

**LegCo Panel on Public Service
Meeting on 19 May 2003**

National Studies Programmes for Civil Servants

This paper briefs Members on the National Studies programmes organised by the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) and Civil Service Training and Development Institute (CSTDI) for civil servants.

Objectives of organising National Studies programmes

2. The main objectives of organising National Studies programmes are to enable Hong Kong civil servants at various levels to acquire knowledge about developments in the Mainland, with particular reference to its political, social, economic and legal systems, and to equip them with the skills required for effective interaction with Mainland officials.

3. In his Policy Address of 1997, the Chief Executive placed emphasis on our commitment to providing more China Studies programmes, when making reference to the role of the Government in creating an environment conducive to greater co-operation between the Mainland and Hong Kong.

4. CSB and CSTDI have since the transition taken proactive steps to enhance our National Studies programmes for civil servants. Apart from organising local National Studies courses, CSB and CSTDI have rolled out more visits and commissioned courses at reputable universities and academic institutions with a view to enabling officers to gain an in-depth understanding of developments in the Mainland as well as providing an opportunity for them to communicate and exchange experience with officials in the Mainland direct. This facilitates the building up of ties that are conducive to strengthening future co-operation with our Mainland counterparts at various levels.

Local courses on National Studies

5. CSTDI organises local courses on National Studies for civil servants at various levels. These include courses commissioned in collaboration with local universities, seminars on contemporary Mainland issues as well as activities to promote understanding of the Basic Law, featuring speakers from the academia, the private sector and government departments. In the six years between 1997 and 2002, about 40,000 civil servants have attended these National Studies courses and seminars.

6. Apart from classroom training, CSTDI also publishes self-learning packages on various topics about Mainland. Up to now, over 2 million copies of 14 packages have been issued to civil servants. In recent years, CSTDI also offers National Studies courses through e-learning means. The Cyber Learning Centre Plus has upgraded its services since September 2002. It now contains two web-based self-learning packages on the Basic Law and one web-based self-learning package and one Job Aid on China. The Job Aid on China provides a monthly update on developments in the Mainland. It also provides hyperlinks to 198 other web-sites with relevant materials on various aspects of the Mainland.

7. To cater for the specific training needs of their staff, individual departments also organise a variety of National Studies programmes for their staff. The structure and contents of these programmes as well as the training methodology adopted are designed to meet the specific operational needs of departments. At present, in addition to training opportunities provided by CSTDI, departments/bureaux are offering some 1,600 customised training places per year for their staff.

National Studies programmes which involve class-room training in and/or visits to the Mainland

8. CSB organises various National Studies courses in the Mainland for senior civil servants. They include the following:

(a) Familiarisation Visits

The first Familiarisation Visit was launched in 1989 for officers at MPS Point 45 or above. As interpretation service is provided, participants who are not proficient in Chinese (or Putonghua) may also join the visits. The visit programme aims to give participants a general exposure to the systems and various aspects of life in the Mainland through discussion sessions, meetings and visits to enterprises and government establishments. At present, about four such visits, each lasting for about five days, are planned for each year. The themes of the next few visits cover the developments in the Pearl River Delta, developments in the Yangzi River Delta and the Go West Project.

(b) National Studies course at the Tsinghua University

The Tsinghua course has been organised since 1993 for officers at MPS Point 45 or above. The course aims to provide participants with a general introduction to the Mainland's political, economic, social, cultural and legal systems. The teaching approach blends classroom training with visits, and meetings with government officials. At present, four such courses are offered a year, each lasting for about 4 weeks. Starting from next year, the duration of the Tsinghua course will be condensed to two weeks thereby making it more focused and helping to ease the release of staff.

(c) Advanced National Studies course at the National School of Administration (NSA) in Beijing

NSA is a ministry level training institution under the State Council. It is the paramount government training agency for the development of senior and middle ranking civil servants and senior public sector managers in the Mainland. The NSA course is a two-week course first launched in 1999 for senior directorate officers. It provides in-depth and theme-based studies on contemporary Mainland issues and policies (e.g. China accession to the WTO, sustainable development strategies in the Mainland, developments in the Great West, various contemporary reform policies). Currently, we are

organising two such courses each year.

