

LCQ4: Civil service lifeguards under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department

Following is a question by the Hon Ho Kai-ming and a reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, in the Legislative Council today (January 16):

Question:

Regarding the recruitment of civil service lifeguards under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) as well as the induction training and remuneration for them, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as LCSD introduced last month a new test item under which applicants for the post of civil service lifeguard must be able to skin-dive to a depth of two metres for carrying out lifesaving duties, but lifeguards may need to skin-dive to a depth of more than two metres when performing lifesaving work, of the criteria adopted by LCSD for setting the requirements of the recruitment interview and trade test for civil service lifeguards;

(2) whether LCSD will require that civil service lifeguards must have completed all the induction training programmes before they are arranged to perform lifesaving work, so as to safeguard the life safety of swimmers; and

(3) given that the duties of civil service lifeguards include cleaning up oil spill at beaches as well as the faeces or vomit found in swimming pools, whether the Government will consider providing them with a hardship allowance for obnoxious duties; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

To protect the safety of swimmers, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) employs lifeguards to perform lookout, patrol, lifesaving and first aid duties etc. at its venues. As at August 1, 2018, there were 1,959 lifeguards in LCSD comprising civil service lifeguards and non-civil service contract (NCSC) seasonal lifeguards.

My reply to the three parts of the Hon Ho's question is as follows:

(1) LCSD requires that all serving and newly recruited lifeguards possess the Lifeguard Award issued by the Hong Kong Life Saving Society (HKLSS). HKLSS is the only body recognised by the International Life Saving Federation for assessing and awarding lifeguard qualifications in Hong Kong. The entry requirements for NCSC seasonal lifeguards in LCSD are the possession of the

Beach Lifeguard Award or Pool Lifeguard Award issued or reassessed by HKLSS within the past three years; whereas the entry requirements for civil service lifeguards include the possession of the Beach Lifeguard Award and Pool Lifeguard Award issued by HKLSS, as well as possession of a valid certificate from the St. John Ambulance Association, Hong Kong Red Cross or Auxiliary Medical Service. Applicants for the posts of civil service lifeguard and NCSC seasonal lifeguard also have to pass the selection interview and trade test. Other recruitment procedures, including integrity checking and medical examination etc., are also applicable.

The recruitment examination for civil service lifeguards conducted by LCSD consists of a selection interview and trade test, which aim to select the most suitable candidates from qualified applicants for the posts concerned having regard to the applicant's abilities, performance, character, physical competence and skills of lifesaving and first aid.

Before the launching of a new round of recruitment exercise for civil service lifeguards, LCSD will review the contents of the selection interview and trade test in the light of various factors, such as job requirements of the post, expected attributes of the suitable candidates, manpower resources, time and venue required for selection interview and trade test and their effectiveness, etc, and make appropriate changes. For instance, while candidates were only required to perform cross chest tow in previous rescue tests, candidates will be required, in the new round of recruitment exercise, to skin dive to the pool bottom at a depth of approximately two metres to search for a drowning manikin and then save it using cross chest tow in order to have a more comprehensive assessment of the candidates. The new rescue test is included taking into account of the actual operational needs since most of the swimming pools of LCSD have a water depth of two metres or less.

In addition, the selection board will assess the candidates' performance in the selection interview and trade test with reference to a set of objective, fair and measurable assessment criteria.

(2) All employed lifeguards had passed the assessments administered by professional bodies concerned and possessed recognised lifesaving qualifications. They have also passed LCSD's recruitment examination. To enable the new recruits to gain an understanding of lifesaving practice as soon as possible, LCSD provides them with a series of induction programme. The department has reviewed the design and arrangements of the induction programme for lifeguards. Starting from 2019, LCSD will arrange for newly employed civil service lifeguards and NCSC lifeguards on long-term employment to complete part of the induction programme before assuming duties, which include, introductory practical training, general training, and courses on advanced skills of skin diving rescue, and require them to pass a five-metre depth skin diving test. Furthermore, LCSD lifeguards will undergo enhanced training by means of regular drills at swimming pools/beaches, and through which they should possess sufficient skin diving skills and be physically competent to carry out search and rescue operation in deep water at swimming pools/beaches, including deep diving pools.

(3) According to the Civil Service Regulations (the Regulations), "Hardship Allowances" is one of the categories under Job-Related Allowances (JRAs). Departments and their respective bureaux shall comply with the Regulations and the governing principles of JRAs when considering any proposal in relation to JRAs having regard to the operational needs of the department, inherent duties of individual grade and working conditions of staff. The relevant general principle stipulated in the Regulations includes that JRAs are only payable when the staff are required to deliver the extra or unusual duties for such duration and frequency as considered appropriate in the light of service need and operational efficiency or when the pay structure of the grade/rank concerned is such that the inherent duties cannot be fully reflected in the pay scale. In addition to the above general principle, as compensation, consideration may be given to paying "Hardship Allowances" under JRAs to officers who are subject to work environment which would render them liable to bodily harm or physical impairment of a degree not normally expected by staff in the same grade or rank.

The duties of lifeguards include rescuing drowning swimmers, ensuring the safety of swimmers, maintaining order and keeping beaches and swimming pools clean. In performing their daily cleansing work, lifeguards may be required to clean up vomitus or faeces found in swimming pools or assist in cleaning up oil spill or marine refuse occasionally found at beaches. Such work is not extra or unusual duties. Hence, having thoroughly considered the inherent duties and working conditions of lifeguards (including the time spent on and frequency of performing the tasks, bodily harm or risk which may arise from carrying out such duties) in accordance with the Regulations mentioned above, it is considered that there are not sufficient justifications to support the granting of "Hardship Allowances" to lifeguards. LCSD will continue providing suitable equipment and operational guidelines to ensure the safety of its staff working at beaches or swimming pools.