

**立法會**  
**Legislative Council**

LC Paper No. CB(3) 798/09-10

Ref: CB(3)/P/5

**Paper for the House Committee meeting  
on 18 June 2010**

**Asking of supplementary questions to oral questions  
and allocation of question slots**

**Purpose**

This paper provides background information on the asking of supplementary questions to oral questions at Council meetings and allocation of question slots.

**Asking supplementary questions to oral questions**

Relevant rules

2. Under the current Rules of Procedure ("RoP"), where there will be a debate on a motion not intended to have legislative effect at a Council meeting, no more than six oral questions shall be asked, and where there is no such debate at a meeting, no more than 10 oral questions shall be asked (Rule 23(3) of RoP). Under the current House Rules ("HR"), where no more than six questions shall be asked, the time limit shall, depending on the Agenda for the meeting, normally be one to one and a half hours, i.e. about 15 minutes ("min") for each question. Where 10 oral questions are to be asked at a meeting, the duration of question time shall be not more than two and a half hours, i.e. also about 15 min for each question (rule 7(a) of HR).

3. HR provide that questions should be precise and to the point and that multiple questions within a single oral question should be avoided. Questions requiring very extensive research efforts for replies should also be avoided and questions should not raise matters of policy too wide to be dealt with in a single reply (rule 6 of HR).

4. RoP and HR also stipulate rules on the asking of supplementary questions. For instance, a supplementary question should not be made a pretext for a debate (Rule 26(5) of RoP). It should not contain more than one question and it should not contain statements and inferences (rule 8(c) and (d) of HR).

5. The texts of the relevant rules are in **Appendix I**.

### Past deliberations

6. The issue of the long time taken by Members to ask oral questions and public officers to reply to them, thus leaving little time for Members to ask supplementary questions to oral questions has been brought up from time to time. At the House Committee meeting held on 11 September 1998, members agreed that an oral question should not contain more than three parts.

7. The former President had also issued guidelines to Members on 5 February 2004 regarding the asking of oral questions and supplementary questions which included, inter alia, that the length of a main question or a supplementary question should be around one min and that, within the stipulated time limit of 15 min, no less than five supplementary questions might on average be asked for each question. The relevant correspondence is in **Appendix II**.

8. The former President also wrote to the Chief Secretary for Administration ("CS") seeking the Administration's co-operation to tailor the length of the main replies of public officers to oral questions to around five min and to give concise replies to Members' supplementary questions. CS replied that in the majority of cases, the length of replies was dictated by the complexity of the subject concerned and the amount of information sought in the original question. Relatively longer replies were necessary, for instance, to questions raising matters of great public concern, seeking a lot of information, or covering a large number of issues. Public officers had already endeavoured to set out the supporting facts and figures in an annex to their main replies, so as not to use up precious time of the Council. CS also indicated that he had reminded public officers to prepare concise replies to Members' questions, and be brief in handling supplementary questions. The relevant correspondences are in **Appendix III**.

9. The above issue has never been referred to the Committee on Rules of Procedure for study.

### Current situation

10. Where the asking of an oral question by a Member and the public officer's main reply to the question have taken considerable time, it is the practice of the President to relax the limit on the total time for the question so that there could still be a few Members who are able to ask supplementary questions. From time to time, the President has also reminded Members to observe the relevant rules regarding the asking of supplementary questions (paragraph 4 above refers), so as to allow more Members to ask supplementary questions. The President has also reminded public officers to give concise answers to Members' questions.

11. In the current term, the average length of an oral question is one min 36 seconds ("sec") and that of a main reply is five min 14 sec. This leaves about eight minutes for Members to ask supplementary questions if the 15-min time limit is followed. In practice, the President allows about 14 min for Members to ask supplementary questions and the average number of questions asked is five to six.

### **Allocation of question slots**

12. Under the current RoP and HR, each Member is limited to asking only one oral and one written question or alternatively two written questions at any one Council meeting (Rule 24(3) of RoP and rule 7(b) of HR). Where 20 or more Members wish to ask questions at a meeting, each Member is allowed to ask only one question (rule 7(b) of HR), either an oral or a written question.

13. A Member may register only one oral and one written or alternatively two written questions each week (rule 5(b) of HR), and the cut-off time for registration of questions for each Council meeting is 12:00 midnight of the third Friday preceding the Council meeting. Registered questions for which question slots have not been allocated may be carried forward.

14. Slots for oral and written questions are allocated separately but subject to the same criteria. In allocating question slots, priority is given to Members who have been allocated the least slots for oral or written questions since the beginning of the session (rule 7(c) of HR). If two or more Members have been allocated the same number of slots, the Member(s) who has registered questions earlier will have priority.

