

**立法會**  
**Legislative Council**

LC Paper No. CB(1)1910/02-03  
(These minutes have been seen  
by the Administration)

Ref : CB1/PL/PS/1

**Panel on Public Service**

**Minutes of meeting**  
**held on Monday, 19 May 2003 at 10:45 am**  
**in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

**Members present** : Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP (Chairman)  
Hon LI Fung-ying, JP (Deputy Chairman)  
Hon Kenneth TING Woo-shou, JP  
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan  
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong  
Hon HUI Cheung-ching, JP  
Hon Bernard CHAN, JP  
Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP  
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung  
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip  
Hon LEUNG Fu-wah, MH, JP

**Members absent** : Hon CHAN Kwok-keung  
Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, SBS, JP  
Hon Howard YOUNG, JP  
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP

**Members attending** : Hon James TIEN Pei-chun, GBS, JP  
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP  
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok

**Public officers attending : Agenda Item III**

Mrs Rebecca LAI, JP  
Permanent Secretary for the Civil Service

Mr Christopher WONG  
Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service (3)

**Agenda Item IV**

Mr Joseph W P WONG, GBS, JP  
Secretary for the Civil Service

Mrs Rebecca LAI, JP  
Permanent Secretary for the Civil Service

Miss Jennifer MAK, JP  
Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service (1)

**Clerk in attendance :** Miss Salumi CHAN  
Chief Assistant Secretary (1)5

**Staff in attendance :** Ms Rosalind MA  
Senior Assistant Secretary (1)9

Ms May LEUNG  
Legislative Assistant

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Action

- I. Confirmation of minutes of meeting**  
(LC Paper No. CB(1)1651/02-03 — Minutes of meeting on 25 April 2003)

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 April 2003 were confirmed.

**II. Information paper issued since last meeting**

(LC Paper No. CB(1)1688/02-03(01) — Information paper on Review of Job-related Allowances for Civilian Grades)

2. The Chairman drew members' attention that the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) had provided an information paper on "Review of Job-related Allowances for Civilian Grades" on 16 May 2003.

**III. Date of next meeting and items for discussion**

(LC Paper No. CB(1)1650/02-03(01) — List of outstanding items for discussion

LC Paper No. CB(1)1650/02-03(02) — List of follow-up actions)

3. Members agreed that the following two items be discussed at the next regular meeting on 16 June 2003:

(a) Review of remuneration of senior executives of statutory and other bodies; and

(b) Commendation schemes for the civil service.

*(Post-meeting notes:*

(a) Under Agenda Item VI of this meeting, the Administration was invited to brief the Panel on the review of job-related allowances for civilian grades at the next meeting on 16 June 2003;

(b) After the meeting, the Chairman accepted the Administration's proposals that the above two items be deferred.)

**IV. National Studies Programmes for civil servants**

(LC Paper No. CB(1)1650/02-03(04) — Paper provided by the Administration)

Briefing by the Administration

4. At the Chairman's invitation, the Permanent Secretary for the Civil Service (PSCS) briefed members that since the 1980s, the Administration had been strengthening China Studies training for civil servants and some 70 000 civil servants had attended these training courses. Since the transfer of sovereignty in July 1997, CSB and the Civil Service Training and Development Institute (CSTDI) had taken proactive steps to enhance the National Studies programmes for civil servants. The Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service (3) (DSCS3) pointed out that the National

Studies programmes involved classroom training in Hong Kong and Mainland, visits to the Mainland and self-learning packages, as follows:

- (a) CSTDI organized local courses on National Studies for civil servants at various levels. These included courses commissioned in collaboration with local universities, seminars on contemporary Mainland issues as well as activities to promote understanding of the Basic Law. In the six years between 1997 and 2002, about 40 000 civil servants had attended National Studies courses and seminars.
- (b) CSTDI also published self-learning packages on various topics about the Mainland. Apart from providing hard copies of these packages, CSTDI also offered web-based self-learning packages through the Cyber Learning Centre Plus.
- (c) To cater for specific training needs, individual departments organized a variety of National Studies programmes for their staff. At present, department/bureaux were offering some 1 600 customized training places per year for their staff.
- (d) CSB organized National Studies programmes in the Mainland for senior civil servants. These included familiarization visits, National Studies course at the Tsinghua University, advanced National Studies course at the National School of Administration in Beijing and short theme-based courses at the Zhongshan University.
- (e) In line with the continuing momentum of economic growth in the Mainland and the development of closer economic ties between Hong Kong and the Mainland, two new initiatives were introduced in the last two years to strengthen the National Studies programmes for the civil servants. The two new initiatives were the exchange visit programme between senior officials of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and major Mainland cities, and the staff exchange programme involving the exchange of senior professional officers between the Mainland and the HKSAR Government.

