

CHAPTER 8

**Civil Service Bureau
Education Bureau
Correctional Services Department
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
Leisure and Cultural Services Department**

Recruitment of staff

**Audit Commission
Hong Kong
4 April 2014**

This audit review was carried out under a set of guidelines tabled in the Provisional Legislative Council by the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee on 11 February 1998. The guidelines were agreed between the Public Accounts Committee and the Director of Audit and accepted by the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

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RECRUITMENT OF STAFF

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RECRUITMENT OF STAFF

Executive Summary

1. As at 31 March 2013, the civil service had a strength of some 162,000 staff. Bureaux/departments (B/Ds) normally fill civil service vacancies at basic ranks by recruitment. The Civil Service Bureau (CSB), in addition to recruiting staff for 14 general civil service grades under its direct control, is responsible for setting service-wide recruitment policies and providing B/Ds with guidelines. In recruiting senior rank civil servants under the Public Service Commission (PSC)'s purview, B/Ds are required to seek its advice. During 2011-12 and 2012-13, 9,784 and 9,595 civil service appointments were made. The Audit Commission (Audit) has recently conducted a review of the staff recruitment work of the CSB and four B/Ds (namely the Correctional Services Department (CSD), Education Bureau (EDB), Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), and Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD)), and has found room for improvement in a number of areas.

Open recruitment of civil servants

2. According to the Government's civil service recruitment policy, B/Ds should normally conduct open recruitment to cast the widest net for candidates. For 2010-11 and 2011-12, a total of 343 open recruitment exercises were conducted (paras. 2.2 and 2.4).

3. *Shortening the recruitment process.* Prior to 2007, an open recruitment exercise could span for three to nine months. After the introduction of streamlining measures for the recruitment of civil servants between 2007 and 2009, the PSC reported that the recruitment process was shortened by about two months. In 96% of the open recruitment exercises under its purview in 2009, the PSC found that the recruitment board report was submitted for its advice within two to seven months. However, Audit analysis of the open recruitment exercises conducted by B/Ds in 2010-11 and 2011-12 revealed that there was still room for improvement. For example, 21% of the 77 exercises within the PSC's purview in 2010-11 and 20% of the 74 exercises in 2011-12 took over eight months before offers of appointment were made (paras. 2.3 to 2.5).

Executive Summary

4. Audit examination of 50 open recruitment exercises conducted by the CSB, CSD, EDB, FEHD and LCSD between 2010-11 and 2012-13 revealed that the CSD took a very long time of 356 to 714 days to complete 10 small-scale exercises. For 17 exercises (including the 10 small-scale exercises), the recruiting B/Ds had not followed the CSB guidelines to draw up recruitment schedules for monitoring the progress of these exercises. Moreover, the CSB did not have an established mechanism to collect information on recruitment exercises conducted by B/Ds and monitor their completion time. A lengthy recruitment process can put the Government in a disadvantageous position in competing with the private sector for talents. It can also result in higher recruitment costs and delays in filling vacancies. The recruiting B/Ds and CSB need to enhance their monitoring work (paras. 2.6, 2.8 and 2.13 to 2.15).

5. **Publicising recruitment exercises.** The CSB has not provided B/Ds with guidelines on the period for submitting applications or the use of e-mail for communicating with candidates. For the 50 open recruitment exercises (see para. 4 above), the application period ranged from 11 to 28 days and e-mail was not used in 43 exercises. Providing B/Ds with guidelines would be useful for ensuring that they do not lengthen the application period beyond the norm without good reasons and make appropriate use of e-mail to enhance efficiency and cost-effectiveness (paras. 2.26 and 2.27).

6. **Vetting applications.** Of the total of 258,400 candidates in the 50 open recruitment exercises, 43% were found not meeting the entry requirements stated in the recruitment advertisements. The situation was unsatisfactory as significant time and resources were wasted in processing their applications. The CSB needs to review exercises having a high percentage of unqualified candidates together with the B/Ds concerned and implement effective measures to address the issue (para. 2.33).

7. **Holding skill tests/examinations and conducting selection interviews.** Skill tests/examinations were held in 34 of the 50 open recruitment exercises. Audit found cases where candidates were given notice shorter than the period of two weeks required by the CSB guidelines or not given the same notice period. The CSB needs to remind B/Ds to give sufficient and uniform advance notice. In 7 of the 50 open recruitment exercises, group interviews were conducted. Further CSB guidelines on how to make the best use of group interviews in the recruitment process would be useful to B/Ds (paras. 2.38 and 2.40).

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In-service recruitment of civil servants

8. An in-service recruitment exercise is restricted to serving civil servants. According to the Government's civil service recruitment policy, B/Ds would conduct in-service recruitment only when there are special reasons (e.g. the required skills can be met by serving officers in other civil service grades with potential surplus staff) (para. 1.4).

9. *In-service recruitment of controlled grade staff.* The CSB maintains control on the open recruitment for controlled grades (e.g. those with surplus staff or under institutional review). According to a CSB Circular Memorandum of 2007, for these controlled grades, B/Ds may conduct in-service recruitment to fill vacancies as they consider necessary or apply for the CSB's approval to conduct open recruitment in justifiable circumstances. However, Audit found the following issues relating to the in-service recruitment of staff in controlled grades (notably Workman I and Workman II): (a) between 2010-11 and 2012-13, the EDB, FEHD and LCSD conducted a total of nine in-service recruitment exercises for Workman I/Workman II to fill vacancies. Due to the reduced pool of candidates and high decline rates, the three B/Ds failed to recruit sufficient staff. As at 31 March 2013, they had a total of 435 Workman I and 497 Workman II vacancies; (b) where an appointee did not come from a civil service grade with surplus staff, there was still a need to fill the vacancy left by the appointee on in-service transfer. Consequently, the civil service vacancies would not be reduced and the B/D concerned would need to conduct a recruitment exercise to fill the vacancy. The competition for candidates among B/Ds continued, resulting in ineffective use of government resources and higher staff turnover; and (c) the operations of a B/D would be adversely affected when a large number of its staff were transferred out to other B/Ds because it is restricted under the Civil Service Regulations from filling the posts vacated by such staff during their trial period (usually one year) in the recruiting B/Ds (paras. 3.6, 3.7, 3.9 and 3.14 to 3.20).

10. *In-service recruitment of other civil servants.* For grades other than the controlled grades, B/Ds should normally conduct open recruitment to fill vacancies. However, between 2010-11 and 2012-13, the CSD conducted a total of 12 in-service recruitment exercises for grades other than the controlled grades. For four of these exercises, the CSD received only a small number of applications and failed to recruit the target number of officers. The CSB needs to regularly remind B/Ds that open recruitment is the norm for filling civil service vacancies (paras. 3.26 to 3.28).

Executive Summary

Recruitment of non-civil service staff

11. In addition to civil servants, B/Ds may employ non-civil service staff, including non-civil service contract (NCSC) staff, to meet service needs. As at 30 June 2013, there were 14,759 full-time non-civil service staff, representing roughly 9% of the civil service strength. The appointments of such staff are separate from the system for making civil service appointments. In general, the norm for recruiting such staff is open recruitment (paras. 1.7 and 4.2 to 4.4).

12. *Using online job application system.* The CSB has implemented a job application system to allow candidates to complete and submit application forms online. B/Ds may use the system in conducting open recruitment exercises for civil servants or non-civil service staff. However, Audit examination of 80 recruitment advertisements for NCSC staff revealed that online applications were accepted for only 18 (23%) exercises (para. 4.6).

13. *LCSD's open recruitment of NCSC staff.* NCSC staff may be used where the mode of service delivery is under review. The LCSD has employed Music Officers, Stage Management Officers and Stage Technicians on NCSC terms for some 14 years and has taken a long time to review these NCSC positions. Due to high turnover, the LCSD had conducted frequent exercises for recruiting these staff. The LCSD needs to closely monitor the staff turnover of the NCSC positions and agree/finalise with the CSB on the way forward for the positions at an early date (paras. 4.9 to 4.11).

Way forward

14. To fill vacancies arising from wastage and creation of posts in a timely manner, B/Ds need to continue to strive to conduct necessary recruitment exercises effectively and efficiently. The CSB also needs to work with B/Ds in refining and streamlining the recruitment process (paras. 1.6 and 5.5).

