

立法會

Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(4)519/19-20
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

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Panel on Public Service

**Minutes of meeting held on
Monday, 16 December 2019, at 10:45 am
in Conference Room 3 of the Legislative Council Complex**

Members present : Hon KWOK Wai-keung, JP (Chairman)
Hon POON Siu-ping, BBS, MH (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Charles Peter MOK, JP
Hon Christopher CHEUNG Wah-fung, SBS, JP
Hon IP Kin-yuen
Hon Elizabeth QUAT, BBS, JP
Dr Hon CHIANG Lai-wan, SBS, JP
Hon CHU Hoi-dick
Hon HO Kai-ming
Hon LAM Cheuk-ting
Hon SHIU Ka-fai, JP
Hon YUNG Hoi-yan, JP
Dr Hon Pierre CHAN
Hon CHAN Chun-ying, JP
Hon LUK Chung-hung, JP
Hon Jeremy TAM Man-ho
Hon Gary FAN Kwok-wai
Hon Tony TSE Wai-chuen, BBS

Members absent : Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-yee, GBS, JP
Hon Steven HO Chun-yin, BBS

**Public Officers
attending** : **Agenda item IV**

Mr Joshua LAW, GBS, JP
Secretary for the Civil Service

Mr Thomas CHOW, JP
Permanent Secretary for the Civil Service

Ms Amy WONG, JP
Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service 2

Agenda item V

Mr Joshua LAW, GBS, JP
Secretary for the Civil Service

Mr Thomas CHOW, JP
Permanent Secretary for the Civil Service

Mr Hermes CHAN
Director of General Grades
Civil Service Bureau

Miss Alice NG
Principal Assistant Secretary (Administration)
Education Bureau

Mr Andy LUI
Assistant Postmaster General (Corporate Development)
Post Office

Clerk in attendance : Mr Anthony CHU
Chief Council Secretary (4)1

Staff in attendance : Ms Maggie CHUNG
Senior Council Secretary (4)1

Miss Carol WONG
Council Secretary (4)1

Mr Griffin FUNG
Legislative Assistant (4)7

I. Application for late membership

(LC Paper No. CB(4)177/19-20(01) -- Letter from Hon LUK Chung-hung on application for membership (Chinese version only))

Members accepted the application for late membership from Mr LUK Chung-hung in accordance with rule 23 of the House Rules.

II. Information papers issued since the last regular meeting on 4 November 2019

(LC Paper No. CB(4)119/19-20(01) -- Joint letter dated 6 November 2019 from Dr Hon CHIANG Lai-wan and Hon Elizabeth QUAT requesting the Panel to discuss the "Enactment of legislation to prohibit acts of insulting public officers" at a future meeting in the 2019-2020 session (Chinese version only))

LC Paper No. CB(4)170/19-20(01) -- Letter dated 3 December 2019 from Hon LAM Cheuk-ting on the Civil Service Bureau's policy relating to the expression of political stance of civil servants and requesting the Panel to discuss the issue at a future meeting (Chinese version only))

2. The Chairman informed members that at the work plan meeting on 11 November 2019, he and the Deputy Chairman had conveyed members' proposed items for discussion by the Panel raised at the Panel meeting on 4 November 2019 to the Secretary for the Civil Service ("SCS"). The above papers with relevant members' views had been included under item 15 "Enactment of legislation to prohibit acts of insulting public officers" and item 19 "Political neutrality of civil servants

and staff of Government-funded public bodies" of the "List of outstanding items for discussion" respectively.

3. Ms Elizabeth QUAT expressed concern that the current social situation in Hong Kong had led to frequent occurrences of public officers on duty being arbitrarily insulted or provoked by members of the public and she called on the Panel to discuss the enactment of legislation to prohibit acts of insulting public officers as soon as possible. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan echoed Ms QUAT's views and sought for a timetable for discussion of the subject.

