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**Panel on Education**

**Background paper prepared by Legislative Council Secretariat**

**Recent marking blunder of the Hong Kong Examinations  
and Assessment Authority and related issues**

**Purpose**

This paper provides background information on the recent marking blunder of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA). This paper also summarises the relevant deliberations of the Panel on Education on previous incidents of errors in and missing of examination scripts, and the supervision of the administration of HKEAA.

**Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority**

2. HKEAA is an independent statutory body established in May 1977 under the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority Ordinance (Cap. 261). HKEAA was formerly known as the Hong Kong Examinations Authority (HKEA). In July 2002, when the function of HKEA was widened to cover the administration of assessment, its name was changed to HKEAA. The statutory responsibility of HKEAA is to plan and conduct the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) and the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE). On behalf of overseas examining bodies and local professional bodies, it also administers various examinations leading to academic, professional or practical qualifications, including the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry Examinations, the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music Examinations, and the Test of English as a Foreign Language Examination.

3. By virtue of the passage of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (Amendment) Bill 2003 in November 2003, HKEAA is empowered to conduct, on its own or jointly with others, examinations and assessment in or outside Hong Kong.

4. It is the vision and mission of HKEAA to be “a world-renowned examination and assessment services provider”, and to “provide valid, reliable and equitable examination and assessment services in a professional, innovative, efficient and effective manner, with due consideration to educational and social needs”.

5. HKEAA is governed by the Authority Council. The Authority Council is responsible for formulating examination policies and monitoring the work of HKEAA. It consists of 17 persons including six ex-officio members. These six ex-officio members are two persons nominated by the Heads of Universities Committee, the Secretary General of HKEAA, and one representative each from the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB), the Vocational Training Council and the Curriculum Development Council. The other 11 members of the Council including the Chairman are appointed by the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administration Region Government from school principals, school teachers and persons experienced in commerce, industry, or a profession.

### **Recent marking blunder relating to HKCEE English Language (Syllabus B) results**

6. HKEAA released the 2005 HKCEE results on 9 August 2005. On 12 August 2005, HKEAA announced that errors were discovered in the results of some candidates taking the English Language (Syllabus B) subject when an appeal case for the 2005 HKCEE was investigated. Upon further investigation, the Oral component grades of 422 candidates and the subject grades of 248 candidates were found to be affected. HKEAA also pointed out that of these 670 affected candidates, 223 were eligible for Secondary Six admission. By 12 August 2005, all affected candidates had been notified and provided with new results notices. HKEAA explained that “the error was caused by an oversight in the quality assurance process during the implementation of a new computer system to process the 2005 HKCEE results”.

7. According to the press release issued by HKEAA on 12 August 2005 (**Appendix I**), the senior manager responsible for the processing of the HKCEE results had tendered his resignation and the Head of the Information Systems Services Division had been relieved of his position pending the outcome of further enquiries.

8. HKEAA made a further announcement on 12 August 2005 that as parents, candidates and the community had shown concern about the need for rechecking the results of HKCEE English Language (Syllabus B), a proposal would be developed for discussion by the Authority Council. A copy of the press release is in **Appendix II**.

9. According to the press release issued by EMB on 12 August 2005 (**Appendix III**), EMB had established a task force to look into individual cases and set up enquiry hotlines. EMB promised that the incident would not affect the chance of affected students being admitted to Secondary Six.

10. On 15 August 2005, HKEAA announced that the Authority Council had decided that a full rechecking of the marks of the English Language (Syllabus B) Oral Component for all 2005 HKCEE candidates would be conducted. A copy of the relevant press release is in **Appendix IV**. According to some press reports on 16 August 2005<sup>1</sup>, the Chairman of HKEAA estimated that the cost was about \$100,000, which would mainly be used to employ 60 temporary staff for carrying out the rechecking work.

11. HKEAA also announced that an independent expert panel reporting directly to the Chairman of HKEAA would carry out an investigation into the cause of the incident and responsibility for the errors. The panel would comprise Mr Victor CHENG, Director of Information Technology Services of the Hong Kong Institute of Education and Mr Philip LEUNG, Acting Director of Information Technology Services of the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

12. On 30 August 2005, HKEAA announced that upon rechecking of the marks of the English Language (Syllabus B) Oral component for all 2005 HKCEE candidates, 16 cases had been identified in which the Oral component grades of the candidates were found to be affected. Among these affected candidates, the subject grade of one candidate had been adjusted from an E to a D. According to HKEAA, the errors were caused by “markers’ transcription or summation errors or incorrect use of forms”.

13. As regards the processing errors previously identified which had affected the HKCEE English Language (Syllabus B) results of 670 candidates, the report of the independent expert panel confirmed that “the error was caused by a programming ‘bug’ that had been identified and fixed, but had not been applied to correct the results of the Oral component of English Language (Syllabus B)”.

14. HKEAA also announced that “the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the HKEAA’s Finance and General Purposes Committee would immediately investigate further into the actions of individual officers with a view to determining whether and to whom to assign responsibility for the error”. According to HKEAA, the Authority Council would meet again in mid September 2005 to deliberate and make a decision on the matter. A copy of the press release issued by HKEAA on 30 August 2005 is in **Appendix V**. According to the press release, “the longer term solution to the various human errors that have affected the public examinations system in recent years is to modernise the Authority’s IT infrastructure and to develop a fully automated and integrated examination system, including online marking”.

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<sup>1</sup> Apply Daily and Wen Wei Po

## **Applications for re-checking of marks**

15. HKEAA announced on 15 August 2005 that in view of the errors identified in the 2005 HKCEE English Language (Syllabus B) results, the deadline for applications for re-checking of marks would be extended and the restriction on the number of subjects that could be checked would be lifted.

16. According to some press reports on 1 September 2005<sup>2</sup>, a total of 6 604 candidates sitting for the 2005 HKCEE had made applications for re-checking of marks. HKEAA admitted that of these candidates, 378 had attained higher grades than they were awarded, and the relevant grades had been adjusted accordingly.

## **Deliberations of the Panel on Education on previous incidents of errors in the examination scripts in 2001 HKALE**

### Incidents of errors in questions in examination scripts

17. In the 2001 HKALE History examination script, a discrepancy was found between the Chinese and English versions of a question. An error was also found in the 2001 HKALE Pure Mathematics examination script, resulting in an unsolvable question.

