

LCQ9: Equipping civil servants to embrace digital transformation of public services

Following is a question by the Hon Chau Siu-chung and a reply by the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mrs Ingrid Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (November 20):

Question:

The Chief Executive has indicated in the Supplement to the 2024 Policy Address that the Civil Service Bureau will drive the adoption of management measures and digitalisation in government departments to reprioritise and reorganise their work, capitalise on technology solutions, and streamline work processes, thereby optimising the use of the civil service manpower resources. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the establishment and strength of the Clerical Officer, Clerical Assistant and Personal Secretary grades in each of the past three years, together with a breakdown by government department and rank;
- (2) of the following information on the recruitment exercises for Assistant Clerical Officers, Clerical Assistants and Personal Secretaries II in each of the past three years and this year to date: (i) target number of recruits, (ii) number of applicants, (iii) number of persons invited to attend skills tests, (iv) number of persons who passed the skills tests, (v) number of persons invited to attend interviews, (vi) number of persons who passed the interviews, (vii) number of appointment letters issued and (viii) number of persons who reported for duty;
- (3) as it has been reported that at present, 10-odd government departments are piloting the use of a document editing copilot application for the civil service (the Application), a generative artificial intelligence (AI) application platform developed by the Government, to help with tasks such as drafting and translating documents, and the authorities expect that the Application will be extended for full deployment in all government departments by the end of this year, of the current application situation and number of users of the Application, together with a breakdown by government department and rank of users; whether they have conducted surveys to collect users' feedback on the Application; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (4) of the research and development expenditure, as well as annual recurrent operating expenditure of the Application;
- (5) of the authorities' specific ways to evaluate the effectiveness of the Application in enhancing internal efficiency of the civil service, and whether they have estimated the Application's effectiveness; if so, of the

details; if not, the reasons for that;

(6) of the following information on technology and AI application training for civil servants provided by the authorities in the past year: (i) name of the training programmes, (ii) training format and programme hours, (iii) target number of trainees, (iv) actual number of trainees, (v) government departments and ranks of trainees and (vi) ways to review the effectiveness of training; and

(7) as various digital government initiatives will be introduced one after another within the coming two years, whether the Civil Service College and the Digital Policy Office have formulated long-term plans for the enhancement of AI and digital literacy of serving civil servants (especially the general grades staff), with a view to equipping civil servants to embrace the digital transformation of public services; if so, of the details and road map; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Supplement to the Chief Executive's 2024 Policy Address states that the Civil Service Bureau will, with the assistance of the Digital Policy Office (DPO), continue to drive the adoption of management measures and digitalisation in policy bureaux and departments (B/Ds) to reprioritise and re-organise their work, capitalise on technology solutions, and streamline work processes, with a view to optimising the use of the civil service manpower resources. At the same time, we are actively providing relevant training to civil servants in response to the challenges posed by the digital transformation of public services, with a view to meeting the needs of contemporary development, government services and operations.

Regarding the question raised by the Hon Chau Siu-chung, we have consulted the Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau, and our reply is as follows:

(1) As a multi-functional workforce, the Clerical and Secretarial (C&S) Grades deliver a wide range of frontline services to the public, in addition to the provision of general support duties at offices. The grade members are centrally managed by the General Grades Office (GGO) and are deployed to various B/Ds. The yearly breakdown (as at December 31 of each year) of the establishment and strength figures of the C&S Grades from 2021 to 2023 by B/Ds is provided at Annex I.

(2) In order to attract people aspiring to serve the community to join the civil service, speed up the recruitment process and provide job seekers with greater convenience, the Recruitment Centre of the GGO commenced operation in October 2023, under which year-round recruitment has replaced the previous biennial open recruitment exercises (OREs), providing "one-stop" service for those interested in applying for the job of Assistant Clerical Officer (ACO), Clerical Assistant (CA) and Personal Secretary II (PSII).

