

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)3090/03-04
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seen by the Administration)

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Panel on Education

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 17 May 2004 at 4:30 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

- Members present** : Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung, BBS (Chairman)
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon SIN Chung-kai
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon SZETO Wah
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
Hon MA Fung-kwok, JP
- Members absent** : Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
- Public Officers attending** : Mr Chris WARDLAW
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (5)
- Mr CHOI Chee-cheong, JP
Secretary General, Hong Kong Examinations and
Assessment Authority
- Clerk in attendance** : Mr Stanley MA
Senior Council Secretary (2)6
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I. Information paper(s) issued since the last meeting

Members noted the Administration's paper on "Feasibility of establishment of an industry compensation fund for private schools offering non-formal curriculum" [LC Paper No. CB(2)2238/03-04(01)] and the paper on "Bullying in school" [Paper No. CB(2)2347/03-04(01)] in response to the request of Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong at the last meeting on 19 April 2004.

II. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[Appendices I and II to LC Paper No. CB(2)2318/03-04]

2. Members agreed to discuss the following at the next meeting scheduled for 21 June 2004 at 4:30 pm -

- (a) Remuneration systems in University Grants Committee-funded institutions after deregulation of university salaries;
- (b) Allocation of secondary school places for children of ethnic minorities; and
- (c) School-based professional support for teachers.

III. Review on the handling of missing examination scripts by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority

[LC Paper No. CB(2)2318/03-04(01)]

3. At the invitation of the Chairman, Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (5) highlighted the main points of the Administration's paper on the subject.

4. Secretary General, Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (SG(HKEAA)) supplemented that HKEAA would consider carefully the recommendations in the investigation report of the Ombudsman published on 4 March 2004. HKEAA would implement a number of precautionary measures starting from the 2004 public examinations to prevent loss of scripts such as reminding markers of the importance of safe custody of scripts and conducting centralized marking at HKEAA premises for single-script subjects of private candidates in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examinations (HKCEE) and the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE).

Handling of examination scripts

5. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that he had studied the flowchart of processing scripts in Appendix 3 of the Administration's paper and consulted

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markers and examination centre supervisors on the procedures for handling examination scripts. Mr CHEUNG noticed that most missing scripts were discovered by the markers when they counted the number of scripts against the computer reports at home, or by the temporary staff (university students) of HKEAA when they checked the marking and scores of the scripts at HKEAA premises. He pointed out that there were loopholes in the current procedures for handling the examination scripts in sealed envelopes, i.e., the number of scripts in sealed envelopes were not counted when they were transferred from the examination centre to HKEAA, from HKEAA to the markers, and from the markers to HKEAA. He suggested that HKEAA should review the procedures with a view to reducing the number of missing scripts and identifying the location at which a script was lost. He asked whether HKEAA would consider requiring the counting of the number of scripts in sealed envelopes for every transfer of the scripts from HKEAA staff to markers or vice versa.

6. SG(HKEAA) explained that centre supervisors should follow the stipulated procedures to ensure that the examination scripts of all attending candidates were collected before the candidates were allowed to leave an examination centre. They should also check and put the scripts in the correct envelopes and sign across it together with an invigilator. Staff of HKEAA would sort the sealed script envelopes returned from examination centres by marker number and check the number of script envelopes before distribution to markers. Each marker was required to check the number of the script envelopes before collection, and to check the number of scripts in the envelopes against the computer report of the attendance of candidates in the examination centres concerned. All markers were required to report any discrepancies to HKEAA at the markers' meeting held a few days after the collection of the script envelopes.

7. SG(HKEAA) further explained that the HKEAA had not counted the scripts from centres because for security reasons, it would be better to keep the opening of the sealed script envelopes to the minimum. It was also unrealistic to count the scripts upon their return from centres at the end of the examinations. The current procedures did not require the markers to count the number of examination scripts in each sealed envelope on collection because HKEAA was of the view that counting would best be carried out by the markers at home. He pointed out that each year, some 160,000 candidates took the HKCEE and the HKALE, and about two million examination scripts were handled by HKEAA. He considered that given the extremely low occurrence rate of missing scripts, the current procedures and systems for handling the examination scripts were generally reliable and appropriate, subject to further review.

8. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that since the scripts were counted by the centre supervisor alone, there would be occasional discrepancies between the number of scripts counted by the centre supervisor and the number of candidates attending the examination. He pointed out that some centre supervisors admitted that they had experienced errors in counting the scripts but

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fortunately such errors were corrected before the scripts were put in the envelopes. As the markers were only required to count the number of scripts in the sealed envelopes at home, it would be difficult to trace the causes and identify the locations for the missing scripts. Mr CHEUNG suggested that HKEAA should review the current procedures for handling of examination scripts to reduce the number of missing scripts.

