

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 is the backbone of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government. Civil servants must 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.

All civil servants must observe the Civil Service Code, which spells out clearly the constitutional basis and order of the HKSAR under 'one country, two systems', the constitutional roles and responsibilities of civil servants, and the core values and standards of conduct which civil servants should uphold. It serves as a behavioural compass to guide the day-to-day work and decision-making of civil servants.

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

According to Article 99 of the Basic Law, except as provided in Article 101, public servants must be permanent residents of the HKSAR. People of different races who are permanent residents of the HKSAR are eligible to apply for employment in the civil service.

Civil service appointments are based on the principle of open and fair competition. The government assesses all candidates on their ability, performance and character, in order to select the most suitable and most meritorious persons to fill civil service vacancies. Appointees must take an oath or sign a declaration to uphold the Basic Law, bear allegiance to the HKSAR, be dedicated to their duties and be responsible to the government.

Establishment and Strength

To optimise the use of manpower resources and ensure the sustainability of public finance, the government has, since the 2021-22 financial year, contained the overall civil service establishment at a level not exceeding that as at end-March 2021. To further utilise manpower resources and to control public expenditure, the overall civil service establishment will be

reduced by 2 per cent each in 2026-27 and 2027-28 based on the establishment of the preceding financial year.

As at end-2025, the total strength of the civil service was 170,600, excluding a total of 1,642 Judges and Judicial Officers (JJOs), Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) officers and locally engaged staff working in Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices outside Hong Kong. This amounted to 4.5 per cent of Hong Kong's labour force.

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 JJOs 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, while 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. Misconduct or illegal acts committed by civil servants will be handled in accordance with the civil service disciplinary mechanism. Depending on the gravity of the misconduct or illegal acts and the specific circumstances of individual cases, the officers concerned may be subject to disciplinary punishment 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 quality service to the public, including the Chief Executive's Award for Exemplary Performance that gives recognition to meritorious and exemplary teams or individuals, 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 basis.

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 perspectives and global outlook.

The college has launched various new initiatives to achieve these training objectives. Since 2022, induction training has been strengthened requiring all new recruits 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 launched the Governance Talents Development Programme in 2025 to nurture governance talents who are dedicated to serving both the country and Hong Kong. Targeting civil servants with leadership potential for governance roles, the college will provide targeted and continual training for developing shared values of patriotism, a sense of mission, and the strategic perspectives and competencies required for achieving good governance.

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 talks on the country's foreign affairs.

The college continues to organise dedicated seminar series on themes including 'Holistic View of National Security' and 'Brokering North and South: China in a Multipolar World' to enhance civil servants' awareness of national security and broaden their international perspectives. Furthermore, the college has launched the 'Thematic Study Programme on Modern Chinese History' and seminar series on 'Presenting China to the World' to enhance civil servants' understanding of the history of the country's endeavours over the past century and its unique development path.

Civil servants can also learn about the real stories of the country from different perspectives and explore Hong Kong's role and contributions along the journey of national rejuvenation.

This helps strengthen their sense of national identity and enable them to better fulfil the role of Hong Kong as a bridge between the country and the world.

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 be operational in 2027.

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