

**立法會**  
***Legislative Council***

LC Paper No. CB(4)979/12-13

(These minutes have been  
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB4/PL/PS

**Panel on Public Service**

**Minutes of meeting held on  
Monday, 3 June 2013, at 9:00 am  
in Conference Room 3 of the Legislative Council Complex**

- Members present** : Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-ye, GBS, JP (Chairman)  
Hon POON Siu-ping, BBS, MH (Deputy Chairman)  
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan  
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP  
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP  
Dr Hon LEUNG Ka-lau  
Hon Claudia MO  
Hon LEUNG Che-cheung, BBS, MH, JP  
Hon KWOK Wai-keung  
Hon IP Kin-yuen  
Hon Martin LIAO Cheung-kong, JP  
Hon TANG Ka-piu  
Hon Tony TSE Wai-chuen
- Members attending** : Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH  
Hon Charles Peter MOK
- Members absent** : Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung  
Hon SIN Chung-kai, SBS, JP

**Public Officers attending** : **Agenda item IV**

Mr Paul TANG, JP  
Secretary for the Civil Service

Mr Raymond H C WONG, JP  
Permanent Secretary for the Civil Service

Mr Peter CHAN, JP  
Director of General Grades  
Civil Service Bureau

Mr Victor LAM  
Deputy Government Chief Information Officer  
(Consulting and Operations)  
Office of the Government Chief Information Officer

Ms Cynthia LO  
Chief Executive Officer (Admin)  
Office of the Government Chief Information Officer

**Agenda item V**

Mr Paul TANG, JP  
Secretary for the Civil Service

Mr Raymond H C WONG, JP  
Permanent Secretary for the Civil Service

Mr Eddie MAK, JP  
Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service 1

**Clerk in attendance** : Ms Anita SIT  
Chief Council Secretary (4)1

**Staff in attendance** : Ms Shirley CHAN  
Senior Council Secretary (4)1

Ms LAM Yuen-kwan  
Legislative Assistant (4)1

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**I. Confirmation of minutes**

(LC Paper No. CB(4)628/12-13 -- Minutes of meeting on  
18 March 2013)

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2013 were confirmed.

**II. Information papers issued since the last meeting**

(LC Paper Nos. -- Submission and the  
CB(4)572/12-13(01) and (02) Administration's response  
on conditions of service of  
the Artisan grade in the  
Correctional Services  
Department

LC Paper No. CB(4)616/12-13(01) -- Administration's response  
to the submission on  
conditioned hours of work  
and leave arrangement for  
staff in the Hospital  
Authority

LC Paper No. CB(4)704/12-13(01) -- Submission from醫院管理局職工總會 regarding the  
terms of employment of the  
IT staff employed by the  
outsourced service  
providers which provide IT  
services to the Hospital  
Authority)

2. Members noted that the above papers had been issued since the last meeting.

3. Regarding the submission from 醫院管理局職工總會, the Chairman said that, as advised by the Civil Service Bureau ("CSB"), the information technology ("IT") staff employed by the Hospital Authority ("HA") were not agency workers or T-contract staff. As such, issues relating to their terms of employment would not be covered under Agenda

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Item IV on "Use of agency workers by government bureaux/departments" of the present meeting. HA had been requested to provide a written response to the concerns raised in the submission.

*(Post-meeting note: A written response from HA was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)774/12-13(01) on 11 June 2013.)*

**III. Date of next meeting and items for discussion**

(LC Paper No. CB(4)625/12-13(01) -- List of outstanding items for discussion

LC Paper No. CB(4)625/12-13(02) -- List of follow-up actions

LC Paper No. CB(4)638/12-13(01) -- Letter dated 7 May 2013 from Hon TANG Ka-piu and Hon KWOK Wai-keung on "Pay policy of the Government in the calculation of salaries of government school teachers"

LC Paper No. CB(4)698/12-13(01) -- Letter dated 24 May 2013 from Hon POON Siu-ping on "Conditioned hours of work and leave arrangement for staff in the Hospital Authority"

LC Paper No. CB(4)723/12-13(01) -- Letter dated 29 May 2013 from Hon Claudia MO on "Promotion system of the civil service")

4. Members agreed to discuss the following items proposed by the Administration at the next regular Panel meeting to be held on 17 June 2013 –

(a) 2013-14 Civil Service Pay Adjustment; and

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(b) Employment of persons with disabilities in the civil service.

