

LCQ15: Promotion of national education

Following is a question by the Hon Paul Tse and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (July 21):

Question:

In 2000, the Government allowed schools to teach Chinese history not as an independent subject at the junior secondary level. Some members of the public have criticised that since then, quite a number of schools have combined Chinese history with other subjects, resulting in fragmented contents on Chinese history in the junior secondary curriculum and, consequently the new generation of young people "have forgotten about their history", have insufficient knowledge of the history of the nation and lack a sense of belonging towards the Chinese people and the nation. The aforesaid members of the public have also pointed out that since the reunification of Hong Kong in 1997, members of the public are required to provide only their nationalities or places of birth, and are no longer required to provide their native places when they complete the forms of the various government departments, which have also made young people "forget about their roots" and lose the means of knowing their personal identities and their links with the Motherland. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has studied the aforesaid issues and formulated remedial measures; if so, of the details; if not, whether it will immediately conduct such a study;

(2) apart from making, since the 2018-2019 school year, Chinese History as an independent compulsory subject at the junior secondary level, of the new policies or measures put in place by the Government to help the new generation of young people develop correct historical perspectives and understand that they, as individuals, have inextricable relationship with Hong Kong and the Motherland; and

(3) whether it will further study (i) the teaching of Chinese history as an independent compulsory subject at the senior secondary level, (ii) requiring afresh members of the public to fill in their native places on the forms of the various government departments, and (iii) organising national education exchange tours, so as to enable young people to understand the history and customs of their native places and see for themselves the fast-developing industries in various provinces and municipalities on the Mainland in recent years, with a view to enhancing their sense of national identity; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Our reply to the Hon Paul Tse's question is as follows:

(1) and (2) The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) is an inalienable part of our nation. The Constitution of the People's Republic of China (the Constitution) and the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China (the Basic Law) form the constitutional basis of the HKSAR and provide strong safeguard for the long-term prosperity and stability of Hong Kong. Enabling young people to never forget their roots takes more than learning national history in schools or focusing on whether the concept of native places should be promoted to encourage the tracing of roots and ancestors. More importantly, it is necessary to enable all people (including young people) of Hong Kong to have a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the constitutional order of the HKSAR as well as the historical and cultural connection between Hong Kong and the nation to illustrate the fact that people of both places are of the same lineage, sharing the same root and mind, so as to help strengthen people's national awareness and sense of belonging to the nation. We also need to help people grow to respect Chinese culture as well as understand and appreciate our national development. Educating young people does not confine to school education only, it also includes efforts and co-operation on all fronts such as constitutional education on the Constitution and the Basic Law, public education, family education, media and information literacy to equip young people with the ability to differentiate true information from false, as well as the promotion of a patriotic atmosphere in society. All these require enhanced efforts and co-operation of different stakeholders in the entire society. Different bureaux and departments of the HKSAR Government, including the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB), the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau and the Education Bureau (EDB), are responsible for the related promotion efforts.

The HKSAR Government has been taking forward the promotion of and education on the Constitution and the Basic Law to enable the public (including young people) to have a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the Constitution, the Basic Law and the "one country, two systems" principle, so as to strengthen their national awareness and sense of belonging to the country. Under the auspices of the Basic Law Promotion Steering Committee chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration and its five working groups (namely Working Group on Local Community; Working Group on Teachers and Students; Working Group on Civil Servants; Working Group on Industrial, Commercial and Professional Sectors; and Working Group on Community Outside Hong Kong), relevant bureaux and departments of the HKSAR Government will carry out promotion and publicity work through different channels and in a diversified manner, including organising or sponsoring various types of promotional activities, with a view to promoting to the public on various fronts the Constitution, the Basic Law and the constitutional order enshrined therein (including the relationship between the country and Hong Kong), as well as enhancing the atmosphere of studying and learning the Constitution and the Basic Law in the community.