## Discussion

### *Monitoring the quality of local National Studies courses*

5. Mr LEUNG Fu-wah expressed support for the strengthening of National Studies programmes to enable civil servants at various levels to acquire knowledge about developments in the Mainland. However, he had received complaints against some instructors for local courses on National Studies for having used disproportionate amount of time during the courses to express their personal opinions on national policies. Mr LEUNG expressed concern about the qualification

requirements for course instructors and how CSDTI monitored the performance of these instructors.

6. In response, DSCS3 pointed out that instead of setting general qualification requirements for course instructors, suitable instructors were identified through two major sources. For the courses commissioned by CSDTI in collaboration with local universities, the course instructors were normally recommended by the universities concerned. On the other hand, CSDTI identified suitable instructors among reputable academics with expert knowledge about developments and systems in the Mainland to conduct seminars or talks on specific topics.

7. On the monitoring of the performance of instructors, PSCS and DSCS3 assured members that staff of CSDTI would attend the courses and take necessary follow-up actions if any irregularities in the conduct of the courses were detected. PSCS also pointed out that course attendees would be invited, upon completion of the course, to complete a questionnaire to give their feedback on the course design and content, and any additional comments. The feedback of course attendees would be taken into consideration in assessing the course arrangements and instructors' performance. PSCS and DSCS3 considered that expression of personal opinions by course instructors during the conduct of the courses could not and should not be prohibited. Mr LEUNG Fu-wah however pointed out that when the instructors deviated from the core contents of the course and elaborated too much on their personal opinions, it would be a waste of time and resources. He would provide information on the relevant complaint cases to CSB after the meeting for its follow-up action.

8. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan opined that course attendees should be exposed to analysis and viewpoints from different perspectives so that there would be room for their independent thinking and judgement. He requested CSB to handle the complaint cases properly. Otherwise, course instructors might be discouraged to express their personal opinions during local courses on National Studies. PSCS responded that the content of such courses covered factual information and analytical training. On analytical training, course attendees would be encouraged to study issues from different perspectives. At Mr LEE's request, PSCS undertook to provide information on the content of National Studies courses and the names of the course instructors.

9. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong shared Mr LEE Cheuk-yan's view. Stressing the importance of academic freedom, Mr CHEUNG expressed grave concern about the possible situation that only positive viewpoints concerning national policies and systems would be allowed in National Studies courses and that instructors having negative comments on national policies would not be invited to conduct such courses. He considered that course attendees should have the ability to analyze different viewpoints presented to them. Mr Michael MAK shared Mr CHEUNG's view. He pointed out that National Studies courses should provide civil servants with the opportunity to understand and examine Mainland issues from different perspectives and should not be used for manipulation of their political mind-set.

10. DSCS3 advised that CSTDI would evaluate the effectiveness and propriety of the courses with reference to the observation of its staff in attendance and the course attendees' feedback on the courses. The evaluation of the courses aimed at improving their quality and arrangements, but not an assessment of the viewpoints of any individual instructors.

11. Mr Andrew WONG pointed out that from his teaching experience over the past 30 years, appointment of teaching staff sharing the same school of thoughts would not be beneficial to students. He pointed out that training courses should be categorized into two major types, i.e. those providing skill training and those for academic training. For academic training, it was necessary to provide not only factual information about the issues under study, but also analysis on the issues concerned. He said that course instructors should give their views on the issues under study and allow attendees to make their own judgement. As regards assessment of teaching quality, Mr WONG said that while feedback of course attendees might be taken into consideration, this should not be the only reference for assessment as the feedback might be biased due to their different expectations of the courses. In this connection, he asked whether the feedback collected from the questionnaire completed by course attendees would be provided to the course instructors so that they could make improvements as appropriate. PSCS undertook to confirm with CSTDI on the existing arrangements for handling the course attendees' feedback and provide members with the information after the meeting.

12. Mr LEUNG Fu-wah clarified that his concern was about the quality of the local courses on National Studies and whether these courses could achieve the set objectives. He had no intention to interfere in academic freedom or to politicize these courses. In view of some members' concern about the impact of the complaint cases on the instructors concerned, Mr LEUNG said that he would not provide information on the cases to CSB.