5. The Chairman suggested and members agreed that the issue of retirement age of civil servants should be discussed at a future meeting. To facilitate members' consideration of this subject, Ms Emily LAU requested that overseas experience should be provided in the Administration's paper. She also requested the Legislative Council Secretariat to conduct a research study on this area.

6. The Secretary for the Civil Service ("SCS") advised that Agenda Item V of the present meeting on "An overview of the civil service establishment, strength, retirement, resignation and age profile" covered the issue of retirement age of civil servants. The issue should be carefully considered taking into account all relevant factors and views. In this connection, CSB was conducting a preliminary assessment on the issue and the study was expected to be completed around end 2013/early 2014.

7. Regarding the requests from the Deputy Chairman and Ms Claudia MO for discussion of the issues of "Conditioned hours of work and leave arrangement for staff in the Hospital Authority" and "Promotion system of the civil service" respectively, SCS agreed to provide information papers on the issues in July 2013. Members agreed that the issue raised by the Deputy Chairman would be discussed at the regular Panel meeting in July 2013.

*(Post-meeting note: The issue of "Conditioned hours of work and leave deduction arrangement for civil servants working 45 hours net per week in the Hospital Authority" was discussed at the Panel meeting on 15 July 2013 and the Administration's paper on the promotion system of the civil service was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)894/12-13(01) on 12 July 2013.)*

**IV. Use of agency workers by government bureaux/departments**

(LC Paper No. CB(4)502/12-13(01) -- Letter dated 15 March 2013 from Hon LEE Cheuk-yan requesting discussion on the use of agency workers

LC Paper No. CB(4)625/12-13(03) -- Paper provided by the Administration on use of

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agency workers

LC Paper No. CB(4)625/12-13(04) -- Paper provided by the Administration on T-contract services

LC Paper No. CB(4)625/12-13(05) -- Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat)

Use of agency workers

8. SCS briefed members on the salient points of the Administration's paper on the use of agency workers by bureaux/departments ("B/Ds"). He said that agency workers generally referred to the manpower supplied by employment agencies under service contracts with B/Ds concerned. They worked under the direct supervision of the procuring B/Ds but they did not have a contractual employment relationship with the B/Ds concerned.

9. Noting that the 1 173 agency workers working in B/Ds as at 30 September 2012 represented a 30% reduction compared with the position in September 2011, Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that while he welcomed the overall reduction in the use of agency workers in B/Ds, he remained concerned about the relatively large numbers of agency workers in the Department of Health ("DH"), the Education Bureau and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department ("LSCD"). He urged CSB to seriously review the deployment of agency workers in these B/Ds with a view to further reducing the use of agency workers in the Government.

10. Referring to the figures provided by the Administration on the numbers of agency workers used by individual B/Ds, Mr LEUNG Che-cheung pointed out that some B/Ds, e.g. DH, had actually used agency workers constantly for certain types of work over the past years. He urged the Administration to consider converting those agency workers who had been providing services to B/Ds for a long time to government employees.

11. SCS assured members that agency workers would only be used under the prescribed ambit of the scheme. CSB had issued a set of guidelines on the proper use of agency workers. Under these guidelines, B/Ds were only allowed to use agency workers to meet urgent or unforeseen service needs or unexpected surge in service demands for the short-term; to fill short-term manpower gap; to provide short-term

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manpower to deliver service the mode of which would be changed shortly; or to meet service needs which entailed irregular work pattern or where the nature of the work rendered it difficult to recruit and retain staff. As a general rule, the use of agency workers should last for no more than nine months. Approval from CSB would need to be sought for engagement of agency workers exceeding nine months. SCS further explained that as recruitment exercises for government posts took time to complete, flexibility should be given to B/Ds to draw additional manpower outside the civil service to provide timely services in response to short-term, urgent and unforeseen operational needs.

12. In response to members' enquiry on the nature of jobs performed by agency workers, the Permanent Secretary for the Civil Service ("PSCS") explained that agency workers were mostly non-skilled and front-line workers. For the agency workers working in DH, the Director of General Grades ("DGG") advised that these workers were mainly general staff who provided menial services (e.g. cleaning and dispatch) to the government clinics operated by DH. The Efficiency Unit had conducted a review on the services provided by DH in 2011. According to the result of the review, the core services provided by DH should continue to be provided by civil servants, whereas some non-core services could be outsourced. As DH was still reviewing the mode of service delivery of its clinics, agency workers were used to tide over the short-term manpower gap.

