

Bills Committee on Race Discrimination Bill

Vocational Training and Interpretation Services at Hospitals for Ethnic Minorities

Purpose

At the Bills Committee meeting held on 12 March 2008, Members asked for the Administration's response on matters relating to –

- (a) provision of vocational training for ethnic minorities and how the development of the Qualifications Framework (QF) would impact on such training; and
 - (b) provision of interpretation services at hospitals for ethnic minorities.
2. This paper provides the Administration's views and response.

Vocational training

Vocational Training Council

3. The Vocational Training Council (VTC) offers a wide range of vocational education and training courses. Eligible persons who are able to meet the admission requirements may enrol in the courses, irrespective of their race or ethnic origin. To better meet the training needs of the ethnic minorities, the former Education and Manpower Bureau has provided subvention to the VTC to organise dedicated courses for the ethnic minorities since the 2006/07 academic year.

4. Following the re-organisation of the Government Secretariat on 1 July 2007, subvented courses leading to formal qualifications offered by the VTC are funded by the Education Bureau (EDB) under the programme area of "vocational education", whereas subvented training courses of short duration and programmes which do not lead to formal qualifications are funded by the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) under the programme area of "vocational training".

5. Support measures for ethnic minorities in relation to vocational education have already been set out under paragraphs 20 and 21 of the Legislative Council Education Panel paper entitled “Progress of Support Measures for Non-Chinese Speaking Students including Ethnic Minorities” (LC Paper No. CB(2)1180/07-08(05)) which was issued to Members on 26 February 2008.

6. As to vocational training courses, in the 2007/08 academic year, dedicated courses subvented by the LWB mainly include preparatory courses for trade tests for in-service personnel and Vocational Development Programmes for non-engaged youth. The VTC is also working on a new “Basic Vocational Chinese Programme” for the ethnic minorities which is expected to be launched in the second quarter this year. The above three types of courses would offer a total of about 380 training places for the ethnic minorities.

Employees Retraining Board

7. Separately, the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) offers full-time placement-tied training courses and part-time generic skills training courses for eligible trainees. Ethnic minorities, as with other applicants, may enrol in these courses.

8. To provide further support for the ethnic minorities, the ERB has launched, on a pilot basis, dedicated full-time placement-tied training courses for them since mid-2007. A total of nine courses have been approved so far, including courses in “Security and Property Management”, “Local Domestic Helper”, “Kitchen Assistant in Indian Cuisine”, “Personal Care Worker” and “Environmental Hygiene and Cleaning Worker”. These nine courses together are expected to provide about 150 training places for the ethnic minorities. Ethnic minority trainees who have completed these courses would be provided with six-month placement follow-up service, which is longer as compared with the normal three-month placement follow-up period for other courses.

9. Besides, in the consultation document on its future directions issued on 24 January 2008, the ERB has proposed to launch more placement-tied training courses which are able to meet the market demands

as well as the job aspirations of the ethnic minorities. With a view to facilitating the integration of the ethnic minorities into the local community, the ERB will develop and organise dedicated job search skills courses to help the ethnic minorities understand the local workplace culture and employers' expectations. The ERB also plans to provide training under the "Workplace Chinese Programme" to the ethnic minorities to enhance their employability.

Qualifications Framework

10. The Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance, which provides for the legislative framework for the implementation of the QF, will commence full operation on 5 May 2008. This also means that the QF will be formally launched on the same date.

11. Under the Ordinance, education and training programmes (including those designed for ethnic minorities) that are quality assured by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications will be recognised under the QF. In this connection, the ERB will strengthen the quality assurance mechanism of its retraining courses (including the dedicated courses organised for the ethnic minorities) to ensure that they would be able to satisfy the requirements of the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications and hence be listed on the Qualifications Register and recognised under the QF.

12. In addition, a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) pilot scheme will also be introduced under the QF for the Printing & Publishing, Watch & Clock and Hairdressing industries. The scheme recognises the skills, knowledge and experience of employees for continuing learning and skills upgrading purposes. Ethnic minorities who are working in these three industries may also benefit from the scheme. A financial subsidy scheme will also be introduced to encourage more employees to undergo RPL assessments. Each employee 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.

Interpretation services at public hospitals and clinics

13. At present, free interpretation services are available to ethnic minorities for the use of medical services at public hospitals and clinics under the management of the Hospital Authority (HA). A list of court interpreters registered with the Judiciary is available for each hospital/clinic to call for interpretation service for patients in need. For emergency cases, doctors would provide immediate treatment as required. As for non-emergency cases, frontline staff may call the interpreters to provide interpretation services for individual patients at the hospital/clinic. For scheduled medical appointment, patients may request the hospital/clinic concerned to make early arrangements before the appointment. In addition, HA staff may also use the “Multilingual Phrasebook for Emergency” published by the Government to facilitate communication with the ethnic minorities patients. HA has also provided translation of its service information in different language to facilitate patients.

14. As for the Department of Health (DH), their services are basically of non-urgent nature and delivered through scheduled sessions so that prior arrangements could be made for patients who require interpretation services. DH staff may also make use of the “Multilingual Phrasebook for Emergency” for communication with the ethnic minorities. DH has provided health education materials in different languages where appropriate.

15. To enhance the support for the ethnic minorities and facilitate their use of public health care services, HA and DH are preparing to make arrangements for the interpreters to provide services to patients through the use of telephone/telephone conference calls.