*(Post-meeting note: The information requested at paragraphs 8 and 11 above was circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(1)1937/02-03(01) on 11 June 2003.)*

#### *Effectiveness of National Studies courses*

13. Mr HUI Cheung-ching supported the provision of more National Studies courses in the Mainland for civil servants, in particular, the senior officials. He sought information on the effectiveness of these courses and how far officers who had attended these courses benefited from the knowledge or experience gained. In reply, PSCS said that assessment of the effectiveness of the training courses would be done regularly for improvements in the course design. The benefits of these courses might not be immediate and should be examined in the long run. It was however evident that officers who had participated in the National Studies courses considered the courses fruitful as they recommended their colleagues and sub-ordinates to attend the

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courses. Mr HUI suggested the Administration to invite officers who had attended the courses to share their training experience and gains through means such as writing of articles. PSCS undertook to consider this suggestion.

14. The Chairman sought information on the feedback of course attendees on the effectiveness of the National Studies courses. Mr Michael MAK also enquired about the course attendees' assessment on the effectiveness of these courses in enriching their knowledge about the Mainland. In reply, PSCS said that over 80% of the course attendees who had attended local courses on National Studies gave an overall rating on the courses as very useful. The quality and content of these courses were also considered good and proper by the course attendees in general.

15. In response to Mr Michael MAK's question on the application of knowledge gained through the exchange programmes, PSCS said that these programmes equipped civil servants with the knowledge of the developments and systems in the Mainland and served as useful reference for their work in the HKSAR Government. Given the difference in circumstances and approaches adopted in different areas of work, the extent to which course participants might directly apply the systems and measures they learned in the Mainland to their daily work also varied.

#### **V. Containing the size of the civil service**

(LC Paper No. CB(1)1650/02-03(03) — Paper provided by the Administration)

##### Briefing by the Administration

16. At the Chairman's invitation, the Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service (1) (DSCS1) briefed members on the approach and implementation arrangements for the initiative to reduce the civil service establishment to around 160 000 by 2006-07. On general approach, DSCS1 said that the Administration aimed at achieving the target of reducing civil service establishment through natural wastage, introduction of the general civil service recruitment freeze and the Second Voluntary Retirement Scheme (Second VRS). With the introduction of the general civil service recruitment freeze with effect from 1 April 2003, no offer of appointment to the civil service establishment on civil service terms could be made except under very exceptional circumstances and with the prior approval of a panel co-chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration and the Financial Secretary and with the Secretary for the Civil Service (SCS) as member. The application period for the Second VRS opened on 21 March and would close on 20 May. Approval of the applications would be made in July/August with VR-takers progressively released from their duties within one year after the approval date.

17. As for implementation arrangements, DSCS1 advised that the reduction of the civil service establishment would be implemented on a bureau basis. Director of Bureaux (DoBs) would oversee the consolidated establishment figures in their

bureaux and departments under their purview. In other words, they would have the flexibility to even out the reduction among departments under their purview having regard to the operational needs of individual departments. DoBs would submit manpower plans for their bureaux and departments under their purview showing the roadmap to achieve the target reduction on a bureau basis by 2006-07. To allow the effect of the Second VRS to be factored into the manpower plans, DoBs were requested to provide CSB with the manpower plans in October 2003 and to update the plans by the end of each financial year starting from 2003-04 to reflect subsequent changes. Bureaux and departments had been requested to actively consider the scope for streamlining their existing mode of operation to enhance productivity and minimize the impact of establishment reduction on the quality of public service. CSB had also reminded DoBs to take into account the optimal proportion between different ranks in the department/grade in effecting deletion of posts.

### Discussion

#### *Forced redundancy*

18. Mr Andrew WONG reiterated his views expressed at previous meetings that the Administration should not introduce a general recruitment freeze and VRS to reduce civil service establishment. He maintained his view that the Administration should arrange for the release of surplus staff on “abolition of office” terms. He opined that the Administration should delete surplus posts for maintenance of a lean and efficient government even without the pressing need to reduce fiscal deficit. Only posts with operational needs should be retained in the civil service.

