

Council on Professional Conduct in Education to officially end

The Education Bureau (EDB) announced today (January 19) that the Council on Professional Conduct in Education (CPC) will officially come to an end on May 1.

A spokesman for the EDB said, "With the continuous development of the services provided by the Government and professional education organisations over the past 30 years, the CPC's role in maintaining teachers' professional conduct and promoting the continuous professional development of teachers is no longer the same as when it was established. After consulting the Education Commission, the EDB has decided that the CPC will officially come to an end upon expiry of the current term of its members on April 30, 2022."

The CPC was established in April 1994 based on the recommendation of the Education Commission Report No 5. Its terms of reference include: to advise the Government on measures to promote professional conduct in education, to draft operational criteria defining the conduct expected of an educator and to gain widespread acceptance of these criteria among all sectors of the education community through consultation, and to advise the Permanent Secretary for Education on cases of disputes or alleged professional misconduct involving educators.

The spokesman said, "On enhancing teachers' professional conduct and promoting their continuous professional development, the Committee on Professional Development of Teachers and Principals (COTAP) was set up in 2013 comprising frontline educators, academics from tertiary institutions, parents and other members from the community. COTAP has all along been offering advice to the Government on policies and measures relating to the professional development of the sector, and conducting relevant educational research and professional development programmes as necessary to promote the professional development of teachers and principals. Apart from introducing the 'T-standard+' on professional standards for teachers and principals in 2018 to outline the professional roles required of teachers and principals, COTAP has strived to promote the development of the Professional Ladder for Teachers and provide advice on its implementation in recent years."

The spokesman continued, "Regarding teachers' code of conduct, as announced in the 2021 Policy Address, the EDB will provide clear guidelines and examples on teachers' professional conduct, which are expected to be completed within this year. We will provide examples to illustrate the penalties for teacher misconduct to help teachers to be mindful about their words and deeds and be law-abiding. These guidelines will also serve as a reference for the EDB in reviewing the registration status of teachers."

For the handling of suspected cases involving teachers' misconduct, the spokesman stressed that the EDB, as the authority of teacher registration, has a responsibility to perform the role of gatekeeping.

In the past, complaints about suspected cases of professional misconduct of teachers could be lodged with the EDB or the CPC. For complaints lodged with the CPC, it would submit a report together with recommendations to the EDB when it completed the cases. From mid-June 2019 to the end of December 2020, the EDB received 269 complaints on professional misconduct of teachers relating to the social turmoil. The EDB has completed all cases except for those still under legal proceedings. As at the end of December 2021, the EDB had cancelled four teachers' registration according to the Education Ordinance, and issued reprimand letters, warning letters, advisory letters or verbal reminders to 176 teachers.

During the same period, the CPC received six relevant complaints involving four teachers. So far, none of the cases have been submitted to the EDB for handling.

The spokesman said that the public is greatly concerned about the professional conduct of teachers and that misconduct cases of teachers should be handled without delay. For cases being processed by the CPC, the EDB will approach the persons concerned and take follow-up action accordingly. The EDB will continue to perform its gatekeeping role to ensure that all teachers permitted to teach in schools are fit and proper persons," the spokesman said.

For complaints about suspected professional misconduct of teachers, they will be investigated by schools in accordance with the established procedures and a report will be submitted to the EDB. The EDB has been prudent and serious in handling all cases from the perspective of education professionalism, basing the handling on evidence and taking students' well-being as the prime consideration. The EDB will enhance the transparency in the handling of cases, and plans to release the numbers of complaints against teachers' misconduct on a regular basis and provide case examples to illustrate the penalties for teacher misconduct and the considerations involved for the public's information and schools' reference in strengthening the management of their teaching staff.

The spokesman thanked all chairmen and members who had contributed to the CPC, especially for the time and efforts dedicated to matters of professional conduct of the education profession.

He said, "The EDB will strengthen the collaboration with COTAP, listen to the views from frontline educators and other stakeholders, and continue to collect the views from various sectors through multiple channels, with a view to enhancing teachers' professional conduct and promoting their continuous professional development."

The EDB calls on the sector to work together to enhance teachers' professional conduct, establish a professional and high-quality teaching force, raise the professional status of teachers, and boost public confidence in the teaching profession.