

For discussion
on 16 October 2006

Legislative Council Panel on Public Service

Policy Initiatives of the Civil Service Bureau

Purpose

The 2006/07 Policy Agenda sets out the Government's new and on-going initiatives for the period from July 2006 to June 2007. This paper elaborates on the on-going initiatives relating to the Civil Service Bureau (CSB).

On-going initiatives under the 2006/07 Policy Agenda

2. The 2006/07 Policy Agenda contains five on-going initiatives on the management of the civil service under the chapter of "Effective Governance". Our plan to follow up on these initiatives is set out in the following paragraphs.

(a) Continuing with the development of an improved civil service pay adjustment mechanism which helps maintain a clean, stable and efficient civil service and is also considered as fair and reasonable by the community. The exercise includes the conduct of a pay level survey, review of the annual pay trend survey and development of a better mechanism to facilitate both upward and downward pay adjustments in future. We aim to complete the pay level survey field work within 2006 with a view to considering the application of the survey results in early 2007.

3. In March 2005, taking account of the feedback from an extensive public consultation exercise and other relevant considerations, the Administration decided to conduct a pay level survey for the civil service based on the survey methodology recommended by the Phase One consultant (i.e. the consultant engaged for the design of the survey methodology). According to the recommended survey methodology, civil service jobs and private sector jobs that are broadly comparable in terms of job content, work nature, level of responsibility and typical requirements on qualifications and experience will be matched to serve as a basis for pay comparison purpose. We appointed the Phase Two consultant in June 2005 to undertake the actual pay level survey. The consultant has recently completed an intensive job inspection process to ascertain the job-related characteristics of the civil service benchmark jobs. In total, 360 job descriptions were drawn up for 61 civil service benchmark grades. This process laid the ground for identifying appropriate job matches in the private sector to facilitate the collection of private sector pay data. After briefing the staff sides on the job matching approach, the consultant is now conducting job matching in some 100

private sector organizations under the principle of broad comparability, with a view to collecting pay data from these organizations using 1 April 2006 as the reference date. The pay level survey is expected to be completed by the end of 2006 or early 2007. We will discuss with the staff sides on how the survey results should be applied having regard to the inherent differences between the civil service and the private sector, and other relevant policy considerations. We will keep Members informed of the progress of the pay level survey at coming meetings of the Panel on Public Service.

4. Apart from taking forward the pay level survey, we shall separately consider other issues pertinent to the development of an improved pay adjustment mechanism, including the mechanism for annual pay adjustment in-between pay level surveys and the development of an effective means for implementing both upward and downward pay adjustments. We shall continue to discuss these issues with the staff sides and consult the Panel with a view to completing the whole exercise in a timely manner.

(b) Continuing to control the size of the civil service by providing the necessary management tools to assist bureaux and departments to achieve staff savings and enhance efficiency, while at the same time giving due consideration of the need for additional manpower resources for delivering new and improved services.

5. We are making steady progress in reducing the size of the civil service. As at the end of August 2006, the civil service establishment stood at around 162 300, representing a reduction of about 18% from the peak of 198 000 in early 2000. It remains our goal to reduce the civil service establishment to around 160 000 posts by the end of 2006/07.

6. We have been monitoring and will continue to monitor the staffing situation of individual bureaux and departments through their annual manpower plans. We shall continue to discuss and work with them to control their establishment through measures such as internal deployment, deletion of vacancies, streamlining, re-engineering, etc. We shall ensure they have the necessary manpower to implement the various new policy initiatives in the 2006 Policy Address. We shall also consider the need to inject new talents into the civil service and to safeguard against succession problem in the longer term. We remain committed to not resorting to forced redundancy to control the establishment.

7. We undertook at the Panel meeting in March this year to conduct a special review of the Non-Civil Service Contract (NCSC) staff situation on a department-by-department basis. Where it is established that civil servants instead of NCSC staff should be employed to meet specific service needs, we would devise appropriate measures with the concerned bureaux and departments while keeping the size of the overall civil service establishment under control. We

would report the outcome of the review to the Panel upon its completion around the end of the year.

- (c) Continuing to provide civil servants with training and development opportunities. We shall also continue to enhance the variety and content of the training materials on our e-learning portal, and promote wider use of e-learning, as part of our endeavours to fortify a culture of continuous learning in the civil service.

8. We are committed to providing civil servants at different ranks with a variety of training and development opportunities, thereby equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge, including their understanding of the latest developments in the Mainland. This helps to ensure the civil service keeps pace with the changing environment and the changing demands of the community.

