The Civil Service is the backbone of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). It is responsible to the Chief Executive (CE). It supports the CE and the Government of the day in formulating, explaining and implementing policies; conducting administrative affairs; delivering public services; and undertaking law enforcement and regulatory functions. It serves the community, and contributes to the effective governance and stability and prosperity of Hong Kong.

The Secretary for the Civil Service is one of the Principal Officials appointed under the Political Appointment System and a Member of the Executive Council. He heads the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) of the Government Secretariat and is responsible to the CE for civil service policies as well as the overall management and development of the civil service. His 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.

Under the Basic Law and the Civil Service Code (the Code), it has consistently been the duty of civil servants to uphold the Basic Law, bear allegiance to the HKSAR, be dedicated to their duties and be responsible to the HKSAR Government. According to the Code, civil servants shall serve the CE and the Government of the day with total loyalty and to the best of their ability.

The following are the core values of the civil service as set out in the Civil Service Code, which all civil servants are required 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, e.g. public works and the construction, maintenance and operation of public facilities, cleansing and public health, education, social welfare, promotion of trade and commerce, fire services and maintenance of law and order. These services are often provided by different public authorities in many countries. By contrast, Hong Kong civil servants are responsible for a wide variety of work.

As at June 30, 2021, the civil service employed about 176,900 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 4.6 per cent of Hong Kong's labour force. About 1,400 of them were directorate officers. Over 99 per cent of the service are local officers and there are about five men to three women employed. The annual growth of the civil service establishment had been mostly in the range of 1 per cent to 1.9 per cent between 2007-08 and 2020-21. It is of utmost importance to maintain the sustainability of public finance amidst economic downturn. Therefore, in 2021-22, there is a zero growth in the civil service establishment in order to contain the growth in government expenditure.

**Appointments:** Appointment to the civil service is based on the principle of open and fair competition. Candidates have to go through a competitive process on the basis of merit and are appointed only if they possess the qualifications and capabilities required for the job. Promotion rank vacancies can be filled by promotion from within the service. In the cases of basic ranks, where promotion is not possible and where there is a special need, vacancies may be filled by open recruitment.

Entry requirements for civil service posts in general include academic or professional qualifications, technical skills, work experience, language proficiency and other qualities as required. Appropriate Chinese and English language proficiency requirements are specified for appointment to individual grades having regard to the job requirements of the grades concerned. In addition, for all civil service positions requiring academic qualifications at or above completion of secondary education level, the job applicants must sit and pass the Basic Law Test. The Government will also include the Hong Kong National Security Law in the scope of assessment from mid-2022. In accordance with the Basic Law, new recruits appointed on or after July 1, 1997 must be permanent residents of the HKSAR, save for certain specified exceptions.

All civil servants are required to declare that they will uphold the Basic Law, bear allegiance to the HKSAR, be dedicated to their duties and be responsible to the HKSAR Government. Civil servants appointed to senior positions such as Heads of Departments are also required to take an oath.

**Promotion:** Officers are promoted on the criteria of character, ability, experience and prescribed qualifications. All eligible officers are considered on an equal basis.

**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 safeguard the impartiality and integrity of the appointment and promotion systems in the civil service. It also aims to ensure that fairness and broad consistency in disciplinary punishment are
maintained throughout the civil service. The Commission's remit is stipulated in the Public Service Commission Ordinance and its subsidiary regulations. The Commission is also consulted on policy and procedural issues pertaining to appointment, promotion and discipline applicable to the civil service.

Independent Advisory Bodies on Pay and Conditions of Service: Three independent bodies advise the CE on matters relating to pay and conditions of service of civil servants. Their members are from outside the Government. The Standing Committee on Directorate Salaries and Conditions of Service advises on pay and conditions of service matters affecting the civilian directorate and heads of disciplined services. 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 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 disciplined services staff except the heads of the services. These advisory bodies are supported by the Joint Secretariat for the Advisory Bodies on Civil Service and Judicial Salaries and Conditions of Service.

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 and efficient service; and to maintain broad comparability between civil service and private sector pay.

