

Education and Manpower Bureau

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Home Affairs Bureau

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I. Education Support for Ethnic Minority Students

Ms Bernadette Linn, Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower, explained to members the education support measures for ethnic minorities adopted by the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB).

2. Members had the following questions and comments –
- (a) **Would the Government hire candidates with only GCSE or other alternative qualifications in Chinese to fill junior civil service positions?** Ms Linn said that the Civil Service Bureau had already started its work on reviewing the language proficiency requirements for civil service appointment, in consultation with Hong Kong Council of Academic Accreditation.
 - (b) **Would the Government consider devising a central Chinese-as-a-second-language curriculum for use of all schools?** Ms Linn explained that there was only one central Chinese Language Curriculum which took the form of a recommended curriculum framework, which was flexible enough to allow for appropriate adaptation at the school level by selection of teaching materials and contexts to meet the different needs of the NCS students. In addition, the Bureau had proposed a supplementary curriculum guide on the teaching of Chinese to non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students aimed at assisting schools and the NCS students.

- (c) **In view of the upcoming change of the secondary education system, would the chances of NCS students entering local university be affected by the alternative Chinese curriculum?** Ms Linn replied that the Bureau would take the change into account when devising the aforementioned supplementary curriculum Guide, hence NCS students' learning of the Chinese language would be enhanced and their chance of entering local university, should not be affected.
- (d) **Would the Government provide any support or guidelines to facilitate school administrations to communicate with NCS parents?** Most designated schools did not have much problems communicating with NCS students. School notices were usually published in both English and Chinese. Some schools had appointed NCS teaching assistants who would approach parents directly to relate important messages to them if necessary.
- (e) **What services does the centralised support for designated schools cover?** Ms Linn said that intensive on-site support was being provided to the designated schools. The support took the form of regular visits by professional officers to conduct collaborative lesson planning with teachers and to help the schools develop school-based Chinese Language curricula, learning and teaching strategies, school-based teaching resources / materials, as well as learning activities and assessment designs, etc.
- (f) **Could University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions consider lowering the language proficiency entry requirement for NCS students, but tighten that requirement for graduation?** Ms Linn agreed to convey this suggestion to the UGC-funded institutions, although it might be difficult for tertiary students with a low Chinese proficiency to catch up on their Chinese levels within the four years of their higher education while having to juggle with their tertiary studies at the same time.
- (g) **What was the latest progress of the Workplace Chinese programme, and what were the entry requirement and support rendered by the government for ethnic minorities?** Ms Linn said that since the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research's

endorsement for the Workplace Chinese Programme only came through last year, researches had to be conducted before working out the details. However, the Bureau had suggested that, as in the case of the existing Workplace English programme, subsidies be made available to students at the start of the programme.

- (h) **Why was Chinese proficiency a necessary entry requirement to universities, when most tertiary institutions were using English as the medium of Instruction?** Ms Linn explained that it was the Government's policy to promote bilingualism, which was instrumental to maintaining Hong Kong's competitiveness in a knowledge-based economy. It was necessary to ensure that tertiary students were proficient in both English and Chinese to fully benefit from tertiary education. Lowering the language requirements would have an immediate impact on the drive and motivation of students in learning the two languages.
- (i) **It was unfair for tertiary institutions to accept overseas students who do not possess the Chinese language proficiency required for admission of local ethnic minority students:** Ms Linn explained that overseas students were admitted on the basis of their excellence in other areas of their studies. Local ethnic minority students who did not have the requisite Chinese proficiency could be admitted via other alternative avenues outside the Joint University Programmes Admissions System. The Government was also discussing with UGC-funded institutions on the possibility of their offering further flexibility in the application of the Chinese Language requirement for the admissions of NCS students.
- (j) **What was the annual expenditure for the centralised support for designated schools, and was it sufficient?** Ms Linn said that different sections of EMB were involved in providing support services for the designated schools and the deployment of staff might change on a need basis. The expenses incurred including manpower resources were subsumed in EMB's expenditure and a breakdown of the respective expenditure was not available. Nevertheless, it was certain that the support afforded by the Government was plenty and comprehensive.

- (k) **The Government should establish a Chinese Learning Support Centre for primary NCS students, set up more of those centres in different areas for the convenience of students, and provide support measures, such as travel allowance, to students visiting the Chinese learning support centre:** Ms Linn clarified that the Chinese Learning Support Centre was not a physical centre as such, but a service through which the service provider would offer remedial programmes to NCS students who were less proficient in Chinese after school hours or during holidays, at borrowed premises of relevant designated schools. On the other hand, it was in fact more difficult to require primary students to attend the remedial programmes outside of their school hours. Also, it was easier for primary students to catch up on Chinese under the regular school-based curriculum, whereas secondary students who lack the proficiency might require greater support outside their school hours.
- (l) **NCS students in non-designated schools had difficulties in their studies:** Ms Linn said that there were information showing that many NCS students were scattered among non-designated schools all over Hong Kong, but most schools only had a few of those students. The EMB was inquiring with those schools on the situation of their NCS students to see if they had any serious problems in their studies, and impressing upon those schools on the best practices in accommodating students of different racial backgrounds. The Bureau would also work with the Equal Opportunities Commission in devising a Code of Practice to provide relevant guidelines to schools after the enactment of the proposed Race Discrimination Bill.
- (m) **The Government should provide a timetable on providing designated schools in all districts:** Ms Linn said that the objective of centralised support for designated schools was two-fold: to enhance the education field's overall capacity for accommodating NCS students, and to provide a greater variety of paths for those students in pursuing further education and choice of schools. Furthermore, having taken account the geographical spread of the NCS students, it was considered not necessary to establish designated schools in all districts.

