

ELECTORAL AFFAIRS COMMISSION

**Investigation Report on
the Long Queues at Polling Stations and
the Prolonged Time Taken in Counting Votes in the
2021 Election Committee Subsector Ordinary Elections**

22 October 2021

ABBREVIATIONS

Amendment Bill	Improving Electoral System (Consolidated Amendments) Bill 2021
APRO, APROs	Assistant Presiding Officer, Assistant Presiding Officers
APRO(S)	Assistant Presiding Officer (Statistics)
CE	Chief Executive
DPRO	Deputy Presiding Officer
EAC	Electoral Affairs Commission
EAC (EP) (EC) Reg	Electoral Affairs Commission (Electoral Procedure) (Election Committee) Regulation (Cap. 541I)
EC	Election Committee
ECSS	Election Committee Subsector
Elections	2021 Election Committee Subsector Ordinary Elections
EPR	Electronic Poll Register
FR, FRs	Final Register, Final Registers
GCIS	Government Cloud Infrastructure Services
HKO	Hong Kong Observatory

HKID, HKIDs	Identity Card, Identity Cards
Hong Kong and Kowloon District Committees	Representatives of Members of Area Committees, District Fight Crime Committees, and District Fire Safety Committees of Hong Kong and Kowloon
LegCo	Legislative Council
New Territories District Committees	Representatives of Members of Area Committees, District Fight Crime Committees, and District Fire Safety Committees of the New Territories
NPCSC	Standing Committee of the National People's Congress
OMR	Optical Mark Recognition
Operational Manual	2021 Election Committee Subsector Ordinary Elections Operational Manual
PO, POs	Polling Officer, Polling Officers
PO(S)	Polling Officer (Statistics)
PRO, PROs	Presiding Officer, Presiding Officers
REO	Registration and Electoral Office
RO, ROs	Returning Officer, Returning Officers
SIC	Statistical Information Centre

Voter, Voters

Voter/Authorised Representative,
Voters/Authorised Representatives

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
CHAPTER 1 Introduction	17
CHAPTER 2 Polling Arrangements at the Polling Stations	19
CHAPTER 3 Delivery of Ballot Boxes, Electoral Documents and Materials to the Central Counting Station after the Close of Poll, Relevant Handover Procedures, Opening of Ballot Boxes and Sorting of Ballot Papers	29
CHAPTER 4 The Count	47
CHAPTER 5 Comments and Recommendations	67
CHAPTER 6 Concluding Remarks	82

		<u>Page</u>
APPENDIX I	2021 Election Committee Subsector Ordinary Elections – Details on Staff Deployment from Emergency Depots to Ordinary Polling Stations	83
APPENDIX II	2021 Election Committee Subsector Ordinary Elections – Hourly Voter Turnout of 5 Ordinary Polling Stations	84
APPENDIX III	2021 Election Committee Subsector Ordinary Elections – Time Required for Each Counting Procedure and the Whole Counting Process	85

Executive Summary

The 2021 Election Committee Subsector (“ECSS”) Ordinary Elections (“Elections”) were held in an open, fair and honest manner on 19 September 2021. In view of the long queues at the polling stations and the prolonged time taken in counting votes, which were far beyond expectations, the Election Affairs Commission (“EAC”) conducted a comprehensive review on the queuing and counting arrangements. The relevant conclusions and recommendations are set out from Chapters 2 to 5 of this report, and the salient points are summarised below.

2. The Electronic Poll Register (“EPR”) system was adopted for the first time in the Elections and it operated smoothly in general. However, there were teething problems with the first use of the EPR system, which affected the subsequent counting process.

3. The main reasons for the long queues at the polling stations in the morning were that staff at ballot paper issuing desks were new to the operation of the EPR system, and were relatively slow in the ballot paper issuing process; voters/authorised representatives (“Voters”) had more enquiries on the new arrangements and it took time to explain to them; some Voters mistakenly marked their ballot papers, which needed to be replaced; non-Voters constituting up to about 10% of the total voter turnout queued at the polling stations to enquire about and confirm their eligibility to vote, the handling of which required extra time. In addition, a large proportion of Voters cast their votes in the morning of the polling day, representing 4 times the voter turnout rate of the 2016 ECSS Ordinary Elections during the same period of time on the polling day. In view

of this, the Registration and Electoral Office (“REO”) immediately deployed additional manpower specially tasked to answer enquiries, so that staff at ballot paper issuing desks could focus on issuing ballot papers. The Chairman of the EAC also appealed to Voters that it was not necessary to rush for voting in the morning as the poll would last until 6:00 pm. At noon of the polling day, the long queues started to dissolve and the voter turnout in the afternoon (a total of 6 hours from 12:00 noon to 6:00 pm) was much lower than that in the morning (a total of 3 hours from 9:00 am to 12:00 noon) (see paragraphs 2.7, 2.8, 2.11 to 2.15 below and **Appendix II** for details).

4. Special queuing arrangements were adopted for the first time in the Elections for elderly persons who were aged 70 years or above, pregnant women and persons who had difficulties in standing for a long time in the queue due to their physical conditions to collect their ballot papers. Although not many people used the special queues, the waiting time of those concerned was significantly reduced to around 3 to 5 minutes. When there is no one lining up in the special queues, the special ballot paper issuing desks would be used to issue ballot papers to other Voters with the EPR system, resulting in flexible use of ballot paper issuing desks to increase efficiency (see paragraph 2.2 below for details).

5. The PRO of a polling station (the Sha Tin Town Hall Polling Station) only operated 3 out of 4 ballot paper issuing desks at the polling station, whilst 1 ballot paper issuing was used for replacement of ballot papers. The fourth ballot paper issuing desk was only put into service at noon as per the instruction already made in the morning. In the morning of the polling day, the fourth

ballot paper issuing desk served only 1 Voter who requested replacement of his/her ballot paper and was left idle for the rest of the time. The situation was highly undesirable (see paragraphs 2.9 and 2.10 below for details).

6. Central counting was adopted for the ECSS Ordinary Elections, and the ballot boxes and related electoral documents and materials (such as counterfoils of ballot papers) of all polling stations were delivered to the central counting station. According to the established procedures, all documents must be checked before the opening of ballot boxes and sorting of ballot papers by subsectors, followed by screening of the ballot papers to make sure they are readable by the Optical Mark Recognition (“OMR”) machines and to screen out invalid and questionable ballot papers; only then should the ballot papers be fed into the OMR machines in batches for scanning to count the votes. The Returning Officers (“ROs”) should also determine questionable ballot papers, which were not to be counted by the OMR machines, in the presence of the candidates and/or their agents and then arrange manual input into the counting system for the valid ballot papers. Upon completion of the count and confirmation with the candidates and/or their agents that no re-count was requested, the election results could be announced. The count had first been estimated to be completed around mid-night of the polling day.

7. After the close of poll, the Presiding Officers (“PROs”) were required to, with the assistance of specified staff, fill in ballot paper accounts, check the number of ballot papers issued, seal the counterfoils of issued ballot papers and the unissued ballot papers, collect other electoral documents, etc. and then deliver them to the central counting station together with the ballot box(es).

According to past experience, depending on the size of the polling station, it takes about 45 minutes to 1 and a half hours on average, to complete the above procedures, before the ballot boxes can be delivered to the central counting station. In the Elections, however, the time taken for some polling stations to dispatch the ballot boxes was much longer than expected:

- (a) For the polling station at Kowloon Park Sports Centre, it took 2 hours 8 minutes before the ballot boxes and electoral documents could depart for the central counting station mainly because the polling staff, unaccustomed to the newly designed electronic forms with automated computing functions, still adopted manual calculation when filling in the paper forms of the ballot paper account, hence the longer time required to complete the task (see paragraph 3.7 below for details);
- (b) (i) As for the polling station at Princess Alexandra Community Centre, it took 2 hours 51 minutes before the ballot boxes and the electoral documents could be delivered to the central counting station because the PRO noted a discrepancy of 2 votes between the voter turnout recorded in the tablets at the polling station and the number of issued ballot papers calculated based on the serial numbers on the counterfoils. The staff did not dare to query the data in the EPR system and spent a lot of time on repeated checking;
- (ii) The central server of the EPR system was stored on the Government Cloud Infrastructure Services (“GCIS”). Each

polling station had several tablets which were connected to the server of the EPR system on the GCIS. The polling staff could access the information in the EPR system through the tablets to verify the Voters' eligibility to vote and the types of ballot papers to be issued before issuing the ballot papers. The tablets were also used to count the voter turnout;

- (iii) After checking the computer system on the day following the polling day, the REO learnt that the EPR system contractor had synchronised the time setting of the clock inside the EPR system's server on cloud with the Hong Kong Observatory ("HKO") clock but not the built-in clocks of the tablets. As a result, the time shown on the tablets was about two minutes behind the HKO clock. As two Voters were issued ballot papers in this two-minute time gap immediately after the start of the poll, when the polling station at Princess Alexandra Community Centre accessed statistical figures from the tablets on ballot papers issued to Voters starting from 9:00 am on the polling day, it was found that the number of ballot papers issued fell short of that recorded in the EPR system by two. The programming errors were not identified during the polling hours, and it was not until the polling staff was completing the ballot paper account that a discrepancy of two votes was discovered. The ballot boxes, ballot paper accounts and related electoral documents and materials were eventually delivered to the central counting station without

identifying the reasons for the discrepancy after a long time of checking, resulting in delay. It was fortunate that other polling stations were not affected by the discrepancy between the time setting of the clock inside the EPR system and the built-in clocks of the tablets (see paragraphs 3.8 to 3.12 below for details).

- (c) (i) It took 1 hour 55 minutes for the polling station at Tuen Mun Town Hall to dispatch the ballot boxes and electoral documents to the central counting station. The reason was that the voter turnout shown when the polling station accessed statistical figures from the EPR system fell short of the number of ballot papers calculated based on the counterfoils by 7;
- (ii) The system was designed in such a way that staff at the ballot paper issuing desk should press the “CONFIRM” button on the tablet after scanning a Voter’s identity card (“HKID”). Only then would the issuance process be completed and the issuance of the ballot paper be recorded by the tablet system. However, staff at one of the ballot paper issuing desks did not press the “CONFIRM” button on the tablet on 7 occasions, hence the discrepancy of 7 votes between the statistics shown on the tablet and that calculated based on the counterfoils. After the close of poll, the polling staff did not dare to query the system statistics and spent a long time to double check the

numbers. Yet, they could not identify the reasons for the discrepancy and finally dispatched the ballot boxes and related electoral documents and materials to the central counting station. The discrepancy was accounted for, as described above, only after the REO checked the EPR system on GCIS the next day. This problem did not occur at other polling stations (see paragraphs 3.13 and 3.14 below for details); and

- (d) It took 1 hour 58 minutes for the polling station at Sha Tin Town Hall to dispatch the ballot boxes and electoral documents to the central counting station. It was because the PRO misunderstood that before leaving for the central counting station to deliver the ballot boxes and related electoral documents and materials, he/she had to wait for the EPR system contractor to take over the system equipment and documents to be returned (see paragraph 3.16 below for details).

8. Upon arrival of ballot boxes and electoral documents at the central counting station, the counting staff would check against the ballot paper account and verify the quantity of electoral documents and materials for acceptance before opening the ballot boxes. A delay also occurred in the receipt of ballot boxes, electoral documents and materials by the central counting station, mainly because staff at the central counting station found that the polling staff had made mistakes when completing ballot paper accounts and sealing electoral documents and materials, and so requested the polling staff to make corrections before they could proceed to the next step. Although the laws require ballot boxes to be

sent to the central counting station together with the ballot paper account before opening of ballot boxes can commence, a minor error or omission on the ballot paper account should not affect opening of ballot boxes for subsequent counting, and there was no need to wait for rectification/correction. Some staff were overly prudent in every step and requested the PROs concerned to return to the central counting station to make corrections on the ballot paper accounts or rectify the omissions, which took a long time. Besides, the supervisory staff at the central counting station lacked hands-on experience and failed to handle issues with discretion. This caused a “bottleneck” in the handover process, hence a delay in the opening of ballot boxes (see paragraphs 3.19 to 3.22 below for details).

9. There was also delay in the sorting of ballot papers. There were 13 contested subsectors in the Elections. After opening the ballot boxes, the counting staff had to sort the ballot papers in the ballot boxes by subsectors. However, a longer time was taken for sorting ballot papers from some polling stations:

- (a) When sorting ballot papers from the polling station at Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, a ballot paper was mistakenly put into the plastic box of a different subsector. It took time to locate it and re-sort the ballot papers, causing delay to the whole sorting process, which took 2 hours 20 minutes (see paragraph 3.29 below for details); and
- (b) After opening the ballot box from the polling station at Sha Tin Town Hall, it took about 2 hours to complete the sorting process. It was

because the counting staff failed to follow the established procedures, which required them to check the envelopes to see if any ballot paper was left while removing the envelopes. Instead, they performed the two steps separately, doubling the time taken (see paragraph 3.33 below for details).

10. After sorting of ballot papers, the counting staff would conduct visual screening mainly to screen out ballot papers that were unmarked, mutilated or with marks by which the Voters could possibly be identified, as well as questionable ballot papers, in accordance with the law. Damaged or mutilated ballot papers must be checked prudently to prevent paper jams in the OMR machines. Overall, the screening of ballot papers was rather slow that night.

