

For information

Bills Committee on Race Discrimination Bill

Responses to Questions Raised on Education Matters

Purpose

At the Bills Committee meeting held on 26 March 2008, the Administration undertook to –

- (a) provide statistics on the number of non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students in schools by grade for the past two school years;
- (b) provide information on what would be done to convey to NCS students the availability of dedicated vocational training and vocational education courses for ethnic minorities after their secondary school education, and find out what sort of programmes would be in demand; and
- (c) elaborate the criteria for accrediting courses under the Qualifications Framework (QF) and whether this would have a bearing on the design and assessment mode of training programmes meeting the needs of ethnic minorities.

2. Separately, at the Bills Committee meeting held on 9 April 2008, the Administration was requested to explain the policy considerations behind the exemptions as provided under Clause 26(2), to advise any difficulties anticipated if these exemptions are removed, and to set out the assistance that would be provided to those ethnic minority students who have little knowledge in Chinese.

3. This paper provides the Administration's response.

Statistics on number of NCS students in schools by grade

4. As reported at the Bills Committee earlier, the Education Bureau (EDB) has, beginning from the 2006/07 school year, started to collect information on students' ethnicity and spoken language at home from Primary 1 to Secondary 7 through the annual Student Enrolment Survey. With the information collected over the past two years, the number of NCS students in public sector and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools by grade in the 2006/07 and 2007/08 school years is set out at Annex. With the statistics, one may work out net wastages/increases up the levels by comparing enrolment figures for consecutive years, bearing in mind that some schools may take time to get familiar with the new survey items introduced only since the 2006/07 school year and there are possible errors in the provision of data especially in the initial years of collection¹. Nevertheless, based on the available figures so far, there does not appear to be any apparent trend of net wastages across the levels below Secondary 5. Net wastage between Secondary 5 and 6 can be expected under the current academic structure for senior secondary education.

Dedicated vocational training and vocation educational courses for ethnic minorities

5. With a view to conveying to NCS ethnic minority students the availability of dedicated vocational training and vocational education courses for them after their secondary school education and finding out what sort of programmes would be in demand, the following actions will be taken by the Administration –

- Starting from May 2008, EDB will include messages for NCS students and highlight, where appropriate, the dedicated courses for ethnic minority students and courses conducted in the English medium as offered by the Vocational Training Council (VTC) and Employees Retraining Board (ERB) (or its course providers) in the “Careers Guidance Handbook for Secondary 5 Graduates” and the “Careers Guidance Handbook for Secondary 7 Graduates”.

¹ It is noted that some schools have updated information submitted previously when providing their returns for the survey in the 2007/08 school year, which may reveal that schools may not be familiar with the new survey items yet.

- EDB will arrange a specific booth for NCS students at the annual “Information Expo for Secondary School Leavers” to be held in August 2008, and representatives from VTC and ERB will be invited to handle enquiries from and exchange views with NCS students on the spot.
- EDB will engage the career guidance teachers in schools in gauging the needs of NCS students and disseminating relevant information. We will:
 - include information on any dedicated courses for ethnic minority students to be offered by VTC and ERB (or its course providers) in the coming career newsletters for career guidance teachers; and
 - increase the awareness of career guidance teachers to the needs of NCS students through the ongoing/upcoming training courses for these teachers.

Qualifications Framework

6. The establishment of the QF aims to provide a platform to promote lifelong learning. The Administration hopes that by setting out clearly the standards required of different qualifications, ensuring the quality of these qualifications, and specifying the articulation ladders between them, a QF with multiple pathways can be established for members of the public to draw up their own road maps for learning and acquire the relevant qualifications.

7. The QF covers the academic, vocational and continuing education sectors. Moreover, under the QF, qualifications are not confined to academic and training attainments. Workers’ skills, knowledge and relevant experience accumulated at work can also be recognised through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism. The QF is not a “work licensing” mechanism and will not affect the employment of in-service employees.

Implementation progress

8. EDB will officially launch the QF on 5 May 2008. A pilot scheme for the RPL mechanism will also be introduced in the first three industries that have formulated their respective Specification of Competency Standards, namely the

Printing & Publishing, Watch & Clock and Hairdressing industries. The VTC will be appointed as the assessment agency for the two-year pilot scheme and a preliminary review will be conducted one year after its implementation. Experienced workers in these three industries including ethnic minorities can have their skills, knowledge and relevant work experience accumulated at work recognised through the RPL mechanism.

RPL pilot scheme

9. Under the RPL pilot scheme, workers (including those who are ethnic minorities) with the required years of working experience and relevant experience may apply for recognition of qualifications at Levels 1 to 4 in the aforesaid industries. To address the concerns of the industries, especially from the labour unions, a five-year transitional period for each industry under the RPL mechanism will be introduced. During the transitional period, workers may apply for recognition of qualifications at Levels 1 to 3 based on their years of working experience and relevant experience, without the need for taking any assessments. Nevertheless, those workers with the required years of working experience and applying for recognition at Level 4 will have to undergo certain assessment the form of which will be in line with the skills and knowledge required of that level. The minimum years of relevant working experience required for recognition of qualifications at Levels 1 to 4 will be one year, three years, five years and six years respectively. The working experience should also be relevant to the cluster of units of competency for which recognition is sought.