Audit recommendations

15. **Audit recommendations are made in the respective sections of this Audit Report. Only the key ones are highlighted in this Executive Summary.**

Executive Summary

Audit has recommended that the Secretary for the Civil Service should:

- (a) **remind B/Ds to draw up recruitment schedules and closely monitor the progress of their open recruitment exercises (para. 2.17(b));**
- (b) **monitor and conduct regular analyses of the time taken by B/Ds to complete open recruitment exercises (para. 2.17(c));**
- (c) **provide B/Ds with appropriate guidelines on the period allowed for submitting applications and the use of e-mail for communicating with candidates (para. 2.29(a) and (b));**
- (d) **review open recruitment exercises having a high percentage of unqualified candidates together with the B/Ds concerned and implement effective measures to address the issue (para. 2.36(a));**
- (e) **remind B/Ds to give sufficient and uniform advance notice of a skill test/examination to all candidates (para. 2.41(a));**
- (f) **provide B/Ds with further guidelines on conducting group interviews in the recruitment process (para. 2.41(c));**
- (g) **review the issues relating to the in-service recruitment of controlled grade staff identified by Audit and improve the recruitment arrangements for the controlled grades (para. 3.24(a) and (b));**
- (h) **regularly remind B/Ds that in-service recruitment should only be conducted under special justifiable circumstances (para. 3.29(a));**
- (i) **take appropriate measures to facilitate B/Ds' use of the CSB's job application system in conducting recruitment exercises for NCSC staff to enhance efficiency (para. 4.13(b)); and**
- (j) **work with the PSC to keep a closer monitoring of the recruitment efforts among the B/Ds and review the controlled grade arrangements (para. 5.5(a) and (c)).**

Executive Summary

16. **Audit has also *recommended* that:**
- (a) **the Commissioner of Correctional Services should:**
 - (i) **continue to work on streamlining the recruitment procedures through a comprehensive review of the overall recruitment processes (para. 2.19); and**
 - (ii) **recruit staff through open recruitment as a norm and conduct in-service recruitment only under special justifiable circumstances (para. 3.30(a)); and**
 - (b) **the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services should closely monitor the staff turnover of the NCSC positions of Music Officers, Stage Management Officers and Stage Technicians, and agree/finalise with the CSB on the way forward for the positions at an early date (para. 4.15(a)).**

Response from the Administration

17. **The Administration agrees with the audit recommendations.**

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 This PART describes the background to the audit and outlines the audit objectives and scope.

Recruitment of civil servants

1.2 ***Civil service establishment and vacancies.*** The civil service divides its establishment into different grades. Each grade normally comprises basic and higher ranks according to job levels (Note 1). The establishment of a bureau/department (B/D) is the number of approved posts in specific ranks to which appointments may be made (Note 2). From time to time, civil service vacancies arise from wastage and creation of posts. Vacancies at the basic ranks are normally filled by recruitment. Table 1 shows an analysis of the vacancies of the civil service as at 31 March 2013.

Note 1: *For example, the Clerical Officer grade is sub-divided into the Assistant Clerical Officer, Clerical Officer and Senior Clerical Officer ranks. On the other hand, there are some grades that have one rank only, such as the Workman I grade. As at July 2013, there were 526 grades and 1,430 ranks in total.*

Note 2: *The Finance Committee of the Legislative Council has delegated certain powers relating to the creation of posts to the Financial Secretary, who has further delegated his powers to Controlling Officers subject to stipulated conditions.*

Introduction

Table 1

**Establishment, strength and vacancies of the civil service
(31 March 2013)**

B/D	Establishment	Strength	Vacancies	Vacancy rate
	(a)	(b)	(c) = (a) – (b)	(d) = $\frac{(c)}{(a)} \times 100\%$
	(No.)	(No.)	(No.)	
<i>Top three B/Ds in terms of number of vacancies</i>				
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department	11,142	10,073	1,069	9.6%
Leisure and Cultural Services Department	8,731	8,202	529	6.1%
Education Bureau	5,447	4,923	524	9.6%
<i>Other B/Ds</i>				
71 other B/Ds	143,274	138,996	4,278	3.0%
Service-wide	168,594	162,194	6,400	3.8%

Source: *Audit analysis of Civil Service Bureau records*

Remarks: *If judges and judicial officers, Independent Commission Against Corruption officers and locally engaged staff working in Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices are excluded, the establishment, strength, vacancies and vacancy rate of the civil service were 166,903, 160,663, 6,240 and 3.7% respectively as at 31 March 2013.*

1.3 ***Responsibilities for civil service recruitment.*** Civil service grades are classified under three categories, as follows:

- (a) ***General grades.*** A general grade is a grade common to B/Ds and controlled by a central authority (e.g. the Executive Officer grade is controlled by the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) and the Accounting Officer grade is controlled by the Treasury). The central authority is responsible for recruiting staff and deploying them to B/Ds;

- (b) **Common grades.** A common grade is a grade employed in different B/Ds but controlled by the individual B/Ds (e.g. Workman I and Workman II grades). Each B/D is responsible for recruiting its own staff in a common grade; and
- (c) **Departmental grades.** A departmental grade is a unique grade employed in one B/D only and controlled by the B/D (e.g. Assessor grade of the Inland Revenue Department and Printing Officer grade of the Government Logistics Department). Each B/D is responsible for recruiting its departmental grade staff.

1.4 **Types of civil service recruitment.** There are two types of civil service recruitment:

- (a) **Open recruitment.** It is open to candidates both outside and within the civil service; and
- (b) **In-service recruitment.** It is restricted to all or selected groups of serving civil servants.

According to the Government's civil service recruitment policy, the guiding principle on civil service recruitment is to select qualified and suitable persons through an open, fair and competitive process. B/Ds should normally conduct open recruitment to cast the widest net for candidates. They would conduct in-service recruitment only when there are special reasons. For example, in cases where the skills, experience or expertise required can be met by serving officers in other civil service grades with potential surplus staff, in-service recruitment may be preferred for the benefit of the overall manpower planning of the civil service.

Introduction

1.5 *Civil service recruitment statistics.* Table 2 shows the civil service appointments made during 2010-11 to 2012-13. Except for 14 grades which are directly controlled by the CSB (Note 3), the CSB is not involved in recruitment of staff. B/Ds are responsible for conducting their recruitment exercises in accordance with the CSB guidelines. While the CSB has monitored the civil service vacancy position to assess whether vacancies are filled in a timely manner, it has not specifically collected information on the time taken by B/Ds in completing recruitment exercises for analysis on a routine basis. In connection with its study on the attractiveness of civil service jobs, the CSB collected information on recruitment exercises conducted in 2010-11 and 2011-12. For the two years, a total of 472 recruitment exercises were conducted and 912,102 applications were processed (i.e. averaging 236 exercises and 456,051 applications a year).

Table 2

**Civil service appointments
(2010-11 to 2012-13)**

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Appointment of persons who were not serving officers	5,465	7,877	7,316
Appointment of in-service transferees who have participated in open or in-service recruitment exercises	1,452	1,614	1,949
Re-employment after retirement	299	293	330
Total	7,216	9,784	9,595

Source: CSB records

Remarks: The above figures as compiled by the CSB do not include judges and judicial officers, Independent Commission Against Corruption officers and locally engaged staff working in Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices.

Note 3: *The 14 grades comprise Administrative Officer, Executive Officer, Official Languages Officer, Simultaneous Interpreter, Calligraphist, Training Officer, Clerical Officer and seven other clerical and secretarial grades.*

1.6 According to the CSB, as the civil service grew significantly in the 1980s and many of the civil servants then recruited are approaching retirement age, the number of civil servants retiring will continue to increase in the coming years. From 2013-14 to 2017-18, it is estimated that on average around 6,000 civil servants will retire every year. From 2018-19 to 2022-23, the number will increase to around 7,000 a year. B/Ds need to continue to strive to conduct necessary recruitment exercises effectively and efficiently.

Recruitment of non-civil service staff

1.7 B/Ds may, subject to the specified conditions and availability of funding, employ non-civil service staff to meet various service needs (e.g. short-term service needs). Non-civil service staff do not occupy posts on the establishment of the B/Ds and are not counted towards the establishment or strength of the B/Ds. Their appointments are separate and distinct from the system for making civil service appointments. B/Ds are required to draw up appropriate procedures for the recruitment of non-civil service staff. As at 30 June 2013, there were 14,759 full-time non-civil service staff, representing roughly 9% of the civil service strength.

Role of CSB

1.8 The CSB is responsible for the management and development of the civil service. Regarding civil service recruitment, the CSB is responsible for setting service-wide recruitment policies, administering the relevant provisions of the Civil Service Regulations (CSRs — Note 4) and providing guidance to B/Ds. In this regard, the CSB has produced a Guidebook on Appointments as a handy reference by B/Ds. The Guidebook is essentially a digest of the rules and regulations promulgated in the CSRs, CSB Circulars, CSB Circular Memoranda and other guidelines issued by the CSB on individual areas. Besides, the CSB is the appointment authority for 14 general grades (see para. 1.5) and thus responsible for recruiting staff for these grades. As regards non-civil service staff, the CSB is responsible for providing recruitment guidelines to B/Ds.

Note 4: *The CSRs are administrative regulations made by or with the authority of the Chief Executive. They set out, among others, the provisions on recruitment of civil servants. The Secretary for the Civil Service is authorised to amend, supplement, apply, interpret and make exceptions to the CSRs. The Secretary may issue CSB Circulars and Circular Memoranda to supplement the CSRs.*

Introduction

Public Service Commission

1.9 The Public Service Commission (PSC), established under the Public Service Commission Ordinance (Cap. 93), is an independent body responsible for advising the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region on civil service appointment, promotion and disciplinary matters to ensure impartiality, integrity and fairness. In recruiting civil servants in ranks under the purview of the PSC (Note 5), B/Ds are required to seek the PSC's advice mainly on:

- (a) the proposed adoption of shortlisting criteria for selecting candidates to be interviewed, if any;
- (b) the proposed offers of appointment to selected candidates; and
- (c) any proposed deviations from the established appointment rules, procedures and practices.