### Preventive measures

18. When the Panel discussed these incidents of errors and related issues at its meeting on 23 April 2001, a member expressed dissatisfaction that HKEA had not taken adequate measures to prevent recurrence of similar incidents. The Secretary of HKEA explained to the Panel that HKEA had a proven system to prevent errors in examination scripts. The chief examiners and subject officers were responsible for proofreading examination scripts. For examination scripts involving calculations, an independent assessor not involved in any of the previous steps would be appointed to work through all the questions as if he/she was a candidate. He also explained that after an error had been found in the History examination script, he asked subject officers to proofread the examination scripts again, but he did not specifically ask them to work through the scripts involving calculations. Following the incident in respect of the Pure Mathematics examination script, he had issued a letter to all subject officers instructing them to proofread and work through the examination scripts again, where applicable, before the examinations.

### The option of re-sitting an examination

19. Some members were of the view that the affected candidates should be given

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<sup>2</sup> South China Morning Post and Sing Tao Daily

the option to re-sit the relevant examination for the sake of fairness. They queried whether it was appropriate to adjust the marking scheme by correlating candidates' performance in the two papers in Pure Mathematics, as proposed by HKEA. The Chairman and the Secretary of HKEA pointed out that the coefficient of correlation between paper I and paper II of Pure Mathematics had hitherto been about 0.85, and the proposed scheme of adjustment was quite acceptable in the field of examination. HKEA would consider the matter carefully having regard to possible practical problems which might arise if re-sitting the examination was allowed. For instance, the schedule of the university admission programme which would start soon after the publication of the HKALE results might be disrupted.

### Disciplinary actions

20. A member considered that HKEA should take disciplinary action against the officer(s) responsible for the errors. The Chairman of HKEA informed the Panel that a special committee would be established to examine the causes of the errors, as well as to review the existing system. Disciplinary action would be considered when the special committee submitted its investigation report. The member suggested that independent persons should be appointed to the special committee and the results of the investigation report should be released to the public.

## **The Ombudsman's investigations**

### Investigation Report on Administration of Public Examinations

21. Following the incidents of errors in the examination scripts in the 2001 HKALE, errors were also found in the 2001 HKCEE. The Ombudsman decided to conduct "a direct investigation into the flaws in the 2001 examinations and the adequacy of the arrangements for the administration of the examinations and the areas for improvement". The Ombudsman published its Investigation Report on Administration of Public Examination in March 2002. According to the conclusions of the investigation, "the Ombudsman is satisfied that the systems for the preparation of question papers and the administration of the examinations are basically sound and effective. The flaws in 2001 have been caused not by defects in the systems but deficiencies in implementation, inadequate vigilance being the main cause". The Ombudsman made a number of recommendations to strengthen the administration of examinations. The executive summary of the Investigation Report is in **Appendix VI**.

### Investigation Report on Handling of Examination Scripts under Marking

22. There were reports on the loss of examination scripts in the course of marking in respect of HKALE and HKCEE. A total of 77 examination scripts were lost

between 1999 and 2003 as set out below<sup>3</sup> –

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of missing scripts</i>		
	<i>HKALE</i>	<i>HKCEE</i>	<i>Total</i>
1999	5	7	12
2000	3	18	21
2001	6	16	22
2002	9	8	17
2003	3	2	5
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b><i>26</i></b>	<b><i>51</i></b>	<b><i>77</i></b>

23. In November 2003, the Ombudsman announced that it would conduct a direct investigation into the recurrent loss of examination scripts under marking. The investigation sought to examine –

- (a) the measures for the safe custody of examination scripts during the marking process and the adequacy and effectiveness of such measures;
- (b) remedial action on loss of scripts and the appropriateness of such action; and
- (c) scope for review and improvement.

24. In its Investigation Report on Handling of Examination Scripts under Marking issued in March 2004, the Ombudsman criticised HKEAA for not keeping proper report on its investigation process and findings and as a result, the Ombudsman was unable to study how the examination scripts were lost and what further steps HKEAA had taken to prevent such loss. The Ombudsman made a number of recommendations for preventing the loss of examination scripts and for providing equitable treatment for candidates concerned. An executive summary of the Investigation Report is in **Appendix VII**.

### **Deliberations of the Panel on Education on the improvement measures of HKEAA and the Ombudsman's recommendations**

#### Handling of examination scripts

25. At its meeting on 17 May 2004, the Panel received a briefing from EMB and HKEAA on the improvement measures to be implemented starting from the 2004

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<sup>3</sup> Paragraph 2.13 of the Investigation Report on Handling of Examination Scripts under Marking

public examinations and the way forward to address the Ombudsman's recommendations.

26. A member pointed out that there were loopholes in the procedures for handling examination scripts in sealed envelopes, i.e. the number of scripts in sealed envelopes were not counted before they were transferred from the examination centres to HKEAA, from HKEAA to the markers, and from the markers to HKEAA. The member suggested that HKEAA should require the counting of the number of scripts in sealed envelopes for every transfer of the scripts from HKEAA staff to markers or vice versa, in order to reduce the number of missing scripts, and to identify the location at which they were lost.

27. The Secretary General of HKEAA explained to the Panel that HKEAA did not count the examination scripts returned from centres because it would be better to keep the opening of the sealed envelopes to the minimum for security reasons. The existing procedures did not require the markers to count the number of examination scripts in each sealed envelope on collection from HKEAA because it was considered that counting would best be carried out by the markers at home. HKEAA was reviewing the procedures for handling examination scripts and would consider requiring an invigilator to cross check the number of scripts collected before they were put in the envelopes.

#### The policy of not allowing affected candidates to re-sit an examination

28. Members noted that a candidate whose script was confirmed as missing would be given an assessed grade by reference to his/her performance in other paper(s) of the same subject, or in the case of a single paper subject, his/her performance at school, moderated by the relevant public examination results of his/her schoolmates.

29. Members also noted that it was the past practice of HKEAA that candidates whose scripts were missing would not be informed. At the end of January 2004, HKEAA announced that with effect from the 2004 public examinations, HKEAA would notify the candidates concerned and inform them of their assessed grades on the day of publication of the results. Candidates concerned had to choose between accepting the marks as assessed or rejecting them for a refund of the examination fees. HKEAA maintained its policy of not allowing affected candidates to re-sit an examination.

30. The Ombudsman recommended in its Investigation Report on Handling of Examination Scripts under Marking that HKEAA should consider offering candidates the option of re-sitting an examination or accepting the assessed marks. According to the Investigation Report, the comments of HKEAA regarding this recommendation were: "the existing arrangements follow international best practices, and is concerned over technical difficulties and cost-effectiveness of re-examination".

31. The Administration informed the Panel that HKEAA was considering whether candidates concerned would be allowed to re-sit an examination, and the comparability of public examination results must be carefully evaluated.

32. Some members pointed out that loss of an examination script was an extremely serious matter to candidates as they had devoted years of hard work to prepare for the examination. These members expressed dissatisfaction that HKEAA would only inform the candidates of the missing scripts and the assessed grades until the day of publication of the results of the public examinations. They suggested that HKEAA should inform the affected candidates once their examination scripts were confirmed missing and provide them with the option of either accepting the assessed grade or re-sitting the examination.