10. After the end of the transitional period, all levels of qualifications have to be attained through assessments. The form of assessment will be in line with the skills and knowledge required of individual levels. For instance, a simpler form of assessment (such as interviews) will be used for QF Level 1. In the assessment process, language should not constitute a barrier to recognition. The VTC will make appropriate arrangements for assessment and interpretation services on a case by case basis, in order to ensure that the assessment results would not be unduly affected by any language barrier.

11. EDB will encourage more employees to obtain recognition under the RPL mechanism, so as to facilitate their continuing education and avoid the need for these employees to take repeated training. For instance, we will introduce a financial support scheme under which each applicant who has

successfully completed a QF-recognised programme after passing the RPL assessment will be entitled to full reimbursement of the RPL assessment fee, subject to a cap of \$1,000.

Qualifications Register and programme accreditation

12. The Qualifications Register (QR) will become operational on 5 May 2008. With legislative backing, the QR will ensure that the qualifications, programmes and training providers listed in the register are quality assured and recognised under QF. The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) will be responsible for the quality assurance of academic and vocational qualifications under the QF, except for the learning programmes operated by the self-accrediting institutions.

13. The HKCAAVQ adopts the “fit for purpose” principle for the accreditation of education and training programmes of different scale and nature. During accreditation, the HKCAAVQ will assess whether the programme can meet its stated objectives. Under the “fit for purpose” principle, the HKCAAVQ will not restrict the content, medium of instruction (MOI) and assessment methods of the courses to be accredited. Training providers are given flexibility to design their programmes for the benefit of its target students. For example, training providers may offer programmes using English as a MOI for NCS students including ethnic minorities who are not conversant in Chinese. The HKCAAVQ will also adopt the “fit for purpose” principle to quality assure the design of such programmes.

Exemptions provided under Clause 26(2)

14. The Bill proposes to make it unlawful for an educational establishment (a school, institute or university) to discriminate on the ground of race in respect of admissions or the treatment of students. It is not mandatory, however, for the educational establishment concerned to have to modify its arrangements or make special arrangements regarding holidays or medium of instruction (MOI) for persons of any race by virtue of the exemptions provided under Clause 26(2). These exemptions have been introduced in the Bill out of the following considerations –

- (a) following the calendar of educational establishments and learning

through the two official languages of Hong Kong (i.e. English and Chinese) are necessary in order to ensure that the ethnic minority students could genuinely integrate into the wider community and be able to maximize their learning alongside other students;

- (b) the exemptions as provided under Clause 26(2) is to avoid unnecessary disputes at **the school/institution level**. On the question of MOI, what it means is that parents, for example, cannot demand the school which their children attend to teach in another language that is not normally used by the school in teaching. This would make clear that parents, for example, cannot demand the school to teach subjects such as mathematics and science in their ethnic minority languages, or cannot demand a school using Chinese as the MOI to teach in English (or a school using English as MOI to teach in Chinese). This is because **at the school/institution level**, it is impracticable and unrealistic to expect each educational establishment to make special arrangements in respect of MOI for individual ethnic minority students. Operation of the educational establishment will be significantly disrupted if special arrangements are to be made in this regard;
- (c) notwithstanding the exemption at the school/institution level, the **system** actually takes care of those who cannot learn effectively in Chinese and would learn better in English. For the school sector, this is done through placement, if needed, to schools adopting English as the MOI for some or all of their classes, including the designated schools places of which are sufficient. For vocational education and training, there are general and dedicated courses conducted in English; and
- (d) **the MOI adopted by an educational establishment and the teaching of Chinese are two different issues**. Notwithstanding the exemption on MOI as provided under Clause 26(2), the Administration and the educational establishments will make their best endeavours to support the teaching and learning of NCS students in general. Irrespective of whether the educational establishment adopts Chinese or English as the MOI, EDB emphasises the teaching of Chinese Language to NCS students and has, as explained to Members earlier, strengthened our support for

schools and NCS students in this regard, including, for example, the development of the supplementary curriculum guide for teaching Chinese Language to NCS students, the provision of focused support for designated schools and the provision of greater flexibility for students to apply for admission to undergraduate programmes with alternative Chinese Language qualifications.

Education Bureau
April 2008

Number of Non-Chinese Speaking Students in Public Sector and Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) Primary and Secondary Day Schools by Grade in 2006/07 and 2007/08 School Years

| Grade | School Year | |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
| P1 | 913 | 1011 |
| P2 | 911 | 1065 |
| P3 | 839 | 1006 |
| P4 | 757 | 954 |
| P5 | 606 | 825 |
| P6 | 477 | 722 |
| P1-P6 | 4503 | 5583 |
| S1 | 691 | 804 |
| S2 | 609 | 706 |
| S3 | 547 | 642 |
| S4 | 341 | 556 |
| S5 | 225 | 325 |
| S6 | 120 | 136 |
| S7 | 100 | 103 |
| S1-S7 | 2633 | 3272 |

Notes

- (1) Figures refer to the position as at September of the respective school years.
- (2) Figures have included NCS students studying in all DSS schools, some of which do not offer the local curriculum. Therefore, some NCS students studying at S5 and S7 in the 2006/07 school year did not participate in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) and Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) respectively in 2007. Similarly, some NCS students studying at S5 and S7 in the 2007/08 school year may not participate in the HKCEE and HKALE respectively in 2008.