In examining submissions from B/Ds, the PSC may make queries and observations where necessary. B/Ds are required to clarify or justify their proposals in response to such queries and observations. In the event that a recruiting B/D wishes not to act according to the PSC's advice, it is required to make a submission to the Chief Executive after seeking the CSB's advice.

Audit review

1.10 The Audit Commission (Audit) has recently conducted a review of the staff recruitment work of the CSB and four selected B/Ds with a view to identifying room for improvement. The four selected B/Ds are the Correctional Services Department (CSD), Education Bureau (EDB), Food and Environmental Hygiene

Note 5: *The PSC's advice on recruitment matters basically relates only to the senior ranks of the civil service (i.e. ranks attracting a maximum monthly salary not less than the amount specified at Master Pay Scale Point 26 or equivalent, but excluding: (a) the basic ranks of non-degree entry and non-professional grades; and (b) the judicial service, the Independent Commission Against Corruption and the disciplined ranks of the Hong Kong Police Force). According to the PSC 2012 Annual Report, about 39,000 civil service posts (23% of the total) were under the PSC's purview.*

Department (FEHD), and Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) (Note 6). The review has focused on the following areas:

- (a) open recruitment of civil servants (PART 2);
- (b) in-service recruitment of civil servants (PART 3);
- (c) recruitment of non-civil service staff (PART 4); and
- (d) way forward (PART 5).

Audit has found room for improvement in the above areas and has made recommendations to address the issues.

Acknowledgement

1.11 Audit would like to acknowledge with gratitude the full cooperation of the staff of the CSB, CSD, EDB, FEHD and LCSD during the course of the audit review.

Note 6: *Based on CSB records, these four B/Ds were selected for audit examination because the CSD had taken a long time to complete some of its recruitment exercises and the other three B/Ds had the largest number of vacancies (see Table 1 in para. 1.2).*

PART 2: OPEN RECRUITMENT OF CIVIL SERVANTS

2.1 This PART examines the following issues relating to the open recruitment of civil servants:

- (a) shortening the recruitment process (paras. 2.3 to 2.25);
- (b) publicising recruitment exercises (paras. 2.26 to 2.32);
- (c) vetting applications and shortlisting candidates (paras. 2.33 to 2.37);
- (d) holding skill tests/examinations and conducting selection interviews (paras. 2.38 to 2.46); and
- (e) making offers of appointment (paras. 2.47 to 2.49).

Key processes in open recruitment

2.2 As mentioned in paragraph 1.4, B/Ds should normally conduct open recruitment of civil servants. The key processes in an open recruitment exercise are summarised as follows:

- (a) ***Publicising recruitment exercise.*** The recruiting B/D publicises a recruitment exercise by various means (e.g. posting recruitment information on the CSB's website, placing advertisements in newspapers and journals, issuing a vacancy circular to serving civil servants, and using the employment services of the Labour Department and local tertiary institutions). Acknowledgments are issued upon the receipt of applications;
- (b) ***Vetting applications and shortlisting candidates.*** The recruiting B/D vets the applications received to identify qualified candidates meeting the entry requirements. If there is a large number of qualified candidates, the recruiting B/D may use shortlisting criteria to reduce the number of candidates to be interviewed. Where the rank involved falls under the purview of the PSC (see para. 1.9), the recruiting B/D is required to seek the PSC's advice on the adoption of shortlisting criteria;

- (c) ***Holding skill tests/examinations.*** The recruiting B/D may hold a skill test/examination to screen out unqualified candidates (i.e. specifying that a “pass” is a prerequisite for appointment), or as a criterion for shortlisting candidates for selection interviews;
- (d) ***Conducting selection interviews.*** The recruiting B/D forms a recruitment board to conduct interviews of the candidates. The assessment form for evaluating the performance and qualities of each candidate and selecting those suitable for appointment should be agreed by the recruitment board and approved by the appointment authority prior to the interviews;
- (e) ***Compiling recruitment board report.*** Having regard to the timing of the availability of vacancies, number of vacancies and merits of individual candidates, the recruitment board selects candidates for immediate appointment or waitlisting for future appointment and decides on the candidates to be rejected. The board compiles and submits a report to the appointment authority (Note 7) for consideration. Where the rank involved falls under the PSC’s purview, the appointment authority is required to submit the report to the PSC for advice (Note 8); and
- (f) ***Arranging recruitment formalities and making offers of appointment.*** Before making an offer to a candidate, the recruiting B/D needs to arrange relevant recruitment formalities (e.g. employer reference and medical examination). A conditional offer may be made prior to completing certain formalities such as medical examination.

Note 7: *The Chief Executive has delegated his powers to appoint holders of public offices to various public officers, depending on the level of the posts. For example, Heads of Department have delegated powers to appoint posts below Directorate Pay Point 2 or equivalent level.*

Note 8: *According to its Annual Reports for 2011 and 2012, the PSC achieved its target of tendering advice within four weeks upon receipt of a submission for each recruitment case handled in 2011 and 2012.*

Shortening the recruitment process

Streamlining measures introduced between 2007 and 2009

2.3 The PSC recommended/introduced/required a number of streamlining measures for the recruitment of civil servants in 2007, 2008 and 2009 as described in the PSC's Annual Reports:

- (a) prior to December 2007, an open recruitment exercise could span from three to nine months (Note 9). The PSC was concerned that a lengthy recruitment process could put the Government in a disadvantageous position in competing with the private sector for talents;
- (b) in December 2007, after a joint review by the PSC and CSB, certain streamlining measures were introduced, including that B/Ds were no longer required to submit the following for the PSC's advice:
 - (i) vacancy circulars and recruitment advertisements;
 - (ii) results of sorting applications into qualified and unqualified ones; and
 - (iii) selection arrangements, including the assessment form to be used in selection interviews, the selection format and interview arrangements.

Of the 97 open recruitment exercises processed by the PSC in 2008, 95% (i.e. 92 cases) were completed within 2.5 to eight months, indicating a general shortening of the recruitment process by about four weeks. However, the PSC considered that a duration of eight months was still long for completing a recruitment exercise; and

Note 9: *The time was counted from the date of placing an advertisement to the date of submitting the recruitment board report to the PSC for advice.*

- (c) in December 2008, in response to the PSC's request, the CSB promulgated a list of streamlining initiatives for B/Ds to follow (Note 10). In 2009, as advised by the PSC, the CSB introduced further measures to improve the recruitment process, including that for those candidates who are serving civil servants or ex-civil servants, B/Ds should only call for and make reference to their staff reports after they are selected for offer of appointment (Note 11). Of the 107 open recruitment exercises processed by the PSC in 2009, 96% (i.e. 103 cases) were completed within two to seven months, indicating a further shortening of the recruitment process by about four weeks.

Audit analysis of completion time of recruitment exercises

2.4 Information on recruitment exercises is kept by the recruiting B/Ds. The CSB does not have an established mechanism to monitor the time taken by B/Ds in completing their recruitment exercises. Instead, the CSB monitors the civil service vacancy position to assess whether vacancies are filled in a timely manner. In 2012 and 2013, for the purpose of assessing the attractiveness of civil service jobs, the CSB completed two studies by calling returns from B/Ds and collecting from them certain recruitment data on their recruitment exercises in 2010-11 and 2011-12 (Note 12). Audit used such recruitment data to analyse the time taken by B/Ds to complete open recruitment exercises in these two years. Table 3 summarises the results. Details are at Appendix A.

Note 10: *The initiatives were related to processes under the recruiting B/Ds' sole control (e.g. planning and staggering recruitment exercises, holding examinations, conducting selection interviews and compiling recruitment board reports).*

Note 11: *According to the PSC, the unduly long time taken by some B/Ds to complete recruitment exercises was due in part to the time spent on checking such staff reports and the time wasted in competing for such reports with other recruiting B/Ds in respect of candidates who had applied for more than one job.*

Note 12: *The requested information included the details of each recruitment exercise conducted (e.g. date of placing an advertisement, number of applications received, number of offers of appointment made including the date of first offer, and number of offers declined by candidates). The CSB found that the competition for civil service job offers remained keen, and the decline and resignation rates were generally low. It considered that civil service jobs remained attractive to job seekers.*

Open recruitment of civil servants

Table 3

Time taken to complete open recruitment exercises (2010-11 and 2011-12)

		2010-11	2011-12
<i>Exercises within the purview of PSC</i>			
No. of exercises conducted		77	74
No. of days taken to complete exercise	Range	84 to 421	74 to 424
	Average	200	194
<i>Exercises outside the purview of PSC</i>			
No. of exercises conducted		99	93
No. of days taken to complete exercise	Range	57 to 714	96 to 496
	Average	197	206
<i>Overall</i>			
No. of exercises conducted		176	167
No. of days taken to complete exercise	Range	57 to 714	74 to 496
	Average	198	201

Source: Audit analysis of CSB records

- Remarks:
1. The recruitment exercises for each year were those with recruitment advertisements placed in the year.
 2. The time taken to complete each exercise was counted from the date of placing an advertisement to the date of making the first offer of appointment. Therefore, the above figures do not include all-year-round recruitment exercises (e.g. those for Inspector/Superintendent of Police and Police Constable conducted by the Hong Kong Police Force) which do not have definite dates of placing advertisements and making offers of appointment.
 3. The above figures do not include exercises for the recruitment of judges and judicial officers, Independent Commission Against Corruption officers and locally engaged staff working in Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices because they were not covered in the CSB's studies of attractiveness of civil service jobs.

