

1. Introduction

1.1 ***The civil service in Hong Kong used to be widely acclaimed as "clean, efficient, professional, fair and rule-abiding", but has been facing many challenges in recent decades.*** These specifically include **(a)** new constitutional environment under the Basic Law upon reunification with the Mainland in July 1997; **(b)** new governance structure upon introduction of the principal officials accountability system in July 2002; **(c)** increased elected seats in the legislature; **(d)** downsized civil service after the outbreak of Asian Financial Crisis; and **(e)** heightened expectation on the quality of public service upon advancement of electronic technology. More recently, there are allegations that local civil service fails to live up to public expectation, nor to keep pace with changes in society. In a global ranking on "government effectiveness" among 209 places conducted by the World Bank, the position of Hong Kong also slipped noticeably during 2015-2019, from the third to the ninth. These precipitate local calls for civil service reforms for enhancement in public responsiveness, performance incentives and e-government.

1.2 At the request of Hon CHAN Han-pan, the Research Office has gathered study papers on civil service reforms launched in three selected places in Asia-Pacific (i.e. Singapore, South Korea and Australia). The relevant documents are organized into an information pack folder, and salient features are highlighted below.

2. Global studies on civil service reforms

2.1 Globally, ***there is no single model of civil service reforms and each one should be analysed in local context. Yet there are some common threads in such reforms,*** aiming to enhance **(a)** the accountability of civil service to the general public; **(b)** its responsiveness to ministers in policy execution whilst maintaining its political impartiality; **(c)** its efficiency through performance-based incentives; and **(d)** promoting digital government for more convenient public services to citizens. These objectives are largely seen in the civil service reforms in three selected places as well.

3. Civil service reforms in Singapore

3.1 The first reform of civil service in Singapore took place in June 1959 when the People's Action Party ("PAP") assumed office, with an aim to break the "isolationist and anachronistic outlook" of civil service after 140 years of British rule. ***Not only were meritocracy measures introduced to improve efficiency, but also attitudinal measures to align the civil service with the "national development goals" of the new government.*** The

latter measures included (a) setting up a Political Study Center to educate civil servants about the policy agenda of the new government; (b) encouraging civil servants to participate in mass civic projects for closer contacts with the public; and (c) setting up the Complaints Bureau to facilitate complaints against civil servants.

3.2 Ever since 1980s, more innovative measures have been introduced to enhance civil service efficiency in Singapore. In 1989, performance-based bonus was introduced to incentivize senior civil servants and this was later extended to all officers in 2000. They are now entitled to a maximum of 6 months of performance bonus annually, plus 1.55 months of other bonus in 2019. From 1995, each civil servant is required to attend at least 100 hours of training annually to sharpen their working capabilities and keep pace with latest developments in society. In 2012, "Public Sector Transformation" ("PST") was launched to enhance coordination amongst departments and public engagement. For instance, under the initiative of the First Responder Protocol, the first public agency receiving public feedback is responsible for a coordinated solution, even though the policy matter falls outside its purview. This enhanced public accountability and stopped passing the buck amongst bureaucrats. In 2018, the Digital Government Blueprint was launched to integrate public services on single platform for residents (e.g. OneService App to report municipal issues) and for enterprises (e.g. one-stop Go Business Licensing portal for application of over 200 licenses across agencies). ***After decades of reforms, the civil service of Singapore is renowned as the best in the world***, ranking the top in the aforementioned study of the World Bank for six consecutive years in 2019, and the top three in "International Digital Government" over the past decade.

4. Civil service reforms in South Korea and Australia

4.1 In **South Korea**, there has been a continued shift in emphasis of civil service reforms, from efficiency and competition in the 1990s to professionalism and public participation since 2000s. In 1999, annual training target of 100 hours and performance-based pay were introduced, with the top-grade civil servants entitled to 1.8 months of bonus. In 2006, up to 50% of high-ranking directorate posts in senior civil service were opened to outside talents in the private sector and other agencies. Since 2013, the Korean government has invested 1% of annual budget in its e-Government initiatives, speeding up development of a pan-government integrated data center.

4.2 In **Australia**, departmental heads of the government have been appointed on a fixed term (not tenure) basis since 1994, encouraging competition and merit-based performance. Performance bonus was introduced in 1997, with a maximum bonus of 1.2 months to top-grade civil servants. Since 2013, all government departments are required by law to publish performance statements annually, and their outcome is audited by the Australian National Audit Office for enhancing public accountability. Digital Transformation Strategy 2018-2025 was announced in 2018 to speed up development of e-government. Also, a comprehensive review of civil service was completed in 2019, aiming to deliver better policies and services to meet the rising expectation of citizens.

Table – Civil service reforms in selected places⁽¹⁾

		Hong Kong	Singapore	South Korea	Australia
A. Basic facts					
1.	Number of civil servants	177 300	85 000 ⁽²⁾	669 100 ⁽³⁾	2 041 200
2.	Ratio to total labour force	4.5%	2.3%	2.4%	15.3%
3.	Global ranking of government effectiveness ⁽⁴⁾				
	-2015	3 rd	1 st	43 rd	17 th
	-2019	9 th	1 st	25 th	16 th
B. Reforms on public accountability and policy implementation					
4.	Open recruitment of directorate staff	✗	✓	✓	✓
5.	Fixed-term contract for directorate staff	✗	✓	✓	✓
6.	First responder protocol	✗	✓	✗	✗
7.	Performance reporting legislation	✗	✗	✗	✓
C. Reforms on civil service efficiency					
8.	Performance-based bonus	✗	✓	✓	✓
9.	Maximum months of bonus for top-grade civil servants	-	6.0	1.8	1.2
10.	% of civil servants receiving bonus	-	N.A.	90%	9.9%
11.	Centralized training institution	Civil Service Training and Development Institute ⁽⁵⁾	Civil Service College Singapore	National Human Resources Development Institute	Australia and New Zealand School of Government ⁽⁶⁾
12.	Mandatory training hours per year	-	100	100	-
D. Reforms on digital government					
13.	E-government blueprint	Hong Kong Smart City Blueprint	Digital Government Blueprint	E-Government 2016-2020	Digital Transformation Strategy 2018-2025
14.	Published year	2017	2018	2016	2018
15.	Online single portal for public services	✓	✓	✓	✓
16.	Training of civil servants on digital capability	✓	✓	✓	✓
17.	Global ranking ⁽⁷⁾	16 th	3 rd	9 th	6 th

¹ All data and information presented in the table refer to situation in 2019 unless otherwise specified.

² Figures in 2018.

³ Figures in 2018.

⁴ Worldwide Governance Indicators by World Bank.

⁵ A new civil service college is scheduled for completion in 2026.

⁶ The School provides training mostly for senior civil servants.

⁷ International Digital Government Rankings by Institute of Digital Government at Waseda University.

Civil service reforms in selected places

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