

Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority

*The*  
**MANAGEMENT**  
*of*  
**PUBLIC**  
**EXAMINATIONS**

101 Questions and Answers

Thomas K Y Cheung



# FROM THE CHAIRMAN

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In education systems around the world, great emphasis has been placed on examinations by students, parents, teachers and communities. Public examinations at the secondary level have been entrenched in the education system of Hong Kong for decades and exert a powerful influence on the paths students take. Students here make great efforts to achieve outstanding academic performances to secure desirable further studies or career opportunities. Parents, families and the entire education community also strive to help youngsters excel in public examinations.

In this regard, there has always been a keen demand for more transparency regarding public examinations, the rigorous and meticulous ways of delivering and marking examinations, and how one can make the most of one's examination preparation.

I am grateful to Dr Thomas K Y Cheung, the former Director of Development and Educational Assessment of the HKEAA, for his valuable contribution and dedication to the public examinations in Hong Kong. His wealth of knowledge and experience in the management of public examinations are now documented in this book, *The Management of Public Examinations: 101 Questions and Answers*.

The book captures the knowledge and expertise of the HKEAA in the development and administration of large-scale public examinations. It serves as a useful guide in understanding the pivotal role played by the HKEAA in assessment development and in building a framework for sharing the vast amount of knowledge required in running a professional, equitable, world-renowned, and well-trusted examination system. It also illustrates the unwavering commitment of the HKEAA to ensure the provision of world-class examinations and assessment services to meet the educational and societal needs of Hong Kong.

By adopting a well-organized and reader-friendly presentation illustrated with examples, we believe that this book will provide its readers, including students, candidates, parents, schools, teachers, the education community, and members of the public, with valuable insights into the public examination system in Hong Kong.

I sincerely hope that the book will prove to be a helpful resource for both new and experienced colleagues, the entire education community, and everyone who is involved with or who has participated in public examinations, and positively influence the development of public examinations and assessments as well as the quality of learning and teaching.

Rock Chen Chung-nin, BBS, JP

*Chairman,  
Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority*

# FOREWORD

by

## THE SECRETARY GENERAL

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Every one of us has sat through many examinations and has been assessed in one way or the other, but does that make us all experts in assessment and public examinations? Do we really know what are the issues involved? What are the functions of a public examination? What are the guiding principles? How do we handle special cases and irregularities while ensuring fairness? How do we administer public examinations that cater to the diversity of needs, abilities, and demands of candidates and other stakeholders? How are the examination questions set? How are the scripts marked and then graded? How should examination performance be reported?

These questions and many more have been asked and dealt with partially but who else could be more knowledgeable than Dr Thomas K Y Cheung, our former Director of Development and Educational Assessment with over 35 years of experience in assessment development and examination administration. In a single volume of *The Management of Public Examinations: 101 Questions and Answers*, he shares with us a personal and invaluable historical perspective on the development of assessment and public examinations over the past four decades. His involvement with public examinations in Hong Kong dated back from the administration of the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination in 1978; the Hong Kong Higher Level Examination in 1979; the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination in 1980 to the first administration of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination in 2012. Dr Cheung has given and shared so much of his expertise throughout and most of all his unique insights in the key processes and workflow of public examinations, what he termed the ‘Examination Engine’, that underlie the development of these examinations.

When Dr Cheung was approaching his retirement, all of us in the Authority felt that his wealth of experience should be retained and shared with the whole educational community and I am delighted that he has agreed to undertake the enormous task to write this book. This book thus represents important knowledge transfer within the Authority. I am also certain that this work will become a much appreciated source of reference for colleagues in the educational sector as well as an important milestone in raising public awareness of and confidence in the public examinations of Hong Kong.

