

立法會

Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(4)858/18-19(04)

Ref: CB4/PL/PS

Panel on Public Service

Meeting on 20 May 2019

Updated background brief on the overall establishment, strength, retirement, resignation, age profile and gender profile of the civil service

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the overall establishment, strength, retirement, resignation and age profile of the civil service, and summarizes the major views and concerns expressed by members of the Panel on Public Service ("the Panel") on the subject in previous discussions.

Background

Establishment and strength

2. In the 2000's, the civil service had been downsized through enhanced efficiency drives, the two general voluntary retirement schemes in 2000 and 2003, the targeted voluntary retirement schemes for specific grades, and the six years of open recruitment freeze¹ which ended in March 2007. As at 31 March 2007, the civil service establishment and strength stood at 159 400 and 153 800 respectively.

3. In recent years, the civil service has grown steadily to meet the demand for new or improved services to the public. In the five-year period from 2014-2015 to 2018-2019,² the civil service establishment had increased aggregately by around 14 400. In the 2019-2020 Draft Estimates, the civil

¹ The open recruitment freeze was in effect from 1999-2000 to 2006-2007, save for 2001-2002 and 2002-2003. Where there were strong operational needs, exceptional approval had been given for a limited number of grades to conduct open recruitment during the period of open recruitment freeze.

² According to the Revised Estimates for the respective years, the establishment figures as at 31 March 2015 and 31 March 2019 were 173 908 and 188 335.

service establishment is expected to expand by 3 481 posts, which represents a year-on-year increase of about 1.8%. Subject to the approval of the 2019-2020 Draft Estimates by the Legislative Council, the civil service establishment is estimated to stand at 191 816 posts at the end of March 2020.

Wastage

Retirement

4. Retirement has always been the primary reason for departure of civil servants from the civil service. The existing retirement age of civil servants is prescribed under the pensions legislation and Civil Service Regulations. New recruits appointed to the civil service on or after 1 June 2015 are subject to the new retirement age of 65 in respect of the civilian grades and 60 in respect of the disciplined services grades, regardless of their ranks.

5. In 2016-2017, the number of retirees was around 6 000, which represented about 3.6% of the strength. According to the Administration, the number of retirees will increase from the annual average of 3.5% of the civil service strength for the five-year period ending 2016-2017 to about 4% in the five-year period ending 2021-2022. The number will then gradually decline to about 3.5% in the five-year period ending 2026-2027 and further decrease in the following years. In view that the majority of serving civil servants who joined the Government between 1 June 2000 and 31 May 2015 will reach their current retirement age around 2030 to 2040, to tie in with the goal of expanding the labour force and to respond to the aspirations of serving civil servants, the Chief Executive-in-Council approved the implementation of an option which allowed serving civil servants who joined the Government during the aforesaid period to choose to retire at 65 (for civilian grades) or 60 (for disciplined services grades) ("the Option"). The Option was subsequently launched in July 2018 and eligible civil servants could choose to opt for the Option on or before 16 September 2020.

6. Separately, to better address the cyclical movements in natural wastage of civil servants in the coming years, flexible human resource tools, including the employment of retired/retiring civil servants on contract terms under the Post-retirement Service Contract ("PRSC") Scheme and adjustments to the further employment mechanism, have been implemented to allow Heads of Department/Heads of Grade to address the different operational and succession needs of individual grades/departments which will change from time to time.

Resignation

7. Resignation only accounts for a small number of departure of civil servants. According to the Administration, the resignation rate ranged from 0.45% to 0.65% of the strength of the civil service from 2012-2013 to 2016-2017. In 2016-2017, the resignation rate was 0.63%. Over half of the resignees left during their probation period.

