

立法會
Legislative Council

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Finance Committee of the Legislative Council

**Minutes of the 3rd meeting
held at the Legislative Council Chamber
on Friday, 2 December 2005, at 2:30 pm**

Members present:

Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP (Chairman)
Hon CHAN Kam-lam, SBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon James TIEN Pei-chun, GBS, JP
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, S.B.St.J., JP
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Dr Hon LUI Ming-wah, SBS, JP
Hon Margaret NG
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP
Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, SBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Dr Hon Philip WONG Yu-hong, GBS
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP
Hon Howard YOUNG, SBS, JP
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
Hon LAU Kong-wah, JP
Hon LAU Wong-fat, GBM, GBS, JP
Hon Miriam LAU Kin-ye, GBS, JP
Hon CHOY So-yuk, JP
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon Timothy FOK Tsun-ting, GBS, JP
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP

Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, JP
Hon Vincent FANG Kang, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Hon LEE Wing-tat
Hon LI Kwok-ying, MH
Dr Hon Joseph LEE Kok-long
Hon Jeffrey LAM Kin-fung, SBS, JP
Hon MA Lik, GBS, JP
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, SBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Dr Hon KWOK Ka-ki
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Hon CHEUNG Hok-ming, SBS, JP
Hon WONG Ting-kwong, BBS
Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
Hon Albert Jinghan CHENG
Hon KWONG Chi-kin
Hon TAM Heung-man

Members absent:

Hon Martin LEE Chu-ming, SC, JP
Dr Hon David LI Kwok-po, GBS, JP
Hon James TO Kun-sun
Hon Bernard CHAN, JP
Hon SIN Chung-kai, JP
Hon WONG Yung-kan, JP
Hon LAU Chin-shek, JP
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
Hon Daniel LAM Wai-keung, BBS, JP
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
Hon CHIM Pui-chung

Public officers attending:

Mr Alan LAI Nin, GBS, JP

Miss Elizabeth TSE, JP

Permanent Secretary for Financial Services
and the Treasury (Treasury)

Deputy Secretary for Financial Services and
the Treasury (Treasury) 1

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| Mr Alfred FOK | Principal Executive Officer (General), Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau (The Treasury Branch) |
| Mrs Fanny LAW, GBS, JP | Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower |
| Mr Chris WARDLAW | Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower |
| Dr Peter W HILL | Secretary General of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority |
| Mr Peter LEUNG | Director (Corporate Services) of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority |

Clerk in attendance:

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| Ms Pauline NG | Assistant Secretary General 1 |
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Staff in attendance:

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| Miss Becky YU | Chief Council Secretary (1)1 |
| Mrs Mary TANG | Senior Council Secretary (1)2 |
| Ms Caris CHAN | Senior Legislative Assistant (1)1 |
| Mr Frankie WOO | Legislative Assistant (1)2 |

Action

Item No. 1 - FCR(2005-06)33

**Head 156 – GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT : EDUCATION AND
MANPOWER BUREAU**

**New Capital Account Subhead Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment
Authority**

**New Item “Grant to support the modernisation and development of the
examination systems of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority”**

The Chairman informed members that the Panel on Education was consulted on the proposal at its meeting on 24 October 2005. She then drew members' attention to a supplementary information note provided by the Education and Manpower Bureau and tabled at the meeting explaining how the proposed examination systems would help to overcome the problems revealed from the misreporting incident involving the 2005 Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) English Language (Syllabus B) oral examination results, and what specific benefits or outcome could be expected from the proposal.

(Post-meeting note: The supplementary information note was subsequently circulated to members under FC Paper No. FC15/05-06.)

2. Dr YEUNG Sum, Chairman of the Panel on Education, said that the Panel supported the rationale and need for modernizing and developing Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA)'s examination systems, in particular, the proposed introduction of centralized onscreen marking, which would help shorten the processing time for examination results, thereby allowing more time for teaching and learning as well as facilitating the university admission processes. Panel members however stressed the need for the modernized system to be properly tested before full implementation, in order to avoid miscalculation or misreporting of examination results. As onscreen marking was a major cultural change in script marking, it should be cautiously planned and progressively implemented so that the markers were able to adapt to the changes. HKEAA should make available at least three centralized onscreen marking centres at convenient locations to facilitate accessibility for markers. It should also simplify the administrative procedures for identification and allocate suitable venues for the establishment of centralized marking centres in order to expedite the implementation progress. Meanwhile, HKEAA was requested to address the concern on the impact of the modernization on examination fees taking into account the affordability of parents and students in setting the fee levels.

The misreporting incident

3. Referring to the discussion paper for the meeting of the Panel on Education on 12 September 2005 which indicated that, based on the outcome of the findings of the Review Panel, the two direct causes for the misreporting incident on 11 August 2005 were associated with programme errors, the Chairman enquired if the proposed examination systems would be able to avoid recurrence of such technical errors. The Secretary General of HKEAA (SG, HKEAA) said that the misreporting incident arose from a failure in staff communication and supervision in implementing a patch (a computer programme fix) designed to correct a previously-identified programming error in the HKCEE computer system. HKEAA had since introduced a package of measures to ensure that such errors would never recur again. The current proposal was aimed at modernizing the antiquated information technology (IT) infrastructure and providing an efficient and reliable examination system for Hong Kong. The replacement of manual intervention of the examination systems by the fully automated processes would minimize chances of human error and shorten the processing time for examination results.

