

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 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.

As the community's expectations and demands of its civil servants have grown, the bureau is updating the Civil Service Code to spell out clearly the constitutional basis and order of the HKSAR, the core values and standards of conduct which present-day civil servants should uphold, and the constitutional roles and responsibilities of civil servants on this constitutional basis. A draft of the updated code was issued for consultation in December. The government will take into account the opinions expressed and promulgate the updated code in 2024.

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, in order to select the most suitable and most meritorious persons to fill civil service vacancies. As an equal opportunities employer, the government treats all candidates who meet the entry requirements equally during the selection process, irrespective of their disability, gender, marital status, being pregnant or not, age, family status, sex orientation and race.

To ensure new recruits have a basic understanding of the Basic Law and the national security law, all civil service job applicants must pass the Basic Law and National Security Law Test in order to be considered for appointment. Prospective appointees are also required to 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. All serving civil servants have already

taken an oath or signed a declaration, fulfilling the basic responsibility and requirement of ‘patriots administering Hong Kong’.

The government will continue to seek to attract talent and has expanded the pool of eligible candidates to include penultimate-year university students.

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-2023, the total strength of the civil service was 172,600, excluding about 1,600 judges, judicial officers and Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) officers. 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 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, 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. 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 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 or team 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 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. Furthermore, the college has launched a training programme on understanding 'one country, two systems' and contemporary China, and various dedicated seminar series on themes including 'Holistic View of National Security' and 'Connecting with the World – ASEAN' to enhance civil servants' sense of national security and broaden their international perspectives.

Since November, the college has implemented a new organisational structure, establishing the School of Public Sector Leadership, the School of Professional Development, and the Centre for Research and Development, with the aim of further strengthening civil service training and fulfilling the college's role as the government's authoritative training institution.

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