

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(4)1340/20-21
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by the Administration)

Ref : CB4/PL/PS

Panel on Public Service

**Minutes of meeting held on
Monday, 17 May 2021, at 10:45 am
in Conference Room 3 of the Legislative Council Complex**

Members present : Hon KWOK Wai-keung, JP (Chairman)
Hon POON Siu-ping, BBS, MH (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Jeffrey LAM Kin-fung, GBS, JP
Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon Steven HO Chun-yin, BBS
Hon LEUNG Che-cheung, SBS, MH, JP
Hon Elizabeth QUAT, BBS, JP
Hon Martin LIAO Cheung-kong, GBS, JP
Dr Hon CHIANG Lai-wan, SBS, JP
Hon SHIU Ka-fai, JP
Dr Hon Pierre CHAN
Hon CHAN Chun-ying, JP
Hon LUK Chung-hung, JP
Hon Tony TSE Wai-chuen, BBS, JP

**Public officers
attending** : **Agenda item III**

Mr Patrick NIP, JP
Secretary for the Civil Service

Mrs Ingrid YEUNG, JP
Permanent Secretary for the Civil Service

Mrs Angelina CHEUNG, JP
Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service 1

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**Public officers
attending**

: **Agenda item IV**

Mr Patrick NIP, JP
Secretary for the Civil Service

Mrs Ingrid YEUNG, JP
Permanent Secretary for the Civil Service

Miss Ann CHAN
Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service 2

Clerk in attendance

: Ms Wendy JAN
Chief Council Secretary (4)1

Staff in attendance

: Ms Maggie CHUNG
Senior Council Secretary (4)1

Ms Peggy CHUNG
Council Secretary (4)1

Mr Griffin FUNG
Legislative Assistant (4)9

Ms Karin TSOI
Clerical Assistant (4)1

**I. Information paper issued since the last regular meeting on
19 April 2021**

[LC Paper Nos. CB(4)898/20-21(01) and CB(4)980/20-21(01)]

Members noted that the following papers had been issued since the last regular meeting of the Panel on Public Service ("the Panel") on 19 April 2021:

- (a) Administration's response to the letter dated 7 April 2021 from Mrs Regina IP requesting information on the employment of non-ethnic Chinese in the civil service; and
- (b) Letter dated 11 May 2021 from Mr LUK Chung-hung requesting the Panel to discuss as soon as possible the grade structure review for lifeguards of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department.

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II. Date of next meeting and items for discussion

[LC Paper Nos. CB(4)986/20-21(01) and (02)]

Items for next regular meeting

2. The Chairman informed members that the Administration proposed to discuss the following items at the next regular meeting of the Panel on 21 June 2021:

- (a) 2021-2022 civil service pay adjustment; and
- (b) Further update on establishing the Civil Service College.

3. Having regard that the Administration had updated the Panel in February 2021 on the progress in establishing the Civil Service College, the Chairman enquired about the reasons for the Administration to propose the discussion of the subject matter again in June 2021. Secretary for the Civil Service ("SCS") advised that the Administration needed to consult the Panel on the new development on the software front in establishing the College.

4. Members subsequently agreed to discuss the two proposed items as mentioned in paragraphs 2(a) and 2(b) above at the next regular meeting on 21 June 2021.

(Post meeting note: Members were informed vide LC Paper No. CB(4)1131/20-21 issued on 17 June 2021 that at the request of the Administration and with the concurrence of the Chairman, the agenda item in paragraph 2(b) above had been changed to "Proposed Creation of the Post of Head of the Civil Service College".)

Items for future meetings

5. Mr LUK Chung-hung referred to his letter (LC Paper No. CB(4)980/20-21(01)) which was mentioned in paragraph 1(b) above and called on the Administration to brief members on the grade structure review for lifeguards of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department within the 2020-2021 session.

6. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan enquired as to when the Panel would discuss item 8 "Enactment of legislation to prohibit acts of insulting public officers" in the Panel's List of outstanding items. The Chairman called on the Administration to brief members on the subject matter within the 2020-2021 session.

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7. SCS replied that the Chief Executive had indicated earlier that the preparation work was yet to reach an advanced stage and the Administration had to deal with other pressing items. As the subject matter was not among the priority legislative proposals on the Administration's agenda, the Administration did not have the discussion timetable in this regard. That said, he would convey members' concern to the Security Bureau.

8. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan also asked whether there were any updates on the oath-taking/declaration arrangement for staff of Government-funded bodies. SCS advised that the oath-taking/declaration arrangement for staff of Government-funded bodies was not under the purview of the Civil Service Bureau ("CSB"). Individual Bureaux/Departments ("B/Ds") were studying the issue and would revert to the Legislative Council in due course.

