

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.

CHP announces no new local confirmed cases of COVID-19 today and follows up on cluster in Luk Chuen House

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health has announced that as of 4pm today (June 10), no new local confirmed cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) had been recorded, and that the number of cases in Hong Kong remained at 1 108 so far (comprising 1 107 confirmed cases and one probable case).

Meanwhile, the CHP has been proactively conducting epidemiological investigations and carrying out preventive control measures in regard to the cluster in Luk Chuen House, Lek Yuen Estate, Sha Tin. As of 4pm today, 1 388 deep throat saliva samples had been collected in Luk Chuen House, among which seven samples need to be collected again owing to leakage, while 1 381 samples have had testing for COVID-19 completed. Except for the four confirmed cases announced on June 2 with positive results, other samples have tested negative.

The CHP is also following up with the residents in Luk Chuen House who have not yet returned their deep throat saliva samples. The CHP strongly appeals to those who have not got in touch with the CHP to contact the CHP personnel according to the medical test order issued and return their samples to the CHP as soon as possible for early testing.

Meanwhile, as of 4pm today, the CHP had collected and tested 2 118 samples for Luen Yuet House, Kwai Luen Estate, with no positive results.

The CHP again urged members of the public to maintain an appropriate social distance with other people as far as possible in their daily lives to minimise the risk of infection. In particular, they should go out less and avoid social activities such as meal gatherings or other gatherings to reduce the chance of contacting infected persons who may not present any symptoms, and minimise the risk of outbreak clusters emerging in the community.

A spokesman for the CHP said, "Given that the situation of COVID-19 infection remains severe and that there is a continuous increase in the number of cases reported around the world, members of the public are strongly urged to avoid all non-essential travel outside Hong Kong.

"The CHP also strongly urges the public to maintain at all times strict personal and environmental hygiene, which is key to personal protection against infection and prevention of the spread of the disease in the community. On a personal level, members of the public should wear a surgical mask when having respiratory symptoms, taking public transport or staying in

crowded places. They should also perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes.

"As for household environmental hygiene, members of the public are advised to maintain drainage pipes properly, regularly pour water into drain outlets (U-traps) and cover all floor drain outlets when they are not in use. After using the toilet, they should put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs."

Moreover, the Government has launched the website "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk) for announcing the latest updates on various news on COVID-19 infection and health advice to help the public understand the latest updates. Members of the public may also gain access to information via the COVID-19 WhatsApp Helpline launched by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer. Simply by saving 9617 1823 in their phone contacts or clicking the link wa.me/85296171823?text=hi, they will be able to obtain information on COVID-19 as well as the "StayHomeSafe" mobile app and wristband via WhatsApp.

To prevent pneumonia and respiratory tract infection, members of the public should always maintain good personal and environmental hygiene. They are advised to:

- Wear a surgical mask when taking public transport or staying in crowded places. It is important to wear a mask properly, including performing hand hygiene before wearing and after removing a mask;
- Perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes, after touching public installations such as handrails or doorknobs, or when hands are contaminated by respiratory secretions after coughing or sneezing;
- Maintain drainage pipes properly and regularly (about once a week) pour about half a litre of water into each drain outlet (U-trap) to ensure environmental hygiene;
- Cover all floor drain outlets when they are not in use;
- After using the toilet, put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs;
- Wash hands with liquid soap and water, and rub for at least 20 seconds. Then rinse with water and dry with a disposable paper towel. If hand washing facilities are not available, or when hands are not visibly soiled, performing hand hygiene with 70 to 80 per cent alcohol-based handrub is an effective alternative;
- Cover your mouth and nose with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of soiled tissues into a lidded rubbish bin, then wash hands thoroughly; and
- When having respiratory symptoms, wear a surgical mask, refrain from work or attending class at school, avoid going to crowded places and seek medical advice promptly.

US Dollar Liquidity Facility Tender Result

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

US Dollar Liquidity Facility Tender Result:

Tender date	:	June 10 (Wednesday)
Settlement date	:	June 11 (Thursday)
Repayment date	:	June 18 (Thursday)
Tenor	:	7 Days
Amount applied	:	Nil
Amount allotted	:	Nil
Lowest interest rate accepted	:	Nil
Highest interest rate accepted	:	Nil

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Wednesday, June 10, 2020 is 107.5 (down 0.3 against yesterday's index).

LCQ2: Employment Support Scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Shiu Ka-fai and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (June 10):

Question:

Last month, the Government announced the extension of the coverage of the Employment Support Scheme (ESS) to include, among others, those mature employees (i.e. aged 65 or above) for whom their employers have made voluntary Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) contributions. However, those self-employed persons (except persons in particular trades) and those mature employees who do not have an MPF account, as well as those mature employees with an MPF account but their employers have not made voluntary contributions for them, are all not covered by the Scheme. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of self-employed persons and mature employees who currently do not have an MPF account, and the number of mature employees with an MPF account for whom their employers have not made voluntary contributions; whether it has assessed the impacts of ESS not covering such self-employed persons and mature employees on their employment outlook and on the employers of such mature employees;

(2) whether it will roll out other measures, such as providing allowances for the employers of those mature employees who are not covered by ESS through relaxing the eligibility requirements of the Employment Programme for the Elderly and Middle-aged, or accepting certificates issued by certified public accountants (practising) as proof of employment of mature employees to replace the requirement for such employees to hold an MPF account, so as to facilitate the employers concerned to apply for the wage subsidies under ESS; and

(3) whether it has studied launching other relief measures to help those self-employed persons who do not have an MPF account; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the relevant policy bureaux and departments, my consolidated response to the Member's question is set out below:

(1) According to the General Household Survey (GHS) conducted by the Census and Statistics Department during December 2019 to February 2020, it is estimated that there are currently about 207 000 self-employed persons (SEPs), i.e. persons who work for profit or fees in their own business/profession, neither employed by someone nor employing others. On the other hand, according to the information provided by the Mandatory Provident Fund Schemes Authority (MPFA), there are about 215 000 persons holding SEP Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) account. It should be noted that, for an employer who is a sole proprietor or a partnership and employing others concurrently, he/she is also eligible for opening an SEP MPF account. In this regard, the number of persons having SEP MPF accounts and the number of SEP as reflected in the GHS are not directly comparable. We do not have figure on the number of SEP who have not set up MPF accounts.

