

**For discussion
On 9 February 2021**

**Legislative Council Panel on Education
Subcommittee to Study the Development of Textbooks and Teaching
Materials for Kindergartens, Primary and Secondary Schools**

Review, complaints and evaluation mechanisms for textbooks

Purpose

This paper aims to brief Members on matters related to the review, complaints and evaluation mechanisms for textbooks.

Background

2. There is a wide range of learning and teaching resources from diversified sources. Textbooks are not only teaching resources, but also important learning materials for student learning. Quality textbooks should be written in line with the aims, objectives and contents of central curriculum, help students to construct knowledge, develop skills, nurture positive values and attitudes, and facilitate self-directed learning. Strictly speaking, textbooks, be they printed or e-version, are those which have passed the Education Bureau (EDB)'s textbook review mechanism for schools' reference in their selection of textbooks. Textbooks that have undergone the review conducted by the EDB contain core elements of the curriculum and provide appropriate learning activities. They not only support the learning and teaching of different subjects, but also help teachers plan for teaching to achieve the curriculum objectives. As such, textbooks are commonly adopted in schools as important learning and teaching resources.

Textbook review mechanism

The EDB's role in reviewing textbooks

3. All along, it is the EDB's policy not to get directly involved in textbook writing and publication. Instead, a rigorous textbook review mechanism is put in place to ensure that textbooks included in the Recommended Textbook List are accurate in content, in line with the curriculum, of good quality and fit for student learning. Under the prevailing mechanism, publishers write the textbooks according to the prescribed guidelines provided by the EDB and submit the textbooks to the Bureau for review.

Textbook review mechanism

4. Since 1972, the EDB has put in place a rigorous textbook review mechanism to ensure the provision of quality textbooks. The Textbook Committee, headed by an EDB directorate officer and comprising heads of relevant sections of the Curriculum Development Institute (CDI), has been set up internally for formulating textbook review policies, procedures and regulations. The Textbook Committee communicates with publishers' associations through meetings held on a regular basis, so as to improve the administrative arrangements for textbook submission, cope with emerging textbook issues as well as exchange views on the textbook review mechanism.

Guidelines on textbook writing and submission of textbooks for review

5. To facilitate publishers to write textbooks, the EDB has issued "Guidelines on Submission of Textbooks for Review" as well as the "Textbook Writing Guidelines" for each subject for the reference of publishers which may then invite authors to draft the books and submit them to the EDB for review. These guidelines are available at <https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/resource-support/textbook-info/index.html>.

Appointment of the textbook review panels as well as procedure and criteria for textbook review

6. Each textbook submitted for review is to be assessed by respective subject review panels, which comprise both internal and external reviewers appointed on a biennial basis. Internal reviewers are members of relevant subject sections of the EDB, while external ones include serving principals, teachers, academics, and other professional veterans of the subjects. For the 2019-2021 term, a total of about 1 400 external reviewers have been appointed in 32 review panels, serving on a voluntary and rotation basis. Since its inception, the textbook review mechanism covers only textbooks submitted by publishers and not complementary workbooks, exercise books and school-based resources.

7. In accordance with the “Guiding Principles for Quality Textbooks” formulated by the EDB, the quality of the textbooks submitted by publishers are assessed in terms of content, learning and teaching strategies and activities, structure and organisation, language and textbook layout, pedagogical use of e-features and technical and functional requirements for e-textbooks, etc. by relevant subject review panels. Under the existing mechanism, each textbook is reviewed by two external reviewers. Incorporating the views of all reviewers (including internal reviewers), comments of textbook review reports serve as reference for textbook publishers and authors to improve the quality of textbooks. The textbook review panels and the EDB will not provide specific suggestions on the approaches of textbook writing and presentation. Since it is the publishers’ obligation to write textbooks, publishers are required to make revision to the textbooks upon receiving the review reports. It is also the responsibility of the publishers to make continued review of their textbooks and do refinement as appropriate.

8. To ensure the textbook review procedure is fair and impartial manner, both the identities of the publishers submitting books for review and the reviewers are protected to minimise conflict of interests. There is a mutual confidentiality agreement between the EDB and members of subject review panels regarding all matters related to the textbook review, including the identity of reviewers and their comments given on the

textbooks covered in the review. The rule of confidentiality ensures that textbook review can be conducted fairly, objectively and professionally free from interference, pressure and bias. It is also an important safeguard against corruption. Textbooks that have passed the review mechanism will be available for sale in the market and members of the public will be able to monitor their contents. This long-standing mechanism has been in place for many years. Relevant arrangements are formulated in consultation with textbook publishers with input from the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC).

