

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
PANEL ON PUBLIC SERVICE**

Grade Structure Reviews for Non-Directorate Civilian Grades

PURPOSE

This paper updates Members on the grade structure reviews (GSRs) for selected non-directorate civilian grades.

BACKGROUND

2. At the Panel meeting held on 19 November 2007, we briefed Members on the planned GSR for the disciplined services; the planned GSR for the directorate grades; and the intention of identifying appropriate non-directorate civilian grades for the conduct of GSRs. We informed Members that we had already invited the Standing Committee on Disciplined Services Salaries and Conditions of Service (Disciplined Services Committee) to carry out the GSR for the disciplined services, and would shortly invite the Standing Committee on Directorate Salaries and Conditions of Service (Directorate Committee) to carry out a GSR for the directorate grades¹. We also informed Members that we had invited heads of grade and heads of department to provide information on non-directorate civilian grades under their purview which had encountered recruitment and retention difficulties in the past few years. Based on their advice and after assessment by the Civil Service Bureau, we would invite the Standing Commission on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of Service (Standing Commission) to carry out GSRs for selected non-directorate civilian grades.

3. In response to Members' request at that meeting, we undertook to provide the details of the non-directorate civilian grades selected for review when available and the reasons for their selection to the Panel.

¹ Subsequent to the meeting in November 2007, the Disciplined Services Committee and the Directorate Committee have accepted our invitation to conduct GSRs for the disciplined services and for the directorate grades respectively.

NON-DIRECTORATE CIVILIAN GRADES SELECTED FOR GSRs

(I) General

4. As mentioned in our paper submitted for the meeting held on 19 November 2007, we have already established the broad comparability of the pay level of non-directorate civilian grades with their private sector counterparts through the 2006 Pay Level Survey (PLS). Nonetheless, we are aware that some grades and ranks are facing recruitment and retention difficulties, and that such problems have not been and cannot be addressed through the service-wide PLS. We, therefore, consider it necessary to conduct GSRs for those non-directorate civilian grades with proven recruitment and retention difficulties.

5. Based on the proposals put up by heads of grade/heads of department concerned, we have critically examined the recruitment and retention situations of the grades concerned having regard to the following considerations –

(a) Retention difficulties

- This is measured by the unnatural wastage rate² of the grade concerned and other qualitative considerations provided by the head of grade/head of department concerned. The unnatural wastage rate of the grade concerned will be compared against the service-wide average. Generally speaking, we will accord priority to those grades with consistently high unnatural wastage rate *vis-à-vis* the service-wide average over the past three years, and with widespread retention difficulties throughout its non-directorate ranks (i.e. not just limited to a particular rank); and

² Unnatural natural wastage comprises resignation from the civil service, and quitting from the civil service through non-renewal of contract upon expiry despite the departmental management's offer to renew it.

(b) Recruitment difficulties

- This is assessed having regard to the number of vacancies available in the grade concerned for each of the past three rounds of recruitment exercises, the offers made in each round of exercise, and the number of offers declined by selected candidates. We will also give regard to the nature of the recruitment, i.e. whether it is opened to outside, or just limited to in-service, applicants³. Generally speaking, we will give more weight to recruitment difficulties encountered in open recruitment exercises.

(II) Grades Selected for GSRs

6. Having examined the GSR requests made by heads of grade/heads of department on the basis of the considerations set out in paragraph 5 above, we consider that two non-directorate civilian grades, namely the Government Counsel grade and the Veterinary Officer grade, are facing proven recruitment and retention difficulties. The Standing Commission has accepted our invitation to carry out GSRs for these two grades.

The Government Counsel Grade

7. The Government Counsel grade comprises two ranks at the non-directorate level, namely the Government Counsel rank and the Senior Government Counsel rank. Officers at these two ranks mainly serve in the Department of Justice. As at 31 December 2007, there were 245 non-directorate government counsels (in terms of strength) in the civil service.

³ A general open recruitment freeze was imposed on the civil service between 1 April 2003 and 31 March 2007. During this period, civil service grades normally conducted in-service recruitment except those approved by a panel co-chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration and the Financial Secretary to conduct open recruitment on an exceptional basis. In addition, for those grades included in the Second Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VR II), an open recruitment freeze has been imposed for five years commencing 21 March 2003. Exceptions for VR II grades to conduct open recruitment within the “recruitment freeze” period also require the approval of the panel co-chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration and the Financial Secretary.

8. Over the past three years, the overall unnatural wastage rate of the Government Counsel grade is 2.5% (4.2% at the Government Counsel rank and 1.68% at the Senior Government Counsel rank), compared to the civil service-wide average of 0.48%. In the past three rounds of open recruitment exercises, the total target number of candidates to be recruited was 94, a total of 76 offers were made and 10 offers were declined.

9. The Government Counsel grade has identical rank structure with the Legal Aid Counsel grade and the Solicitor grade at the non-directorate level. Since the job nature, level of responsibilities and qualification requirements of the three grades are similar, the Standing Commission, at our invitation, has also agreed to include the Legal Aid Counsel grade and the Solicitor grade in the course of conducting the GSR for the Government Counsel grade.

The Veterinary Officer Grade

10. The Veterinary Officer grade comprises two ranks, namely the Veterinary Officer rank and the Senior Veterinary Officer rank. These officers mainly work in the Agricultural, Fisheries and Conservation Department and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department. As at 31 December 2007, there were 15 veterinary officers (in terms of strength) in the civil service.

11. Over the past three years, the overall unnatural wastage rate of the Veterinary Officer grade is 8.45% (7.03% at the Veterinary Officer rank and 9.52% at the Senior Veterinary Officer rank). In the past three rounds of open recruitment exercises, the total target number of candidates to be recruited was 23, a total of 13 offers were made and 1 offer was declined.

TIMETABLE

12. We envisage that the Standing Commission will complete the GSRs for the Veterinary Officer grade and the Government Counsel grade (and the related Legal Aid Counsel grade and Solicitor grade), and submit its recommendations to the Administration in September/October 2008. If their recommendations were to include any change to the existing rank and/or pay structure of these grades, then subject to the decision of the Chief Executive-in-Council, we would seek the approval of the Establishment Subcommittee and the Finance Committee of this Council in accordance with the established practice.

WAY FORWARD

13. Members are invited to note the position on the non-directorate civilian GSRs as set out in paragraphs 6 to 12 above. We will keep Members informed of the progress of the GSRs, and make further report to Members as appropriate.

Civil Service Bureau
January 2008