

LCQ22: Extension of the service of civil servants

Following is a question by the Hon Ho Kai-ming and a written reply by the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Joshua Law, in the Legislative Council today (November 20):

Question:

The Government launched in July last year an initiative of extending the service of civil servants. Those civil servants who joined the Government between June 1, 2000 and May 31, 2015 are given two years (i.e. from September 17, 2018 to September 16, 2020) to decide whether or not to apply for raising their retirement age. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of applications for raising retirement age which have been (i) received, (ii) approved, and (iii) rejected so far, as well as (iv) the number of such applications being processed, together with a breakdown by government department and applicant's rank (i.e. lower, middle and senior ranks); if some applications were rejected, of the reasons for that; and

(2) whether it will consider afresh extending the aforesaid initiative to cover those serving civil servants who joined the Government before June 1, 2000; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

To tie in with the goal of expanding the labour force and to respond to the aspirations of our serving colleagues in the civil service, the Government launched in July 2018 the option for serving civil servants who joined the Government between June 1, 2000 and May 31, 2015 to choose to retire at the age of 65 (for civilian grades) or 60 (for disciplined services grades, regardless of ranks). Eligible civil servants can decide whether or not to take the Option within the two-year option period commencing on September 17, 2018.

The reply to various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) As at September 16, 2019, about 24 000 (or 43 per cent) out of some 56 000 eligible civil servants had taken the Option. Breakdowns of the statistics by bureaux/departments/offices and salary groups are set out at Annexes A and B respectively. It is noteworthy that the statistics only reflect the position as at one year after the commencement of the option period. Since there is still one year's time before the end of the two-year option period (i.e. September 16, 2020), we believe that many colleagues will make the decision later. The Option taken by eligible civil servants will

normally take effect within six months after the option period ends. So far, no eligible civil servant who has opted in has been rejected. Besides, for bureaux/departments which mainly comprise officers belonging to general grades, posting of the officers would cause changes to the statistics (and its components) of the bureaux/departments concerned.

(2) The Pensions Ordinance (Cap 89) and Pension Benefits Ordinance (Cap 99) have stipulated the retirement age applicable to civil servants who were appointed before June 1, 2000 and are serving on pensionable terms (hereafter referred to as "Pre-2000 Officers"). The majority of the Pre-2000 Officers will reach their currently applicable retirement age in the next decade or so, but the overall labour force in Hong Kong is expected to start declining in 2022 and the labour market will only become relatively critical after 2030. Therefore, from the population policy perspective, it is unjustifiable to also allow these officers to choose to retire later. In particular, quite a number of the Pre-2000 Officers will retire soon. If they are allowed to choose to extend their retirement age, departments may not have sufficient time to adjust their manpower planning accordingly, and to address management problems that might arise immediately, such as promotion blockage and hindrance to healthy turnover, and mismatch of human resources. All these will affect the planning and deployment of manpower resources in departments, and such situations should be avoided.

In the light of the above, from the civil service management's perspective, the Government has to handle the issue of extending the service of the Pre-2000 Officers in a flexible manner. Although the Pre-2000 Officers cannot choose to retire later at present, departments may, taking into account factors such as their overall manpower situation, genuine and operational needs, and succession arrangement, flexibly employ various initiatives for extending the service of civil servants, including the Post-retirement Service Contract Scheme, final extension of service and the adjusted further employment mechanism, to retain experienced civil servants reaching their retirement age and meet the manpower demand and operational needs. Such measures also provide different avenues for civil servants to serve beyond their retirement age.