Age profile

8. In 2016-2017, 28% and 34% of the strength of the civil service are in the age groups of 40-49 and 50 or above respectively. Whilst around two-thirds of civil servants are in these two age groups since 2006-2007, the remaining one-third is in the age groups of 20-29 and 30-39. In the five-year period ending 2016-2017, there were around 26 100 new recruits in the age group of 20-29 (or about 62% of the total intake) and around 10 000 new recruits in the age group of 30-39 (or about 24%). As a result, the number of civil servants in the age group of 20-29 increased from 9% of the civil service strength in 2009-2010 to about 14% in 2016-2017. According to the Administration, this trend would continue in the years ahead, which would moderate the ageing profile of the civil service against the backdrop of a larger number of anticipated retirement in the coming decade.

Gender profile

9. The overall proportion of female civil servants increased from 33.7% in 2002-2003 to 37.2% in 2016-2017. The participation rate of female civilian civil servants rose from 42.9% in 2002-2003 to 48.1% in 2016-2017, under which the proportion increased from 26.3% in 2002-2003 to 37.7% in 2016-2017 for directorate officers, and from 43% in 2002-2003 to 48.2% in 2016-2017 for non-directorate officers. For Hong Kong labour force as a whole, the overall female participation rate rose from 43.9% in 2003 to 49.1% in 2016.

Major views and concerns expressed by the Panel

10. Major views and concerns expressed by Panel members in previous meetings and the Administration's responses are summarized below.

Disparity between the establishment and strength of the civil service

11. Noting that the difference between the establishment and strength of the civil service had widened from 5 000 posts in 2002-2003 to around 7 500 posts in 2016-2017, members expressed concern on its impact on the workload

and efficiency of the civil servants, and that the increasing manpower shortage might hinder the implementation of new government initiatives/policies.

12. The Administration advised that due to the lead time required for conducting recruitment exercises, it was unavoidable that there was a gap between the establishment and strength of the civil service. The average time for completing recruitment exercises was about six months.

13. With a view to maintaining the quality and efficiency of public services, members opined that the Administration should implement measures to address the manpower shortage problem in individual bureaux/departments ("B/Ds"). The Administration pointed out that the civil service establishment would expand by 6 700 posts in 2018-2019, representing an increase of 3.7%, to take up new initiatives and services. Besides, B/Ds would deploy staff resources according to the operational needs.

Succession planning

14. Noting that the number of civil servants retiring would be on the increasing trend until 2021-2022, question was raised as to whether the Administration had put in place any measure to ensure the smooth succession and handover of responsibilities.

15. The Administration advised that a well-established mechanism had been put in place to facilitate B/Ds in making early planning for succession and taking timely actions where necessary. Under the mechanism, the Secretary for the Civil Service regularly met with Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Department to discuss the succession situation in individual departments and grades and make advance planning. In cases involving special succession and/or operational needs, B/Ds could also further employ, on a case-by-case basis, officers beyond their retirement age to meet specific operational or succession needs. In tandem with the succession planning efforts, the Administration provided professional training and development opportunities for civil servants. For civil servants identified to have potential for higher responsibilities, training would also be provided to enhance their all-round capabilities. In addition to local training, they would be sponsored to attend overseas executive development programmes at renowned educational institutions. Arrangement would also be made for them to undergo attachments to policy bureaux, regional and international organizations to broaden their experience, perspective and network.

16. At the Panel meeting on 21 May 2018, a member expressed concern about the workload of some serving officers who had to coach new appointees and take up additional work before the new staff could effectively discharge duties by themselves. In this connection, the member asked whether the

Administration could arrange staff with potential to take up duties at a senior level at an early stage. Some members opined that some sorts of recognition, such as an additional allowance or recording their contributions in their personnel files, should be provided for these officers.

17. The Administration responded that with a view to strengthening peer support and fostering the sense of belonging among civil servants, it was a common arrangement for serving civil servants to offer coaching for or serve as mentors to new appointees. On the suggestion of introducing an additional allowance for that purpose, the Administration advised that any relevant proposals from individual B/Ds would be carefully examined and duly considered by the Civil Service Bureau ("CSB"). Currently, to facilitate smooth succession in the civil service, B/Ds were requested to make early planning of recruitment and promotion exercises, as appropriate, having regard to the number of and timing in which vacancies were expected to arise.

