public to understand the candidates' language proficiency, Assessment Reports are released by the HKEAA and the EDB every year to report the observations on candidates' performance, including their strengths and areas for improvement, for public reference. The reports have been uploaded onto the websites of the EDB and the HKEAA.

(3) The LPR policy has been implemented since 2000. From the 2006/07 school year onwards, all serving English Language and Putonghua teachers holding a regular post have attained the LPR. In the 2020/21 school year, since face-

to-face classes were suspended for a relatively long period due to COVID-19, affecting the arrangements for the CLA, the teachers being assessed will receive notification of the assessment results in August 2021 to confirm whether they have passed the CLA. As the supply of English Language and Putonghua teachers in recent years is generally sufficient to meet the demand, serving teachers of other subjects may not need to be redeployed to teach English Language or Putonghua and hence need not take the LPAT. When making long-term planning on manpower deployment, if schools see the need to deploy teachers of other subjects to teach English Language and Putonghua in future, they should encourage teachers to get equipped to meet the LPR as early as possible, and taking the LPAT is one of the ways to do so.

(4) The EDB has always encouraged teachers to pursue continuing education and strive for excellence in order to enhance their professional capability. Under the prevailing Continuous Professional Development policy for teachers, they are required to meet the soft target of completing 150 hours of professional development activities in every three-year cycle. All teachers (including English Language and Putonghua teachers) are required to participate in relevant professional development activities according to their needs, so as to strengthen their subject knowledge and keep themselves updated with effective pedagogy. Under the Professional Ladder for Teachers, training and professional development activities undertaken by English Language and Putonghua teachers related to the respective subjects to enhance their language proficiency or teaching capabilities could be counted towards the 60 hours of elective training. Furthermore, the EDB will continue to provide a wide range of support for teachers of different subjects (including English Language and Putonghua), including teacher professional development programmes, to help serving teachers keep abreast of the times and enhance the effectiveness of teaching.