

LCQ4: Curriculum Development Council

Following is a question by the Hon Au Nok-hin and a reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (May 29):

Question:

The Curriculum Development Council (CDC) is mainly responsible for advising the Government on matters relating to the curriculum development of kindergartens, primary and secondary schools. Its tasks include reviewing the existing curriculum policies, compiling curriculum guides and syllabuses, and putting forward recommendations on reform of curriculum development. Some initiatives of CDC in recent years, such as the setting of a long-term vision that "Putonghua be used as the medium of instruction for teaching the Chinese Language Subject" and the compilation of the Moral and National Education Curriculum Guide, have given rise to controversies. CDC operates under a two-tier structure: the first tier being CDC and its Standing Committees, and the second tier being the Key Learning Area/Subject Committees and Functional Committees. All members of CDC and its committees are appointed by the Government, and their meetings are all held in camera. Some members of the education sector have pointed out that CDC lacks democratic elements in its composition and transparency in its operation, resulting in its decisions being prone to be questioned. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the criteria adopted by the Chief Executive for appointing members to the first-tier structure of CDC; why none of the 22 incumbent members of CDC are frontline teachers but several of them are members of the business sector; whether it will, by making reference to the method of formation of the Council on Professional Conduct in Education, let practitioners of the education sector nominate candidates from teachers and elect among them CDC members;

(2) among the current members of the various committees in the second-tier structure of CDC, of the respective numbers and percentages of those who are teachers nominated by principals; and

(3) whether it will request CDC to allow the public to observe the proceedings of CDC's meetings, publish detailed minutes of meetings as soon as possible after the meetings, and increase the channels for gauging public opinion; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Curriculum Development Council (CDC) is an advisory body set up by the Government to give advice on matters relating to the curriculum development of kindergartens, primary and secondary schools. Currently, there

are three Standing Committees under the CDC (the first tier of the CDC), which are responsible for reviewing and advising on matters relating to the curriculum of kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, as well as exploring and reviewing curriculum initiatives, curriculum resources and support services. Committees on Key Learning Areas/Liberal Studies and Functional Committees (the second tier of the CDC) have also been set up under the Standing Committees. The memberships of the CDC and its Standing Committees seek to represent "a wide spectrum of stakeholders" as the members not only need to be well versed in the work of curriculum development or other related areas (such as technological development), but also examine and formulate the directions, emphases and priorities of curriculum development in a holistic manner. The membership of the second tier of the CDC, on the other hand, is drawn from "specialised disciplines" as the members are required to provide concrete views on matters relating to the curriculum development of individual Key Learning Areas/subjects (such as languages and science). While performing their respective functions, the two tiers interact under a regular reporting and feedback mechanism with a view to facilitating the ongoing development of school curriculum effectively.

Like the appointment of non-official members of other government advisory and statutory bodies, members of the CDC and its Committees are appointed on the principle of meritocracy. All members of the CDC are appointed by the Secretary for Education under delegated authority of the Chief Executive for a term of two years. Members of the CDC and its Standing Committees, which represent a wide spectrum of stakeholders, can pool their wisdom together and give their views on the policy of curriculum development and the way forward in a holistic and impartial manner during discussions at meetings. The current CDC, chaired by a professional with enthusiasm in education, comprises a total of 20 non-official members and two official members. The other non-official members include five academics from post-secondary institutions, nine school personnel, one parent, three members from the business and technology sectors and one representative of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority. Among the nine school personnel, apart from a representative of a school-sponsoring body, the rest are principals and teachers of kindergartens, primary, secondary and special schools. Besides, the curriculum must keep abreast with social, economic and technological changes, etc. At present, the CDC includes three members from the business and technology sectors. Building on their extensive experience and insights into areas such as human resources, vocational and professional education and training (VPET), innovation and technology, they can offer professional advice on how to equip students to meet the future development needs of Hong Kong and the world.

I must clearly point out to Members that the work of the CDC is very professional. Members of the CDC are required to have a high degree of professionalism, excellent performance in learning and teaching and/or extensive experience in public examinations, as well as capabilities for curriculum leadership. They can be school principals or teachers of other ranks. Therefore, assessing the representation of the CDC simply with reference to the number of teachers appointed will not provide a comprehensive perspective. Apart from nine school personnel, there are five

academics from post-secondary institutions who are educators with considerable experience and vision in areas such as teacher education, subject expertise (such as Chinese History and STEM education), educational research and VPET. Thus, together with the current Dean of Business and Management of The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, who is serving as the chairperson of the CDC, 15 out of the 22 members come from the education sector. Members of the education sector form the majority of the membership of the CDC, accounting for nearly 70 per cent of the total number of CDC members; while the proportion of members from the business and technology sectors, parents and official members is relatively lower. Therefore, we do not agree with the view, as presented in the question, that there are no frontline teachers involved in the first tier of the CDC. In fact, we should uphold the principle of meritocracy and appoint the most suitable persons as CDC members.

The term of office of the eight Committees on Key Learning Areas and Liberal Studies and the five Functional Committees under the CDC is also two years. To identify the most suitable persons for participation in the work of curriculum development, the Education Bureau (EDB) issues a circular memorandum every two years inviting schools to nominate their teachers as members of the second tier CDC's Committees. The selection exercise is administered by the CDC in accordance with the established mechanism. Except for the Committee on Applied Learning, which must consist of a certain proportion of members from the professional and vocational sectors owing to its unique curriculum design, members of the second tier of the CDC are mostly experienced educators with subject expertise and extensive experience, as well as profound knowledge of the Key Learning Areas/subjects and curriculum areas concerned. Most of them are educators from primary and secondary schools and kindergartens, while some are experienced teaching staff members from post-secondary institutions. They account for over 70 per cent of the total number of members of the Committees. Though individual Committees have different functions and needs and therefore the total number of members and the number of members from various sectors may vary, teachers nominated by schools have been appointed to serve on the eight Committees on Key Learning Areas and Liberal Studies, accounting for about 30 per cent to 35 per cent of the total number of members.

To increase the transparency of its operation, currently the membership lists, agendas and gist of meetings of the CDC and its committees are uploaded to its website for public access. However, in view of the fact that sensitive and confidential issues such as new curriculum development, textbook publishing, resource deployment and information on public examinations may be involved in the discussions, and to ensure that members can freely and candidly express their views in an environment which is free from any external interference and pressure, the meetings of both tiers of the CDC are not open to the public and the minutes of the meetings are not uploaded to the CDC website. This arrangement is made having regard to the need to strike a balance between enhancing the transparency of the CDC's operation and ensuring its effective operation. In fact, the EDB and the CDC have been directly collecting the views of the school sector on the ongoing renewal of curriculum through different channels including briefings, school

surveys, focus group discussions, etc. For instance, when we updated the eight Key Learning Area Curriculum Guides and the General Studies Curriculum Guide for Primary Schools in 2017, questionnaires were distributed to all primary and secondary schools across the territory and the drafts of the relevant guides were uploaded to the EDB website for public information. Furthermore, 22 large-scale consultation sessions were organised for the school sector and there was a total attendance of over 5 300. As regards the Revised Curriculum Frameworks of Junior Secondary Chinese History and History, a two-stage consultation exercise was conducted in 2016 and 2017 respectively to forge a broad consensus in the school sector. All these are proof that the work of curriculum development in Hong Kong is indeed highly transparent and that it is implemented after thorough consultation with the school sector. Members of the public who have any views or suggestions on matters relating to curriculum development may forward them to the EDB through the existing channels or the CDC Secretariat for our follow-up.

Thank you, President.