III. An overview of the civil service establishment, strength, retirement, resignation, age profile and gender profile
[LC Paper Nos. CB(4)986/20-21(03) and (04)]

9. At the invitation of the Chairman, SCS briefed members on the overall civil service establishment, strength, retirement, resignation, age profile and gender profile, as set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(4)986/20-21(03)).

Difference between the establishment and strength of the civil service

10. Mr LUK Chung-hung noted with concern that the difference between the establishment and strength of the civil service had reached about 14 000 posts as at 31 March 2021. He asked whether the gap between the establishment and strength of the civil service had widened.

11. SCS replied that the vacancy rate of the civil service ranged from 4% to 7.5% in the past five years, and the increase in the vacancy rate was due to the significant growth of the civil service establishment in recent years. Permanent Secretary for the Civil Service ("PSCS") added that as B/Ds tended to conduct recruitment exercises in the first half year to tie in with the graduation of local university students, the gap between the establishment and strength of the civil service would be wider in the first half year and gradually narrowed down when the vacancies were filled.

12. In response to the questions raised by Mr LUK Chung-hung and Ms Elizabeth QUAT as to whether any measures were in place to close the gap between the establishment and strength of the civil service in a timely manner, SCS advised that there was always a gap between the establishment and

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strength of the civil service due to the lead time for completing recruitment exercises (about six to seven months in average). In this connection, the Administration had streamlined the recruitment process and would improve the planning and coordination of recruitment exercises. PSCS pointed out that some disciplined services departments would conduct year-round recruitment exercises for individual grades to expedite the intake of new recruits.

13. Mr Tony TSE was concerned about the gap between the establishment and strength at directorate level and the prolonged acting appointments for some directorate posts. Having regard that officers at directorate level played an important role in taking forward various major initiatives of the Administration, he asked whether CSB had monitored the arrangements for acting appointments in the civil service.

14. SCS explained that the retirement wave in the Government and the new posts created for implementing new policies in the past few years had led to the increase in the difference between the establishment and strength. He added that an established mechanism was in place to select the most suitable officers for promotion. CSB would remind B/Ds to expedite the conduct of promotion exercises to fill the vacancies at directorate level as soon as practicable.

Recruitment and remuneration

15. Mr CHAN Chun-ying asked whether there were any differences in the remuneration packages and entry requirements between permanent directorate posts and time-limited supernumerary directorate posts. SCS replied in the negative and advised that noting the views of Legislative Council Members on the creation of directorate posts under the current economic situation, the Administration had reviewed the directorate staffing proposals and converted majority of the proposals of permanent directorate posts in 2020-2021 legislative session into time-limited supernumerary directorate posts with duration ranging from three years to a maximum of five years.

16. Noting that the Administration had decided to impose a freeze on the growth in the civil service in 2021-2022, the Deputy Chairman asked how the Administration would alleviate the workload of civil servants and at the same time provide quality public services. Mr Tony TSE was worried that the Administration might impose a recruitment freeze on the civil service for a long period of time and engage a large number of non-civil service contract staff to address the manpower shortage problem. Mr TSE called on the Administration to ensure that there were adequate manpower resources to meet the operational needs of B/Ds during the recruitment freeze.

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17. SCS advised that the Administration would continue to conduct recruitment exercises in 2021-2022 to fill the vacancies arising from retirement and newly created civil service posts to take forward new initiatives. Given that the recruitment freeze in the civil service in the early 2000s had created a manpower gap and resulted in succession problems, the Administration would keep in view the manpower and succession planning in the civil service and provide civil servants with necessary and adequate support to help them perform their duties.

18. Mrs Regina IP asked whether the Administration had encountered recruitment difficulties upon the implementation of oath-taking/declaration arrangement for civil servants. SCS replied in the negative and said that, in a recent recruitment exercise for the Administrative Officer grade, the Administration had received around 14 000 applications, which were 14% more than the around 12 000 applications received under the recruitment exercise conducted last year.

Resignation

19. Mr LUK Chung-hung, the Chairman and Dr CHIANG Lai-wan expressed concern about the increasing number of resignees in the civil service in the past few years. Mr LUK called on the Administration to seriously look into the matter. Mr CHAN Chun-ying asked whether the Administration had ascertained the underlying reasons for civil servants resigning from the civil service. Ms Elizabeth QUAT enquired if the Administration had a grasp of the movements of civil servants after leaving the service.

