

Number of SATs held outside US to be cut

A cut in the number of times students will be able to take the Scholastic Assessment Test—which is used for entry to United States colleges—throughout the year will force many Chinese students to revise their strategies for studying abroad, according to people involved in testing services.

The College Board, based in New York City, announced it will reduce how many SATs are held outside the US from six to four—in January, May, October and December—for the 2017-18 and 2018-19 academic years. Two tests, scheduled for June and November, will be canceled, it said.

The board said that it will also step up security audits of testing centers.

Qi Lianshan, who has worked for several SAT prep services over the past decade and is now a self-employed SAT tutor in Beijing, said the decision could affect those who had planned to take the test in June the most.

June is an ideal time for students to take the SAT because they usually start submitting applications for undergraduate programs in the second half of the year. In May, they are still busy taking Advanced Placement tests, also administered by the College Board.

“Now the students may have to take both AP tests and the SAT in May, which means a lot more pressure and less possibility of achieving a high score,” he said, adding that students who plan to take the SAT next year should modify their preparations to secure a good result.

Si Mingxia, director of the US division at Vision Overseas, an agency under New Oriental Education and Technology Group that helps Chinese study overseas, said the move by the College Board could be a step to thwart rampant cheating and unfair competition.

The College Board did not respond to a request for comment. Its chief administrative officer and general counsel, Peter Schwartz, said in a statement last week, “We are unwavering in our commitment to SAT test security and we will continue to confront any efforts to undermine it.”

In 2015, prosecutors in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia charged 15 Chinese citizens over a conspiracy to have impostors take the SAT and other college entrance exams for other students for payment of up to \$6,000. Most of the defendants pleaded guilty and were deported.

Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region to build one-hour commuting circle

The construction of a rail and road network in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region is in full swing, bringing the three neighboring areas closer together. [Photo/Xinhua]

The construction of a rail and road network in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region is in full swing, bringing the three neighboring areas closer together.

Rail transit line connects Beijing, Hebei

According to the plan for a 1,000-kilometer-long inter-city railway network across Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region laid down in 2016, the construction will take five years to complete.

The network centers around Beijing, Tianjin and Shijiazhuang, with three major channels, namely Beijing-Tianjin-Tanggu, Beijing-Baoding-Shijiazhuang and Beijing-Tangshan-Qinhuangdao Expressways.

Line Pinggu will be equipped with vehicles running at a maximum speed of 160 kilometers per hour. It will take only 45 minutes to go from Pinggu to downtown Beijing.

Picking up pace in building 7 highways

The Beijing section of Beijing-Taipei Expressway was opened on Dec. 9, 2016. Currently, seven highways are under construction. The next four years will see new highways open to traffic every year.

3 cities share transportation card

A total of 317,000 interconnective cards have been given out for transportation in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region. Since Dec. 25, 2016, the card has been viable on all bus lines in Beijing (except for tailored business buses) and 122 suburban lines operated by bus groups.

Six hundred more bus lines in 10 cities in Tianjin and Hebei also use the card.

Xi urges urban planning, preparation

for the Winter Olympics

Chinese President Xi Jinping has identified Beijing's urban planning and development, and preparation for its upcoming Winter Olympic Games as the two major tasks for the city at present and in the near future.

Xi made the remark during his inspection tour in Beijing between Feb. 23 and 24, during which he visited the city's new airport, the Wukesong Sports Center, the Capital Gymnasium, the office of Beijing's sub-center and the Grand Canal Forest Park.

During his visit to the construction site of the new airport, Xi stressed the control of standards and quality of the project and urged proper relocation and settlement of the people living nearby.

As a landmark project in China's capital Beijing, the new international airport will become a driving force for the country's development and it should adopt the strictest standards in its construction and the most advanced technology and expertise in its management, said Xi as he visited the site of the main terminal building.