11. After screening the ballot papers, the counting staff would feed the OMR-readable ballot papers to the OMR machines in batches of 20 or 50. Some of the ballot papers were jammed probably because they were not stacked up neatly. In fact, the OMR machines all along were used in the ECSS Ordinary Elections in 2016 and before for vote counting, with the difference that each ballot paper then was printed with a unique barcode. Even when there was a paper jam in the OMR machine, the counting staff could re-scan the ballot paper by the OMR machines and through the barcode the counting system could identify whether the ballot paper had been counted. However, with the implementation of the EPR system in the Elections, if unique barcodes were printed on ballot papers as in the previous practice, Voters' voting choices would have been identified by retrieving and comparing the ballot paper issuing record in the EPR system with the serial numbers of the counterfoils of the ballot papers

issued at the ballot paper issuing desks. To ensure voting secrecy, such unique barcodes were no longer printed on ballot papers. Given the absence of the unique barcodes on the ballot papers, the REO had prepared contingency plans in which a two-tier manual input would be adopted to record choices on the ballot papers in the event of paper jams, instead of feeding the ballot papers to the OMR machines again for scanning.

12. Nevertheless, when the paper jam issue involved the subsectors with relatively more members to be returned, such as the Representatives of members of Area Committees, District Fight Crime Committees, and District Fire Safety Committees of the New Territories (“New Territories District Committees”) subsector, it would definitely take a longer time if the process of manual input was continued. Therefore, the REO requested the counting system contractor on the spot to study whether it was possible to scan the ballot papers by the OMR machines again on the premise of avoiding double counting. The counting system contractor believed that a feasible approach was to void the relevant batch of ballot papers in the counting system, assign a new batch number and use the OMR machines to count that batch of ballot papers under the witness of the independent computer auditor, candidates and/or their agents and the counting system contractor, so as to avoid further delay caused by manual input (see paragraphs 4.10 to 4.15 below for details).

13. There was also a delay in the determination of questionable ballot papers. In handling questionable ballot papers, ROs had to invite all candidates and/or their agents of the subsectors concerned who were present to the questionable ballot paper determination tables to participate. The candidates

and/or their agents had the right to make representations on the validity of each questionable ballot paper and the initial decision of the ROs before the ROs made a determination. The reasons for the delay included the followings: for individual subsectors with relatively more members to be returned, a longer processing time was inevitable because many candidates/or their agents were involved; there was only 1 of the 3 questionable ballot paper determination tables which could accommodate subsectors with a larger number of candidates, therefore leading to the waiting (see paragraphs 4.18 and 4.19 below for details).

14. Regarding the announcement of election results, upon completion of the count, the ROs had to make known the initial counting results to the candidates and/or their agents for the subsectors concerned and confirm any request from them for a re-count. This process would take considerable time for subsectors with more candidates. Moreover, the location where candidates and/or their agents met up with the ROs was exactly the questionable ballot paper determination table, therefore occupying the tables and indirectly affecting the progress of handling questionable ballot papers of other subsectors.

15. Other problems include:

- (a) The Counting Information Display System at the central counting station failed to announce the counting progress of all subsectors in detail at various stages in a timely manner, rendering the candidates and/or their agents, the media and members of the public inside the counting station unable to keep track of the actual situation;

(b) polling staff took much time during and after the poll to complete and crosscheck a number of paper-based and electronic statistical returns. Despite the introduction of electronic forms in the Elections, the staff still filled in the ballot paper accounts and electoral documents by repetitive copying and failed to make full use of information technology; and

(c) staff at the counting station also had to do repetitive copying of the counting results and did not make full use of information technology.

16. The EAC's recommendations are detailed in Chapter 5 and summarised below:

(a) The EPR system – The EAC recommends that the EPR system should continue to be used in future elections. Regarding the operational problems of the system arising in the Elections, the EAC considers that the EPR system contractor has to bear the responsibility. The REO must follow up with the contractor to rectify the relevant programming errors and optimise the entire ballot paper issuing process, so as to prevent recurrence of similar incidents and ensure accurate and smooth operation of the system in future elections. In addition, the REO also needs to seek assistance from relevant professional departments;

(b) Queuing arrangement – The EAC is of the view that long queues at polling stations are inevitable if many people go to vote around the same time. Therefore, those who wish to cast their votes on the

polling day should arrange their schedules and choose to vote at a time when there will generally be fewer people waiting at the polling stations. The EAC recommends that the REO should appropriately increase the numbers of polling stations and ballot paper issuing desks when venue and manpower permit, and consider taking appropriate arrangements, such as showing the approximate waiting times in certain places of the queues for voters' reference and examining the use of information technology to disseminate the queuing situation;

- (c) Completion of ballot paper accounts and delivery of ballot boxes after the close of poll – The EAC considers that the delay in vote counting in the Elections was related to the long time taken by the polling staff to complete and crosscheck a number of statistical returns after the poll. The EAC recommends that the REO should streamline the relevant procedures and set standards on the time required, so that the PROs could deliver the ballot boxes to the central counting station for counting as soon as possible. Any delay should be reported immediately to the seniors, the central command centre and the EAC to seek directions;

- (d) Receipt of ballot boxes by the central counting station – The EAC recommends that the REO should review the entire handover process in respect of ballot boxes and separate the receipt of ballot boxes from that of other electoral documents, so that the handover of ballot boxes could be completed as soon as possible to commence vote counting while other matters not affecting the count could be processed later;

- (e) Review of the entire process of vote count – The EAC recommends that the entire process of vote count should be reviewed afresh, including manpower deployment and provision of sufficient space for various counting procedures (such as opening ballot boxes, sorting ballot papers and handling questionable ballot papers, etc). The EAC also recommends that indicators should be prepared on the expected amount of time required for each counting procedure for staff to follow, so that when problems arise, the staff can report to and seek directions from their seniors, the central command centre and the EAC in a timely manner. As regards the use of OMR machines for vote counting, the EAC recommends that the REO should formulate better plans in response to the occurrence of paper jams;

- (f) Dissemination of information – The EAC observes that the Counting Information Display System at the central counting station failed to announce the counting progress of all subsectors in detail at various stages in a timely manner, and recommends that the REO should enhance the design of the system to allow manual update as and when necessary. The REO should also arrange staff to make timely broadcast of relevant information in case of unexpected incidents or delays during the counting process;

- (g) On-site supervision and co-ordination – The REO staff at the central command centre should remain vigilant against any unusual delays or irregularities detected at the polling and counting stations, and take the initiative to study the problems and render assistance. The REO

should also assign more staff who are familiar with and have mastery of the counting process to supervise the operation of the central counting station, strengthening the co-ordination between different teams, giving timely and appropriate directions, as well as implementing contingency measures at their own discretion. Where necessary, they should report to and seek directions from their seniors, the central command centre and the EAC as early as possible;

- (h) Strengthening training for electoral staff – The EAC recommends that the REO should step up training for the polling and counting staff in future elections by providing clear instructions on each procedure, and increasing practical sessions and simulated scenario questions to familiarise the staff with their duties, and more importantly, to remind them that they should report to their seniors, the central command centre and the EAC to seek directions as soon as possible in case of unexpected incidents;
- (i) Experience of responsible staff in electoral work – The EAC noted that the REO had encountered the severe challenge of staff transfer or resignation over the past year. The 6 officers in charge of preparation and implementation of the Elections were mostly new to the REO and lacked experience in electoral work. Although they had tried hard, the actual outcome was still unsatisfactory. A public election is a large-scale project. Every election is unique in that all election-related activities and procedures basically take place on the polling day, and there is not much time allowed for participants to adapt and adjust

according to the actual situation. As voters go to vote on the polling day and a large number of people are involved, there will still be unforeseeable circumstances, even if different contingency plans have been prepared for different scenarios. The EAC considers that the authorities concerned should identify and deploy personnel with experience in organising elections and/or electoral work to the REO to take up core electoral posts, and consider retaining some of the core staff with experience in organising elections after an election cycle to provide training for new staff, so as to facilitate the preservation and passing on of knowledge and experience; and

- (j) Other recommendations – As for other recommendations, see Chapter 5 for details.

17. The Elections were conducted in an open, fair and honest manner, and the accuracy of the counting results was ascertained. However, there is still room for improvement in terms of efficiency. The EAC considers that the REO should improve the efficiency and avoid delays in the counting process, without sacrificing the accuracy of counting results and the proper receipt of electoral documents.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 The Elections were held on 19 September. These are the first public elections after the adoption of the amended Annex I and Annex II to the Basic Law by the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress (“NPCSC”) in March 2021 and the passage of the Improving Electoral System (Consolidated Amendments) Bill 2021 (“Amendment Bill”) by the Legislative Council (“LegCo”) in May 2021. A total of 364 members from 13 different subsectors were returned to the Election Committee (“EC”). The term of office of the new EC, comprising 325 ex-officio members registered earlier, 156 members returned by valid nominations, 603 members returned uncontested and ex-officio members to be returned by the LegCo General Election later, will be effective from 22 October 2021 to 21 October 2026.

1.2 On the polling day, 13 contested subsectors involving 4 389 Voters cast their votes. The turnout rate was nearly 90%, reflecting the support from members of various subsectors for the new election system. Besides, a number of enhancement measures were implemented for the first time in the Elections, including the EPR system and the setting up of special queues, etc. The relevant enhancement measures generally operated smoothly on the polling day, laying a solid foundation for implementation of the above-mentioned measures in future public elections.

1.3 The EAC considers that the Elections were conducted under the principles of openness, fairness and honesty and were successful as a whole. However, the long queues appearing at the polling stations in the morning of the polling day and the prolonged time taken in counting votes were far beyond

expectation. These problems should be addressed and solved as soon as possible, in order to prevent recurrence of similar incidents in the two upcoming important public elections. In this regard, the EAC has conducted a comprehensive review. Although the EAC is required to submit a report on the Chief Executive (“CE”) Election including a report on the ECSS Elections to CE within 3 months of the conclusion of the CE Election (i.e. on or before 26 June 2022) under section 8(6AA) of the Electoral Affairs Commission Ordinance (Cap. 541), in view of the LegCo General Election and CE Election which will be held on 19 December 2021 and 27 March 2022 respectively, the EAC has produced this report ahead of time based on the facts in hand at this stage to conclude the experience related to polling and counting arrangements in the Elections and identify the root causes of the problems, so as to put forward improvement recommendations and make comprehensive and thorough preparations for the next two elections.

Chapter 2 – Polling Arrangements at the Polling Stations

(A) EPR System

2.1 In previous elections, printed copies of the final register (“FR”) were used in issuing ballot papers. The PRO would, taking into account the numbers of voters and ballot paper issuing desks at his/her polling station, split and allocate the printed copies of FR to ballot paper issuing desks according to the alphabetical prefixes of the HKID numbers of the voters. A voter must collect his/her ballot paper at a designated and not any ballot paper issuing desk according to the alphabetical prefix of his/her HKID number. Under such arrangements, some ballot paper issuing desks might be left idle during the peak hours and thus the ballot paper issuing process might become inflexible and inefficient. As such, the EPR system, whereby Voters could collect their ballot papers at any of the ballot paper issuing desks at the polling stations as instructed, was introduced for the first time in the Elections for issuing ballot papers to even out the work distribution and the queuing time for Voters among various ballot paper issuing desks, and to enhance the overall efficiency of ballot paper issuance. The operation of the EPR system was generally smooth on the polling day.

(B) Special Queuing Arrangements

2.2 To cater for Voters who were unable to queue for a long time due to their physical conditions, a special queue was set up at each ordinary polling station in the Elections for persons who were aged 70 or above, pregnant women or persons who were not able to queue for a long time or had difficulty in queuing

because of illness, injury, disability or dependence on mobility aids to collect ballot papers. The special queuing arrangements were smoothly implemented in the Elections, with about 5 to 10 Voters in the special queue at each polling station during the peak hours from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm. Compared with the average waiting time of 30 to 60 minutes at an ordinary ballot paper issuing desk, the average waiting time in a special queue was around 3 to 5 minutes, representing a significant reduction in the waiting time of the relevant Voters. The special ballot paper issuing desks could use the EPR system to issue ballot papers to ordinary Voters when there was no one lining up the special queue, resulting in flexible use of ballot paper issuing desks to increase efficiency.

(C) The Numbers of Polling Stations and Ballot Paper Issuing Desks

2.3 In the Elections, the REO set up in total 5 ordinary polling stations at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, Kowloon Park Sports Centre, Princess Alexandra Community Centre, Tuen Mun Town Hall and Sha Tin Town Hall respectively on Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories. Moreover, 1 dedicated polling station was set up in Cheung Sha Wan Police Station for Voters imprisoned or held in custody by a law enforcement agency, if any, to cast their votes on the polling day.

2.4 Following the adoption of the amended Annex I and Annex II to the Basic Law by the NPCSC in March 2021 and the passage of the Amendment Bill by the LegCo in May 2021, there have been changes in the composition of the ECSSs and the eligibility of Voters. In the absence of past numbers of polling stations and ballot paper issuing desks as a reference, the REO made reference to the number of ordinary polling stations (110) and the total number of eligible

Voters (243 000) in the 2016 ECSS Ordinary Elections. Having regard to the 13 contested subsectors involving a total of 4 889 eligible Voters in the Elections, and taking into account the distribution of residences of Voters, the REO decided that 5 polling stations would be set up to serve 500 to some 1 600 Voters respectively.

