

For discussion
on 28 December 2020

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON PUBLIC SERVICE

Policy Measures of Civil Service Bureau in the 2020 Policy Address

Purpose

This paper outlines the policy measures relating to Civil Service Bureau (CSB) featured in the 2020 Policy Address and Policy Address Supplement.

Details

Civil Service Establishment

2. The civil service is the core team formulating and implementing the Government's policies and measures. Between 2017-18 and 2020-21, the civil service establishment has increased by about 19 600 posts (11%). The projected establishment by end-March 2021 will be 197 845 posts.

3. It is of utmost importance to maintain the sustainability of public finance amidst the economic downturn. It is therefore our target to have zero growth in the civil service establishment in the coming financial year in order to contain the growth in establishment expenditure. We have encouraged bureaux and departments to enhance effectiveness 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.

4. The Chief Executive announced in the Policy Address that the Government noticed that recently Members of the Legislative Council

(LegCo) have expressed reservations about the Government's proposals to create directorate posts under the current situation. The Government understands Members' concern, and has decided to withdraw all the staff establishment proposals awaiting scrutiny and review them individually. If any of the posts is confirmed to be absolutely necessary, we will only seek to create time-limited supernumerary posts first to handle the related duties.

5. The Government is reviewing all the staff establishment proposals individually and will strive to complete the work as soon as possible.

Oath-taking / Declaration by Civil Servants

6. It has consistently been the duty of civil servants to uphold the Basic Law, bear allegiance to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China (HKSAR) and be responsible to the HKSAR Government under the Basic Law and the Civil Service Code. This has also been what the Government and the society expect and require of them all along. In order to enhance civil servants' awareness of the expectations and responsibilities brought on them by their official positions, we issued a circular to all bureaux and departments on 12 October promulgating the introduction of an arrangement to require new appointees to the civil service to take an oath or to declare that they will uphold the Basic Law, bear allegiance to the HKSAR and be responsible to the HKSAR Government. This is a genuine manifestation of the responsibilities of and expectations on civil servants, which will further safeguard and promote the core values that should be upheld by civil servants, and ensure the effective governance of the HKSAR Government. This arrangement also accords with the relevant provisions of the National Security Law.

7. As regards other serving civil servants, the Government has decided to require all serving civil servants to comply with the requirement of taking the oath or signing the declaration in one go. Negligence or refusal to take an oath or to duly sign and return the declaration by a civil servant casts serious doubts on his/her willingness to shoulder these basic duties as well as his/her sense of responsibility

and commitment to serve as a civil servant. It would even have an adverse impact on the entire civil service as well as good governance. Given the loss of confidence in the officer, the Government will give due consideration to requiring him/her to leave the service according to the established mechanism under the Public Service (Administration) Order. Where a civil servant who is on probationary or agreement terms neglects or refuses to take the oath or to duly sign and return the declaration, his/her probationary/agreement service shall be terminated immediately.

8. Improper conduct which constitutes a breach of the oath/declaration may take many different forms, and cannot be set out exhaustively. Nevertheless, we will elaborate on the content of the oath/declaration and what constitutes a breach of the oath/declaration upon introduction of the oath-taking/declaration requirement for serving civil servants. We also plan to produce a short video to introduce the content of the oath/declaration to civil servants in a clear and easily-understandable way. The Government has an established mechanism in place to handle civil service disciplinary matters. Where a civil servant has committed an improper conduct, the Government will, having regard to the specific circumstances of the case, take appropriate disciplinary action(s) against the officer in accordance with the established mechanism. If the misconduct constitutes a breach of the oath/declaration, in determining the punishment to be meted out for the misconduct involved, the Government will take into account the circumstances, impact and gravity of the case etc. and also the fact that the misconduct is committed by an officer even though the officer has taken an oath or signed a declaration to acknowledge acceptance of the expectations and responsibilities brought by the official position on him/her.

Enhancing National Studies Training for Civil Servants

9. The country's development is clearly visible to all. It is now the world's second biggest economy. As the HKSAR is part of the country, it is important for civil servants to enhance their understanding of the latest developments of the Mainland and the relevant national strategies and plans. It is also necessary for civil servants to fully understand the constitutional order of the HKSAR established by the

Constitution of the People’s Republic of China and the Basic Law under the principle of “one country, two systems”.