19. SCS pointed out that the Administration had set the target of 10% reduction in civil service establishment by 2006-07 for achieving the overall goal of reducing Government operating expenditure by \$20 billion in 2006-07. The target of reduction in establishment would be achieved through measures including natural wastage, general recruitment freeze and the Second VRS. On natural wastage, upon departure of officers due to retirement, resignation and expiry of contracts, DoBs/Heads of Departments would critically review the continued need for the relevant posts, including whether the workload could be redistributed through streamlining, re-engineering or outsourcing of services, and make a decision as to whether it was feasible to delete the posts. With the introduction of the general recruitment freeze, vacant posts would not be filled except under very exceptional circumstances and with the prior approval of the panel mentioned in paragraph 16 above. As regards the implementation of the Second VRS, civil servants of about 200 grades with identified or potential surplus might apply to leave the service voluntarily and the response to the Second VRS would be known after the closing date for applications on 20 May. SCS pointed out that DoBs would be requested to review their manpower plans in the light of the response to the Second VRS and the resources allocated in their “envelopes” in the coming years and provide a projection of their manpower up to 2006-07. CSB would oversee and monitor the overall manpower position after collecting and examining the manpower plans submitted by DoBs. SCS also pointed out that while



there was at present no plan for releasing surplus staff on “abolition of office” terms, he would not rule out any feasible options to achieve the target of reduction in civil service establishment.

20. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan stated that he had all along opposed any plan of forced redundancy in the civil service. He said that forced redundancy would be harmful to the stability of the civil service and set a bad example to employers in the private sector. Given that the Chief Executive (CE) had undertaken not to implement any forced redundancy plan during his term of office, Mr LEE queried whether SCS’s remarks that he would not rule out any feasible options to achieve the target of reduction in civil service establishment was contradictory to CE’s undertaking. He urged the Administration to clarify its stance on forced redundancy and whether CE would still honour his undertaking. Mr Andrew WONG and Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong also urged the Administration to clarify the issue. Mr CHEUNG stated that the Democratic Party considered employees’ job security very important for maintaining the stability of the community during the present economic downturn. Hence, the Government should take the lead to provide job security to civil servants. He expressed grave concern that SCS’s remarks were contradictory to CE’s undertaking.

21. In reply, SCS pointed out that CE had responded to Members’ enquiry on the issue at the Question and Answer Session on 15 May 2003. CE had advised Members that the Administration would examine and review its measures for containing the size of the civil service in the light of the results of the Second VRS and no concrete plans had been decided at the present stage. SCS said that this was consistent with his remark made at this meeting. SCS also said that at previous meetings of the Panel on Public Service, he had consistently advised members that there was no plan for forced redundancy at the present stage.

22. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong urged the Administration to adopt a mild approach for achieving the target of reduction in civil service establishment. He opined that the Administration should explore other measures to achieve savings in staff costs, such as allowing civil servants to opt for job-sharing on a voluntary basis and encouraging inter-departmental transfer through the co-ordination of DoBs. SCS noted Mr CHEUNG’s suggestion and reiterated that the Administration would not rule out any feasible options to achieve the target of reduction in civil service establishment. The Administration would examine all options when the manpower plans were submitted by DoBs.

23. Mr Albert CHAN shared Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong’s view that the Administration should adopt a mild approach for achieving the target of reduction in civil service establishment. Pointing out that the economy of Hong Kong had become more vulnerable after the outbreak of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome and some DoBs had requested private sector employers of the affected industries to refrain from dismissing their employees, Mr CHAN considered that SCS’s remarks on not ruling out the option of forced redundancy were contradictory to the calls of the DoBs. He was concerned that if the Administration proceeded with forced redundancy of

civil servants, this would set a very bad example to the private sector employers and would also aggravate the problem of unemployment.

24. SCS clarified that while he did not rule out the option of forced redundancy, there was no such plan at the present stage. He further explained that it would be the responsibility of the Government to critically examine how public services could be delivered in a more efficient and cost-effective manner and identify any staff surplus resulting from the change in circumstances including advancement of technology and streamlining of procedures. Where surplus was identified, the Government had to explore feasible means to delete the surplus posts for maintaining a lean and efficient civil service. It would be undesirable to rule out any options before detailed examinations on the manpower positions in bureaux/departments. He assured members that before making any policy changes, the Administration would take into consideration the overall social and economic circumstances and would consult staff side representatives on the details of the proposals.

25. Mr Albert CHAN, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong and Mr LEE Cheuk-yan still maintained their view that SCS's remarks that he would not rule out any feasible options, including the option of forced redundancy, were contrary to CE's undertaking of not implementing forced redundancy during his term of office. Mr LEE asked whether CE had consulted/discussed with SCS before giving the undertaking. SCS responded that he did not see any conflict between CE's answer at the Question and Answer Session on 15 May 2003 and his remarks on forced redundancy. He reiterated that as a responsible Government, all feasible options for releasing surplus staff should be examined and that as a Principal Official, he had to report and to be responsible to CE. Mr LEE hoped that the Administration could give the assurance that no forced redundancy plan would be implemented so as to restore the confidence of civil servants and rebuild their sense of job security.

