

For Information

Legislative Council Panel on Public Service

Follow-up to the Meeting on 16 April 2012

At the meeting of the Legislative Council Panel on Public Service (the Panel) on 16 April 2012, the Administration updated the Panel on the use of agency workers by Bureaux/Departments (B/Ds). The Panel noted that as at 30 September 2011, there were 1 687 agency workers in B/Ds, representing a 25% reduction compared with the position in September 2010. It also noted that a few B/Ds used relatively more agency workers than others did and accordingly requested the Administration to advise –

- (a) the reasons for the use of agency workers in Buildings Department (BD), Department of Health (DH), Education Bureau (EDB), Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) and Water Supplies Department (WSD) in 2011, and whether there was room for reduction in future; and
- (b) the reasons for a ten-fold increase, as compared to the previous year, in the number of agency workers in Immigration Department (ImmD) in 2011.

Use of agency workers in the five named B/Ds

2. As at 30 September 2011, there were 859 agency workers in BD, DH, EDB, LCSD and WSD, which represented a 30% reduction when compared with the corresponding number over a year earlier. These five B/Ds are responsible for the delivery of a wide range of public services, some of which are subject to fluctuating demands. They have therefore made use of a relatively larger number of agency workers to meet very short-term or unforeseen service needs. A more detailed analysis of the situation in each of these B/Ds is set out in the ensuing paragraphs.

(I) Buildings Department

3. Of the 125 agency workers in BD (as at 30 September 2011), the majority were deployed to meet unforeseen short-term manpower needs, such as providing clerical support to cope with the sudden increase in the submission of building plans before the new requirements of quality and sustainable built environment came into effect on 1 April 2011. The other agency workers were deployed either for filling short-term manpower gap arising from vacancies in civil service positions or for delivering services the mode of which would be changed shortly following an anticipated reorganisation of the Department subsequent to the completion of a comprehensive review of the building safety policy and the implementation of measures to enhance building safety in 2011. With the completion of the Department's reorganisation and the various short-term tasks, the number of agency workers was reduced to 32 in February 2012.

(II) Department of Health

4. Of the 294 agency workers in DH (as at 30 September 2011), about half provided services the mode of which was under review or would be changed shortly. The majority of these agency workers provided workman type ancillary services including cleaning, delivery, patient service, menial service, etc. in various clinics and branch offices. A review on the manpower requirements for services provided by workmen and on the appropriate mode of delivery of these services, conducted by DH, concluded that the core support duties should be delivered by civil servants while some non-core cleaning and menial services should continue to be outsourced through service contracts. Upon the implementation of the review findings, it is anticipated that the number of agency workers performing workman duties in the Department will be reduced to about 90 by mid 2013. The other half of the agency workers in DH were mainly deployed to fill short-term manpower gap arising from vacancies in civil service posts or non-civil service contract (NCSC) positions and their service would be discontinued upon the filling of these vacancies.

(III) Education Bureau

5. Of the 150 agency workers in EDB (as at 30 September 2011), 44% provided short-term clerical and administrative manpower to provide services which were under review or services where the mode of delivery was under review. Based on the findings of the reviews, these agency workers will be phased out by end June 2012. Another 32% of the agency workers were deployed to meet an upsurge in service demands or urgent short-term service needs, such as processing applications for teacher registration and the recruitment exercise of Native-speaking English Teachers. Some 13% were deployed to meet service needs where the work pattern rendered it difficult to recruit and retain staff, such as organising training courses and activities in the evenings or undertaking shift duties. The remaining 11% was for filling short-term manpower gap arising from vacancies in civil service posts and NCSC positions; and their services would be discontinued upon the filling of the vacancies.

(IV) Leisure and Cultural Services Department

6. Of the 188 agency workers in LCSD (as at 30 September 2011), about half were deployed to meet urgent and short-term service needs, such as assisting in organising short-term leisure and cultural programmes. Another 13% met service needs which entailed irregular work pattern, such as providing stage support services for performances held in the evenings and weekends. The remaining 37% filled short-term manpower gap arising from vacancies in civil service posts or NCSC positions. As at 1 January 2012, the number of agency workers in the Department was reduced to 142.

(V) Water Supplies Department

7. Of the 102 agency workers in WSD (as at 30 September 2011), about 61% were deployed to work mainly in the Customer Telephone Enquiry Centre which operated round-the-clock to provide a wide range of customer services, such as answering telephone enquiries, co-ordinating response relating to temporary disruption of water supply. As the work entailed working at odd hours in evenings, on overnight

shifts and during public holidays, the Department had encountered difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff. The other agency workers were deployed to provide clerical support for different departmental functions and customer account related services; and their service will be discontinued either upon the outsourcing of the work in mid-2012 or the deployment of civil servants and NCSC staff to take up the work.

Use of agency workers in ImmD

8. As at 30 September 2011, the number of agency workers in ImmD stood at 88, representing a ten-fold increase over the previous year's figure. This increase was mainly attributed to the additional short-term manpower requirement to implement the Scheme \$6,000 initiative; the upsurge in demand for various immigration services such as processing of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region passport applications, marriage registrations, verification of One-way Permit referrals; the additional enquiries and workload following the Court of First Instance judgment on the right of abode litigation of foreign domestic helpers; and the conduct of Immigration Officer and Immigration Assistant recruitment exercises. The demand for the above services had subsided in the six months following September 2011 and the number of agency workers had been reduced by over 50% as at end March 2012.

**Civil Service Bureau
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