

**Information Note
for LegCo Members' meeting with The Ombudsman
on 2 December 2003**

Recruitment of staff and assurance of service quality

(i) Progress of replacing remaining civil servants by contract officers

Just before delinking, the Office was staffed by 78 seconded civil servants and 12 contract officers. By the end of November 2003, only six civil servants remained out of a total of 87 staff. Of these six civil servants, three are involved in investigation duties and three in administrative duties. Recruitment is now in progress, with a view to filling five of these posts by the end of March 2004. The remaining one will be phased out through normal retirement by the end of April 2004.

(ii) How The Ombudsman could ensure the quality of service of her Office with the newly recruited staff and the temporary case officers and a reduction of resources from the Administration

With the recruitment of new contract staff and temporary case officers and also reduction of resources by the Administration, we have taken the following measures to maintain the quality of our service –

(a) Recruitment, training and development of staff

1. To appoint applicants of the right calibre and having relevant working experience: selection emphasizes aptitude, development potential, language skills, investigation skills, public administration knowledge and relevant professional qualifications.
2. To provide adequate training to equip full-time new appointees with the necessary vocational skills: the Office's training programme includes –

● ***Induction training***

- Basic Induction Training covers an overall view of the structure and business relationships within Government,

Vision & Mission of the Office, and how the Office performs its statutory functions;

- Skill-based training covers investigation matters, language and report writing skills; and
- Attachment to different units to familiarize with different aspects of the Office's work, such as interpretation of the Ombudsman Ordinance in the screening of incoming complaints, different methods used to conduct complaint based investigations, direct investigations etc.
- ***On the job training***
 - All new recruits are given proper hand-over periods, during which they are briefed on policies, practices, procedures and techniques relevant to their jobs. In addition, junior officers are assigned mentors whom they could approach for advice and assistance;
 - Job rotation is arranged to expose staff to different aspects of work, as well as to test and develop their potential;
 - Investigation teams meet weekly to discuss approaches to be adopted for new cases, review on-going cases, share techniques and working experiences. Where necessary, the Directorate will give advice and directions at these meetings;
 - When specific problems have been identified, open forums are organized for information dissemination and experience sharing. The Ombudsman holds direct dialogue with staff at these forums to impart first-hand her philosophy and stance on relevant issues; and
 - Special job-related or development training courses are organized to enhance expertise and professionalism, e.g. mediation theory and technique (a 5-day course), time-management (1 day).

- ***Self development***

- All officers are encouraged to undertake self arranged studies. For studies relevant to the work of the Office or would enhance staff's development, reimbursement of course fees may be approved upon completion of the programme.
3. Departmental manuals on policies and operations of individual organizations that have major impact on the public are compiled and updated regularly to serve as handy references. Apart from helping officers to better understand complaints arising from these areas, the experience and knowledge gained in past investigations are retained and passed on to new comers.

(b) Reduction of resources by the Administration

1. Since delinking , the Office's organization and staffing structure (including ranking and number of staff) have been kept under constant review. We do not want to be lumbered with too many grades and rankings as exist within the civil service. We used the opportunity of delinking to introduce multi-tasking and combined grades, less complex investigation duties are re-assigned to lower ranks, and the scope of duties of administrative staff are expanded to provide a multi-skilled support service. We see the civil service practice of automatic increments as potentially undermining the financial viability of this Office under the new funding arrangements. We therefore devised completely new salary scales that would better reflect prevailing wage levels; abolish automatic increments; and on contract renewal, introduce flexible performance-based salary-point review.

Some measures implemented which resulted in costs-saving are –

- Constantly reviewing the size and ranking of the establishment to ensure that the staffing complement is commensurate with workload and the nature of work. Since delinking, there has been a net reduction of three posts in the overall establishment and 9 posts have been replaced by posts of a lower rank. Of the posts replaced, three were administrative posts and the other six were Senior Complaints Officer posts. Two more administrative posts will be deleted in the near future;

- Reviewing administrative support services and combining the Head and Deputy Head of the Administrative Division into one post for overseeing the Division;
 - Expanding the scope of responsibilities of Complaints Assistants and deploying them to assist in investigation work;
 - Recruiting multi-skilled Administrative Assistants to replace clerical and secretarial staff seconded from the civil service; and
 - Use of Temporary Case Officers to deal with sudden influx of cases to keep waiting time within acceptable levels.
2. The Office practices flexible and responsive management by being able to re-engineer work procedure and redistribute workload among investigation teams to maximize output. In August 2002, we reshuffled the work schedule of investigation teams to even out workload to improve efficiency. The caseload and output of investigation teams as well as individual officers are monitored on a weekly basis. Cross-team deployment of staff and work is common to deal with sudden bulges of workload increase.
 3. Control of operating expenditure is tightened with a view to building up a reserve to meet the longer term needs of the Office. Staff are constantly being reminded to help keep operating costs down, e.g. through reduced electricity and paper consumption. Our Stores and Procurement Regulations also require active involvement of senior management in controlling the procurement of services and equipment.