4. In response, SCS advised that the Security Bureau had completed the study on the subject and was seeking legal advice from the Department of Justice. The Security Bureau would further consult relevant bureaux on the way forward and the Administration would revert to the Panel in due course. The Chairman assured members that he would follow up with the Administration the progress of the subject at the coming Panel meetings.

5. Mr LAM Cheuk-ting also urged for early discussion on the principle of political neutrality of the civil service and the Administration's mechanism for handling cases of civil servants who were suspected to have violated the principle.

6. SCS stressed that while the Administration would not comment on individual cases, the Civil Service Bureau ("CSB") would provide a written response to Mr LAM Cheuk-ting's letter (LC Paper No. CB(4)170/19-20(01)) to elaborate on the principle of political neutrality of the civil service and the relevant guidelines.

III. Date of next meeting and items for discussion

(LC Paper No. CB(4)177/19-20(02) -- List of outstanding items for discussion

LC Paper No. CB(4)177/19-20(03) -- List of follow-up actions)

7. Members agreed that the next regular Panel meeting would be held on 20 January 2020 to discuss the following items proposed by the Administration:

- (a) Grade structure review of disciplined services; and

(b) Employment of persons with disabilities in the civil service.

8. Members also noted that as agreed at previous Panel meetings held on 15 April and 4 November 2019, relevant staff unions/associations would be invited to give views on item (a) above.

9. On the concerns raised by Dr CHIANG Lai-wan relating to the remuneration packages of doctors in the Hospital Authority ("HA"), SCS explained that although HA might have made reference to the arrangement of the civil service, HA was an independent statutory body which had its own autonomy to decide the terms of employment of its staff. As the subject was under the purview of the Panel on Health Services, the Chairman advised Dr CHIANG to raise the issue for discussion at that Panel.

IV. An overview of medical and dental benefits for civil servants, pensioners and eligible dependants

(LC Paper No. CB(4)177/19-20(04)-- Administration's paper on an overview of medical and dental benefits for civil servants, pensioners and eligible dependants

LC Paper No. CB(4)177/19-20(05) -- Paper on medical and dental benefits for civil servants, pensioners and eligible dependants prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat (updated background brief)

10. At the invitation of the Chairman, SCS briefed members on the provision of medical and dental benefits for civil servants, pensioners and eligible dependants ("civil service medical benefits"), details of which were set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(4)177/19-20(04)).

Provision of Chinese medicine services

11. Noting that Chinese Medicine Clinics for civil servants would be set up at two Chinese Medicine Centres for Teaching and Research ("CMCTRs") located respectively on Hong Kong Island (Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital) and in the New Territories (Yan Chai Hospital) ("the two CMCTRs") to provide free Chinese medicine general

consultation and acupuncture services to civil service eligible persons ("CSEPs") in the form of a pilot scheme, Mr CHAN Chun-ying and Ms Elizabeth QUAT enquired whether the Administration would consider setting up more service points in other districts, such as at the new Tseung Kwan O Chinese Medicine Hospital or on Kowloon side. In addition to setting up more Chinese Medicine Clinics, Mr HO Kai-ming also suggested engaging experienced medical organizations to provide mobile clinics in the vicinity of government offices to facilitate civil servants' convenient access to Chinese medicine services.

12. SCS said that the Administration had considered setting up the Chinese Medicine Clinics in different districts over the territory. After assessing the availability of space in all CMCTRs and considering the need to provide services as early as possible, the Administration decided to set up Chinese Medicine Clinics for civil servants in the two CMCTRs to provide Chinese medicine services to CSEPs on a pilot basis. CSB would review the pilot scheme, including the scope and quality of services, mode of operation, location and service quota about one year after its commencement, and then consider the long-term arrangements.

13. In reply to the questions raised by the Deputy Chairman relating to the appointment booking arrangements and medicine collection system of the Chinese Medicine Clinics, SCS advised that the arrangements would be similar to those provided by the existing 18 CMCTRs.