(d) Theme-based course

To meet the needs for short theme-based National Studies programmes, we have introduced the Zhongshan University course since 1999 to enable our officers at MPS Point 45 or above who are proficient in Putonghua to gain a better understanding of contemporary issues and policies through a theme-based approach. The one-week course, consisting of a mix of lectures and visits, touches on issues relating to economic co-operation between HKSAR and Southern China. It is particularly relevant to officers who are involved in cross border projects, e.g. infrastructure, town planning, etc. We have so far conducted three such courses, each for about 20 participants. We plan to organise one theme-based course with focus on developments in the Greater Pearl River Delta region by late 2003/early 2004.

New initiatives in recent years

9. In line with the continuing momentum of economic growth in the Mainland and the development of closer economic ties between Hong Kong and the Mainland, we have strengthened our National Studies programmes with the introduction of two new initiatives in the last two years.

Exchange Visit Programme with Mainland Cities

10. To promote the sharing of practical experience in the development and management of urban cities and to strengthen future co-operation between Hong Kong and Mainland cities, we reached an agreement with the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office (HKMAO) in 2001 to introduce an exchange visit programme between senior officials of Hong Kong and major Mainland cities. Apart from visiting a major Mainland city during each visit, our delegations will also visit a less well-developed city in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of different aspects of urban development in the Mainland.

11. The first visit under the programme was conducted in November 2001 when a 11-person strong delegation led by Beijing's Vice Mayor (Executive) visited Hong Kong. Apart from offering a solid platform for the sharing of experience in city management, the 6-day visit had helped fortified contacts between the top officials of both cities. To reciprocate, the Secretary for the Civil Service led a 8-person strong delegation to visit Shanghai and Hangzhou in November 2002. During the visit, the delegation had met with officials from various offices in the Shanghai and Hangzhou Municipal People's Governments and exchanged views on civil service management and other issues.

Staff Exchange Programme

12. We also reached an agreement with HKMAO in 2001 on organising a programme which involves the exchange of senior professional officers between the Mainland and HKSAR. The objectives of the programme are to enrich and broaden the exposure of officers of the respective governments, foster communication and enable cross-fertilisation of experience and expertise in areas of special relevance to the respective civil service.

13. As a start, CSB has reached an agreement with the Shanghai Municipal People's Government to arrange at least one exchange programme for not more than five professional officers each year from 2002 to 2005. The officers selected are attached to the other government for three to six months for experience sharing. During the attachment, the secondees remain the employees of their home government. Their remuneration and the expenses incurred are borne by their respective government. The secondees are subject to general rules and codes of conduct appropriate to their positions in the service of their host government. They are also bound by the legislation and regulations governing official secrets and confidentiality enforced by the host government.

14. Four senior professional officers from the Architectural Services Department, Environmental Protection Department and Highways Department respectively of the HKSARG and four senior professional officers from the counterpart departments in Shanghai joined the first exchange programme in 2002. The attachments are more training in nature and do not involve substantial functional discharge of public duties. The secondees have gained invaluable opportunities through the exchange programme to share with their counterparts experience and expertise on professional management. It has contributed toward

further fostering the partnership and communication between both civil services. We are now discussing with the Shanghai side on arrangements for the next programme.

Future Direction

15. It is important to keep our civil servants abreast of contemporary developments in the Mainland and to sustain our efforts in building up closer ties between Hong Kong civil servants and their Mainland counterparts. We will endeavour to make our National Studies programmes more robust in the years to come.

16. Starting from next year, we will be offering a Peking University National Studies programme for senior civil servants. This two-week programme will be similar to the Tsinghua course which provides participants with a general introduction to the Mainland's systems. Two such courses will be organised each year. We will also organise more theme-based seminars to keep our civil servants in touch with latest developments in the Mainland.

Civil Service Bureau
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