13. Noting that the Offices of the Chief Secretary for Administration and the Financial Secretary ("Offices of CS and FS") had engaged agency workers, Mr LEUNG Che-cheung expressed concern that this might pose a risk of leakage of confidential or sensitive information in the Government. In reply, DGG explained that the agency workers engaged in Offices of CS and FS were mainly responsible for preparing and compiling daily newspaper clippings. It was very unlikely that they would have access to any confidential or sensitive information. In case they were required to do so, they would be required to sign a confidentiality undertaking. The Chairman remarked that the deployment of agency workers to prepare daily newspaper clippings was unnecessary as electronic newspaper clipping service was widely used nowadays.

14. Mr Tony TSE noted that 56% of the agency workers were sourced from service contracts lasting nine months or less, and 35% of the agency workers were sourced from contracts lasting more than nine months but not exceeding 15 months. He enquired about the arrangements regarding the remaining agency workers who were sourced from "term contracts". SCS

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explained that under the "term contracts", employment agencies would supply agency workers as and when needed by B/Ds. This kind of contracts might have a longer duration to cater for unexpected surge in service demands. The workers provided by the employment agencies might not be the same group of persons every time. At the request of Mr TSE, SCS agreed to provide further information on the arrangements under "term contracts", including the nature of jobs and the services involved.

*(Post-meeting note: The relevant information provided by the Administration was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)929/12-13(01) on 26 July 2013.)*

### Use of T-contract staff

15. The Deputy Government Chief Information Officer (Consulting and Operations) ("DGCIO") briefed members on the salient points of the Administration's papers on the use of T-contract staff by B/Ds. He said that T-contract staff were IT staff engaged through technical service providers under IT project-based contracts ("T-contracts") centrally administered by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer ("OGCIO"). Most of the T-contracts had a duration of two to three years. T-contract staff complemented the service provided by IT staff employed by the Government in conducting IT projects. This arrangement enabled technology and skill exchange between IT personnel in the civil service and IT professionals in the private sector. It was welcomed and supported by the IT industry. To ensure a proper use of T-contract staff in the Government, OGCIO had formulated internal guidelines for compliance by B/Ds.

16. In response to the Chairman's enquiry on the selection of technical service providers, DGCIO explained that currently, 13 companies were engaged by the Government to provide T-contract services and they were selected through an open tendering exercise. These contractors would provide suitable IT staff for different durations to B/Ds to support the development of IT initiatives on an as-and-when-required basis. As a standing offer agreement, the Government was not obligated to order any services from these contractors. Actual expenditure would only be incurred when the requisite staff had provided the services. T-contract staff were paid by the contractors which were paid based on the prevailing daily service rates for the respective staff categories. Despite that the individual T-contract staff was working under the direct supervision of the



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procuring B/D, there was no contractual employment relationship between the two.

17. Mr Charles Peter MOK pointed out that although individual IT projects were time-limited, there were constantly IT projects being carried out in the Government. He understood that some T-contract staff had been providing services to the Government for many years through repeated renewal of T-contracts. He considered it unfair that T-contract staff, who were required to perform the same duties as the civil servants of comparable ranks, were remunerated on less favorable terms of employment. He also considered it undesirable that the ratio of T-contract staff to civil servants in conducting T-contract projects was at such a high ratio of one to one. As the use of T-contract staff would undermine the image of the Government as the biggest employer in Hong Kong, he urged the Administration to replace T-contract staff by a permanent IT workforce. He pointed out that such arrangement would help to ensure smooth succession of IT professionals and stable development of IT services in the Government and reducing the risk of leakage of confidential information of the Government. He also called on the Administration to conduct a consultancy study on the use of T-contract staff and its impact on the IT industry.

18. DGCIO advised that the use of temporary staff for the implementation of time-limited IT projects was a common practice in the IT industry. He clarified that the job nature and responsibilities of the civil servants and T-contract staff were very different. Besides implementing IT projects, the civil servants were also responsible for the administrative and management duties which involved formulating, implementing and explaining government policies, whereas the T-contract staff were not required to perform such duties. Given the time-limited nature of IT projects, the fast technology development and the different job responsibilities between T-contract staff and civil servants, it might not be effective and efficient to replace all the T-contract staff by a permanent workforce.