10. The HKSAR Government attaches great importance to national studies training for civil servants. We have in recent years enhanced substantially the training in this area, and has collaborated with nine Mainland education institutions (including National Academy of Governance, Tsinghua University, Peking University, China Foreign Affairs University, Zhejiang University, Nanjing University, Wuhan University, Jinan University and Sun Yat-sen University) to run national studies programmes in the Mainland. To enhance national studies training for civil servants, we will further increase the number of training places in these national studies programmes to allow more civil servants to attend training in the Mainland. We will also extend the Civil Service Staff Exchange Programme between Hong Kong and the Mainland to cover the Mainland municipalities in the Greater Bay Area (GBA), and continue to enhance the contents of the thematic visits to the Mainland municipalities in the GBA.

Establishing a Civil Service College

11. The Government has identified a site in Kwun Tong for setting up a new Civil Service College in a composite development. We are pressing ahead with the relevant preparatory work. We plan to construct two buildings, including a high block and a low block. The high block will mainly house the Civil Service College and other civil service supporting facilities, while the low block will mainly provide social welfare facilities. The composite development will also provide elevated walkways, public open space and a landscaped deck to enhance the connectivity of the surrounding areas. We are conducting relevant studies on the construction works in accordance with the established procedures for public works, and will submit a funding proposal to LegCo afterwards. If everything goes smoothly, and subject to timely funding approval by the Legislative Council, the construction is expected to commence in 2022.

12. Apart from the hardware facilities, the Government is also committed to enhancing, on the software front, the training programmes

provided for civil servants. A civil service training advisory board comprising professionals and government officials was set up in November last year to give guidance on training programmes for the civil service and its long-term development strategy, and to prepare for the development of the new Civil Service College. We hope that, by way of upgrading the training facilities and enhancing the training programmes, civil servants will be better equipped to cope with the various challenges in delivering public services and to further enhance their capacity in providing better services and striving for excellence.

Internship in Government Departments and Public Organisations

13. 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 2020/21, the Government has increased the short-term internship quota and has at the same time invited public organisations to provide internship placements, which has raised the total number of internship places from 2 890 to 3 600. The initiative aims to provide students with more opportunities to work as intern in the Government and public organisations, so as to enable them to understand their operations and to accumulate work and practical experience.

Employment of Non-ethnic Chinese

14. CSB completed in February 2018 a comprehensive review on the Chinese language proficiency requirements (LPRs) for appointment in all civil service grades. CSB will continue to monitor the recruitment situation of the concerned grades and remind Heads of Department / Grade to keep reviewing the Chinese LPRs for civil service grades while maintaining the latter's satisfactory performance.

15. Separately, we have launched an internship programme for non-ethnic Chinese students on a pilot basis in 2019, and invited the eight universities funded by the University Grants Committee to nominate students studying undergraduate degree programmes to participate in the internship programme. This year, we continued to run the programme. Apart from doubling the number of placements, we have also invited

more higher education institutions in Hong Kong to nominate students to participate in the programme. So far, about 50 non-ethnic Chinese post-secondary students have participated in the programme.

Employment of Persons with Disabilities

16. 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 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 during the internship in the light of their aptitude and interests. As of September 2020, some 360 students with disabilities had participated in the internship scheme.

Strengthening the Management of Probationary Civil Servants

17. 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. In light of the arrest of a number of civil servants during the social unrest, CSB has issued guidelines to all Heads of Departments/Grades in August this year, requesting them to tighten the scrutiny of probationary civil servants, with a view to instilling a stronger sense of discipline and integrity among civil servants. Specifically, 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 Civil Service Regulations. In fact, Heads of Departments/Grades have all along been responsible for applying stringent standards in assessing the performance and conduct of probationers in accordance with the provisions of the Civil Service

Regulations, to ensure that only those who are considered suitable in all respects are allowed to pass the probation bar.

Extension of Service of Civil Servants

18. To tie in with the goal of expanding the labour force, the Chief Executive announced in the 2017 Policy Address that serving civil servants who joined the Government between 1 June 2000 and 31 May 2015 will be allowed to choose to retire at 65 (for civilian grades) or 60 (for disciplined services grades). CSB had in July 2018 invited all eligible serving civil servants to opt. At the end of the option period, some 47 000 civil servants, representing about 83% of those eligible, have opted for the new retirement age. At the same time, having regard to factors such as their overall manpower situation (e.g. wastage rate), genuine and operational needs, as well as succession arrangement, departments have been using, where necessary, the various measures for flexibly 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 reaching their retirement age to meet manpower needs and to ensure that experience could be passed on within the civil service.

