

Legislative Council Panel on Public Service

Civil Service Promotion System

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the existing promotion system of the Civil Service.

Background

2. The Civil Service comprises of different grades according to job categories and each grade normally comprises of different ranks according to job levels. The Civil Service appointment system provides the framework of how civil service posts in different grades and ranks should normally be filled, through either recruitment or promotion.

Appointments Policy

3. The basic principles of appointment in the Civil Service are openness, fairness and the best person for the job. The appointment system of the civil service emphasises open and fair selection processes, in order that posts can be filled by candidates of merit, proven ability and integrity. The appointment system also provides pathways or potential avenues for staff to aspire for higher ranks, so as to maintain a clear and stable career development structure enabling the recruitment and retention of quality staff.

4. At present, civil service posts in the basic ranks of grades are normally filled by open recruitment or recruitment from within the Civil Service (i.e. in-service appointment), while posts in the higher ranks (promotion ranks) are usually filled by promotion of suitable and meritorious serving officers from the lower rank in the same grade. Where no serving officer is considered suitable for promotion, direct recruitment from outside the Civil Service may be considered for filling vacancies in promotion ranks.

Promotion System

5. Promotion is the process of selecting officers in a grade for advancement and filling higher rank positions with persons of the right qualities and competencies. A fair, impartial and effective promotion process is the key to a quality Civil Service. Promotion provides motivation for staff to perform well and is an important part of performance management. In turn, an effective performance

appraisal system is essential to enable a fair and merit-based promotion system.

6. Officers are selected for promotion on the basis of merit according to criteria of character, ability, experience, performance, conduct and any qualifications prescribed for the promotion rank. Promotion is not a reward for long service. Seniority will be given weight only when no eligible officer stands out as the most meritorious and suitable for promotion. All eligible candidates are considered on equal terms irrespective of their terms of appointment. As a normal rule, officers who have less than twelve months' active service to give after promotion or appointed to another grade on trial are not normally considered for promotion.

7. To ensure fairness and impartiality, promotion to middle and senior ranks is subject to the advice of the Public Service Commission (PSC). The PSC is an independent statutory body comprising non-official members who have experience in human resource management or related expertise, and is responsible for advising the Chief Executive on, inter alia, appointment and discipline matters of the Civil Service.

Promotion Procedures

8. Selection for promotion is conducted by promotion boards comprising officers at ranks senior to the posts being considered for promotion. Eligible candidates are notified of the initiation of a promotion exercise. The promotion board is responsible for determining the selection criteria and selecting meritorious officers for filling higher rank posts by assessing the relative merit of all eligible officers having regard to their performance and conduct. The PSC and the Civil Service Bureau may also send observers to monitor the conduct of the promotion board.

9. To ensure that the character and integrity of serving officers recommended for promotion are not in doubt and that they can be trusted to perform the functions expected of them in those positions, integrity checks are carried out as part of the promotion procedures. The integrity checking provides an opportunity to check the particulars provided by the officers against records of the law enforcement agencies. The level of checks applicable will depend on the nature or rank of the post to which a candidate is to be appointed.

Civil Service Reform

10. Under the Civil Service Reform, we have proposed to introduce a more competitive appointment system for filling vacancies in higher ranks for the benefit of facilitating the intake of suitable candidates where promotion from staff in the grade cannot meet the requirement. These may include, where necessary and appropriate, widening the field of candidates to other appropriate grades or ranks or bringing in outside candidates with the relevant skills, expertise or experience. While these do

take place under the existing system, we consider there is scope to promote this see scope in enhancing the scope and shall work out appropriate guidelines in consultation with the staff sides and departmental management. On the other hand, to provide a clear and structured career development framework, we recognise the need to maintain reasonable aspirations for serving staff to advance in the civil service through career paths. In particular, it would not be necessary and would indeed be impracticable to open up higher rank vacancies to competition indiscriminately.

11. We have set up four Working Groups with representatives of the Staff Sides of the four Central Staff Consultative Councils and four major cross-departments staff unions to further discuss proposals under the Civil Service Reform. The scope and guidelines for introducing greater flexibility into the appointment system for filling higher ranks will be discussed in the Working Groups.

Conclusion

12. The Civil Service Bureau attaches great importance to maintaining an effective promotion system which selects the best person for the job through a fair and open process, having regard to the need to maintain reasonable aspirations of serving staff for promotion and advancement through a clear and structured career path.

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