15. If there are question slots remaining after the allocation of question slots to Members who submitted questions before the cut-off time for registration of questions, the slots will be allocated on a first-come-first-served basis to Members who submit questions after the expiry of the cut-off time for registration of questions, until all slots have been taken up or the expiry of the deadline for giving notice of questions, whichever is the earlier.

16. The texts of the relevant rules are in **Appendix I**.

Council Business Division 3  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
17 June 2010



**Extract from the Rules of Procedure**

\* \* \* \* \*

**23. Question Time**

(3) Where, in the opinion of the President, there will be no debate on a motion not intended to have legislative effect at a meeting, no more than 10 questions shall require an oral reply. Where, in the opinion of the President, there will be such a debate, no more than 6 questions shall require an oral reply. The questions shall be counted by the Clerk in the manner recommended by the House Committee and agreed by the President. *(L.N. 228 of 2000)*

\* \* \* \* \*

**24. Notice of Questions**

(3) A Member may not ask more than two questions of which notice has been given at any one meeting and not more than one of those questions shall require an oral reply. *(L.N. 15 of 2006)*

\* \* \* \* \*

**26. Asking and Answering of Questions**

(5) A Member shall not address the Council on a question and a question shall not be made a pretext for a debate.

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## Extract from the House Rules

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### 5. Registration of Questions to the Government at Meetings

- (b) Each Member is limited to registering only one oral and one written or alternatively two written questions per calendar week ending at 12:00 midnight on Friday. When a question is passed for registration, draft wording sufficient to identify the subject matter and the scope of the question should be provided.

\* \* \* \* \*

### 6. Form of Questions

- (a) Questions should be precise and to the point.
- (b) Multiple questions within a single oral question may be ruled out of order and should be avoided.
- (c) Questions requiring very extensive research efforts for replies, e.g. statistics relating to an unduly long period of time, should be avoided. If necessary, questions requiring statistics should be asked more appropriately as written questions.
- (d) Questions should not raise matters of policy too wide to be dealt with in a single reply.

### 7. Number and Allocation of Questions

- (a) Where there is no debate on a motion not intended to have legislative effect at a meeting, no more than 10 oral questions shall be asked. Where, in the opinion of the President, there will be such a debate at a meeting, no more than six oral questions shall be asked and the time limit shall, depending on the Agenda for the meeting, normally be one to one and a half hours. Where 10 oral questions are to be asked at a meeting, the duration of question time shall be not more than two and a half hours.
- (b) Under Rule 24(3) of the Rules of Procedure, each Member is normally limited to asking only one oral and one written or alternatively two written questions at any one meeting. Where 20 or more Members wish to raise questions at a meeting, each Member is allowed to raise only one question. However, questions asked under Rule 26(6) and (6A) of the Rules of Procedure are not counted for the purpose of these restrictions.

- (c) The allocation of questions to be asked at a meeting is normally based on the order of registration of the questions by the Secretariat. Where there are more questions to be raised by Members than can be scheduled for the same meeting and subject to (b) above, priority will be given to Members who have been allocated the least slots respectively for oral or written questions within the session.

\* \* \* \* \*

**8. Supplementary Questions**

- (c) A supplementary question should not contain more than one question.
- (d) A supplementary question should be framed as a question and should not include statements, contain inferences, suggest its own answer or ask for confirmation of rumours or press reports.

\* \* \* \* \*







立法會主席辦公室  
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

范徐麗泰議員 Mrs Rita Fan, GBS, JP

來函檔號 YOUR REF :  
本函檔號 OUR REF : CB(3)/P/5 (V)  
電 話 TELEPHONE : (852) 2869 9461  
圖文傳真 FACSIMILE : (852) 2877 9600

5 February 2004

To: Hon Members of the Legislative Council

Dear Members

### Oral questions asked at Legislative Council meetings

During the Chinese New Year holidays, I reviewed the time taken up by the oral questions asked at Council meetings since the beginning of this session.

On average, each oral question took up close to 19 minutes; and six oral questions took up close to two hours, which far exceeds even the upper time limit of one and a half hours for question time at a meeting, as stipulated in House Rule 7(a).

I have examined the duration of the questions in an attempt to identify the causes of the length of question time. The longest time taken up by one single question (asked at the meeting held on 12 November 2003) was 30 minutes 50 seconds, broken down as: 1 minute 36 seconds for the question; 12 minutes 55 seconds for the reply; and 16 minutes 19 seconds for the supplementaries raised by five Members. The shortest time taken up by one single question (asked on 26 November 2004) was 9 minutes 6 seconds, broken down as: 35 seconds for the question; 3 minutes 54 seconds for the reply; and 4 minutes 37 seconds for the supplementaries raised by four Members.