19. DGCIO further advised that to ensure B/Ds had the right mix of the different types of IT workforce to implement their IT projects effectively, OGCIO had put in place a mechanism whereby B/Ds would submit their IT manpower plans, including the types of staff required, to OGCIO on an annual basis. OGCIO would review the manpower situation of individual B/Ds in relation to their IT plans and advised B/Ds to bid for permanent posts should there be a long-term need for the services concerned. In this connection, over 100 civil service IT grades staff had been recruited over

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the past three years. Some of the T-contract staff had successfully been recruited as civil servants. As a mechanism had been put in place for regular review of the IT manpower of B/Ds, it might not be necessary to conduct a consultancy study in this regard.

20. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan commented that the use of T-contract staff had given rise to unfair terms of employment and middle-man exploitation. In response, DGCIO explained that although the Administration did not specify the level of wages of T-contract staff, as far as he knew, T-contract staff at all levels received competitive service rates and various employment benefits, as there was great demand for IT personnel in the market. Middle-man exploitation by the contractors had not been a cause of concern. He understood that about 80-90% of the service fees paid to the contractors were used as payment for the salaries of T-contract staff and other employment related benefits. Furthermore, the Administration had increased the service fee paid to the contractors over the past years, a large part of which was used for increasing the salaries of T-contract staff. In order to ensure T-contract staff would be given due employment protection and fair treatment by their employers, the terms of T-contracts had included provisions to require the contractors to comply with the employment laws of Hong Kong, to act as responsible employers and not to include unreasonable terms and conditions in the contracts.

21. In order to avoid middle-man exploitation, Mr Tony TSE suggested the Administration specifying, in the contracts, the level of service rates provided by the contractors to the T-contract staff. In response, DGCIO said that such arrangement might not be the most effective measure to safeguard the interests of T-contract staff. The Administration was of the view that the flourishing IT market, high mobility of IT personnel and the high demand for IT personnel from both the public and private sectors had helped to maintain the service rates of T-contract staff at a buoyant level.

22. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan expressed concern about the daily service rates paid to the T-contract staff under inclement weather and the sanction imposed on them for quitting the jobs. DGCIO advised that after a recent review, the Administration had decided that the service fee paid to the contractors would not be deducted when typhoon signal No. 8 or above or rainstorm black warning signal was hoisted. He also confirmed that restriction period would not be imposed on T-contract staff from taking up other employment. However, under the existing agreement, contractors were required to give not less than two months' notice to the B/Ds concerned of any early termination of service of the engaged T-contract

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staff. Failing that, the Administration would deduct the service fee paid to the contractors in accordance with the length of notice period given by the respective T-contract staff. DGCIO considered the arrangement not unreasonable as IT projects had to be completed within a specified timeframe, and the duration of the notice period helped strike a balance between job seeking and operational needs.

23. On Mr. LEE Cheuk-yan's concern about possible IT security problems arising from the engagement of T-contract staff, DGCIO advised that contractors had to ensure the T-contract staff engaged had not previously been convicted of any criminal offence. All newly joined T-contract staff were required to sign a confidentiality undertaking. Unauthorised disclosure of confidential information would be subject to criminal liabilities. At Mr LEE's request, DGCIO agreed to provide a sample of the confidentiality undertaking signed by T-contract staff.

24. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan was not convinced of the Administration's explanations for engaging T-contract staff. He remained of the view that the Administration should cease the use of T-contract staff and convert these staff to government employees. Mr TANG Ka-piu shared similar views. He enquired about the numbers and percentages of T-contract staff who had been continuously employed by contractors to provide service to B/Ds. DGCIO responded that about 50 percent of T-contract staff had been working in various B/Ds on different IT projects for over three-years. Some of them had earned a career path working in the Government through employment under more senior categories over the years. At the request of members, DGCIO agreed to provide detailed statistics in this regard.

*(Post-meeting note: The relevant information provided by the Administration was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)929/12-13(02) on 26 July 2013.)*

## Use of service bureau staff

25. Mr TANG Ka-piu was concerned about the number of and the employment protection for the service bureau staff who provided service to public libraries. He asked whether the terms of employment of these staff met the requirement of "4-1-18" (i.e. continuous employment of at least four weeks with a weekly working hours of 18 or more) so that they could be protected by the employment laws of Hong Kong. Mr TANG cited the example of the Hongkong Post which had employed non-civil service

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contract staff on an hourly or daily basis, and suggested that a similar employment package should be offered to these service bureau staff.

