

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(1)876/06-07
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

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Panel on Public Service

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 15 January 2007 at 10:45 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

- Members present** : Hon Howard YOUNG, SBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Margaret NG
Hon James TO Kun-sun
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Hon KWONG Chi-kin
- Members absent** : Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, SBS, JP
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
- Public officers attending** : **Agenda item IV**

Miss Denise YUE, GBS, JP
Secretary for the Civil Service

Mr Andrew H Y WONG, JP
Permanent Secretary for the Civil Service

Mr Patrick CHAN Nim-tak
Director of General Grades
Civil Service Bureau

Mr SIU Yu-bun, Alan, JP
Deputy Director of Leisure & Cultural Services
(Leisure Services)

Mrs WAN KEE Wai-fun, Helen
Departmental Secretary
Leisure & Cultural Services Department

Mr CHAN Yau-fung, JP
Deputy Postmaster General

Mrs Vivian TAM
Departmental Secretary
Hongkong Post

Miss LAU Lee-kwan, Vivian, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (6)

Mrs LEUNG WONG Le
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower
(Administration)

Dr LEUNG Ting-hung, JP
Deputy Director of Health

Mr LEUNG Chi-fai, John, JP
Assistant Director of Health
(Administration and Policy)

Agenda items V and VI

Miss Denise YUE, GBS, JP
Secretary for the Civil Service

Mr Andrew H Y WONG, JP
Permanent Secretary for the Civil Service

Mrs Rosanna URE, JP
Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service 3

Clerk in attendance : Mr Andy LAU
Chief Council Secretary (1)2

Staff in attendance : Mr Noel SUNG
Senior Council Secretary (1)4

Miss Winnie CHENG
Legislative Assistant (1)5

I Confirmation of minutes of meeting

(LC Paper No. CB(1)621/06-07 — Minutes of meeting on 18 December 2006)

As the Chairman was engaged in another Panel meeting, Ms LI Fung-ying, the Deputy Chairman, chaired the meeting.

2. The minutes of the meeting held on 18 December 2006 were confirmed.

II Information paper issued since last meeting

3. Members noted that no information paper had been issued since the last meeting.

III Items for discussion at the next meeting scheduled for 8 February 2007

(LC Paper No. CB(1)623/06-07(01) — List of outstanding items for discussion

LC Paper No. CB(1)623/06-07(02) — List of follow-up actions)

4. Members agreed that the following items should be discussed at the next meeting scheduled for 8 February 2007 –

- (a) Follow-up on review of employment situation of non-civil service contract staff;
- (b) Integrity enhancement initiatives for civil servants; and
- (c) Update on occupational safety and health in the civil service.

IV Follow-up on review of employment situation of non-civil service contract staff

(LC Paper No. CB(1)623/06-07(03) — Information paper provided by the Administration

LC Paper No. CB(1)471/06-07(03) — Information paper provided by the Administration

LC Paper No. CB(1)473/06-07 — Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat)

Review of non-civil service contract staff situation

5. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that when the Chief Executive (CE) met the representatives of labour associations in an open forum in November 2005, some representatives of the non-civil service contract (NCSC) staff in the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) had pointed out to the CE that many

NCSC staff had worked in the FEHD for eight to ten years, and over the years their contracts, the length of which ranged from one month to a year, had been renewed for many times. Mr WONG said that the CE had responded that if there was a continued need for the posts and the staff had worked in the posts for a long time, the staff should be engaged on a long term basis. Mr WONG said that notwithstanding the undertaking given by the CE, the NCSC staff of the FEHD were still being offered one-year contracts. He therefore queried why the Administration had not honoured the undertaking given by CE.