4. Given the substantial financial commitment for the project, Mr WONG Kwok-hing sought HKEAA's assurance that no misreporting incidents would recur after the implementation of the proposed examination systems. SG, HKEAA assured members that there would not be recurrence of the misreporting incident. The proposal would address the general problem of missing scripts, which had been occurring annually as a result of the lack of capacity to scan the scripts. The introduction of onscreen marking would also eliminate errors in copying and adding marks manually. However, HKEAA could not guarantee that all problems could be resolved immediately because the modernization process would take two to three years to complete. The Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower

(PSEM) added that the phased implementation of the modernization process would gradually eliminate the errors associated with manual intervention. By way of illustration, the problem of missing scripts could be dealt with as original examination scripts would be backed up once they had been scanned and movement of scripts would be monitored. Variation of marks arising from manual intervention could also be addressed after automation of systems. Notwithstanding, it would not be possible to provide a guarantee that the proposed examination systems were problem free given that technical errors might occur as a result of computer breakdown.

Centralized onscreen marking centres

5. Noting that the Administration had so far identified two school premises, one in Tsuen Wan and one in Lai King, for setting up centralized onscreen marking centres, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed concern that the two locations might not be convenient to those markers, who were mainly teachers, in the New Territories East and Hong Kong Island who would need to spend a long travelling time to reach the centres. He enquired if more centralized onscreen marking centres could be provided for the convenience of teachers who would have to go to these centres after school to perform marking.

6. PSEM said that while effort would be made to provide more centralized onscreen marking centres at convenient locations, the supply of vacated school premises for conversion into marking centres in mid-2006 was limited. At present, only two premises in Tsuen Wan and Lai King were identified for such purpose and approval was being sought for their conversion under the current proposal. The Administration would endeavour to identify more convenient locations, but it would need to go through the necessary administrative procedures. It was intended that centralized onscreen marking centres would be provided in New Territories East, Hong Kong Island and Kowloon East, accommodation of which would have to be made available for conversion in mid-2006 so that these centres would be ready for trial by January 2007. In the event of slippage in the provision of longer-term accommodation, HKEAA was prepared to lease commercial premises to make up for the space shortfall.

Onscreen marking

7. Given that centralized onscreen marking represented a major cultural change in script marking, Mr Jasper TSANG enquired if the affected teachers were consulted and if so, their reaction to the proposal. SG, HKEAA agreed that the introduction of centralized onscreen marking would bring a significant change in work processes and workplace. Through visits to schools, teachers were consulted on the acceptability of the proposal. It was noted that the main concern was the need and time for teachers to travel to the marking centres. There was suggestion that teachers should be released during the day rather than after school for the marking, which HKEAA considered feasible as most of the teachers concerned would not be teaching during the examination period. As regards the concern about the use of computers which might be new to some teachers, a pilot run on onscreen marking would be conducted

in March and April 2006. Based on the results of the pilot run, HKEAA would further refine the policy and procedures on onscreen marking taking into account experience outside Hong Kong, including the Mainland where teachers were very apprehensive about onscreen marking at first but later preferred the new system to the traditional method. HKEAA would be responsive to the needs of teachers and efforts would be made to ensure that they would feel comfortable with the new arrangement. Sufficient rest intervals would be provided so that teachers would not be over-strained. Their marking would be carefully supervised so that they would have the full support of the chief examiner while working.

8. Being a member of the education sector himself, Mr Jasper TSANG pointed out that the teaching profession would not be keen to accept major cultural changes in their work. The applicability of experience of other places in Hong Kong was also questionable given the different situation of each place. He then enquired if impact assessment had been made on the proposed changes and whether there would be sufficient teachers to participate in onscreen marking when it was implemented. SG, HKEAA said that HKEAA was conscious of the difficulties which teachers might have in adapting to the new system. A working group had been set up to look into the issue and to work out contingency plans, including manual marking albeit not the preferred option. Major problems with onscreen marking were not expected as these would be rectified following the trials in March and April 2006. Besides, the onscreen marking experience of other examination bodies in United States, United Kingdom, Australia and the Mainland was very encouraging. SG, HKEAA added that while teachers were only given an honorarium for marking, they were still willing to take up this arduous task because it was an important and professionally rewarding for them. When performing marking, teachers would learn how the scripts should be marked and the criteria for marking which would be very helpful to teaching. Onscreen marking would be even more professionally rewarding because the markers would be able to interact with the chief examiner in a collegiate environment. It would also relieve them from the manual work of counting scripts and adding marks, thereby focusing on the professional task of marking. In response to Mr Jasper TSANG's further question, SG, HKEAA confirmed that markers would not be given a choice between onscreen and traditional marking after implementation of the proposed examination systems.

