



Civil Service

The main administrative and executive functions of government are carried out by 12 policy bureaux in the Government Secretariat, and 58 departments and agencies, mostly staffed by civil servants. The Secretary for the Civil Service (SCS) is one of the Principal Officials appointed under the Political Appointment System and a Member of the Executive Council. She heads the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) of the Government Secretariat and is responsible to the Chief Executive (CE) for civil service policies as well as the overall management and development of the civil service. Her primary role is to ensure that the civil service serves the best interests of the community and delivers various services in a trustworthy, efficient and cost effective manner. The CSB assumes overall policy responsibility for the management of the civil service, including such matters as appointment, pay and conditions of service, staff management, manpower planning, training, and discipline.

Core values : The following are the core values of the civil service, which all civil servants are expected to uphold:

- commitment to the rule of law;
- honesty and integrity;
- objectivity and impartiality;
- political neutrality;
- accountability for decisions and actions; and
- dedication, professionalism and diligence.

The Hong Kong civil service provides a wide range of services, which in many countries are divided among various public authorities, e.g. public works and utilities, cleansing and public health, education, fire services and the police force. Hong Kong civil servants therefore do a wide variety of jobs.

As at December 31, 2008, the civil service employed about 154 300 people (excluding judges, judicial officers, officers of the Independent Commission Against Corruption and locally engaged staff working in overseas Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices) or about four per cent of Hong Kong's labour force. About 1 200 of them are directorate officers. Over 99 per cent of the service are local officers and there are about two men to every woman employed. The establishment of the civil service is about 18 per cent down from that in early 2000. To help reduce the Government's operating expenditure, the Government has met its target set in 2003 to reduce the civil service establishment to around 160 000 by 2006/07.

The civil service is a unified service in the sense that all its employees are subject to common appointment procedures and similar disciplinary codes.

Appointments: Appointments to the civil service are based on the principle of open and fair competition. Candidates have to go through a competitive process on

the basis of merits and are appointed only if they possess the qualifications and capabilities required for the job. Vacancies can be filled by promotion from within the service. In the case of basic ranks or where promotion is not possible or where there is a special need, vacancies may be filled by open recruitment. As the target to reduce the civil service establishment to around 160 000 was achieved by 2006/07, the Government has lifted the open recruitment freeze for civil service grades in 2007/08 except for selected grades (e.g. those with existing/anticipated surplus) which require prior approval from CSB before conducting open recruitment.

Entry requirements for civil service posts in general are set on the basis of academic or professional qualifications obtainable from local institutions or professional bodies (or equivalent), technical skills, work experience, language proficiency and other qualities and attributes as required. To achieve the aim of a civil service which is biliterate (Chinese and English) and trilingual (generally conversant in spoken Cantonese, English and Putonghua), language proficiency in Chinese and English is also required. The language proficiency requirements for individual posts are set having regard to the academic qualifications and the job requirements of the posts concerned. Besides, to heighten public awareness of the Basic Law and promote a culture of learning of Basic Law in the community, all candidates applying for civil service jobs will be assessed on their Basic Law knowledge.

In accordance with the Basic Law, new recruits appointed on or after July 1, 1997 must be permanent residents of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, save for certain specified exceptions.

Promotion: Officers are promoted on the criteria of character, ability, experience and prescribed qualifications. All eligible officers are considered on an equal basis. The officer selected for promotion must be the most meritorious one who is able and ready to perform duties at a higher rank.

Public Service Commission: The commission is an independent statutory body responsible for advising the CE on civil service appointment, promotion and discipline matters. The chairman and members of the commission are appointed by the CE. The commission seeks to ensure the impartiality and fairness in appointments to the civil service and also advises on discipline matters. In accordance with the Public Service Commission Ordinance, advice of the commission has to be sought for appointment or promotion of officers to middle and senior ranking posts (excluding the disciplined ranks of the Hong Kong Police Force). The commission is also consulted on changes in appointment procedures applicable to civil service posts.

Independent Advisory Bodies on Pay and Conditions of Service: Three independent bodies advise the Government on matters relating to pay and conditions of service. Their members are selected from outside the Government. The Standing Committee on Directorate Salaries and Conditions of Service advises on matters affecting the directorate. The Standing Commission on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of Service advises on the principles and practices governing the pay and conditions of service of all non-directorate staff except those in the judicial and disciplined services. The Standing Committee on Disciplined Services Salaries and Conditions of Service advises on the pay and conditions of service of all disciplined services staff except the heads of the services who remain under the purview of the Standing Committee on Directorate Salaries and Conditions of Services.

Pay Policy and System: It is the Government's established policy to offer sufficient remuneration to attract, retain and motivate staff of a suitable calibre to provide the public with an effective, efficient and high quality service. In order to ensure that civil service pay is regarded as fair and reasonable by both civil servants who provide the service and the public who foot the bill, the Government adopts the principle that the level of civil service pay should be broadly comparable with private sector pay.

