

For discussion
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Legislative Council Panel on Public Service

Policy Initiatives of the Civil Service Bureau

Purpose

The 2007/08 Policy Address and Policy Agenda set out the Government's new and on-going initiatives. This paper elaborates on the initiatives relating to the Civil Service Bureau (CSB).

New Initiatives under the 2007/08 Policy Address and Policy Agenda

2. The 2007/08 Policy Address and Policy Agenda contain a number of new initiatives on the management of the civil service. The implementation of these initiatives is set out in the following paragraphs.

(a) Issue a Civil Service Code

3. The political appointment system for Principal Officials was introduced in July 2002 to create a political tier at the top echelon of the Government. It has been operating for more than five years now. In addition, the Administration will shortly decide the way forward on the proposed further development of this system, on which the public was consulted earlier this year.

4. Complementing the political appointment system, we consider it appropriate to prepare and issue a Civil Service Code applicable to civil servants. The Code will set out the principles and values which civil servants are expected to uphold and the framework within which they are expected to work with appointees under the political appointment system. The Civil Service Code will also delineate the roles and responsibilities of civil servants under the political appointment system and safeguard the

integrity and political impartiality of the civil service. We will consult the staff sides before issuance of the Code.

(b) Include an assessment on knowledge of the Basic Law in the civil service recruitment process, and implement an action plan to enhance understanding of the Basic Law by serving civil servants

5. To encourage greater understanding of the Basic Law among the community, we will consider how an assessment on Basic Law knowledge can be featured in the recruitment process for job openings in the civil service, e.g. through incorporating Basic Law questions in written examinations or recruitment interviews.

6. For serving civil servants at different levels, we will implement an action plan which will ensure that the Basic Law forms an integral part of their training and that such training is provided in a systematic and well planned manner. The action plan will include the provision of an introductory course on the Basic Law for new appointees, an intermediate course for middle level officers and an advanced course for senior officers.

7. In addition, to engender and sustain the interest of civil servants, in particular junior and frontline staff, in the learning of the Basic Law, we aim to create a learning community by organising interesting and easy-to-understand learning and promotional activities for civil servants. The Civil Service Training and Development Institute under CSB will co-ordinate the training on the Basic Law for civil servants. We will develop new information systems to help monitor progress.

(c) Invite the relevant advisory bodies on civil service salaries and conditions of service to conduct grade structure reviews for selected grades

8. In the context of the 2006 Pay Level Survey (PLS), we undertook to conduct grade structure reviews for the directorate grades and the disciplined services as the PLS did not cover them owing to the lack of private sector comparators for the disciplined services and the need for adopting a different survey methodology for the directorate. We also plan to conduct grade structure reviews for a few selected non-directorate civilian grades that are

facing serious recruitment and retention difficulties. In line with past practice, we will invite the relevant advisory bodies on civil service salaries and conditions of service, which are supported by the Joint Secretariat of the advisory bodies, to carry out the grade structure reviews.

On-going Initiatives under the 2007/08 Policy Agenda

9. The 2007/08 Policy Agenda contains five on-going initiatives on the management of the civil service in the chapter of “Developing Democracy, Enhancing Governance”. The implementation of these on-going initiatives is set out in the following paragraphs.

(a) Continue to control the size of the civil service

10. We will continue to control the size of the civil service. As at the end of July 2007, the civil service establishment stood at around 162 200, representing a reduction of about 18% from the peak of 198 000 in early 2000. Through measures such as internal deployment, deletion of vacancies, streamlining, re-engineering, etc, we will continue to work with individual bureaux and departments to control the size of their establishment. At the same time, we will ensure that they have the necessary manpower to implement the various new policy initiatives in the 2007 Policy Address.

11. We are also mindful of the need to inject new talents into the civil service and to forestall succession problem in the longer term. In this connection, we have decided that the open recruitment freeze imposed on grades included in the Second Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VR II) will not be further extended after its scheduled expiry on 21 March 2008. Taking into account the lead-time of an open recruitment exercise, we have allowed HoDs to initiate the open recruitment process for VR II grades under their management, provided that no offer of appointment is made before 21 March 2008.

(b) Continue to provide civil servants with training and development opportunities and to fortify a culture of continuous learning in the civil service

12. In order to ensure the civil service keeps pace with the changing environment and demands of the community, we are committed to providing civil servants at different ranks with a variety of training and development opportunities, thereby equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge, including their understanding of the latest developments in the Mainland.

