

Chapter 6

Civil Service

The civil service serves the people of Hong Kong with dedication and is recognised for its efficiency, integrity, impartiality and professionalism. It plays a pivotal role in fostering effective governance as well as maintaining the stability and prosperity of the city.

The Civil Service Bureau assumes overall policy responsibility for the management of the civil service, including appointment, pay and conditions of service, staff management, staff relations, manpower planning, training and discipline.

In 2022, the bureau reviewed and updated the assessment content of the Basic Law Test for civil service recruitment and introduced the Basic Law and National Security Law Test to assess candidates' knowledge on both the Basic Law and the national security law.

The bureau adopts and promotes good human resource management practices. It runs various commendation schemes to encourage civil servants to provide quality public service and recognise officers with a high standard of performance. In 2022, the Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme awarded 55 teams from 32 departments for their achievements in service excellence, while the Secretary for the Civil Service's Commendation Award Scheme gave recognition to 100 civil servants from 37 departments for their consistently outstanding performance. At the same time, the government adopts a zero-tolerance approach towards any misconduct or violation of the law by civil servants. During 2021-22, there were 602 disciplinary cases with punishment imposed.

Since its establishment in 2021, the Civil Service College has launched a series of initiatives to enhance training for civil servants. From July 2022, induction training has been strengthened, requiring all new recruits to complete a foundation programme to get an accurate understanding of the constitutional order and the responsibility of safeguarding national security, as well as civil service core values and public service culture.

The civil service is the backbone of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government. Civil servants have the duty to uphold the Basic Law, bear allegiance to the HKSAR, be dedicated to their duties and be responsible to the HKSAR Government. Civil servants serve the Chief Executive and the government with total loyalty and to the best of their ability.

The civil service assists the government in formulating, explaining and implementing policies; providing administrative support; delivering public services; and undertaking law enforcement and regulatory functions. The civil service serves the people of Hong Kong with dedication, enthusiasm and professionalism, and is driven by a strong sense of responsibility and commitment to improving people's well-being and making Hong Kong a better home and workplace.

Administration of Civil Service

The Civil Service Bureau has overall policy responsibility for the management of the civil service. It is the focal point for consultation with major staff associations and manages a number of grades. Management of the civil service is governed mainly by three instruments: the Public Service (Administration) Order, the Public Service (Disciplinary) Regulation and the Civil Service Regulations, all made with the authority of the Chief Executive.

The Chief Executive is advised on civil service appointments, promotions and discipline by the Public Service Commission, an independent statutory body under the Public Service Commission Ordinance.

Appointment

Civil service appointments are based on the principle of open and fair competition. The government assesses all candidates on their ability, performance and character, with regard to the stipulated entry requirements of the grade concerned. The most suitable and most meritorious persons are selected to fill civil service vacancies.

As an equal opportunities employer, the government is 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, receive equal treatment during the selection process.

Basic Law and National Security Law Test

The government attaches great importance to ensuring civil servants have an accurate understanding of the constitutional order of the HKSAR and national security. To ensure new recruits have a basic understanding of the Basic Law and the national security law, the government has reviewed the content of the Basic Law Test and included the national security law in the scope of assessment. The updated assessment content has been incorporated in the Basic Law and National Security Law Test since June. For civil service recruitment exercises commencing on or after 1 July 2022, all candidates must pass the Basic Law and National Security Law Test to be considered for appointment.

Oath-taking and Declaration Requirements

All serving civil servants have signed a declaration pledging to uphold the Basic Law, bear allegiance to the HKSAR, be dedicated to their duties and be responsible to the government. Prospective appointees to the civil service are also required to sign the declaration as one of the conditions for appointment. Civil servants appointed to senior positions are required to take an oath, fulfilling the basic responsibility and requirement of ‘patriots administering Hong Kong’. The bureau will continue to strengthen the development of civil service values, including loyalty, a strong sense of responsibility and a good grasp of national affairs, in civil service training.

Establishment and Strength

The government keeps the size of the civil service establishment under control to ensure the sustainability of public finances. Zero growth has been maintained in the civil service establishment since 2021-22.

As at end-2022, the total strength of the civil service was 173,700, excluding about 1,500 judges, judicial officers and Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) officers. This amounted to 4.6 per cent of Hong Kong’s labour force.

The government monitors staff turnover for manpower planning purposes. Overall wastage in the civil service was 5.9 per cent in 2021-22.

Pay and Conditions of Service

The government’s civil service pay policy is 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.

