

For discussion
on 19 October 2021

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON PUBLIC SERVICE

Policy Measures of Civil Service Bureau in the 2021 Policy Address

Purpose

This paper outlines the policy measures relating to Civil Service Bureau (CSB) featured in the 2021 Policy Address and Policy Address Supplement.

Details

2. With the implementation of The Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (the National Security Law) and improvement to our electoral system, chaos has ended and social order has been restored. We are now embracing a new era where we can focus on economic development and improving people's livelihood. The 2021 Policy Address delivered by the Chief Executive focuses on developing and mapping out Hong Kong's future, and puts forth a number of new measures.

3. In order to achieve good administration and governance so that we could implement various measures and long-term development plans to benefit the public and resolve the society's problems, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government will enhance the effectiveness of governance in five aspects, which include: re-organising the government structure, attracting talents to join the Government as politically appointed officials, reviewing the selection and appointment mechanism for senior levels of civil service, advocating dedicated positions with specific responsibilities, and enhancing Government's capability in information dissemination and public communication.

Strengthening Governance

4. As the backbone of the HKSAR Government, the civil service plays a vital role in implementing “One Country, Two Systems”. CSB will strengthen the main elements of the management of the civil service, including recruitment, training and the selection and appointment mechanism for senior civil service positions, so that the civil service can zealously embrace the opportunities and challenges of the new era.

Review of the Basic Law Test in Civil Service Recruitment

5. For all civil service positions requiring academic qualifications at or above completion of secondary education level, the job applicants must sit the Basic Law Test (BLT). The BLT result will constitute an appropriate weighting in a candidate’s overall assessment. This August, CSB stipulated a pass result in the BLT as an entry requirement for these positions. Regardless of the performance of the candidates in other parts of the assessments, applicants for the jobs concerned must pass the BLT in order to be considered for appointment.

6. In order to ensure that new recruits to the civil service will have basic understanding of the Basic Law and the National Security Law, we will review and update the assessment content of the Basic Law Test, and include the National Security Law in the scope of assessment to render the test better-suited to the requirements of the relevant civil service posts.

7. We believe that the updated Basic Law and National Security Law Test can further promote the learning and deepen the understanding of the Basic Law and the National Security Law among those who are interested in joining the civil service. The new assessment content is expected to be incorporated in the Basic Law and National Security Law Test from mid-2022 onwards.

Requirement for Government Staff to Sign Declaration

8. CSB introduced, in October 2020 and January 2021 respectively, the arrangements for requiring new appointees to the civil service and serving civil servants to sign a declaration to uphold the Basic Law, bear allegiance to the HKSAR of the People's Republic of China, be dedicated to their duties and be responsible to the HKSAR Government. Starting from October 2021, prospective appointees to the civil service shall sign the declaration as one of the conditions for appointment, and it must be completed before being appointed. Civil servants appointed to senior positions such as Heads of Departments are also required to take an oath.

9. At present, all serving civil servants, including those who joined the HKSAR Government before 1 July 2020, have signed the declaration. For 129 officers who neglected or refused to duly sign and return the declaration without any reasonable explanation, the great majority of them have already left the Government for various reasons, including termination of probationary service in accordance with the Civil Service Regulations (CSRs), retirement in the public interest under section 12 of the Public Service (Administration) Order, resignation, or dismissal due to misconduct. It is expected that the service of the remaining officers will be terminated shortly.

10. The declaration requirement was also extended to Government staff appointed on non-civil service terms on or after 1 July 2020. More than 18 000 full-time and 8 000 part-time serving non-civil service Government staff have signed and returned their declarations. Among them, the 149 full-time and 386 part-time non-civil service Government staff who neglected or refused to duly sign and return the declaration without reasonable explanation have all left the Government already.

11. The requirement for civil servants and non-civil service government staff to sign the declaration is an open acknowledgement of the acceptance and a genuine manifestation of the responsibilities of and expectations on them, thereby further safeguarding and promoting the core values that should be upheld by all government staff, and ensuring

the effective governance of the HKSAR Government. This also accords with the requirement of the National Security Law.

Strengthening Civil Service Training

(a) Civil Service College

12. The establishment of the Civil Service College is a major undertaking by the HKSAR Government to enhance training for civil servants on all fronts. Civil service training is currently delivered by the Civil Service Training and Development Institute (CSTDI) under CSB. The Government proposed to establish a civil service college in the 2017 Policy Address, and announced in the 2018 Policy Address that a site in Kwun Tong had been identified for composite development, including the construction of the College and other facilities, based on the principle of “single site, multiple uses”. Funding approval for the Kwun Tong Composite Development project has just been obtained from the LegCo Finance Committee on 8 October 2021. The tendering exercise has also commenced. The construction works are expected to commence in 2022. Subject to the actual progress of the construction works, the composite development is expected to be completed by phase beginning from the end of 2026.