26. In reply, DGG advised that the number of service bureau staff working in the public libraries varied from time to time. They assisted the core workforce to deliver services during peak demand periods as and when needed. At the request of Mr TANG, SCS agreed to provide further information on the terms of employment of service bureau staff.

*(Post-meeting note: The relevant information provided by the Administration was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)929/12-13(01) on 26 July 2013.)*

**V. An overview of the civil service establishment, strength, retirement, resignation and age profile**

LC Paper No. CB(4)625/12-13(06) -- Paper provided by the Administration

LC Paper No. CB(4)625/12-13(07) -- Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat)

27. SCS briefed members on the salient points of the Administration's paper on an overview of the civil service establishment, strength, retirement, resignation and age profile. He said that as the projected number of retiring civil servants would peak in the five-year period from 2017-18 to 2021-22, the Administration had put in place measures to facilitate B/Ds in making early succession planning, particularly that at the directorate level. Also, timely recruitment would be conducted to fill vacancies and bring in new blood to facilitate succession in the long run. With regard to the issue of extending the retirement age of civil servants, SCS said that in tandem with the Administration's study on the broader issue of extending the working life of the working population in Hong Kong, CSB had also commenced a preliminary study to assess the retirement situation in the civil service, and look at possible options to address any operational needs identified. The study was expected to be completed around end 2013/early 2014.

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### Succession situation in the civil service

28. Noting that there would be a large number of civil servants retiring in the next 10 years, and that nearly 70% of the serving directorate civil servants were in the age group of 50-59, Ms Emily LAU expressed concern about the succession situation in the civil service. Mr TANG Ka-piu worried that the succession problems of the professional grades in the Housing Department, such as the architect and engineer grades, would affect the progress of public housing construction in Hong Kong.

29. In response, SCS said that the Administration had taken a number of measures to facilitate succession planning. Specifically, recruitment processes were streamlined where possible so as to expedite the recruitment of officers with suitable calibre to fill vacancies arising from the retirement of civil servants. B/Ds were also required to conduct promotion exercises in a timely manner to fill vacancies in the higher ranks. In addition, arrangement was in place for B/Ds to further employ civil servants beyond their retirement age under exceptional circumstances so as to help them meet specific operational or succession needs. As regards the succession situation for civil servants at the directorate level, SCS said that there was a well-established mechanism, under which B/Ds would review regularly the succession situation in individual grades and make advance planning for facilitating smooth succession at the directorate level.

30. Referring to the information provided by the Administration regarding the age groups of civil servants, Mr KWOK Wai-keung pointed out that two-thirds of the civil servants were in the age groups of 40-49 and 50-59. He enquired what measures were in place to ensure effective transfer of knowledge from experienced civil servants to younger ones. He suggested that the Administration set a target on the average age range of civil servants, so as to proactively manage their age profile and to forestall succession problems in the future.

31. In reply, SCS said that appropriate training and development programmes were provided for civil servants to enable them to discharge their duties more effectively. Also, where possible, junior civil servants would be given opportunities to take up greater responsibilities so that they could accumulate relevant experience and job knowledge. In respect of the age profile of the civil service, SCS said that with the resumption of open recruitment for civil service posts since 2007, there had been more new recruits in the younger age groups of 20-29 and 30-39 and it would gradually moderate the ageing profile of the civil service in the years ahead.

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It was, however, not appropriate to set a target on the average age range of the civil servants, and it might give rise to concern about age discrimination if recruitment of civil servants were to be based on age.

### Extending the retirement age of civil servants

32. Given that some of B/Ds had further employed civil servants beyond their retirement age on a need basis to help meet their operational needs, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan enquired whether the Administration would consider extending the retirement age of civil servants. He suggested that voluntary extension of retirement age could first be implemented for civil service grades where promotion blockage was not an issue, such as the Modal Scale I grades.

