

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON PUBLIC SERVICE

Update on National Studies and Basic Law training for civil servants

Purpose

This paper updates Members on the national studies and Basic Law programmes and related training activities offered to civil servants.

Background

2. In keeping with the development of closer ties between Hong Kong and the Mainland, the Civil Service Bureau continues to devote great efforts to enhance civil servants' understanding of and exposure to the systems and developments in the Mainland. These efforts take the form of training courses and theme-based visits to the Mainland, local seminars, civil service exchange programme and a dedicated website on Mainland-related information and developments. In addition, we also provide training on the Basic Law for civil servants and organise a variety of promotional activities to enhance awareness of the Basic Law amongst civil servants. Following the pledge in the Chief Executive's 2007 Policy Address to further enhance Basic Law training for civil servants, the Civil Service Training and Development Institute (CSTDI) launched an action plan in April 2008 to ensure that Basic Law training forms an integral part of training for all civil servants.

National Studies

3. A brief description of the training programmes and activities related to national studies is given below.

(i) National School of Administration (NSA) Programme

4. This is a two-week programme introduced since 1999 for civil servants at the directorate level. Through lectures and talks delivered by distinguished Mainland scholars and senior Central People's Government officials, the programme aims to deepen participants' understanding of the

current policies and topical issues in the Mainland, and to enhance networking between participants and Mainland officials. As at the end of 2009, about 340 directorate civil servants have attended this programme. Participants' feedback on the programme has been highly positive. Also, we commissioned the NSA to organise an intensive one-week programme for directorate Administrative Officers in 2005 and 2006. Over 100 directorate Administrative Officers attended the programme.

(ii) Tsinghua/Peking University Programmes

5. We have been organising the Tsinghua University Programme and the Peking University Programme since 1993 and 2004 respectively for senior civil servants (at point 45 of the Master Pay Scale (MPS) or equivalent or above). Both programmes last for 17 days and include classroom lectures and visits to state agencies in Beijing, as well as a 3-day visit to selected Mainland cities. The programmes provide participants with a comprehensive introduction of the political, social, economic, cultural and legal developments in the Mainland. They also aim to enhance communication between participants and Mainland officials. So far about 2 000 civil servants have attended the two programmes. Participants generally considered the programmes highly effective in improving their understanding of the Mainland and its latest development.

(iii) Foreign Affairs Studies Programme

6. Since 2004, we have commissioned the China Foreign Affairs University to organise a one-week Foreign Affairs Studies Programme for directorate and other civil servants involved in external affairs. The programme covers China's foreign affairs, protocol and other related topics. As at the end of 2009, about 110 civil servants have attended this programme, including heads of our Economic & Trade Offices overseas.

(iv) Thematic Study Programmes

7. Since 1991, thematic study programmes have been organised through the coordination of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office (HKMAO). These programmes mainly take the form of familiarisation visits to selected Mainland provinces and cities. They aim to enhance participants' general understanding of the systems and developments in the Mainland in selected policy areas or themes. As at the end of 2009, more than 1 100 civil servants have attended these programmes. The themes of the more recent programmes include "Economic Development in Guangxi" and "Strategic Planning on Economic and Financial Development of Shanghai".

(v) *National Studies Programme for Middle Managers*

8. To enable middle-ranking civil servants (at MPS 34 to 44 or equivalent) to acquire a better understanding of the Mainland's systems, and to deepen their knowledge on the developments in the Pearl River Delta region, we have commissioned the Sun Yat-sen University and the Shenzhen Graduate School of Peking University since 2006 and 2007 respectively to organise a one-week national studies programme for these civil servants. The programme covers the latest socio-economic and political developments in the Mainland, with special focus on the Pearl River Delta region. As at the end of 2009, around 870 civil servants have attended the programme. Overall, the feedback received has been very positive.

(vi) *Civil Service Exchange Programme with the Mainland*

9. The civil service exchange programme with the Mainland commenced in 2002. Under the programme, we have partnered with the municipal governments of Beijing and Shanghai, the city government of Hangzhou and the provincial government of Guangdong. For each exchange under the programme, civil servants of one side are attached to government departments of the other side for about four to eight weeks with a view to widening exposure, sharing experience and expertise, and fostering partnership and communication. While on attachment, the participants will study the relevant legislation, rules and regulations, and codes of conduct, if any, of the host organisations. They will also observe the host organisations' work practices through attendance at briefings, participation in training, meetings, discussion forums, experience sharing sessions and site visits, etc.

10. Civil servants taking part in the exchange programme will not take up any specific posts or duties in the host organisations, and they will only have access to information which is not of a confidential and sensitive nature. Participants have to observe the law, rules and regulations, as well as the general working rules and codes of conduct of the host organisations.

11. As at the end of 2009, 50 Hong Kong government departments/public organisations and about 110 Mainland departments/agencies have participated in the exchange programme. HKSARG has sent a total of 84 civil servants at senior professional level to the Mainland, while about 140 Mainland officials mostly at division director (處長級) or deputy division director (副處長級) level have been sent to Hong Kong. The scope of exchange covers a wide range of disciplines, including infrastructure development, city planning, traffic management, environmental protection, public housing, health and food safety, trade and commerce, information technology, social security, education, civil service management, culture and arts, etc.

