

**For discussion
on 19 January 2009**

Legislative Council Panel on Public Service

Entry System for the Civil Service

Purpose

This paper provides information on the implementation of the new civil service entry system.

Background

2. As one of the initiatives of the Civil Service Reform, the Government introduced a new entry system for new recruits appointed on civil service terms on or after 1 June 2000¹. The objective of the new entry system is to provide greater flexibility in the civil service appointment system and allow for better quality control of staff.

Core components of the new entry system

3. Under the new entry system, new recruits to basic ranks are normally appointed on three-year probationary terms, to be followed by three-year agreement terms, before they are considered for appointment on permanent terms (hereafter referred to as the “3+3” system). As at March 2008, there were a total of 153 477 civil servants, of whom 12 863 (or 8.4%) were appointed on new terms. Among the latter, 8 122 were on probation terms, 691 were on agreement terms, and 4 044 were on permanent terms as at March 2008².

4. Individual grades may, with the approval of the Civil Service Bureau, modify the “3+3” system to meet management and operational needs. For those

¹ Prior to the implementation of the new entry system, new appointees to the civil service, irrespective of ranks, were normally employed on probationary terms for a period of time before they were confirmed to permanent establishment. This period of time was two years for some ranks and three years for other ranks.

² The remaining six civil servants were appointed on day-to-day terms pending completion of recruitment formalities (e.g. medical examination). Upon satisfactory completion of the formalities, they would be offered appointment on probationary terms with retrospective effect from the date of appointment on day-to-day terms.

civil service grades under the purview of the Public Service Commission³, approval of the Civil Service Bureau on the advice of the Commission is required for any modification. For example, for reason of stability, approval has been given for new recruits joining all disciplined services grades to be offered appointment on permanent terms after satisfactory completion of the three-year probation period.

5. To cater for the circumstances of individual candidates, the probation period may be reduced by up to half – on a case-by-case basis – for those new recruits who are civil servants or non-civil service contract staff who have performed duties comparable to those of their new civil service appointments. Since the implementation of the new entry system, some 1 700 recruits (or 12.5%) have had their probation period reduced.

Better quality control of staff

6. Unlike the practice adopted by the private sector, appointment to the civil service on permanent terms is distinct in that it provides a long-term career and a high level of job security. A three-year probation period for assessment of basic suitability followed by a three-year agreement service to confirm the longer term potential and attributes of a civil servant is commensurate with the security of tenure and career expectation offered by subsequent appointment on permanent terms. It helps to ensure that only candidates with qualities suited for civil service jobs are retained in the service. Among the 13 980 civil servants who had been appointed under the new entry system since its implementation in June 2000 and up to March 2008, 37 (or 0.3%) had been made to leave the service⁴ due to unsatisfactory performance/conduct.

Recruitment and retention of staff

7. Concerns have been raised that requiring civil servants under the new entry system to serve for six years before affording them security of long-term employment would not be conducive to attracting quality individuals to join the civil service and retaining quality staff in the service. Staff recruitment and retention in the civil service is affected by a number of factors such as current economic situation and short-term economic outlook, the availability of job opportunities in the private sector, and the number of job seekers in the market.

³ The Public Service Commission is a statutory body. In accordance with the Public Service Commission Ordinance, the advice of the Commission has to be sought for appointment of officers to senior ranking civil service posts attracting maximum monthly pay at Master Pay Scale (MPS) Point 26 and above or equivalent, excluding the basic ranks of non-degree entry and non-professional grades with a maximum monthly salary at MPS Point 26 or above, the judicial service, the Independent Commission Against Corruption and the disciplined ranks of the Hong Kong Police Force.

⁴ Including termination of service during the probation/agreement period and non-offer of further employment upon completion of the probation/agreement period by the management.

8. We have been keeping a close watch on the civil service recruitment and resignation statistics. We note that the situation in 2008 (when the “3+3” system has been implemented for more than seven years and when the open recruitment freeze was lifted for most grades) was broadly on par with that in 1998 (prior to the introduction of the “3+3 system” and to the open recruitment freeze which came into effect in 1999). On the recruitment front, a total of 271 971 applications (covering 277 exercises) and 264 412 applications (covering 184 exercises) were received in the recruitment exercises of all civil service grades conducted in 1998 and 2008 respectively. On average, 982 applications were received in each recruitment exercise conducted in 1998, and 1 437 in each exercise in 2008. As regards the number of resignation cases, the figures in 1998 and 2008 were 987 and 601 respectively, accounting for 0.5% of the strength of civil servants in 1998 and 0.4% in 2008. Of the 987 resignees in 1998, 354 (or 35.9%) had yet to serve out their probation period, whereas among the 601 resignees in 2008, 266 (or 44.3%) had yet to serve out their “3+3” period. On the basis of the information available, there is no evidence to suggest that the “3+3” system has deterred good candidates from pursuing a long-term career in the civil service. A breakdown of the recruitment and resignation statistics by civilian and disciplined services grades in the years of 1998 and 2008 is at *Annex*.

9. Concerns have also been expressed that the “3+3” system would facilitate dismissal of civil servants through forced redundancy. We wish to point out that the Government has always strived to maintain the stability of the civil service. There had been no forced redundancy of civil servants during the period when the civil service establishment was brought down from some 198 000 in 2000 to about 160 000 in 2007. No civil servant has been made to leave the service due to uncertainty or cessation of service needs thus far.

Conclusion

10. We consider that the “3+3 system” has been effective in achieving an appropriate balance between stability and quality assurance. We will continue to monitor the overall appointment and unnatural wastage of civil servants. We will also continue to consider and – where justified and with the support of the Public Service Commission as relevant – approve modification to the “3+3 system” for specific grades. We would consider any systemic changes to the “3+3” system should circumstances warrant.

Recruitment and Resignation Statistics in 1998 and 2008

	1998			2008		
RECRUITMENT ^{Note 1}	Number of applications	Number of recruitment exercises	Average number of applications per recruitment exercise	Number of applications	Number of recruitment exercises	Average number of applications per recruitment exercise
Civilian grades	165 077	248	666	216 575	171	1 267
Disciplined services grades	106 894	29	3 686	47 837	13	3 680
Total	271 971	277	982	264 412	184	1 437
RESIGNATION ^{Note 2}	Number of resignation cases	Strength	Turnover rate	Number of resignation cases	Strength	Turnover rate
Civilian grades	675	136 827	0.5%	281	103 359	0.3%
Disciplined services grades	312	49 386	0.6%	320	50 446	0.6%
Total	987	186 213	0.5%	601	153 805	0.4%

Note:

(1) Recruitment exercises of Police Constable and Inspector of Police are conducted all year round. For the purpose of calculating average number of applications per exercise, one recruitment exercise is counted for each year.

(2) Turnover rate = Number of resignation cases in the year / Strength as at the beginning of the year