33. The Secretary General of HKEAA explained to the Panel that HKEAA did not recommend an earlier notification because the assessed grades could only be worked out at the end of the grading process, i.e. a few days before the publication of the results of the public examination concerned. In addition, earlier notification of missing examination scripts without the assessed grades would lead to unnecessary anxiety on the part of the affected candidates. He further pointed out that the School Examinations Board under HKEAA was of the view that if the affected candidates were allowed to re-sit an examination, that examination was essentially a different examination and it would be difficult to compare its results with those in the previous examination. For this reason, most overseas examination and assessment authorities did not adopt a policy for allowing affected candidates to re-sit an examination. However, in the light of the Ombudsman's recommendations, HKEAA would review its policy of not allowing affected candidates to re-sit an examination.

34. According to some press reports on 25 May 2004<sup>4</sup>, HKEAA had decided that candidates would be given the option of re-sitting an examination, if their examination scripts were lost.

#### Centralised marking

35. Some members expressed doubts whether HKEAA could enforce full compliance by markers with specified procedures and requirements for ensuring the safe custody of examination scripts. They suggested that HKEAA should consider requiring markers to mark examination scripts in selected venues. Another member, however, pointed out that in view of the heavy workload of teachers, secondary schools might not be able to release their teachers to participate in centralised marking during daytime, and many serving teachers would not prefer to mark scripts in selected venues in the evening.

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<sup>4</sup> Hong Kong Standard, Hong Kong Economic Times and Wen Wei Po.

36. The Secretary General of HKEAA responded that the arrangements and procedures for markers to collect, mark and return the examination scripts had been implemented for years. While HKEAA would consider the feasibility of conducting centralised marking, it was concerned that most markers who were serving teachers in day schools might not prefer such an arrangement.

### **Reports of missing examination scripts in 2004 and 2005**

37. On 11 August 2004, it was reported by a newspaper<sup>5</sup> that two examination scripts of the 2004 HKCEE were lost. According to the same newspaper on 13 August 2005, HKEAA confirmed that six examination scripts of the 2005 HKCEE were lost.

### **Deliberations of the Panel on Education on the supervision of the administration of HKEAA**

38. Arising from some allegations of malpractices in the administration of HKEAA, the Panel discussed the supervision of the administration of HKEAA at its meeting on 18 November 2002.

39. A member expressed concern that HKEAA would increase examination fees in order to address the issue of financial deficit, given that the accumulated reserve of HKEAA at the end of the 2002-03 financial year would only be about \$17 million. The Secretary of HKEAA explained to the Panel that a number of measures had been implemented to curb its financial deficit in the 2002-03 financial year by about \$9.5 million, including reduction of pay level in line with civil service salary adjustment and reduction in overtime pay and staff benefits. Increasing examination fees would be the last resort to balance the budget in the 2003-04 financial year. Another member was concerned about the low staff morale of HKEAA. The Secretary of HKEAA responded that the management of HKEAA would strive to enhance internal communication and staff involvement in policy formulation. Members suggested that HKEAA should establish an internal mechanism to enhance staff communication.

### **Relevant questions raised at Council meetings**

40. Details of the questions raised at Council meetings relating to the work of HKEAA since the first term are in **Appendix VIII**.

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<sup>5</sup> South China Morning Post

## **Relevant papers**

41. Members may wish to refer to a list of the minutes of the relevant meetings and papers provided by the Administration/HKEAA in **Appendix IX**. Soft copies of these documents are available at the website of the Legislative Council at <http://www.legco.gov.hk>.

Council Business Division 2  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
6 September 2005

## Press Release

An error in the results of some candidates who took the HKCEE English Language (Syllabus B) was identified yesterday (Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> August). All affected candidates have been notified and provided with new Results Notices. EMB has established a special taskforce to ensure that no candidate suffers any disadvantage as a result of having been provided incorrect results. A full system check has been made and this has confirmed that no further processing errors have been made.

Yesterday evening, while investigating an appeal case for this year's HKCEE, an error was discovered in the result of a candidate taking English Language (Syllabus B). The error affected the score awarded in the Oral component of this subject.

On investigation, it was found that the error had affected the component grade of 422 candidates and the subject grade of a further 248 candidates.

223 of the affected candidates are eligible for sixth form admission. Two candidates have best 5 points scores that change from 7 to 8 as a result of correcting the error. Another two candidates have a best 6 points score that changes from 13 to 14 in one case and 15 in the other.

The error was caused by an oversight in the quality assurance process while implementing a new computer system to process the 2005 HKCEE results. The error has now been corrected and a full check implemented on the computer routines to ensure that there are no further errors in the new system.

The results of all candidates have been recalculated, all affected candidates notified by phone and new Results Notices sent to their schools (if day school candidates) or homes (if private candidates). HKEAA will undertake a full re-check of the marks of all affected candidates in all subjects, with candidates being notified of the outcome in writing by 24<sup>th</sup> August. Candidates who have enquiries about their examination results should call HKEAA's hotline: 2239-2712.

The Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower (School Development), Mr. K S Lee, expressed deep concern over the incident. He promised that the Bureau would render the necessary support, follow up the cases of the students concerned and ensure that no student will be disadvantaged in the Secondary Six (S6) admission process.

"We have taken the initiative to contact individual students, especially those with grades of English Language (Syllabus B) affected. Should there be any S6 applications affected by the incident, we will liaise with the relevant schools and make appropriate arrangements for the students," he said.

The Education and Manpower Bureau has set up special hotlines (2863 4710, 2863 4772 and 2863 4727) to handle enquiries from students who have their S6 applications affected by the incident. The service hours are as follows:

August 12 (Friday)	: from now until 8 pm
August 13 (Saturday)	: 9 am to 12:30 pm
August 15 (Monday) – August 19 (Friday)	: 9 am to 12:30 pm and 2 pm to 5 pm

The Chairman of HKEAA, Mr Irving Koo, said that an external review had recently been concluded of the HKEAA's information systems services. The chairman of the review team, Mr Victor Cheng, Director of ITS, HKIEd, has agreed to supplement the team's work by conducting an investigation of this particular incident and providing a report with recommendations to the Council of HKEAA.

Mr Koo noted that the senior manager responsible for the processing of the HKCEE results has tendered his resignation and the Head of the Information Systems Services Division has been relieved of his position pending the outcomes of further enquiries.

Mr Koo said: "On behalf of the HKEAA, I deeply apologise to the candidates and to the public for this error." He said that the incident provided added urgency to the task of reforming the Authority's information systems services in line with the review team's recommendations.