9. SG(HKEAA) replied that he believed that all centre supervisors would conscientiously check the number of candidates presented in an examination centre and count the number of examination scripts collected from candidates, and re-count the number of scripts in case of any discrepancy. Currently, HKEAA was reviewing the procedures for handling examination scripts and would consider requiring an invigilator to counter-check the number of scripts collected before they were put in the envelopes. He reiterated that a marker would report any discrepancy between the number of scripts in an envelope and the number of candidates printed in the computer report at the markers' meeting for follow-up investigation.

10. Mr SZETO Wah suggested that HKEAA should consider requiring markers to open the sealed envelopes and count the examination scripts in front of HKEAA staff, and HKEAA staff to count the scripts returned by markers before acknowledging the receipt. He considered that such arrangements would enhance accountability of markers and staff in the handling of the examination scripts as any discrepancy would be identified before the transfer of the script envelopes, and help reduce the number of missing scripts in the long run. SG(HKEAA) responded that enforcing the requirements would incur additional time and space and therefore needed to be carefully considered. Ms Cyd HO remarked that HKEAA should consider the distribution of sealed envelopes to markers at a markers meeting and require them to count the number of scripts in sealed envelopes at the meeting.

11. SG(HKEAA) responded that the reliability of markers in keeping safe custody of examination scripts should not be doubted. He pointed out that among the two million examination scripts which were handled by HKEAA last year, only five scripts were found missing. He stressed that HKEAA would consider the loss of any examination script a serious error.

A choice for candidates to accept the assessed grades or re-sit an examination

12. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that the loss of any script was extremely significant to candidates who had devoted years of hard work in preparation for the examination. He expressed regret about HKEAA's former policy of not informing the candidates about the loss of their examination scripts and the provision of assessed grades as a remedial measure. He also expressed reservations about the revised policy under which HKEAA would only inform the candidates of the missing scripts and the assessed grades until the day of

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publication of the results of the public examinations. He considered it cruel and unfair to ask the affected candidates to either accept the assessed grades or a refund of the examination fees. He pointed out that the affected candidates would have no other alternative but to accept the assessed grades if they were in urgent pursuit of higher level studies. He asked whether HKEAA would consider advising the affected candidates earlier and providing them with a choice to accept the assessed grades or re-sit the examination.

13. SG(HKEAA) responded that the practice of not informing the candidates whose scripts were missing was not uncommon among examination authorities in different jurisdictions. The purpose was to avoid creating unnecessary anxiety on the part of the candidates concerned. In view of the concerns and recommendations of the Ombudsman, HKEAA would adopt a number of improvement measures to enhance the transparency of the handling of the examination scripts. With effect from the 2004 public examinations, HKEAA would notify the affected candidates of the missing scripts and the assessed grades on the day of publication of results. HKEAA did not recommend an earlier notification because the assessed grades could only be worked out at the end of the grading process, and that notification without the assessed grades would lead to unnecessary anxiety on the part of the affected candidates. He added that many overseas examination and assessment authorities with an established policy on disclosure of missing scripts adopted the same practice.

14. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed reservations about the policy of not informing the candidates of the loss of their examination scripts earlier for the sake of avoiding unnecessary anxiety on their part. He considered it more appropriate to give the affected candidates a choice to accept the assessed grades, or to re-sit the examination at an early opportunity. He pointed out that some schools would arrange students to re-sit an examination if their examination scripts were found missing.

15. SG(HKEAA) responded that many missing scripts were identified by HKEAA temporary staff during the final stage of checking carried out at HKEAA premises to ensure correct calculation of marks and data entry of the scores of individual candidates. This exercise would be completed about two weeks before the publication of results. He pointed out that the assessed grades could only be worked out at the end of the grading process which would be a few days before the publication of the results of the public examination concerned. It would not be fair to ask the affected candidates whether they would prefer to re-sit the examination when the assessed grades were not yet available. SG(HKEAA) added that HKEAA had consulted the Committee on Home-School Co-operation on remedial measures for handling missing scripts, and most members of the Committee had expressed reservations about the adoption of a policy to provide a re-sit of the examination. To improve the reliability of the assessed grades, the Committee suggested that HKEAA should take into account candidate's achievements in the subject in the second term of secondary

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4 and the first term of secondary 5 in derivation of the assessed grades for the affected candidates.

16. SG(HKEAA) further said that in the light of the Ombudsman's recommendations, HKEAA would consider whether the affected candidates should be offered to re-sit an examination in the same administration at its meeting in May. He pointed out that the School Examinations Board under HKEAA was of the view that a re-sit examination in the same administration was essentially a different examination and it would be difficult to compare its results with those in the mainstream examination. For this reason, most overseas examination and assessment authorities had not adopted a policy for candidates to re-sit an examination. SG(HKEAA) added that to improve the reliability of the assessed grades, HKEAA would consider -

- (a) for school candidates, the candidate's achievement in the subject in school and the results of his schoolmates in the same public examination with effect from 2004; and
- (b) for both single-script and multi-script subjects, the candidate's public examination results in other subjects, particularly those of a similar nature.

17. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that giving the affected candidates a choice to re-sit or accept the assessed grade was most crucial, and the offer of a re-sit should be provided as soon as a script was reported missing. If the missing script was located at a later stage, the candidate should be advised to accept the grading for this script. Mr CHEUNG considered that with in-depth expertise in administering public examinations, it would not be difficult for HKEAA to arrange a re-sit for the small number of affected candidates in a year.

18. Mr SZETO Wah said that candidates whose examination scripts were reported missing were innocent, and should be provided with an assessed grade and an opportunity to re-sit the examination. He considered that these candidates should be allowed to accept the assessed grades or the results of their re-sits.

Centralized marking

19. Mr WONG Sing-chi said that he was shocked by a newspaper report that a marker was found marking the scripts in a public place within sight of some secondary school students. He asked whether HKEAA had specified the procedures and requirements for ensuring the safe custody of examination scripts, and how HKEAA would enforce compliance by markers.

20. SG(HKEAA) responded that HKEAA was also shocked by the newspaper report but considered it an isolated incident as markers were

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professional teachers who were well aware of the importance of ensuring safe custody of the examination scripts. He pointed out that the “Instructions to Markers” issued by HKEAA had stipulated that no marking of examination scripts should be carried out in a public place. He stressed that an isolated case of non-compliance with the requirement should not affect the reliability of the current procedures and the system of marking of the examination scripts as a vast majority of the markers did comply with the instructions of the HKEAA. Mr WONG Sing-chi expressed reservations about the reliability of the current procedures and systems and said that HKEAA did not specifically require markers to mark their scripts at home and had no mechanism in place to enforce the requirement that markers should not mark the scripts in public places.

21. The Chairman and Mr WONG Sing-chi asked whether HKEAA would consider the adoption of centralized marking and require markers to mark examination scripts in selected venues, in order to enhance safe custody and prevent further missing of scripts. The Chairman pointed out that the examination authorities in the Mainland had an established policy on centralized marking, and provided venues for markers to mark the scripts in the day time so that no scripts would be taken away by markers.

22. SG(HKEAA) responded that HKEAA would consider the feasibility of conducting centralized marking in Hong Kong, but pointed out that the current arrangements and procedures for markers to collect, mark and return the scripts had been implemented for years. He considered that most markers were serving teachers in day time school who were willing to sacrifice their leisure time to mark scripts at home. They had accustomed to the operation of the existing system and might not consider centralized marking a better alternative. He added that the availability of suitable venues for conducting centralized marking in Hong Kong and the operating hours of these venues and the cost had to be considered.

23. Mr WONG Sing-chi considered that the conduct of centralized marking at specific venues and periods would facilitate safe custody of the examination scripts. He pointed out that although markers were instructed not to mark scripts in public places, it would be difficult for HKEAA to ensure full compliance. SG(HKEAA) responded that he believed that markers were professional teachers who understood the importance of keeping the scripts in safe custody and not marking them in a public place.

24. Mr SZETO Wah pointed out that centralized marking was previously adopted for the Academic Aptitude Tests incorporated under the Secondary School Places Allocation System. He pointed out that in view of the heavy workload of teachers, secondary schools might not be able to release their teachers to participate in centralized marking during the day time period, and many serving teachers would not prefer to mark scripts in selected venues in the evening.

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Way forward

25. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed disappointment that SG(HKEAA) was more concerned about the technical difficulties involved in implementing improvement measures to help reduce the number of missing examination scripts. He cited paragraphs 13 – 16 of the executive summary of the Ombudsman’s investigation report to illustrate that HKEAA should consider the rights of the affected candidates to be informed and have a say on possible remedy, and improve the transparency of its procedures for handling the missing scripts in order to restore public faith in its administration of the public examination system in Hong Kong. Mr CHEUNG stressed that HKEAA should review its remedial measures for handling missing scripts from the perspective of the candidates. He urged HKEAA to consider the recommendations of the Ombudsman as well as the views and suggestions of members in a more positive manner.

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26. SG(HKEAA) responded that HKEAA was reviewing the current procedures for enhancing the safe custody of examination scripts and would discuss the proposed improvement measures at its meeting to be held on 24 May 2004. He stressed that HKEAA did not wish to have any missing scripts and had all along put the interests of candidates in the first place. He undertook to convey members’ views and suggestions to HKEAA for consideration.

27. The Chairman asked whether HKEAA had tested the reliability of its mechanism on the provision of assessed grades for candidates whose examination scripts were missing. He suggested that HKEAA should conduct a study to compare the actual grades and the assessed grades derived from the mechanism for randomly selected candidates in different subjects of HKCEE and HKALE. Mr SZETO Wah expressed support for the conduct of such a study.

28. SG(HKEAA) replied that so far HKEAA had not conducted a study to compare the actual grades and the assessed grades of candidates in HKCEE and HKALE. He reiterated that HKEAA would take into account the school results in working out the assessed grades for the candidates concerned, which was in line with the growing world trend to recognize students’ attainment at school and the spirit of school-based assessment of students’ performance.

IV. Any other business

29. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 5:30 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
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