

## Ethnic minority students battle the Chinese language barrier

Eighteen-year-old Bisma Naz saw her hard work pay off yesterday when the results of her university entrance exams exceeded her expectations.

The Pakistani-born and locally raised teenager was surprised to rack up 24 points in this year's Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education examinations.

"I work hard to get good grades at school and receive scholarships so that I can use the money to buy supplementary books for improving myself," the student of HKTA The Yuen Yuen Institute No 3 Secondary School, said.

She attained level 5\* for English, 5 for liberal studies and geography, and 4 for mathematics and history.

"I knew I will get a pass for everything but I wasn't really expecting to do that well. The scores really show that hard work does pay off," Naz, who studied for 10 hours every day, said.

Despite her better-than-expected results, Naz and many other students from the city's ethnic minority community still faced difficulties with their studies, including uncertainties in pursuing university courses, because of what they have described as a lack of support for learning the Chinese language.

Naz picked a degree course in education or the arts at the University of Hong Kong, as she knew it recognised her GCSE in Chinese.

The GCSE is taken by many ethnic minority students as an alternative to DSE Chinese, a core subject for those taking the university entrance exam.

But according to Phyllis Cheung Fung-mei, executive director of [Hong Kong Unison](#), a non-profit organisation assisting ethnic minority groups, while the GCSE was designed to be easier than DSE, it was harder to get some universities to recognise the qualification.

"Although all UGC-funded [University Grants Committee] universities accept these alternative qualifications with minimum requirements, not all programmes have clear guidance on the conversion of alternative Chinese examination results to DSE scores.

"Hence, students do not know what the final DSE points are and are disadvantaged when they apply to schools," she said.

"Ethnic minority students are capable of learning Chinese but the government has made Chinese a barrier in education. There needs to be a reform on the system with an appropriate Chinese language curriculum so that ethnic minority students can learn Chinese to the level of Chinese students," she said.

Another Pakistani student, who wished to be known only as Alina, said the recognition issue

surrounding GCSE Chinese results had limited her choices of university courses.

Scoring a total of 19 DSE points, the teenager recorded level 4 in liberal studies, 3 in English and biology, 2 in mathematics, and 1 in chemistry. Alina added she was "very scared" about her DSE results.

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