

LCQ7: External secondment and exchange of public servants

Following is a question by the Hon Sunny Tan and a written reply by the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mrs Ingrid Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (July 10):

Question:

Regarding the external secondment and exchange of public servants, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as it is learnt that some Asian countries such as Singapore and Japan have put in place mechanisms whereby civil servants are seconded to work in public organisations and quasi-government organisations for a period of time, so that the civil servants can have a better grasp of the frontline work of these organisations, policy implementation and public opinion, whether the Government has put in place a mechanism for external secondment of civil servants to take up temporary positions in public organisations, statutory bodies and quasi-government organisations; if so, of the specific details and examples; if not, whether it will study the establishment of such mechanism for external secondment of civil servants to public organisations, statutory bodies or quasi-government organisations within the scope of their work (e.g. the Hospital Authority, the MTR Corporation Limited, post-secondary education institutions, research and development centres and scientific research institutions, as well as social welfare organisations), so that the work of civil servants will be more down-to-earth, feel the pulse of society and connect with people's real lives; and

(2) given that as indicated in the paper submitted by the Government to the Panel on Public Service of this Council in April this year, the Civil Service Bureau jointly organised a civil service staff exchange programme with the Mainland cities of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) last year, and with the first phase of the exchange programme having been completed earlier, the authorities will consolidate the experience gained and discuss the arrangements for the next phase of the programme with the receiving units in Guangdong Province and Shenzhen Municipality, while at the same time the authorities are also actively preparing for exchange programmes with other Mainland cities beyond the GBA, of the details and progress of the preparatory work for the next phase of the exchange programme, and what further measures will be taken in the future to enable more civil servants to enhance their understanding of the systems, policies and government operations in the Mainland, so as to deepen co-operation between Hong Kong and the Mainland in the future?

Reply:

President,

The Government places a high priority on communication and interaction between civil servants and citizens, seeking to understand the citizens' actual living conditions and public sentiment. In addition, as Hong Kong is an international city with an externally-oriented economy, we emphasise cultivating international perspectives in civil servants. To this end, we encourage civil servants from all departments to reach out to the community and various sectors to gain first-hand understanding of social issues and the operation of various sectors. In terms of civil service training, the Government organises a variety of training and exchange activities for civil servants to broaden their horizons and exposure, as well as enhance their overall abilities, so as to continuously improve the quality of public services.

The Government's consolidated reply to the two parts of the question is as follows:

The Civil Service College of the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) arranges for promising departmental officers to attach to policy bureaux for a period of six months, acquiring hands-on experience in handling different areas of policy work, including handling of Legislative Council business, assisting with public consultations and policy promotion, co-ordinating the work of taskforces. The Secretariat Attachment Scheme helps enhance departmental officers' understanding of policy implementation outside of their own professions, provides more opportunities for them to engage with different sectors of the community, and fosters a culture of mutual learning and collaboration in the civil service.

To further widen the exposure of civil servants, various departments collaborate with international organisations to second civil servants to work in the relevant organisations (e.g. the International Criminal Police Organization, the United Nations Commission On International Trade Law Secretariat, the Financial Action Task Force Secretariat, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Secretariat, etc) for a limited period of time in order to facilitate exchanges and collaboration between the two sides, and cultivate an international perspective in the civil service.

With the support of the Central People's Government and the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), the first two batches comprising 17 young public officers have been recommended by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to participate in the United Nations (UN) Junior Professional Officer Programme as Chinese personnel and work in the UN headquarters or its affiliated bodies (e.g. the UN Secretariat, the UN Environment Programme, the UN Conference on Trade and Development, the World Intellectual Property Organization and the UN Economic Commission for Europe, etc). We will continue to explore opportunities for our civil servants to enrich their experience in the international arena, give play to their strengths, tell good stories of Hong Kong and contribute to the country.

In terms of fostering exchange and collaboration with civil servants

from the Mainland, since 2002, the CSB has organised the Civil Service Staff Exchange Programme jointly with a number of Mainland municipalities. Under the programme, officers from Hong Kong and the Mainland are attached to each other's side to share experience and expertise so as to better understand each other's structure, regulations, policy, operation, etc, foster co-operation and communication, and gain first-hand experience of the host city's latest developments. The exchange programme was suspended during the epidemic.

In 2023, the Government resumed civil service exchange with the Mainland, starting with the launch of an exchange programme with the Mainland municipalities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA). The first batch comprising 10 participants from Hong Kong went to Shenzhen in December 2023. They were assigned to different government departments in Futian and Qianhai to perform specific duties and to have in-depth exchanges with officers from Shenzhen. The participating middle and senior-ranking civil servants came from eight departments and grades, including the Administrative Officer Grade, the Executive Officer Grade, the Environmental Protection Department, the Highways Department, the Innovation and Technology Commission, the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer, the Planning Department and the Transport Department. The CSB is discussing arrangements for the next phase of the programme with the Guangdong Provincial Government, including the arrangements for selecting civil servants of Guangdong Province for exchanges with HKSAR government departments. We are also preparing for resumption of exchange programmes with other major Mainland cities beyond the GBA and plan to sign exchange agreements with them in the second half of 2024. Specific arrangements have yet to be finalised.

In addition to the exchanges co-ordinated by the CSB for civil servants to perform specific tasks in Mainland cities, bureaux/departments will make their own arrangements for training and study tours related to their business to strengthen liaison with their Mainland counterparts, thereby fostering mutual exchanges and co-operation.