

**For discussion
on 21 June 2004**

Legislative Council Panel on Public Service

**Study on the civilianization potential
in disciplined services departments**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the civilianization studies being carried out in the five disciplined services departments, viz. the Hong Kong Police Force (HKP), the Correctional Services Department (CSD), the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED), the Fire Services Department (FSD) and the Immigration Department (Imm D).

Background

2. To help achieve the target of reducing the size of the civil service to 160 000 by 2006-07, a general recruitment freeze to the civil service was introduced with effect from 1 April 2003. Exemption from recruitment freeze would be considered only under very exceptional circumstances and with the approval of the panel co-chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration (CS) and the Financial Secretary (FS) and with the Secretary for the Civil Service as member.

3. In September 2003, four of the disciplined services departments (i.e. HKP, CSD, FSD and Imm D) applied to the panel for exemption to proceed with open recruitment. In granting approval to the four departments to proceed with open recruitment to fill a total of 560 posts, the panel asked Secretary for Security (S for S) to further explore opportunities for civilianization in order to facilitate a more efficient deployment of disciplined services staff and to minimize the need for further external recruitment. The S

for S commissioned the Efficiency Unit (EU) of the CS's Office in December 2003 to assist the five disciplined services departments, namely HKP, C&ED, CSD, FSD and Imm D to conduct studies on the potential for civilianization in these departments.

Objectives of the civilianization studies

4. In recent years, the disciplined services departments have been pursuing civilianization as a measure to enhance efficiency and cost effectiveness. Built upon the on-going efforts by departments, the current civilianization studies are conducted simultaneously in the five disciplined services departments on a more comprehensive basis and with the professional input from EU as Government's management consultant.

5. The objective of the current studies is to identify areas of work which can be taken up by civilian staff to release the specially trained disciplined services staff for core frontline duties for which their expertise could be put to best use. The exercise is not intended or expected to create any redundancy of disciplined services staff. There is no pre-determined quota on the number of posts to be civilianized. Staff currently filling any posts which are to be civilianized would be redeployed to fill existing or new posts requiring their professional expertise. Where suitable opportunities are identified, civilianization may have an added result of absorbing some surplus civilian staff, such as general grades staff.

Conduct of the civilianization studies

6. With the consultancy service rendered by EU, the five disciplined services departments commenced studies on civilianization potential in their departments in January 2004 with a target of completion in around June 2004. A Project Steering Committee (PSC) is set up in each of the five disciplined services departments to guide and direct the study team on the conduct of the study. Each PSC is chaired by the deputy head of the respective disciplined services departments and comprises members from the departmental management, EU, Security Bureau and Civil Service Bureau. The staff sides

are also consulted in the process (see paragraph 9 below).

7. The study team formed in each department is staffed mainly by officers from the EU and assisted by designated officers of the department. The civilianization studies are conducted in two phases. Phase 1 which has been completed was a high level scanning of the job descriptions and actual duties of all disciplined posts in the departments to identify possible civilianization opportunities. In Phase 1, the study teams identified over 1 700 posts in the five disciplined services departments as having civilianization potential that merit further consideration under Phase 2. These included posts in areas such as administrative and logistical support, systems management, driving and transport service, photography, quartering, venue management, staff/public relations, records management, issue of documents, answering enquiries from the public, research and analysis, training and public education.

8. In Phase 2 of the study, the study teams assess the feasibility of civilianization of each identified post. The guiding principles for consideration include cost-effectiveness, ease of implementation, safeguarding of the departments' capability and effectiveness in performing their core duties, quality of service, no staff redundancy, and provision of room to accommodate health impaired officers and for contingency staff reinforcement. In addition to detailed examination of the work contents, formation heads, middle managers, post-holders and staff associations are consulted. The views of the departmental management are also sought with a view to establishing a pragmatic implementation plan.

Staff consultation

9. The views of staff are collected in the course of the studies through site visits by the study teams, interviews with the post holders and their superiors, and feedback from staff associations. Staff have also been kept informed of the progress of the studies and consulted on the recommendations through representation at the PSC meetings and/or other channels such as the Departmental Consultative Committees and special meetings arranged for the staff. Views from the departments' management and staff have been taken

into consideration in finalizing the Phase 1 findings. Staff will also have an opportunity to comment on the EU's proposals on civilianization following Phase 2 study before the departments finalize their recommendations to S for S.

Current position

10. The study teams in all the five disciplined services departments are in the final stage of the Phase 2 study and will shortly submit reports to the departmental steering committees.

11. Based on early indications on the Phase 2 study, it is expected that some recommendations can be implemented in the short to medium term, for example, where the identified posts can be taken up by surplus staff in existing civilian grades subject to the provision of post-specific training by the department. Some are to be civilianized in phases such as when the incumbents leave the service through natural wastage, for example, for specialist posts where the post holders cannot be redeployed to the core duties or other streams of the department. In cases where a new civilian departmental grade is proposed, the merit and cost-effectiveness of such recommendation needs to be scrutinized against other human resource management principles. It is expected that the number of posts identified for civilianization at the conclusion of the Phase 2 study will be less than the number identified in Phase 1.

Way forward

12. Following further consultation with staff, the PSCs will finalise the recommendations and propose a civilianization plan to their respective Heads of department for onward submission to the S for S in the third quarter of 2004, who will make a formal submission to the panel co-chaired by the CS and the FS, with SCS as a member.

13. When the Administration has taken a final decision, the disciplined services departments will take forward the agreed recommendations. They will plan for the staff deployment, recruitment and training, and

alignment of the civilianization recommendations with other departmental initiatives. Adequate consultation and communication, as appropriate, will be made with the officers affected, staff associations and any other stakeholders to be affected by the proposed changes.

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