13. Pending commissioning of its long-term accommodation in Kwun Tong, the Government plans to establish the College at the end of this year in CSTDI’s existing premises in the North Point Government Offices (NPGO). Upgrading and refurbishing works for the facilities in NPGO are already underway.

14. In parallel, we are also preparing for the recruitment exercise of the Head of the College, with a view to appointing through an open-cum-in service recruitment exercise a suitable candidate to the post in Q1 of 2022 to steer further development of the College and drive the efforts of delivering various initiatives on the front of civil service training.

(b) Current New Initiatives in Strengthening Civil Service Training

15. The Government has also set up the Civil Service Training Advisory Board, which comprises prominent leaders in the business, professional and academic fields and government officials, to give guidance on training programmes for the civil service and its long-term development strategy. The Advisory Board has set up four working groups to examine four key areas of training for civil servants in a focused manner, namely national studies and the Basic Law, leadership development, innovation and technology applications, and international collaboration. The working groups will finish their work shortly in mapping out the way forward for enhancing training in the respective areas.

16. The civil service is the backbone of the HKSAR Government, shouldering the responsibilities of thoroughly implementing “One Country, Two Systems”. It is of utmost importance for civil servants to understand accurately the constitutional order established under the Constitution of our country and the Basic Law to ensure the steadfast and successful implementation of “One Country, Two Systems”. Civil servants must also have an accurate understanding of the Hong Kong National Security Law, enhance their awareness of safeguarding national security and act in full accord with the HKSAR Government in discharging its duty to safeguard national security. The Government has strengthened training for civil servants on the country’s Constitution, the Basic Law and the National Security Law. With the establishment of the Civil Service College by the end of this year, and upon resumption of normal cross-boundary flow of people between Hong Kong and the Mainland, we will continue to enhance training in this area both in breath and depth. We will establish a more systematic training framework and designate training programmes for mandatory attendance, so as to enhance the understanding of civil servants on our country’s development and the HKSAR’s constitutional order.

17. On the front of national studies training, we will also arrange for more middle and senior-level civil servants to take part in national studies programmes or thematic visits in the Mainland that suit their ranks as they advance in their career, so that they will have appropriate

opportunities to deepen their understanding of the country at different career stages. Participation in programmes held in the Mainland will also constitute a part of the training framework for civil servants. We have been getting in close touch with the relevant authorities of the Guangdong Province and Shenzhen municipality, with a view to extending the Civil Service Staff Exchange Programme between Hong Kong and the Mainland to cover the Mainland municipalities in the Greater Bay Area (GBA). This will provide our civil servants with the opportunity to experience more deeply the development of the GBA municipalities, so as to enable them to play a more active role in the development of the GBA in their respective areas of work.

18. In face of the increasingly sophisticated international landscape, civil servants need to acquire a deeper understanding of the national development strategy and the evolving global order. We will enhance training for civil servants in learning more about the country's foreign affairs, through close collaboration with the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the HKSAR, so as to deepen civil servants' understanding of the international scene and the country's positioning which in turn enables them to act in better concert with the country's foreign affairs policy in handling the relevant areas of work.

19. On the front of training for senior civil servants, we will collaborate with renowned Mainland institutions. We are working with Peking University to jointly design and organise a Master Programme in Public Policy, and will arrange for senior civil servants to attend this programme to be launched in 2022. The whole programme will last for two years, with the first year to be attended in Peking University. Moreover, since 2021, we have provided sponsorship for senior civil servants nominated by their departments to attend the Project of Hong Kong Public Administrative Talents, Executive Master of Public Administration Programme, Tsinghua University, so as to broaden their horizons and enhance their expertise in public administration. We will continue to offer sponsorship for this programme.

Review of Selection and Appointment Mechanism for Senior Levels of Civil Service

20. Directorate civil servants including Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Departments, who are at the core and highest echelons of the civil service, also play a critical role in the effective implementation of policies in the HKSAR. CSB will review the existing selection and appointment mechanism for the senior levels of the civil service in the coming months in accordance with the principle of meritocracy, which will cover whether the scope of grades and ranks that could be considered for promotion to such posts could be widened, with a view to appointing the most visionary and competent officers to the most suitable positions.

21. In face of what is required of the governing team in the new era, CSB will review the appraisal arrangement for directorate civil servants, including the competency requirements for directorate civil servants and the assessment methods adopted by appraising officers. This is to enable a more comprehensive and detailed reflection of the competencies and potential of directorate civil servants, which would serve as accurate reference in the selection of talents for advancement to senior positions.