2.5 The REO also drew reference from the 2016 ECSS Ordinary Elections and took the average capacity of each ballot paper issuing desk at 60 Voters per hour as the basis for estimation. Against a polling time of 9 hours in the Elections, about 540 Voters could be processed on average at each ballot paper issuing desk. Based on such estimation, it should be enough for each polling station to be equipped with 1 to 3 ballot paper issuing desks. As mentioned above, the efficiency of ballot paper issuance should be enhanced given that the EPR system was adopted in the Elections. Nevertheless, taking into account that a number of new measures were implemented for the first time in the Elections and there was also change in the ballot paper issuing procedure due to the use of EPR system for the first time, the REO thus aligned to increase the number of ballot paper issuing desks at each polling station to 4 ^{Note 1} for the sake

Note 1

Polling station	No. of Voters	Estimated no. of ballot paper issuing desks required based on handling 60 Voters per hour	Final no. of ballot paper issuing desks
Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre	1 271	3	4
Kowloon Park Sports Centre	1 605	3	4
Princess Alexandra Community Centre	505	1	4
Tuen Mun Town Hall	556	2	4
Sha Tin Town Hall	952	2	4

of prudence.

(D) Long Queues Appearing in the Morning of the Polling Day

2.6 Before the opening of the polling stations at 9:00 am on the polling day, there were already people queuing outside some of the polling stations. Among them, there were dozens of people queuing at the polling stations at Kowloon Park Sports Centre and Sha Tin Town Hall during that time session. After the poll commenced, with the continuous arrival of Voters, the number of waiting people peaked between 10:00 am and 12:00 noon. Long queues of more than 100 people appeared at the polling stations at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, Kowloon Park Sports Centre and Sha Tin Town Hall.

2.7 The reasons for the long queues appearing outside the polling stations include the following:

- (a) The EPR system was adopted for the first time in the Elections. As polling staff were new to the system, it took them longer time to process the issuance of ballot papers at the early stage of the polling day;
- (b) Many Voters of newly created or restructured subsectors voted for the first time in the ECSS Ordinary Elections. Polling staff at the ballot paper issuing desks had to explain in detail how to mark the ballot papers when issuing the ballot papers to them. Voters also had relatively more enquiries and it took time for explanation to them. As such, the issuance of ballot papers at the ballot paper issuing desks

required more time than expected; and

- (c) Some Voters were not familiar with the voting method of marking against multiple candidates with a pen. Polling staff had to answer their enquiries about replacement of the mistakenly marked ballot papers and arranged for such replacement when Voters had made errors in marking their ballot papers. This added to the hectic workload of the polling stations.

2.8 Another reason for the long queues appearing at the polling stations was that a large number of people who were not Voters lined up there. According to the record, during the peak hours (from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm) in the morning of the polling day, all polling stations were engaged in verifying the eligibility of more than 260 people^{Note 2} whose record was not found in the EPR system, and confirming their status as non-registered Voters in the Elections. Over 500 non-Voters, representing one-tenth of the total number of Voters served on the polling day, were received by the 5 ordinary polling stations throughout the day in the Elections. After the passage of the Amendment Bill, many subsectors have switched to the corporate voter system from the individual voter system. As a result, some people, who were once individual voters, were not

Note 2

Polling station	Number of non-Voters		
	9:00 am – 1:00 pm	1:00 pm – 6:00 pm	Total
Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre	38	41	79
Kowloon Park Sports Centre	18	40	58
Princess Alexandra Community Centre	79	54	133
Tuen Mun Town Hall	45	51	96
Sha Tin Town Hall	84	78	162
Total	264	264	528

aware that they no longer needed to vote in the Elections. Hence, the polling staff of ballot paper issuing desks had to perform checks via the system for each of them before they could confirm the status of these people as non-Voters and explain to them. This inevitably lengthened the overall waiting time for voting.

(E) The Case that Only 3 Ballot Paper Issuing Desks at the Polling Station at Sha Tin Town Hall Were Open in the Morning

2.9 The EAC also noted that only 3 out of 4 ballot paper issuing desks available at the polling station at Sha Tin Town Hall were in operation whilst 1 ballot paper issuing desk was used for replacement of ballot papers until 12:00 noon when it was put into service as per the instruction to PRO in the morning. According to the response of the PRO concerned, he discovered at about 9:30 am on the polling day that the EPR application installed in the tablet of the PRO desk could not be activated. Having regard to the small number of people queuing outside the entrance at the moment, he believed that the queue could be absorbed shortly. Also, during the period, quite a number of Voters were asking for replacement of the ballot papers they mistakenly marked. Therefore, the PRO decided to open 3 ballot paper issuing desks only, with the tablet of the fourth ballot paper issuing desk reserved for the replacement of ballot papers. He explained that after the EPR application in the tablet of the PRO desk had been successfully re-activated, the fourth ballot paper issuing desk was put into service at around 12:00 noon.

2.10 However, according to the preliminary investigation by the REO on the polling day, the EPR System Helpdesk did not receive any report from the polling station at Sha Tin Town Hall about the failure in activating the EPR

application in the tablet of the PRO desk. Furthermore, records show that from 9:00 am to 12:00 noon of the polling day, only 1 case of replacement of mistakenly marked ballot paper for 1 Voter was processed by the tablet of the fourth ballot paper issuing desk re-deployed for use by the PRO desk. The EAC considers it very undesirable that the polling staff failed to follow the procedure^{Note 3} of notifying the EPR System Helpdesk of system operation problems and failed to fully utilise all ballot paper issuing desks such that the fourth desk served only 1 Voter in the morning, which resulted in long queue outside the polling station at Sha Tin Town Hall in the morning.

(F) Contingency Work in Response to the Long Queues

2.11 In view of the rather long queues at the polling stations, emergency depot staff were sent by the REO to provide support at various ordinary polling stations starting from 9:30 am on the polling day. These included an additional 16 staff members deployed to the polling station at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, 17 staff members deployed to the polling station at Kowloon Park Sports Centre, 10 staff members deployed to the polling station at Tuen Mun Town Hall, 7 staff members deployed to the polling station at Sha Tin Town Hall and 2 others deployed to the polling station at Princess Alexandra Community Centre (see **Appendix I** for details). Besides, the REO also reviewed the work procedures and division of labour of ballot paper issuing desks immediately. After the review, 1 additional staff member was assigned for each ballot paper issuing desk to explain the voting procedures (including

Note 3 According to the 2021 Election Committee Subsector Ordinary Elections Operational Manual (“Operational Manual”), the PRO should report to the EPR System Helpdesk immediately in case of any operational problems with the EPR system.

how the ballot paper should be marked) and answer enquiries from Voters who had just been issued a ballot paper, so that the 2 polling staff members responsible for issuing ballot papers to Voters could stay focused on their work. The EAC noted that such contingency measure was effective in enhancing the overall efficiency of ballot paper issuing and absorbing long queues.

2.12 Indeed the REO had once considered increasing the number of ballot paper issuing desks on the polling day. However, with the poll being in progress, there were Voters queuing both inside and outside the polling stations. The setting up of additional ballot paper issuing desks, such as the laying of electricity and network cables, placement of desks, tablet installation, power and Internet connection, updating of new staff of the ballot paper issuing desks in the EPR system, etc., would require certain procedures and time for completion. It would inevitably cause inconvenience to Voters waiting for collection of ballot papers, and the relevant polling stations might even have to temporarily cease operation. The REO considered it inappropriate and therefore decided not to set up additional ballot paper issuing desks. The EAC agrees with the decision made but recommends that, when preparing for future elections, the REO can examine the feasibility of increasing the number of ballot paper issuing desks in a flexible manner.

2.13 From experience, long queues at polling stations are inevitable if many voters go to vote around the same time. As noted from past elections, more people go to the polling stations to vote in the morning. In this regard, after his visit to the polling station and the central counting station at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre the day before the polling day, the Chairman

of the EAC issued a press release pointing out that it was not necessary for the Voters to rush for voting in the morning of the polling day given the poll would last until 6:00 pm. He also advised Voters to vote around noon or in the afternoon when there would be fewer people waiting at the polling stations, so as to avoid long queues at polling stations due to too many people going to vote at the same time. The Chairman also made the same appeal at the media session after visiting the polling stations at around 11:00 am on the polling day.

(G) Queues Receding in the Afternoon of the Polling Day

2.14 Queues at polling stations started to ease at 12:00 noon of the polling day. As shown in **Appendix II**, the hourly voter turnout of individual polling stations continued to decline from 12:00 noon onwards. At the polling station at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, the hourly voter turnout once peaked at 290 but dropped to below 100 at 12:00 noon to 1:00 pm. At the polling stations at Tuen Mun Town Hall and Princess Alexandra Community Centre, the hourly voter turnout at 12:00 noon to 1:00 pm also dropped from the previous peak of about 70 to about 30.

2.15 The queues at the Sha Tin Town Hall Polling Station as well as the Kowloon Park Sports Centre Polling Station, which had the largest number of Voters assigned, were also successfully cleared at 1:00 pm and 2:00 pm respectively. With the fourth ballot paper issuing desk put into service at the Sha Tin Town Hall Polling Station at around 12:00 noon, the hourly voter turnout of the polling station decreased from the previous peak of over 140 to around 70 from 1:00 pm to 2:00 pm, while that of the Kowloon Park Sports Centre Polling Station also dropped from the previous peak of over 250 to around 100 from

2:00 pm to 3:00 pm.

2.16 The EAC suggests appealing to voters to avoid casting their votes at a polling station at the same time as far as possible in future elections. In order to facilitate members of the public to know the waiting time of the polling stations, the EAC also advises that the REO should consider taking appropriate arrangement, such as showing the approximate waiting time in certain places of the queues for voters' reference, and examine the use of information technology to upload the queuing situation at various polling stations onto the REO website for public inspection. Taking into account the number of electors in the upcoming 2021 LegCo General Election in December 2021, the EAC suggests that the REO should appropriately increase the numbers of polling stations and ballot paper issuing desks where venue and manpower permit (see paragraphs 5.5 to 5.7 below for details).

Chapter 3 – Delivery of Ballot Boxes, Electoral Documents and Materials to the Central Counting Station after the Close of Poll, Relevant Handover Procedures, Opening of Ballot Boxes and Sorting of Ballot Papers

3.1 According to the Operational Manual, after the close of poll, polling staff have to complete all statistical returns on ballot papers, seal up counterfoils of issued ballot papers and unissued ballot papers, and pack up other electoral documents before delivering them to the central counting station together with ballot boxes and other electoral materials.

3.2 Since a FR of electors was lost by the REO during the 2016 LegCo General Election, after a comprehensive review, a series of improvement measures have been launched by the REO in packing, delivery and storage of electoral documents, including requiring polling stations to assign 1 supervisory electoral staff (Deputy Presiding Officer (“DPRO”) or Assistant Presiding Officer (“APRO”)) to be specially responsible for preparation, packing and delivery of electoral documents after the close of poll. The electoral documents will be handed over to the PRO for thorough examination and verification, so that the documents will be handled more properly.

3.3 The above-mentioned improvement measures also strictly stipulate the packing methods for various types of electoral documents, including using plastic bags of different colours for different electoral documents (including unused ballot papers, etc.) before sealing them with sealing certificates and signing. While such measures can undoubtedly ensure proper handling of electoral documents, enhance the procedural reliability and staff accountability, they also increase the workload of polling staff after the close of poll and the

time required to deliver ballot boxes, electoral documents and materials to the central counting station.

(A) Procedures after the Close of Poll

3.4 According to past experience, depending on the size of the polling station, it takes about 45 minutes to one and a half hour on average for a polling station to complete the relevant procedures before departing from the polling station to dispatch the ballot boxes, electoral documents and materials to the central counting station.

3.5 In comparison, the poll of the Elections closed at 6:00 pm, and as shown in **Table 1**, it took 1 hour 25 minutes to nearly 3 hours for each of the 5 ordinary polling stations to complete all statistical returns and pack up the electoral documents and materials, before the ballot boxes could be delivered to the central counting station in Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre.

**Table 1: Departure Time of Ballot Boxes,
Electoral Documents and Materials from Polling Stations**

Polling station	Time of close of poll (1)	Departure time of ballot boxes, electoral documents and materials from polling station (2)	Time required from close of poll to departure of ballot boxes, electoral documents and materials from polling station (2) – (1)
Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre	18:00	19:25	1 hour 25 minutes
Kowloon Park Sports Centre	18:00	20:08	2 hours 8 minutes
Princess Alexandra Community Centre	18:00	20:51	2 hours 51 minutes
Tuen Mun Town Hall	18:00	19:55	1 hour 55 minutes
Sha Tin Town Hall	18:00	19:58	1 hour 58 minutes
Cheung Sha Wan Police Station ^{Note 4}	18:00	18:43	43 minutes

3.6 Under section 69 of the Electoral Affairs Commission (Electoral Procedure) (Election Committee) Regulation (Cap. 541I) (“EAC (EP) (EC) Reg”), a PRO must deliver to the central counting station the ballot boxes from his/her polling station, together with the sealed packets of unissued ballot papers, unused ballot papers and spoilt ballot papers, as well as the ballot paper account

Note 4 Although no ballot paper was cast into the ballot box of the polling station at Cheung Sha Wan Police Station, completion of statistical returns and packing of electoral documents and materials were still required after the close of poll.

prepared by that PRO, etc. Some polling stations took longer time than expected and the findings of the review are set out below.