- End -

Date: 12 August 2005

New HKCEE system developed



New system tested by using both the old and new systems to reanalyze the 2004 data and compare the results



Programming error identified in module for combining scores in cases of double marking where a marker belongs to more than one team of markers



Programming error fixed and tested



Corrected module used to recalculate results for relevant subjects:

- Putonghua
- English (Syllabus A)
- English (Syllabus B), Paper 1
- English (Syllabus B), Paper 4 - Oral

## 新聞稿

香港考試及評核局於今日(8月12日)，發布有關今年中學會考英國語文(課程乙)部分考生成績，受到資訊系統的技術錯誤而影響的事宜後，有部分考生、家長和社會人士提出對覆核該科成績的關注和要求。有見及此，本局將研究方案，並將於8月15日(星期一)提交委員會會議討論。

## Press Release

At a press conference today (12<sup>th</sup> August) HKEAA has released details concerning an error in the results of some candidates who took this year's HKCEE English Language (Syllabus B).

Subsequent to this announcement, parents, candidates and the community have shown concern about the need for rechecking the results of this subject. In view of such concern, HKEAA will develop a proposal for discussion by the Authority Council in its meeting, to be held on Monday, 15<sup>th</sup> August.

- End -

Date: 12.08.2005

## Press Release

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SEM expresses concern over errors of HKCEE results

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The Secretary for Education and Manpower, Professor Arthur K C Li, said today (August 12) that the Bureau was deeply concerned with the technical errors of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) which had affected the results of some candidates taking the Oral paper of English Language (Syllabus B) of the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE).

"We are taking follow-up actions to render assistance to the affected students and promise that the incident will not affect their chance of being admitted to Secondary Six (S6)," he added.

According to the information provided by HKEAA, some 200 of the affected candidates are eligible for S6 admission.

"The Bureau has established a task force to look into individual cases and set up enquiry hotlines. So far we have contacted most of the students and some 100 have no problems. We will continue to follow up with the remaining students," Professor Li said.

"I regret that HKEAA has made the errors. I have asked the Authority to account for the incident and review the information systems as well as the results processing procedures. This is to ensure that there will be no recurrence of the same incident," he added.

Ends/Friday, August 12, 2005

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## Press Release

At a special meeting this morning, the Council of HKEAA received a briefing on the recent incident of errors in HKCEE English Language (Syllabus B) results provided to candidates. Council members expressed their grave concern about the impact of the error on candidates and their deep regret for the incident.

Council noted that all affected candidates have been sent a written apology and a new results notice. EMB have set up a Taskforce to assist all affected candidates to ensure that none are in any way disadvantaged in seeking sixth form admission as a result of the errors.

Council reviewed the actions taken to ensure that there are no further processing errors and is satisfied that there are none.

In order to fully assure candidates that their marks have not been affected, the Council decided to conduct a full rechecking of the marks of English Language (Syllabus B) Oral Component for all 2005 HKCEE candidates. The re-checking exercise will be supervised by two Council members. The exercise will check for both processing errors and any summation errors covered during the normal re-checking process.

The Council also decided to extend the deadline for normal applications for re-checking of marks until 5:00p.m. on 20<sup>th</sup> August. For 2005, the restriction on the number of subjects that can be rechecked will be lifted. Results of appeals will be released by 31<sup>st</sup> August.

Council established an external investigation into the cause of the incident and into responsibility for the errors. This will be carried out by an independent panel comprising:

Mr. Victor Cheng (Director of Information Technology Services, HKIEd)  
Mr. Philip Leung (Acting Director of Information Technology Services, CUHK)

The panel will report directly to the Chairman.

Council will make decisions at its September meeting on the following actions designed to strengthen quality assurance processes:

- Finalise the establishment of an Information Technology committee to oversee the implementation of key recommendations of a recently-completed expert review of HKEAA's Information Systems Services Division.
- Finalise the establishment of a new Quality Assurance unit that was initially discussed at its June meeting. This unit will be responsible for quality assurance, risk management and internal audit

Council Chairman, Mr. Irving Koo, said: “We apologize once again to the candidates and the public and understand their grave concerns. We appreciate that assistance is being rendered to all of the affected candidates who are eligible for S6 admissions. With the new preventive measures in place, we believe the quality of future examinations will be further assured.”

The Council has full confidence in the staff of the Authority. It also has confidence in the capacity of the senior staff to implement ongoing initiatives to improve the work of the Authority and to carry through broader reforms of the examinations and assessment system.

- End -

Date: 15<sup>th</sup> August 2005

## Press Release

At a special meeting this morning, the Council of HKEAA met to consider two reports on the recent incident of errors in HKCEE English Language (Syllabus B) results provided to candidates.

The first was a report on the re-checking of the Oral results of all candidates who sat for English Language (Syllabus B). This exercise was supervised by two Council members, namely Professor Magdalena Mo Ching Mok and Mr. Kwok Wing Keung. As a result of the re-checking, it was confirmed that only the 670 candidates as previously reported were affected by processing errors and no new cases were found.

The re-checking resulted in 16 cases in which a change in results was necessary as a result of markers' transcription or summation errors or incorrect use of forms. Of these, 16 cases, one resulted in a change in the candidate's subject grade from an E to a D. This candidate already has secured a sixth form place in her own school and the change did not affect her 'best six' score.

The report contains some recommendations for improving the process for marking and checking of marks, including improvements to the design of the score sheets used by examiners and the strengthening of the random sample re-checking procedures.

The second report focused on the incident itself and was undertaken by an independent expert panel comprising Mr. Victor Cheng, Director of IT Services at Hong Kong Institute of Education and Mr. Philip Leung, Acting Director of ITSC, The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Their report confirms that the error was caused by a programming 'bug' that had been identified and fixed, but had not been applied to correct the results of the Oral component of English Language (Syllabus B). Due to the peculiarity of the bug, only rare cases were affected.

The report identifies weaknesses in incident management relating to processes for authorization, verification, documentation and reporting of incidents. It concludes that the overnight checking from 11 to 12 August to verify the results of the papers affected by the bug was adequate.

Council agreed that the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Authority's Finance and General Purposes Committee would immediately investigate further into the actions of individual officers with a view to determining whether and to whom to assign responsibility for the error. The Council will meet again in mid September to deliberate and make a decision on this matter.

Council agreed that at its next regular meeting it would move to finalise the establishment of an IT Committee under the council to oversee improvements to HKEAA's IT systems, and to restructure the IT function. It will also finalise the establishment of a Quality Assurance unit to strengthen quality assurance processes throughout the organization.

Mr Irving Koo, the Chairman of the Council, reiterated the Council's apologies to the affected candidates and its deep regret for the incident. He thanked EMB colleagues for their prompt response in ensuring that no candidate suffered any disadvantage in the sixth form selection process.