Recommended Textbook List (RTL)/Recommended e-Textbook List (eRTL)

9. Those textbooks that reach the acceptable standard are classified as “Recommended” and included in the Recommended Textbook List (RTL)/Recommended e-Textbook List (eRTL) (www.edb.gov.hk/rtl). Currently, textbooks for all subjects, except Liberal Studies (LS), in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools are accepted for review and all textbooks that have undergone the review process are listed on the RTL for schools’ reference in the selection of textbooks. There are now 539 sets (4 129 volumes) of printed textbooks and 62 sets (450 volumes) of e-textbooks are on the RTL and eRTL respectively. Taking into account the experience of the recommendation made by the Task Force on Review of School Curriculum, the EDB will strengthen quality assurance measures for the senior secondary LS subject (the subject is to be renamed), including the submission of LS textbooks for review by publishers.

Procedure and criteria for selection of textbooks in schools

10. Quality textbooks are learner-focused, comprehensive and self-contained. They not only serve as teaching materials for teachers, but are also important self-directed learning materials for students for lesson preparation and revision purposes to support the implementation of school curriculum. To facilitate schools’ choice of learning and teaching materials, including textbooks, the EDB has provided guidelines, such as “Guiding Principles for Quality Textbooks”, to remind schools of the necessity for setting out well-defined school-based criteria for the selection, and devising a review mechanism for evaluating and updating the learning and teaching resources adopted by schools. We have also been

elucidating to schools, through various channels such as curriculum guides, circular memorandum, different professional development programmes for teachers and school visits, the requirements and criteria for the selection of learning and teaching resources, including textbooks, emphasising that teachers should be prudent in the selection of teaching materials and ensure that the learning and teaching materials of various subjects are in line with the aims and objectives of the central curriculum. The contents of and information provided in the materials should be correct, complete, objective and impartial.

11. As for the internal mechanism of schools, the EDB has advised schools to set up a textbook selection committee for individual subjects and make reference to the Quality Textbook Guidelines in setting up relevant school-based criteria. Each textbook committee should review and select learning and teaching resources (including textbooks and school-based teaching materials) annually and submit the results to the school principal and the School Management Committee (SMC) / Incorporated Management Committee (IMC) for their approval. (For details, please refer to EDBCM No. 26/2020: <https://applications.edb.gov.hk/circular/upload/EDBCM/EDBCM20026E.pdf>)

Complaints and evaluation mechanism for textbooks

Evaluation of textbook review mechanism

12. All along, the Curriculum Development Council (CDC) Committee on Learning Resources and Support Services (CLRSS), among other functions, plays the key role of advising the EDB on matters related to the quality of textbooks and the provision of other learning resources and support services. In addition, the EDB meets regularly with other stakeholders, including school sponsoring bodies, principals, teachers and parents, through various channels such as seminars and sharing sessions, to disseminate policies, share experiences and practices related to textbooks and other resources development as well as discuss with them relevant issues.

13. In response to public concern about textbook issues, such as the textbook review procedure, quality of textbooks and textbook prices, the EDB has liaised with different external bodies to review the textbook review mechanism for improvement. This include the ICAC assignments on Curriculum Development and Textbook Review in 1998, 1999 and 2005, the Working Group on Textbooks and e-Learning Resources Development in 2009 and the Task Force to Review Learning and Teaching Materials in 2011, as well as the Director of Audit’s report of 2018 regarding the EDB’s efforts in harnessing information technology to facilitate learning and teaching. The EDB has followed up via implementing different initiatives, such as development of e-textbooks, the implementation of “Debundling Policy for pricing of textbooks and teaching and learning resources”, not accepting revised edition of textbooks included in the Recommended Textbook List within five years under “five-year-rule of no revision” etc., to continuously refine the textbook review mechanism as a transparent and impartial system and to provide more choices of quality textbooks for schools.

Handling complaints against textbooks

14. If schools and the public have any comments or complaints on textbooks which are on the RTL, they can reflect directly the issues to the publisher concerned or to the EDB. Upon receiving the cases about textbooks, the EDB will review the contents and contact the publisher concerned for follow up if necessary. Along with the textbook review mechanism, it is the professional duty of publishers to provide appropriate contents and learning activities when writing textbooks according to the relevant guidelines issued by the EDB. The contents of textbooks should be in line with the aims and objectives of the curriculum of respective subjects, and the information provided should be correct, complete, objective and impartial that help students to construct knowledge, develop skills and nurture positive values and attitudes. Publishers should always review the textbook contents and make necessary amendments from time to time to enhance the quality of textbooks. The EDB may also require publishers to make amendments if deemed necessary.

Advice sought

15. Members are kindly reminded to note the roles of the EDB in the review and quality monitoring mechanism of textbooks.

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