9. We attach great importance to the various programmes on national studies. Continuous endeavours are made to widen civil servants' exposure to the latest developments in the Mainland through training courses, theme-based visits, civil service exchange and a dedicated website. Since 1997, some 2 500 senior officers have participated in theme-based visits or structured programmes in the Mainland which include the national studies programmes at Tsinghua University, Peking University, the China Foreign Affairs University and the National School of Administration. A new National Studies Programme at Sun Yat-sen University (中山大學) for middle-ranking officers has just been launched last month (September 2006). We plan to organize four classes under this Programme in 2006/07 for about 120 trainees. In addition, we provide local national studies training to enhance civil servants' understanding of the latest political, social and economic developments in the Mainland. Over 900 seminars have been organized since 1997 and the number of attendees has amounted to 63 000. The Civil Service Exchange Programme with the Mainland now covers Guangdong, Shanghai, Beijing and Hangzhou. Since the introduction of the Programme in 2002 and up to end 2006/07, a total of 43 civil servants from Hong Kong will have been attached to government offices or departments in these Mainland cities for a period ranging from one to three months, while 73 Mainland civil servants will have been seconded to about 40 Hong Kong SARG departments. To enhance civil servants' understanding of the Basic Law, we continue to organize thematic seminars, customized programmes meeting specific needs of departments, and induction seminars for new appointees. We have also revamped our dedicated website on national studies to provide more robust learning resources.

10. We continue to offer various management-related training programmes, such as leadership development and change management, to the more senior staff. These programmes include a one-week course offered by the John Kennedy School of Government (Harvard University), a three-week leadership course for prospective directorate officers, workshops and seminars on various themes such as innovation, outsourcing management, and performance management. We have

also made strenuous efforts to carry frontline staff on board in coping with changes. Programmes on handling and embracing changes have been provided to foster a change culture among them. We will continue to focus on job skills and personal effectiveness training for clerical and secretarial staff to enhance their capability to take on new job assignments with competence and confidence.

11. We are committed to sustaining a culture of continuous learning in the civil service. Towards this end, we have launched two new training sponsorship schemes since 2005/06 to help staff at different levels, including frontline staff and middle managers, upgrade their qualifications and skills. Staff may apply for reimbursements of course fees on work-related courses or programmes which lead to a qualification. To tie in with the new 5-day week arrangement, we have enhanced the schemes by expanding the scope and raising the sponsorship ceiling to allow more staff to benefit from self-arranged studies after office hours. So far, close to 1 000 civil servants at different levels have joined the schemes and more are expected.

12. We have continued to enhance the quality and variety of the e-learning resources available at the Cyber Learning Centre Plus (CLC) web site in order to facilitate the pursuit of continuous learning amongst civil servants. There are now 270 web courses and job aides on language, IT, management, as well as a whole array of e-learning resources on national studies, health and stress management. The number of registered users of the CLC Plus has increased from 55 000 in 2005 to 62 000 by the end of August 2006. We will also provide more advisory services to bureaux and departments in achieving wider use of the e-learning mode in the civil service.

(d) Continuing to maintain and enhance the morale of the civil service, and encourage fuller use of various commendation schemes to recognise and motivate exemplary performance.

13. In keeping with our policy to induce meritorious performance through proper recognition, we introduced in 2004 the Secretary for the Civil Service's Commendation Scheme. In 2006, 75 civil servants from 37 departments will be awarded the Commendation.

14. We expanded the scope of the Civil Service Customer Service Award Scheme and re-named it as the "Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme" in 2005. This Award recognizes those departments and teams that are considered to provide best customer-oriented services to the public. It also recognizes partnership efforts amongst two or more departments that have resulted in enhanced services to the public. Quality services provided by teams of civil servants who have introduced innovative ideas, are proactive in applying new technology, or are engaged in specialized operations that may not be widely known to the public are also recognized. The next Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme will be conducted in 2007.

- (e) Continuing to maintain a vigorous, effective and efficient disciplinary system against misconduct in the civil service. Continuing to monitor closely implementation of the streamlined procedures for removing under-performers whilst sustaining efforts to further improve efficiency and productivity in the civil service.

15. We simplified the procedures for removing persistent under-performers from the civil service in March 2003. More bureaux and departments have since made better use of the tool to deal with under-performance. Building on the positive results achieved and following consultations with the Public Service Commission and the staff sides, we further revised the procedures in 2005 to enable swifter action to be taken against under-performers. We will continue to monitor closely implementation of the streamlined procedures for removing under-performers.

16. We shall sustain our efforts in reinforcing a performance-based culture in the civil service that is conducive to improving efficiency and productivity in the civil service.

Way Forward

17. The Administration remains committed to maintaining a civil service with the highest level of integrity, efficiency and performance. CSB will continue to set or change civil service policies and practices in the public interest, including matters concerning recruitment, appointment, pay and conditions of service, manpower planning, training and development, conduct and discipline etc. For instance, to cater for the different language proficiency requirements among degree/professional grades, we have recently established a two-tier passing mechanism for the Common Recruitment Examination (CRE), i.e. 'Level I' and 'Level II'. Heads of departments and grades will determine the requisite level for posts in the grades under their purview having regard to the actual job requirements. We have also decided to accept Grade C or above and Grade D in the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) in Use of English and Chinese Language and Culture as equivalent to Level II and Level I in the two language papers of the CRE respectively after being satisfied that there is a positive correlation between the HKALE grades that candidates achieved and their performance in the CRE language papers. This would exempt a substantial number of job-seekers and university graduates from taking the CRE language papers.

18. We shall continue to maintain a professional, stable and motivated civil service. We shall take forward the above initiatives in close consultation with departmental management and staff. We shall seek Members' views or keep Members' informed as appropriate.

Civil Service Bureau
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