He said that while the Council can and will take steps to improve current systems, the longer-term solution to the various human errors that have affected the public examinations system in recent years is to modernize the Authority's IT infrastructure and to develop a fully automated and integrated examination system, including online marking. He noted that the Authority is well advanced in initiating development work on such a system and is committed to moving as quickly as possible in this direction.

- End -

Date: 30 August 2005

## **Executive Summary of the Investigation Report on the Administration of Public Examinations**

### **BACKGROUND**

This direct investigation was initiated by The Ombudsman on 18 May 2001 in the wake of a spate of errors in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examinations (HKCEE) and the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examinations (HKALE) in 2001. It has been conducted with the full cooperation of the Hong Kong Examinations Authority (HKEA).

#### **Ambit**

2. The investigation examines the flaws in the 2001 examinations and, in such light, the adequacy of the current arrangements for the administration of the examinations and the areas for improvement.

#### **Methodology**

3. In the course of the investigation, the Office of The Ombudsman has:
- examined relevant papers of HKEA, including administrative guidelines, manuals and working files of persons participating in the preparation of the relevant question papers;
  - interviewed 29 persons participating in preparing question papers and making administrative arrangements for the examinations; and
  - met with senior officers of the HKEA Secretariat.

### **ADMINISTRATIVE FRAMEWORK**

#### **HKEA**

4. HKCEE and HKALE are administered by HKEA, an independent organisation set up by statute. Practical arrangements for the conduct of the examinations are made by the HKEA Secretariat under the direction of its governing body, the HKEA Council.

#### **Question paper development process**

5. The process of developing question papers for the two examinations has the following characteristics:

- Questions for a paper are always set by more than one Setter
- Each paper is scrutinised by a Moderation Committee usually comprising university professors/lecturers, secondary school teachers, and Education Department officers. A HKEA Subject Officer serves the committee as its secretary.

- Every question in a paper is examined in the context of compliance with the syllabus, appropriate level of difficulty, suitability of length and clarity of presentation.
- Each paper is checked at least three times before it is printed (by the Moderation Committee, Subject Officer and Chief Examiner ) and twice again after printing (by the Subject Officer and Chief Examiner).
- Papers involving calculations are worked through another time by Independent Assessors before printing.

### **Arrangements for Listening Tests**

6. HKEA officers visit schools to test radio reception efficacy before they are included as listening test centres. In 2001, centres where more than 20 candidates had experienced difficulties in receiving the radio broadcast in the previous year were excluded.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Flaws in the 2001 Examinations**

7. The Office of The Ombudsman has investigated into flaws reported in the media and by HKEA, with the following findings:

- (a) Mistakes were found in eight question papers either during or after the examinations. In four cases, the work of candidates was affected and remedial measures (such as mark adjustment), had to be taken. In the other four cases, candidates' performance was not affected (**Appendix 1**).
- (b) There were two incidents of flaws in the arrangements for listening test centres (**Appendix 2**).
- (c) In another 21 papers, minor errors (mostly relating to language or administrative details) were found after printing but before the examinations. They were corrected by "Special Notices" read out at the time of the examinations (**Appendix 3**).
- (d) Two other question papers contained a number of language errors and were reprinted shortly before the examinations.
- (e) In six cases reported in the media, no flaw with the administration of the examinations was found (**Appendix 4**).

### **Causes of Errors**

8. The investigation has identified the following factors leading to errors:

- (a) *Inadequate vigilance*

This was the main cause. Most of the mistakes in question papers were made initially by Subject Officers or Setters. Undetected in the moderation and proofreading processes, they finally found their way into the live question papers. In a case relating to an unsuitable listening test centre, the HKEA staff member responsible had overlooked radio reception efficacy report for the centre.

(b) *Unclear role of proofreaders*

Instructions to proofreaders did not clearly spell out their duties and the proofreaders did not seek to clarify. Certain details in papers were left unchecked as a result.

(c) *Proofreading without due diligence*

Even where clear instructions were given regarding how question papers were to be checked, in some cases they were not observed.

(d) *Unclear instructions regarding originality of questions*

A new Setter used materials from an overseas examination paper in the belief that it was not improper to do so, as the HKEA guidelines were imprecise and did not state the relevant policy clearly.

(e) *Inflexible adherence to guidelines*

Guidelines were rigidly followed in one case where a listening test had shown signs of unsatisfactory radio reception efficacy in the previous year. Some HKEA staff member considered only the number of candidates affected, but not the fact that the centre was small and the proportion of candidates affected was high.

### **Contributing Administrative Factors**

9. The following factors, mainly relating to the administrative practices of HKEA, have also contributed to the errors:

(a) *Lack of open recruitment system*

Moderation Committee members were not recruited openly. They were nominated by HKEA committee members or Subject Officers, from among their acquaintances. Some accepted appointment solely out of goodwill with the nominators. They might not take the task sufficiently seriously or could not afford sufficient time and energy for the examinations work.

(b) *Lack of recognition and appreciation*

A strong sense of commitment is essential for Moderation Committee members to achieve a consistently high-quality and error-free result, but the

enthusiasm of some members was dampened by lack of appreciation and recognition for their services.

(c) *Heavy workload*

Subject Officers had to shoulder other duties such as curriculum development and internal management improvement projects. Some, particularly new recruits, were not able to pay as much attention as they should to preparing question papers.

(d) *Inadequate supervision*

As question-setting was a professional and highly secured task, HKEA management did not take proactive steps to supervise and guide individual Subject Officers.

(e) *Incomplete records*

The development processes of individual question papers were not fully documented for those involved to take reference, or for supervising officers to keep track of progress.

(f) *Insufficient training*

Some Subject Officers, especially new recruits, did not have sufficient training to enable them to perform their duties without falling prey to the many potential pitfalls in the demanding tasks of examinations administration. Non-permanent examinations personnel were not trained in question-setting principles and skills.

(g) *Outdated guidelines and manuals*

The guidelines and manuals issued to Subject Officers and non-permanent examinations personnel were outdated in places or lacking in details.

## **REMEDIAL MEASURES AND INITIATIVES**

10. HKEA took swift measures to minimise the effect on candidates once a flaw was detected. It has since also adopted the following improvement initiatives:

- Drawing up a code of practice on the question paper development system with special emphasis on the checking procedures;
- Introducing an audit system to ensure every step in the question paper development system is properly implemented; and
- Providing more formal training to Subject Officers.

## CONCLUSIONS

11. On the basis of the investigation, The Ombudsman is satisfied that the systems for the preparation of question papers and the administration of the examinations are basically sound and effective. The flaws in 2001 have been caused not by defects in the systems but deficiencies in implementation, inadequate vigilance being the main cause.

