

For discussion  
On 16 May 2022

## **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON PUBLIC SERVICE**

### **Civil Service Recruitment System**

#### **Purpose**

This paper briefs Members on the civil service recruitment system, including the review of the Basic Law Test in civil service recruitment.

#### **Civil service recruitment system**

2. Civil service appointments are based on the principle of open and fair competition. The most suitable and the most meritorious persons are selected to fill civil service vacancies. The Government has all along been making every effort to recruit new talents and inject new blood to the civil service. During the period from 2018-19 to 2020-21, the Government has launched a total of over 860 recruitment exercises, and received on average around 500 000 civil service job applications each year. In the aforesaid period, there were a total of around 40 000 appointments to the civil service (including direct appointment and in-service appointment).

3. Vacancies at the basic ranks of civil service grades are normally filled by open recruitment and/or in-service recruitment from other grades. The officers concerned are normally appointed on probationary terms for three years. If their performance is satisfactory in all aspects during the probationary period, they can be appointed on permanent terms upon the end of the probationary period. As for vacancies at the promotion rank, where no officer from the relevant lower rank is considered suitable for promotion, consideration may be given to conducting open recruitment to fill the vacancies concerned. Such officers are normally appointed on agreement terms for three years. If they perform satisfactorily in all aspects during the agreement period, they can be similarly appointed on permanent terms after the completion of the agreement period (please see paragraph 19 for details).

4. The entry requirements for civil service grades are set with regard to the operational need of the grades/ranks concerned. The requirements concerning

academic or professional qualification, technical skills, working experience, language proficiency and other qualities or attributes will be listed clearly to the public. During the recruitment process, the Government assess all candidates on their ability, performance and character, having regard to the stipulated entry requirements set according to the job requirements of the grade concerned. On this basis, the Government will ensure that all applicants who aspire to join the civil service will have equal access to government job opportunities.

5. Where a large number of candidates meet the specified entry requirements, the recruiting department/grade may adopt suitable shortlisting criteria in order to reduce the number of candidates to a reasonable and manageable size. The recruiting department/grade may also make use of written examinations or trade tests to shortlist candidates for selection interviews. During such interviews, the recruitment board will assess candidates and recommend suitable ones for appointment and prioritise their suitability. The selected candidates are also subject to other recruitment formalities, such as medical examination and integrity checking, to ensure their suitability for appointment.

6. As an equal opportunities employer, the Government has all along been committed to eliminating all forms of discrimination in employment. All candidates who meet the entry requirements, irrespective of their disability, sex, marital status, being pregnant or not, age, family status, sex orientation and race, will receive equal treatment during the selection process. In this connection, we endeavour to ensure that applicants who have declared their disabilities<sup>1</sup> (applicants with disabilities), like other applicants, enjoy equal opportunities in applying for government jobs. To this end, we have formulated and implemented appropriate measures to facilitate their participation in the recruitment process. Specifically, applicants with disabilities meeting the basic entry requirements for a post will not be subject to shortlisting criteria, if any, and will automatically be invited to attend the selection test/interview. At the same time, the recruiting department/grade may suitably adjust the recruitment process and provide technical aids and other assistance to facilitate their participation in the selection test/interview. In addition, an appropriate degree of preference may be given to applicants with disabilities found suitable for appointment by placing them ahead of other applicants whose suitability for appointment is considered comparable to the former. Where applicants with disability are successfully employed, the Government will also provide financial assistance for purchasing technical aids to assist in their performance of duties.

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<sup>1</sup> The Government does not require applicants for government jobs to declare their disabilities. They may make such declaration on a voluntary basis.

7. According to Article 99 of the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China (Basic Law), public servants serving in all government departments of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China (HKSAR) must be permanent residents of the HKSAR except where otherwise provided for in Article 101 of the Basic Law.

8. In addition, all civil servants appointed on or after 1 July 2020 shall sign a declaration to uphold the Basic Law, bear allegiance to the HKSAR, be dedicated to their duties and be responsible to the HKSAR Government, as one of the conditions for appointment. In case a prospective appointee neglects or refuses to duly sign and return the declaration, Heads of Department/Heads of Grade should treat the prospective appointee as failing to meet the conditions for appointment and the conditional offer shall lapse accordingly.

9. With the aid of established rules and guidelines governing the proper conduct of recruitment exercises, recruiting departments/grades are equipped to recruit civil servants guided by objective selection criteria and through a fair and impartial process. The Public Service Commission (PSC) also performs a monitoring and advisory role in this respect. The PSC is an independent statutory body responsible for advising the Chief Executive (CE) on civil service appointment, promotion and disciplinary matters. In respect of recruitment, according to the Public Service Commission Ordinance, the advice of the PSC has to be sought<sup>2</sup> for the appointment of officers to some 50 200 (as at 30 June 2021) middle and senior ranking posts.