Dr Tong Chong-sze  
*Secretary General,  
Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority*

## FROM THE SEVEN COMPONENTS TO 101 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The main seven components outlined are:

1. clarifying examination objectives
2. designing examination frameworks
3. setting examination tasks (questions)
4. scoring candidates' work
5. reporting examination results
6. organizing administration work
7. conducting evaluation and securing recognition

In order to help readers understand the details, related issues under each of these seven components will be brought up for discussion and clarification in the subsequent chapters. These issues and topics are considered in the 'question-and-answer' format. In the first component, the essentials of public examinations will be considered. The functions of public examinations will be explained and the meanings of assessment, examinations, reliability, validity and fairness will be discussed. The second component focuses on the design of examination frameworks. The discussions include: the work of subject committees; the use of different question types and different examination modes. The various initiatives which can be designed to address the issue of learner diversity will also be included. The third component is related to the setting of examination tasks. The discussion covers the work of moderation committees and the work flow in the development of question papers. The fourth component is concerned about the scoring of candidates' work. The use of different marking modes will be considered and the quality assurance procedures used by examination boards will be explained. The moderation mechanisms used in the SBA scheme are also discussed. The fifth component is related to the reporting of results. This is a complex topic, covering technical issues on the use of standard scores and the differences between the use of norm-referenced, criterion-referenced and standards-referenced reporting modes. In the sixth component, various aspects of examination administration work will be considered, covering a wide variety of issues, from pre-examination preparation to the conduct of the examination and post-examination activities. Examples of work in connection with examination administration include: the drafting of examination regulations; accommodations offered to candidates with special educational needs; the handling of cheating cases and the provision for appeals. The last component is related to evaluation and recognition, covering issues about the interaction with different groups of stakeholders.

The above topics form the basis for generating 99 questions and answers under the seven headings, and they are grouped under fourteen chapters from Chapter 2 to Chapter 15. Towards the end of the book, I have introduced two other questions. Some people

have questioned that usefulness of giving examiner comments and providing exemplar materials. A question is posed to address this issue. In addition, many years ago, I was invited to speak at a seminar for parents. One of the parents posed a question: How should students study in order to obtain good results in the examination? This is a good question and some study hints are suggested based on my own study experience. The above issues are addressed in Questions 100 and 101, grouped under Chapter 16.

The book will end with a short reflection in the final chapter. It goes without denial that writing is a good learning exercise. I personally believe that a good public examination system can have a beneficial impact on teaching and learning in schools and can exert a positive influence on students, teachers and school leaders. The relevant discussion will be given in Chapter 17: Further Thoughts on Examinations.

## **THE ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK**

The organization of the book is outlined in Table 1.1. Readers are not expected to read the whole text from cover to cover. As the materials are organized into a hundred and one topics, readers can directly go to individual topics in different parts of the book which interest them without a loss of continuity.

**Table 1.1**  
**Organization of the Book**

<b>Chapter 1</b>	<b>Introduction</b> About public examinations The four local public examinations and the organization of the book
<b>Chapters 2-15</b>	<b>The seven components of the public examinations</b> Questions and answers from questions 1 to 99, grouped under the seven components
<b>Chapter 16</b>	<b>Preparing for examinations</b> On study methods Questions and answers for questions 100 and 101
<b>Chapter 17</b>	<b>Epilogue</b> Further thoughts on public examinations Improving future assessments and examinations