12. All those involved in the administration of public examinations should always be alert to the vital importance of a fairly and reliably administered examinations system to the individual candidate and the community. Any flaw – even one – would compromise the confidence and esteem that Hong Kong's examinations regime has acquired locally and overseas.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

13. To strengthen the administration of examinations, The Ombudsman has made the following recommendations:

- (a) Duties should be clearly described for different examinations personnel;
- (b) Measures should be taken to ensure that all persons participating in administration of the examinations clearly understand their duties;
- (c) Guidance notes and instructions should be reviewed and updated to ensure the processes relating to the administration of the examinations are accurately and clearly conveyed;
- (d) Training, initial and refresher, should be provided to Subject Officers as well as non-permanent examinations personnel;
- (e) In assigning duties to Subject Officers, consideration should be given to their levels of experience and the specific requirements of different examination papers;
- (f) Supervisors should proactively check the work of subordinates, in particular new officers and officers in new posts, and offer guidance and assistance where appropriate;
- (g) A system should be introduced for the proper recording of the key stages in the development of question papers;
- (h) The system for recruitment of non-permanent examinations personnel should be open and stand the test of public scrutiny;
- (i) Suitable recognition and appreciation should be given to non-permanent examinations personnel so as to motivate and maintain their commitment to service; and
- (j) For listening tests, HKEA should -

- i. continue to explore better ways to conduct the tests; and
- ii. explore the possibility of using other radio channels with better transmission efficacy.

**FINAL REMARKS**

14. The Ombudsman considers that the unfortunate experience in 2001 should help all those participating in the administration of the examinations to do better in future.

15. The Ombudsman also hopes that releasing the findings of this investigation allays the public concern about the system and re-assures our community of the integrity of the local examinations regime.

**Office of The Ombudsman  
March 2002  
Re. OMB/WP/14/1 S.F. 93**

## Appendix 1: Flaws in the 2001 Question Papers

<b>Question Paper</b>	<b>Problem</b>	<b>Remedial Action</b>
CE Physical Education	Wrong marks were indicated in a question	--
AL History	There was a discrepancy between the Chinese (1900-1945) and English (1919-45) versions of a question	Special instructions to markers
AL Pure Mathematics	“(6-x)” was wrongly put as “(x-6)”	Adjustment of marking scheme
AL Geography	A question was based on a reference book	--
CE English Writing	The words “END OF PAPER” were left out	--
AL Computer	The example given in a question contained a mistake	Adjustment of marking scheme
AS Computer	The paper contained a number of language mistakes	--
CE Chinese History	A multiple-choice question did not provide a correct answer	Adjustment of marking scheme

**Appendix 2: Flaws in Listening Test Arrangements**

<b>Question Paper</b>	<b>Problem</b>	<b>Remedial Action</b>
AL Use of English, Listening Test	88 of the 150 candidates taking the test at a centre, where 20 candidates experienced radio reception difficulties in the previous year, were adversely affected by poor transmission	Adjustment of marks for candidates affected
CE English Language, Listening Test	Listening test was held at a school previously found to be unsuitable	Arrangements were made on time for candidates to take the test in “special rooms” equipped with transistor radios to broadcast the examination materials

**Appendix 3: Errors Corrected by “Special Notices”**

No.	Question Paper	Correction
1	CE Chinese History Paper 2	In Question 31, the word “場” should be amended as “場”
2	CE Computer Studies Paper 1A	In Question 4, “as” should be deleted from “A sample output is shown as below”
3	CE Computer Studies Paper 2	In Question 19, “playing computer game” should be amended as “playing computer games”
4	ASL Engineering Science Paper 1 (Chinese version)	In Question 7(d), “電滋波” should be amended as “電磁波”
5	CE English Language (Syllabus A) Paper 4	In Question Paper version 9.2, “talk him/her” should be amended as “talk to him/her”
6	CE English Language (Syllabus B) Paper 4	In Question Paper version 12.1, “at (the) evening” should be amended to “in (the) evening”
7	CEE English Language (Syllabus B) Paper 4	In Question Paper version 17.1, “activies” should be amended as “activities”
8	CE Geography Paper 1	In Question 3, “sendiment” should be “sediment”
9	CE Geography 2 (Chinese version)	In the title of the map, “香中學會考” should be amended as “香港中學會考”
10	CE History Paper 1	In Question 4, “Billions of Dollars” should be amended as “Billions of US Dollars”
11	AL Chinese Language and Culture Paper 1A	In Question 4, “己” should be amended as “已”
12	AL Chinese Language and Culture Paper 1B	In Comprehension Passage 2, “跔” should be amended as “研”
13	AL Chinese Literature Paper 1B	In the playscript provided, words attributed to “虞姬” should be attributed to “牛郎”
14	AL Computer Applications Paper 1	In Question 3, the punctuation mark 「 」 should be included to enclose each of the four expressions 互聯網資源, 協定, 操作系統 and 其他

No.	Question Paper	Correction
15	AL Computer Studies Paper 2	In Question 12(b), “CPMX” should be amended as “CMPX”
16	ASL Ethics and Religious Studies	In question 1, “上斷頭台” should be deleted from “卡登冒充情敵上斷頭台受死”
17	AL Liberal Studies (The Modern World)	On the front page, the time duration of the examination was wrongly written as “8.30 am – 11.00 am”. It should be “1.30 pm – 4 pm”
18	AL Liberal Studies (Science, Technology and Society)	On the front page, the time duration of the examination was wrongly written as “8.30 am – 11.00 am”. It should be “1.30 pm – 4 pm”
19	AL Liberal Studies (China Today), Chinese version	On the front page, the time duration of the examination was wrongly written as “上午八時三十分至上午十一時”. It should be “下午一時三十分至下午四時”
20	AL Music Paper 2	A revised version of page 1 of Question 1 had to be issued to candidates because some signs had not been provided in the original version
21	AL Principles of Accounts Paper 2	The question on page 5 was not numbered. It should be numbered as Question 5

**Appendix 4: Cases Not Involving Errors**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Problem alleged</b>	<b>Findings</b>
AL Chinese Language & Culture	Media reported about suspected leakage of questions	The Independent Commission Against Corruption investigated the case and found no evidence of malpractice
AL Physics, Practical Examination	Complaints about instruments failing to function	Sufficient guidance had been given to schools by HKEA about the setting up of instruments and conduct of the examination. Spare instruments were provided to cater for instrument failure
CE Putonghua Listening Test	Complaints about difficulties in receiving radio broadcast at a centre in Kowloon Tong	15 candidates complained about poor radio reception before the test started and were moved to the “special room” to take the test. They were not adversely affected. The centre had been previously checked for radio reception efficacy and the result was satisfactory
CE Mathematics	Air-conditioner was not turned on at a centre	The matter was reported in the press and HKEA received a complaint. The decision whether to turn on the air-conditioning was made by the supervisor at the centre. Other candidates at the same centre found the condition satisfactory
CE Chinese Language	Temporary power failure at a number of centres in Kowloon	The power failure was caused by problems at the power supplier’s installation. HKEA had provided guidance notes to centre supervisors on how to handle such contingency, and centres took action accordingly. Candidates at centres seriously affected were given mark adjustments
CE Computer Studies	A letter published in the press suggested that a multiple-choice question did not include the correct answer	In fact, the correct answer was included

## **Executive Summary of Investigation Report on the Handling of Examination Scripts under Marking**

### **Background**

Competition for employment has always been keen in Hong Kong; so, too, for university education. Local students desirous of pursuing further studies or seeking employment need to prove their academic attainment in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) or Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE).