## **Promotion work**

10. The Civil Service Bureau (CSB) and recruiting departments/grades spare no effort in conducting promotion in various aspects to attract talents to join the civil service. CSB holds regular meetings with local tertiary institutions to share information on civil service recruitment, as well as exchange views on relevant issues such as how students wish to develop their career interests and how employers may reach out to graduates. Moreover, CSB and recruiting departments/grades focus on promoting the recruitment of the grades under their purview to encourage young

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2 They refer to civil service posts attracting a maximum monthly salary not less than the amount specified at Master Pay Scale Point 26 (currently \$53,500) or equivalent, but exclude (a) the basic ranks of non-degree entry and non-professional grades; and (b) judicial service, the Independent Commission Against Corruption and the disciplined ranks of the Hong Kong Police Force which are specifically outside the purview of the PSC.

people to join the government for a career. For example, CSB collaborates with the institutions in organising career talks to promote the recruitment of the Administrative Officer and the Executive Officer grades; the Hong Kong Police Force holds the Police Recruitment Experience and Assessment Day to showcase to participants the work of different police units and the recruitment selection process; various government departments also set up booths in the Education & Careers Expo organised by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council to attract students and young job seekers to apply for their grades. To facilitate potential candidates to apply for the posts concerned and to expedite the intake of new blood to fill vacancies, individual departments (such as the Department of Health, the Hong Kong Police Force, Correctional Services Department, Customs and Excise Department and the Fire Services Department) conduct year-round recruitment for their grades.

11. To enable potential candidates studying or living outside Hong Kong to obtain information about civil service recruitment more easily, CSB has participated in talks organised by the Education Bureau in recent years to explain the civil service recruitment policy, conditions of service and recruitment procedures to Hong Kong students studying in the Mainland, as well as promote the recruitment of the Administrative Officer and the Executive Officer grades. The Beijing Office and the overseas Economic and Trade Offices of the HKSAR Government also proactively promote the Administrative Officer recruitment as well as help conduct the Common Recruitment Examination, the Basic Law and National Security Law Test and the Joint Recruitment Examination in cities outside Hong Kong.

12. The Efficiency Office also maintains a dedicated page on the Youth Portal (Youth.gov.hk) featuring various short videos introducing the nature of different civil service jobs. The page, which offers useful information on civil service recruitment as well as perspectives from young civil servants budding in their career, serves as a useful platform for young job seekers to find out more about different civil service jobs.

## **Review of the Basic Law Test in civil service recruitment**

13. As the backbone of the HKSAR Government, the civil service plays a vital role in fully implementing “One Country, Two Systems” and supporting the HKSAR Government in its governance. In order to raise the awareness of the Basic Law among those who intend to join the civil service of the HKSAR Government, CSB introduced the Basic Law Test in civil service recruitment since 2008. All applicants for civil service jobs would be arranged to take the Basic Law Test. As there are a

large number of applicants for civil service jobs each year, the introduction of the Basic Law Test in civil service recruitment has played an important role over the years in promoting a culture of learning the Basic Law in the community. During the period from 2018-19 to 2020-21, the Basic Law Test (degree/professional grades) and the Basic Law Test (non-degree/non-professional grades at or above completion of secondary education level) have been taken for around 27 400 times and 13 700 times on average each year respectively. We are also pleased to see that candidates have generally achieved good results in the Basic Law Test over the years.

14. Before August 2021, there was no passing mark requirement for the Basic Law Test. However, for grades requiring academic qualifications at or above completion of secondary education level, the result attained in the Basic Law Test would constitute an appropriate weighting in the assessment of the candidate's overall performance. To raise the importance of the Basic Law Test in the civil service recruitment process, CSB stipulated a pass result in the Basic Law Test as an entry requirement for all civil service posts requiring academic qualification at or above completion of secondary education level from August 2021 onwards. All candidates for the civil service posts concerned must obtain a pass result in the Basic Law Test in order to be considered for appointment, regardless of how they have performed in other areas of assessment.

15. The CE announced in the 2021 Policy Address Supplement that a review of the assessment content of the Basic Law Test would be conducted and the Hong Kong National Security Law would be included in the scope of assessment to render the test better-suited to the requirements of the relevant civil service posts. This would ensure that new recruits to the civil service will have basic understanding of the Basic Law and the Hong Kong National Security Law. The new assessment content will be incorporated in the Basic Law and National Security Law Test (BLNST) from June 2022 onwards.

16. For all civil service recruitment exercises to be advertised on or after 1 July 2022, attaining a pass result in the newly introduced BLNST will be an entry requirement for all civil service jobs. All candidates for civil service jobs must pass the BLNST in order to be considered for appointment, regardless of whether they have previously taken the Basic Law Test and the result attained. We believe that the updated BLNST can further promote the learning and deepen the understanding of the Basic Law and the Hong Kong National Security Law among those who are interested in joining the civil service.