6. The Secretary for the Civil Service (SCS) responded that as she was not present at the open forum concerned, she was not in a position to comment on the discussion on that occasion. However, in 2006, the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) conducted a special review on the employment situation of NCSC staff in various bureaux and departments (B/Ds) and identified 4 004 NCSC positions, including NCSC positions in the FEHD, which were considered suitable for conversion into civil service posts. Around 12 500 NCSC positions fell within the ambit of the NCSC Staff Scheme. Guidelines had been issued to B/Ds that they should avoid offering short contracts, i.e. one to several months, to NCSC staff. SCS pointed out that many NCSC staff were employed to provide services which were under review, e.g. whether alternative mode of service delivery was possible, such as through contracting out the services. In such circumstances, the NCSC positions could not be converted into civil service posts.

7. Mr WONG Kwok-hing reiterated that since the NCSC staff had worked in the FEHD for many years, there should be a continued need for their service and the staff should be employed on a long term basis so that they did not have to worry about losing their jobs at the end of each contract. He requested that the Government should take care of the interests of the NCSC staff in the review instead of contracting out the services.

8. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that he was greatly disappointed with the Administration's response to the motion passed at the last Panel meeting, as the Government declined to conduct another review of the NCSC staff situation in various B/Ds, and maintained that only 4 004 NCSC positions would be converted into civil service posts. He highlighted the worsening situation of the NCSC staff as a result of the Government's policy to contract out its services which had led to the NCSC staff losing their jobs. He opined that outsourcing would only benefit the contractors at the expense of workers as the cost to the Government was neutral whereas the wages for workers would be unreasonably suppressed to enable the contractors to make a profit. Mr LEE opined that Government, being a responsible employer, should set a good example for the private sector, and should not attempt to exploit its employees, resulting in pay cut. He also said that the CE should not, on the one hand, stress the importance of creating more job opportunities whereas, on the other hand, dismiss thousands of NCSC staff.

9. SCS responded that as public money was involved, the Government had to ensure that it obtained the best value for the money spent. Based on the "big market,

small government" principle, the Government had to be conscious of the need to deliver public services in the most cost effective and efficient manner. The contracting out of appropriate government services would not give rise to a net reduction of job opportunities in Hong Kong because jobs displaced from the Government would be created in the private sector. When the Government contracted out services which involved non-skilled labour, namely security and cleansing services, it would require the contractors to pay a salary to the non-skilled workers not lower than the median monthly wages for the relevant industry/occupation in the market as published by the Census and Statistics Department.

10. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that given the grave concern expressed by members regarding the small number of NCSC positions that would be converted into civil service posts, and the employment arrangements for NCSC staff, SCS should follow up on the undertaking given by the CE despite that she was not present at the forum. Mr WONG requested that the Administration should respond sympathetically to the humble requests of the NCSC staff, who had worked loyally for the Government for a long period of time. He said that what the NCSC staff wanted was a long term contract so that they could continue to support their families, and he strongly requested that SCS and the heads of bureaux/departments (HoDs) should re-consider the NCSC staff's situation and offer them long term employment.

Hongkong Post

11. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan doubted whether all 2 033 NCSC positions in Hongkong Post were not suitable for conversion into civil service posts, as many NCSC staff had worked in the department for more than five years. With reference to Annex C of LC Paper CB(1) 623/06-07(03), Mr LEE pointed out that the 445 Contract Sorting Office Assistants and 396 Contract Workers in Hongkong Post worked 42 hours a week, only three hours short of the 45 weekly working hours required for civil servants. He said that the Hongkong Post could in fact offer three more working hours each week to the NCSC staff so that they could meet the normal 45 conditioned hours required of equivalent civil service posts. With regard to the NCSC positions for meeting service needs that were subject to market fluctuation, Mr LEE stated that the 157 Contract Operations Assistants and 303 Contract Workers performed the same duties as Postal Officers and Postmen respectively, and it was unreasonable to classify these positions as unsuitable for conversion into civil service posts. Based on the above, it would appear that the Hongkong Post, which operated on a trading fund basis, was exploiting its staff.

12. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong shared Mr LEE's concern and said that it was unreasonable that the working hours of hundreds of NCSC staff in the Hongkong Post were just three hours short of the conditioned hours required of civil servants, which resulted in these NCSC positions not being converted into civil service posts. He said that it was highly suspicious that the department had deliberately restricted the working hours of NCSC staff so as to avoid creating civil service posts.

13. The Deputy Postmaster General (DPMG) explained that generally speaking most of the NCSC staff in Hongkong Post worked between 18 and 36 hours a week. At present, NCSC staff were engaged in sorting the mails between 6 am to 10 am before the commencement of the mail delivery service at about 10 am. NCSC staff were also employed between 6 pm and 10 pm to handle the mails, having regard to the fact that most companies posted their mails between 5 pm and 6 pm in the evening. DPMG stressed that the operation pattern was not peculiar to the Hongkong Post, but was common among the postal services of overseas countries. He said that the Hongkong Post had not unduly limited the working hours of NCSC staff who were employed based on actual operational and service need as well as the seasonal fluctuation of mail volume.

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14. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan requested the Administration to provide detailed information on the working hours specified in the contracts and the actual working hours performed by individual NCSC staff in Hongkong Post in December 2006. He said that according to the NCSC staff concerned, the staff performed three hours overtime daily, and their positions could be converted into civil service posts if they were given three more hours of work each week. With regard to the NCSC positions relating to service needs which were subject to market fluctuation, Mr LEE said that the 157 Contract Operations Assistants and the 303 Contract Workers performed the same duties as Postal Officers and Postmen. He opined that as the major part of the Hongkong Post's business was stable and only a very small portion of the business, e.g. the "PaythruPost", was subject to market fluctuation, the NCSC positions relating to these types of services should be converted into civil service posts.

(Post-meeting note: The information provided by the Administration was circulated to members vide LC Paper CB(1)843/06-07(03) on 2 February 2007.)

15. DPMG explained that apart from Hongkong Post's core business of handling mails, the department engaged some 900 NCSC staff in duties directly related to postal business which was not permanent in nature. The continuous employment of the NCSC staff was subject to the securing of the business contracts, bearing in mind the fact that Hongkong Post faced intense competitions from other service providers in the market.

16. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that the NCSC staff in Hongkong Post performed duties relating to both the core business and non-core business, e.g. the NCSC staff also handled mail services, and there was no clear-cut demarcation between the so-called core and non-core businesses. He opined that the fact that Hongkong Post was a trading fund department should not imply that it had to exploit its staff in order to maximize its profit.

17. DPMG responded that most of the NCSC staff in Hongkong Post worked three to four hours a day although during the peak periods such as Christmas, or during April and May when a lot of companies posted their annual reports, the NCSC staff

would be required to work longer hours. He added that the Hongkong Post planned to launch a number of major projects in the next few years, which would have consequential impact on manpower requirement. For instance, Hongkong Post was studying the feasibility of providing automated counter services in order to enhance operational efficiency. The tender exercise for a new mechanized mail sorting system was in progress, and the new system was expected to enhance the efficiency in mail sorting by about 10%. An efficiency enhancement drive was also implemented in the three mail processing centres. In the circumstances, Hongkong Post had to be very cautious in planning its manpower requirement. DPMG also pointed out that the Hongkong Post had in fact conducted in-service appointment exercises to fill vacancies in the Controller of Post, Postal Officer and Postman grades. He said that if suitable civil servants could not be found to fill all the vacancies, arrangements would be made to seek approval for open recruitment, which would reduce the need for employing NCSC staff.

18. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that if hundreds of NCSC staff in Hongkong Post were required to work at least 42 hours a week, which was only a couple of hours less than the conditioned working hours for civil servants, it seemed that the department was manipulating the situation in order to bar the NCSC staff from transferring into civil servants. He said that the department should be ashamed of the arrangement which was not conducive to a harmonious working relation between employers and employees. Mr CHEUNG said that under the circumstances, the NCSC staff in Hongkong Post would continue to work as cheap labour for 42 hours a week and would have no prospect of transferring into civil servants. He requested that the department should consider adjusting the working hours of the NCSC staff so that they could be considered for conversion into civil servants. Mr CHEUNG requested that a public hearing should be held to hear the views of the NCSC staff of Hongkong Post.