14. Mr SHIU Ka-fai expressed support for the provision of Chinese medicine services to CSEPs, yet he was concerned that the service quota of the pilot scheme could not fulfill the needs of all CSEPs, and he sought information on the basis for setting the annual service quota at around 63 000. SCS explained that since the Chinese medicine services were provided to CSEPs in the form of a pilot scheme, the annual service quota was set in accordance with the capacity of the two CMCTRs and at this stage the quota might not be able to cater for the needs of all CSEPs.

15. Mr SHIU Ka-fai proposed that the Administration could collaborate with registered Chinese medicine practitioners and Chinese medicine associations in the future to further expand the provision of the services. SCS said that the Administration would take into account members' views when deciding the way forward on the provision of the Chinese medicine services for CSEPs.

16. Regarding the suggestion raised by Mr CHAN Chun-ying, Mr HO Kai-ming and Ms YUNG Hoi-yan on allowing CSEPs to claim reimbursement for procuring Chinese medicine services in the private

market, SCS said that the Administration would not pursue the suggestion for the time being as it would be difficult to control the cost and quality of service provided by the private healthcare sector.

Taking out medical insurance for civil servants, non-civil service contract staff and outsourced workers

17. Ms Elizabeth QUAT pointed out that representatives of some disciplined services had suggested to the Security Bureau and CSB about taking out medical insurance for disciplined services staff so as to improve their medical benefits and secure their post-retirement medical protection. Given that there were cases of healthcare staff of public hospitals expressing hostile views against police officers who were admitted into hospitals, she was supportive of the proposal and sought the Administration's views in this regard. Ms YUNG Hoi-yan echoed Ms QUAT's views and enquired about the Administration's reasons for not opting for public-private-partnership to expand the healthcare services and provide more choices for civil servants.

18. SCS emphasized that taking out medical insurance for civil servants would involve fundamental changes in the policy relating to civil service medical benefits and give rise to significant financial implications, hence the Administration had to make thorough and careful consideration. He pointed out that there were limitations in the scope of the medical services provided by the private medical sector and the insurance coverage. For the medical services provided by HA and the Department of Health ("DH") for CSEPs, they were free of charge and comprehensive in scope, and the Administration had been striving to enhance the services to meet the increasing demands of CSEPs. Regarding the cases mentioned by Ms Elizabeth QUAT in paragraph 17 above, he noted that HA had reminded its staff to uphold their professionalism and mutual respect to provide equitable services for patients regardless of their identity and background.

19. Expressing concern about the long waiting time for medical and dental services provided under civil service medical benefits and the persistent manpower shortage in public healthcare sector, both Ms Elizabeth QUAT and Ms YUNG Hoi-yan considered that the taking out of medical insurance for civil servants could be complementary to civil service medical benefits and help reduce the burden on the local public healthcare system. They called on the Administration to give serious consideration to their suggestion.

20. SCS advised that the Administration and HA noted the manpower constraint in the public healthcare sector. In this connection, measures such as increasing the number of medical training places funded by the University Grants Committee and regularly conducting recruitment exercises were implemented to address the problem.

21. Mr LUK Chung-hung said that to his understanding, the Administration had engaged around 10 000 full-time non-civil service contract staff ("NCSC") staff and 50 000 outsourced workers to provide various public services. Taking into account that the employment terms and conditions for NCSC staff and outsourced workers were normally less favourable than their civil service counterparts, he considered that the Administration should at least provide all NCSC staff and outsourced workers with medical protection by taking out group-based medical insurance, the expenditure of which should be minimal.

22. SCS considered it inappropriate to compare the pay and conditions of service of NCSC staff with those of civil servants as they were two distinct types of employment. The remuneration offered to NCSC staff was an all-inclusive pay package, and the Administration would not separately provide them with medical benefits. That said, bureau/departments ("B/Ds") were allowed to have due flexibility in the employment of NCSC staff, and B/Ds would conduct periodic reviews on the salary and terms and conditions of service for NCSC staff to ensure their employment package remained competitive with the employment market. As regards outsourced workers, outsourcing of government services was not under CSB's purview.