20. SCS advised that the numbers of resignees in the civil service in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 were 1 571 and 1 863 respectively. The resignation rate was 1.05% of the strength in 2020-2021. He further advised that civil servants resigned from the civil service for various reasons, including health or family issues, taking up jobs in the private sector/statutory bodies, etc., but over half of the resignees left the civil service during their probationary period. From 2018-2019 to 2020-2021, 68%, 63% and 53% of the resigned civil servants left during their probationary period respectively. Having regard to the mounting workload and public expectation towards the civil service in recent years, it was understandable that some probationers found themselves unsuitable for a long term career in the Government and would leave the service during their probationary period.

21. Regarding the resignees who left the civil service in 2020-2021, the Deputy Chairman and Dr CHIANG Lai-wan enquired about their grades, ranks and the B/Ds in which they had served. Dr CHIANG also asked which departments had the highest resignation rate and vacancy rate.

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22. SCS and PSCS explained that as slight personnel changes in B/Ds with small establishment would result in high vacancy rate and/or resignation rate and civil servants of general grades/other centrally managed civil service grades were deployed to work in various B/Ds, the vacancy rate and resignation rate might not truly reflect the manpower situation of individual B/Ds. As such, the Administration considered it inappropriate to compare the rates of various B/Ds.

23. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan requested the Administration to provide the following information as at 31 March 2021:

- (a) civil service vacancy rate;
- (b) department which has the highest vacancy rate, and the vacancy rate of such department;
- (c) civil service resignation rate; and
- (d) department which has the highest resignation rate, and the resignation rate of such department.

(Post-meeting note: The Administration's response was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)1107/20-21(01) on 11 June 2021.)

Wastage situation of individual grades/departments

24. Mrs Regina IP was concerned whether any Administrative Officer ("AO") Grade staff had left the service and opted to work in statutory bodies for better remuneration and working environment. The Chairman echoed and questioned whether the remuneration package offered by the civil service had lost its competitive edge when compared to that offered by the private sector, in particular that the Administration imposed a pay freeze for civil servants in 2020-2021 and civil servants appointed on the New Permanent Terms on or after 1 June 2000 were not entitled to pension, medical and dental benefits after retirement. He called on the Administration to give due consideration to the attractiveness of the civil service remuneration packages in deciding the civil service pay adjustment in 2021-2022 so as to prevent talent drain.

25. SCS reiterated that civil servants resigned from the service for various reasons, and youngsters nowadays had a greater tendency towards job hopping. He believed that the civil service was still attractive and competitive in the labour market as the terms of the Civil Service Provident Fund Scheme, which was applicable to civil servants appointed on or after

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1 June 2000, was more favourable than the retirement benefits provided by many companies in the private market. He noted the Chairman's views on the civil service pay adjustment and assured members that the Administration would give thorough consideration when making a decision on the civil service pay adjustment.

26. Mrs Regina IP sought further information about the strength and wastage situation of AO Grade staff in 2020-2021. SCS advised that in 2020-2021, 14 and 21 staff members in AO Grade left the civil service due to retirement and resignation respectively, and one AO Grade officer transferred to another grade. The wastage rate of AO Grade staff was 5.21% of the strength. Currently there were 680 AO Grade officers, while 317 of them were at directorate level.

27. Ms Elizabeth QUAT enquired about the vacancy rates of the Hong Kong Police Force ("HKPF") and the Correctional Services Department ("CSD"). She asked whether the Administration's initiative of allowing civil servants who joined the Government between 1 June 2000 and 31 May 2015 to extend their service had helped address the serious wastage problem in HKPF and CSD, and how the Administration could alleviate the problem before the completion of the grade structure review for the disciplined services.

28. Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service 1 advised that as at 30 June 2020, the vacancy rates of CSD and HKPF were 7% and 8% respectively. SCS pointed out that apart from allowing disciplined services officers who joined the Government between 1 June 2000 and 31 May 2015 to extend their service, the Chief Executive had approved HKPF's proposal to launch a scheme for all serving police officers at non-directorate level who joined the Government before 1 June 2000 to apply for extending their service beyond retirement age up to the age of 60. Other disciplined services departments were also assessing the need to launch a similar scheme. Coupled with the grade structure review for the disciplined services, the recruitment and retention problems of HKPF and CSD should be adequately addressed. The Administration would brief the Panel on the findings and recommendations of the grade structure review in mid 2021.

Gender profile

29. Mr CHAN Chun-ying sought information about the proportion of female and male officers at the Deputy Secretary level in 2020-2021. SCS replied that as at 31 March 2021, of the 18 Permanent Secretary posts ranked at Point 8 of the Directorate Pay Scale (i.e. the top civil service positions), 14 (or 77.8%) were filled by female officers. Similar situation was noted at the Deputy Secretary level.