3.7 For the polling station at Kowloon Park Sports Centre, it took 2 hours 8 minutes to deliver the ballot boxes and electoral documents to the central counting station. It was mainly because the polling staff spent a rather long period of time in completing the ballot paper account. Unaccustomed to the newly-designed electronic forms with automated computing functions, the polling staff adopted manual calculation when filling in the paper forms of the ballot paper account, hence taking extra time to complete the task. The EAC opines that the REO should reduce and consolidate the procedures of filling in paper-based forms and step up training for polling staff in the use of the electronic forms so as to facilitate the completion of the ballot paper account.

3.8 As for the polling station at Princess Alexandra Community Centre, it took 2 hours and 51 minutes to deliver the ballot boxes to the central counting station because the PRO, when completing the ballot paper account, noted a discrepancy of 2 votes between the actual number of issued ballot papers calculated based on the counterfoils and the statistics of voter turnout recorded in the EPR system^{Note 5}. Since the statistics of voter turnout were based on the automated computing functions from the issuing time of the ballot papers (starting from the official polling time at 9:00 am) registered in the tablets, and no manual input was involved during the process, the chances of making errors

Note 5 The central server of the EPR system is stored in the server of the GCIS. The particulars of registered Voters are uploaded to the central server before the polling day. The polling staff may access the relevant information via the tablets set up at the ballot paper issuing desks in the polling stations and verify whether the Voter is entitled to vote and the types of ballot papers to be issued. The central server will record the issuance of the relevant ballot papers and compile the statistics of voter turnout according to the issuing time of the ballot papers registered in the tablets.

were minimal. In that case, if the actual number of issued ballot papers exceeded the statistics of voter turnout, it would probably mean that ballot papers had been issued to persons who were not confirmed by the EPR system. This could cause people to query the propriety of the polling procedures, and therefore should be handled prudently. Hence, it took the PRO almost 1 hour to re-count the counterfoils, perform repeated checks and re-calculate the results, but still could not identify the reasons for the discrepancy. In the end, the PRO departed from the polling station to dispatch the ballot boxes, electoral documents and materials to the central counting station only after obtaining instructions from the Statistical Information Centre (“SIC”). In preparing the ballot paper account, the polling staff would compare the counterfoils of the ballot papers issued with the voter turnout. In case of a discrepancy, the PRO would try to find out the reason for it. The EAC considers it understandable that the dispatch of ballot boxes, related electoral documents and materials to the central counting station was delayed as a result.

3.9 After checking the activity log of the EPR system server against the issuing time of ballot papers registered in the tablets on the day following the polling day, the REO identified the following programming errors on the part of the EPR system contractor.

3.10 The EPR system contractor had only synchronised the time setting of the clock inside the EPR system’s server on GCIS with the HKO clock, but not the built-in clocks of the tablets. As a result, the time shown on the tablets was about two minutes behind the HKO clock, and two Voters were issued ballot papers in this two-minute time gap immediately after the start of the poll. When

the polling station at Princess Alexandra Community Centre accessed statistical figures from the tablets on ballot papers issued to Voters starting from 9:00 a.m. on the polling day, it was found that the number of ballot papers issued fell short of that recorded in the EPR system by two. The programming errors were not identified during the polling hours and it was not until the polling staff was completing the ballot paper account that a discrepancy of two votes was discovered. The ballot boxes, ballot paper accounts, and related electoral documents and materials were eventually delivered to the central counting station without identifying the reasons for the discrepancy after prolonged checking, resulting in delay.

3.11 The REO noted that the DPRO of the polling station at Princess Alexandra Community Centre did synchronise his smart watch in accordance with the established guidelines after calling the HKO at 8:50 am on the polling day to ensure time consistency with the HKO and announced to those present at 9:00 am sharp the start of the poll before admitting Voters outside into the polling station. As such, the ballot papers of the polling station at Princess Alexandra Community Centre were all issued only after the start of the poll.

3.12 Due to programming errors on the part of the EPR system contractor, two ballot papers issued by the polling station at Princess Alexandra Community Centre were not included in the statistical figures. The EAC considers that the contractor has to bear the responsibility. Although it has been verified that, among the 5 ordinary polling stations, only the one at Princess Alexandra Community Centre encountered this situation and this discrepancy of two votes did not affect the results of the Elections, the EAC opines that this blunder in

system programming was undesirable as it caused a long delay in the departure of the PRO from the polling station at Princess Alexandra Community Centre and hence a delay in the delivery of ballot boxes to the central counting station. The REO has required the contractor to submit a report on the incident and will rectify the programming errors to prevent recurrence of the problem.

3.13 It took 1 hour 55 minutes for the polling station at Tuen Mun Town Hall to dispatch the ballot boxes, electoral documents and materials to the central counting station. The reason was also that the PRO, when completing the ballot paper account, found that the actual number of issued ballot papers calculated based on the serial numbers on the counterfoils exceeded the statistics of voter turnout recorded in the EPR system by 7. While it took the PRO almost 1 hour to re-count the counterfoils, perform repeated checks and re-calculate the results, he still could not identify the reasons for the discrepancy. In the end, the PRO dispatched the ballot boxes, related electoral documents and materials to the central counting station only after obtaining instructions from the SIC.

3.14 On the day following the polling day, after checking the EPR system server for the ballot paper issuance records and comparing them with the statistics on the number of ballot papers issued, the REO still found a discrepancy of 7 votes against the ballot paper account. After further investigation, the REO revealed that one of the polling staff at the ballot paper issuing desk did not press the “CONFIRM” button in the EPR system to complete the ballot paper issuing process after scanning the HKIDs of Voters, hence the issuance of those ballot papers was not recorded in the EPR system. Although this discrepancy of 7 votes did not affect the results of the Elections, the EAC opines that the REO

should step up staff training and enhance the EPR system by incorporating a message to remind polling staff at the ballot paper issuing desks to complete the whole ballot paper issuing process in the EPR system.

3.15 When the actual number of ballot papers issued exceeded the statistics of voter turnout recorded in the EPR system, it might infer that some ballot papers had been issued under improper circumstances. Therefore, the EAC considers it understandable that the PRO needed to handle the matter with particular caution.

3.16 It took 1 hour 58 minutes for the polling staff at Sha Tin Town Hall Polling Station to dispatch the ballot boxes, electoral documents and materials to the central counting station. It was because the PRO misunderstood that before leaving for the central counting station to deliver the ballot boxes, related electoral documents and materials, he had to wait for the EPR system to complete the shutdown process, and then check with the contractor and sign to return the equipment of the EPR system. However, according to the Operational Manual, only the APRO (Information Technology) was responsible for shutting down the EPR system, whereas the PRO was only required to sign for verification before leaving for the central counting station with the ballot boxes, related electoral documents and materials. Checking and signing to return the equipment of the EPR system should only be undertaken by the APRO (Information Technology). Also, there was no need to deliver the acknowledgement documents for return of equipment to the central counting station. The EAC considers that the REO should enhance training in the future to ensure that the PROs are well aware of the workflow and avoid delays in the delivery of ballot boxes to the central

counting station.

(B) Receipt of Ballot Boxes, Electoral Documents and Materials by the Central Counting Station

3.17 The time lapse from arrival of ballot boxes at the central counting station to completion of the handover of ballot boxes, electoral documents and materials at each polling station is set out in **Table 2**:

Table 2: Time of Arrival at the Central Counting Station and Completion of the Handover of Ballot Boxes, Electoral Documents and Materials

Polling station	Time of arrival at central counting station (1)	Time of completion of receipt of ballot boxes, electoral documents and materials by central counting station (2)	Time required for handover (2) – (1)
Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre	19:40	21:01	1 hour 21 minutes
Kowloon Park Sports Centre	20:45	21:25	40 minutes
Princess Alexandra Community Centre	21:30	22:36	1 hour 6 minutes
Tuen Mun Town Hall	20:45	21:41	56 minutes
Sha Tin Town Hall	20:30	20:56	26 minutes
Cheung Sha Wan Police Station	19:15	19:42	27 minutes

3.18 There were 3 counters at the central counting station to receive ballot

boxes, electoral documents and materials. When a PRO arrived at the central counting station with the ballot boxes, electoral documents and materials, the counting staff had to follow the established procedures to check every ballot box and verify all the electoral documents and materials (such as the counterfoils of issued ballot papers and the unissued ballot papers) for acceptance before the handover process could be completed. As shown in **Table 2**, it took about 30 minutes to 1 hour 30 minutes for the polling staff of each of the polling stations to complete the handover of ballot boxes, electoral documents and materials. The reasons for delay in the handover for some polling stations are set out below.

3.19 It took more than 1 hour for the polling staff of the polling station at Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre to complete the handover process. The main reason was that, upon receipt of the electoral documents of the polling station, the counting staff found that the PRO did not duly complete some of the forms and did not sign next to corrections of information on the ballot paper account. Therefore, the PRO was requested to fill in the missing information on the forms. Afterwards, the counting staff also found that the PRO did not bring along sealing certificates for counterfoils and various unused ballot papers, as well as those for the printed copies of subsector FRs. Since there were no relevant sealing certificates stocked at the central counting station, and both the polling station and central counting station were situated in Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, the PRO thus contacted and asked the polling staff to send the sealing certificates to the central counting station. However, as the polling staff had no authority to enter the central counting station with his/her staff badge, it was only with the assistance of REO staff that the requested

sealing certificates could be duly received. In the midst of this, the counting staff also realised that the PRO had lost the key for one of the suitcases, rendering it necessary for REO staff to change the padlock for the suitcase.

3.20 For the Kowloon Park Sports Centre Polling Station, it took 40 minutes for the polling staff to complete the handover mainly because errors in a number of forms were spotted by the counting staff when they collected the electoral documents of that polling station and correction by the PRO was required. Besides, polling staff did not sign and seal packets containing various types of unused ballot papers and the plastic bags containing the printed copies of subsector FRs as instructed. Neither did they use specified envelopes for some of the electoral documents. Staff of the REO had to assist the PRO in signing and sealing the electoral materials one by one on the spot and look for suitable envelopes for the electoral documents.

3.21 For the Princess Alexandra Community Centre Polling Station, it took about 1 hour for the polling staff to complete the handover mainly because polling staff failed to pack and seal electoral documents as instructed, including using wrong seals for the plastic bags containing the ballot paper counterfoils and various types of unused ballot papers and the plastic bags containing the printed copies of subsector FRs, as well as putting some documents into non-specified envelopes, so that the counting staff had to spend extra time on the handover process. Since some of the related materials were not stocked in the central counting station, staff of the REO had to contact the emergency depot for dispatch of the materials.

3.22 For the Tuen Mun Town Hall Polling Station, it took nearly 1 hour

for the polling staff to complete the handover because the PRO also did not pack and seal the electoral documents as instructed and failed to duly complete some of the forms.

3.23 The EAC considers that the delay in the handover of ballot boxes, electoral documents and materials at the above 4 polling stations was undesirable. The EAC advises the REO to review the handover process of ballot boxes, electoral documents and materials. In addition, the REO should stock some electoral materials (such as sealing certificates, specified envelopes, etc.) at the central counting station in case polling staff forget to bring along such materials to the central counting station. The REO should also step up training on completion of electoral documents and packing of electoral materials (see paragraphs 5.11 and 5.24 below for details).

(C) Opening of ballot boxes

3.24 The time from completion of handover to opening of ballot boxes of each polling station is set out in **Table 3**:

Table 3: Time from Completion of Handover to Opening of Ballot Boxes

Polling station	Time of completing receipt of ballot boxes, electoral documents and materials by central counting station (1)	Time of opening ballot box(es) (2)	Time required (2) – (1)
Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre	21:01	21:42	41 minutes
Kowloon Park Sports Centre	21:25	21:33	8 minutes
Princess Alexandra Community Centre	22:36	23:08	32 minutes
Tuen Mun Town Hall	21:41	21:47	6 minutes
Sha Tin Town Hall	20:56	21:04	8 minutes
Cheung Sha Wan Police Station	19:42	N/A	N/A

3.25 For the polling station at Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, it took 41 minutes to open the ballot boxes because the date of the ECSS Ordinary Elections written down by the PRO on the seals of the ballot boxes was incorrect and the staff responsible for relevant procedures considered it necessary to seek legal advice. Eventually, upon obtaining the legal advice, the Assistant RO explained to the candidates and/or agents present that it was a scribal error. The ballot boxes were then opened for ballot paper sorting. Under section 61 of the EAC (EP) (EC) Reg, the PRO must seal each ballot box at his/her polling station with a seal after the close of poll, so that no ballot papers

or any other materials will be dropped into or taken out from the ballot box after it is sealed. The EAC considers that errors of information on the seals should not delay the opening of ballot boxes.

3.26 It took 32 minutes to open the ballot boxes from the polling station at Princess Alexandra Community Centre. The main reason was that there were only 4 sorting tables in the central counting station for opening the ballot boxes from 5 ordinary polling stations and 1 dedicated polling station and for sorting the ballot papers by subsectors. It was originally planned that one of the sorting tables could be assigned for opening the ballot boxes from 2 polling stations with fewer Voters (i.e. the polling stations at Tuen Mun Town Hall and Princess Alexandra Community Centre) and for sorting ballot papers. However, after the handover of ballot boxes was completed, no sorting tables were available for opening the ballot boxes of Princess Alexandra Community Centre Polling Station at the time. It was not until the sorting of ballot papers from the Sha Tin Town Hall Polling Station was completed at one of the sorting tables that the ballot boxes from Princess Alexandra Community Centre could be opened. The EAC deems it necessary for the REO to enhance the arrangements for opening ballot boxes (see paragraph 5.12 below for details).