Provision of Families Clinic services

23. In response to the Deputy Chairman's enquiry about the planning work for the seventh Families Clinic in Tseung Kwan O and the eighth Families Clinic in Kwun Tong, SCS advised that the seventh Families Clinic would be housed in a new government office building in Tseung Kwan O, and the works of the building project would tentatively commence in 2020 and were expected to be completed in 2025. The eighth Families Clinic would be included in the composite development project in Kwun Tong together with the civil service college, and the estimated completion date of the project was 2026.

24. Concerning that the current social atmosphere had created increasing work pressure on civil servants, the Deputy Chairman enquired whether the Families Clinics had accordingly enhanced the provision of clinical psychological services to civil servants.

25. Permanent Secretary for the Civil Service ("PSCS") advised that with a view to improving CSEPs' abilities in coping with pressure, Families Clinics had been providing clinical psychological services, including offering individual counselling and organizing health talks to enhance mental health education, since 2016. In 2018, the attendances of CSEPs for clinical psychology services at Families Clinics was around 2 200 (the shortest appointment time for a new case was around four weeks) and about 100 mental health talks were organized. Separately, the Christian Family Service Centre was commissioned to provide hotline counselling service on stress management to government staff. The service included telephone and face-to-face counselling and referral for clinical psychological and psychiatric services. CSB had also organized training to help staff handle work stress.

Provision of dental services

26. In response to Ms YUNG Hoi-yan's enquiry on whether the general dental surgeries and specialized dental surgeries could catch up with the needs of CSEPs, SCS advised that with a view to enhancing the dental services for CSEPs, the number of general dental surgeries for the exclusive use by CSEPs had increased from 167 in 2008-2009 to around 240 in 2018-2019, which represented an around 45% increase, and the percentage of increase in the number of orthodontic surgeries in the same period was around 31%.

27. Noting that the Administration had been expending more resources to enhance the service capacity for specialized dental services, the Deputy Chairman commended the Administration for its efforts in improving the civil service medical benefits and enquired about the waiting time for prosthodontic service and periodontal service.

28. PSCS replied that the waiting time of CSEPs for periodontal service and prosthodontic service as at 31 December 2017 was 13 to 26 months and 16 to 33 months respectively, and the latest waiting time as at 1 October 2019 had been respectively shortened to 10 to 17 months and 12 to 20 months.

Enhancement of priority discs arrangement for civil servants

29. Mr CHAN Chun-ying enquired whether the arrangement of reserving priority discs at General Outpatient Clinics ("GOPCs") for serving civil servants would prolong the waiting time of members of the public. Mr HO Kai-ming understood that the priority discs arrangement

for civil servants might be a fringe benefit provided by the Government as an employer to its employees, yet he was worried that the arrangement might create a perception that civil servants were competing with the public for medical resources.

30. PSCS explained that reserving priority discs for serving civil servants at GOPCs was an established arrangement to enable civil servants to receive medical treatment and return to work, if considered fit, as early as possible to maintain normal workforce. He pointed out that in 2018-2019, 558 000 priority discs were reserved for civil servants, which was only around 10% of the total number of quota available in GOPCs. SCS added that the number of attendances by civil servants using priority discs at GOPCs in 2018-2019 was about 358 000, which was only about 64% of the reserved total.

31. Noting from the Administration's paper that HA had redistributed the priority discs among six GOPCs since April 2019 so as to better utilize the priority discs resources, Ms YUNG Hoi-yan enquired whether the Administration would consider using new technologies or centralized computer system to co-ordinate the redistribution of priority discs of all GOPCs, so that the priority discs could be fully utilized optimally. SCS said that he would convey Ms YUNG's suggestion to HA for consideration.

