

Ethnic-minority students decry huge exam fees

Huge fees are deterring ethnic-minority students from sitting a more advanced level of overseas Chinese-language examination, making them less competitive when it comes to applying for a university place or a job.

They say it is not fair that they have to pay eight times more than local students to sit a Chinese-language examination which demonstrates a high proficiency.

Pakistani-Filipino Mashal Khalid, a 16-year-old Form Six student at the Delia Memorial School (Broadway), wants to be a doctor. She has secured an interview with the University of Hong Kong in June and has an A* GCSE in Chinese.

However, that A* is equivalent to the primary two-to-three standard of a local student and nowhere near as advanced as the HKDSE Chinese-language exam, tailor-made for local students. I currently stand a good chance, but still I have to pass the interview and compete with local Chinese. They have to see my results also. I don't want the GCSE exams to be an obstacle for me to get into HKU, she said.

It costs *ethnic minorities* HK\$540 to sit the government-subsidised GCSE Chinese-language exam - the same price local secondary students pay to sit the HKDSE.

There are some 150 minorities students who want to sit the more advanced GCE Chinese-language exams, but this costs HK\$2,720 at AS level and HK\$4,080 at the advanced level - out of reach for students from lower-income families.

Indian Navdipak Kaur, 15, a Form Four student at the same school, has two brothers studying at the same level. It would cost her family more than HK\$12,000 if they all take the GCEs together. But the monthly income of her family is just over HK\$15,000.

Kaur, who wants to be a civil servant, said it would be ridiculous for her to take the easier GCSE because her Chinese proficiency was well above that.

The school sent 107 students to sit the GCSE Chinese-language exam last year, and more than 96 per cent passed - with over 53 per cent gaining A or A*.

Assistant principal Lau Kwok-chang, who teaches Chinese, said the GCSE did not differentiate students' Chinese abilities.

The legislature yesterday passed a non-binding motion to review education policy on *ethnic minorities*. Secretary for Education Michael Suen Ming-yeung

said the government would look into the feasibility of non-Chinese-speaking students sitting an internationally recognised Chinese language examination.

But Fermi Wong Wai-fun, executive director for Unison, which fights for minorities' rights, said she wanted the Community Care Fund to subsidise the fee ahead of the government's long-term plans.

It should not still be in a stage of understanding the matter. We need a solid subsidy. Many students are ready to take the examinations, she said.

Unison recently raised HK\$150,000 to subsidise the 150 students to sit the GCE, but it takes HK\$476,000 to cover full expenses.

Community Care Fund executive committee chairman Law Chi-kwong said a subcommittee agreed to provide a full fee subsidy for students taking GCE exams, at a November meeting, but he could not say when it would be implemented.

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EDUCATION

ETHNIC-MINORITY STUDENTS DECRY HUGE EXAM FEES

They say it is unfair that they have to pay eight times more than local students in order to sit a Chinese-language examination

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Navdipak Kaur

Cost of learning

Fees for ethnic minorities taking Chinese language exams (HK\$)
Equivalent local Chinese standard in brackets

GCSE (Primary 2-3)

540

AS-level (Primary 5-6)

2,720

A-level (Secondary 1-2)

4,080

HKDSE (Secondary 6)

540

Source: Hong Kong Unison

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