Enhancing Civil Service Medical and Dental Benefits

19. We implemented in March 2020 a pilot scheme on Civil Service Chinese Medicine Clinics (Pilot Scheme), providing Chinese medicine services for civil service eligible persons (CSEPs) as part of their medical benefits. Under the Pilot Scheme, two Civil Service Chinese Medicine Clinics have been set up at the Chinese Medicine Clinics cum Training and Research Centres located in the Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital and Yan Chai Hospital, providing free Chinese medicine general consultation and acupuncture services as an alternative treatment choice to CSEPs. The Pilot Scheme has been very well received and the utilisation rate has been over 90% since service launch. We will review the arrangements for the Pilot Scheme in the first quarter of 2021, and at the same time actively explore increasing the service capacity with a view to enhancing civil service medical benefits.

20. Apart from provision of Chinese medicine services for CSEPs, we have also implemented since March 2020 two new service programmes in families clinics, namely the “Integrated Care Programme” for improving the quality of care for patients with diabetes mellitus; and the “Stable Drug Use Pilot Programme” for enhancing drug safety for patients with chronic diseases who need to take multiple types of drugs and are in stable condition. Furthermore, to enhance dental services for CSEPS, we will set up more general and specialised dental surgeries, including opening up more surgeries in the West Kowloon Government Offices Dental Clinic and expanding the Victoria Road Dental Clinic.

Extending Maternity Leave for All Female Government Employees

21. 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 30 September 2020, more than 3 200 Government employees have benefited from this measure.

Universal Community Testing Programme

22. CSB was responsible for the overall coordination of the Universal Community Testing Programme (UCTP) which lasted for 14 days. The UCTP concluded smoothly in mid-September, identified asymptomatic patients and cut the community transmission chain as far and as early as possible and achieved the objective of early identification, early isolation and early treatment. It prevented further transmission of the virus for better control of the third wave of the epidemic. More than 40 patients in the community were identified through testing under the UCTP and tracing of close contacts of these confirmed cases, who were arranged for isolation and treatment. Without the UCTP, these patients would have continued to carry out various activities in the community which might lead to further community outbreak and clusters.

Job Creation Scheme

23. To relieve the worsening unemployment situation due to the epidemic and the anti-epidemic measures and in view of the difficulties encountered by graduates in seeking job opportunities, the Government has earmarked \$6.6 billion under the Anti-epidemic Fund to create 30 000 time-limited jobs in the public and private sectors in the coming two years for people of different skill sets and academic qualifications. CSB is responsible for coordinating with bureaux and departments the implementation of the Job Creation Scheme.

24. As at end November 2020, nearly 30 000 jobs have already been created, about half of the jobs are created in the Government and the other half in the non-governmental sector. Many of the jobs are suitable for young people and fresh graduates. Among the jobs already created, around 12 000 jobs have been filled while recruitment of the remaining some 18 000 jobs are in progress or will commence shortly.

25. Under the Job Creation Scheme, in addition to bearing the salary of the jobs created in various government departments, the Government subsidises part of the cost of the jobs created in the non-government sector.

26. Some of the subsidy programmes under the Job Creation Scheme are specifically implemented for fresh graduates and young people. For example, the Development Bureau subsidises employers to employ graduates and assistant professionals from the fields of engineering, architecture, surveying, town planning and landscape architecture. These jobs will specifically include training elements which are conducive to the long-term career development of young people and provide them with the opportunity to acquire the relevant working experience. Some of the jobs would facilitate the young people to attain professional qualifications in the relevant industries. Besides, the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau subsidises local fintech companies, start-ups, etc. to create 1 000 jobs which are suitable for young people.

27. Apart from young people, the Job Creation Scheme also caters

for the need of the grassroots. Over 40% of the jobs created are relatively junior positions with a view to relieving the underemployment situation of the grassroots.

28. CSB will continue to coordinate with other relevant bureaux to create more job opportunities for the society and recently graduated young people.

Advice Sought

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

Civil Service Bureau
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