The first year target of the year-round recruitment is to recruit about 2 000 officers for the C&S Grades. Since its commencement, we have received more than 40 000 applications for the posts of ACO, CA and PSII, representing an increase of 23 per cent over the total number of applications received for the three posts in the 2022 ORE. So far, about 1 860 suitable candidates have passed the interview. We will make offer of appointment to them progressively upon completion of the requisite recruitment procedures. The breakdown of the recruitment figures for the above posts in the 2020 ORE, 2022 ORE and year-round recruitment since October 2023 is at Annex II.

(3) to (5) In 2023, the Government supported, through the InnoHK Research Clusters under the Innovation and Technology Commission, the establishment of the Hong Kong Generative AI Research and Development Center (HKGAI) which is formed by a group of research and development teams of local universities and focuses on the research and development of generative AI (GenAI) technology and large language models (LLMs). The HKGAI is currently developing a LLM and a GenAI document processing copilot application based on that LLM. The application has been provided to officers of B/Ds for internal trial use starting from 2024. Under the co-ordination of the DPO, currently more than 800 government officers of different grades from over 20 B/Ds are participating in the pilot use programme, mainly for document processing work like drafting, translation and summarisation of documents.

The above-mentioned application is currently at the development stage. Through the pilot use programme, the HKGAI keeps on collecting feedbacks from government users (including feedbacks on the accuracy of contents and terminologies, user experience, effectiveness) in order to further train up and optimise LLM and the effectiveness of the application in document processing work. The costs associated with the above-mentioned application as well as the hardware, software and operating costs involved in the pilot use programme are covered by the HKGAI through existing resources. On the other hand, the relevant B/Ds participate in the pilot use programme and provide feedbacks with their existing staff, with no additional manpower resources involved.

(6) to (7) The DPO provides regular and multifarious training for government staff having regard to the needs arising from the application of technology in the course of development of the digital government. Such training includes face-to-face courses, seminars, workshops, e-learning, professional training courses, covering different technological fields such as big data analytics, AI, blockchain, cloud computing, geospatial analytics, information security and cybersecurity, Internet of Things, smart cities, information management, information system design and implementation, digital accessibility, information technology (IT) infrastructure and standards, etc. In 2023-24, the DPO arranged over 380 training programmes for some 17 800 trainees in total from IT-related professional grades of the DPO and various grades of other government departments. The DPO will continue to strengthen the training content and diversify the delivery modes to encourage more personnel from different grades to undergo training, thereby supporting the digital transformation of the Government.

Innovation and technology (I&T) application is also one of the key

training areas of the Civil Service College (CSC). The CSC organises I&T application training for government officers at all levels, covering topics like global trends of the digital media, application and management of AI, data sharing, the use of social media to promote public services, etc. The CSC has also enriched the I&T element in its leadership and national studies training and Mainland visits to enhance civil servants' understanding on the latest advancements in I&T as well as smart city development in the Mainland. In 2023-24, around 5 000 civil servants of different ranks from various B/Ds participated in the above training programmes. Furthermore, the CSC provides civil servants with e-learning resources relating to AI, blockchain, data analytics and cybersecurity, etc. All the CSC classes collect feedbacks from participants through questionnaires. In class, discussions and analyses are held, where tutors would observe the performance of the participants to assess their grasp of the subject matter. The CSC also enhances the elements relating to I&T application in the flagship leadership development programmes at all levels and national studies programmes, including organising workshops for the middle and senior management to enhance the digital literacy of civil servants and their capability in leading digital transformation. Furthermore, the CSC co-organises with the DPO on a regular basis a series of lectures specifically designed for senior directorates to deepen their understanding of topics such as IT, data management and cybersecurity, etc.

B/Ds also provide I&T training for their staff having regard to their operational needs, including training on AI, big data analytics, departmental IT application systems such as Building Information Modelling technology, application of geospatial data, etc.

In response to the digital transformation of public services, the GGO has also been actively enhancing the digital literacy and digital mindset of General Grades staff through classroom instruction, practical workshops and thematic sharing sessions to improve the knowledge and skills of General Grades staff in software application, social media, cybersecurity, IT project management, innovative thinking, etc. Examples include an executive training programme this year for suitable Executive Officers at middle and senior levels on digital transformation.