

LCQ16: Moderation Committees of Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority

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

Question:

A question 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 two pieces of information and then answer the following question: "Japan did more good than harm to China in the period 1900-45. Do you agree?" There are comments that the question was inappropriate in the selection of topic and was ill-intended, downplaying the painful historical facts of Japan's invasion of China, thereby leading candidates to reach a conclusion which turns the truth upside down. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that moderation committees (MCs) has been set up separately for Category A subjects of HKDSE Examination, which are responsible for setting examination questions and drafting marking schemes, and that the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) appoints members to MCs through various channels (e.g. nominations from schools and subject committees), whether it knows the relevant selection criteria and the weightings attached to the various criteria;

(2) given that the work nature of MCs is highly confidential, and that a staff member who had been nominated by the Education Bureau (EDB) in 2019 was eventually not invited to join the MC of the History subject of HKEAA, whether the EDB will request HKEAA to review the composition of MCs and require that each MC should comprise a member appointed by the EDB in order to strengthen the EDB's monitoring role on the HKDSE Examination;

(3) whether the EDB will explore taking part in the work of setting and moderating questions for the HKDSE Examination in order to ensure that examination questions are objective and neutral; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) as it has been reported that a member of the MC relating to the aforesaid incident has repeatedly made biased remarks on social media, whether it knows if HKEAA has assessed the effectiveness of the monitoring mechanism established to ensure that the acts of MC members meet the codes of professional conduct, and the mechanism put in place by HKEAA for imposing punishments on those members who have breached the codes of professional conduct; and

(5) given that HKEAA publishes, every year after the HKDSE Examination, question papers for the various Category A subjects, in which information such as marking schemes are set out for the reference of the relevant parties, whether it knows if HKEAA will, in view of the grave public concerns aroused by and the invalidation of the aforesaid question, immediately make public the marking scheme of the question, so as to facilitate the public to have a better understanding of the process of setting the question; if HKEAA will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

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 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), (2), (4) and (5) of the question which involve confidential information on assessment and staff conduct to the HKEAA. The consolidated reply is as follows:

(1) According to the HKEAA, MC members are appointed through various channels, including inviting nominations from subject committee members and chief/assistant examiners, and writing to schools for nominations from principals on a regular basis. MC members should meet the following criteria:

- currently teaching the relevant subject or have taught the subject in recent years;
- being experienced and innovative in teaching or setting examination questions;
- being up-to-date on the subject area and able to contribute to the process of question setting;
- having significant professional responsibilities (e.g. being a panel chairperson)

All members of MCs are required to declare interest in order to avoid any potential conflicts of interest. This declaration requirement covers the spouse, immediate family members, as well as persons who are residing in the home of the declarant concerned. Persons with potential conflicts of interest will not be appointed as MC members.

MCs comprise academics from tertiary institutions, secondary school

teachers, curriculum officers and subject experts and an appropriate mix will be maintained based on the members' academic knowledge, teaching experience, and expertise and experience in question setting or moderation. The HKEAA has laid down guidelines to ensure a healthy turnover of MC members and to provide opportunities for new examination personnel to take up assessment development work.

It is especially important that MC members should be well experienced and innovative in setting examination questions, and be up-to-date on the knowledge and development of the subject area. In the selection of members for a MC, priority will be given to members who can provide constructive and insightful comments and suggestions from the stages of question setting to moderation, and refine the draft questions up to the required standard for public examination.

(2) and (3) The HKEAA points out that it has been appointing members of MCs based on the criteria mentioned above. Apart from the Manager of Assessment Development of the HKEAA and frontline teachers and principals, some of the curriculum specialists invited by the HKEAA to join the MCs of some subjects include employees of the EDB. These curriculum specialists participate in the work of MCs in their personal capacities. They have to seek prior approval from the EDB for taking up outside work but are forbidden to disclose the relevant work to their supervisors in the EDB. With the EDB's request in recent years for greater participation of its curriculum specialists to enhance the alignment of curriculum and assessment, the EDB will recommend experienced personnel conversant with the curriculum requirement to the HKEAA for consideration. The number of personnel invited by the HKEAA to join the MCs has increased. However, not all the MCs of the 24 Category A subjects in the 2020 HKDSE have invited the personnel recommended by the EDB to join the MCs. Furthermore, their posts in the MCs and the stages they are going to participate are entirely the decision of the HKEAA.

In view of the grave public concern over the History examination question in the HKDSE Examination, the EDB and the representatives of the education sector and the HKEAA will set up a task force to review the issue. The EDB has requested the HKEAA to investigate the incident, review the question setting and moderation mechanism of the HKDSE, and whether the mechanism has been strictly complied with in the question setting and moderation of the History examination paper. The EDB will also review the existing mechanism to fulfil its monitoring role in the HKDSE Examination, with a view to ensuring the sustained quality of the HKDSE Examination and examination questions. As the review has not completed yet, it is difficult at this stage to comment on future improvement measures.

(4) According to the information provided by the HKEAA, regardless of their personal background and beliefs, MC members have to comply with the HKEAA's established procedures and follow the curriculum and assessment requirements in a professional manner when setting examination questions to ensure that candidates are assessed by the examination papers in an effective and fair manner.

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 all HKEAA 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 the 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.

(5) The HKEAA Council is actively considering the request for releasing the marking scheme of the examination question concerned.

According to the information provided by the HKEAA, a marking scheme, which specifies the requirements of individual questions, mark allocation and the range of acceptable responses, is prepared for markers as an important reference but should not be regarded as a model answer. The draft marking scheme has to go through a standardisation process. After examination, sample scripts will be selected by the Chief Examiner and Assistant Examiners, who will then review and compare the sample scripts, in order to reach an agreement on the marking principles and standards among markers. Revisions would be made to the marking scheme if necessary. Markers will then be briefed on the assessment objectives and requirements of individual questions in the markers' meeting. Sample scripts will be trial marked by markers to facilitate better understanding of the principles of the marking scheme, so as to ensure the consistency of the marking principles. Teachers and other readers who were not involved in the marking process are advised to interpret the contents of the marking scheme with caution.