



EIGHTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

26 May 2026

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

NCE EXAMINATIONS – ABOLISHMENT – ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS & MEASURES

(No. B/820) Mr C. Baboolall (First Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resource whether, in regard to the National Certificate of Education Examinations, he will state whether same will be abolished after the holding of the 2026 edition thereof and, if so, indicate the alternative pathways and measures being envisaged for students thereafter.

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the National Certificate of Education (NCE) was introduced in 2018 under the Nine-Year Continuous Basic Education Reform Framework by the previous Government. While the inaugural assessment for grade 9 students was originally scheduled for 2020, disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic delayed the first live administration of the examinations until 2021.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is currently finalising a comprehensive blueprint for the Mauritian education sector, which proposes among other structural reforms, the abolition of the NCE examinations at the end of grade 9. I wish to inform the House; the blueprint has almost reached the final stage of its preparation. Following legal vetting by the Attorney General's office and review by an Inter-Ministerial Committee, the blueprint will be submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to assure the House that this Government does not believe in throwing the baby out with the bath water. Where a system is pedagogically flawed, it is our responsibility to rectify it, not merely patch it. In its current form, the curriculum of the NCE is partially flawed because it does not adequately prepare our students to meet the exigencies of the School Certificate examinations. Consequently, we are reviewing both the lower secondary curriculum and its assessment framework. In collaboration with Cambridge International, we are developing a new curriculum and assessment framework that prioritises holistic student development over rigid, high-stakes testing. Let me inform the House that the NCE was initially designed to assess both mainstream and Extended Programme students.

Numerous stakeholders openly showed their disapproval regarding the practice of asking the former extended stream students to take the NCE examinations.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, between 2022 and 2025, nearly 7,000 Extended Programme students who sat for the NCE examination failed miserably. And 7,000 Extended Programme students were left entirely without certification. This is unacceptable systemic failure which could not be condoned. That is why this Government came with the Foundation Programme as an alternate pathway for children who need a special curriculum and assessment framework based on their competencies.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, during the extensive stakeholder consultations held for the preparation of the blueprint; educators, parents and psychologists highlighted several critical flaws inherent in the NCE system.

For example –

(i) The current system induces severe stress. Learners are driven into an intense cycle of private tuitions, spanning from Grade 7 to Grade 9. In reality, extending continuously from Grade 5 to the Higher School Certificate, causing learner burnout and considerable harm to the well-being of our children.

(ii) The NCE curriculum is inherently flawed. It is not designed to prepare our Grade 7 to Grade 9 students to actually prepare for the exigencies of the School Certificate examinations.

(iii) The migration of thousands of students from regional colleges to academies after the NCE examinations, which severely disrupts schools' continuity.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, education cannot be reduced to a conveyor belt of examinations that alienates and penalises the majority of our children. The alternative pathways being engineered in our upcoming blueprint will ensure that every child, regardless of their academic stream, is provided with a humane, equitable and certified pathway towards secondary and technical education. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, hon. Member!

Mr Baboolall: I thank the hon. Minister for his answer. Can the hon. Minister at least give some indications because there is a legitimate expectation in the public, for teachers and pupils – they are stressed as well – when the system will change?

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Member for this question. With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, through this question, let me assure everyone that due attention will be given for the phasing out so that the new system, which will come will respect the legal framework and that enough time will be given to students. For example, students who are already in Grade 8 will take the NCE examination. The phase out will not come abruptly. We assure students and everyone that nobody will be harmed. They will be given sufficient time in order to prepare for the change that will take place.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, you have one question?

Mr Beejan: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Will the hon. Minister inform the House whether the NCE examination is used to eliminate students from being promoted to Grade 10 so that the percentage of pass rate in the SC exam could be maintained at a high level?

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Member for this question. In fact, I would wish to inform the House, in general, this is what was happening when we came with the criteria of five credits. That was happening with the criteria of five credits. The idea was to eliminate the students with three and four credits so that the HSC result could be good and the percentage could be lofty.

I presume similarly, with hindsight, perhaps that was the intention. What was happening with the NCE examination? I am saying it from memory: around 30% of students used to fail the NCE examination. Already one out of three students used to be eliminated at Form 3, that is, the NCE level itself so that we could buttress the SC result.

Our Government is of a different approach. We believe in giving our kids the maximum opportunity. Coming from the sector, when a student sits for the Form 3 exam/the Grade 9 examination, it is better left to the rector and the members of staff to decide whether the child can be promoted in Grade 10 or not. Very often, it is at this point that they opt for the stream, whether they will do science, technical, arts side, or economic side. It is at that level. But the NCE examination was not doing justice to the potential of our kids. Thank you.