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Panel on Education

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 12 June 2008**

Education for non-Chinese speaking students

Purpose

This paper provides updated information on the discussions of the Panel on Education (the Panel) on issues relating to education for non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students.

Government policy

2. According to the Education Bureau (EDB), all eligible local children, including NCS children of ethnic minorities, are entitled to nine-year free education. As far as EDB is concerned, children of ethnic minorities generally refer to South Asian (mainly Indian/Pakistani/Nepalese) children who are residing in Hong Kong.
3. The established Government policy is to facilitate early integration of students of ethnic minorities into the local education system. Parents of children of ethnic minorities can apply to schools direct, or through EDB which has pledged to arrange places for these children within 21 working days. From the 2004 allocation cycle for admission to Primary One (P1) and Secondary One (S1) onwards, students of ethnic minorities may opt for mainstream schools, or schools that traditionally admit a large number of students of ethnic minorities.

Deliberations of the Panel

4. The Panel has followed up the subject of the provision of education for ethnic minorities since 2001. The provision of an alternative Chinese Language curriculum and opportunities for post-secondary education and

employment for NCS students are major concerns raised by members. The Panel's discussions on these issues are summarized in the following paragraphs.

An alternative Chinese Language curriculum

5. At present, there is one Chinese Language curriculum for all learners, irrespective of whether or not they are native Chinese speakers. Many organizations which had presented views to the Panel highlighted the difficulties encountered by NCS students in following the Chinese Language curriculum. According to these organizations, EDB left it to schools to adapt the Chinese Language curriculum for their students. Different schools used different reference materials for teaching. Some schools adopted the textbooks used by local schools, while others used the teaching materials designed and developed by front-line teachers. As NCS students usually communicated among themselves in English or in their mother tongue, the vast majority of NCS students could not follow the mainstream Chinese Language curriculum during their primary studies. Their lack of proficiency in Chinese had limited their choices for quality secondary schools, and many NCS students eventually ended up with poor performance in public examinations. The ethnic minority groups stressed that proficiency in Chinese was a prerequisite for pursuing further education, getting a decent job, and improving their socio-economic status in Hong Kong. They asked for the provision of an alternative Chinese Language curriculum for selection by NCS students.

6. While acknowledging the concerns of the ethnic minority groups, members had considered the implications of providing an alternative Chinese Language curriculum for NCS students. In response to the invitation of the Panel, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) advised that while the provision of an alternative Chinese Language curriculum would not constitute discrimination against children of ethnic minorities, such provision would mean a lower requirement, and ethnic minority students studying the alternative curriculum would be regarded as less proficient than their Chinese peers in the subject. This might affect the progress and extent of integration of the ethnic minorities into the community. However, as it was difficult for ethnic minority students to learn the Chinese Language in schools at the same pace as their Chinese counterparts, EOC considered it appropriate for the Administration to explore the need for the provision of an alternative Chinese Language curriculum for ethnic minority students.

7. According to the Administration, the central curriculum framework for the Chinese Language was divided into key stages and was flexible enough to accommodate different adaptations in catering for a wide range of learner abilities and interests. Similar curriculum frameworks and adaptation approach were adopted in the Mainland, Singapore and Taiwan for NCS students. From the professional perspective of curriculum design, an adapted school-based version of the Chinese Language curriculum which was

competency-based and suitable for NCS students was essentially an "alternative" curriculum for second Chinese language learners to cater for their needs and diversity in learning without creating a labelling effect.

Supplementary Guide

8. Nevertheless, to address the concern of some schools about the lack of a central steer and common standards in the teaching of Chinese for NCS students, the Administration agreed to develop, under the umbrella of the central Chinese Language curriculum framework, a supplementary guide to the Chinese Language curriculum for NCS students (the Guide). The Guide would advise on the selection of key learning targets and objectives related to different strands, and principles of selecting relevant materials and contexts for the different needs of students, including the choice of Putonghua and Cantonese and of simplified and traditional characters. The Administration stressed that the Guide should not be taken as the provision of a simpler Chinese Language curriculum or the setting of lower expectations for NCS students. The Guide would also not be tied to a particular Chinese language examination. NCS students who were capable of following the central Chinese Language curriculum should be encouraged to learn the subject as their local counterparts and sit for the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) or the future Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE). NCS students who would prefer to attain alternative qualification(s) in Chinese would have access to the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) (Chinese) examination, which was simpler than the Chinese paper in HKCEE or HKDSE by design. The results of students in the (GCSE) (Chinese) examination would be recorded in HKDSE as for other subjects. The Guide was expected to be finalized in mid-2008.

9. While welcoming the development of the Guide, members considered this inadequate and called on the Administration to develop as a long-term goal an alternative Chinese Language curriculum for NCS students in the light of the operational experience of the Guide. Members also considered that given the small market for Chinese Language textbooks for NCS students, publishers would unlikely embark on such a business. It was therefore necessary for the Administration to provide financial support for publishers in this regard.

10. In the view of the Administration, given the diverse ethnic origins of ethnic minority students, it was more appropriate to develop learning resources for these students based on the teaching and learning materials developed by schools which would serve largely as textbooks. Since 2003, EDB had been sponsoring production projects on Chinese Language teaching resources for NCS students through the Quality Education Fund (QEF). EDB was exploring further utilization of QEF to pool together and disseminate teaching resources, and the format of dissemination. It was expected that the first set of teaching resources would be disseminated in 2009.