(D) Sorting of Ballot Papers

3.27 The time from opening of ballot boxes to completion of ballot paper sorting is set out in **Table 4:**

Table 4: Time from Opening of Ballot Boxes to Completion of Ballot Paper Sorting

Polling station	No. of ballot papers	Time of opening ballot box(es) (1)	Time of completing ballot paper sorting (2)	Time required (2) – (1)
Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre	1 148	21:42	00:02 (+1)	2 hours 20 minutes
Kowloon Park Sports Centre	1 434	21:33	00:34 (+1)	3 hours 1 minute
Princess Alexandra Community Centre	454	23:08	00:05 (+1)	57 minutes
Tuen Mun Town Hall	503	21:47	23:56	2 hours 9 minutes
Sha Tin Town Hall	859	21:04	23:00	1 hour 56 minutes
Cheung Sha Wan Police Station	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

3.28 The time required for sorting ballot papers depends on the number of ballot papers in a ballot box. Since OMR machines were used for vote counting in the ECSS Ordinary Elections, every Voter must put the ballot paper into an envelope provided by the polling station to protect the ballot paper. Before sorting the ballot papers, counting staff had to remove all such envelopes, and then count the number of ballot papers of each subsector and check it against the ballot paper account to see if they tallied. The reasons why it took longer time for some polling stations to complete the sorting of ballot papers are set out below.

3.29 After opening the ballot boxes from the polling station at Hong

Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, it took about 2 hours 20 minutes for the counting staff to complete the sorting of ballot papers because there were more ballot papers from that polling station. In addition, when counting the sorted ballot papers, counting staff noted that the number of ballot papers of one of the subsectors was inconsistent with that on the ballot paper account. It was then estimated that during the sorting process, a ballot paper was mistakenly put into the plastic box of a different subsector. Hence, the counting staff had to lay all ballot papers of other subsectors on the counting table to re-count the ballot papers of each subsector in front of the RO. Eventually, the misplaced ballot paper was found in a plastic box of another subsector. The EAC understands that given the rather large number of ballot papers to be counted, it would take a longer time for the sorting process. Nevertheless, the EAC considers the delay caused to the whole ballot paper sorting process by misplacement of a ballot paper in the plastic box of another subsector is a delay due to human error.

3.30 For the polling station at Kowloon Park Sports Centre, it took about 3 hours for the counting staff to complete the sorting of ballot papers after the ballot boxes were opened. It was because the number of ballot papers of that polling station was the largest among the 5 polling stations, and above all, the counting staff spotted that some items on the ballot paper accounts for 2 subsectors were not duly completed, and therefore had to wait for the APRO of the Kowloon Park Sports Centre Polling Station to return to the central counting station. The sorting of ballot papers was finally completed only after the APRO arrived at the central counting station to fill in relevant missing information at around 12:30 am.

3.31 For the polling station at Tuen Mun Town Hall, it took about 2 hours for the counting staff to complete the sorting of ballot papers after the ballot box was opened. It was mainly because the information on the ballot paper accounts for some subsectors was inaccurate, rendering it necessary for the counting staff to wait for the return of the PRO of the Tuen Mun Town Hall Polling Station to the central counting station to make corrections. Eventually, the PRO corrected all relevant information on the ballot paper accounts at around 11:30 pm.

3.32 The EAC considers it undesirable that the counting of votes was delayed because of the need to wait for the polling staff of the polling stations at Kowloon Park Sports Centre and Tuen Mun Town Hall to return to the central counting station. The counting of votes is based on the actual number of ballot papers inside the ballot boxes. To postpone the commencement of vote counting just because of the need to wait for the polling staff to return to the central counting station to correct/fill in information on the ballot paper accounts is putting the cart before the horse. The EAC recommends that in future elections, the REO should ask the PROs to stay at the central counting station until all submitted necessary electoral documents are duly checked (see paragraph 5.12 below for details).

3.33 After opening of the ballot boxes from the polling station at Sha Tin Town Hall, it took about 2 hours for the counting staff to complete the sorting of ballot papers. It was because according to the 2021 Election Committee Subsector Ordinary Elections Operational Manual for Staff at Central Counting Station, after taking out the ballot papers, the counting staff needed to check

every envelope to ensure that there was no ballot paper inside before putting the envelopes back in the ballot boxes to commence the sorting of ballot papers. However, the REO found that the counting staff failed to follow the established procedures, which required them to check the envelopes to see if any ballot paper was left while removing the envelopes. Instead they performed the two steps separately. It was after the removal of all ballot papers from the envelopes that a counting staff was tasked to check all envelopes from beginning, thus doubling the time taken for the sorting of ballot papers. The EAC considers it inappropriate that the sorting process was delayed because the counting staff failed to follow the established procedures, and recommends that the REO must step up staff training and rehearsal to ensure that they perform their duties in accordance with the established procedures.

Chapter 4 – The Count

4.1 The following procedures were involved in the count -

- (a) screening of ballot papers;
- (b) counting of votes by OMR machines;
- (c) determination of questionable ballot papers (if any); and
- (d) announcement of election results.

The time required for each of the procedures in the Elections and for the count is set out in **Appendix III**.

(A) Screening of Ballot Papers

4.2 The staff responsible for screening of ballot papers had to sort the ballot papers into 3 categories: clearly invalid ballot papers (such as ballot papers endorsed with the words “TENDERED”, “UNUSED” or “SPOILT”), questionable ballot papers and ballot papers readable by OMR machines. This procedure was mainly to screen out ballot papers that were unmarked, mutilated or with marks by which the Voters could possibly be identified, as well as questionable ballot papers, in accordance with the law. Damaged or mutilated ballot papers must be checked prudently to prevent paper jams in the OMR machines. Although sorting of ballot papers was not completed until 12:34 am on 20 September, the screening procedure had already commenced at 12:11 am. The time of screening ballot papers for each subsector is set out in **Table 5**:

Table 5: Time of Screening Ballot Papers by Subsectors

Subsector	Number of ballot papers	Commencement time of screening of ballot papers (1)	Completion time of screening and dispatching ballot papers to scanning zone (2)	Time required for screening of ballot papers (2) – (1)
Chinese Medicine	50	0:48	2:05	1 hour 17 minutes
Representatives of Members of Area Committees, District Fight Crime Committees, and District Fire Safety Committees of Hong Kong and Kowloon (“Hong Kong and Kowloon District Committees”)	969	0:11	2:52	2 hours 41 minutes
New Territories District Committees	796	0:13	2:14	2 hours 1 minute
Insurance	82	0:15	1:05	50 minutes
Education	1 473	0:14	3:27	3 hours 13 minutes
Legal	30	0:50	1:46	56 minutes
Medical and Health Services	79	0:26	1:20	54 minutes
Architectural, Surveying, Planning and Landscape	55	0:17	1:21	1 hour 4 minutes
Labour	395	0:17	2:16	1 hour 59 minutes
Social Welfare	136	0:20	1:50	1 hour 30 minutes
Commercial (third)	91	0:13	1:41	1 hour 28 minutes
Financial Services	188	0:18	2:09	1 hour 51 minutes
Technology and Innovation	54	0:51	2:20	1 hour 29 minutes

4.3 As shown in **Table 5**, most subsectors started to screen ballot papers

at early midnight on 20 September, while the later ones, i.e. the Chinese Medicine subsector, Legal subsector and Technology and Innovation subsector, started the screening between 12:48 am and 12:51 am.

4.4 Given the smaller number of Voters in some subsectors in the Elections, to protect the secrecy of votes, the counting staff had to follow the prudent approach adopted in previous ECSS Ordinary Elections to mix the ballot papers collected from at least 2 polling stations, and waited until the number of ballot papers had reached the default criteria for batching (i.e. 20 or 50 in the Elections depending on the number of Voters in a subsector), before they would proceed with the screening procedure. Therefore, the screening of ballot papers of those subsectors could only be commenced after the sorting of ballot papers for the last ballot box (i.e. the ballot box of the Kowloon Park Sports Centre Polling Station) was completed, and the number of ballot papers had reached the default batching criteria. On balance of the need to protect the secrecy of votes, the EAC considers it understandable that it took time to complete the screening of ballot papers.

4.5 The screening of ballot papers for the Legal subsector started late because the counting staff responsible for this task were also deployed for opening ballot boxes and sorting ballot papers, and they could only commence screening of ballot papers for the Legal subsector after they had completed sorting of the ballot papers from the Kowloon Park Sports Centre Polling Station at 12:34 am. The EAC considers that the delay was related to manpower allocation, and recommends that the REO should deploy staff more flexibly and arrange appropriate manpower to provide support in future elections.

4.6 According to the counting procedures, while screening the ballot papers, the counting staff should also group the ballot papers readable by the OMR machines into batches of 20 or 50, and then pack each batch of ballot papers^{Note 6} in a separate sealed packet for delivery to the Ballot Paper Scanning Zone, where the ballot papers will be fed to the OMR machines for scanning.

4.7 Given the larger number of ballot papers in some subsectors (i.e. Hong Kong and Kowloon District Committees subsector, New Territories District Committees subsector, Education subsector and Labour subsector), the staff therefore used about 2 to 3 hours to screen the ballot papers. The EAC considers that it is still understandable despite the longer time taken. As for some subsectors (such as the Architectural, Surveying, Planning and Landscape subsector) which had a smaller number of ballot papers but required more than 1 hour to complete the screening of ballot papers, the REO believes that the delay was due to too much time taken for the counting staff to screen each ballot paper during the screening process. It may be caused by staff being prudent in handling the matter, however, it is unsatisfactory if the adopted method would harm the overall working efficiency. Although the counting staff would screen the ballot papers while at the same time dispatching OMR-readable ballot papers to the OMR machines for counting in batches of 20 or 50, the EAC considers that the screening process at that night was generally slow. Any delay in the screening process would create a domino effect and affect the subsequent counting by the OMR machines, and was undesirable.

(B) Vote Counting by the OMR Machines

4.8 As mentioned in paragraph 4.6 above, screening of ballot papers was

Note 6 Each batch of ballot papers will be packed and sealed in a separate packet, and assigned with a separate batch number to trace the handling progress and to avoid double counting of the same batch of ballot papers.

conducted in parallel with the dispatch of OMR-readable ballot papers to the OMR machines for counting. The number of ballot papers as well as the commencement time and completion time of vote counting by the OMR machines for each subsector are set out in **Table 6**:

Table 6: Time of Vote Counting by the OMR Machines for Each Subsector

Subsector	Number of ballot papers	Completion time of screening and dispatching ballot papers to scanning zone	Commencement time of counting of votes by the OMR machines (1)	Completion time of counting of votes by the OMR machines (2)	Time required for counting of votes by the OMR machines (2) – (1)	Number of ballot papers involved in paper jam(s)
Chinese Medicine	50	2:05	1:29	2:06	37 minutes	N/A
Hong Kong and Kowloon District Committees	969	2:52	0:45	2:54	2 hours 9 minutes	N/A
New Territories District Committees	796	2:14	0:43	2:17	1 hour 34 minutes	50
Insurance	82	1:05	0:42	1:08	26 minutes	N/A
Education	1 473	3:27	0:51	3:29	2 hours 38 minutes	48
Legal	30	1:46	1:26	1:48	22 minutes	N/A
Medical and Health Services	79	1:20	0:46	1:22	36 minutes	N/A
Architectural, Surveying, Planning and Landscape	55	1:21	0:56	1:23	27 minutes	N/A
Labour	395	2:16	1:14	2:22	1 hour 8 minutes	20
Social Welfare	136	1:50	0:48	1:51	1 hour 3 minutes	N/A
Commercial (third)	91	1:41	0:47	1:44	57 minutes	N/A
Financial Services	188	2:09	0:43	2:11	1 hour 28 minutes	N/A
Technology and Innovation	54	2:20	1:58	2:22	24 minutes	N/A

4.9 Since the counting staff had to group the ballot papers into batches of 20 or 50 before feeding them to the OMR machines for counting, the more the ballot papers, the longer the time required by the counting staff to arrange batching of ballot papers. For example, the 969 ballot papers of the Hong Kong and Kowloon District Committees subsector were grouped into a total of 20 batches each comprising 50 ballot papers. Besides, the completion time of counting of votes by the OMR machines and the completion time of ballot paper screening were also correlated. As shown in **Table 6**, although it was recorded that it took more than 1 hour to complete the counting of ballot papers of the Social Welfare subsector and Financial Services subsector by the OMR machines, the completion time of counting by the OMR machines was actually just 1 to 2 minutes apart from the completion time of ballot paper screening for the 2 subsectors. According to the record, it took the counting staff an average of around 1 minute and 2 minutes to scan a batch of 20 ballot papers and a batch of 50 ballot papers respectively. Hence, the completion time of ballot paper screening directly affected the completion time of counting by the OMR machines. As mentioned in paragraph 4.7 above, the EAC considers that the delay in completion of ballot paper screening was undesirable and that the REO should examine ways to enhance the efficiency of ballot paper screening (such as by increasing the manpower and strengthening the operational rehearsals of the counting staff), so as to avoid causing delay in the completion of counting by the OMR machines.