Reimbursement of medical expenses

32. Mr CHAN Chun-ying sought the reasons for the substantial increase in the expenditure on reimbursement of medical expenses from \$687 million in 2017-2018 to an estimate of \$1.1 billion in 2019-2020.

33. SCS explained that under the existing policy, CSEPs might apply to the Government for reimbursement of expenses on drugs/equipment/services which formed an essential part of the medical treatment as prescribed and certified by the attending HA doctors on medical grounds but were either chargeable by or not available in HA. The payment/reimbursement of medical fee and hospital charges was largely demand-driven, and the estimated provision for the reimbursement was worked out on the basis of the relevant actual expenses incurred in the previous years.

V. Non-civil service contract staff

(LC Paper No. CB(4)177/19-20(06) -- Administration's paper on NCSC staff

LC Paper No. CB(4)177/19-20(07) -- Paper on employment situation of NCSC staff prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat (updated background brief)

Other relevant papers

LC Paper No. CB(4)124/19-20 (01) -- Letter dated 7 November 2019 from Hon IP Kin-yuen requesting information on the number of full-time NCSC staff by reasons of employment and work types and inviting Bureaux/Departments/Offices which employ more than 1 000 NCSC staff to attend the meeting (Chinese version only)

LC Paper No. CB(4)177/19-20(08) -- Administration's response to the letter dated 7 November 2019 from Hon IP Kin-yuen requesting information on the number of full-time NCSC staff by reasons of employment and work types and inviting Bureaux/Departments/Offices which employ more than 1 000 NCSC staff to attend the meeting)

34. The Chairman informed Panel members that a copy of the letter dated 13 December 2019 from Mr IP Kin-yuen regarding the employment of NCSC staff by the Education Bureau ("EDB") (LC Paper No. CB(4)201/19-20(01)) was tabled for information.

(*Post-meeting note:* Mr IP Kin-yuen's letter was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)201/19-20(01) on 16 December 2019.)

35. At the invitation of the Chairman, SCS briefed members on the NCSC staff in the Government, details of which were set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(4)177/19-20(06)).

Employment of NCSC staff

36. Notwithstanding disagreement on employment of NCSC staff in the Administration, the Deputy Chairman asked whether the Government would create more contract positions to make up for the job market demands in view of the foreseeable economic downturn. SCS replied that creation of new job positions, regardless of nature, should depend on actual operational needs of the B/Ds concerned.

Fringe benefits and promotion prospect of NCSC staff

37. Expressing contentment that the Administration would increase the number of leave days (i.e. 17 general holidays) for NCSC staff to be on par with civil servants starting from 2020-2021, the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman asked whether the Administration would consider aligning benefits and promotion arrangements for NCSC staff, particularly those who had worked over five years, with those of civil servants. The Chairman queried whether the workers under government outsourced service contracts should also be entitled to 17 general holidays.

38. With reference to Annex D of the Administration's paper, the Chairman also enquired about the reasons for 1 003 out of 3 314 staff engaged in different NCSC positions within the same department for over five years. He criticized the Administration for sacrificing NCSC staff's benefits in return of its flexibility in daily operation.

39. SCS advised that civil service and NCSC appointments were two distinct types of employment. There was no promotion for NCSC staff. It was the Government's policy to provide B/Ds with a flexible means of employment for coping with the changing operational and service needs mentioned in the paragraphs 2 (a) to (d) of the Administration's paper. The employment package for NCSC staff should be no less favourable than the provisions of the Employment Ordinance (Cap. 57). He added that NCSC staff who were interested in the civil service openings were welcome to apply for civil service vacancies. As relevant working

experience was one of the factors taken into account in the recruitment of civil servants, NCSC staff who met the basic entry requirements of civil service ranks did generally enjoy a competitive edge over other applicants because of their working experience. The average success rate for NCSC staff was 15%, which was far higher than that of other applicants at 3%.