Under the improved civil service pay adjustment mechanism, three sets of surveys are conducted to assess how the prevailing civil service pay compares with the pay in the private sector and, having regard to the findings of the surveys, whether and how civil service pay should be adjusted. The three sets of surveys are the annual pay trend survey, the six-yearly pay level survey and the starting salaries survey which will be conducted as and when necessary. Apart from these surveys, grade structure reviews for individual 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.

Training and Development: The Government attaches great importance to civil service training, and is committed to nurturing a forward-looking, visionary and innovative civil service to tackle different challenges and deliver outstanding public services. While individual bureaux and departments take charge of providing vocational training to meet job-specific needs of their officers, the Civil Service Training and Development Institute (CSTDI) under the CSB is responsible for providing training courses and services to meet service-wide training needs of civil servants. The Civil Service College will be established in December 2021 to take over from the CSTDI the important mission of strengthening training for civil servants on various fronts, in particular training on the understanding of our country’s development, the HKSAR’s constitutional order, leadership development, innovation and technology applications, and international outlook. The College will also strengthen exchanges with civil servants in other places, and promote the development of Hong Kong into a regional training hub.

The Civil Service College will make use of the CSTDI’s existing premises in North Point as interim accommodation. Construction works of the College’s long-term accommodation in Kwun Tong will commence in 2022. The College will move to its long term accommodation upon its commissioning. Upgraded training facilities and equipment supporting more effective delivery of training services in terms of quality, flexibility and diversity will be provided.

The Government set up in November 2019 a Civil Service Training Advisory Board to give guidance on training programmes for the civil service and long-term development strategy.

Performance Management: As an integral part of the overall human resource management strategy, performance management is a major tool in human resource planning (e.g. succession planning), development (e.g. training and job rotation) and management (e.g. confirmation to the permanent establishment, promotion, posting and action to address under-performance). Through the performance management process, supervisors and staff communicate on the work objectives and expected standard of performance. Proper management of the process helps maximise individual performance and improve weaknesses, thereby enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the civil service.

Performance management is an on-going process. While appraisal reports are normally completed annually, continuous communication between managers and staff on performance is essential. Transparency, objectivity and timeliness in appraisal are emphasised in the process.

Departmental management is encouraged to establish assessment panels to undertake levelling and moderating work among appraisal reports where necessary, identify substandard and outstanding performers for appropriate action, and adopt other management tools including target-based assessment and competency-based assessment to facilitate comprehensive and objective performance appraisal.

Good performance management ensures that exemplary performers 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, there are commendation schemes to award officers with meritorious performance. These schemes include, inter alia, the Secretary for the Civil Service’s Commendation Award Scheme, the Commendation Letter Scheme and the Long and Meritorious Service Travel Award Scheme.

Integrity Management and Staff Discipline: The Government is committed to upholding integrity and probity in

1 Judges and judicial officers are not civil servants. The Government has in place the Standing Committee on Judicial Salaries and Conditions of Service to advise on pay and conditions of service of judges and judicial officers.
the civil service under a three-pronged approach, namely prevention, education and training, and sanction. The emphasis of prevention is placed on the provision of clear policies and guidelines, and proper checks and balances. On education and training, the Government continues to provide integrity education and training at all levels in the civil service, and to embed the core value of integrity and honesty through integrity initiatives spearheaded by senior management of all bureaux/departments. On sanction, the Government takes a serious view on offences and misconduct committed by its staff particularly those involving a breach of trust in the public office or misuse of power. The Government is determined to take disciplinary action against the staff concerned to achieve a punitive, deterrent and rehabilitative effect. All disciplinary cases are processed expeditiously subject to the adherence to principles of natural justice and observance of procedural propriety.

**Staff Relations:** There is a well-established staff consultative machinery at both the central and departmental levels. Centrally, there are four central consultative councils, namely 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 major changes which affect their conditions of service.

At the departmental level, there are departmental consultative committees which aim to improve cooperation and understanding between management and staff through regular exchange of views.

There are established channels to deal with staff grievances and complaints. Individual 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.