2.5 For the 2010-11 and 2011-12 open recruitment exercises, Audit has the following observations:

- (a) *Exercises within the purview of PSC.* Table 3 shows that for the exercises within the purview of the PSC, the average completion time (counting from the date of placing an advertisement to the date of making the first offer of appointment) had slightly improved from 200 days in 2010-11 to 194 days in 2011-12. However, it can be seen from Appendix A that 16 (21%) exercises in 2010-11 and 15 (20%) exercises in 2011-12 took over 240 days (over 8 months) to complete (Note 13). The position suggests that there is room for improvement taking into account the timeframe suggested by the PSC (Note 14); and
- (b) *Exercises outside the purview of PSC.* For the exercises outside the purview of the PSC, the recruitment board reports were not submitted to the PSC for advice and this generally should have reduced their completion time. However, Table 3 shows that their average completion time was 206 days in 2011-12, longer than that of 194 days for the exercises within the purview of the PSC. Moreover, as shown in Appendix A, for the exercises outside the purview of the PSC, 24 (24%) exercises in 2010-11 and 25 (27%) exercises in 2011-12 took over

Note 13: *According to the CSB, it has been monitoring the civil service vacancy position to assess the situation and noted that the overall vacancy position of the civil service has generally remained low at 4% or below of the establishment since 2008, which is generally comparable to the position before the lifting of the recruitment freeze. Based on information available to the CSB, in 2012-13, the decline rate of appointment has remained low at 12%, indicating that the civil service is by no means disadvantaged in competing for talents.*

Note 14: *In its 2009 Annual Report, the PSC indicated that the recruitment process had been shortened to seven months. The PSC counted the completion time of a recruitment exercise from the date of placing an advertisement to the date of submitting the recruitment board report to the PSC for advice. Given that the PSC's target was to process each case within four weeks and the target was fully achieved in 2011 and 2012, 240 days (7 months plus 4 weeks) was used as a benchmark in Audit analysis.*

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240 days (over 8 months) to complete, both more than that for the exercises within the purview of the PSC (see (a) above — Note 15).

Audit examination of 50 open recruitment exercises

2.6 Between 2010-11 and 2012-13, the CSB and the four selected B/Ds (i.e. the CSD, EDB, FEHD and LCSD — see para. 1.10) conducted a total of 70 open recruitment exercises (Note 16). Audit examined 50 of the 70 exercises (Note 17). Appendix B shows the details of the 50 exercises. The audit findings on various issues are in paragraphs 2.7 to 2.49.

2.7 Table 4 shows an analysis of the completion time of the 50 exercises.

Note 15: *According to the CSB, there are a host of factors affecting the processing time of a recruitment exercise, such as the number of applications received and whether skill tests/examinations have to be conducted. Based on the data in the CSB's records, for example, the average number of applications received for the open recruitment exercises outside the purview of the PSC in 2011-12 was 2,930 which was larger than the corresponding figure of 1,819 for exercises within the purview of the PSC. The larger number of applications could be a contributing factor for the longer processing time of the exercises outside the purview of the PSC.*

Note 16: *The recruitment advertisements of the exercises were placed between 2010-11 and 2012-13, and the exercises were completed within or after the period.*

Note 17: *The number of exercises selected from each of the five B/Ds for examination was largely in proportion to its total number of exercises conducted during the period.*

Table 4

**Analysis of completion time of 50 open recruitment exercises
examined by Audit**

B/D	No. of exercises	No. of applications processed in each exercise		No. of days taken to complete each exercise (Note)	
		Range	Average	Range	Average
CSB	10	247 to 24,244	10,129	141 to 253	215
CSD	18	96 to 11,695	2,878	125 to 714	382
EDB	7	29 to 4,394	1,801	108 to 259	209
FEHD	8	1,176 to 6,600	3,655	158 to 235	184
LCSD	7	1,253 to 18,100	9,067	134 to 315	224
Overall	50	29 to 24,244	5,168	108 to 714	270

Source: Audit analysis of CSB, CSD, EDB, FEHD and LCSD records

Note: The time was counted from the date of placing an advertisement to the date of making the first offer of appointment.

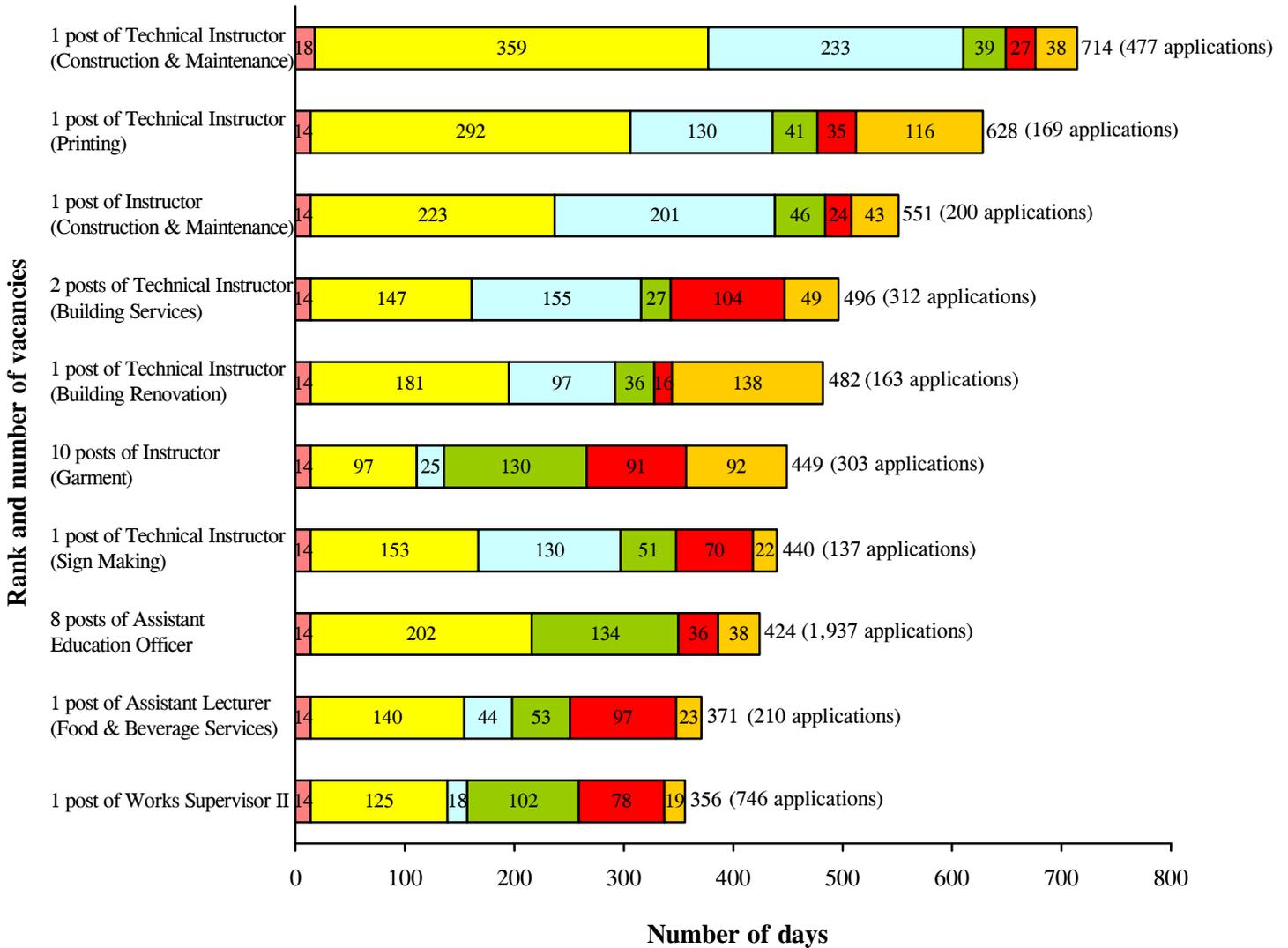
Long completion time of CSD recruitment exercises

2.8 It can be seen from Table 4 that the CSD on average took a much longer time to complete its 18 open recruitment exercises. Audit analysis revealed that the 10 CSD exercises taking the longest time (i.e. 356 to 714 days) to complete were all small-scale exercises, involving 1 to 10 vacancies. Figure 1 shows an analysis by key recruitment steps of the 10 exercises.