19. DPMG responded that Hongkong Post had regularly reviewed the employment situation of individual NCSC positions and if the working hours of a particular NCSC position required "part-time" staff to work around 45 hours a week throughout the year, the department would, subject to operational need, consider converting it into a full-time NCSC position. DPMG said that these NCSC staff normally worked three to four hours a day, although they might be required to work one or two hours more each day during peak periods such as Christmas, or for leave relief purpose.

20. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong was concerned that Hongkong Post had 2 033 NCSC positions and the department did not consider it necessary to convert any of the NCSC positions into civil service posts. Yet many of the NCSC staff in the department worked 42 hours a week, i.e. just three hours short of the 45 weekly working hours required of civil servants. There were reasons to believe that the department had deliberately arranged the NCSC staff to work just less than 45 hours a week so that they could not be qualified for civil service status, and if so, the department was doing injustice to the NCSC staff. Mr CHEUNG said that it would appear that no matter how heavy was the workload, Hongkong Post would only

employ more NCSC staff in order to ensure that each NCSC staff worked less than 45 hours a week.

21. DPMG reiterated that if there was a continued need for a particular NCSC position requiring "part-time" staff to work around 45 hours a week throughout the year, the department would, subject to operational need, consider converting it into a full-time NCSC position. DPMG added that Hongkong Post had earlier reviewed the staffing situation in the department and was conducting in-service appointment exercises for about 200 posts for the various grades in the department. If there were insufficient suitable candidates in the civil service to fill the vacancies, arrangements would be made to seek approval for open recruitment, which would have an impact on the manpower requirement of NCSC staff.

22. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong reiterated that if there were several hundreds of NCSC staff in Hongkong Post working about 42 hours a week, there should be scope for Hongkong Post to convert some of the positions into civil service posts.

23. Having noted that the Hongkong Post had to recruit 200 more civil servants, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan doubted the justification for not converting any of the 2 033 NCSC positions into civil service posts; when the department needed to create 200 more civil service posts in addition to the 2 033 NCSC positions.

24. DPMG clarified that the 200 vacancies mentioned were existing vacancies in the department. Approval would be sought to fill these vacancies through open recruitment if sufficient number of suitable candidates could not be found in the in-service appointment exercises. He said that the arrangement would reduce the need for employing NCSC staff.

Leisure and Cultural Services Department

25. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) had decided to contract out its horticulture service which resulted in termination of the contracts of the related NCSC staff. He said that given that the NCSC staff concerned had worked in the department for a long time, the department should consider retaining these staff as staff experience and loyalty would be lost if the service was contracted out. He reiterated that the CE had pledged at an open meeting with the labour associations in November 2005 that if there was a continued need of the NCSC positions and the staff had worked in the posts for a long time, the NCSC staff should be employed on a long term basis. He said that the department's policy on NCSC staff should follow the pledge of the CE and should give sympathetic consideration to the long term employment of NCSC staff.

26. The Deputy Director of Leisure and Cultural Services (Leisure Services) (DD/LS) said that LCSD, as a Government department, had to follow the Government's policy on the employment of NCSC staff as well as the "big market, small government" principle to ensure cost-effectiveness of the services. It was the finding of the special review on the employment situation of NCSC staff that some of

the NCSC positions in LCSD involved work that should more appropriately be performed by civil servants whereas certain types of services should more appropriately be contracted out or delivered through alternative modes. As far as horticulture service was concerned, over 90% of the service that could be outsourced had already been contracted out. In the course of further contracting out the remaining horticulture service, the Department had, in recognition of the work of the NCSC workmen concerned, and having regard to their concerns about difficulties in finding replacement jobs within a short time, extended their contracts until the end of 2007 so that they could have more time to look for a new job or make other arrangements for themselves. A few large organizations had expressed interest in considering employing the NCSC staff concerned and such information had been relayed to the staff concerned to assist them in finding a new job. With the concurrence of individual NCSC staff, LCSD could also pass on their personal information to the LCSD contractors for consideration of employment.

27. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that he was dissatisfied with the Administration's response. He reiterated that the CE had pledged that if there was a continued need of the NCSC positions, consideration should be given to employing the NCSC staff on a long term basis. He said that at the open meeting with the labour associations in 2005, the CE had not mentioned about the "big market, small government" principle, and the government departments should follow the CE's labour policy. Mr WONG reiterated that the Government should consider the NCSC staff's situation sympathetically as the NCSC staff needed the jobs to support their families.

28. DD/LS said that LCSD had reviewed the arrangements for horticulture service and considered it appropriate to outsource the service as this was in accordance with established Government policy. The department would continue with its work in this direction.

29. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan pointed out that although a number of large organizations were interested in employing the NCSC horticulture staff of LCSD, the NCSC staff concerned were worried that they would be offered a much lower salary as a result, or lose their income if the contractors went bankrupt. In his view, outsourcing would only benefit the external contractors at the expense of employees as the wages of the latter would be unreasonably suppressed to enable the former to make a profit. He said that the SCS should clarify whether the CE had given a false hope to the NCSC staff in 2005. Mr LEE requested that the Administration should provide a written explanation as to why the NCSC positions in public libraries, including two Assistant Librarians and 471 Library Officers/Assistants, could not be converted into civil service posts as the department had reviewed the library operations over the past ten years and yet it had to conduct a further review for another year before deciding the future of the NCSC positions.

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(Post-meeting note: The information provided by the Administration was circulated to members vide LC Paper CB(1)843/06-07(03) on 2 February 2007.)

30. SCS reiterated that she was not present at the meeting held in November 2005 as mentioned by Mr WONG Kwok-hing. She said that she was not aware of what the CE had said at the aforesaid meeting, and was not sure whether the audience of the meeting might have misunderstood the CE's words. SCS stressed that the "big market, small government" principle and the need to obtain value for the public money spent were the established policy of the HKSAR Government. Where it was considered appropriate and cost-effective for the private sector to take up a government service, the Administration would consider contracting out the particular service. Any impact on serving civil servants would be taken into consideration when the Government decided on the timing for contracting out.

Education and Manpower Bureau

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31. At the request of Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong, the Deputy Secretary to Education and Manpower (6) undertook to provide information regarding the highest, lowest and median points of salary of the 1 204 NCSC staff in the Education and Manpower Bureau, and the number of NCSC staff in the Bureau earning a salary below the median point of salary.

(Post-meeting note: The information provided by the Administration was circulated to members vide LC Paper CB(1)843/06-07(03) on 2 February 2007.)

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32. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan requested that the Administration should provide a written explanation as to why the 138 General Clerk and 22 General Worker positions could not be converted into civil service posts, as these NCSC staff worked in government schools which should have a long term need for their services.

(Post-meeting note: The information provided by the Administration was circulated to members vide LC Paper CB(1)843/06-07(03) on 2 February 2007.)

Department of Health

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33. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan requested that the Administration should provide a written explanation as to why the 277 Health Surveillance Assistant NCSC positions could not be converted into civil service posts.

(Post-meeting note: The information provided by the Administration was circulated to members vide LC Paper CB(1)843/06-07(03) on 2 February 2007.)

Through-train arrangement

34. Mr KWONG Chi-kin was concerned that since the Government had identified, after the special review, 4 004 NCSC positions which were suitable for conversion into civil service posts, and the NCSC staff concerned had worked in these

posts for several years, yet the Government did not allow the NCSC staff to transfer as civil servants under a "through train" arrangement. Mr KWONG asked whether the Government would give priority to the 4 004 NCSC staff in filling the converted civil service posts.