Promotion opportunities

18. Concern was raised about the lack of promotion opportunities within a reasonable period of time and prolonged acting appointments for some professional grades. The Administration was urged to review the promotion system of the civil service, including the acting appointment arrangements. A member also asked whether the Administration had developed any system for outstanding talents to get fast-track promotion.

19. The Administration advised that the objective for promotion was to select the most suitable and meritorious officer who was able to perform the more demanding duties in a higher rank. Selection for promotion was based on objective criteria, including character, ability, performance, etc. Seniority would only be given weight if no eligible officer stood out clearly as the most suitable for promotion. At the Panel meeting on 15 May 2017, members enquired about the average time taken for civil servants to get promoted to the next higher rank. The Administration replied that based on statistics of the three financial years 2013-2015, it took an officer an average of about 11 years to be promoted to a rank in the upper salary group,³ and 15 years to be promoted to a rank in the middle salary group.⁴ The situation varied among different grades/ranks, and it usually took shorter time for those with outstanding performance to reach the directorate ranks.

20. As regards the impacts of the PRSC Scheme and the arrangement for final extension of service beyond retirement age of serving civil servants on the promotion prospects of younger civil servants, the Administration advised

³ Ranks with maximum pay point above Master Pay Scale Point 33 or equivalent.

⁴ Ranks with maximum pay point from Master Pay Scale Point 10 to 33, or equivalent.

that the package of flexible initiatives for extending the service of civil servants sought to cater for different manpower needs at different times. For ranks that faced serious succession problems at a certain time, the B/Ds concerned might consider retaining serving civil servants at the ranks concerned beyond their retirement age under the adjusted further employment mechanism so that the officers at the lower ranks could have more time to consolidate. In some other cases, the PRSC Scheme might be more suitable for retaining experience in the B/Ds concerned while avoiding promotion blockage. The package of initiatives would provide B/Ds with flexibility for meeting their specific manpower needs.

Recruitment of civil servants

21. Members noted that the Director of Audit had commented in his Report No. 62 about the long time taken by B/Ds for conducting civil service recruitment exercises. Members enquired what measures had been/would be taken by the Administration to address the problem.

22. The Administration advised that CSB had, since 2007, introduced streamlining measures to the recruitment process. For instance, a recruiting department could invite candidates whose qualifications required further verification to attend recruitment examination and/or interview, and offer appointment subject to the completion of the qualifications assessment. CSB had also implemented improvement measures since 2013 to reduce the number of unqualified applications by revising the standard application form for civil service jobs and enhancing the online job application system to add built-in reminders for applicants to confirm that they could meet the entry requirements of the jobs selected. Furthermore, CSB had set up a task force to look into ways for improving the efficiency and effectiveness in the conduct of recruitment exercises and a platform for sharing/identifying best practices for conducting recruitment exercises.

23. At the Panel meeting on 21 May 2018, a member enquired whether the Administration had encountered any difficulties in recruiting civil servants and whether there was any mechanism in place to help B/Ds identify recruitment problems so that they could seek assistance from CSB where necessary.

24. The Administration advised that internal guidelines had been laid down for civil service recruitment exercises. If there were a large number of vacancies in a certain rank with many applications received, B/Ds could, with the purpose of expediting the intake of new recruits, conduct year-round recruitment exercises; set up several recruitment boards to conduct interviews concurrently; and strengthen the manpower responsible for conducting recruitment exercises. CSB would monitor the recruitment situation amongst B/Ds, and consider whether grade structure reviews would be needed for

addressing proven and persistent recruitment and retention difficulties of individual grades.

Resignation of civil servants

25. Some members expressed concern over the outflow of civil servants in the Administrative Officer grade to other public organizations, which might be attributable to the adverse impact of the political appointment system on the morale of senior civil servants.