40. SCS further explained that it would not be appropriate for the Government to provide employment benefits to workers hired under outsourced service contracts who were not Government employees. The service providers had the obligations to provide suitable employment benefits to their employees under the Employment Ordinance and other relevant labour laws.

Employment of NCSC staff by certain bureaux/departments

Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency and Registration and Electoral Office

41. Mr HO Kai-ming expressed concern whether it was appropriate to deploy NCSC staff to undertake jobs of great pressure and heavy workload. Citing the examples of handling applications for the \$4,000 allowance under the Caring and Sharing Scheme at the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency ("WFSFAA"), and undertaking electoral related duties at the Registration and Electoral Office ("REO"), both of which employed a large number of NCSC staff, he doubted whether the Administration could ensure NCSC staff implementing government's policy fully and faithfully as there had been criticism about the handling of the applications by WFSFAA. Noting that 558 NCSC staff were employed in REO, which constituted around two thirds of the manpower in the Office, he doubted if civil servants would be able to manage so many contract staff.

42. SCS elucidated that the tasks handled by WFSFAA and REO were time-limited and one-off in nature, which were inappropriate for civil servants to undertake. As NCSC staff should also serve the Government with total loyalty and implement Government's policy fully and faithfully as civil servants as stipulated in the Civil Service Code, any infringement of the Civil Service Code would be handled according to the contract terms of individual NCSC staff and departmental policies. B/Ds applied a three-pronged approach, including recruitment, training and daily performance monitoring in managing NCSC staff. He added that WFSFAA was reviewing its procedures of the Caring and Sharing Scheme. Given that another territory-wide election would be held in

2020, REO would need to employ a large number of NCSC staff to meet short-term manpower requirements.

Department of Health

43. On behalf of Mr CHAN Chun-ying, the Deputy Chairman enquired about the reasons of a long tenure for a considerable number of NCSC staff in DH (i.e. over 120 staff for five years to less than 10 years and over 170 staff for 10 years or more). He enquired if DH had reviewed the employment situation of their NCSC staff from time to time, especially for those positions created for more than 10 years, to ascertain the needs for replacing those NCSC positions with established long-term operational and service needs by civil service posts.

44. PSCS explained that 223 NCSC staff were employed in DH for conducting health screening service at boundary control points. There had been a significant reduction (76%) in the number of NCSC staff engaged as compared to the peak after an internal review was conducted. DH would continuously follow up the matter.

(At 12:45 pm, the Chairman decided to extend the meeting for 15 minutes beyond the appointed end-time to allow sufficient time for discussion.)

Education Bureau

45. Mr IP Kin-yuen doubted the need for EDB to employ over 1 000 NCSC staff and raised the following questions referring to Annex of CSB's reply dated 6 December 2019 (LC Paper No. CB(4)177/19-20(08)) and Controlling Officer's Reply in Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2019-2020 in his letter which was tabled at the meeting:

- (a) the nature of the work types, namely "Education staff" and "Non-skilled staff", in EDB;
- (b) the reason to categorize the employment of Teaching Assistant ("TAs") under the purpose of "meet service needs which are time-limited, short-term or seasonal in nature", and duration of their employment contracts;
- (c) whether General Workers ("GWs") were classified under the category of "Non-skilled staff"; and

- (d) details of any reviews conducted for or any changes made to GWs which were considered as to "meet service needs where the mode of delivery of the service is under review or likely to be changed."