35. SCS stated that the Government's response to the Panel's motion regarding the request for a "through train" arrangement for NCSC staff was given in Annex D of LC Paper CB(1)623/06-07(03). She reiterated that the recruitment of civil servants should go through an open, fair and competitive process. She said that in setting the selection criteria for new recruits to the civil service, many B/Ds would take into account the relevant past working experience of the candidates. NCSC staff who had relevant working experience in the Government before should therefore enjoy a strong competitive edge over other candidates in the open recruitment exercises. She pointed out that a "through train" arrangement for NCSC staff would be unfair to those persons who had not worked as NCSC staff but wished to join the civil service, as it would deprive them of the opportunity to compete for the civil service posts.

Outsourcing of services

36. Mr KWONG Chi-kin asked whether the Government, in contracting out its services, had considered the implications on the continuity and quality of public services, e.g. recently a sizable service provider, the Security Centre Limited which served a large number of government departments and public bodies including the LCSD, the Hospital Authority and the Housing Society, went bankrupt resulting in the lay-off of over 900 security staff and interruption of the operation of the departments and public bodies concerned.

37. SCS pointed out that currently there were around 1 000 on-going contracts between the Government and contractors. While the Government would endeavour to be as careful as possible in its selection of contractors, it could not totally avoid a handful of contractors failing to complete their contracts with the Government through, for example, management problems of the concerned contractors. It however did not follow that there was problem with the outsourcing policy or that such policy was not suitable for Hong Kong.

Use of existing vacancies for phasing out the NCSC positions

38. Noting that there was no "through train" arrangement nor priority for selection of the 4 004 NCSC staff whose positions were considered appropriate for conversion into civil service posts, Ms LI Fung-ying enquired as to the details of using and re-grading existing vacancies in the civil service, or creation of additional civil service posts to offset the converted 4 004 NCSC positions, in particular the arrangement for phasing out the 803 NCSC positions in the LCSD which would be converted into civil service posts. Ms LI said that there was a concern among the NCSC staff and some civil servants that it was only a political ploy of the Government to convert some of the NCSC positions into civil service posts because even if the NCSC staff were

selected to fill the converted posts, the staff might still be dismissed during or after the probation period.

Admin 39. Referring to paragraph 3 of LC Paper No. CB(1)623/06-07(03), SCS said that CSB was working with the bureaux/departments/offices concerned on phasing out the 4 004 NCSC positions by making use of existing and anticipated vacant civil service posts, or creating new posts to be offset by deletion of existing vacancies, or re-grading existing vacant posts, or creating new posts but only as a last resort. In the process, CSB would review the work of the individual NCSC positions and identify the most appropriate civil service ranks to take up the work. She said that a report on the outcome of the arrangements would be made to the Panel in due course.

40. SCS stressed that she had always been frank with members on CSB's position. For instance, in response to members' suggestions of the "through train" arrangement and according priority to the NCSC staff in the selection of candidates to fill civil service posts, she had made it very clear that these proposals were not acceptable under the Government's policy of recruiting civil servants through an open, fair and competitive process. She said that it would be unthinkable for a HoD to deliberately recruit a NCSC staff as a civil servant through an open recruitment process and then dismiss him during the probation period even if the staff had satisfactorily performed his duties, as this would not bring any benefits to the department concerned.

Creation of NCSC positions

41. Noting that, as a result of the special review, some NCSC positions in the Judiciary, the Department of Justice and Immigration Department would be converted into civil service posts, Ms Margaret NG said that the use of NCSC staff in the departments concerned had caused some administration problems and inconvenience to the public. She enquired as to why the NCSC positions were created in the first place; and the Government's criteria for and control over the creation of NCSC positions.