4.10 Paper jams would also lengthen the time required for counting by the OMR machines. The failure of some counting staff to stack up the ballot papers neatly before feeding to the OMR machines caused paper jams to 3 batches of

ballot papers from the Labour subsector, Education subsector and New Territories District Committees subsector, involving 20, 48 and 50 ballot papers respectively.

4.11 In fact, the OMR machines were all along used in the ECSS Ordinary Elections in 2016 and before for vote counting, with the difference that each ballot paper then was printed with a unique barcode which facilitated the handling in the event of paper jams. When there was a paper jam in the OMR machine, the counting staff could re-scan the ballot papers by the OMR machine, and through the barcode the counting system could identify whether the ballot paper had been counted. The relevant barcode was linked to the serial number on the counterfoil of ballot papers. With the introduction of the EPR system in the Elections, if printing of unique barcodes on ballot papers was continued, Voters' voting choices could be identified by retrieving and comparing the ballot paper issuing record in the EPR system with the serial numbers of the counterfoils of the ballot papers issued at the ballot paper issuing desks. Therefore, to ensure voting secrecy, unique barcodes were no longer printed on ballot papers. Given the absence of the unique barcodes on the ballot papers and the counting staff could not feed that batch of ballot papers to the OMR machines again for scanning, the REO's contingency plan in the event of paper jams was to cancel the record of the relevant batch of ballot papers from the counting system and then adopt manual input for the choices marked on ballot papers. The counting staff had to bring that batch of ballot papers to the enquiry desk, where the ballot papers would be re-scanned by the OMR machines and reports with valid choices would be printed out one by one. Subsequently, under the supervision of the candidates and/or their agents, the counting staff

would work in pairs, with one person inputting the records on the statements into the counting system and the other entering the choices marked on the ballot papers into the counting system one by one. The counting system would check against these data, and if there was any discrepancy, the computer system would prompt counting staff to crosscheck the data input and correct any mistakes before the data were saved.

4.12 The time for manual input for ballot papers of relevant subsectors due to paper jams is set out in **Table 7**:

Table 7: Time for Manual Input for Ballot Papers of Relevant Subsectors due to Paper Jams

Subsector	No. of ballot papers involved	Commencement time of manual input (1)	Completion time of manual input (2)	Time required for manual input (2) – (1)
Labour	20	03:42	05:21	1 hour 39 minutes
Education	48	04:05	04:49	44 minutes
New Territories District Committees	50	N/A (See paragraph 4.15 below for details)		

4.13 Among the 3 subsectors with the encounter of paper jams, the Education subsector had 48 ballot papers which required manual input of the choices on ballot papers but it took only 44 minutes to complete the manual input since the number of members to be returned in the subsector was relatively smaller (i.e. 13). The EAC considers the time taken reasonable.

4.14 As for the Labour subsector, although only 20 ballot papers required manual input because of paper jams, the counting staff found that the batch number was mistakenly input and not accepted by the counting system when they tried to input the choices on ballot papers manually into the counting system. After checking with the system contractor by the REO staff, the manual input could be resumed only when a new batch number was assigned to that batch of ballot papers. The commencement time of manual input was delayed as a result. After the Elections, the REO has requested the system contractor to conduct further investigation on the reason for the batch number not being accepted. Moreover, since there were more members to be returned in that subsector, the counting staff used about 1 hour 39 minutes to complete the manual input of the choices marked on the ballot papers. The EAC considers that the staff were quite exhausted as it was already around 3:00 am. To ensure that the choices marked in each ballot paper were correctly input into the counting system, it is understandable that the counting staff had to take time to perform repeated checks.

4.15 Regarding the handling of paper jams in the New Territories District Committees subsector, since a larger number of ballot papers were involved with as many as 80 members to be returned, it would take a very long time if the process of manual input was continued. Although manual input had already commenced, the REO requested the system contractor of the counting system on the spot to study whether it was possible to scan the ballot papers by the OMR machines again on the premise of avoiding double counting. After examining the feasibility of various plans, the time expected to be taken and the possible impact on the data stored in the system, and on the premise of ensuring the

impartiality and acceptance of the counting results, the system contractor considered it feasible to void the relevant batch of ballot papers in the counting system, assign a new batch number and use the OMR machines to count that batch of ballot papers instead of manual input under the witness of the independent computer auditor, candidates and/or their agents and the counting system contractor. The EAC noted the contingency measures taken at the night of the polling day, considers them feasible and recommends the relevant arrangement should be regularised (see paragraph 5.15 below for details).

(C) Determination of Questionable Ballot Papers

4.16 3 questionable ballot paper determination tables were set up in the central counting station for determination of questionable ballot papers and announcement of the initial counting results. 10 out of the 13 contested subsectors had questionable ballot papers requiring determination, and the number of questionable ballot papers in each subsector ranged from 1 to 24. The number of questionable ballot papers in each subsector and the time involved in determination of questionable ballot papers are set out in **Table 8**:

Table 8: Time for Handling Questionable Ballot Papers and Manual Input of Ballot Papers in Each Subsector

Subsector	No. of questionable ballot papers	Commencement time of questionable ballot paper determination (1)	Completion time of questionable ballot paper determination (2)	Time required for questionable ballot paper determination (2) – (1)	No. of ballot papers ruled valid and required manual input	Commencement time of manual input of ballot papers ruled valid (3)	Completion time of manual input of ballot papers ruled valid (4)	Time required for manual input of ballot papers (4) – (3)
Chinese Medicine	2	2:17	2:30	13 minutes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Hong Kong and Kowloon District Committees	18	4:21	5:13	52 minutes	8	5:15	5:39	24 minutes
New Territories District Committees	4	4:04	4:20	16 minutes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Insurance	1	1:19	1:27	8 minutes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Education	24	4:12	5:16	1 hour 4 minutes	16	5:19	5:32	13 minutes
Legal	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Medical and Health Services	1	1:49	2:03	14 minutes	1	2:25	2:27	2 minutes

Subsector	No. of questionable ballot papers	Commencement time of questionable ballot paper determination (1)	Completion time of questionable ballot paper determination (2)	Time required for questionable ballot paper determination (2) – (1)	No. of ballot papers ruled valid and required manual input	Commencement time of manual input of ballot papers ruled valid (3)	Completion time of manual input of ballot papers ruled valid (4)	Time required for manual input of ballot papers (4) – (3)
Architectural, Surveying, Planning and Landscape	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Labour	6	3:31	4:01	30 minutes	2	4:56	5:07	11 minutes
Social Welfare	3	2:30	2:44	14 minutes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Commercial (third)	2	1:57	2:10	13 minutes	1	2:22	2:25	3 minutes
Financial Services	1	2:46	2:57	11 minutes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Technology and Innovation	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

4.17 In the process of handling questionable ballot papers, the ROs had to invite all candidates and/or their agents of the subsectors concerned who were present to the questionable ballot paper determination tables to participate. Candidates and/or their agents had the right to make representations on the validity of each questionable ballot paper and the decision of the ROs, before the ROs made a determination.

4.18 Both the Hong Kong and Kowloon District Committees subsector and the Education subsector took about 1 hour to complete the determination of questionable ballot papers. For the former subsector, the determination of questionable ballot papers took time because a larger number of members had to be returned, involving many candidates and/or their agents. Besides, among the 3 questionable ballot paper determination tables, only 1 could accommodate subsectors with a larger number of candidates, therefore leading to the waiting of the questionable ballot paper determination tables for the Hong Kong and Kowloon District Committees subsector. The EAC opines that greater flexibility should be exercised in the allocation of questionable ballot paper determination tables. Although there was only 1 such table to accommodate subsectors with more candidates, if a vacant questionable ballot paper determination table is available, the counting staff should advise the RO to discuss with the candidates and/or their agents of relevant subsectors about using a smaller questionable ballot paper determination table to avoid causing delay to the determination of questionable ballot papers.

4.19 As for the Education subsector, the determination of questionable ballot papers took time because of the largest number of questionable ballot

papers (i.e. 24). Besides, due to overlapping of the time of determination of questionable ballot papers for the Education subsector and the time of announcement of the initial counting results of other subsectors, the Education subsector had to wait for its turn to use the questionable ballot paper determination table. The EAC considers that, subject to the availability of manpower, resources and spaces in venues, another suitable location should be arranged for announcement of the initial counting results, so as to avoid the waiting of questionable ballot paper determination tables (see paragraph 5.16 below for details).

4.20 In addition, among the 10 subsectors which required determination of questionable ballot papers, only some questionable ballot papers of 5 subsectors were ruled valid, involving 1 to 16 ballot papers for each subsector. Before manual input of the ballot papers ruled valid into the counting system commenced, the RO would read out the choices marked on all the ballot papers ruled valid in front of the candidates and/or their agents, and the counting staff would write down the information on a statement. Based on the records on the statement, the counting staff would work in pairs to input data into the counting system, with one person entering the records on the statement and the other entering the choices marked on each ballot paper ruled valid. The counting system would then check against these data, and if there was any discrepancy, the computer system would prompt counting staff to crosscheck the data input and correct any mistakes before the data were saved.

4.21 Although 8 ballot papers and 2 ballot papers were ruled valid for the Hong Kong and Kowloon District Committees subsector and the Labour

subsector respectively, the counting staff took 24 minutes and 11 minutes respectively to manually input the choices marked on these ballot papers given the larger number of members to be returned in these 2 subsectors (i.e. 76 and 60 respectively). The EAC considers that manual input of choices marked on the ballot papers ruled valid is irreplaceable. It follows that the larger the number of members to be returned in the subsector, the more time will be required to complete the process of manual input.

(D) Announcement of Election Results

4.22 The time of announcement of election results of each subsector is set out in **Table 9**:

Table 9: Time of Announcement of Election Results of Each Subsector

Subsector	Time of announcement of initial counting results (1)	Time of confirmation and announcement of election results (2)	Time required for announcement of election results (2) – (1)
Chinese Medicine	3:37	4:11	34 minutes
Hong Kong and Kowloon District Committees	6:01	7:09	1 hour 8 minutes
New Territories District Committees	5:50	7:50	2 hours
Insurance	2:13	3:17	1 hour 4 minutes
Education	5:57	6:45	48 minutes
Legal	3:09	3:50	41 minutes
Medical and Health Services	4:06	4:40	34 minutes
Architectural, Surveying, Planning and Landscape	2:01	3:02	1 hour 1 minutes
Labour	5:56	7:39	1 hour 43 minutes
Social Welfare	4:16	5:12	56 minutes
Commercial (third)	2:56	3:31	35 minutes
Financial Services	4:33	5:20	47 minutes
Technology and Innovation	3:43	4:25	42 minutes

4.23 After consolidating the counting results, the ROs of all subsectors would announce the initial counting results at the questionable ballot paper determination tables. The ROs had to make known the initial counting results to the candidates and/or their agents for the subsectors concerned and ascertain any request from them for a re-count. When it was confirmed that no request for re-count was made by the candidates and/or their agents, the staff would

prepare a specified form for printing of the counting results, and arrange for the issue of “Notice of Result of Election”. The results would then be submitted to the SIC for confirmation. Subsequently, the ROs would go to the media centre to wait for their turns to announce the election results on the stage.

4.24 It took about 1 hour to confirm and announce the formal election results for the Insurance subsector and the Social Welfare subsector because, after the ROs announced the initial counting results, there was a tie in votes for the last seat in both subsectors and the ROs had to arrange a draw of lots among the candidates concerned.

4.25 In accordance with the established procedures, the ROs had to make known the initial counting results to the candidates and/or their agents for the subsectors concerned who were present to announce the initial election results and confirm any request from them for a re-count. Therefore, in view of the larger number of candidates of the Hong Kong and Kowloon District Committees subsector, New Territories District Committees subsector and the Labour subsector, the EAC considers it understandable that the ROs took time to announce the initial counting results before issuing the “Notice of Result of Election”. Besides, the location where candidates and/or agents met up with the ROs was exactly the questionable ballot paper determination table, therefore occupying the tables and indirectly affecting the progress of handling questionable ballot papers of other subsectors.

4.26 The EAC observes that the ROs announced the election results based on the “Notice of Result of Election”. The “Notice of Result of Election” is a statutory form which comprises 2 tables, one listing all candidates and the

number of votes given to them, and the other containing a list of elected candidates (without the number of votes given to them). To facilitate the ROs' announcement of the election results on the stage, upon receipt of the "Notice of Result of Election", staff at the media centre had to spend time copying the numbers of votes obtained onto the table of elected candidates and double check to ensure accuracy. The EAC considers it unnecessary and undesirable to do such copying work which will delay announcement of the election results. The EAC advises that the REO should provide a separate table listing out the names of elected candidates and the number of votes given to them so as to facilitate the RO's announcement of the election results.

4.27 Furthermore, the EAC also observes 2 "bottlenecks" leading to a longer time to announce the election results, i.e. the SIC and the media centre. Since the SIC had to verify and confirm the election results, when several subsectors submitted the "Notice of Result of Election" to the SIC at the same time, staff at the SIC would have to take time to check and confirm the election results of each subsector. The EAC recommends that subject to availability of resources and manpower, the REO should deploy additional staff to the SIC, consider the application of information technology and assign staff who are familiar with the procedures to closely supervise the progress of every step, in order to enhance the efficiency of verifying election results.

