

For information on
15 April 2013

Legislative Council Panel on Public Service

Employment of Ethnic Minorities in the Civil Service

Purpose

This paper sets out the measures to facilitate the employment of ethnic minorities in the Civil Service for Members' information.

Biliterate and tri-lingual Civil Service

2. Article 9 of the Basic Law states that *“In addition to the Chinese language, English may also be used as an official language by the executive authorities, legislature and judiciary of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.”* Section 3 of the Official Languages Ordinance (Cap. 5) states that *“(1) The English and Chinese languages are declared to be the official languages of Hong Kong for the purpose of communication between the Government or any public officer and members of the public and for court proceedings. (2) The official languages possess equal status and, subject to the provisions of this Ordinance, enjoy equality of use for the purpose set out in subsection (1).”*

3. It is the Administration's policy to maintain a fully biliterate (Chinese and English) and tri-lingual (Cantonese, Putonghua and English) Civil Service. As a general rule, all written materials and announcements meant for the public, including reports, forms, pamphlets, booklets, posters, notices, signs, rules and regulations, and Internet home pages of the Government are in both Chinese and English. Verbal announcements for the general public (such as radio and television advertisements) are bilingual. In addition, bureaux and departments

reply to correspondence or answer oral enquiries from members of the public in either Chinese or English, depending on the language used in the incoming correspondence or enquiries.

Appointments to the Civil Service

4. Appointments to the Civil Service are based on the principle of open and fair competition. All candidates in an open recruitment exercise are assessed on the basis of their merits and having regard to the stipulated entry requirements (including language proficiency) set according to the job requirements of the grade concerned. The race of a candidate is not a relevant consideration in the selection and appointment of civil servants. Likewise, race is not a relevant consideration in the assessment for promotion of civil servants.

5. In order to maintain a fully biliterate and tri-lingual Civil Service that can function effectively and efficiently in the two official languages, the Administration needs to specify appropriate Chinese and English language proficiency requirements (LPRs) as part of the entry requirements for appointments to individual grades having regard to the job requirements of the concerned grades. This arrangement is in line with the guidance of the Equal Opportunities Commission as set out in its Code of Practice on Employment under the Race Discrimination Ordinance (the “Code of Practice”), which provides that an employer must ensure that any language requirement for a job is relevant to and should be commensurate with the satisfactory performance of a job.

6. Heads of department/grade (HoDs/HoGs) are responsible for stipulating the LPRs for each of the grades under their charge, as they are best placed to know the work and operational needs of such grades. To ensure compliance with the guidance in the Code of Practice, the Civil Service Bureau has issued guidelines to HoDs/HoGs reminding them to review the LPRs from time to time, taking into account the changing operational needs of the grades concerned, and to make suitable adjustments whenever and wherever appropriate.

Implementation of LPRs and other relevant measures

Setting of Chinese LPRs

7. Following a comprehensive review of LPRs by all HoDs/HoGs in 2010, actions have been taken to adjust the Chinese LPRs of certain grades, such as Workman and Artisan, and the revised LPRs have been implemented in subsequent recruitment exercises. Recently, the Government Logistics Department has revised one of the LPRs for the Motor Driver grade from “be able to write simple Chinese” to “be able to write simple Chinese or simple English”. The revised LPRs have been adopted in the recruitment exercise for Motor Driver launched in January 2013. The above effort serves to facilitate the recruitment of candidates whose first language is not Chinese without affecting the work and operational needs of the concerned grades.

8. To obtain up-to-date information on the implementation of the LPRs and ensure that these requirements remain relevant to and commensurate with the satisfactory performance of the relevant duties, the Civil Service Bureau has just launched another round of review of the LPRs of all civil service grades.

Acceptance of results of non-local public examinations

9. To facilitate candidates in applying for civil service posts, the Administration also accepts Chinese language results of specified non-local public examinations in addition to local qualifications as meeting the LPRs. Specifically, Chinese language results in the United Kingdom International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) / General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) / General Certificate of Education (GCE) ‘Ordinary’ (‘O’) Level as well as GCE ‘Advanced’ / ‘Advanced Subsidiary’ (‘A’ / ‘AS’) Levels, which are qualifications popular amongst students learning Chinese as a second language, are accepted for the purpose of appointments to the Civil Service.