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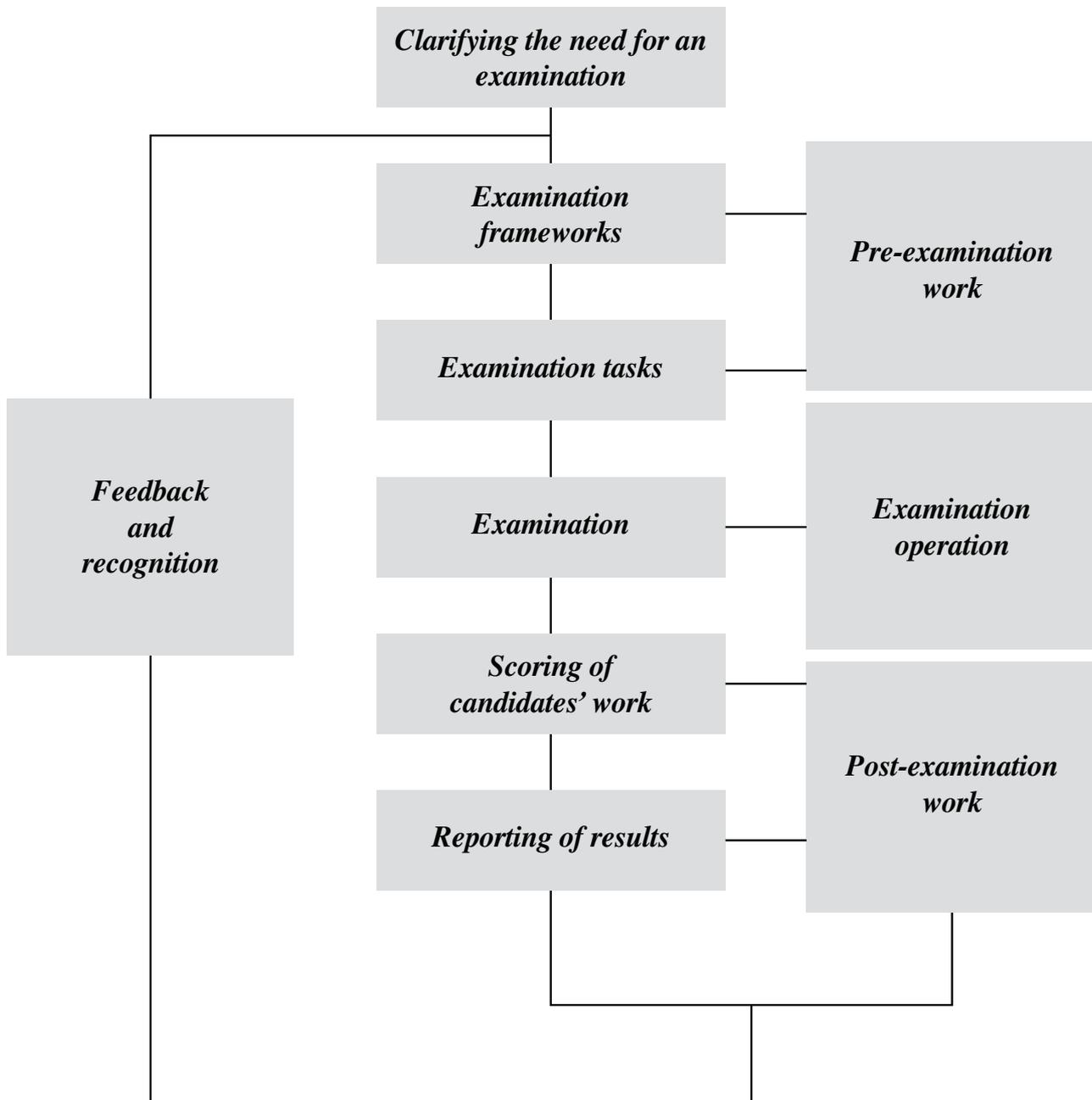
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# THE EXAMINATION ENGINE



# THE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS

## 101 Questions and Answers

Despite the importance and attention given to public examinations in Hong Kong, writings about public examinations in the local context are still emerging, even though there has been a considerable body of work undertaken on educational assessment. It is hoped that examinations could be better understood by stakeholders including students, parents, teachers, staff of tertiary institutions, education policy makers and the general public since the successful operation of public examinations depends on their assistance and co-operation. This book introduces public examinations in a systematic manner and can be useful to readers in the following ways:

- A more thorough understanding of public examinations will help teachers better align their teaching strategies and processes in accordance with the intended learning outcomes.
- Students who are well aware of examination requirements will be able to make more effective preparation for examinations.
- Parents who appreciate the rationale and the procedures of public examinations will be more supportive of and better engaged in their children's learning experiences.

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This book addresses seven key issues in the organization of public examinations:

- 1 Clarifying examination objectives**
- 2 Designing examination frameworks**
- 3 Setting examination tasks (questions)**
- 4 Scoring candidates' work**
- 5 Reporting examination results**
- 6 Organizing administration work**
- 7 Conducting evaluation and securing recognition**

A hundred and one questions and answers are developed under these seven themes to offer a framework for thinking systematically about the management of public examinations.

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