As regards mature employees, the above-mentioned GHS estimates that

there are currently about 115 000 employees aged 65 or above, whereas the information provided by the MPFA suggests that there are about 60 000 employees aged 65 or above who have set up MPF accounts. Under the Employment Support Scheme (ESS), an employer is eligible to apply for wage subsidies in respect of his/her employees aged 65 or above who have MPF accounts, even if the employer has not made any MPF voluntary contributions for them. If the employer has provided to the MPF trustee(s) information on the basic salaries of employees aged 65 or above, the amount of wage subsidies will be calculated based on 50 per cent of the basic salaries actually paid to the relevant employees in the "specified month", with a wage cap at \$18,000 per month per employee. The maximum wage subsidy per employee is \$9,000 per month. We currently do not have figure on the number of employees aged 65 or above who have MPF accounts but their employers have not made MPF voluntary contributions for them.

Apart from the 60 000 employees aged 65 or above covered by the ESS, together with around 40 000 employees aged 65 or above under the various sector schemes covering land transportation (i.e. taxi, Red minibuses, Green minibuses and local ferries), laundry, catering and construction sectors which have been, or will be launched under the two rounds of Anti-epidemic Fund, as well as around 10 000 employees aged 65 or above employed by government outsourced contracts whose wages are not affected by the epidemic, the various measures as referred above will altogether cover more than 110 000 employees aged 65 or above.

Regarding self-employed persons who do not currently have an MPF account, the relevant bureaux have rolled out financial support for various trades, such as providing a one-off grant of \$7,500 for instructors and coaches of interest classes provided in schools and subvented welfare service units, and active sports coaches registered under National Sports Associations or recognised sports organisations.

(2) The Employment Programme for the Elderly and Middle-aged (EPEM) implemented by the Labour Department (LD) aims to encourage, through the provision of on-the-job training (OJT) allowance, employers who still have doubts over employing the elderly and middle-aged in hiring these unemployed job seekers and providing them with OJT so as to help them settle down in their jobs as soon as possible and acquire the required work skills. LD will enhance EPEM in the second half of 2020 by raising the amount of OJT allowance payable to employers so as to further encourage them to hire the elderly and middle-aged. At the same time, LD will, on a pilot basis, provide a retention allowance to the elderly aged 60 or above who have participated in EPEM so as to encourage them to undergo and complete OJT, thereby stabilising employment.

The Government aims to introduce bold and prompt measures to provide subsidies to employers as soon as possible so that they can pay employees' wages and thereby retaining jobs for employees. In order to assist employers and employees as soon as practicable, we have to implement the ESS in the simplest and fastest manner. The MPF schemes cover 270 000 employers who have been making MPF contributions or have set up Occupational Retirement Schemes Ordinance Schemes for more than 1.77 million employees, as well as

about 215 000 SEPs who have MPF accounts. Hence, we have decided to implement the ESS through the MPF system.

In order to provide timely assistance to large number of employers and employees within the shortest period of time, the administrative arrangement for the ESS must be simple. Hence, we are calculating the wage subsidy amount based on the certificates on the relevant MPF records issued by MPF trustees. Detailed vetting of other information provided by individual applicants, for instance, proof of employment of individual employees provided by employers, would involve highly complex vetting procedures. This would render the Government unable to disburse wage subsidies to employers within three to four weeks upon receipt of applications.

(3) The Employees Retraining Board (ERB) launched the "Love Upgrading Special Scheme" ("Special Scheme") in October last year, expected to provide 10 000 employees affected by economic downturn with comprehensive training to upgrade their skills and pursue self-enhancement, with a view to rejoining the employment market as soon as possible. The Special Scheme imposes no restriction on the trade or educational attainment of trainees, nor upper limit to the age of trainees. Elderly persons aged 65 or above may, according to their career aspirations and training needs, enrol in the nearly 70 courses currently provided under the Special Scheme or the about 700 training courses regularly provided by ERB. ERB will launch the enhanced new tranche of the Special Scheme in July 2020, providing quotas for another 10 000 employees. The maximum amount of monthly allowance payable to each trainee during the training period has also been increased from \$4,000 to \$5,800 from May 25, 2020.

Having considered the unprecedented challenges posed by coronavirus disease 2019 in Hong Kong, the Chief Executive announced on April 8, 2020 the second round of anti-epidemic measures including the provision of a time-limited unemployment support scheme through the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) system, with a view to providing timely and basic assistance to the unemployed during this difficult time. The Finance Committee of the Legislative Council approved the related funding on April 18. The Social Welfare Department has temporarily relaxed the CSSA asset limits for able-bodied persons (including able-bodied adult singletons and able-bodied adults and children under family cases) by 100 per cent for six months (from June 1 to November 30, i.e. the asset limits will revert to the normal level on December 1). Separately, under the existing CSSA arrangement, the value of an owner-occupied residential property of households with able-bodied persons will be disregarded for a grace period of the first 12 months. This arrangement will also apply to applicants under the six-month unemployment support scheme.