- (n) **How did the Government intend to enhance the education field's capacity in accommodating NCS students if not through the increase in the number of designated schools?** Ms Linn clarified that it was also not the Government's intention to maintain the number of designated schools at the current 15 and a review would be conducted annually. The Government was also working on strengthening the network between designated and non-designated schools through initiatives such as workshops which enabled designated schools to share with non-designated schools their experiences in and materials for teaching NCS students.
- (o) **There were no reference materials available in the market to facilitate teachers to teach Chinese as a second language. Would EMB be able to provide the alternative Chinese curriculum devised by schools to non-designated schools which admit ethnic minority students?** Ms Linn expressed her understanding of members' concern on the difficulties encountered by teachers in developing their own alternative Chinese curricula in view of the lack of reference materials available in the commercial market. She anticipated that textbooks publishers would start producing books and other materials after the publication of the Supplementary Guide, as in the cases of other subjects. Furthermore, the EMB had held workshops from time to time to share with non-designated schools which had admitted NCS students the teaching materials they had devised in cooperation with designated schools. She assured members that different curricula and teaching materials developed by individual schools were designed with reference to the syllabi of the relevant public examinations.
- (p) **The Government should conduct a review on the effectiveness of its current policy on education for ethnic minorities, and provide a timetable for such review:** Ms Linn said that the initiatives were implemented at different times, so there was not one single timetable for their review. However, the Bureau would keep reporting their progress to various forums and relevant Legislative Council Panels to ensure that their effectiveness was well-monitored.

- (q) **The Government should organize cross-departmental out-reach service to provide support to ethnic minority parents:** Ms Linn said that there were now many channels to reach out to ethnic minority parents, including the various forums under HAB as well as government departments and outlets such as the Maternal and Child Health Centres under the Department of Health. However, in order to reach out to as many EM parents as possible, help from relevant NGOs was essential as it would be impossible for the Government to do so by itself.
- (r) **The Government should allow some flexibility in implementing its policy of bilingualism. Language proficiency requirement should not be an absolute bar, but only one consideration for admission to UGC-funded institutions:** Ms Linn said that the language requirements were not an absolute bar, as UGC-funded institutions were already exercising flexibility in admitting students who did not meet those requirements. However, some members of the public already queried the fairness of the possible acceptance of the results of GCSE examination, the syllabus of which was much easier than that of the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination, for admission to those institutions. Thus the Government had to discuss with the UGC-institutions in the hope that they would extend more flexibility in considering the admission of NCS students in that regard.
- (s) **Learning Chinese had become a learning responsibility, instead of a learning opportunity to students:** Ms Linn disagreed, as the Government was increasing the opportunities for NCS students to learn Chinese in schools, as per the ethnic minority communities' request. On university admission, many bilingual countries or places would impose language requirements in admitting students to their tertiary institutions. The Government was discussing with university authorities to institutionalise their admission requirements so to give students a clearer idea on the necessary qualification to enter the universities.

II. Any other business

3. Members raised the following questions –

- (a) **A member asked the Chairman to explain why his earlier request to discuss four topics in this meeting, namely (1) public service broadcasting, (2) establishing a human rights commission, (3) status of the ICCPR report on follow-up information, and (4) review of human rights development in the past 10 years, was not entertained:** The Chairman said that members were welcome to submit any topics to the Forum for discussion, and HAB would try to invite relevant bureaux or departments to attend the forum for a discussion, after ascertaining that the topics raised were indeed human rights-related. He said that HAB was now heavily occupied with a number of important tasks, including facilitating the Legislative Council Bills Committee's deliberation on the Race Discrimination Bill, the compilation of HKSAR's second report under the International Convention Against All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and responding to the Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs' Subcommittee on Human Rights Protection Mechanism. These tasks took priority over other issues and while members were welcome to suggest any topics for discussion, HAB could not promise to be able to produce a large amount of papers for the Forum's timely discussion. The Chairman undertook to inform members of the meeting and agenda as early as possible in the future.

On the four topics raised –

- (i) ***ICCPR report on follow-up information:*** the Chairman said that the Government was finalising the report, and would publish the report after it had been submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Committee;
- (ii) ***Establishment of a human rights commission:*** the Chairman said that the Government's stance on this issue remained unchanged, i.e., there was no plan to establish a human rights commission in Hong Kong. He said HAB was preparing relevant papers for the Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs' Subcommittee on Human Rights Protection Mechanism, and would submit those papers to the Forum for discussion in the next meeting;

- (iii) ***Review of human rights development in the past 10 years:*** the Chairman said that the progress of human rights development in the past 10 years had been well-documented in the various human rights reports submitted to the United Nations, and members were welcome to discuss them. In view of the heavy workload of HAB, there was no plan to deploy any further resources to conduct a separate review on the subject;
 - (iv) ***Public service broadcasting:*** the Chairman undertook to inform CITB of members' wish to discuss this subject in the next meeting, and encourage members to put their views on the subject in writing for CITB's consideration.
- (b) **Why there was no interpretation service provided at this meeting:** Miss Amy Yeung explained that the service provider was not able to provide interpretation service for this meeting. She explained that HAB had informed the two NCS members on the non-provision of the service prior to the meeting, and apologized to any inconvenience this had caused. The Chairman suggested, and members agreed, that in the future HAB would ensure the availability of interpretation service for all meetings attended by NCS members, and if the service could not be made available, the secretariat would re-schedule the meeting. However, in case there were no NCS members attending a meeting, interpretation service would not be provided, and a notice announcing the non-provision of the service would be posted up at the door of the meeting room for the information of the audience.

III. Date of next meeting

4. The next meeting is scheduled for 6 November 2007.