46. Principal Assistant Secretary (Administration), the Education Bureau ("PAS/EDB") replied that with the introduction of school-based management, the Administration had devolved more responsibilities to schools and provided them with greater autonomy and flexibility in their resources management. Government schools would employ TAs to meet their operational needs which were time-limited, short-term or seasonal in nature. TAs belonged to the work type "education staff" and were normally employed under 12-month contracts to tie in with the school year. More than 90% of TAs were employed under 12-month contracts in the past three school years. The others were engaged with shorter contract periods to meet operational needs which arose after the start of the school year. On the other hand, GWs, which belonged to work type "non-skilled staff", were mainly employed by government schools under the Funding Flexibility Scheme. Under the Scheme, government schools were given the flexibility to employ a right mix of supporting staff or to hire services from external providers to meet their operational needs for clerical and janitor services at different times. The engagement of NCSC staff in EDB, including government schools, was under constant review. When the work performed by NCSC staff in government schools should become regular duties and it was more appropriate for such work to be taken up by civil servants, EDB would, as always, seek conversion of NCSC positions to civil service posts as and when appropriate. Over the past few years, 118 civil service posts had been created in government schools for replacement of NCSC GW and General Clerk positions employed under the Scheme. In the 2019-2020 school year, another 39 civil service posts were created to replace NCSC GW and General Clerk positions in government schools.

47. While commending EDB's effort in decreasing the number of NCSC GWs in government schools, Mr IP Kin-yuen expressed concern that the number of NCSC TAs employed by government schools had increased noticeably from 258 in 2014-2015 financial year to 349 in 2018-2019. Further, he noted that some of the TAs' contracts did not cover the period of summer vacation, thus requesting the Administration to follow up these cases in both government schools and aided schools. Noticing that some TAs might be employed in the same positions for a long duration, he enquired if the Administration would consider replacing these long-standing NCSC TA positions by civil service posts.

48. PAS/EDB explained that with the implementation of various new initiatives in education and the provision of additional resources to schools in recent years, government schools had to engage more TAs to meet additional service needs which were time-limited, short-term or seasonal in nature. EDB had kept under constant review the employment of NCSC staff in government schools and encouraged school principals to employ NCSC staff, including TAs, with contract duration of 12 months (covering the summer holidays) as far as possible. The cases mentioned by Mr IP Kin-yuen were not common in government schools, as less than 10% of their TAs were offered contracts of less than 12 months. It was noted that some candidates might turn down the job offers shortly before or even after the commencement of the school year. After going through the necessary appointment procedures, the duration of the contracts of the replacement NCSC staff up to the end of the school year would inevitably be less than 12 months. She would convey Mr IP's concerns to the responsible division of EDB for taking this up with schools in the aided sector. As for the long tenure of NCSC TAs in government schools, PAS/EDB explained the schools' autonomy and flexibility in resources management under the principle of school-based management. EDB would continue to constantly review government schools' operational needs and seek further conversion of NCSC positions to civil service posts as and when appropriate having regard to the pertinent criteria.

49. Mr IP Kin-yuen requested EDB to provide a breakdown of the number of TAs in government schools engaged under the NCSC Scheme by duration in the same position. PAS/EDB replied that as at 30 June 2019, 23 of the 372 NCSC TAs employed in government schools had stayed in the same positions for more than five years.

(Post-meeting note: The Administration's response was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)379/19-20(01) on 6 March 2020.)

50. Quoting a case about a contract teacher in which the school principal did not discuss with him/her whether to renew the contract or not until the summer holiday, Mr LAM Cheuk-ting commented that it would be more desirable if principals could inform contract teachers earlier of their decision on contract renewal, as the teachers could have more time to plan ahead and look for new positions if necessary. He also expressed concern that some contract teachers had worked consecutively for two to three years in the same school.

51. PAS/EDB responded that contract teachers in government schools were not employed under NCSC terms and conditions. They were mainly employed to fill short-term vacancies (e.g. to substitute teachers on maternity or sick leave) or to fill vacancies of permanent teaching posts for over 90 days. With the implementation of various new education initiatives and the provision of additional resources to schools in recent years, there were cases where the school principals did not know the exact amount of resources available and/or the number of contract teachers that could be employed for the coming school year until a rather late stage. Hence, they were unable to discuss contract renewal with the contract teachers at an earlier stage. Given the keen competition for teaching staff in the last few years, government schools would normally start discussion with contract teachers about their contract renewal as soon as possible. She would advise the respective division of EDB to remind the school principals of government schools accordingly.