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Figure 1

10 CSD open recruitment exercises which took a long time to complete



- Legend:
- Publicising recruitment exercise
 - Vetting applications and shortlisting candidates
 - Holding skill tests/examinations
 - Conducting selection interviews
 - Compiling recruitment board report
 - Arranging recruitment formalities and making the first offer of appointment

Source: *Audit analysis of CSD records*

2.9 Audit further analysed the key recruitment steps (i.e. vetting applications and shortlisting candidates, and holding skill tests/examinations) which accounted for a large portion of the total time taken for the CSD's 10 recruitment exercises (see Figure 1), taking into account the number of applications/candidates involved. The following issues were identified:

- (a) ***Vetting applications and shortlisting candidates.*** With the exception of the Assistant Education Officer recruitment exercise which involved 1,937 applications, the number of applications for the other nine exercises ranged from 137 to 746. For four of the seven exercises for the Technical Instructor/Instructor posts, the CSD had taken on average more than one day to vet each application (ranging from 1.1 to 1.7 days). Audit noted that the CSD's Appointments Unit had taken a long time to vet the applications because the training and experience requirements were specialised. Direct involvement of the user section which is familiar with the requirements may help speed up the vetting process as seen in some other departments' recruitment exercises (see para. 2.16); and
- (b) ***Holding skill tests/examinations.*** For six of the seven exercises for the Technical Instructor/Instructor posts, the skill tests consisted of a written test and a practical test (for the Instructor (Garment) post, the skill test consisted of only the written test). The CSD took 97 to 233 days to complete the skill tests for the six exercises, which involved 30 to 179 candidates. Audit noted that the CSD only invited external service providers to submit tenders for providing the test services after vetting the applications when the number of candidates to be invited for the tests was known. To save time, consideration may be given to inviting tenders for the test services on a unit cost basis (i.e. cost per candidate) in parallel with the vetting of applications.

2.10 In February and March 2014, the CSD informed Audit that:

Heavy workload from the large-scale recruitment exercises

- (a) the CSD is encountering a period of high natural wastage of staff starting a few years ago. The CSD has been under great pressure and urgency in recruiting sufficient new blood at the Officer and Assistant Officer II ranks. The two grades constitute the core operational strength of the

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CSD, accounting for around 15% and 70% of its establishment. For the recruitment exercises for Officer and Assistant Officer II conducted between 2010 and 2012, the CSD processed over 25,180 and 30,200 applications respectively and recruited 197 Officers and 742 Assistant Officer IIs. The workload arising from the large-scale recruitment exercises on the CSD's Appointments Unit has been enormous;

- (b) with attention being focused on the all important recruitment exercises for large number of Officers and Assistant Officer IIs, the CSD has taken a long time to complete other smaller scale recruitment exercises for non-main stream ranks;

Long time taken to complete the 10 small-scale recruitment exercises

- (c) ***Vetting applications and shortlisting candidates.*** The work nature of Technical Instructors/Instructors of the CSD was very unique and there were hardly any comparable jobs in the labour market. For some CSD trades, there was no directly relevant institutional training available in Hong Kong. Therefore, it was very difficult to verify applicants' relevant apprenticeship/institutional training and work experience. As applicants very often did not provide clear information on their work experience and training records, the CSD Appointments Unit had to contact many applicants for clarification and spend a lot of time to consider whether to endorse the vetting results of such applications;
- (d) ***Holding skill tests/examinations.*** Technical Instructor/Instructor candidates were required to pass a skill test. The test was trade-specific and was outsourced to an outside contractor. It took additional time to attend to the outsourcing exercises, which included drawing up specifications, inviting quotations, evaluating proposals, seeking internal approval and entering into contract;
- (e) ***Other factors.*** Other factors leading to the long time taken to complete the 10 small-scale recruitment exercises included the following:

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- (i) due to the uniqueness of the Technical Instructor/Instructor posts and the complexity of the vetting work and selection process, the CSD Appointments Unit and user section required extra time to compile recruitment board reports and consider whether to endorse the assessments;
 - (ii) the recruitment of instructing staff was suspended before the merger of two user sections (i.e. the Correctional Services Industries with the Vocational Training Unit to form the Industries and Vocational Training Section) in early 2009. When recruitment exercises resumed, manpower resources of the Appointments Unit and user section were stressed in handling various exercises at the same time, especially in 2010-11; and
 - (iii) for the posts of Assistant Education Officer, it was the first occasion to recruit Assistant Education Officers after the implementation of Specialised Teaching policy. The long time required was mainly due to inexperience in vetting applications, devising shortlisting criteria and making various logistics arrangements; and
- (f) ***Improvement measures.*** The CSD has taken improvement actions as follows:
- (i) comprehensive reviews were conducted on the large-scale Officer and Assistant Officer II recruitment exercises. Significant changes were introduced and the logistics arrangements were revamped to achieve more satisfactory results. For example, the completion time of the annual Assistant Officer II recruitment exercises had been significantly shortened from about eight months in the 2010 exercise to an average of four months in the 2011, 2012 and 2013 exercises; and
 - (ii) learning from experience, a series of improvement measures have been implemented since February 2014 to ensure that both large-scale and small-scale recruitment exercises are conducted efficiently. For example, the vetting process has been streamlined so that verification of relevant work experience is now conducted by user section. The CSD is also exploring the feasibility of

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modifying the quotation specification of skill test, say procuring the service by unit cost, in order to reduce the lead time of contracting-out procedures. The CSD will also consider starting the appointment of external training and examination bodies and the vetting of their examination papers and materials upon initiation of a recruitment exercise. In addition, the CSD is conducting a comprehensive review of the overall recruitment processes to identify further room for improvement.

2.11 Audit notes the CSD's recent efforts and suggests that the CSD continues to work on streamlining the procedures for arranging skill tests/examinations, and sets a deadline for completing its comprehensive review of the overall recruitment processes.

Long time taken in some EDB recruitment exercises for arranging formalities and making offers of appointment

2.12 Apart from the 18 CSD recruitment exercises, Audit analysis revealed that three EDB exercises (involving 3 to 59 candidates recommended for appointment) took a long time of 67 to 85 days to arrange recruitment formalities and make offers of appointment, compared with the average of 23 days for the remaining 29 exercises (Note 18). In Audit's view, the EDB needs to review the long time taken to arrange recruitment formalities and make offers of appointment in the three exercises and take appropriate improvement measures.

Implementation of streamlining measures

2.13 In general, as pointed out by the PSC, a lengthy recruitment process can put the Government in a disadvantageous position in competing with the private sector for talents (see para. 2.3(a)). It can also result in higher recruitment costs

Note 18: *According to the EDB, for the recruitment exercise of Specialist (Education Services) II posts in 2010, all the three selected candidates had already been serving as non-civil service contract staff prior to the offer in the section to which they were posted. The time taken should not have caused any operational difficulties to the office concerned.*

and delays in filling vacancies. Audit noted that the CSB had incorporated the streamlining measures introduced between 2007 and 2009 in its Guidebook on Appointments (see para. 1.8). However, as at December 2013, it had made no amendments appropriately to the CSRs to reflect the relevant measures. For example, according to Annex 1.1 to the CSRs, recruitment boards are required to study the staff reports of candidates who are serving officers before they are interviewed, contrary to the streamlining measure of calling and making reference to such reports after the candidates are selected for offer of appointment (see para. 2.3(c)). In 17 (34%) of the 50 open recruitment exercises examined by Audit, the relevant staff reports were called before interviews (Note 19). In Audit's view, the CSB needs to amend the CSRs to reflect all the streamlining measures and ensure that B/Ds implement them properly.

Departmental monitoring of progress of recruitment exercises

2.14 According to the CSB guidelines, B/Ds should complete the recruitment process within a reasonable timeframe so that timely offers can be made to secure the most suitable candidates. They should draw up a recruitment schedule to specify the timeframe for each stage of a recruitment exercise to facilitate monitoring. The CSRs specifically provide that any undue delay in finalising a particular stage should be explained to the approving authority (see Note 7 to para. 2.2(e)). Audit examination of the 50 open recruitment exercises revealed cases of non-compliance with these requirements (see Table 5). In particular, no recruitment schedule was used in 13 CSD recruitment exercises, including the 10 small-scale exercises mentioned in paragraph 2.8. Audit noted that the 13 exercises took an average of 435 days to complete, compared with that of 243 days for the remaining 5 CSD exercises in which recruitment schedules were used. In Audit's view, the CSB needs to remind B/Ds of the need to closely monitor the progress of their recruitment exercises in accordance with the requirements.

Note 19: *According to the CSB's Guidebook on Appointments, the recruiting B/Ds should as far as possible only call for staff reports of recommended candidates who are serving officers after the conclusion of recruitment interviews, so as to help reduce abortive work and time of calling for and checking staff reports of candidates who are not selected for appointment. In exceptional cases where, for example, there are a large number of candidates who are serving officers, recruiting B/Ds may retrieve the staff report files of all candidates before interview in order not to hold up the recruitment board's deliberation in finalising its recommendation.*

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Table 5

Using recruitment schedules to monitor recruitment progress

B/D	No. of open recruitment exercises		
	Recruitment schedule used	Recruitment schedule not used	Total
CSB	10 (Note)	—	10
CSD	5	13	18
EDB	4 (Note)	3	7
FEHD	7	1	8
LCSD	7 (Note)	—	7
Overall	33	17	50

Source: CSB, CSD, EDB, FEHD and LCSD records

Note: The CSB, EDB and LCSD had 3, 1 and 3 exercises respectively not meeting the recruitment schedules. There was no documentary evidence that explanations had been given to the approving authorities.