17. The way of assessment of the BLNST is set according to the different academic qualification requirements stipulated for different types of civil service jobs. For civil service jobs to be advertised on or after 1 July 2022, the detailed arrangements for the BLNST are set out below:

(a) Civil service jobs requiring degree or professional qualifications

CSB will conduct the BLNST (degree/professional grades) alongside the Common Recruitment Examination. This BLNST is a 30-minute bilingual paper (in both English and Chinese) comprising 20 multiple-choice questions. Answering at least 10 out of 20 questions correct will be deemed to have a pass result in the BLNST (degree/professional grades). Such pass result of this BLNST is acceptable for the purpose of applying for all civil service jobs.

(b) Civil service jobs requiring non-degree or non-professional qualifications at or above completion of secondary education level<sup>3</sup>

The BLNST (non-degree/non-professional grades at or above completion of secondary education level) will be conducted by the recruiting department/grade during the recruitment process. This BLNST paper is a 35-minute bilingual paper (in both English and Chinese), comprising 20 multiple-choice questions. Answering at least 10 out of 20 questions correct will be deemed to have a pass result in BLNST (non-degree/non-professional grades at or above completion of secondary education level). Such pass result of this BLNST is acceptable for the purpose of applying for all non-degree or non-professional civil service jobs.

(c) Civil service jobs requiring academic qualifications below completion of secondary education level<sup>3</sup>

Candidates will be tested orally on a total of four questions on the Basic Law and the Hong Kong National Security Law during recruitment

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3 For the purpose of BLNST, “completion of secondary education” refers to completion of Secondary 6 under the New Academic Structure (Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSEE)), or equivalent; or completion of Form 5 under the previous academic structure (Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE)), or equivalent. Non-degree and non-professional civil service jobs with appointment requirements at Higher Diploma, Diploma, Higher Certificate, and Certificate level also fall under this category.

interviews. Candidates who answer two or more questions correct will be treated as having passed the BLNST (for grades requiring academic qualifications below completion of secondary education level). Such pass result of this BLNST is acceptable for the purpose of applying for all civil service jobs requiring academic qualifications below completion of secondary education level.

For candidates who have not taken the relevant BLNST or have not attained a pass result in the relevant BLNST at the time of application for a civil service post, they may still apply for the job and arrangements will be made for them to take the BLNST during the recruitment process.

### **Stringent management of civil servants appointed on probationary terms**

18. The Government attaches great importance to the conduct of civil servants. 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.

19. New appointees to the civil service normally need to undergo a probationary period of usually three years, before they could be considered for appointment on permanent terms. Heads of Department/Heads of Grades apply stringent standards in assessing the performance, capabilities, potential and conduct of probationers in accordance with the provisions of the Civil Service Regulations, in order to ensure that only those who are considered suitable in all respects can be appointed on permanent terms. Specifically, if the appointment authority considers that for reasons of poor character/temperament, misconduct, inefficient performance of duties or for other reasons, the officer should not continue to hold office, the appointment authority should take full advantage of the probationary period and terminate the officer's probationary service or refuse the officer's passage of probation bar without recourse to disciplinary procedure.

### **Strengthening training for civil servants on the Country's Constitution, the Basic Law and the Hong Kong National Security Law**

20. The Government has all along attached great importance to civil service training which is a vital element of the management of the civil service. We accord top priority in particular to enhancing the understanding of civil servants on the country's Constitution, the Basic Law, the Hong Kong National Security Law, as

well as their knowledge of national affairs. While civil servants are required to have attained a pass result in the Basic Law and National Security Law Test during the recruitment process, this is only a basic entry requirement for civil service jobs and there is still an ongoing need to deepen their understanding of the country's Constitution, the Basic Law, the Hong Kong National Security Law and national affairs. For new recruits, starting from April 2021, we have enhanced the component on the Hong Kong National Security Law in the induction training required to be attended by officers of degree or professional grades, by incorporating the contents of a video talk delivered by the then Deputy Director of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council, Mr Deng Zhonghua, with a view to enabling colleagues to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the Hong Kong National Security Law. Going forward, the Civil Service College will further strengthen induction training for civil servants, and all new recruits will be required to complete within the probationary period a more comprehensive foundation training programme. The enhanced contents will cover the country's Constitution, the Basic Law, the Hong Kong National Security Law, the country's system and major policies, and aim to deepen colleagues' understanding of HKSAR's constitutional order and the country's development, enhance their grasp of Hong Kong's positioning and roles in the country's system, and raise their awareness and sense of responsibility of safeguarding national security. Officers of degree or professional grades would also be required to take part in advanced training upon confirmation to the permanent establishment, so as to further enhance their understanding of the country's development and major policies, as well as subjects such as the principle of "One Country, Two Systems" and national security.

### **Advice sought**

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

**Civil Service Bureau**  
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