26. The Administration advised that turnover of civil servants in the Administrative Officer grade was stable. The Administration also pointed out that as politically appointed officials ("PAOs") were not civil servants, their appointments would not impact on the promotion of civil servants. The Civil Service Code promulgated in 2009 set out the working relationship between PAOs and civil servants. The respective roles and responsibilities of PAOs and civil servants under the political appointment system were delineated clearly in the Code.

27. Concerning that the resignation rate had increased by three times from around 0.2% of the strength of civil servants in 2002-2003 to 0.63% in 2016-2017 with some of these resignees setting up their own business or taking up jobs in private sector/publicly funded organizations, members questioned whether this implied the diminished attractiveness of civil service jobs. Members also remarked that as civil servants appointed on the New Permanent Terms on or after 1 June 2000 would not be entitled to pension benefits and medical and dental benefits after retirement, the civil service remuneration package had lost its competitive edge when compared to the remuneration package offered by private sector. Members therefore urged the Administration to come up with measures to preserve the attractiveness of and retain talents in the civil service, such as providing post-retirement medical benefits for all civil servants.

28. The Administration responded that based on the large number of applications received in the recruitment exercises conducted in these few years and the low level of resignation rates of civil servants, the civil service should still be attractive and competitive in the labour market. As regards civil servants appointed on or after 1 June 2000, the Administration advised that the terms and conditions of employment for them were introduced following the civil service reform undertaken in 1999 and were drawn up with reference to private sector's practices. It was the Government's civil service pay policy to ensure that civil service remuneration was regarded as fair by both civil servants and the public. In order to maintain broad comparability between civil service pay and private sector pay, the former was compared with the latter on a regular basis through three types of survey, namely the annual Pay

Trend Survey, the triennial Starting Salaries Survey and the six-yearly Pay Level Survey.

29. Having regard to the small number of respondents in the exit survey (457 out of 1 000 in 2016-2017), members questioned the representativeness of the findings and asked whether the Administration had looked into the underlying reasons for officers resigning from the civil service.

30. The Administration explained that around 60% of the resignees left during probationary period. The Administration considered it understandable that the resignation rate among probationers was comparatively higher than the rest of the civil service, because probationers might be still exploring a suitable career path for themselves and find working in the Government unsuitable for them.

31. Some members commented that as the imminent retirement wave in the civil service would create an impact on the retention and transfer of experience of civil servants, the Administration should formulate measures to attract and retain high-calibre staff.

32. The Administration assured members that CSB would continue to monitor the attractiveness of the civil service posts and implement measures according to the situation of individual grades/ranks to retain staff when necessary.

Female participation rate in the civil service

33. A member sought the reasons why the overall proportion of female civil servants in Hong Kong in 2016-2017 was only 37.2%. The member called on the Administration to take into account gender balance when employing civil servants and consider setting a target ratio for female civil servants.

34. The Administration advised at the Panel meeting on 21 May 2018 that appointment to the civil service was based on the principle of open and fair competition. All candidates would be assessed on the basis of their ability, performance and character and having regard to the stipulated entry requirements set according to the job requirements of the grade concerned. Gender was not a consideration in the selection process. There was a rising trend of female participation rate in the civil service and the trend was more prominent in respect of civilian grades. For instance, around 76.8% of the clerical grades officers were female and 50% of the 18 Permanent Secretary posts, the highest level civil service rank, were filled by female officers.

Latest development

35. At the Panel meeting scheduled for 20 May 2019, the Administration will brief members on the overall establishment, strength, wastage position and age profile of the civil service.

Relevant papers

36. A list of relevant papers is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 4
Legislative Council Secretariat
16 May 2019

**Overall establishment, strength, retirement, resignation,
age profile and gender profile of the civil service**

List of relevant papers

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Public Service	18 April 2016	Administration's paper Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat Minutes
	15 May 2017	Administration's paper Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat Minutes Administration's follow-up response to issues raised at the Panel meeting
	21 May 2018	Administration's paper Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat Minutes Administration's follow-up response to issues raised at the Panel meeting