CSB monitoring of time taken to complete recruitment exercises

2.15 Since working with the PSC to monitor the effectiveness of the streamlining measures in speeding up civil service recruitment in 2009 (see para. 2.3(c)), the CSB had not conducted any analysis of the time taken by B/Ds to complete open recruitment exercises. Audit analyses (see paras. 2.4 to 2.12) revealed cases of delay in completing open recruitment exercises by B/Ds. In Audit's view, the CSB needs to monitor and conduct regular analyses of the time taken by B/Ds to complete open recruitment exercises. This will help the CSB assess the overall effectiveness and efficiency of civil service recruitment and ascertain the need for introducing further streamlining measures service-wide.

2.16 Where the CSB identifies recruitment exercises taking a very long time to complete, it needs to provide specific guidance to the B/Ds concerned to help them shorten their processes. For exercises completed in a very short timeframe, it may wish to identify good practices that can be shared with other B/Ds. For example, in analysing the time taken by B/Ds to complete open recruitment exercises in 2010-11 (see para. 2.4), Audit noted that the Housing Department took 69 and 75 days to complete two exercises (Note 20). According to the Housing Department, in both exercises, the user sections provided support on vetting technical qualifications and working experience of candidates in accordance with the agreed recruitment schedule, and preparations for appointment of the first batch of recommended candidates were started in parallel with the finalisation of the recruitment board report to save time.

Audit recommendations

2.17 **Audit has recommended that the Secretary for the Civil Service should:**

- (a) **amend the CSRs to reflect all the streamlining measures that had been implemented between 2007 and 2009 for shortening the recruitment process, and ensure that B/Ds implement them properly in conducting recruitment exercises;**
- (b) **remind B/Ds of the need to draw up a recruitment schedule to specify the timeframe for each stage of a recruitment exercise and follow the prevailing guidelines in monitoring the progress; and**
- (c) **monitor and conduct regular analyses of the time taken by B/Ds to complete open recruitment exercises, with a view to:**
 - (i) **assessing the overall effectiveness of the streamlining measures in speeding up civil service recruitment and ascertaining the need for introducing further streamlining measures service-wide;**

Note 20: *For the two exercises respectively, the Housing Department received 454 and 398 applications, shortlisted 46 and 36 candidates for selection interviews, and appointed 12 and 3 candidates.*

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- (ii) **identifying open recruitment exercises that have taken a very long time to complete so as to provide specific guidance to the B/Ds concerned to help them shorten their recruitment processes; and**
- (iii) **identifying open recruitment exercises that have been completed in a very short timeframe to see whether there are any good practices that can be shared with other B/Ds.**

2.18 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for the Civil Service, Secretary for Education, Commissioner of Correctional Services, Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene and Director of Leisure and Cultural Services should ensure that their staff draw up a recruitment schedule to specify the timeframe for each stage of a recruitment exercise and/or follow the prevailing guidelines in monitoring the progress.**

2.19 **Audit has *recommended* that the Commissioner of Correctional Services should:**

- (a) **continue to work on streamlining the procedures for arranging skill tests/examinations; and**
- (b) **set a deadline for completing the comprehensive review of the overall recruitment processes.**

2.20 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Education should review the long time taken to arrange recruitment formalities and make offers of appointment in the three open recruitment exercises mentioned in paragraph 2.12 and take appropriate improvement measures.**

Response from the Administration

2.21 **The Secretary for the Civil Service agrees with the audit recommendations in paragraphs 2.17 and 2.18. He has said that:**

- (a) the CSB has, since 2007, worked with the PSC and introduced measures to streamline the recruitment process. Taking into account the experience gained in the past few years, the CSB would, on top of the ongoing efforts in monitoring the filling of civil service vacancies, work with B/Ds in considering suitable refinements to the arrangements for monitoring and streamlining the recruitment process. While there is always room to further streamline and expedite the recruitment process, any additional resources to be invested in expediting the process should be proportional to the improvement in efficiency. It is also important to strike a balance between upholding fairness and due process in conducting recruitment exercises, and achieving an efficient processing time so as to fill vacancies in a timely manner; and
- (b) for the recruitment exercises of Training Officer I in 2011 and 2013 (i.e. two of the three CSB exercises mentioned in the Note to Table 5 in para. 2.14), recruitment schedules were drawn up. Overall speaking, submission of the recruitment board report to the PSC for advice was delayed by four and three working days for the 2011 and 2013 exercises respectively. There was no substantial delay in each exercise. The CSB will continue to closely monitor the progress of the recruitment exercises under its purview and follow the relevant guidelines.

2.22 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendations in paragraphs 2.18 and 2.20. He has said that:

- (a) the EDB's Administration Division and Appointment and Personnel Section have all along had regular meetings to monitor effectively the progress of recruitment exercises. The approving authority was fully aware of the development of the recruitment exercises through these meetings. The EDB will formalise the use of recruitment schedule to monitor the progress of recruitment exercises in future; and
- (b) the time taken to arrange recruitment formalities and make offers of appointment in the three open recruitment exercises mentioned in paragraph 2.12 would have been shortened if some of the steps had been undertaken concurrently. The EDB would closely monitor the recruitment process of future exercises and arrange concurrent completion of steps whenever possible with a view to shortening the lead time.

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2.23 The Commissioner of Correctional Services agrees with the audit recommendations in paragraphs 2.18 and 2.19. In addition to those comments in paragraph 2.10, he has said that:

- (a) the CSD is actively following up the audit recommendations on implementing relevant improvement measures and ensuring timely completion of both large-scale and small-scale recruitment exercises;
- (b) for all ongoing recruitment exercises, the CSD has drawn up recruitment schedules since February 2014. For the large-scale recruitment exercises for Officer and Assistant Officer II organised annually, the CSD will continue to draw up a recruitment schedule before the launch of each exercise. For other small-scale recruitment exercises not conducted regularly, recruitment schedules will be drawn up shortly after the closing dates for applications because the time required for each stage can be better estimated when the actual number of applications is known; and
- (c) the CSD already commenced a comprehensive review of the overall recruitment processes in mid-February 2014. Initial views, including suggestions on streamlining the procedures of contracting-out skill tests/examinations, are being invited from user sections. The CSD will take appropriate measures, in consultation with the CSB where necessary, to ensure compliance with the relevant CSB guidelines. The CSD aims at completing the comprehensive review by the fourth quarter of 2014.

2.24 The Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene agrees with the audit recommendation in paragraph 2.18. She has said that in respect of the FEHD recruitment exercise for which a formal recruitment schedule had not been prepared, there had been close monitoring of each stage of the exercise, and it was completed in a timely manner within 187 days. The FEHD will ensure that there will be formal recruitment schedules for all recruitment exercises to specify the timeframe for each stage.

2.25 The Director of Leisure and Cultural Services agrees with the audit recommendation in paragraph 2.18. She has said that it has been the existing practice in the LCSD for all recruiting offices to report progress to the approving authority at various stages of the recruitment process. The LCSD has reminded the

recruiting offices to closely monitor the progress of the recruitment exercises in accordance with the prevailing CSB guidelines.

Publicising recruitment exercises

2.26 *Period for submitting applications.* The CSB has not provided guidelines on the period for submitting applications. For the 50 open recruitment exercises examined by Audit, the application period ranged from 11 to 28 days. While a reasonable time should be allowed to notify potential applicants and for them to prepare applications, B/Ds normally should not lengthen the application period beyond the norm (in 35 (70%) of the 50 exercises, the application periods were 14 or 15 days) without good reasons. In Audit's view, the CSB needs to consider providing B/Ds with appropriate guidelines.

2.27 *E-mail not commonly used for communicating with candidates.* E-mail communication is generally efficient and cost-effective. In all the 50 open recruitment exercises, candidates could choose to submit applications online, by post or by hand. Online applications were acknowledged by e-mail automatically and others acknowledged by post. For 7 of the 50 exercises (4 for the CSB and 3 for the CSD), e-mail was used for sending invitation letters to candidates shortlisted for selection interviews and/or regret letters to unsuccessful candidates. As regards the remaining 43 exercises, e-mail was not used for communicating with candidates. In Audit's view, the CSB needs to provide B/Ds with guidelines on using e-mail for communicating with candidates, with a view to enhancing efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

2.28 *Verification of candidates' local qualifications.* According to the CSB guidelines, B/Ds should not require candidates to send copies of local qualification documents at the application stage unless it is operationally necessary to do so (e.g. the collection of such is essential for the recruiting B/D to determine whether to send invitations for candidates to take recruitment examinations or attend selection interviews). Instead, B/Ds may verify candidates' qualifications when they attend recruitment examinations/selection interviews. However, of the 50 open recruitment exercises, the recruitment advertisements in 2 LCSD exercises required, without any operational need, attaching copies of qualification documents with application forms. In Audit's view, the CSB needs to remind B/Ds to follow the requirements of the CSB guidelines.