It appears that the time taken up by an oral question depended on:

- (a) the length of the main question, which ranged from 16 seconds to 2 minutes 5 seconds; or
- (b) the length of the reply to the main question, which ranged from 43 seconds to 12 minutes 55 seconds; or
- (c) the duration of the time for supplementaries, which ranged from 4 minutes 37 seconds for four Members' supplementaries and 18 minutes 16 seconds for seven Members' supplementaries; or

- (d) whether Members made long preambles or statements before raising supplementaries, or made claims that their questions had not been answered; or
- (e) the length of the public officers' replies to supplementaries.

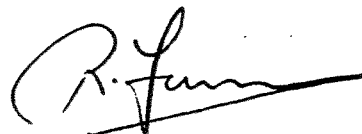
As I expect that Council meetings for the remainder of this term is likely to become longer, and in order to adhere as closely as possible to the stipulated time limit for oral questions, I have devised the following guidelines:

- (a) the length of a main question or a supplementary should be around one minute;
- (b) the length of the reply to a main question should preferably be around five minutes;
- (c) within the stipulated time limit, on average no less than five supplementaries may be asked for each question;
- (d) where it is obvious to me that there is considerable interest among Members and the public in the subject matter of a question, I shall exercise my discretion and suitably adjust the time available to the question; and
- (e) I shall cut short Members whose supplementaries clearly contravene Rule 26(4) and (5) of the Rules of Procedure.

In the interest of the efficient conduct of Council business, I seek Members' cooperation in making your best effort to follow the above guidelines.

I have separately written to the Chief Secretary for Administration to seek the cooperation of public officers in preparing their replies to oral questions.

Yours sincerely



(Mrs Rita FAN)  
President  
Legislative Council

c.c. The Chief Secretary for Administration



立法會主席辦公室  
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

范徐麗泰議員 Mrs Rita Fan, CBE, JP

來函編號 YOUR REF :  
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電 話 TELEPHONE : (852) 2869 9461  
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5 February 2004

The Hon Donald TSANG Yam Kuen, GBM, JP  
Chief Secretary for Administration  
Chief Secretary for Administration's Private Office  
12/F, West Wing  
Central Government Offices  
Lower Albert Road  
Central, Hong Kong

Dear *Donald,*

**Oral questions asked at Legislative Council meetings**

Following my review, during the holidays, of the time taken up by the oral questions asked at Council meetings since the beginning of this session, I have written to Members to seek their cooperation in adhering as closely as possible to the time limit for oral questions stipulated in the House Rules. A copy of my letter of today's date to Members is attached.

Regarding public officers' replies to oral questions, I urge you to liaise with them, with a view to tailoring the length of their replies to main questions to around five minutes and offering concise replies to Members' supplementaries.

I am confident that, in the interest of the efficient conduct of Council business, I have the full cooperation of the Administration in this regard.

Yours sincerely

( Mrs Rita FAN )  
President  
Legislative Council

Encl.

c.c. Hon Members of the Legislative Council (without enclosure)

香港特別行政區政府  
政務司司長辦公室



CHIEF SECRETARY  
FOR ADMINISTRATION'S OFFICE  
Government of the Hong Kong  
Special Administrative Region

17 February 2004

Hon Mrs Rita FAN HSU Lai-tai, GBS, JP  
President  
Legislative Council  
Legislative Council Building  
8 Jackson Road  
Hong Kong

*Dear Rita*

### **Oral questions asked at Legislative Council meetings**

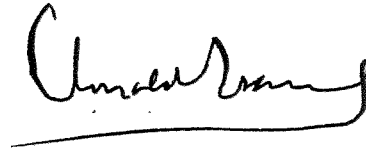
Thank you for your letter of 5 February 2004, on the duration of question time at Council meetings.

I have reviewed the length of replies made by public officers to oral questions asked in the current session. It appears that in a majority of cases, the length of the replies is dictated by the complexity of the subject concerned and the amount of information sought in the original question. Relatively longer replies were necessary, for instance, to questions raising matters of great public concern; seeking a lot of information; or covering a large number of issues. Where appropriate, public officers already endeavour to set out the supporting facts and figures in an annex to their main replies, so as not to use up precious time of the Council. In all fairness, public officers have by and large tried to confine their replies to information sought by Members.

Notwithstanding this finding, we appreciate the need to ensure the efficient conduct of Council business, which is indeed the Administration's policy. I have accordingly reminded colleagues to prepare concise replies to Members' questions, and be brief in handling supplementary questions.

Thank you for bringing this matter to my attention.

*Sincerely*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donald Tsang". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

( Donald Tsang )  
Chief Secretary for Administration