9. While supporting the proposal, Mr Howard YOUNG enquired about the mechanism for monitoring markers' performance which was said to provide capacity for prompt remedial actions in cases where markers were found to be too harsh, too lenient or inconsistent. He asked if this was similar to the cross-referencing arrangement commonly adopted by commercial firms in performing staff appraisals. SG, HKEAA said that about 5 000 markers, mostly teachers and academics, would be employed during the examination period to perform marking. Specific training for individual examinations would be given to the markers. This would include analyzing scripts already marked by the examiner to ensure that the marks were consistent with the chief examiner. Under the prevailing manual marking system, the chief examiner would not be able to know if a marker was too harsh or too lenient until the end of the marking process. If the marking quality was found not

acceptable, then it would be necessary to adjust the marks of all scripts marked by the marker. Onscreen marking would however enable the chief examiner to perform real-time monitoring of the entire marking process such that a marker with unsatisfactory quality of marking would not be allowed to continue marking and the scripts which had already been marked by the marker would be re-marked. A marker who was found to be too harsh or too lenient in his/her marking and who failed to make improvement would not be employed again. Only good markers would be retained after evaluation of their performance. However, as markers were temporary employees of HKEAA, they would not be subject to regular staff appraisal arrangement.

10. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung said that markers in Hong Kong were subject to great deal of pressure as they had to complete marking within a short period of time. The situation would be further aggravated with the introduction of the new examination systems. He asked how the workload and pressure of markers in Hong Kong compared with that of their counterparts in places outside Hong Kong. He also enquired if consideration could be given to employing more markers to share out the workload. SG, HKEAA said that the duration of marking would depend very much on the complexity of the examination papers, some of which did not require any expertise while others required professional input and specialized knowledge. As such, markers would not be required to complete their task within a specific time frame even with the implementation of onscreen marking. HKEAA would analyze the complexity of the examination papers and remunerate the markers accordingly.

Costs

11. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung questioned the propriety of the estimated cost of \$198.87 million for the proposal, which according to his understanding, was much higher than that incurred by the Mainland in implementing similar onscreen marking systems. PSEM said that a direct cost comparison between the Mainland and Hong Kong on the provision of onscreen marking might not be appropriate because their systems and capacities were different. SG, HKEAA added that unlike the Mainland which used universities as examination centres, Hong Kong had to invest heavily in the provision of centralized onscreen marking centres. Besides, the Mainland authorities did not have to include cost for security and supervision of examination operation, which were to be provided by police officers. Mr LEUNG also opined that the IT consultancy fee of \$2.25 million was on the high side. He was concerned that once the consultancy study was committed, the project would have to proceed regardless of any problems encountered. PSEM said that as the IT infrastructure for onscreen marking was relatively new, a consultant had to be engaged to work out the tender specifications before tendering.

12. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung enquired if the IT infrastructure for onscreen marking system would be subject to open tender and if so, the criteria for tendering. He said that the successful bidder should be responsible for the repair and maintenance of the system in case of failure. SG, HKEAA said that an expert in the field had been identified to assist in working out the tender requirements taking into account overseas experience. The tender document would need to be carefully

prepared to protect the interest of users. A tender board would be set up to oversee the tendering process to ensure that the right hardware and software would be procured. There were only a limited number of companies in the world which were involved in the provision of IT infrastructure for onscreen marking.

13. Mr WONG Kwok-hing expressed concern about the considerable amount of resources which had to be invested in the provision of centralized onscreen marking centres and the related equipment, including closed circuit television (CCTV), Access Control systems and notebook computers, for security and supervision of public examination operation. As the centralized onscreen marking centres and equipment would only be used once or twice a year during the examination period, after which these would be left idle for most of the time, he opined that efforts should be made to optimize the use of these centres. Consideration should also be given to renting the equipment, as otherwise this would be outdated in a short time. SG, HKEAA assured members that there would be a flexible use of resources. By way of illustration, the onscreen making centres and equipment could be used for onscreen marking, training purposes and other examinations held in Hong Kong. While agreeing that CCTVs installed in the examination centres might not be fully utilized during the year, SG, HKEAA said that these were useful for security purposes as they could assist in supervising the examination and monitoring incidents which might occur during examination. On the suggestion of renting equipment for use during the examination season, SG, HKEAA said that this might not be practicable as it would be difficult to secure hundreds of computers on a short-term lease. As such, the investment in equipment for the examination, albeit to be used on a seasonal basis, was worthwhile.

Savings

14. Mr WONG Kwok-hing enquired about the number of staff who would become redundant as a result of automation of examination processes and their respective ranks. He also enquired if the staff concerned would be redeployed to other departments. SG, HKEAA said that while there would be staff savings as a result of onscreen marking since temporary staff would no longer be required for checking the examination results after automation of processes, it was not possible to precisely quantify the savings at this stage. PSEM added that to ensure accuracy of marking, it had been the practice for HKEAA to engage two teams of staff to add marks and cross-check examination results manually. Although the accuracy rate would improve with more cross-checking, human errors were still common. The situation would improve with the automation of processes.

15. The Chairman put the item to vote. The Committee approved the proposal.

16. The meeting was adjourned at 3:20 pm.