33. The Chairman expressed the view that extending the retirement age of civil servants could help forestall the outflow of experienced civil servants to other organizations. She pointed out that with the introduction of the Mandatory Provident Fund Schemes in 2000, many civil servants appointed thereafter were inclined to have a longer working life so that they could withdraw a larger sum of accrued benefits at their retirement. She suggested that CSB should take into account the impact of different retirement benefit systems on civil servants' retirement when conducting the study to assess the retirement situation in the civil service. Echoing the Chairman's view, Mr TAM Yiu-chung also suggested that if it was the Government's intention to engage civil servants after their retirement, greater incentive should be given to those civil servants who were appointed on pensionable terms.

34. SCS replied that there could be different options for extending the working life of civil servants, if so required. Apart from extending their retirement age, retired civil servants could also be engaged in some short-term jobs on contract terms where operationally justified. As civil servants under different retirement benefit schemes could have different considerations regarding work after retirement, it might not be advisable to adopt a standard approach for all civil servants. The Administration would take into account all relevant factors, including the impacts on public finance and employment prospects of job seekers in the labour market, etc. in taking forward the study, and would continue to listen to different views from civil servants in this regard.

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### Recruitment of civil servants

35. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that the workload of civil servants had increased tremendously in recent years, but the increase in civil service posts were insufficient to cope with the growth in workload. Mr KWOK Wai-keung said that some B/Ds had been requiring civil servants to take up extra responsibilities through the acting arrangement, and as a result, many civil servants were overstretched. The Deputy Chairman also pointed out that there was a shortfall of about 6 000 civil servants to achieve full strength of the civil service, thus resulting in a shortage of manpower to cope with the heavy workload. The members enquired what measures were in place to alleviate the situation.

36. In reply, SCS said that additional manpower would be provided to B/Ds where justified and necessary. There had been a modest increase of about 1% in the civil service establishment each year since 2007. To meet short-term manpower needs such as those arising from the taking of leave by officers, B/Ds could arrange acting appointments. With regard to the shortfall in actual number of civil servants to fill all civil service posts, SCS said that such shortfall was inevitable as it took time to conduct recruitment exercises for civil service posts, which usually attracted a large number of applications. That said, B/Ds were requested to make early planning and arrangements to fill vacancies arising from resignation or retirement of civil servants and creation of new posts, and to streamline the recruitment process in accordance with the relevant guidelines where possible.

37. Mr LEUNG Che-cheung referred to the information provided by the Administration on the reasons of job seekers declining civil service job offers, and noticed that 2% of the respondents had taken up jobs in publicly-funded organizations. He enquired whether CSB could coordinate with these organizations on recruitment matters, so that they would not be competing with the Government for manpower. SCS replied that the 2% figure did not indicate a significant problem and it was not appropriate for the Administration to intervene with the employment matters of publicly-funded organizations. There were well-established mechanisms to facilitate B/Ds in making early succession planning and filling vacancies arising from retirement and resignation in a timely manner.

### Resignation of civil servants

38. The Chairman and Ms Emily LAU expressed concern over the resignation situation in the civil service, particularly the outflow of

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experienced and high-calibre civil servants to other public organizations. They considered that the information collected by the Administration from resigned civil servants on their reasons of resignation could not reflect certain factors such as the decline in the morale of civil servants. Ms Claudia MO opined that resignation of some civil servants was attributable to the increasing bureaucratic and flattering culture in the civil service.

39. SCS responded that the resignation situation in the civil service was not alarming, as the resignation rate had remained at a low level of below 0.5% of the strength of the civil service. Turnover of civil servants in the Administrative Officer grade was stable, although there might be individual cases of senior officers resigning because of other job opportunities. He acknowledged that in face of the increasing public expectations on the services rendered by the Government, civil servants were facing greater pressure in discharging their duties. In this connection, the Administration had stepped up training efforts to enhance the competence of civil servants in serving the public. SCS further advised that he did not notice any decline in the morale of civil servants, and that there were well-established mechanisms for civil servants to channel opinions or grievances they had at work.

40. Mr TANG Ka-piu said that according to the information provided by the Administration, over half of the resigned civil servants left the service during the probation period. He opined that the probation period of three years for civil service posts was too long, and enquired whether the Administration would consider shortening the probation period. SCS said that new recruits might still be searching for their career goals when joining the civil service. The probation period of three years for civil service posts was considered appropriate as it would allow time for the Administration to observe and assess the suitability of the officers concerned.

## **VI. Any other business**

41. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 11:00 am.