At the Wukesong Sports Center and the Capital Gymnasium, both venues for the 2022 Winter Olympics, Xi emphasized the importance of learning from foreign experience and technology innovation in stadium planning, design and construction.

At the construction center of Beijing's sub-center in eastern Tongzhou District, Xi stressed good overall planning as well as functional design of its landscape and buildings.

Later, Xi visited the Grand Canal Forest Park and was debriefed on the history, culture, water treatment and ecological protection of Tongzhou District. He highlighted the importance of protecting historical and cultural heritage and the ecological environment along the canal during the construction of the sub-center.

Press release: National Audit Office investigation into the Parole Board

The Chair of the Parole Board, Professor Nick Hardwick, has welcomed the publication of the National Audit Office's findings following its investigation into the work of the Parole Board.

He said: "I am pleased the NAO has recognised the huge challenges the Parole

Board faced as it dealt with more cases and more oral hearings with fewer Parole Board members. As a result, the backlog of outstanding cases grew, with unacceptable delays for victims and prisoners. Given the scale of the challenge it has taken time to put things right.

I am pleased the NAO recognises the progress we have made. We have a new strategy, have recruited over a 100 new members and our backlogs are down by over a third. There is more to do and the NAO report helpfully highlights a number of areas for us to focus on. I am confident we will continue to make progress whilst making sure that in each of the approximately 7,000 cases we decide every year we protect the public whilst treating prisoners fairly.”

Martin Jones, Chief Executive said:

“I welcome this report, as a timely examination of the challenges facing the parole system. In recent years there has been a substantial increase in the number of cases needing to be heard by the Parole Board and this has led to excessive, often unacceptable delays. We are now making steady progress in reducing those delays and are committed to ensuring that we deal with all cases fairly and in a timely fashion, whilst ensuring the protection of the public; but there remains more to do.

The appointment of new members, who are now starting to sit on hearings, will enable us to sustain our good progress in bringing the backlog down. Also, our digital project which aims to have paperless hearings by October, is helping to make the Parole Board run more efficiently. The majority of our members have transitioned from paper to digital working, saving the Board time and money. The backlog at present is 2,030 cases, down over a third from its high point of 3,163 cases in 2015, and we are on track to eradicate the delays by the end of the year.”

Notes to Editors

A full copy of the National Audit Office’s investigation report (HC 19/2016-17) is available on the NAO website at www.nao.org.uk

The Parole Board Strategy 2016-2020 is available on the Parole Board web pages at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/parole-board>

The Parole Board is an independent body that works with its criminal justice partners to protect the public by risk assessing prisoners to decide whether they can safely be released into the community. The Board has responsibility for considering life sentence prisoners (mandatory life, discretionary life and automatic life sentence prisoners and Her Majesty’s Pleasure detainees; and prisoners given indeterminate sentences for public protection); and determinate sentence cases (discretionary conditional release prisoners serving more than 4 years whose offence was committed before 4 April 2005; prisoners given extended sentences for public protection for offences committed on or after 4 April 2005; and prisoners given an Extended Determinate Sentence or Sentence of Particular Concern after 3 December 2012). The Board considers initial release into the community and re-release following a recall to prison.

For further information please call Glenn Gathercole, Business Development Directorate on 0203 334 4392 during office hours, or 07725-927954 out of hours, or e-mail glenn.gathercole@paroleboard.gsi.gov.uk

Press release: Increase in BME workplace progression could give UK economy a £24bn boost – Baroness McGregor-Smith Review finds

- GDP could increase by up to 1.3 per cent a year if workers from BME backgrounds progressed at the same rate as their white colleagues
- Businesses with more than 50 employees urged to publish breakdown of workforce by race and pay band
- New Business Diversity and Inclusion Group announced to make sure government and industry work more closely to improve representation, inclusiveness and opportunities in the workplace

The UK economy could benefit from a £24bn-a-year boost if black and minority ethnic (BME) people progressed in work at the same rate as their white counterparts, a government-backed review has found.