4.28 Another "bottleneck" was the media centre. When the ROs of several subsectors arrived at the media centre around the same time, they would have to queue and wait for their turns to announce the election results on the stage. The EAC is of the view that timely announcements could be made by

the media centre to keep the ROs, candidates and/or their agents of each subsector informed of the queuing situation, so that they could assemble before the stage in a timely manner, with a view to shortening the waiting time of the candidates and/or their agents of other subsectors before the stage.

(E) Other Issues

4.29 It took around 11 hours from the opening of first ballot box at 9:00 pm to the announcement of the election results of the last subsector at 7:50 am on the next day. As the restaurants at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre were closed at 10:00 pm and no prior arrangement was made between the REO and the restaurants, there was no light food or beverages provided to the candidates and/or their agents, the media and the staff who had stayed overnight at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre.

4.30 In view of this, the EAC recommends the REO to explore with the venue provider the possibility to temporarily set up vending machines and/or kiosks for food and beverages at the counting venue, and/or discuss with the restaurants at the venue to extend and/or advance (applicable to the next morning of the polling day) the operating hours, so as to provide food and beverages to the persons on site.

Chapter 5 – Comments and Recommendations

(A) Polling Arrangements

The EPR System

5.1 The EPR system was adopted for the first time in the Elections, and the EAC considers it operated smoothly in general on the polling day. However, as the built-in clocks of the tablets installed with the EPR system application were not synchronised with the HKO clock by the EPR system contractor, the time shown on the tablets was about two minutes behind the HKO clock. As a result, when the Princess Alexandra Community Centre Polling Station accessed statistical figures from the tablets on ballot papers issued to Voters starting from 9:00 am on the polling day, it was found that the number of ballot papers issued fell short of that recorded in the EPR system by two. It was not until the PRO was completing the ballot paper account after the close of poll that the discrepancy was discovered. The ballot boxes, ballot paper accounts, and related electoral documents and materials were eventually delivered to the central counting station without identifying the reasons for the discrepancy after a long time of checking, resulting in delay (see paragraphs 3.8 to 3.12 above for details). The EAC considers that these were teething problems with the first use of the EPR system, which affected the subsequent counting process and the EPR system contractor has to bear the responsibility. The EAC has instructed the REO to rectify the relevant programming errors to prevent recurrence of similar incidents in future elections.

5.2 In addition, as it was also found at the Tuen Mun Town Hall Polling

Station that the statistics of voter turnout recorded in the EPR system fell short of the actual number of issued ballot papers calculated based on the counterfoils by 7. Preliminary investigation revealed that one of the polling staff at the ballot paper issuing desk did not press the “CONFIRM” button in the EPR system to complete the ballot paper issuing process after scanning the HKIDs of Voters, hence the issuance of those ballot papers was not recorded in the EPR system (see paragraphs 3.13 to 3.14 above for details). The EAC recommends that the EPR system should be further enhanced by incorporating a function to ensure completion of the “CONFIRM” step before proceeding to the next step. Besides, the REO should step up staff training and improve the workflow of issuing ballot papers with the use of the EPR system, so as to remind staff at the ballot paper issuing desks to complete the whole ballot paper issuing process in the EPR system.

5.3 The EPR system is only used on the polling day, and it is not possible to improve the system through continuous application. Therefore, the smooth implementation of the EPR system hinges on comprehensive planning, sufficient preparations and tests, as well as the co-ordination of appropriate hardwares and softwares, all of which are indispensable. As information technology is a professional subject, it is necessary for the REO to seek assistance from professional departments so as to improve the EPR system to ensure its smooth operation in future elections.

Special Queuing Arrangements

5.4 The special queuing arrangements were not under too much test during the Elections as there were not many users. However, the EAC noted

positive feedbacks in general from society. The EAC believes that based on the experience gained from the Elections, the special queuing arrangements should be continued in the LegCo General Election in December this year.

Long Queues

5.5 Long queues at polling stations are inevitable if many voters go to vote around the same time. The EAC recommends that if venue and manpower permit, the REO should appropriately increase the numbers of polling stations and ballot paper issuing desks. The EAC noted that the contingency measures taken by the REO to dissolve queues (see paragraph 2.11 above for details) had been effective. The EAC believes that the contingency measures taken by REO will be more effective with the consolidation of relevant experience.

5.6 Not all 4 ballot paper issuing desks set up at the Sha Tin Town Hall Polling Station were in operation in the morning of the polling day in the Elections, and 1 ballot paper issuing desk was used for replacement of ballot papers. The fourth ballot paper issuing desk was only put into service at noon. From 9:00 am to 12:00 noon on the polling day, the fourth ballot paper issuing desk served only 1 Voter who requested replacement of his/her ballot paper and was left idle for the rest of the time. The EAC considers it very undesirable because the number of ballot paper issuing desks at each polling station is determined with due regard to the total number of voters assigned for that polling station and the maximum number of voters that can be handled by each ballot paper issuing desk. The EAC considers that the PROs should operate all ballot paper issuing desks available to optimise the use of resources at the polling stations and to ensure a smooth flow of voting. Should there be manpower

shortage or other technical problems, the PRO must report to the central command centre immediately to seek assistance and directive.

5.7 To keep voters informed of the queuing situation at their respective polling stations, the EAC recommends that the REO should consider taking the following arrangements in future elections:

- (a) arranging polling staff to show the estimated waiting times in certain places of the queues; and
- (b) examining the feasibility of using information technology or other media to disseminate the queuing situation at various polling stations.

The EAC understands that the implementation of the above recommendations requires co-ordination on various fronts and, it also involves the development of relevant systems.

(B) Arrangements after the Close of Poll

5.8 The EAC understands that since a FR of electors was lost by the REO during the 2016 LegCo General Election, the REO has further tightened the arrangements relating to the packing, delivery and storage of electoral documents, including requiring polling stations to assign 1 polling staff member of a higher rank (DPRO or APRO) to be specially responsible for preparation, packing and delivery of electoral documents after the close of poll. The electoral documents will be handed over to the PRO for thorough examination and verification, so that the documents will be handled more properly. According to section 69 of

the EAC (EP) (EC) Reg, a PRO must deliver to the central counting station the ballot boxes from his/her polling station, together with the sealed packets of unissued ballot papers, unused ballot papers and spoilt ballot papers, marked copies of the FR (if having been used), as well as the ballot paper account prepared by that PRO, etc. The EAC understands that if the actual number of issued ballot papers exceeded the statistics of voter turnout recorded in the EPR system, it would probably mean that ballot papers had been issued to persons who were not confirmed by the EPR system. This could cause people to query the propriety of the polling procedures, and therefore should be handled prudently. The repeated checks performed by the polling staff show that they were prudent and responsible. In any case, since the counting results are based on the actual number of ballot papers inside the ballot boxes, the EAC considers that the ballot boxes should be delivered to the central counting station as soon as possible after the close of poll to commence the count immediately. Other issues should be addressed based on the actual situation and handled with discretion.

Streamlining the Procedures of Compiling Statistical Returns

5.9 The EAC observes that in the Elections, polling staff took longer time during and after the poll to complete and crosscheck paper-based and electronic statistical returns. The EAC understands that although the EPR system, which could indicate real time voter turnout rate, was introduced in the Elections to verify the eligibility of Voters and record the voter turnout, the functions of EPR system cannot fully replace all statistical returns. Some paper-based statistical returns need to be retained by the polling stations as a contingency plan in case

of a sudden breakdown of the EPR system. In any case, the EAC recommends that the REO should further examine ways to reduce and consolidate the statistical returns that still need to be used. Making use of information technology can prevent polling staff from filling in the ballot paper accounts and electoral documents by repetitive copying, so that they can save the time and energy for other important tasks and problems encountered on the polling day, and can dispatch the ballot boxes to the central counting station for counting as soon as possible after the close of poll.

Setting Recommended Time Required for Delivery of Ballot Boxes to the Central Counting Station

5.10 The EAC noted that, in the Elections, some PROs lacked the initiative to seek directions from the central command centre. The EAC suggests the REO should provide PROs with clearer instructions, recommend the amount of time required of each major procedure and the reporting mechanism to the central command centre, such as setting indicators on the appropriate time required for polling stations with regard to different types of elections and different numbers of voters, so that the PROs should leave their polling stations to bring the ballot boxes and electoral documents and materials to the central counting station within the recommended time required; otherwise they should report to the central command centre in a timely manner to seek directions and support.

(C) Arrangements for the Receipt of Ballot Boxes

5.11 The EAC considers that the handover process of ballot boxes should

be completed and then arrange for their opening for counting as soon as possible after the arrival of ballot boxes at the central counting station. The EAC observes that the procedure of the receipt of ballot boxes, electoral documents and materials by the central counting station in the Elections was complicated and it required a rather long time in handling, which was undesirable. The EAC recommends that the REO should review the entire handover process. Since the PRO is only required to pass the ballot boxes and ballot paper accounts to the relevant RO under section 71 of the EAC (EP) (EC) Reg, the EAC considers that the receipt of ballot boxes and ballot paper accounts should be separated from that of other electoral documents and materials, with a view to expediting the completion of the handover of ballot boxes for counting. In addition, the EAC also recommends that the REO should stock some electoral materials (such as sealing certificates and specified envelopes, etc.) at the central counting station in case polling staff forget to bring along such materials to the central counting station, which will affect the handover process.

(D) Arrangements for the Opening of Ballot Boxes and Sorting of Ballot Papers

5.12 The EAC observes that the opening of ballot boxes and sorting of ballot papers were delayed in the Elections because the polling staff had made mistakes when completing ballot paper accounts, the counting staff were overly prudent and requested the polling staff to return to the central counting station to correct/fill in information on the ballot paper accounts, and also the supervisory staff lacked hands-on experience and failed to handle issues with discretion. As mentioned in paragraph 5.11 above, although the laws require ballot boxes to be sent to the central counting station together with the ballot paper accounts before

opening of ballot boxes can commence, if the relevant error or omission would not affect opening of ballot boxes for subsequent counting, there was no need to wait for rectification/correction. Since the counting results are based on the actual number of ballot papers inside ballot boxes, the EAC considers it undesirable that sorting of ballot papers was delayed because of the need to wait for the PROs to return to the central counting station to correct/fill in information on the ballot paper accounts. The EAC recommends that the REO should remind its staff to seek directions from their seniors instead of postponing the opening of ballot boxes when they have queries about any errors and omissions on a ballot paper account. The EAC also recommends that in future, the PROs should be asked to stay at the central counting station until all necessary electoral documents are checked to be duly completed.

(E) Counting Arrangements

Screening of Ballot Papers

5.13 The EAC observes that the time taken to complete the screening of ballot papers would affect subsequent counting by the OMR machines. The EAC understands that given the smaller number of Voters in some subsectors in the Elections, to protect the secrecy of votes, the counting staff had to mix the ballot papers from at least 2 polling stations and only when the number of ballot papers had reached the criteria for batching, they would proceed with the screening procedure. However, in any event, the screening of ballot papers was relatively slow that night. The EAC considers that, apart from carefully examining manpower allocation and deploying sufficient manpower to provide support in future elections, the REO should also review the entire ballot paper

screening process and formulate plans to expedite work progress.

Operation of OMR Machines

5.14 The EAC noted that paper jams might lengthen the time required for counting of votes by OMR machines. To prevent paper jams, the EAC recommends that the REO should remind counting staff to minimise the number of ballot papers in each batch and feed to the OMR machines with care.

5.15 The EAC understands that, with the use of the EPR system, to ensure voting secrecy, no unique barcode was printed on a ballot paper in the Elections in order to prevent chances of identifying Voters' voting choices by retrieving and comparing the ballot paper issuing record in the EPR system and the serial numbers on the counterfoils of ballot papers issued at the ballot paper issuing desks. Given the absence of the unique barcodes on the ballot papers and the counting staff could not feed that batch of ballot papers to the OMR machines again for scanning, the REO's contingency plan in the event of paper jams was that the counting staff would cancel the record of the relevant batch of ballot papers from the counting system and then adopt double manual input to record choices on the ballot papers. The EAC understands that manual input of the choices marked on the ballot papers enables the candidates and/or their agents present to observe the entire process, which will enhance transparency. However, under such arrangements, when paper jams occur in some subsectors with relatively more members to be returned, manual input will take quite a long time and the work progress will be affected by the fatigue of the counting staff. The EAC recommends that the REO should regularise the contingency arrangements adopted on the polling day, i.e. to void the relevant batch of ballot

papers in the system, assign a new batch number and use the OMR machines to count that batch of ballot papers under the witness of the independent computer auditor, candidates and/or their agents and the counting system contractor, so as to avoid further delay caused by manual input.

Arrangements for the Determination of Questionable Ballot Papers

5.16 The EAC observes that some subsectors started determination of questionable ballot papers in one go only at a later stage of the count. The limited number of questionable ballot paper determination tables had created a bottleneck effect, which adversely affected the counting progress. The EAC considers that setting up additional questionable ballot paper determination tables^{Note 7} can expedite the overall counting progress. However, if it is not possible to significantly increase the number of questionable ballot paper determination tables due to venue constraints, the EAC recommends that the REO should consider arranging for the ROs to take turns to determine the questionable ballot papers, and presetting the number of questionable ballot papers to be handled by the ROs in each round based on the voter turnout of each subsector. When the number of questionable ballot papers of a subsector reaches the preset level, the RO concerned should proceed with that round of determination of questionable ballot papers, so as to record the determination results in each round as soon as possible, and avoid having to wait for the questionable ballot paper determination tables or handle a large number of questionable ballot papers at the final stage of the count. In addition, the REO

Note 7 In the upcoming LegCo General Election, each contested Functional Constituency will have a dedicated questionable ballot paper determination table set up at the Functional Constituency counting zone in the central counting station.

should also consider arranging another suitable location for the announcement of initial counting results to avoid waiting for the questionable ballot paper determination tables due to overlapping of the time of determination of questionable ballot papers for some subsectors and announcement of initial counting results of other subsectors.