2. The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) is an independent statutory body established in 1977 under the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority Ordinance, Cap. 261. Its primary function is to administer HKCEE and HKALE. Some 150,000 candidates take part in these two examinations each year.

3. We noted media reports on the recurrent loss of examination scripts in the course of marking. As this could adversely affect some young people's future and even undermine public confidence in our examinations system, The Ombudsman decided to conduct a direct investigation under Section 7(1)(a)(ii) of The Ombudsman Ordinance, Cap. 397. The Secretary General of HKEAA welcomed the investigation and pledged full cooperation, for which we are grateful. In a press conference held on 14 November 2003, The Ombudsman declared this direct investigation.

### **The Investigation**

4. This direct investigation examines:
- (a) the measures for the safe custody of examination scripts during the marking process;
  - (b) the adequacy and effectiveness of such measures;
  - (c) remedial action on loss of scripts;
  - (d) the appropriateness of such action; and
  - (e) scope for review and improvement.

### **Appointment of Markers**

5. Some two million scripts have to be marked every year. With the principals not

raising objection to their undertaking outside work, HKEAA appoints teachers as markers and pay them for each script or question marked. Such remuneration ranges from \$22 for papers lasting one-and-a-half hours to \$55 for three-hour papers. Some 5,000 markers are appointed each year and on average, a marker would process some 400 scripts.

6. On appointment, markers are given an instruction guide and a briefing on such details as the collection and checking of scripts, the marking and check marking procedures. However, apart from reminding markers not to mark scripts in public places, the instructions do not contain any specific guidelines or cautionary advice on the safe custody of scripts.

7. A record of lost scripts will normally not affect the subsequent appointment of the marker. Only when negligence is admitted will the marker be barred from appointment for the following three years.

### Checking of Scripts

8. On receipt of the scripts contained in sealed envelopes, markers are required to check the number against the attendance records and report any missing scripts. HKEAA will also conduct another check for any missing scripts.

9. To confirm a loss, the marker concerned is asked to search the location where the marking was conducted. To eliminate mistakes about the attendance record, HKEAA will telephone the candidate concerned to probe for evidence of his/her attendance at the examination.

10. In the last five years, 77 scripts were lost:

Year	No. of missing scripts		
	HKALE	HKCEE	Total
1999	5	7	12
2000	3	18	21
2001	6	16	22
2002	9	8	17
2003	3	2	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>77</b>

Source: HKEAA

HKEAA's view is that with the collection and transfer of a large volume of scripts, loss of some is inevitable.

### **Remedial Measures**

**11.** On confirmation of a loss, HKEAA will not inform the candidate but will award an assessed mark. Neither will HKEAA disclose the basis for awarding the assessed mark.

**12.** To our surprise, HKEAA keeps no proper investigation report on its investigation process and findings. We were, therefore, unable to study how scripts were lost, and what further steps HKEAA took to prevent such loss.

### **Observations and Opinions**

**13.** It may be true that over the past five years, “only 77” out of ten million scripts were lost, representing an “insignificant” 0.00077%. Statistically, this is an extremely low occurrence rate and may explain HKEAA's view (para. 10) and the lack of any proper investigation reports.

**14.** However, to individual candidates, the loss of any script is extremely significant. Years of hard work culminates in these public examinations. Accreditation of their academic attainment has far-reaching implications on their future fortune – be it studies or employment. As the loss is through no fault of the candidate, it raises the question whether HKEAA has sufficiently focussed on the rights of candidates to be informed and have a say on possible remedy.

**15.** HKEAA's lack of transparency (i.e. not informing the affected candidates) is out of step with present-day accountable governance. Some may even see this as an indictment on its dereliction of duty to the candidates. On a broader front, it is a breach of the public faith in HKEAA's administration of the public examinations system in Hong Kong.

### ***Follow-up Action on Loss***

**16.** The loss of even one single script is one too many. We are astounded, and puzzled, why HKEAA does not conduct proper investigation into reported loss and maintain a record on the investigation processes and findings. The total absence of proper investigation to ascertain responsibility from among those concerned and a penalty system to accord with the level of responsibility thus ascertained is incredible. It could encourage dishonesty, or at least evasion, on

the part of the markers concerned, by not admitting negligence or revealing in full the circumstances of the loss.

### ***Prevention of Loss***

**17.** Examination scripts are confidential documents and should be handled with utmost care. It is not satisfactory that HKEAA does not have guidelines to markers on prevention of loss or on due caution. Markers are left to their own devices as to what they consider to be the best precautions.

**18.** On the other hand, it is amazing that markers responsible for the loss should be so casual, so cavalier. Common sense dictates the need to safe keep scripts in their care. Markers are experienced teachers who understand the far-reaching implications of a lost script and are remunerated for marking, they should not expect to be exonerated simply because HKEAA has not issued reminders or guidelines.

**19.** In the absence of any reports on the investigation process, we could not identify and analyse how scripts came to be missing or lost. However, HKEAA has outlined the following possibilities:

- (a) examination centre supervisors or invigilators may have made a mistake in counting the scripts or recording the attendance. They may not have noticed that a candidate leaving early has taken his/her script out of the centre;
- (b) it is not realistic for HKEAA to “mandate” where markers can work. They may mark scripts in school or at home. Scripts may thus be lost in transit; and
- (c) some markers may be less conscientious over the need for safe custody of the scripts and may leave them unattended and not properly locked. They can thus be removed by any passer-by or someone with malicious intent.

In addition, we believe that loss may also occur in one of the following processes:

- (a) markers still have to handle their students’ homework or attend classes during the entire period of marking HKEAA scripts. Scripts may, therefore, be misplaced and mixed up with their students’ day-to-day homework or other teaching materials; and
- (b) markers with their myriad duties may have difficulties conducting the necessary thorough search for the missing script or even recalling where and how the script went missing. This may be compounded by HKEAA’s generally lax attitude towards such loss and the lack of proper deterrent measures.