12. Prior to the commencement of each exchange, the host governments will provide participants with an orientation and briefing. At the end of the exchange, an evaluation will be conducted to collect feedback. Participants from both sides have found the programme very useful and effective, especially in enabling them to understand the structure and operation of the host governments. They also valued the opportunity to experience the work culture of their counterparts, and strengthen their network and relationship with the respective authorities.

(vii) Local Seminars on Subjects Related to National Studies

13. We work closely with local and Mainland institutions on conducting seminars on the latest developments in the Mainland. These seminars target civil servants of different seniority and grades. They cover a wide variety of topics such as the Mainland's political and government reforms, legal system, economic and social changes, administrative and civil service systems, foreign affairs, etc. Seminars on topical issues, e.g. challenges for Hong Kong funded enterprises in Guangdong, RMB business and its impact on the HKSAR, etc, have also been organised. Apart from local scholars and professors from renowned universities in the Mainland, we have also invited officials from relevant Mainland institutions, such as the National Development and Reform Commission and the People's Bank of China, to speak on their expert areas. Since 2000, over 30 000 civil servants have attended these national studies seminars.

(viii) National Studies E-Learning Portal

14. Established since 2002 and further enhanced in 2005, the learning portal on national studies in our "Cyber Learning Centre Plus" website provides comprehensive information about the Mainland, covering such areas as the political and civil service systems, the economy, the legal framework and geographical data. In-depth analyses of current issues, such as "Rising of China: 60 years of development" and "Cooperation between HKSAR and the Pearl River Delta region" are also available. To help keep civil servants abreast of the latest developments, the portal also houses up-to-date policy documents of the Central People's Government, relevant speeches on key policies and developments, and useful linkages. The e-learning portal provides a convenient platform for civil servants to pursue national studies at their own pace and in their own time. The portal has been well received, recording a hit rate of over 430 000 since July 2005.

Basic Law

15. Since the promulgation of the Basic Law in the early 1990's, the CSTD (then the Civil Service Training Centre) has been providing training on the Basic Law for civil servants. Since 1997, over 27 000 participants have attended dedicated training programmes on the Basic Law and 6 000 have participated in our promotional activities. Many civil servants have also learned the Basic Law through our e-learning portal on national studies. In addition, over 2 300 senior civil servants, who took part in the national studies programmes at the Tsinghua University, Peking University and National School of Administration, also attended lectures on the Basic Law delivered by Mainland experts.

16. As announced in the Chief Executive's 2007 Policy Address, we have further enhanced Basic Law training for civil servants to ensure that the training forms an integral part of training in the civil service, and is provided in a systematic and well planned manner which takes into account the needs of civil servants of different levels and work nature. We have adopted a multi-pronged approach which includes classroom training, e-learning, publications and diversified promotional activities to achieve this objective. The progress of the enhanced training on the Basic Law is given below.

(i) Core Programmes on the Basic Law

17. Three core programmes on the Basic Law were introduced in 2008-09 to enable civil servants, at various stages of their careers, to have the opportunity to learn and refresh themselves on knowledge about the Basic Law. As at the end of 2009, over 10 000 civil servants attended the Introductory Course for New Civil Service Appointees; Intermediate Course for Middle Level Civil Servants (MPS 34 - 44); and Advanced Course for Senior Level Civil Servants (MPS 45 and above). These programmes generally aim to enhance civil servants' understanding of the key concepts and provisions of the Basic Law. In the Intermediate and Advanced Courses, more in-depth analyses are provided and court cases related to the Basic Law are discussed. Academics, legal practitioners and officials from both Hong Kong and the Mainland are invited to conduct the programmes. Feedback from the participants has been very positive. They generally found the training useful in enhancing their understanding of the Basic Law, and the speakers are professional and knowledgeable in the subject.

(ii) E-learning Resources on the Basic Law

18. At present, a section of our national studies e-learning portal contains online resources on the Basic Law for self-learning by civil servants.

These resources include reference materials as well as the latest information updates related to the Basic Law. They also include the presentation materials of the Basic Law course speakers, the background to and judgments of major court cases relating to the Basic Law, and relevant articles and speeches by government officials, etc. To tie in with the enhanced training on the Basic Law in the civil service, we have enriched the resources on the portal, and developed a new modular web course on the Basic Law. We will continue to strengthen our e-learning resources and web programmes to supplement classroom training and to help civil servants refresh their knowledge on the Basic Law.

(iii) Thematic Seminars, Publications and Promotional Activities

19. We have organised seminars on specific topics of the Basic Law such as “China’s Constitution and the Basic Law” and “Implementation of the ‘One Country Two Systems’ Principle” for different levels of civil servants. We have also assisted some departments to organise seminars to address their departmental training needs. We will continue to organise these seminars and provide services to departments.

20. To enhance the awareness of and sustain interest in the Basic Law amongst all civil servants, especially frontline staff, we regularly organise promotional activities. Such activities take the forms of quiz, competition and exhibition related to the Basic Law, etc, which help disseminate the fundamental concepts of the Basic Law as well as the relevance of the Basic Law to civil servants’ work and daily life. In addition, we regularly publish a “Basic Law Bulletin” jointly with the Department of Justice and the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau, and provide a “Basic Law Corner” in the Civil Service Newsletter which is circulated to all civil servants.

Way Forward

21. We are committed to enhancing civil servants’ knowledge and understanding of the Mainland, and their specific knowledge on the Basic Law on an on-going basis. In addition to what we have outlined above, we will continue to monitor closely the feedback on and effectiveness of our programmes and activities, and seek to make improvements where appropriate.