

**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**

**Development of textbooks and the question-setting mechanism of the
Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination**

Purpose

This paper aims to brief Members on the existing development of textbooks and the question-setting mechanism of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination.

Background

2. 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. Textbooks that have undergone the review conducted by the Education Bureau (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.

3. Curriculum, teaching and assessment are closely linked, and assessment is not independent of the curriculum. The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) is responsible for the setting and moderation of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE) questions. The primary principles of question setting for the public examinations are meeting the requirements of the Curriculum and Assessment Guide and the Assessment Framework, and effectively assessing students' abilities.

Development of textbooks

4. 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.

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>.

6. 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.

7. 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>)

Question-setting mechanism of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination

8. The HKEAA is responsible for the setting and moderation of the HKDSE questions. The primary principles of question setting for the public examinations are meeting the requirements of the Curriculum and Assessment Guide and the Assessment Framework, and effectively assessing students' abilities. At present, a moderation committee is set up for each of the 24 Category A subjects of the HKDSE. Each moderation committee comprises the Chief Examiner, setters and moderators. Apart from the subject manager from the HKEAA, members include subject / curriculum experts, experienced secondary school teachers and academics from post-secondary institutions. The duty of the moderation committee

is to develop examination questions and marking schemes in alignment with the Curriculum and Assessment Guide and the Assessment Framework.

9. Members of the moderation committees are appointed through various channels, including nominations from schools, post-secondary institutions and subject committees, as well as selection from among experienced markers. The major considerations in selection of members include their subject knowledge and expertise, as well as their relevant experience in teaching and assessment. The appointment of moderation committee members is reviewed annually with a turnover of membership. The members, regardless of their personal background and beliefs, should set examination questions professionally based on the curriculum and assessment requirements according to the established mechanisms of the HKEAA, so as to ensure that students are assessed by the examination papers in an effective and fair manner. The Chief Examiner is responsible for leading the work of developing examination questions and marking schemes to ensure that the examination papers can manifest the spirit of the curriculum and is in alignment with the requirements of the Assessment Framework. All question-setting and moderation work is confidential; participants are not allowed to disclose any information to others.

10. After the public examination has been conducted, the Chief Examiner of the moderation committee will be responsible for leading the work of marking the examination scripts, including reviewing sample scripts and analysing candidates' actual performance with the Assistant Examiners, so as to set the marking criteria and standards. The Chief Examiner will also chair the Markers' Meeting to explain the assessment objectives, requirements of each question to the markers, as well as answer markers' questions to ensure consistency in assessment. The markers are mostly frontline teachers. An open recruitment for markers is held every year. A grade point mechanism is adopted, and the selection criteria include the applicants' relevant teaching and marking experience, their academic qualifications, and whether they are subject panel heads. The points required for appointment are subject to the number of applicants every year and their qualifications.

Improvement measures

11. Arising from a problematic question in History Paper 1 in the 2020 HKDSE that deviated from the History Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4 – 6) which aroused great controversies in society, the HKEAA conducted an internal investigation and review on the question setting, moderation and approval mechanism, and submitted a report to a Task Force established by the EDB. The Task Force reviewed since last July whether the mechanism was strictly complied with in the process of History question paper development and moderation. The Task Force completed the investigation and review in November last year and made recommendations for improvement to the HKEAA Council.

12. Apart from the recommendations from the Internal Review, the HKEAA has also adopted the recommendations put forward by the Task Force. A series of measures are formulated to enhance the questions setting procedure, and to provide training for the examination personnel. The HKEAA has rolled out some measures by phases since last September and planned to implement all the measures in the next two years to further improve the HKDSE examination paper development mechanism. These include full-implementation of the six-year rule to ensure a growing number of experts from different professional backgrounds that can contribute to paper development, participation of the EDB curriculum experts as ex-officio in moderation committees to help align curriculum and assessment goals, improvement of the workflow by exploring use of advanced technology to streamline and properly document moderation meetings and to provide the development process with a higher degree of structure and consistency, and setting up an Arbitration Committee of Moderation consisting of seniors members of the HKEAA and representatives of the Curriculum Development Council and the EDB to deal with unresolved disputes arising during the HKEAA's internal paper moderation process.

Summary

13. The quality of examination questions has a far-reaching impact on students' learning. The HKEAA will implement the relevant improvement measures to maintain the fairness, impartiality and credibility of the HKDSE. The EDB will continue to work closely with the HKEAA to ensure the close alignment between curriculum and assessment of the HKDSE, as well as upholding the high recognition of the HKEAA as a professional assessment organisation.

Advice sought

14. Members are kindly reminded to note the existing development of textbooks and the question-setting mechanism of the HKDSE.

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