

The Civil Service is the backbone of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and is responsible to the Chief Executive (CE). It supports the CE and the Government of the day in formulating, explaining and implementing policies; providing administrative support; delivering public services; enforcing the law; and performing regulatory functions. It serves the community, and contributes to the effective governance and stability and prosperity of Hong Kong.

The Secretary for the Civil Service (SCS) is one of the Principal Officials appointed under the Political Appointment System and a Member of the Executive Council. The SCS heads the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) of the Government Secretariat and is responsible to the CE for civil service policies as well as the overall management and development of the civil service. The SCS' primary role is to ensure that the civil service serves the best interests of the community and delivers various services in a trustworthy, efficient and cost effective manner. The CSB assumes overall policy responsibility for the management of the civil service, including such matters as appointment, pay and conditions of service, staff management, manpower planning, training and discipline.

As the expectations and demands of the community towards civil servants have continuously grown, the Government has updated the Civil Service Code (the Code) in 2024 to stipulate clearly the constitutional roles and responsibilities of civil servants as members of the executive authorities, and the core values and standards of conduct that civil servants should uphold. In addition, all serving civil servants have signed a declaration that they will uphold the Basic Law, bear allegiance to the HKSAR, be dedicated to their duties and be responsible to the HKSAR Government.

The Hong Kong civil service provides a wide range of services, e.g. public works and the construction, maintenance and operation of public facilities, cleansing and public health, education, social welfare, promotion of trade and commerce, fire services and maintenance of law and order. These services are often provided by different public authorities in many countries. By contrast, Hong Kong civil servants are responsible for a wide variety of work.

As at March 31, 2024, the civil service employed about 173 100 people (excluding judges, judicial officers, officers of the Independent Commission Against Corruption and locally engaged staff working in the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices outside Hong Kong) or about 4.6 per cent of Hong Kong's labour force. About 1 400 of them were directorate officers. The Government had maintained zero-growth in the civil service establishment since 2021-22 for the sustainability of our public finances. In 2024-25, the Government will continue to maintain the zero-growth target by containing the

civil service establishment at a level not exceeding that as at end-March 2021.

Appointments: Appointment to the civil service (including recruitment and promotion) is based on the principle of open and fair competition. The Government considers the ability, performance and conduct of applicants/officers, in order to select the most suitable and the most meritorious persons to fill civil service vacancies in a fair and impartial manner. Vacancies at the basic ranks of civil service grades are normally filled by open recruitment and/or in-service recruitment from other grades. As for promotion rank vacancies, they are generally filled by promotion from within the service. Where no officer from the relevant lower rank is considered suitable for promotion, consideration may be given to conducting open recruitment to fill these vacancies. As an equal opportunity employer, the Government will ensure that all applicants, including disabled and ethnic minority candidates, who aspire to join the civil service will have equal access to government job opportunities.

In accordance with the Basic Law, civil servants appointed on or after July 1, 1997 must be permanent residents of the HKSAR, save for certain specified exceptions. All applicants for civil service jobs must also attain a pass result in the Basic Law and National Security Law Test in order to be appointed.

The Government actively attracts talents of different background to join the civil service. Relevant measures include expanding the pool of eligible candidates to penultimate year students, enhancing recruitment publicity and promotion in Hong Kong, Mainland and overseas, etc.

Public Service Commission: The Commission is an independent statutory body responsible for advising the CE on civil service appointment, promotion and discipline matters. The chairman and members of the Commission are appointed by the CE. The Commission seeks to safeguard the impartiality and integrity of the appointment and promotion systems in the civil service. It also aims to ensure that fairness and broad consistency in disciplinary punishment are maintained throughout the civil service. The Commission's remit is stipulated in the Public Service Commission Ordinance and its subsidiary regulations. The Commission is also consulted on policy and procedural issues pertaining to appointment, promotion and discipline applicable to the civil service.

Independent Advisory Bodies on Pay and Conditions of Service: Three independent bodies advise the CE on matters

relating to pay and conditions of service of civil servants.¹ Their members are from outside the Government. The Standing Committee on Directorate Salaries and Conditions of Service advises on pay and conditions of service matters affecting the civilian directorate and heads of disciplined services. The Standing Commission on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of Service advises on the principles and practices governing the pay and conditions of service of non-directorate staff except those in the judicial and disciplined services. The Standing Committee on Disciplined Services Salaries and Conditions of Service advises on the pay and conditions of service of disciplined services staff except the heads of the services. These advisory bodies are supported by the Joint Secretariat for the Advisory Bodies on Civil Service and Judicial Salaries and Conditions of Service.

Pay Policy and System: It is the Government's established policy to offer sufficient remuneration to attract, retain and motivate staff of suitable calibre to provide the public with an effective and efficient service; and to maintain broad comparability between civil service and private sector pay.

Under the improved civil service pay adjustment mechanism, three sets of surveys are conducted to assess how the prevailing civil service pay compares with the pay in the private sector and, having regard to the findings of the surveys, whether and how civil service pay should be adjusted. The three sets of surveys are the annual pay trend survey, the six-yearly pay level survey and the starting salaries survey which will be conducted as and when necessary.