### ***Marker Ethics***

20. In a case reported by the media, students saw their teacher marking scripts in class. This would constitute dereliction of duty, both to the class and to HKEAA, and via HKEAA to the candidate(s) concerned.

### ***Remedial Measures***

21. Candidates affected have a right to be informed of the loss of their scripts and to decide on remedy in view of the impact of the loss on their future, and because of their payment for the marking of their scripts as well as their trust in the system and HKEAA.

22. We appreciate that there are financial and technical difficulties involved in re-examination and recognise that the current arrangements follow international best practices. However, we consider that HKEAA could and should endeavour to overcome these difficulties.

### ***Recent Development***

23. At the end of January 2004, HKEAA announced new arrangements of informing candidates of the loss on the day examination results are released. Candidates can then choose between accepting the marks as assessed or rejecting them for a refund of the examination fees. However, HKEAA maintains that there would be no re-examination.

24. We applaud HKEAA's realisation of the need for improvement and commend its initiative in this direction. While this is a start, it is not good enough.

25. The only material difference from the previous practice is *to give candidates a choice*: accepting an assessed mark or receiving a refund of fees. Timing of this "choice", on the day examination results are released, is also too late. Students cannot afford to wrangle with HKEAA as most of them require the examination results on that day to facilitate their enrolment for further studies.

### ***Recommendations***

26. The loss of scripts may have far-reaching implications on the candidates' subsequent career, or even life. There is, therefore, no room whatsoever for complacency -- and certainly, no place for negligence or casual approach -- no matter how "insignificant" the percentage of scripts

lost.

27. In undertaking this direct investigation, our prime concern is precautions for prevention of loss and provision of equitable treatment for candidates concerned. Accordingly, The Ombudsman makes the following recommendations to HKEAA:

**(a) General**

i) both HKEAA and markers, adopt a more responsible and transparent attitude towards loss of scripts.

**(b) Follow-up Action on Loss**

*Investigation*

i) maintain a file for each case -- for documentation of the investigation process, for record of all deliberations and any other data;

ii) properly investigate each and every report of loss (requiring from the marker and/or invigilators a full account of the circumstances surrounding the loss), analyse causes for the loss and consider remedial measures; and

iii) arrange for each and every case to be discussed by members of the Authority at a proper forum convened for the purpose of apportioning responsibility, awarding penalties, analysing causes for the loss and determining precautionary measures.

*Penalty System*

i) devise a system of deterrent and penalty for loss of scripts.

**(c) Prevention of Loss**

i) include in the instruction guide to markers a firm reminder of the importance of safe custody for scripts and appropriate advice against risk of loss in transit and marking;

ii) circulate extracts of reports on the investigation of loss among markers to promote and enhance their awareness;

iii) appeal for school principals' cooperation in providing markers with safe storage for scripts, say, in the teachers' offices; and

iv) review the invigilation process, in the context of the procedures for collection of scripts from candidates on departure from the examination centre. Strengthen the guidelines for centre supervisors and invigilators in this respect.

**(d) Marker Ethics**

i) impress upon markers their duty to their classes and candidates.

**(e) Remedial Measures**

i) notify candidates affected soonest possible, on availability of assessed score;

ii) consider offering candidates the option of re-sitting for an examination or accepting the assessed marks. On this, it may be useful for HKEAA to consult such interest groups as parent-teacher associations; and

iii) set up proper mechanism for appeal against remedial measures taken.

**Comments from HKEAA**

**28.** HKEAA has indicated that it does recognise the significance of lost scripts and the need for any remedial measures to be fair. It considers that most markers are conscientious and the incidents of lost scripts relatively few. It has agreed that there is a need for the investigation to be more thorough and the processes documented.

**29.** HKEAA has generally accepted the recommendations. Implementation of some is underway. However, on recommendation 24(e)(ii), it has reiterated that the current arrangements follow international best practices, and is concerned over the technical difficulties and cost-effectiveness of re-examination.

**Final Remarks**

**30.** On recommendation 24(e)(ii), The Ombudsman believes that with HKEAA's established procedures and experience, the technical difficulties can, and should, be overcome. As regards cost-effectiveness, we consider that the interests and rights of the candidates and the public interest in maintaining a fair and credible public examination and assessment system in Hong Kong should not be ignored.

**31.** In conclusion, The Ombudsman thanks the Chairman, members, Secretary General and staff of HKEAA for assistance throughout this investigation.

**Office of The Ombudsman**

**March 2004**

**Releant questions raised at Council meetings  
(since the first term of the Legislative Council)**

<u>Date of Council Meeting</u>	<u>Question</u>
3 May 2000	Written question on "Broadcasting quality in listening tests of public examinations" raised by Hon David CHU Yu-lin
28 March 2001	Written question on "Examinations of private candidates in science, technical and computer subjects" raised by Hon SIN Chung-kai
27 June 2001	Written question on "Examination arrangements for disabled persons" raised by Hon CHAN Yuen-han
13 November 2002	Written question on " Financial situation of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority" raised by Hon SZETO Wah
21 April 2004	Written question on "Improvement measures by Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority to deal with loss of examination scripts" raised by Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
19 May 2004	Written question on "Assessment methods for examination on Chinese Language and English Language subjects in HKCEE" raised by Ir Dr Hon HO Chung-tai

## Panel on Education

**Relevant documents on recent marking blunder of the  
Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority and related issues**

<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Minutes/Paper</b>	<b>LC Paper No.</b>
23.4.01	Panel on Education	Minutes of meeting	CB(2)1829/01-02 <a href="http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr00-01/english/panels/ed/minutes/ed230401.pdf">http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr00-01/english/panels/ed/minutes/ed230401.pdf</a>
18.11.02	Panel on Education	Minutes of meeting	CB(2)627/02-03 <a href="http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr02-03/english/panels/ed/minutes/ed021118.pdf">http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr02-03/english/panels/ed/minutes/ed021118.pdf</a>
		Paper entitled "An anonymous letter"	CB(2)337/02-03(01) <a href="http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr02-03/english/panels/ed/papers/ed1118cb2-337-1e.pdf">http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr02-03/english/panels/ed/papers/ed1118cb2-337-1e.pdf</a>
17.5.04	Panel on Education	Minutes of meeting	CB(2)3090/03-04 <a href="http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr03-04/english/panels/ed/minutes/ed040517.pdf">http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr03-04/english/panels/ed/minutes/ed040517.pdf</a>
		Paper entitled "Review on the handling of missing examination scripts by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority"	CB(2)2318/03-04(01) <a href="http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr03-04/english/panels/ed/papers/ed0517cb2-2318-1-e.pdf">http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr03-04/english/panels/ed/papers/ed0517cb2-2318-1-e.pdf</a>