The Chief Executive is advised on civil service pay and conditions of service by three independent bodies: the Standing Committee on Directorate Salaries and Conditions of Service, which covers directorate officers excluding judges, judicial officers and the disciplined services but including the heads of the disciplined services; the Standing Committee on Disciplined Services Salaries and Conditions of Service, which covers the disciplined services except the heads of the disciplined services; and the Standing Commission on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of Service, which covers all other civil servants.

Performance Management

Civil servants at all levels are subject to annual performance appraisals, in order to enable the management to monitor and assess performance. Good performers are given due recognition and rewards, whereas substandard performers are counselled, monitored and offered assistance with a view to bringing their performance up to the required standard. For persistent substandard performers who fail to improve despite supervision and assistance, action will be taken to retire them in the public interest.

Conduct and Discipline

The government attaches great importance to the conduct and integrity of civil servants and adopts zero tolerance towards any misconduct or violation of the law by civil servants. Acts of misconduct committed by civil servants will be handled in accordance with the established disciplinary procedures. Depending on the gravity of the misconduct and the specific circumstances of individual cases, the officers concerned may be subject to disciplinary sanctions ranging from warning to dismissal.

The bureau collaborates with the ICAC in running training and educational activities to uphold an ethical culture in the civil service.

Staff Relations

The government maintains close communication with staff and consults them on issues of concern through various channels, including an established staff consultation mechanism which consists of four staff consultative councils at the central level and some 90 consultative committees at the departmental level.

Staff Motivation

Exemplary performance is recognised through various commendation schemes to motivate civil servants to provide a quality service to the public, including the Secretary for the Civil Service's Commendation Award Scheme that recognises individuals with consistently outstanding performance, and the Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme for achievements in service excellence on a departmental or team basis.

Fight Against COVID-19

The fifth wave of the epidemic in early 2022 brought unprecedented challenges to Hong Kong. Regardless of their departments and grades, all civil servants were mobilised to take up various anti-epidemic duties. More than 140,000 government employees, representing 70 per cent of the total, were estimated to have participated in the anti-epidemic work at different times and in different roles. Major duties included implementing universal and targeted testing strategies; contact tracing; quarantine, isolation and community medical service arrangements; distributing medical supplies for the community; and strengthening external and internal communications.

Vaccination was one of the government's priorities in the fight against COVID-19. The bureau took charge of the Community Vaccination Programme to set up vaccination facilities around the territory and launched various publicity and outreach initiatives to drive up the vaccination rate to offer better protection to the community. At the end of the year, around 20.34 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines were administered. In order for the civil service to lead by example and to boost vaccination, the government implemented the Vaccine Pass arrangement at government venues for compliance by all government employees. The bureau also enhanced targeted measures in infection control by implementing special work arrangements and risk-based testing strategies for government employees to safeguard staff health and safety while fighting the epidemic.

Civil Service College

The bureau, through the Civil Service College, enhances training for civil servants on various fronts. The college provides training to deepen civil servants' understanding of the country's development and the HKSAR's constitutional order, reinforce their patriotic spirit and the people-oriented service ethos, strengthen leadership development and innovation and technology application, and broaden their international horizons and global outlook.

Since its establishment in 2021, the college has launched various new initiatives to achieve these training objectives. From July 2022, induction training has been strengthened so that all new recruits are required to complete within the probationary period a foundation training programme to acquire an accurate understanding of the constitutional order and the responsibility of safeguarding national security, as well as the civil service's core values and public service culture.

The college also jointly organises a master's degree in public policy programme with Peking University and arranges for about 15 senior civil servants nominated by their departments to attend the programme every year. To deepen civil servants' understanding of the international scene and the country's foreign policy, the college has been collaborating with the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the HKSAR to organise monthly talks on the country's foreign affairs. It has also launched expert seminars on different themes, such as the Expert Round Table for Economic Development Series in collaboration with the Hong Kong Academy of Finance, and the Dialogue with Experts Series for senior civil servants.

The college is temporarily based in North Point Government Offices while its long-term accommodation, under construction as part of the Kwun Tong Composite Development Project, is expected to complete in phases from end-2026.

Official Languages

Chinese and English are Hong Kong's official languages. It is government policy to have a civil service that is proficient in written Chinese and English, and competent in Cantonese, Putonghua and spoken English. Important government documents are issued in both official languages, while correspondence with the public is conducted in the language appropriate to the recipient. The Civil Service Bureau's Official Languages Division helps implement the government's language policy, and provides bureaus and departments with a range of language-related support.

Website

Civil Service Bureau: www.csb.gov.hk