22. In reviewing the existing selection and appointment mechanism for senior civil service positions, CSB will fully consult the Public Service Commission, with the aim to pursue excellence in the administration of the civil service appointment and promotion systems.

Advocating Dedicated Positions with Specific Responsibilities

23. In addition, the Policy Address also suggests Directors of Bureaux to make greater use of commissioner posts (e.g. Commissioner for Heritage, Commissioner for Sports and Commissioner for the Development of the Guangdong Hong Kong Macao Greater Bay Area) to take forward the relevant work, and to play an “advocacy” role in certain specific areas. This serves to highlight the importance the Government attaches to the relevant policy areas and avoid the undesirable situation of fragmentation of responsibilities among different departments or that the public not knowing which bureau or department to turn to for assistance.

Civil Service Establishment

24. The civil service is the core team formulating and implementing the Government's policies and measures. Between 2017-18 and 2021-22, the civil service establishment has increased by about 19 500 posts (11%). The projected establishment by end-March 2022 will be 197 646 posts.

25. We will have zero growth in the civil service establishment in 2021-22 in order to ensure steady development of the civil service while maintaining the sustainability of public finance. We encourage bureaux and departments to enhance effectiveness and efficiency through re-prioritisation, internal redeployment and streamlining of work processes, so that the workload can be coped with even without increase in civil service establishment.

Strengthening the Management of Probationary Civil Servants

26. The Government attaches great importance to the conduct of civil servants. The conduct of civil servants should not lead the public to cast doubt on them, and civil servants must absolutely not participate in any unlawful activities. The Government adopts a zero-tolerance attitude towards the breaching of the law by civil servants. With the arrest of a number of civil servants in the social unrest earlier, the Government has tightened the scrutiny of probationary civil servants, with a view to instilling a stronger sense of discipline and integrity among civil servants.

27. All along, it has been the responsibility of the Heads of Departments/Grades to apply stringent standards in assessing the performance and conduct of probationers in accordance with the provisions of CSRs, to ensure that only those who are considered suitable in all respects are allowed to pass the probation bar. For probationers who have been arrested and charged with offences related to their suspected involvement in unlawful public activities, the Department should terminate their probationary service in accordance with the CSRs.

Extension of Service of Civil Servants

28. To be more targeted in achieving the goal of expanding the labour force, the Government launched in July 2018 the option for serving civil servants who joined the Government between 1 June 2000 and 31 May 2015 to choose to retire at 65 (for civilian grades) or 60 (for disciplined services grades). At the end of the option period, some 47 000 civil servants, representing about 83% of those eligible, had opted for the new retirement age. The option taken by the eligible civil servants had been implemented on 15 March 2021. At the same time, having regard to factors such as their overall manpower situation, genuine and operational needs, as well as succession planning, departments have been deploying, where necessary, the various flexible measures for extending the service of civil servants, including the Post-retirement Service Contract Scheme, final extension of service and the adjusted further employment mechanism, to retain civil servants having reached their retirement age to meet manpower needs and to pass on experience within the civil service.

Grade Structure Review for the Disciplined Services

29. The Chief Executive-in-Council decided on 10 August 2021 to accept in full the recommendations made by the Standing Committee on Disciplined Services Salaries and Conditions of Service and the Standing Committee on Directorate Salaries and Conditions of Service in the Report on the Grade Structure Review for the Disciplined Services (the Report). The Report covered enhancement in areas including pay, grade structures, conditions of service, etc., with an aim to ensure that the grade structures and remuneration of the disciplined services are still effective in attracting and retaining talent under the current social environment with the job nature, responsibilities and workload of the disciplined services. With approval from the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council, recommendations on salary and increment, as well as the normal conversion arrangement for serving staff in the affected ranks, have come into effect starting from 1 September 2021.

Civil Service Medical and Dental Benefits

30. The Chief Executive announced in her 2018 Policy Address the introduction of Chinese Medicine as part of the civil service medical benefits. Subsequently, the Government launched the Pilot Scheme on Civil Service Chinese Medicine Clinics (Pilot Scheme) in March 2020. Two Civil Service Chinese Medicine Clinics (CSCMCs) have been set up at the Chinese Medicine Clinics cum Training and Research Centres (CMCTRs) in the Eastern and Tsuen Wan districts respectively, providing civil service eligible persons (CSEPs) with an additional choice when seeking medical treatment.