*Implementation arrangements for reducing the civil service establishment*

26. Mr LEUNG Fu-wah pointed out that as the strength of the civil service was 170 605 as at 31 March 2003, there was only a difference of about 10 000 from the target of reducing civil service establishment to 160 000 by 2006-07. If 7 000 to 10 000 posts could be deleted by 2006-07 through natural wastage and the implementation of the Second VRS, it would not be necessary for the Administration to implement any forced redundancy plan. In this connection, Mr LEUNG sought information on the estimated number of civil servants leaving the service through natural wastage annually. He commented that staff morale would be boosted if the Administration could undertake not to proceed with forced redundancy of civil servants.

27. SCS advised that about 8 500 civil servants would reach their normal retirement age in the coming four years, i.e. by 2006-07. Nevertheless, some officers under the new pension scheme might choose to retire earlier by giving one-year's advance notice during the five-year period before they reached their normal retirement

age. Moreover, the deletion of posts held by the retiring officers would be subject to assessment of operational requirements by the DoBs concerned. He pointed out that upon the submission of the manpower plans by DoBs in October 2003, CSB would have a clearer picture on the effect of the Second VRS and the roadmap to achieve the target of reduction in civil service establishment. Ms LI Fung-ying was concerned that the Administration might use all possible means to reduce the civil service establishment if the target of 160 000 could not be achieved by 2006-07 through natural wastage and voluntary retirement.

28. Responding to Mr LEUNG Fu-wah's enquiry, SCS advised that in order to achieve the target of reducing the overall establishment to 160 000 by 2006-07, a 10% reduction target had been set for each bureau as a start. Nevertheless, the reduction in operating expenses for individual bureaux would be considered according to their operational requirements. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan opposed the setting of a standard 10% target of reduction for all bureaux and doubted the practicability of the target, as the operational requirements of bureaux and departments under their purview varied greatly. Mr LEE considered that while it might be feasible for smaller bureaux, such as the Constitutional Affairs Bureau, to achieve the target, it might not be the case for larger bureaux involving departments with considerable establishment, such as the Security Bureau which oversaw the disciplinary forces. Mr Kenneth TING also expressed concern about the application of a standard 10% reduction target to all bureaux.

29. In reply, SCS explained that DoBs were requested to work out their manpower plans on bureau basis with the target of achieving a 10% reduction in establishment as a start. However, depending on the results of the manpower plans submitted, the 10% reduction target might be applied more flexibly to each bureau/department having regard to the operational needs of individual bureaux/departments. He said that CSB would examine and monitor the progress of reduction through the manpower plans submitted by DoBs, and would further discuss with the bureaux/departments on the implementation of their reduction plans, where necessary. DSCS1 added that as DoBs were required to work out the plan to achieve the target reduction on a bureau basis, they would have the flexibility to even out the reduction among departments under their purview having regard to operational needs of individual departments.

30. To minimize the adverse impact of establishment reduction on civil service stability and morale, Ms LI Fung-ying suggested that CSB should state clearly the grades/departments with identified or potential surplus for establishment reduction. SCS responded that it would be impracticable for CSB to identify or work out the detailed manpower plans for individual bureaux/departments without first-hand information on their operational requirements. CSB would rely upon DoBs to oversee the consolidated establishment figures in their bureaux and departments under their purview. However, CSB would monitor the progress of achieving the target through the information provided in the manpower plans submitted by DoBs.

31. Responding to Mr Kenneth TING's enquiry, SCS advised that CSB had not set any separate reduction targets for each financial year given the need to allow flexibility for bureaux/departments to phase out the reduction in establishment for operational considerations. He said that more details including the annual reduction plan for bureaux would be available when DoBs submitted their manpower plans in October 2003. Mr Kenneth TING commented that CSB should try to expedite the process of reduction through detailed examination of the operational requirements of individual bureaux/departments to ascertain the number of surplus posts that could be deleted in each bureau/department.

## **VI. Any other business**

### Review of job-related allowances for civilian grades

32. SCS drew members' attention that CSB had provided an information paper on the "Review of Job-related Allowances for Civilian Grades" to the Panel on 16 May 2003 (LC Paper No. CB(1)1688/02-03(01)). Mr LEE Cheuk-yan noted from the information paper that the review of Hardship Allowances would be deferred by six months and that the review of the remaining Job-related Allowances (JRAs) had substantively been completed. At the request of Mr LEE, the Chairman invited CSB to brief the Panel at the meeting on 16 June 2003 on the outcome of the review of the remaining JRAs and the Administration's decision on these allowances.

33. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:50 pm.