Audit recommendations

2.29 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for the Civil Service should:**

- (a) **provide B/Ds with appropriate guidelines on the period allowed for submitting applications in open recruitment exercises and remind B/Ds that the period normally should not be lengthened without good reasons;**
- (b) **provide B/Ds with guidelines on using e-mail for communicating with candidates; and**
- (c) **remind B/Ds to verify candidates' local qualifications when they attend recruitment examinations/selection interviews, instead of requiring candidates to send copies of their local qualification documents at the application stage, unless it is operationally necessary to do so.**

2.30 **Audit has *recommended* that the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services should ensure that LCSD staff verify candidates' local qualifications when they attend recruitment examinations/selection interviews, instead of requiring candidates to send copies of their local qualification documents at the application stage, unless it is operationally necessary to do so.**

Response from the Administration

2.31 The Secretary for the Civil Service agrees with the audit recommendations in paragraph 2.29.

2.32 The Director of Leisure and Cultural Services agrees with the audit recommendation in paragraph 2.30. She has said that the LCSD has reminded the recruiting offices not to require candidates to send copies of local qualification documents at the application stage unless it is operationally necessary to do so.

Vetting applications and shortlisting candidates

2.33 *Many unqualified candidates.* Of the total of 258,400 candidates in the 50 open recruitment exercises, 43% (ranging from 6.5% to 99.7% for each exercise) were found not meeting the entry requirements stated in the recruitment advertisements. The situation was unsatisfactory as significant time and resources were wasted in processing their applications. In Audit's view, the CSB needs to review open recruitment exercises having a high percentage of unqualified candidates together with the B/Ds concerned and implement effective measures to address the issue. For example, B/Ds should spell out the entry requirements in the recruitment advertisements more specifically to avoid any misunderstanding by potential applicants. Consideration may also be given to making more use of computerised processes to assist in processing applications. In this regard, the CSB has implemented an improvement measure since 2013 by revising the standard application form of civil service jobs and enhancing the online job application system to add built-in reminders for applicants to confirm that they meet the entry requirements of the jobs selected. In Audit's view, the CSB needs to monitor the effectiveness and adequacy of the improvement measure.

2.34 *Shortlisting candidates.* B/Ds commonly used shortlisting criteria (usually academic qualifications and working experience) to reduce the number of candidates to be interviewed. Where appropriate, B/Ds may adopt assessment tools and methods such as recruitment examinations or preliminary interviews to assist in assessing the skills or attributes required of desired candidates. Of the 50 open recruitment exercises, 36 adopted these tools. In Audit's view, these tools are useful for B/Ds to assess suitable candidates in addition to shortlisting criteria. The CSB needs to remind B/Ds to consider using such tools and provide them with necessary assistance.

2.35 *Seeking PSC advice.* Of the 50 open recruitment exercises, 24 involved ranks under the purview of the PSC. The shortlisting criteria adopted in such exercises and the shortlisting result were submitted to the PSC for advice in accordance with the requirements stated in the CSB guidelines (see para. 2.2(b)). According to the PSC, B/Ds should maintain consistency in the shortlisting criteria adopted for the same rank in different exercises unless special circumstances have arisen. As such, the CSB may explore with the PSC as to whether the process can be streamlined by dispensing with the requirement to submit the shortlisting criteria and shortlisting result to the PSC for advice if the criteria are the same as those adopted in the preceding recruitment exercise for the same rank.

Audit recommendations

- 2.36 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for the Civil Service should:**
- (a) **review open recruitment exercises having a high percentage of unqualified candidates together with the B/Ds concerned and implement effective measures to address the issue;**
 - (b) **monitor the effectiveness and adequacy of the enhancement of the online job application system to address the issue of unqualified applications;**
 - (c) **remind B/Ds to consider assessment tools, such as recruitment examinations or preliminary interviews, apart from shortlisting criteria to assist in identifying suitable candidates, and provide them with necessary assistance; and**
 - (d) **explore with the PSC as to whether the requirement to submit the shortlisting criteria and shortlisting result to the PSC for advice can be dispensed with if the criteria are the same as those adopted in the preceding recruitment exercise for the same rank.**

Response from the Administration

- 2.37 The Secretary for the Civil Service agrees with the audit recommendations.

Holding skill tests/examinations and conducting selection interviews

2.38 *Short notice of skill tests/examinations.* Skill tests/examinations were held in 34 of the 50 open recruitment exercises examined by Audit. According to the CSB guidelines, B/Ds should give sufficient advance notice of a skill test/examination to candidates, usually two weeks before the test/examination. However, in 6 of the 34 exercises (1 for the CSB, 4 for the CSD and 1 for the EDB), the B/Ds concerned gave notice to the candidates only 9 to 13 days before

the test/examination (Note 21). For two FEHD exercises, not all candidates were given the same notice period and some were given less than two weeks' notice (Note 22). In Audit's view, the CSB needs to remind B/Ds of the need to give sufficient and uniform advance notice of a skill test/examination to all candidates to facilitate their preparation.

2.39 **Formation of recruitment board.** Audit examination of the 50 open recruitment exercises revealed that the majority of the recruitment boards (32 exercises) had four officers, including the secretary if there was one. The remaining recruitment boards had three (12 exercises) or five officers (5 exercises) (Note 23). In this respect, Audit noted that there were inconsistencies in the CSRs and CSB guidelines, as follows:

- (a) **Annex 1.1 to the CSRs.** A chairman, a member and a member/secretary should be nominated to form a recruitment board. Exceptionally, additional members may be nominated, but an unduly large or high-powered board must be avoided; and
- (b) **CSB's Guidebook on Appointments.** A recruitment board should comprise at least three officers, excluding the secretary.

In Audit's view, the CSB needs to review the requirements on the formation of recruitment board and provide B/Ds with clear guidelines.

Note 21: *According to the CSB, for the recruitment exercise of Training Office I in 2011, invitation letters for attending the written test were sent to candidates 11 days before the test. The CSB contacted the candidates by phone on the same day separately with a view to giving advance notice to them. The arrangement has improved in the 2013 exercise whereby candidates were given 20 days' notice.*

Note 22: *For one exercise, 1,527 candidates were given 25 days' notice. The remaining 24 candidates were given 5 or 6 days' notice after the FEHD had confirmed their eligibility by further examining their documentary proof of academic qualifications. For the other exercise, 3,029 candidates were invited in batches to skill tests over a period of about two weeks. According to the FEHD, it had a tight schedule and the first batch of 149 candidates were given a 6-day notice. It improved gradually on the period of notification for subsequent batches.*

Note 23: *For one exercise, the recruitment board was not formed as no suitable candidate was identified for selection interviews.*

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2.40 *Interviews conducted on a group basis.* In 7 of the 50 open recruitment exercises (2 for the CSB, 3 for the CSD and 2 for the LCSD), group interviews were conducted. In Audit's view, group interviews have provided an additional tool to help B/Ds identify suitable candidates and where appropriate, could be used as a step in the recruitment process to identify candidates for further interview on an individual basis. The CSB needs to provide further guidelines to B/Ds on how to make the best use of group interviews in the recruitment process.

Audit recommendations

2.41 *Audit has recommended that the Secretary for the Civil Service should:*

- (a) **remind B/Ds of the need to give sufficient and uniform advance notice of a skill test/examination to all candidates to facilitate their preparation;**
- (b) **review the requirements on the formation of recruitment board and provide B/Ds with clear guidelines; and**
- (c) **provide B/Ds with further guidelines on conducting group interviews in the recruitment process.**

2.42 *Audit has recommended that the Secretary for the Civil Service, Secretary for Education, Commissioner of Correctional Services and Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene should ensure that their staff give sufficient and uniform advance notice of a skill test/examination to all candidates to facilitate their preparation.*

Response from the Administration

2.43 The Secretary for the Civil Service agrees with the audit recommendations in paragraphs 2.41 and 2.42.

2.44 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendation in paragraph 2.42. He has said that the EDB will in future ensure that the full two-week advance notice of a test/examination is given to all candidates.

2.45 The Commissioner of Correctional Services agrees with the audit recommendation in paragraph 2.42. He has said that the CSD will give at least 14 days of advance notice to individual candidates for attending various selection processes of all recruitment exercises as a standard practice.

2.46 The Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene agrees with the audit recommendation in paragraph 2.42. She has said that the FEHD will closely monitor the progress of each stage of a recruitment exercise to ensure that sufficient and uniform advance notice can be and is given to all candidates of a skill test/examination.

Making offers of appointment

2.47 *Making offers of appointment by batch.* In 4 of the 50 open recruitment exercises, the CSB made offers of appointment to candidates in batches in the course of conducting the selection interviews, in order to speed up the filling of a large number of vacancies by suitable persons selected from a large pool of candidates. For the remaining 46 recruitment exercises, the B/Ds made offers of appointment after conducting all selection interviews. There were cases where making offers by batch also appeared appropriate (e.g. the CSD's recruitment of 283 Assistant Officer IIs in August 2011). The CSB has not issued any guidelines on making offers by batch. In Audit's view, such guidelines are useful for ensuring that proper procedures are followed by B/Ds.

Audit recommendation

2.48 **Audit has recommended that the Secretary for the Civil Service should provide B/Ds with guidelines on making offers of appointment by batch.**

Response from the Administration

2.49 The Secretary for the Civil Service agrees with the audit recommendation.

PART 3: IN-SERVICE RECRUITMENT OF CIVIL SERVANTS

3.1 This PART examines issues relating to the in-service recruitment of civil servants. The following issues are discussed:

- (a) in-service recruitment of controlled grade staff (paras. 3.5 to 3.25);
- (b) in-service recruitment of other civil servants (paras. 3.26 to 3.32); and
- (c) concessionary in-service appointment requirements (paras. 3.33 to 3.38).