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30. The Deputy Chairman enquired whether the Administration would set target ratios for male and female civil servants as a reference for B/Ds. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan urged the Administration to maintain a balanced gender composition in the civil service and conduct studies to assess whether there was gender power imbalance in Hong Kong.

31. SCS advised that the female participation rate in the civil service was increasing. This was in line with the overall trend of increasing female participation in the labour force of Hong Kong. He stressed that as appointments to the civil service were based on the principle of open and fair competition, the gender of a candidate was not a relevant consideration in the selection process. That said, the Administration would keep in view the gender composition of the civil service.

Other concerns

32. Mr SHIU Ka-fai opined that a small number of civil servants had adopted a lax attitude in discharging their duties. He enquired about the measures/mechanism in place to assess the performance of civil servants. SCS advised that civil servants were subject to performance appraisal on an annual basis which enabled B/Ds to monitor and assess their performance. If members of the public were dissatisfied with the work attitude of individual civil servants, they could lodge their complaints to the B/Ds concerned direct. When such complaints were directed to CSB, they would be referred to the relevant departments for follow-up.

33. In response to Mr LUK Chung-hung's question regarding the measures in place to enhance the loyalty, commitment, sense of belonging and solidarity of civil servants, SCS advised that the oath-taking/declaration requirement for civil servants served the purpose of reminding them that they should uphold the Basic Law, bear allegiance to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, be dedicated to their duties and be responsible to the Government. In addition, the Administration would enhance relevant training programmes for civil servants in this regard.

IV. Targeted measures for protection of government employees under the epidemic

[LC Paper No. CB(4)986/20-21(05)]

34. At the invitation of the Chairman, SCS briefed members on the targeted measures for protection of government employees under the epidemic, details of which were set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(4)986/20-21(05)).

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Infection control measures

Contact Tracing work

35. Noting that all government employees and members of the public had been required to use the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app or register their names, contact numbers and the dates and times of their visits before entering any government buildings and offices with effective from 1 March 2021, Mr CHAN Chun-ying asked whether there were government employees preferred to register personal information instead of using the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app. He further asked whether the Administration had checked the accuracy of such personal information provided.

36. Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service 2 replied that almost all of the government employees were using the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app. On rare occasions when some government employees had forgotten to bring their mobile phones, they had to go through the registration process. SCS further assured members that there should not be any concern on privacy issue as the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app did not retrieve data from the users' mobile phones.

37. The Deputy Chairman asked whether there were any government employees who had contracted Coronavirus Disease 2019 ("COVID-19") in the performance of duties. SCS advised that there were 200 confirmed cases of COVID-19 involving government employees in 38 B/Ds as of end April 2021. To his understanding, most of these cases were infected in the community and the relevant B/Ds would provide appropriate support to these staff members in accordance with the established mechanism.

Provision and enhancement of protective gear

38. In response to the Deputy Chairman's enquiry, SCS confirmed that the production of face masks was still ongoing at the workshops of CSD.

39. Noting that there were a total of 200 confirmed cases involving government employees, Mr Tony TSE enquired whether such employees were engaged in frontline duties, such as disciplined or healthcare services. He further enquired whether they were equipped with sufficient personal protective gears. Mr TSE also expressed concern as to whether the Administration had provided extra support to the outsourced services contractors to ensure that their frontline staff were equipped with the necessary personal protective gears.

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40. SCS assured members that necessary personal protective gears had been provided to healthcare workers and frontline staff even when the market was in short supply at the beginning of the outbreak of the epidemic. SCS reiterated that the majority of the confirmed cases involving government employees were infected in the community. Relevant B/Ds had taken necessary infection control measures to prevent an outbreak of COVID-19 in the government buildings or offices. He added that the Administration had provided extra support to the contractors in the provision of personal protective gears to their frontline staff.

Special work arrangements for government employees

41. Ms Elizabeth QUAT expressed concern that some government employees had encountered difficulties working from home due to insufficient provision of computers and other devices. She urged the Administration to review the provision of equipment to facilitate government employees to work at home when necessary. Mr Tony TSE asked about the percentage of government employees who were provided with notebook computers.

42. SCS advised that the Administration had enhanced the technical support for government employees to work from home since January 2020. As of the end of February 2021, the number of staff authorized for using virtual private networks for working remotely had increased from 6 000 to over 20 000 and the number of staff authorized for real-time sharing had increased by 12 700. The number of staff who were provided with notebook computers for accessing department intranets and servers had increased from 7 000 to about 19 000. SCS advised that the Administration would review the arrangements for government employees to work from home.