31. The Pilot Scheme has been very well received by the CSEPs with the average utilisation rate over 95% since service launch. In order to assess the effectiveness of the Pilot Scheme, we have just completed a review and decided to regularise the Pilot Scheme. We plan to increase the number of discs by increasing the capacity of the two CSCMCs and setting up new civil CSCMC(s) at other CMCTR(s). Our target is to increase the annual service capacity from 63 000 currently to around 100 000 by 2022-23. In addition, we will adopt a series of measures to enhance the Chinese Medicine services, including launching a CSCMCs webpage to enhance communication and information dissemination, as well as introducing a mobile application within 2022 for appointment booking of Chinese Medicine services. The Government will strive to improve the Chinese Medicine services for CSEPs in close collaboration with the Hospital Authority and the CSCMCs, with a view to providing more comprehensive civil service medical benefits to CSEPs in the long run.

32. Apart from enhancing the Chinese Medicine services, we will continue to provide better quality and systematic medical services for CSEPs with chronic diseases through two services programmes, namely the “Integrated Care Programme” and “Stable Drug Use Pilot Programme” launched in March 2020. Furthermore, we are working towards the setting up of more families clinics and dental clinics with a view to enhancing the medical and dental benefits for CSEPs in the long run.

Mainland and Local Education Allowance

33. Having regard to the Government's policy of encouraging young people in Hong Kong to actively integrate into the overall development of our country, CSB has put in place the Mainland and Local Education Allowance (MLEA) scheme by expanding the scope of the then Local Education Allowance (LEA) scheme to cover primary and secondary education in the Mainland on the premise that the eligibility criteria and the maximum rates for the LEA remain intact. Eligible civil servants (i.e. those who were offered appointment before 1 June 2000 and joined the civil service) can apply for education allowances in respect of their children's primary and secondary education in the Mainland or in Hong Kong.

Extending Maternity Leave for All Female Government Employees

34. With immediate effect from the date of the announcement of the 2018 Policy Address by the Chief Executive (i.e. 10 October 2018), the maternity leave for all eligible female employees of the Government has been extended from 10 to 14 weeks to allow them more time to take care of their new-born children. As at 31 March 2021, more than 4 000 Government employees had benefited from this measure.

Internship in Government Departments and Public Organisations

35. In order to encourage and assist young people to make better planning and preparation before entering the job market, the Government offers different short-term internship opportunities to students every year. In 2021/22, the Government and public organisations provided about 3 500 short-term internship placements to expose more post-secondary students to the work of the Government and public organisations with a view to enabling them to gain valuable experience and broadening their perspectives.

Employment of Non-ethnic Chinese

36. The Government places great emphasis on creating an equitable and caring society for our culturally diverse groups. As far as

employment support is concerned, CSB launched an internship programme since 2019 for non-ethnic Chinese students to help them acquire work experience and gear up for employment. So far, a total of around 80 non-ethnic Chinese post-secondary students from the eight universities funded by University Grants Committee and local higher education institutions participated in the programme and were posted to different government departments for an internship lasting about eight weeks.

37. With a view to providing more government job opportunities for non-ethnic Chinese, CSB will co-ordinate another comprehensive review by all Heads of Departments/Grades of the Chinese language proficiency requirements for all the grades of the civil service since the round completed in 2018. This is to ensure that such requirements are no more than necessary for performance of the job, so that non-ethnic Chinese would have equal access to government job opportunities like other applicants.

Employment of Persons with Disabilities

38. As an Equal Opportunities employer, the Government has all along been leading by example in its commitment to eliminating disabilities and other forms of discrimination in employment. We have formulated and implemented facilitating measures to assist persons with disabilities to apply for government jobs to ensure that they enjoy equal opportunities in this respect. We have also enhanced our effort in providing students with disabilities with internship opportunities in the Government. Starting from 2018, we have doubled the number of internship places for students with disabilities from an average of 50 per year in the past to 100 per year. We will continue to assign them with diversified jobs having regard to their aptitude and interests. As of September 2021, 458 students with disabilities had participated in the internship scheme.

COVID-19 Vaccination Programme

39. CSB is also responsible for the implementation of COVID-19 Vaccination Programme together with FHB.

40. The Government launched the territory-wide COVID-19 Vaccination Programme in February 2021 to provide to the eligible population the Sinovac and Comirnaty vaccines, which are safe, efficacious and meet quality requirements. Under the Programme, members of the public may get vaccinated through channels such as Community Vaccination Centres (CVCs), general outpatient clinics under the Hospital Authority, private clinics and outreach services, etc. As at 11 October, the Government has provided to the public around 8.83 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines. Around 4.54 million people have received the first dose, accounting for around 67.4% of the eligible population.

