

LCQ19: Employment of Non-Civil Service Contract staff

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Ngan Man-yu and a written reply by the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mrs Ingrid Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (June 26):

Question:

The Non-Civil Service Contract Staff (NCSC) Scheme, introduced by the Government in 1999, provides Heads of Departments with a flexible means of employing staff on fixed term contracts outside the civil service establishment to cope with the changing operational and service needs of policy bureaux/government departments (B/Ds). In addition, B/Ds set quotas for the number of NCSC staff to be employed. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the quotas set by various B/Ds for the employment of full-time NCSC staff and the number of such staff employed in each of the past five years;
- (2) of the criteria adopted by various B/Ds for setting the quotas, and whether they have regularly reviewed the effectiveness of the quotas concerned and the necessity of the posts concerned; and
- (3) as it has been reported that the current vacancy rate in the civil service is about 10 per cent, of the approach adopted by the Government for maintaining the level of public services (e.g. by filling vacancies, creating new posts or outsourcing the relevant work to personnel employed by contractors); the criteria adopted by the Government for determining whether the newly created posts are civil service posts or NCSC posts?

Reply:

President,

Reply to different parts of the questions is as follows:

(1) and (2) The Non-Civil Service Contract (NCSC) Staff Scheme aims at providing bureaux/departments (B/Ds) with flexible means to employ additional staff on fixed term contracts outside the civil service establishment to cope with the following needs of B/Ds:

(a) the work concerned is time-limited, seasonal, or subject to market fluctuations; or

(b) the mode of delivery of the service involved is under review or is likely to be changed.

B/Ds can also consider employing NCSC staff to cope with business needs where the working hours of the manpower required are less than the

conditioned hours of civil servants, or tap from the labour market the latest expertise in a particular area.

To control the overall number of NCSC staff, since 2006, the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) has set a ceiling on the number of NCSC staff that each B/Ds can employ every year having regard to factors such as the contract staff being employed by respective B/Ds at that time, the operational needs and work nature of the B/Ds, etc. B/Ds are allowed to employ full-time NCSC staff on the conditions that the criteria of NCSC Staff Scheme are met, the number of NCSC staff to be employed does not exceed the ceiling and B/Ds can bear the required salary cost, so as to flexibly deploy manpower and swiftly respond to service or operational needs.

While B/Ds have the full authority to employ full-time NCSC staff within the assigned ceiling, in accordance with the prevailing requirements, each proposal on engagement of NCSC staff must be approved by Heads of Departments (HoDs) or a directorate officer with delegated authority from HoDs in order to ensure that the quotas are used appropriately, the employment concerned is cost-effective and conforms to the service needs, etc.

If B/Ds require to employ additional NCSC staff exceeding the assigned ceiling due to the changing service needs, they have to seek approval from the CSB, with prior consent of HoDs. The CSB may grant time-limited special quotas to B/Ds for the work and service concerned after careful consideration of various factors, including whether the job positions concerned are within the scope of the NCSC Staff Scheme, whether the job nature is appropriate for NCSC staff to perform, the manpower situation, the availability of suitable alternative service mode, etc. These special quotas will automatically lapse upon expiry of the validity period.

The number of full-time NCSC staff employed by B/Ds and the total number of quota approved for B/Ds (including the assigned ceiling and the special quotas granted by the CSB) in the past five years (i.e. from 2019-20 to 2023-24) are set out at Annex A and Annex B respectively.

(3) To cope with the ever-evolving public services, B/Ds can flexibly deploy manpower resources through various means including re-prioritisation, internal redeployment, streamlining of work processes and taking advantage of information technology, etc, so as to strive for excellent public services and address society development needs with the most cost-effective manpower establishment.

At the same time, having regard to such factors as operational needs, service nature and effectiveness, B/Ds will adopt the most suitable mode of public service delivery, like employing civil servants or non-civil service contract staff, or service outsourcing.

Government departments have put in place mechanisms for handling the duties of vacant posts, such as by recruitment, promotion, appointing suitable officers to take up acting appointments and, if necessary, extending the service of civil servants beyond their retirement age. We will continue to keep in view the overall manpower requirement and recruitment situation,

remind recruiting B/Ds to take early actions to formulate manpower plans, launch recruitment exercises in a timely manner, as well as step up publicity to fill vacancies.

If B/Ds have justifiable operational needs and find redeployment of internal manpower not feasible, they may consider creating civil service posts to support new policy initiatives and service needs in accordance with the Government's established mechanisms. For creation of civil service posts, consideration will be given to various factors, such as the genuine operational needs and job nature of the proposed posts, the manpower situation of the departments and grades concerned, room for internal redeployment and availability of more suitable modes of service delivery. In order to maintain the sustainability of public finances, the Government has strictly controlled the civil service establishment since 2021-22. In 2024-25, the Government will continue to control the overall establishment at a level not exceeding that as at end-March 2021.

As to NCSC staff, their employment has to meet the above-mentioned objectives.

Regardless of the mode of service delivery, with the use of public money, B/Ds should ensure that public resources are properly deployed to deliver quality public services in an effective manner.