

Parliamentary reply by Minister Grace Fu on integration efforts

TWELFTH PARLIAMENT OF SINGAPORE

ORAL ANSWER

MONDAY, 13 AUG 2012

Ms Tan Su Shan:

To ask the Prime Minister whether recent efforts to integrate new immigrants have been effective and what are the specific goals to be achieved from these integration efforts.

Ms Grace Fu (for the Prime Minister):

Our goals are to encourage our new immigrants to integrate into society by embracing our Singaporean values and norms and contributing to their new homeland, and to strengthen the bonds between new immigrants and local-born Singaporeans.

Integration needs to occur at all levels of society and involve as many locals and new immigrants as possible, in order to be effective and sustainable.

The National Integration Council (NIC) was therefore established in 2009 to encourage ground-up integration efforts by the people, private and public sectors.

The NIC has made inroads into the key spheres of interaction between new immigrants and locals, namely our schools, the workplace and the community.

For example, the People's Association Integration Council was formed in July 2012 to support the network of 87 Integration and Naturalisation Committees, one in each constituency. More than 1,200 Integration and Naturalisation Champions from these Committees help newcomers settle down in the community and establish social networks with Singaporeans.

Through the Community Integration Fund, the NIC has provided grants to support some 200 integration initiatives organised by students, companies and community and cultural groups.

We monitor the effectiveness of such initiatives through indicators such as participation levels and feedback, while recognising that such measurements are at best proxy indicators.

For example, feedback collated from new citizens who have participated in the Singapore Citizenship Journey indicated that the programme had enriched their knowledge of our country's key institutions and values. Many also felt encouraged to take part in community activities after attending the programme.

We also take reference from independent research conducted by think tanks and academic institutions. One such study by the Institute of Policy Studies showed that 85% of new immigrants attested to friendships with local born Singaporeans in the heartlands. As integration is a long-term process, it is still too early to conclude on the effectiveness of the initiatives and programmes. Nonetheless, more must be done. Student leaders and educators, employers and unions, grassroots and community leaders as well as new immigrants must join us in this important task of strengthening our social cohesion.

I encourage our new immigrants to also actively seek out opportunities to contribute to our community. This is a good way to expand your social network, gain first-hand experience of our norms and culture, and settle down in your new home more quickly.

We seek Singaporeans' understanding and patience as we work towards a common goal of strengthening our social harmony.