13. Continuous endeavours are made to deepen civil servants' knowledge in the latest developments in the Mainland through training courses, theme-based visits, civil service exchange and a dedicated website. Theme-based visits or structured programmes in the Mainland include the national studies programmes at Tsinghua University, Peking University, China Foreign Affairs University, National School of Administration, Sun Yat-sen University and Peking University Shenzhen Graduate School. We also provide local national studies training to enhance civil servants' understanding of the latest political, social and economic developments in the Mainland. The Civil Service Exchange Programme with the Mainland now covers Guangdong, Shanghai, Beijing and Hangzhou. We will continue to enrich our dedicated website on national studies to provide more robust learning resources. As mentioned in paragraphs 6 and 7 above, we will implement an action plan to ensure that the Basic Law forms an integral part of the training for civil servants and that such training is provided in a systematic and planned manner.

14. Various management-related training programmes, such as leadership development and people-based governance, are provided to middle managers and senior staff. These programmes include, for example, a three-week leadership course for prospective directorate officers, workshops and seminars for directorate officers on various themes such as communication strategy and performance management. We have also made strenuous efforts to carry frontline staff on board in coping with changes. We will continue to focus on job skills and personal effectiveness training for clerical and secretarial staff to enhance their capability to take on new job assignments with competence and confidence.

15. We will continue to enhance the quality and variety of the e-learning resources available at the Cyber Learning Centre Plus (CLC Plus) website in order to facilitate the pursuit of continuous learning among civil servants.

There are now over 280 web courses and job aids on language, IT, management, and a whole array of e-learning resources on national studies, health and stress management. The number of registered users of the CLC Plus has increased from 62,000 in 2006 to 71,000 by the end of August 2007.

16. In addition, a new training administration system will soon be rolled out service-wide to all bureaux and departments. This convenient one-stop service platform, with an electronic workflow and instantaneous capture, storage and retrieval of training data, will enable better management of the training function, both for individual civil servants and departments.

(c) Continue to maintain and enhance morale of the civil service

17. In keeping with our policy to induce meritorious performance through proper recognition, we introduced in 2004 the Secretary for the Civil Service's Commendation Award Scheme. In 2007, 75 civil servants from 38 bureaux/departments will be awarded the Commendation.

18. Separately, we introduced in 1999 the "Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme". This Scheme recognises those departments and teams that are considered to provide best citizen-centric services to the public. It also recognises partnership efforts amongst two or more departments to provide enhanced services to the public. Quality services provided by teams of civil servants who have introduced innovative ideas, are proactive in applying new technology, or are engaged in specialised or internal operations that may not be widely known to the public, are also recognised. The 2007 Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme attracted 129 entries from 49 departments. Two half-hour TV programmes and 5 short videos featuring the exemplary services of the winning teams and departments were broadcast on TVB Jade and KCRC trains respectively in September/October 2007.

(d) Continue to maintain a vigorous, effective and efficient disciplinary system against misconduct in the civil service

19. With the introduction of simplified procedures for removing persistent under-performers in March 2003, bureaux and departments have found it more effective to deploy the tool to deal with under-performance.

Building on the positive results achieved and following consultations with the Public Service Commission and the staff sides, we further revised the procedures in 2005 to enable swifter action to be taken against under-performers. We will continue to monitor closely implementation of the streamlined procedures for removing under-performers.

20. We will also sustain our efforts in reinforcing a performance-based culture in the civil service that is conducive to improving efficiency and productivity in the civil service.

(e) Continue to develop an effective arrangement for implementing both upward and downward pay adjustments in future

21. The management of civil service pay comprises three main components: (i) the conduct of a pay level survey every six years to ascertain whether civil service pay is broadly comparable with private sector pay; (ii) the conduct of a starting salaries survey every three years to ascertain whether the starting pay specified for different entry ranks in the civil service requiring different qualifications is comparable with private sector jobs requiring similar qualifications; and (iii) the conduct of a pay trend survey every year to ascertain the average year-on-year movements in private sector pay.

22. Developing an effective arrangement for implementing both upward and downward pay adjustments is part and parcel of the initiative to develop an improved civil service pay adjustment mechanism. We will continue to discuss this issue with the staff sides.

Way Forward

23. The Administration is committed to maintaining a civil service with the highest level of integrity, efficiency and performance in order to contribute to the effective governance of the HKSAR. We will continue to keep under review civil service policies and practices concerning matters such as recruitment, appointment, pay and conditions of service, manpower planning, training and development, conduct and discipline, etc.

24. We will take forward the new and on-going initiatives in close consultation with departmental management and staff. We will seek Members' views or keep Members informed as appropriate.

Civil Service Bureau
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