

Standing Commission on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of Service: Report No. 59: Review on Civil Service Pay Level Survey and Starting Salaries Survey

The following is issued on behalf of the Standing Commission on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of Service:

The Standing Commission on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of Service submitted its report on the Review on Civil Service Pay Level Survey (PLS) and Starting Salaries Survey (SSS) to the Chief Executive today (December 17). The report sets out the findings and recommendations of the Standing Commission in relation to the Review.

The PLS and SSS are important components of the Improved Civil Service Pay Adjustment Mechanism. Together with the annual Pay Trend Survey, they serve to ensure broad comparability between civil service pay and private sector pay.

In April 2017, the Government invited the Standing Commission to conduct a review on the PLS and the SSS, including a specific study on the Qualification Group (QG) 8 (Degree and Related Grades). In light of the practical experience gained in conducting a number of pay surveys since the implementation of the Improved Mechanism, the Government considered it opportune to conduct a review before launching the next round of surveys.

A Consultant was appointed to provide professional advice on the Review and collect relevant market data. Besides reviewing the survey methodologies of the PLS and the SSS, a specific study on QG 8 was conducted to investigate further into the distinctive features and characteristics of this QG and to determine whether the SSS methodology should be improved. Pay data on degree graduate entry-level positions in the private sector were collected for comparison with those of the QG 8 ranks in the civil service. Research was also conducted by the Consultant on civil service pay arrangements in five overseas countries (namely Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Singapore and the United Kingdom), with a view to identifying practices that might be of relevance to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

The Chairman of the Standing Commission, Dr Wong Ying-wai, said, "Regarding the methodology of the PLS, we recommend the continued adoption of the broadly defined Job Family-Job Level method and the five Job Level categorisation. Key enhancements to the methodology of the PLS which are recommended include increasing the number of Job Families from five to six, broadening the scope of the survey to include more ranks (including entry and promotional ones), increasing the number of surveyed organisations in the

private sector and relaxing the selection criteria for civil service benchmark jobs. In addition, before the onset of the next PLS, a brief study will be conducted to ascertain the latest remuneration arrangements for the medical and health care field before deciding if this field should be excluded from the survey. Other existing practices, such as those in data collection and consolidation, and a survey reference date of April 1, are recommended for the future PLSs and SSSs. Detailed arrangements could be determined after taking into account views from stakeholders including the Staff Sides. We also recommend that a holistic approach should continue to be adopted in considering the application of survey results.

"As for the frequency of conducting the two surveys, we recommend continuing to conduct the PLS at a six-yearly interval and to conduct the SSS (either a comprehensive one or of a smaller ambit) as and when necessary after reviewing the broad indications as revealed by the enhanced PLS and the specific circumstances, which include changes or difficulties in relation to recruitment, appointment or regulatory framework which affect certain entry ranks or QGs, as well as any rapid and unforeseeable changes to the external environment and the socio-economic landscape that may have a significant impact on the employment market in Hong Kong as a whole. Staff Sides request their engagement in the process of consideration."

In addition, having regard to the inherent differences between the private sector and the civil service in human resources management practices, the Standing Commission recommends that when an SSS covering QG 8 is conducted, the feasibility of a more precise selection of private sector jobs for comparison with QG 8 ranks in the civil service should be explored, and a holistic approach should continue to be adopted in interpreting survey results for degree graduates in the private sector and with greater flexibility in relation to the QG.

For QG 3 Group I (Higher Diploma or Associate Degree Grades) and QG 4 (Technical Inspectorate and Related Grades: Higher Certificate or equivalent qualification plus experience), the Standing Commission notes the Staff Sides' comments that the entry requirements of certain ranks, as currently classified in different QGs, may no longer be in synchrony with the current market practices and that the qualification and/or experience possessed by the civil service recruits of some of the ranks are different from and usually higher than the entry requirement. The Standing Commission recommends that the Government further consider the issues identified in relation to the QG framework in light of the findings of future pay surveys. When the SSS involves QG 4, the vetting criteria for data collection from private sector organisations for this QG may be relaxed.

In relation to the research on the civil service pay arrangements in overseas countries, the holistic approach that the Standing Commission has adopted in considering the results of the previous rounds of the PLS and the SSS is in tandem with the common trend identified in the five countries surveyed.

"In formulating our recommendations on the Review to the Chief Executive, it is important for us to strike a balance among the different

interests of the Government, the civil servants and the public. Staff Sides were also consulted in the Review exercise. We consider it prudent to take forward enhancement measures in a progressive manner, having regard to the practical constraints in the survey methodology," Dr Wong said.

"We would like to express our appreciation to all parties that have contributed to the Review, including the Staff Sides of the four central consultative councils and the four major service-wide staff unions, the Civil Service Bureau, the Education Bureau, the Census and Statistics Department and the University Grants Committee Secretariat. Last but not least, our gratitude also goes to the participating private sector organisations for their support and co-operation on the specific study on QG 8," he added.

The Standing Commission Report No. 59 is available for public access on the website of the Joint Secretariat for the Advisory Bodies on Civil Service and Judicial Salaries and Conditions of Service at www.jsscs.gov.hk.

The Standing Commission is appointed by the Chief Executive to advise on the structure, salaries and conditions of service of the non-directorate civilian grades in the civil service. The Standing Commission is chaired by Dr Wilfred Wong Ying-wai. Its members are Mrs Edith Chan Ngan Man-ling, Mr Chan Tze-ching, Ms Christina Maisenne Lee, Mr Lee Luen-fai, Mr Lee Ming-kwai, Ms Angela Lee Wai-yin, Mr Joseph Lo Kin-ching, Ms Elaine Lo Yuen-man, Mr Tony Tse Wai-chuen and Mr Wilfred Wong Kam-pui.