

## LCQ6: Setting and moderating questions for Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination

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

Question:

One of the questions in Paper 1 of the History subject of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination this year was about the Sino-Japanese relations in the first half of the 20th century. The question provided two pieces of information and requested candidates to answer the following: "Japan did more good than harm to China in the period 1900-45. Do you agree?" There are comments that the question was silent on the fact that the invasive war waged by Japan on China back then had resulted in the death of tens of millions of compatriots. As the information attached to the question was grossly one-sided and carried a leading sense, as much as 38 per cent of the candidates reached a "more good than harm" conclusion. The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) has advised that as in the case of other HKDSE subject examinations, a moderation committee (MC) is responsible for setting questions and drafting marking guidelines for the History subject. The MC of the History subject comprises a chief examiner, a setter or co-setters, moderators and an assessment development manager of HKEAA. It has been reported that the manager concerned has repeatedly made biased remarks on social media. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether HKEAA and the Education Bureau (EDB) have currently put in place a mechanism for preventing MC members from presenting their political stances or instilling biased thoughts into candidates through examination questions; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (2) whether HKEAA and EDB received, in the past three years, complaints about inappropriate contents of the questions in the examination papers of the History subject of the HKDSE Examination; if so, of the contents of the complaints and the follow-up actions taken;
- (3) whether it knows if HKEAA will conduct a comprehensive review on the mechanism for setting and moderating questions for the History subject of the HKDSE Examination, as well as the division of work among MC members;
- (4) whether it knows if HKEAA will examine the mechanism for appointing MC members, so as to ensure that the members will act in an objective, impartial and a professional manner; and

(5) as EDB has indicated that it will review the current mechanism with a view to fulfilling its role of monitoring the HKDSE Examination, thereby ensuring the sustained quality of the HKDSE Examination and the examination questions, of the details and the timetable of the review?

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 the curriculum and assessment, especially those involving educational 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, not to mention preventing MC members from presenting their political stances and instilling biased thoughts into candidates through examination questions. If such situation does exist, the EDB shall request the HKEAA to follow up seriously so as to maintain the credibility of public examinations. Regarding the problematic examination question in this incident, the EDB has requested the HKEAA to conduct an investigation and take follow-up actions, and will set up a task force to follow up on the issue.

The EDB has referred Parts (1) to (4) of the question which involve confidential information on assessment work and complaints to the HKEAA. The reply, with HKEAA's reply consolidated, is as below:

(1) 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 their validity and fairness in assessing candidates.

A pre-setting meeting will be held by the MC to give directions to setters for question-setting with regard to the assessment objectives, question types, coverage and requirements of the questions. Appropriate reference materials and feedback from previous examinations, such as the Curriculum and Assessment Guide, Assessment Framework, sample papers, past question papers, statistics, specification grids and comments on candidates' performance of past examinations, appropriate textbooks and reference materials, are also provided to MC members.

A series of moderation meetings will then be held in which draft

questions are reviewed, discussed and modified taking into consideration the assessment objectives, coverage, difficulty level, balance of questions of different demands and difficulty, clarity and appropriateness of wordings used, consistency of language within the paper and consistency between the English and Chinese versions (if applicable). The finalised versions have to be unanimously agreed by the MC after thorough discussions.

The finalised draft of the non-language examination papers after moderation will be polished by subject managers of the language teams of the HKEAA. To ensure the workability and clarity of the questions, two subject experts who have not been involved in the moderation process are appointed as independent assessors to work through the entire paper from a candidate's point of view and complete a checklist.

To further ensure the quality of the papers, the preliminary-camera-ready-copy (PCRC) of selected subjects are reviewed by experienced senior management staff from an assessment perspective. PCRC may be further updated based on the feedback from the proof-readers and reviewers. Updated versions are subsequently endorsed and proofread by the chief examiner and the subject manager concerned.

After each year's public examination, different forms of review on all subjects of the HKDSE Examination will be conducted, including teacher survey, external vetting, Examination Paper Quality Audit, as well as post-examination review by the Subject Committees.

(2) Both the EDB and the HKEAA have not received any complaints about the contents of the History examination questions in the 2017-2019 HKDSE Examinations.

(3) and (4) After discussion, the HKEAA Council has agreed to cooperate with the EDB to review the question setting and moderation mechanism and the HKEAA will conduct an internal investigation on the overall question setting and moderation mechanism. The EDB has requested the HKEAA to review the overall mechanism for question setting for examination papers, including the mechanism for appointing MC members.

(5) In view of the grave public concern about the History examination question, the EDB will set up a task force with representatives from the education sector and the HKEAA. 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. The EDB has requested the HKEAA to submit an internal investigation report to the task force in late June for review and follow-up. Subject to the preliminary findings of the HKEAA's investigation, the task force will complete its review and propose improvement measures as soon as possible.