School education is one of the focuses with fostering students' sense of national identity as a key learning goal of primary and secondary education

in Hong Kong. The EDB has been adopting a "multi-pronged and co-ordinated" approach in the implementation of national education, with a view to helping students understand different aspects of national affairs and the development of history, culture, economy, technology and political system of our country through various learning activities within and beyond the classroom. With the efforts to enhance students' sense of identity and belonging towards the nation on all fronts, we will nurture a new generation with a sense of national identity and social responsibility, who have an affection for Hong Kong and an international perspective.

Chinese history education is an important part of national education in the school curriculum. In view of this, the EDB listed "reinforcing the learning of Chinese history and Chinese culture" in the Secondary Education Curriculum Guide as a major renewed emphasis in 2017, and implemented Chinese History as an independent compulsory subject at junior secondary level in the 2018/19 school year. These measures enable all students to learn Chinese history in a holistic and systematic manner. The new curriculum has been implemented progressively starting from Secondary One in September 2020. Attaching equal weight to the ancient and modern times, the proportion of modern Chinese history in the new curriculum is expanded so that students can learn the history of the nation more comprehensively, and understand the fact that the interactive relationship between Hong Kong and the country since ancient times is inseparable. Under the new subject, students will understand that being citizens of Hong Kong, we are also people of our country, and that we have a close bond and a shared future and destiny with the 1.4 billion fellow countrymen in the Mainland. The curriculum will also develop students' sense of identity towards the nation, the Chinese race and our society, and help students respect, appreciate and inherit the Chinese culture.

In addition, the EDB is going to introduce a senior secondary subject, namely Citizenship and Social Development (CS), in lieu of Liberal Studies starting from Secondary Four in the 2021/22 school year. This CS subject emphasises helping students understand Hong Kong, the country and the contemporary world as well as how they interact with each other from multiple perspectives. Through this subject, students can build up a broad knowledge base, develop critical thinking and rational analytical skills and a sense of national identity to become informed and responsible citizens with a sense of belonging towards the country and a global perspective. The curriculum covers three themes, two of which, namely "Hong Kong under 'One Country, Two Systems' " and "Our Country since Reform and Opening-up", aim at helping students understand the meaning and implementation of "one country, two systems", the development and achievements of our country since reform and opening-up, and the latest development of our country and the integration of Hong Kong into the overall national development. The CS subject will also provide Mainland study opportunities for students to gain a first-hand understanding of our country and its history, culture and development, which cultivates their sense of national identity.

National security education is an integral part of national education. In 2021, the EDB has launched the Curriculum Framework of National Security Education in Hong Kong and 15 related national security education subject

frameworks to elucidate to schools how the learning elements of national security education can be connected naturally with and integrated organically into the relevant curriculum contents of different subjects. Meanwhile, to support the smooth promotion of the education of Chinese history, our country's developments, the Constitution, the Basic Law and national security in schools, the EDB continues to update/enrich relevant learning and teaching resources, provide suitable professional training and organise diversified territory-wide students' activities to assist schools in creating a conducive atmosphere to impart correct information of the national history, current situation and developments of our country to students through diversified life-wide learning experiences and activities (including museum visits, exchange activities in the Mainland, quiz competitions and project learning, etc.), so as to help them develop a sense of belonging to the country, an affection for the Chinese people and a sense of national identity.

Apart from promoting national education by the EDB in schools, the HAB has been working closely with the Committee on the Promotion of Civic Education (CPCE) to promote civic and national education (including the Constitution, the Basic Law and "one country, two systems", etc.) outside schools and in the community through various channels and projects, such as providing sponsorship to eligible organisations for organising civic and national education activities; producing publicity programmes and publications or organising exhibitions/talks on relevant themes (e.g. the Basic Law); disseminating information through the CPCE's website and social media pages; and launching promotion activities in the Civic Education Resource Centre.

