

Promotion of Education and Employment Opportunities for the Non-Ethnic Chinese Population and Promulgation of Racial Inclusion

Submission from the Equal Opportunities Commission

Purpose

March 21 is the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. In line with the principles underlying the day, this paper aims to provide the views and recommendations of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) on addressing the education and employment challenges facing the non-ethnic Chinese (NEC) population and advancing racial inclusion among people of different races. All matters raised below reflect feedback gathered from important stakeholders and racial groups as well as findings from recent studies and reports.

Education Challenges to NEC Students

2. Education issues faced by NEC students continue to remain at the top of our concern list. The EOC published the “Closing the Gap” Report of the Working Group on Education for Ethnic Minorities¹ in September 2019 and released two related studies² in 2020. The Working Group Report delineated the key concerns and areas for improvement from diverse feedback while the two studies provided strong empirical evidence on the problems and required actions.

3. All the three study reports pointed to a major gap in the current education system for NEC students. At the root lies the need to acknowledge that a non-native learner learns a language differently from how a native-speaker does, and then making the necessary tools and assessments available to cater to that difference. Despite all the Government intervention and resources, we are deeply concerned that the majority of NEC students ended up taking overseas Chinese

¹ Equal Opportunities Commission, “Closing the Gap” Report of the Working Group on Education for Ethnic Minorities, September 2019

https://www.eoc.org.hk/EOC/upload/ResearchReport/Closing_the_Gap_Full_Report.pdf

² Oxfam Hong Kong, Loh Ka Yee Elizabeth and Hung On Ying, “A Study on the Challenges Faced by Mainstream Schools in Educating Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong”, January 2020,

https://www.eoc.org.hk/eoc/upload/ResearchReport/researchreport_20200115_e.pdf; and

The Centre for Youth Research and Practice, Hong Kong Baptist University, “A Study on Education and Career Pathways of Ethnic Minority Youth in Hong Kong”, June 2020,

https://www.eoc.org.hk/EOC/upload/ResearchReport/20200619_em.pdf

language examinations as part of their secondary education, which deprives them of the required language level for most mainstream workplaces.

Key Recommendations for Improving the Education Opportunities for NEC Students

4. It is essential to take the following steps now to prevent irredeemable damage:
 - i. Develop a full-fledged Chinese-as-a-second-language curriculum complete with specific pedagogy, corresponding teaching tools and textbooks, systematic teacher training, etc., which are inadequate in the current Learning Framework;
 - ii. Track and closely monitor NEC students' learning progress and take proactive actions to steer them to the mainstream Chinese curriculum under the HKDSE examination system, including the Applied Learning (Chinese) subject;
 - iii. Make it essential for Chinese subject teachers to have undergone pre-job training on teaching second language learners; providing intensive and progressive in-service training courses for practicing Chinese subject teachers; and requiring every school to have a certain ratio of trained teachers.

Employment Challenges for the NEC Population

5. The NEC population faces a number of barriers in securing jobs and building careers that align with their potential and skills. There is discrimination (on the grounds of their racial background and religious practices, etc.) and tangible hurdles (e.g. language proficiency requirements) which stand in the way of equal opportunities to employment for many NEC community members. Removal of barriers that currently prevent them from securing a job as well as positive action are required to level the playing field. It is encouraging that the Government has committed to taking the lead in providing more job opportunities for the NEC population. Positive measures from the Government will definitely set an example for other employers to follow.

Key Recommendations for Promoting NEC Employment in the Government

6. Riding on a few successful initiatives such as Project Gemstone run by the Yau Tsim Police District and Internship Programme for NEC University Students under the Civil Service Bureau, the Government is recommended to create trainee positions in civil services, especially for NEC graduates as a positive action to address their limited opportunities. Training may include Chinese language learning with a view to prepare them with adequate Chinese language proficiency for the Common Recruitment Examination.

7. It is also important that pathways be created through training and internship programs that can lead to civil service and other public careers. In the past few years, there are increasing number of short-term job positions in the Government for NEC job seekers to serve their communities. This exposure is valuable but should be seen as the first step to train NEC employees for mainstream civil service positions instead of an end in itself.

8. The EOC also advises that the Government intensify the review of Chinese language proficiency requirements in civil service recruitment, especially in professional grade positions, with the consideration of introducing in-service language enhancement schemes for candidates not meeting the Chinese requirement but excelling in other skills and expertise for the jobs. The review should measure the response to language relaxation policies in terms of the actual recruitment of NEC candidates since the introduction of the revised criteria.

Racial Bias and Discrimination Facing the NEC Population

9. Racial bias and discrimination in the mainstream community against the disadvantaged NEC populations, such as South Asians, Southeast Asians, Africans, etc. is deep-rooted. Racial prejudices in renting flats and getting services are shared experiences by many NEC community members. Microaggression in schools, workplaces and community interactions also make NEC community members feel excluded and marginalised.

Key Recommendations for Advancing Racial Integration

10. The EOC sees a genuine need for greater integration and understanding of the NEC communities in Hong Kong. It would be truly wonderful to see a time

when the major religious and cultural festivals of Hong Kong's certain racial groups are marked and celebrated by Hong Kong people. Suggestions to achieve this include issuing official greetings to the public and highlighting the cultural and religious significance of these festivals by the Government; and launching central public events to celebrate these festivals with the mainstream community.

11. In view of the positive feedback to the EOC's advertising campaigns on removing racial bias and promoting cultural sensitivity since 2020, it is strongly recommended that such publicity be regularised and strengthened. For example, a cross-departmental, territory-wide campaign on promoting racial acceptance will surely create a stronger impact and engage a wider community in paying positive attention to racial inclusion.

Conclusion

12. The above suggestions do match the spirit of President XI's speech in celebration of the HKSAR's 25th Anniversary, in which President XI emphasised the need to "Address People's Concerns & Difficulties in Daily Life" "Work together to safeguard harmony and stability" and "Continue to create strong impetus to growth".

13. As Hong Kong faces a talent shortage coupled with economic headwinds, it needs to make effective use of all the resources it has available. Local, homegrown talent can be groomed to make them part of the economic recovery. The NEC population is a growing pool that is being under-utilised. By providing them with the required skills in a manner that is appropriate for them, this latent talent pool can be mobilised to contribute effectively to Hong Kong, a city they too call home.

14. With racial bias remaining a challenge for many NEC community members to be fully engaged in society, intensifying public education on racial inclusion showcases our genuine concern for their needs. It is key to building a sense of belonging among the NEC population in Hong Kong.

*Prepared by Ethnic Minorities Unit
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