Alternative Chinese Language qualifications for further studies

11. Members considered that in the long run, it was necessary to develop another examination of the Chinese Language, other than HKCEE or HKDSE, which would be recognized by the local universities for admission purpose. Members also opined that it was necessary for the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions to specify their required standards in the Chinese Language for admission of NCS students to their undergraduate programmes.

12. According to the Administration, the UGC-funded institutions had currently built in flexibility in the admission process by providing a number of alternative avenues to admit students without the requisite Chinese Language proficiency. The Administration had discussed with the UGC-funded institutions the possibility of providing further flexibility in the application of the Chinese Language requirement for the admission of NCS students. The institutions' representatives pointed out that there should not be any discrimination on the ground of whether or not a student was Chinese-speaking as far as admission of students was concerned. Any special consideration and arrangements should target at specified circumstances which should apply to both NCS and Chinese-speaking students.

13. After discussions, the Administration had reached a general consensus with the UGC-funded institutions regarding the direction for offering further flexibility in the application of the general Chinese Language requirement to NCS students who had pursued the local curriculum and who wished to apply for undergraduate programmes under the Joint Universities Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS). With effect from the current JUPAS Cycle, i.e. for admission in 2008, the institutions would be prepared to consider alternative qualifications in Chinese Language, such as those under GCSE, General Certificate in Education (GCE) and International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), in lieu of the general Chinese Language requirement based on the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) for JUPAS applicants under the following specified circumstances -

- (a) the student had learned Chinese Language for less than six years while receiving primary and secondary education; or
- (b) the student had learned Chinese Language for six years or more in schools, but had been taught an adapted and simpler curriculum not normally applicable to the majority of students in local schools.

14. Members noted that the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority would accept an award of a Grade D or above attained in the Chinese Language paper of GCSE, GCE or IGCSE as satisfying the corresponding subject requirements at Grade E or Level 2 in HKCEE for the purpose of meeting the HKALE entry qualification. However, the examination results of GCSE, GCE and IGCSE were released normally in late August after the deadline of S6 and university admission. They were concerned about the availability of measures to assist NCS students in this regard.

15. The Administration pointed out that most students attended GCSE, GCE or IGCSE examination at S5, and as such, they would be able to submit the examination results when applying for admission to undergraduate programmes under JUPAS. As regards admission to S6, starting from 2008, EDB would invite secondary schools to consider giving conditional offers to students satisfying the criteria other than the one on Chinese Language for admission to their S6 classes under specified circumstances, pending the release of GCSE, GCE or IGCSE Chinese Language examination results in late August. In other words, NCS students would be considered for admission to S6 on a par with their Chinese counterparts on the basis of their attainments in other subjects.

16. Notwithstanding the above measures, members considered that given the fierce competition for admission to S6, there was little incentive for secondary schools to give conditional offers to NCS students whose attainment in the Chinese Language could only be confirmed in late August. Members were of the view that EDB should encourage secondary schools, in particular those designated to receive focused support for enhancing the learning and teaching of NCS students, to give priority to their NCS students for admission to S6.

17. The Administration assured members that secondary schools normally accorded priority to their S5 graduates for admission to S6, and schools designated to receive focused support had tried to facilitate the admission of their NCS students to S6 in 2007. EDB would continue to encourage schools to provide equal opportunities for NCS students for admission to S6.

18. For the purpose of assessing the effectiveness of the various support measures, members requested the Administration to conduct tracking surveys on NCS students at key stages of education including P6, S1, S5, S6/S7 and university.

Employment

19. Members were of the view that the Administration should take the lead in the acceptance of a lower Chinese language proficiency requirement for appointment to certain civil service posts. They requested the Administration

to consider accepting the Chinese Language qualifications in GCSE, GCE and IGCSE examinations for appointment purpose. This would enhance the opportunities for ethnic minorities to join the civil service.

20. According to the Administration, EDB had informed the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) of its plan to run the GCSE (Chinese) examination in Hong Kong from 2007 onwards for NCS students in the public sector schools. CSB had issued a circular to advise bureaux and Government departments on the acceptance of a Grade D or above attained in the Chinese Language paper of GCSE, GCE or IGCSE examinations as equivalent to a Grade E or Level 2 in HKCEE for appointment to civil service posts. NCS applicants would be considered for civil service appointment as other applicants on a competitive basis. Depending on the job nature, specific or higher requirements in Chinese Language proficiency were specified for individual civil service posts.

Relevant papers

21. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
4 June 2008

**Relevant papers on
education for non-Chinese speaking students**

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Education	23.4.2001 (Item IV)	Minutes Agenda CB(2)46/01-02(01)
Panel on Education	21.6.2004 (Item V)	Minutes Agenda CB(2)3156/03-04(01)
Panel on Education	20.1.2005	Minutes CB(2)2305/04-05(01)
Legislative Council	23.11.2005	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 135 - 136 (Question)
Panel on Education	9.1.2006 (Item IV)	Minutes Agenda CB(2)1536/05-06(01)
Legislative Council	24.5.2006	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 92 - 95 (Question)
Panel on Education	10.7.2006 (Item V)	Minutes Agenda CB(2)2792/05-06(01)
Panel on Education	8.1.2007 (Item V)	Minutes Agenda
Legislative Council	11.7.2007	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 286 - 360 (Motion)
Panel on Education	18.10.2007	Minutes
Legislative Council	9.1.2008	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 33 - 38 (Question)

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Legislative Council	20.2.2008	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 50 - 52 and 65 - 67 (Questions)
Panel on Education	29.2.2008	Minutes Agenda CB(2)1450/07-08(01) CB(2)2025/07-08(01)

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