Apart from salaries, civil servants are eligible for various fringe benefits depending on their terms of appointment, rank, salary point, length of service and other eligibility rules. The Government has been taking proactive steps over the years to modernise the provision of fringe benefits to civil servants.

Training and Development: Established in 2021, the Civil Service College (CSC) strives to strengthen training for civil servants with a view to solidifying their sense of national identity and people-oriented service ethos, enhancing the governance capability and ensuring that Hong Kong is administered by patriots. The CSC's vision is to become a centre of excellence for nurturing civil servants of the new age by shaping a cohesive, professional and responsive civil service.

The CSC has operated under a new structure since November 2023 in support of its long-term development. The School of Public Sector Leadership and the School of Professional Development enhance the leadership, governance and public policy-making capabilities of civil servants, cultivate in them holistic views with a macro perspective, and to ensure they fully and faithfully implement the principle of "One Country, Two Systems". The Centre for Research and Development will conduct case studies and public policy researches to inform the CSC's curriculum and support the building of institutional knowledge on good governance. The CSC's training objectives include:

- (1) enhancing governance and leadership capabilities;
- (2) deepening understanding of the constitutional order, and national development and strategies;
- (3) building a people-oriented service culture;
- (4) strengthening professional competence; and
- (5) promoting a culture of continuous learning.

The CSC emphasises mindset inculcation and has introduced the people-oriented and "One Government" ethos into its various training programmes so that civil servants are capable of navigating the complexities of the modern world and are united in their efforts with a shared commitment to serve the country and Hong Kong.

Performance Management: As an integral part of the overall human resource management strategy, performance management is a major tool in human resource planning (e.g. succession planning), development (e.g. training and job rotation) and management (e.g. confirmation to the permanent establishment, promotion, posting and action to address under-performance). Through the performance management process, supervisors and staff communicate on the work objectives and expected standard of performance. Proper management of the process helps maximise individual performance and potential, and identify areas for staff improvement and development, thereby enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the civil service.

Performance management is an on-going process. While appraisal reports are normally completed annually, continuous communication between managers and staff on performance is essential. Transparency, honest reporting and timely assessment are emphasised in the process.

Departmental management is encouraged to take various measures, including establishment of assessment panels to undertake levelling and moderating work among appraisal reports where necessary, identification of outstanding and sub-standard performers for appropriate action, and adoption of other management tools such as target-based and competency-based assessment to facilitate comprehensive and objective performance appraisal.

Effective performance management ensures that exemplary performers are rewarded or given due recognition, whilst under-performers are supervised, counselled and offered assistance to bring their performance up to the required standard. For persistent sub-standard performers who fail to improve despite supervision and assistance, action will be taken to retire them in the public interest. On the other hand, there are commendation schemes to award officers with meritorious performance. These schemes include, inter alia, the Chief Executive's Award for Exemplary Performance, the Secretary for the Civil Service's Commendation Award Scheme, the Commendation Letter Scheme and the Long and Meritorious Service Travel Award Scheme.

Staff Conduct and Discipline: The Government attaches great importance to the conduct and integrity of civil servants. On the whole, civil servants are law-abiding and dedicated to their duties. We have spared no efforts in putting across the message to all civil servants, through various means

¹ Judges and judicial officers are not civil servants. The Government has in place the Standing Committee on Judicial Salaries and Conditions of Service to advise on pay and conditions of service of judges and judicial officers.

(including provision of clear rules and guidelines, training and the declaration requirement), on the great importance attached by the Government to civil service discipline and the Government's expectations and requirements on their conduct and integrity. As regards individual officers who have breached the law or misconducted themselves, the Government would handle each case thoroughly under the civil service disciplinary mechanism. Generally speaking, if an officer is alleged to have breached government regulations or official instructions, his/her department will conduct internal investigation in accordance with established procedures. Where upon investigation there is evidence showing that misconduct is substantiated, the management will take appropriate disciplinary action, including imposing disciplinary punishment of verbal warning, written warning, reprimand, severe reprimand, compulsory retirement, dismissal, etc. Likewise, the management will also take appropriate disciplinary action against an officer, on top of the sanctions imposed by the court, if the officer has been convicted of criminal offence by the court. The Government takes a zero-tolerance approach against civil servants who have breached the law or misconducted themselves. In handling disciplinary cases, the Government would, apart from upholding fairness and impartiality, also strive to complete the cases within a reasonable timeframe and promptly impose appropriate punishment, so as to achieve the necessary punitive and deterrent effects.

Staff Relations: There is a well-established staff consultative machinery at both the central and departmental levels. Centrally, there are four central consultative councils, namely the Senior Civil Service Council, the Model Scale 1 Staff Consultative Council, the Police Force Council and the Disciplined Services Consultative Council. Through these councils, the Government consults staff on major changes which affect their conditions of service.

At the departmental level, there are departmental consultative committees which aim to improve co-operation and understanding between management and staff through regular exchange of views.

There are established channels to deal with staff grievances and complaints. Individual staff with difficulties can receive counselling, advice and help.

A Staff Suggestions Scheme is run by both the CSB and departments to encourage staff to make suggestions for improving the efficiency of the civil service. Awards are given to those whose suggestions are found useful.