Under the improved civil service pay adjustment mechanism, a pay level survey will be conducted every six years, a starting salaries survey will be conducted every three years, and a pay trend survey will be conducted every year. Apart from the periodic pay surveys, grade structure reviews for selected grades will also be conducted as and when necessary.

Apart from salaries, civil servants are eligible for various fringe benefits depending on their terms of appointment, rank, salary point, length of service, and other eligibility rules. Proactive steps have been taken over the years to modernise the provision of fringe benefits to civil servants. The payment of many fringe benefit type of allowances has been either ceased or tightened up for new recruits offered appointment on or after June 1, 2000 to reflect present day circumstances. Following a comprehensive review, the Government has implemented measures to further rationalise the provision of fringe benefit type of allowances since September 2006.

Training and Development: The main objectives of training and development are to equip civil servants with updated knowledge and skills, and to develop their potential so that they can continue to improve their performance and provide quality service to the public. Training and development programmes are carefully designed to enhance performance and to support the core values and functions of the civil service.

Job-related training is arranged by departments while induction and grade specific management training for general grade members are in general provided by respective grade management. Full-time and part-time courses are provided, either locally or overseas, for staff to obtain the requisite knowledge.

The CSB provides robust training and development support to departments through its Civil Service Training and Development Institute. There are four core service areas: senior executive development, national studies programmes, human resource management consultancy service and promotion of a continuous learning culture.

Senior executive development programmes include leadership development and national studies programmes for directorate and potential directorate officers. Advisory services on Human Resources Development (HRD) and succession planning are also provided.

National studies programmes include courses at Mainland institutes like the National School of Administration, Foreign Affairs University, Tsinghua University, Peking University and Sun Yat-sen University.

There are also local programmes on national affairs and the Basic Law, as well as staff exchange programme with the Mainland.

Through the provision of advisory services to departments, the Institute disseminates best practices in HRD covering such core subjects as training needs analysis, learning strategies, development of competency profiles, and performance management systems. Continuous learning is promoted on the learning portal, "Cyber Learning Centre Plus". The portal features comprehensive learning resources and training information to help staff learn at their own pace.

Performance Management: Through the performance appraisal process, staff at different levels are made aware of the standard of performance expected of them. Proper management of the process helps maximise individual performance and enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the civil service. As an integral part of the overall human resource management functions, the performance appraisal system is a major tool in human resource planning (e.g. succession planning), development (e.g. training and job rotation), and management (e.g. confirmation, promotion, posting and action to address under-performance).

Performance appraisal of staff is an on-going process. While appraisal reports would normally be completed annually, regular communication between managers and staff on performance is essential. Transparency and objectivity of the appraisal process are also emphasised.

Departmental management is encouraged to establish assessment panels to undertake levelling and moderating work among appraisal reports where necessary, identify under-performers/outstanding performers for appropriate action, adopt other management tools including target-based assessment and core competencies assessment, and ensure appraisal reports are written honestly, objectively and on time.

The performance management system ensures that good performance and exemplary service are rewarded or given due recognition, whilst under-performers are managed, counselled and offered assistance to bring their performance up to requirement. For persistent substandard performers who fail to improve, action will be taken to retire them in the public interest. On the other hand, in recognition of long and meritorious services, there are the Long and Meritorious Service Travel Award Scheme, the Long and Meritorious Service Award Scheme and the Retirement Souvenir Scheme. There is also a commendation system to give recognition to exemplary performance.

Staff Discipline and Integrity Management: Disciplinary action is taken against staff misconduct to achieve a punitive, rehabilitative and deterrent effect. All disciplinary actions are handled promptly in accordance with the principles of natural justice and established procedures. The Administration is committed to upholding integrity and probity in the civil service through prevention and education as well as service-wide rules and regulations on conduct matters, which lay down clear guidelines against malpractices.

Staff Relations: There is a well established staff consultative machinery at both the central and departmental levels. Centrally, there are the Senior Civil Service Council, the Model Scale 1 Staff Consultative Council, the Police Force Council, and the Disciplined Services Consultative Council. Through these councils, the Government consults staff on any major changes which affect their conditions of service.

At the departmental level, there are Departmental Consultative Committees which aim to improve co-operation and understanding between management and staff through regular exchanges of views.

There are established channels to deal with staff grievances and complaints. Individual members of staff with problems can receive counselling, advice and help.

A Staff Suggestions Scheme is run by both the CSB and departments to encourage staff to make suggestions

for improving the efficiency of the civil service. Awards are given to those whose suggestions are found useful.

A Staff Welfare Fund is available for welfare and recreational activities of staff. A Staff Relief Fund provides assistance to staff to meet unforeseen financial needs.