43. SCS further advised that the Administration had all along been improving the electronic government services and encouraging members of the public to use the post, drop-in boxes or online channels to receive services to reduce social contact. In response to Mr Tony TSE's enquiry about cyber security in the Administration, SCS said that the Administration would closely monitor cyber security and privacy issues.

Vaccination

44. Mr CHAN Chun-ying enquired whether the Administration would provide outreach COVID-19 vaccination ("vaccination") service to individual B/Ds to facilitate civil servants to get vaccinated. Noting that the Administration had set up a small scale vaccination centre at the Central Government Offices, the Deputy Chairman asked whether the Administration

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would consider allowing government employees to get vaccinated together with their family members at the centre.

45. Mr SHIU Ka-fai and the Chairman asked whether the Administration would allow civil servants to get vaccinated during duty hours and grant vaccination leave to them after vaccination so as to encourage them to get vaccinated.

46. SCS advised that government employees were strongly encouraged to receive vaccination to safeguard their health and that of their family members or the people being served. The Administration had requested B/Ds to arrange testing for frontline staff engaged in high-risk duties on a sentinel basis. It would also strengthen the testing for target groups and encourage specific group of frontline government employees to receive vaccination in lieu of the regular testing.

47. SCS also stressed that directorates of B/Ds and himself had taken the lead to get vaccinated and appealed to government employees to get vaccinated as soon as possible. The Administration had taken various measures to facilitate government employees to get vaccinated. They were allowed to get vaccinated during duty hours without taking leave, and B/Ds were advised to handle applications for leave after vaccination favourably. Regarding the leave arrangement after vaccination, SCS advised that the Administration would review the arrangement.

48. As regards vaccination centres, SCS explained that their locations were convenient to both the public and government employees. The vaccination centre set up at the Central Government Offices was open to government employees working in the building or the vicinity. The Administration would provide outreach vaccination service to various sectors and industries, and consider the feasibility of extending the service to individual B/Ds if necessary.

49. Noting that government employees might apply for sick leave to recuperate after vaccination, Ms Elizabeth QUAT asked whether it would be a paid leave and whether this arrangement applied to staff of outsourced services. SCS confirmed that the sick leave taken by government employees would be paid leave. The Administration was examining the arrangements for the staff of outsourced services.

50. In reply to the enquiries of Mr CHAN Chun-ying and Mr SHIU Ka-fai about the vaccination rate among civil servants, SCS advised that the Administration did not have such information. Since a significant number of frontline staff engaged in high-risk duties in the civil service was

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covered in the priority groups of the COVID-19 vaccination programme, he believed that the vaccination rate among civil servants should be higher than that of the whole community.

51. The Chairman opined that the Administration should collect information on the number of civil servants who had been vaccinated. SCS elaborated that B/Ds would identify and draw up a list of frontline staff, covering those who were regularly involved in enforcement, inspection and investigation duties having frequent and close contact with members of the public, or involved in high risk duties. B/Ds would encourage them to get vaccinated in lieu of regular testing on a bi-weekly basis. As such, the Administration would have a better grasp of the number of frontline staff who got vaccinated. However, it would be difficult for the Administration to keep track of whether individual civil servants had been vaccinated.

52. Ms Elizabeth QUAT opined that civil servants, staff of the Hospital Authority, school staff and social welfare organizations' employees should take the lead to get vaccinated so as to encourage the general public to get vaccinated. SCS emphasized that it was the obligation of all civil servants to proactively receive vaccination. The Administration had provided facilitation to colleagues receiving vaccination. To his understanding, staff of the Hospital Authority could receive vaccination at the centres set up at the hospitals they worked in.

(At 12:44 pm, the Chairman extended the meeting for five minutes beyond the appointed ending time to allow sufficient time for discussion.)

53. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan urged the Administration to take new measures to encourage members of the public to receive vaccination as many of them were still hesitant towards vaccination.

54. SCS advised that the Administration had procured sufficient vaccines for the entire Hong Kong population. These vaccines were effective against variants. The vast majority of people, including persons with chronic illness, were suitable to receive these vaccines. The Administration would step up promotion to urge members of the public to get vaccinated by disseminating accurate and comprehensive information on vaccination. Members of the public might seek medical advice if they had concerns. SCS further advised that the community vaccination centres were expected to operate until the end of September 2021.

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55. In response to Dr CHIANG Lai-wan's enquiry, SCS said the coverage of the vaccination programme would be progressively extended to persons under CSD's custody and non-Hong Kong residents who would stay in Hong Kong for a period of time.

V. Any other business

56. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:49 pm.

Council Business Division 4
Legislative Council Secretariat
10 August 2021