42. In response, SCS said that NCSC positions were created to meet service needs which were time-limited, short-term, seasonal, or subject to market fluctuations, or which required staff on a part-time basis, or which required tapping the latest expertise in a given area in the market, or when the mode of delivery of the service was under review or likely to be changed through, for example, contracting out. SCS stressed that the special review did not focus on why the 16 000 odd NCSC positions were created, but rather whether these positions fell within the ambit of the NCSC Staff Scheme, i.e. the aforesaid criteria, and whether the work of some NCSC positions should be more appropriately be performed by civil servants. She said CSB had stepped up measures to ensure that B/Ds complied with the guidelines of the NCSC Staff Scheme.

(Mr Howard YOUNG, the Chairman of the Panel, took over the chair of the meeting at this point, i.e. 12:20 pm)

Follow-up on special review of NCSC staff employment situation

43. The Chairman said that despite that it was not the Government's policy to allow the NCSC staff to transfer automatically into civil servants under a "through train" arrangement, the Government could in fact consider taking measures which could effectively absorb the NCSC staff concerned into the civil service. Quoting the recent taking-over of an airline company by another airline company as an example, the Chairman said that the affected staff were allowed to take up the posts in the new company without going through a probation period, in view of their good performance in the past and the continued need of their service in the new company.

44. The Chairman said that another four departments would attend the next Panel meeting for discussion of the follow-up actions on the special review of the NCSC staff employment situation. In response to Mr LEE Cheuk-yan's enquiry regarding the public hearing proposed by Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong for hearing the views of the NCSC staff of Hongkong Post, the Chairman said that he would discuss with the Deputy Chairman regarding the appropriate arrangement for such a proposal.

V Update on National Studies Programmes for civil servants

(LC Paper No. CB(1)623/06-07(04) — Information paper provided by the Administration)

Briefing by the Administration

45. SCS said that in keeping with the development of closer ties between Hong Kong and the Mainland, the CSB devoted continuous efforts to enhancing civil servants' understanding of and exposure to the systems and developments in the Mainland. These efforts took the form of training courses and theme-based visits in the Mainland, local seminars on national studies and the Basic Law, civil service exchange programmes and a dedicated website on Mainland-related information and developments.

Discussion

46. Ms Margaret NG stated that whilst she supported that the HKSAR Government officials should have good understanding of the systems and developments in the Mainland, she was concerned that since it was said that corruption was rampant in the Mainland, such malpractice might be taken up by Hong Kong officers through the exchange programmes. She asked about the measures taken by the HKSAR Government to ensure the integrity of Hong Kong civil servants involved in the exchange programmes. Ms NG asked whether the Government had evaluated the effectiveness of different national studies programmes to facilitate better planning of such programmes. As Hong Kong was an international city, Ms NG also enquired as to whether the Government had introduced any similar exchange programmes at the international level. With reference to the list of seminars on

Admin national studies and the Basic Law in Annex C of LC Paper No. CB(1)623/06-07(04), Ms NG requested the Administration to provide further information regarding the national studies seminars, e.g. the speakers and the topics, in particular those relating to the legal system and the Basic Law. She asked whether the seminars were open to the public as members of the public might be interested in some of the topics of the seminars.

(Post-meeting note: The information provided by the Administration was circulated to members vide LC Paper CB(1)879/06-07 on 2 February 2007.)