Selection process

10. Some departments have made suitable adjustments to their recruitment selection process, particularly the part concerning tests of language/communication ability. Since May 2011, the Police Force has

arranged applicants of Police Constable who meet the basic academic qualifications and minimum English language proficiency standard but do not have the required minimum Chinese language proficiency standard to sit for the Government Standard Examination (GSE)¹. At the Group Interview stage, applicants will be arranged to participate in a job-related “Practical Incident Handling Test” to assess their communication ability, judgment and fact-finding ability. Under this Test, candidates are asked to watch two videos (one in English and the other in Chinese) on Police-related incidents and then give a simple account of the incidents as shown in the videos in written English and Chinese respectively. This Test has replaced the previous requirement for candidates to answer questions in Chinese. In addition, applicants of Police Constable who possess foreign language skills are awarded extra marks in the selection process. From 1 May 2011 to 31 March 2013, a total of 54 applications for Police Constable were received from Non-ethnic Chinese (NECs) of whom eight have been appointed.

11. Since September 2011, the Correctional Services Department (CSD) has replaced the Chinese written test by a Group Interview in the recruitment of Assistant Officer II. In the two recruitment exercises conducted in September 2011 and July 2012, a total of 72 applications from NECs were received, of whom five were offered appointment. In respect of career advancement, CSD has done away the Chinese language written test for serving staff of the Assistant Officer grade to be considered for appointment to the Officer grade under the “Potential Officer Scheme” and “Special Appointment Scheme”² since December 2010. Candidates are allowed to answer oral questions in either English or Chinese (Putonghua or Cantonese) during the selection process. In the two rounds of exercise conducted with the revised process, a total of 21 staff in the Assistant Officer grade who were NECs participated in these schemes and three of them were appointed to the Officer grade.

Employment initiatives

12. Where appropriate, departments may also employ ethnic minorities to meet specific operational needs. In September 2010, the

¹ GSE is conducted by the Civil Service Examination Unit of the Civil Service Bureau and the examination paper is set at a level equivalent to Level 2 of the Chinese Language subject in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination or the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination.

² “Potential Officer Scheme” and “Special Appointment Scheme” are special in-service advancement schemes which enable meritorious Assistant Officers nominated by their supervisors to advance to the Officer rank without having to meet the academic qualifications necessary for direct entry to the Officer grade.

Police Force launched a scheme to hire NECs as Police Community Liaison Assistant (PCLA) in five selected Police Districts on a trial basis. The scheme has subsequently been extended to cover a total of 14 Police Districts with 15 PCLA positions.

13. The Police Force has also launched programmes in certain Police Districts to engage the NEC communities. For example, in Yuen Long District, arrangement has been made for police officers to share work experience and job interview skills with NECs interested in joining the Police Force. In some other districts, recruitment talks and visits to Police Units have been organised to facilitate interested NECs in getting a better understanding of the work of the Police Force.

Racial profile of the Civil Service

14. At the Panel meeting held on 20 June 2011, the Administration briefed Members on the findings of the first survey on the racial profile of the Civil Service vide LC Paper No. CB(1)2436/10-11(02). The survey, conducted on a voluntary and anonymous basis, sought to reflect the overall racial profile of the Civil Service through compilation of consolidated information. A total of 26 671 civil servants (or 17% of the 156 781 serving civil servants as at 31 March 2011) responded to the survey, out of which 225 (or 0.8%) were of non-Chinese ethnicities. The distribution of individual ethnic minority groups in the Civil Service, as revealed in the survey, was broadly comparable to that in the general population as noted in the 2006 By-census.

15. To obtain up-to-date information on the racial profile of the Civil Service, the Civil Service Bureau has recently launched another similar survey. Apart from collecting information on ethnicity and salary band as in the last survey, we have expanded the scope of the survey to collect information on the respondents' education level and length of service in the Civil Service. We expect that the survey findings will be available in the third quarter in 2013.

Advice sought

16. Members are invited to note the above policy and measures relating to the employment of ethnic minorities in the Civil Service for information. As regards the general question raised at the Panel meeting held on 18 March 2013 concerning the employment of ethnic minorities

by government-funded public bodies, which is outside the scope of the Civil Service, a response will be provided to Members separately.

Civil Service Bureau
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