41. Hong Kong has procured sufficient vaccine doses for vaccination by the entire population. We will continue to press ahead with vaccination amongst target groups, particularly the elderly over 70 years of age to protect them from serious illness if they were infected and to build a community defence. In order to facilitate members of the public to get vaccinated, 21 CVCs will have their operations extended till end-2021. The same day ticket arrangement has also been extended to cover all eligible persons who want to receive vaccination. In view that the vaccination rate of elders is persistently low and growing at a slow rate, we strive to encourage and facilitate elders to get vaccination through different ways, such as organising health talks at shopping centres, housing estates and districts, with healthcare personnel answering enquiries from the elderly and their families and the provision of vaccination services on-site. Starting from 29 September, COVID-19 Vaccination Stations operated by medical organisations have been set up in three public hospitals under the Hospital Authority, namely Queen Mary Hospital, Queen Elizabeth Hospital and Tuen Mun Hospital to enable patients visiting the hospitals for follow-up appointments and visitors, in particular patients of specialist out-patient clinics, to receive the Comirnaty vaccine. We will set up more vaccination stations at public hospitals after the implementation of the pilot scheme. We will also continue to look into providing more channels for members of the public to get vaccinated.

42. Currently, the Sinovac vaccine has been approved by the Secretary for Food and Health for application on those aged 18 or above. Regarding the lowering of age limit for receiving the Sinovac vaccine, the Government will liaise with the vaccine manufacturer to review the data with a view to lowering the age limit.

Vaccination of Government and Key Public Service Sector Employees

43. To encourage government employees to get vaccinated as early as possible, the Government has been adopting appropriate arrangements for all government employees to get vaccinated during duty hours without taking leave. In addition, the Government launched the vaccination leave arrangement at the end of May 2021, offering government employees a day of vaccination leave for each vaccination dose received, so that they can have sufficient time to recuperate after getting vaccinated. Moreover, since the end of May 2021, the Government has adopted the vaccination in lieu of regular testing arrangement by phases. From 1 September 2021 onwards, save for those who are unfit to receive COVID-19 vaccination because of medical conditions supported by a medical certificate, all government employees who have not received their first dose of vaccine are required to take polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid tests (PCR tests) outside their working hours on a bi-weekly basis at their own expense. For government employees who are unfit to receive COVID-19 vaccination due to medical conditions supported by a valid medical certificate, they are still required to undergo PCR tests bi-weekly. Relevant bureaux/departments will allow these employees to undergo PCR tests where practicable, provided that departmental operations will not be affected, and will continue to fully fund their tests on a reimbursement basis. Making reference to the Government's experience, key public service sectors have implemented similar arrangements for their employees. Upon the implementation of the relevant measures, the COVID-19 vaccination rates among the employees of the Government and major public service sectors have increased significantly. As at early October 2021, the first dose take-up rates of the employees of the Government, Hospital Authority, residential care homes for the elderly, residential care homes for persons with disabilities, nursing homes and schools have all exceeded 90%.

44. The Government also appreciates the strong support of the business corporations and different sectors for the COVID-19 vaccination programme. Apart from organising various lucky draw campaigns to encourage members of the public to get vaccinated, numerous business organisations and district organisations (such as international business services companies, public utilities, property developers, financial services companies, mass communication companies, airlines, district organisations, etc.) have asked the Government to send outreach teams to provide vaccination for their employees. The Government strongly calls on the employers of various trades to actively promote the vaccination programme, including the administration of vaccine of all of their staff. Otherwise, they have to arrange self-paid testing service regularly and take similar arrangements. Through the increase of the vaccination rate of working population, “persons who are suitable for vaccination should get vaccinated” with a view to achieving the protection for themselves and for the community.

Job Creation Scheme

45. In order to relieve the unemployment situation caused by the epidemic and anti-epidemic measures, the Government has earmarked \$6.6 billion under the Anti-epidemic Fund last year to implement the Job Creation Scheme to create around 30 000 time-limited jobs in the public and private sectors within two years. Subsequently, in view of the impact of the epidemic on the labour market and the remarkable result of the first round of the Job Creation Scheme, the Government has earmarked an additional provision of \$6.6 billion in the 2021-22 year to launch the second round of Job Creation Scheme to create around 30 000 additional time-limited jobs.

46. As at end September 2021, around 31 000 jobs have already been created under the first round of the Job Creation Scheme and among them, more than 29 000 jobs have been filled. As for the second round of the Job Creation Scheme launched in the second quarter this year, around 24 000 jobs have been created up till now and 7 500 of them have been filled.

Advice Sought

47. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

Civil Service Bureau
October 2021