Diversified activities organised by social organisations are very important for the creation of a patriotic atmosphere. Life-wide learning activities, such as thematic exhibitions on China's development and history, film shows of patriotic movies and talks by famous Mainland Olympians or aerospace crew during their visit to Hong Kong, can help the public (including young people and students) understand more about the history and development of the country through difficult times, and strengthen their national identity. All these efforts are no less important than activities in schools.

(3) Chinese History has always been an elective subject in senior secondary curriculum. Students may choose to study the subject according to their interests and abilities in order to increase their understanding of the historical development of China. Besides Chinese History, senior secondary students can also learn about the historical development of China and the characteristics of Chinese culture through senior secondary compulsory subjects such as Chinese Language and CS subject/Liberal Studies. Currently, some people in the community suggest that Chinese History should be made a compulsory subject at the senior secondary level. Such proposal will affect the overall structure of the senior secondary curriculum while reducing students' choice of subjects and imposing more restrictions on subject selection. Students and parents may not find it agreeable.

In addition to classroom learning, first-hand experience can also help

cultivate students' affection for our country more effectively. As such, over the years the EDB has been organising Mainland exchange programmes for students or subsidising those organised by schools with diversified themes to dovetail with the latest development of the school curriculum and the country. Since the 2017/18 school year, the EDB has provided about 100 000 exchange quotas every year, which is sufficient for every student to join at least one Mainland exchange programme in the respective primary and secondary stages. This can consolidate and deepen their classroom learning, help students understand our country's development in aspects such as history, culture, economics, education, science and technology, and enhance their sense of national identity. The Mainland exchange programmes for students cover 22 provinces, four autonomous regions and four municipalities in the Mainland. Many of the destinations are students' native places, which can help them learn about their home towns and experience the customs and cultures and the fast-developing industries of different provinces and municipalities. However, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, these Mainland exchange programmes have been suspended or postponed. The EDB will closely monitor the latest development of the pandemic and the clearance situation so as to resume the Mainland exchange programmes in due course. We will enhance the promotion and publicity in schools to actively encourage students to participate in the programmes.

On promotion in society, the HAB currently subsidises non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to organise Mainland exchange projects for young people through the Funding Scheme for Youth Exchange in the Mainland, in order to deepen their understanding of the culture and history of the Mainland, the way of life of Mainland people, the developments of our country, etc., as well as foster their exchange with Mainland people. Before the pandemic, about 15 000 Hong Kong young people benefitted from the Scheme each year. As regards internship, the HAB subsidises NGOs through the Funding Scheme for Youth Internship in the Mainland to organise Mainland internship activities for local young people, with a view to enabling them to obtain real experience in the actual workplace environment in the Mainland, as well as acquire a deeper understanding of the employment market, work culture and development opportunities therein. In addition to these funding schemes, the HAB also collaborates with top-notch scientific research and cultural institutions in the Mainland as well as major corporations in Hong Kong to implement the Thematic Youth Internship Programmes to the Mainland and the Scheme on Corporate Summer Internship on the Mainland and Overseas respectively, providing unique internship opportunities for local young people with different backgrounds, expertise and interests. Before the pandemic, the three internship schemes altogether offered Mainland internship opportunities to over 4 000 young people each year. Even though the Mainland exchange and internship projects cannot be held for the time being due to the pandemic, the HAB has allowed the organisers to arrange local activities that do not involve crowd gatherings, such as online briefing sessions, lectures and training courses, so that participants may learn about the culture, history, social features, people's way of life, latest development, etc. in the Mainland (particularly the exchange/internship destinations). The HAB is closely keeping in view the developments of the pandemic and the cross-boundary quarantine requirements between the Mainland and Hong Kong, and will

arrange for the resumption of the exchange and internship activities in the Mainland when it is safe and practicable to do so.

We hope that stakeholders and organisations from different sectors can work with the Government in the promotion of national education and creation of a patriotic atmosphere in society so as to nurture our young people into quality citizens with a sense of social responsibility and national identity, an affection for Hong Kong as well as an international perspective.