Counting Information Display System and Timely Announcement of Information

5.17 The counting process involved many stages. The EAC observes that the Counting Information Display System at the central counting station failed to announce the counting progress of all subsectors in detail at various stages in a timely manner, rendering candidates and/or their agents, media and members of the public inside the counting station to have queries and worries. The EAC recommends that the REO should enhance the design of the system to display clearly the counting progress of each subsector, and allow manual update as and when necessary in light of the actual on-site circumstances. The EAC recommends that the REO should arrange staff to make timely broadcast of relevant information in case of unexpected incidents or delays during the counting process.

Setting General Standards for Major Procedures

5.18 The EAC recommends that the REO may consider setting indicators on the expected time span required for each counting procedure for staff to follow, so that they can report to and seek directions from their seniors, the central command centre and the EAC in a timely manner when they encounter delay.

Experience of Responsible Staff in Electoral Work

5.19 A public election is a large-scale project. Every election is unique in that all election-related activities and procedures basically take place on the polling day and there is not much time allowed for participants, including staff from the REO and other government bureaux/departments, to adapt and adjust according to the actual situation. As voters go to vote on the polling day and a large number of people are involved, there will still be unforeseeable circumstances, even if different contingency plans have been prepared for different scenarios. The electoral arrangements are intertwined and inseparable. A delay in one step will affect the next. Thus, it is extremely important for staff to react flexibly to the actual situation.

5.20 The EAC noted that the REO had encountered the severe challenge of staff transfer or resignation over the past year. The 6 officers in charge of preparation and implementation of the Elections were mostly new to the REO and lacked hands-on experience in electoral work -

Duration of service at REO since transfer (as at polling day)	No. of Officer-in-charge
3 months	1
4-5 months	2
8 months	1
11 months	1
20 months	1

Although the relevant staff had tried hard to familiarise themselves with the electoral work, legal provisions and work procedures, etc., they did not have sufficient time to understand the details and they tended to follow the established procedures. In the absence of actual experience in organising elections, they were unable to exercise discretion and flexibility to deal with unexpected incidents. The situation was unsatisfactory. While the impartiality of the elections had been upheld, they failed to achieve a balance to enhance work efficiency, judge the situation accurately and detect possible deterioration of the problems. As a result, they did not report to their seniors to seek a better solution.

5.21 The EAC recommends that the authorities concerned should identify and deploy personnel with experience in organising elections and/or electoral work to the REO to take up core electoral posts, and consider retaining some of the core staff with experience in organising elections after an election cycle to provide training for new staff, so as to facilitate the preservation and passing on of knowledge and experience.

On-site Supervision and Co-ordination

5.22 The EAC recommends that the REO should assign more staff who are familiar with and have mastery of the counting process to supervise the operation of the central counting station, strengthening the co-ordination between different teams, giving on-site support and appropriate directions to the ROs and counting staff, as well as implementing contingency measures at their own discretion. Where necessary, they should report to and seek directions from their seniors as early as possible.

5.23 REO staff at the central command centre should remain vigilant against any unusual delays or irregularities detected at the polling and counting stations on the polling day, and take the initiative to study the problems and render assistance. Where necessary, they should also report to their seniors as early as possible to work out measures in response.

(F) Strengthening Training

5.24 The smooth implementation of a public election hinges on comprehensive planning and co-ordination of staff. The REO recruits polling and counting staff for each election. The EAC would like to thank civil servants from various government bureaux/departments for working at different positions on the polling day, as the REO alone could not cope with the Elections which required massive manpower and resources. However, if electoral arrangements are to be implemented smoothly, electoral staff need to be sufficiently trained beforehand. Although the REO did provide training^{Note 8} to polling and counting staff, the EAC considers that, based on the experience gained from the Elections, the REO should step up staff training in the following aspects:

- (a) Increasing the practice hours on the use of the EPR system to equip polling staff with a better understanding of the application of the EPR

Note 8 The REO organises briefing sessions for all polling staff on the polling procedures and relevant arrangements, and arranges Polling Management Training for the PROs and DPROs on maintenance of order of polling stations, response to crises and handling of complaints, as well as experience sharing. Staff assigned to compile statistical returns on the polling day are also provided with specialised statistical training. The REO arranges briefings cum mock counting exercises for all counting staff. As OMR machines are used for counting of votes, the REO arranges practical training sessions for counting staff tasked to operate this counting system. In addition, staff working at the central counting station also need to attend an on-site counting rehearsal on the day before the polling day.

system, with a view to enhancing their efficiency in issuing ballot papers and completing ballot paper accounts and other electoral documents;

- (b) Regarding the serious delay in the handover of ballot boxes and the subsequent opening of ballot boxes for sorting and counting of ballot papers due to errors or omissions made by many polling staff in completing the relevant ballot paper accounts and electoral documents, the EAC suggests increasing the practice hours on completing ballot paper accounts and electoral documents to better prepare the staff; and
- (c) Providing clear instructions on each counting procedure, and increasing practical sessions and simulated scenarios to familiarise the counting staff with their duties, and more importantly, to remind them that they should report to their seniors to seek directions as soon as possible in case of unexpected incidents.

5.25 The EAC hopes that the staff can spare more time for training before the elections. The EAC also hopes that the heads of bureaux/departments will, as a complementary measure, approve temporary absence of staff involved in the electoral work to attend training and workshops organised by the REO.

CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUDING REMARKS

6.1 The Elections are the first public elections after the adoption of the amended Annex I and Annex II to the Basic Law by the NPCSC in March 2021 and the passage of the Amendment Bill by the LegCo in May 2021. There are a number of changes and enhancements no matter in the composition of the EC or electoral arrangements, which have attracted much attention from various sectors of the community. The electoral staff might have focused too much on the new changes and enhancement measures, and overlooked other arrangements already in place. They showed great caution in checking the number of ballot papers issued against the voter turnout, conducting the vote count and handling electoral documents. Election is a solemn matter and all electoral arrangements have to be conducted in accordance with the law. However, efforts must be made to strive for improvements if areas of incompetence are identified.

6.2 The EAC would like to thank civil servants from various government bureaux/departments for working at different positions on the polling day. The EAC is also grateful to the government bureaux/departments concerned and the REO for their assistance in conducting the Elections.

6.3 Drawing on the experience from the Elections, the EAC hopes that the recommendations in Chapter 5 of this report will be implemented as soon as possible, so as to facilitate the smooth conduct of the LegCo General Election and the CE Election to be held in December 2021 and March 2022 respectively.

APPENDICES

**2021 Election Committee Subsector Ordinary Elections
Details on Staff Deployment from Emergency Depots to
Ordinary Polling Stations**

Polling station	Number of staff members deployed from emergency depots and time of deployment	
Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre	9:00 am	1 Assistant Presiding Officer (“APRO”), 1 Assistant Presiding Officer (Statistics) (“APRO(S)”), 1 Polling Officer (Statistics) (“PO(S)”), 5 Polling Officers (“POs”)
	1:00 pm	4 POs
	2:00 pm	2 APROs, 1 APRO(S), 1 PO(S)
Kowloon Park Sports Centre	7:00 am	1 APRO
	10:00 am	1 APRO, 7 POs
	11:00 am	3 APROs, 3 POs
	1:00 pm	1 PO(S), 1 Polling Assistant
Princess Alexandra Community Centre	7:00 am	2 POs
Tuen Mun Town Hall	7:00 am	1 APRO
	11:00 am	1 APRO(S), 4 POs
	12:00 noon	4 POs
Sha Tin Town Hall	7:00 am	1 APRO, 2 POs
	11:00 am	2 APROs, 2 POs

Appendix II

**2021 Election Committee Subsector Ordinary Elections
Hourly Voter Turnout of 5 Ordinary Polling Stations**

Polling station	Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre	Kowloon Park Sports Centre	Princess Alexandra Community Centre	Tuen Mun Town Hall	Sha Tin Town Hall	Total
9:00–10:00	149	169	113	144	147	722
10:00–11:00	226	188	78	100	138	730
11:00–12:00	290	230	71	70	134	795
12:00–13:00	96	254	32	30	145	557
13:00–14:00	89	204	44	28	71	436
14:00–15:00	109	104	37	46	67	363
15:00–16:00	84	132	30	30	66	342
16:00–17:00	72	102	35	31	47	287
17:00–18:00	33	51	14	24	44	166
Total	1 148	1 434	454	503	859	

**2021 Election Committee Subsector Ordinary Elections
Time Required for Each Counting Procedure and the Whole Counting Process**

Subsector (Number of ballot papers)	Commencement time of screening of ballot papers	Vote counting by Optical Mark Recognition (“OMR”) machines			Handling of ballot papers involved in paper jam(s)				Handling of questionable ballot papers							Announcement of election results			Time required for the whole counting process	
		Commencement time of counting of votes by OMR machines	Completion time of counting of votes by OMR machines	Time required	Number of ballot papers involved in paper jam(s)	Commencement time of manual input	Completion time of manual input	Time required	Number of questionable ballot papers	Commencement time of questionable ballot paper determination	Completion time of questionable ballot paper determination	Time required for questionable ballot paper determination	Number of ballot papers ruled valid	Commencement time of manual input	Completion time of manual input	Time required for manual input	Time of announcement of initial counting results	Time of confirmation and announcement of election results		Time required
(1)	(2)	(3)	(3)-(2)	(4)	(5)	(5)-(4)	(6)	(7)	(7)-(6)	(8)	(9)	(9)-(8)	(10)	(11)	(11)-(10)	(11)-(1)				
Chinese Medicine (50)	0:48	1:29	2:06	37 minutes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	2:17	2:30	13 minutes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3:37	4:11	34 minutes	3 hours 23 minutes
Representatives of members of Area Committees, District Fight Crime Committees, and District Fire Safety Committees of Hong Kong and Kowloon (969)	0:11	0:45	2:54	2 hours 9 minutes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	18	4:21	5:13	52 minutes	8	5:15	5:39	24 minutes	6:01	7:09	1 hour 8 minutes	6 hours 58 minutes
Representatives of members of Area Committees, District Fight Crime Committees, and District Fire Safety Committees of the New Territories (796)	0:13	0:43	2:17	1 hour 34 minutes	50	N/A ^[1]	N/A ^[1]	N/A ^[1]	4	4:04	4:20	16 minutes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	5:50	7:50	2 hours	7 hours 37 minutes
Insurance (82)	0:15	0:42	1:08	26 minutes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	1:19	1:27	8 minutes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2:13	3:17	1 hour 4 minutes	3 hours 2 minutes
Education (1473)	0:14	0:51	3:29	2 hours 38 minutes	48	4:05	4:49	44 minutes	24	4:12	5:16	1 hour 4 minutes	16	5:19	5:32	13 minutes	5:57	6:45	48 minutes	6 hours 31 minutes
Legal (30)	0:50	1:26	1:48	22 minutes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3:09	3:50	41 minutes	3 hours
Medical and Health Services (79)	0:26	0:46	1:22	36 minutes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	1:49	2:03	14 minutes	1	2:25	2:27	2 minutes	4:06	4:40	34 minutes	4 hours 14 minutes
Architectural, Surveying, Planning and Landscape (55)	0:17	0:56	1:23	27 minutes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2:01	3:02	1 hour 1 minute	2 hours 45 minutes
Labour (395)	0:17	1:14	2:22	1 hour 8 minutes	20	3:42	5:21	1 hour 39 minutes	6	3:31	4:01	30 minutes	2	4:56	5:07	11 minutes	5:56	7:39	1 hour 43 minutes	7 hours 22 minutes
Social Welfare (136)	0:20	0:48	1:51	1 hour 3 minutes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3	2:30	2:44	14 minutes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4:16	5:12	56 minutes	4 hours 52 minutes
Commercial (third) (91)	0:13	0:47	1:44	57 minutes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	1:57	2:10	13 minutes	1	2:22	2:25	3 minutes	2:56	3:31	35 minutes	3 hours 18 minutes
Financial Services (188)	0:18	0:43	2:11	1 hour 28 minutes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	2:46	2:57	11 minutes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4:33	5:20	47 minutes	5 hours 2 minutes
Technology and Innovation (54)	0:51	1:58	2:22	24 minutes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3:43	4:25	42 minutes	3 hours 34 minutes

^[1] Paper jams occurred during the count of one batch of ballot papers by an OMR machine. According to the established procedures, the counting result of the relevant batch of ballot papers would be cancelled and manually input into the counting system. Having regard to the large numbers of ballot papers and candidates involved, the staff of the Registration and Electoral Office adopted the contingency measures to void the relevant batch of ballot papers (including those ballot papers which had been manually input into the system) in the counting system under the witness of the computer audit services contractor, counting system contractor, candidates and/or their agents, and using an OMR machine to count that batch of ballot papers again in 5 separate batches, which were eventually completed at 5:19 am.