The independent Baroness McGregor-Smith Review, which has been published today, found people from BME backgrounds are still being held back in the workplace because of the colour of their skin, costing the UK economy the equivalent of 1.3 per cent in GDP a year.

The review also found employment rates for people from BME backgrounds are 12 per cent lower than their white counterparts at 62.8 per cent, with just six per cent reaching top level management positions.

People from BME backgrounds are also more likely to work in lower paid and lower skilled jobs despite being more likely to have a degree, the report reveals.

In a series of recommendations, the review calls for large employers should lead the way in tackling barriers to BME progression, calling on companies with more than 50 employees to:

- Publish a breakdown of their workforce by race and pay band

- Draw up five-year aspirational diversity targets
- Nominate a board member to deliver on these targets

Baroness McGregor-Smith said:

“The time for talk on race in the workplace is over, it’s time to act. No-one should feel unable to reach the top of any organisation because of their race.

“If businesses and the Government act on my recommendations, it will show everyone from a minority background that Britain’s workplace is for everyone not just the privileged few.

“The consequences of continuing to do nothing will be damaging to the economy and to the aspirations of so many. So from the Cabinet table to the board rooms, there is no more time for excuses – just change.”

The Government has today also announced that a Business Diversity and Inclusion Group will be set up and chaired by Business Minister Margot James. It will bring together business leaders and organisations to coordinate action to remove barriers in the workplace and monitor employers’ progress.

The group will also bring together the leaders of three industry-led diversity reviews:

- Baroness McGregor-Smith
- Sir Philip Hampton and Dame Helen Alexander, who are leading a review aimed at increasing female leadership in FTSE companies
- Sir John Parker, who today concludes a consultation on recommendations to increase BME representation in the boardroom, to participate in the group

This highlights the importance government places on working with business to build an economy that works for everyone.

Business Minister Margot James said:

“It is very wrong that so many barriers lie in the way of people from ethnic minority backgrounds. Outdated attitudes or lack of awareness about ethnicity, in the workplace must be challenged.

“As this report shows, the economic benefit of harnessing untapped talent is huge and I urge employers to implement these recommendations to ensure everyone can reach the top of their career – whatever their background.

“I would like to thank Baroness McGregor-Smith for helping to shine a light on this important issue. We need to work together to build an inclusive culture in the workplace.”

The review found large employers like the NHS, KMPG and RBS have benefitted from increased innovation, more effective teamwork and a better understanding of customer demands by harnessing BME talent.

As part of the recommendations, Business in the Community (BITC) has agreed to publish an annual list of Best 100 Employers to celebrate success and highlight best practice.

Sandra Kerr, Race Equality Director at BITC, said:

“As this review clearly shows, harnessing the very best of BME talent is the only way forward that makes sense for employers. But this change has to be business led.

“The annual list of ‘Best 100 Employers for Race’ will showcase businesses at their best and spur other employers on to improve diversity and inclusion in the workplace.”

Notes to editors

1. 14 per cent of the working age population come from BME background, which is expected to rise to 21 per cent by 2051.
2. The review also found 15.3 per cent of BME workers would like to work more hours compared to 11.5 per cent of white workers.
3. Almost 500 individuals and companies responded to Baroness McGregor-Smith’s call for evidence, including a host of FTSE 100 companies.
4. The Government has invited the following individuals and organisations to be founder members of the Business Diversity and Inclusion Group, which will meet quarterly:
 - Baroness Ruby McGregor-Smith
 - Sir Philip Hampton and Dame Helen Alexander
 - Sir John Parker
 - Equalities Minister Caroline Dinenage
 - Confederation of British Industry
 - Institute of Directors
 - BITC
 - Financial Reporting Council
 - Equality and Human Rights Commission
5. Business in the Community offers businesses a number of practical ways tackle social and environmental issues in the workplace.
6. Anonymised case studies can be provided on request