47. SCS responded that one of the primary objectives of the exchange programmes was to study the systems of the partner to the exchange programme with a view to promoting mutual understanding and sharing of knowledge and experience, thus bringing further improvements to the procedures and practices of each of the partner to the exchange programme. As far as corruption was concerned, the HKSAR Government had introduced training programmes and put in place systems to uphold the integrity of civil servants, and officers from both sides of the exchange programmes should fully understand the need to maintain the highest level of integrity among public officers. SCS said that participants in the national studies programmes were required to give their feedbacks in the form of questionnaires to the CSB with a view to further improving the arrangements of the programmes. For example, CSB would continue to organize the Sun Yat-sen University programme based on the favourable feedback from the participants. SCS added that apart from the national studies programmes organized with the Mainland authorities, CSB also invited internationally renowned experts and scholars to conduct seminars for civil servants. Recently, Professor Christopher Forsyth of Cambridge University was invited to Hong Kong and he conducted a series of seminar on public administration law for civil servants. There was also an exchange programme with the Singapore Government for a small number of civil servants from each side to be attached to the Government of the other side for a period of time. Hong Kong Government officers had also been attached to international organizations, e.g. the World Customs Organization, the European Commission, and the World Trade Organization. A Hong Kong civil servant was currently being seconded to work in the Secretariat of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). Through these channels, opportunities were given to civil servants to gain exposure in international arenas. SCS stated that the seminars on national studies and the Basic Law were organized for civil servants and would not be open to the public. The Deputy Secretary for Civil Service 3 (DS/CS3) added that academics from local tertiary institutions and Mainland universities such as Peking University, Tsinghua University and Sun Yat-Sen University had been invited to conduct seminars for civil servants on topics relating to the legal, political and economic aspects and developments in the Mainland.

Admin 48. In response to Ms Margaret NG's request, SCS undertook to provide supplementary information relating to Annex C of LC Paper No. CB(1)623/06-07(04), including the names of speakers from the Mainland and the topics they had spoken on to the Panel.

(Post-meeting note: The information provided by the Administration was circulated to members vide LC Paper CB(1)879/06-07 on 2 February 2007.)

49. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan pointed out that many civil service staff associations also organized their own national studies programmes. He asked whether the CSB would arrange or assist the staff associations to participate in the national studies programme.

50. SCS replied that the training programmes organized by CSB catered for the needs of the whole civil service and were not aimed at particular civil service staff associations, which should plan their own activities.

51. Having noted that four Mainland officers from Beijing had each been attached to Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) for 21 days, and an officer from the Guangdong Provincial Finance Bureau had been attached to the Financial Secretary's Office for 93 days, whereas many engineers from the HKSAR Government had been attached to various Mainland offices, Ms Margaret NG enquired as to the criteria in selecting the government officers for the exchange programmes.

52. SCS replied that the officers of the exchange programmes were mainly selected on a functional and operational need basis; and the areas covered in the programmes were of mutual interest to the Mainland and HKSAR authorities, including public works, transportation, education, environmental protection, intellectual property, immigration and customs services, and consumer protection, etc. DS/CS3 added that the Mainland officers attached to RTHK were also arranged to visit the Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority (TELA) and LCSD to familiarize themselves with the operation of a public radio station, the role and clientele of RTHK and audience expectations, the production of public affairs and other television programmes by RTHK, the structure and functions of the TELA, etc.

53. Having noted that over the years a large number of officers and engineers from the Transport Department had been attached to the Mainland transportation authorities, Ms Margaret NG asked that a summary of the findings of the officers on attachment should be provided to the Panel. In response, SCS undertook to provide the Panel with information on the areas covered in the respective exchanges and feedback from the Transport Department officers.

Admin

(Post-meeting note: The information provided by the Administration was circulated to members vide LC Paper CB(1)879/06-07 on 2 February 2007.)

VI Commendation schemes for civil servants

(LC Paper No. CB(1)623/06-07(05) — Information paper provided by the Administration)

54. SCS said that the Administration was committed to upholding high standards of performance and conduct in the civil service. Maintaining a clean, effective and dedicated civil service was essential in ensuring the continued stability and prosperity

of Hong Kong. To maintain an environment in which civil servants were motivated to deliver quality service that met the rising expectations of the general public, a fair commendation system was necessary to help induce proactive and sustained exemplary performance from civil servants. She said that in response to members' observations on the award of commendations for civil servants at the Panel meeting on 16 October 2006, arrangements would be made to enhance the publicity of the outstanding performance of civil servants awarded with commendations.

55. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that enhanced publicity for outstanding civil servants would help set examples for other civil servants, and re-assure staff of the society's recognition of the good work of public officers.

VII Any other business

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