52. In response to the Chairman's enquiry about EDB's role on the employment of contract teachers in government schools, PAS/EDB replied that while government schools were allowed flexibility in employing their contract teachers under the principle of school-based management, EDB oversaw the policies on employment of contract teachers and approved the number of contract teachers to be employed in government schools.

53. Concerning the growth in the number of NCSC staff in work types "Information Technology ("IT")/Technical Support Staff" ("IT/technical staff") and "Educational Psychologist/Audiologist" ("Specialists") in the past five years, Mr IP Kin-yuen enquired whether the Administration would convert more IT/technical support NCSC positions to civil service posts.

54. PAS/EDB replied that EDB provided cash grants, such as the Information Technology Staffing Support Grant and the One-off Information Technology Grant for e-learning in schools, to public sector schools for strengthening the IT/technical staffing support and enhancing support in the practice of e-learning in recent years. Government schools could flexibly deploy their resources as appropriate to meet their changing operational needs, including the employment of an appropriate number of NCSC IT/technical support staff. As regards NCSC educational psychologist/audiologist positions, EDB had secured resources for the creation of a considerable number of civil service educational psychologist/audiologist posts in the past years. Recruitment exercises had been conducted with a view to recruiting a

sufficient number of educational psychologists and audiologists to fill all the vacancies. NCSC specialists were employed only as a short-term stop-gap measure pending the availability of civil servants. The number of these NCSC positions would be reduced once civil servants were available.

55. Mr IP Kin-yuen suggested that the Administration should provide long-term IT related funding to government schools in order to convert more IT/technical support NCSC positions to civil service posts. The Chairman requested EDB to provide a written reply to Mr IP's suggestion after the meeting.

(*Post-meeting note:* The Administration's response was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)379/19-20(01) on 6 March 2020.)

Radio Television Hong Kong

56. In view of increasing reporting of social incidents in recent months and the provision of more TV programmes with additional frequency spectrum allocated, Mr LAM Cheuk-ting expressed concern on the manpower of the Radio Television Hong Kong ("RTHK") to handle the heavy workload. He urged the Administration to speed up replacing NCSC staff with civil servants and review the manpower and resources requirements in RTHK.

57. SCS replied that B/Ds could raise manpower and resources requests according to the existing mechanism. In replying to Mr LAM Cheuk-ting's comment, he responded that B/Ds would review from time to time whether the NCSC positions were suitable to be replaced by civil service posts. From 2011-2012 to 2018-2019, 98 civil service posts were created to replace NCSC positions, while 16 new civil service posts were approved in 2019-2020 in RTHK.

Hongkong Post

58. In response to Mr SHIU Ka-fai's enquiry, SCS explained that Hongkong Post ("HKP") was required to be self-financing under the Post Office Trading Fund ("POTF"). Assistant Postmaster General (Corporate Development), Hongkong Post added that HKP had recorded operating losses in the recent two financial years. HKP would continue to explore a wide range of initiatives to generate new revenues streams and capture new business opportunities. He supplemented that both civil service posts and NCSC positions would be created under POTF.

59. Responding to Mr SHIU Ka-fai's question about the premises of post offices, Assistant Postmaster General (Corporate Development), Hongkong Post replied that 26 premises were allocated to HKP when POTF was established in 1995. For other post offices located in government premises or privately owned buildings, HKP would pay rent to the respective owners. Mr SHIU was concerned about HKP's performance in achieving the target rates of return. He urged HKP to take effective measures to reduce its operating costs, and boost the percentage of revenue from sources other than traditional postal services, in particular delivery service for online orders.

VI. Any other business

60. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 1:03 pm.

Council Business Division 4
Legislative Council Secretariat
29 April 2020