Key processes in in-service recruitment

3.2 As mentioned in paragraph 1.4, the Government's civil service recruitment policy is that B/Ds should normally conduct open recruitment of civil servants to cast the widest net for candidates. They would conduct in-service recruitment only when there are special reasons. For example, in cases where the skills, experience or expertise required can be met by serving officers in other civil service grades with potential surplus staff, in-service recruitment of civil servants may be preferred for the benefit of the overall manpower planning of the civil service. In this respect, it is worth noting that in its 2011 Annual Report, the PSC has expressed the view that:

- (a) as a norm, open recruitment should be conducted for basic ranks irrespective of the number of vacancies; and
- (b) in-service recruitment should only be considered when there are potential surplus staff in the service, such as during the service-wide recruitment freeze, or when there are other special reasons that suit the needs or special circumstances of certain grades.

3.3 For the majority of the civil service grades, since January 2012, B/Ds have been required to seek the advice of the PSC, or the CSB if the rank of the officers to be recruited is outside the PSC's purview, before conducting in-service

recruitment. For controlled grades (see para. 3.6), B/Ds may conduct in-service recruitment as they consider necessary.

3.4 In conducting an in-service recruitment exercise, the recruiting B/D issues a vacancy circular to serving civil servants to invite their applications. The other key processes in an in-service recruitment exercise are basically the same as those in an open recruitment exercise (see para. 2.2).

In-service recruitment of controlled grade staff

3.5 *Open recruitment freeze.* To achieve the target of reducing the size of the civil service to around 160,000 by 2006-07, the Government announced in January 2003 that a civil service general open recruitment freeze would be imposed with effect from April 2003. In March 2003, the Government launched the Second Voluntary Retirement Scheme for officers in 229 designated grades as a means to achieve the target. To ensure the cost-effectiveness of the Scheme, the 229 grades were subject to a five-year open recruitment freeze until March 2008. The target reduction of the civil service was achieved in March 2007, and the civil service general open recruitment freeze and the five-year open recruitment freeze for grades included in the Second Voluntary Retirement Scheme were lifted in April 2007 and March 2008 respectively.

3.6 *Controlled grades.* In July 2007, the CSB issued CSB Circular Memorandum No. 15/2007 to set out the arrangements associated with the lifting of open recruitment freeze imposed on grades included in the Second Voluntary Retirement Scheme in March 2008. According to the Circular Memorandum, to ensure that open recruitment will only be conducted where it is fully justified, the CSB will continue to maintain control on the open recruitment for grades belonging to any one of the following categories (Note 24):

Note 24: *Before July 2012, grades included in various targeted voluntary retirement schemes launched after the Second Voluntary Retirement Scheme were also selected as controlled grades. In July 2012, this criterion was removed as open recruitment freeze period for all such schemes had expired.*

In-service recruitment of civil servants

- (a) grades that have existing or anticipated surplus based on the latest manpower plans prepared by their B/Ds and submitted to the CSB in the annual manpower plan updating exercise;
- (b) grades (or their duties) that are under review or may be affected by ongoing/impending institutional reviews, and/or reviews on mode of service delivery;
- (c) grades considered by their grade management as being in a state of obsolescence; or
- (d) grades where the new intakes normally come from in-service recruitment, or requiring skill sets that are commonly available within the civil service or can easily be acquired through training.

The Circular Memorandum promulgated a list of 76 grades selected as controlled grades.

3.7 ***Control mechanism.*** The recruitment arrangements for controlled grades set out in CSB Circular Memorandum No. 15/2007 are as follows:

- (a) for the controlled grades, B/Ds may conduct in-service recruitment to fill vacancies as they consider necessary; and
- (b) having regard to their specific operational needs, B/Ds may also apply for the CSB's approval to conduct open recruitment for controlled grades in accordance with the established mechanism. In seeking approval, they are required to provide relevant information for the CSB's consideration, such as the up-to-date manpower position of the grade concerned, whether in-service recruitment can provide the required intake (Note 25) and whether alternative modes of service delivery have been critically explored and considered infeasible.

Note 25: *B/Ds are required to indicate either the results of in-service recruitment that has been conducted or the reasons why in-service recruitment is considered unlikely to be able to identify sufficient number of candidates to fill the vacancies.*

According to the CSB, the control mechanism was introduced in support of the Government's established policy to maintain a lean and efficient civil service, and has helped ensure that open recruitment of selected grades, in particular the grades included in the voluntary retirement schemes, will only be conducted where it is fully justified. During July 2007 to January 2014, the CSB approved a total of 61 applications from B/Ds for conducting open recruitment to fill about 5,200 vacancies in 18 controlled grades. It has approved most of the applications for mounting open recruitment exercises to meet B/Ds' operational needs.

3.8 *CSB revisions of the list of controlled grades.* The list of controlled grades promulgated in July 2007 comprised 76 grades (see para. 3.6). The list had remained unchanged until August 2008 when the CSB conducted a review and revised the number of controlled grades to 88 (adding 13 grades and removing 1 grade). In July 2012, after another review, the CSB reduced the number of controlled grades to 74 (adding 1 grade and removing 15 grades). The 74 grades varied considerably in terms of their establishment and vacancy situation. Among them, 54 grades had an establishment of less than 100 posts and 12 grades had an establishment of between 100 and 500 posts as at 31 March 2013. The Artisan, Workman I and Workman II grades were the three largest grades among the controlled grades in terms of establishment, and were the only three controlled grades that had an establishment of over 2,000 posts.

3.9 *Large number of vacancies in a few controlled grades.* Unfilled vacancies may undermine the quality of public service unless: (a) the posts are no longer needed and should be deleted; or (b) endeavour has been made to meet genuine service needs through reshuffling of duties, streamlining or re-engineering of procedures, redeployment of existing manpower and/or alternative means of service delivery. The CSB guidelines specify that B/Ds may conduct recruitment exercises in advance before the emergence of vacancies to achieve smooth succession. According to CSB records, as at 31 March 2013, the Workman I and Workman II grades (Note 26) had 675 and 1,110 vacancies respectively, the most among the 74 controlled grades. The Artisan, Education Officer and Office Assistant grades ranked number three to five, having 375, 174 and 157 vacancies respectively. Among the remaining controlled grades, three grades had more than

Note 26: *The Workman I grade has only one rank, namely Workman I. Similarly, the Workman II grade has only the rank of Workman II. The two grades have been selected as controlled grades since July 2007.*

In-service recruitment of civil servants

100 vacancies while 60 grades had fewer than 20 vacancies. Audit analysis revealed that the top three B/Ds in terms of number of vacancies (FEHD, LCSD and EDB — see Table 1 in para. 1.2) had high vacancy rates because they had a large number of vacancies in the controlled grades, notably the Workman I and Workman II grades (see Tables 6 and 7).

Table 6

**Analysis of vacancies of FEHD, LCSD and EDB
(31 March 2013)**

Grade	Establishment	Strength	Vacancies	Vacancy rate
	(a)	(b)	(c) = (a) – (b)	(d) = $\frac{(c)}{(a)} \times 100\%$
	(No.)	(No.)	(No.)	
<i>FEHD</i>				
Controlled grades	4,536	3,675	861	19.0%
Other grades	6,606	6,398	208	3.1%
Overall	11,142	10,073	1,069	9.6%
<i>LCSD</i>				
Controlled grades	2,980	2,603	377	12.7%
Other grades	5,751	5,599	152	2.6%
Overall	8,731	8,202	529	6.1%
<i>EDB</i>				
Controlled grades	3,536	3,093	443	12.5%
Other grades	1,911	1,830	81	4.2%
Overall	5,447	4,923	524	9.6%

Source: Audit analysis of CSB records

In-service recruitment of civil servants

Table 7

**Top two controlled grades in terms of number of vacancies
(2010-11 to 2012-13)**

B/D	No. of vacancies (vacancy rate) as at 31 March		
	2011	2012	2013
<i>Workman II</i>			
EDB	50 (17%)	61 (23%)	52 (23%)
FEHD	557 (16%)	508 (15%)	393 (12%)
LCSD	-6 (-5%) (Note)	36 (28%)	52 (40%)
Other B/Ds	415 (14%)	539 (19%)	613 (22%)
Service-wide	1,016 (15%)	1,144 (17%)	1,110 (17%)
<i>Workman I</i>			
EDB	No Workman I posts		
FEHD	188 (33%)	190 (33%)	234 (41%)
LCSD	291 (27%)	263 (25%)	201 (19%)
Other B/Ds	166 (16%)	251 (25%)	240 (25%)
Service-wide	645 (24%)	704 (27%)	675 (26%)

Source: Audit analysis of CSB records

Note: In 2010-11, the LCSD converted some Workman II posts to Workman I posts to meet urgent manpower need for inspection and maintenance of trees. During the conversion period, the strength of Workman II (including some Workman IIs acting as Workman Is on operational grounds) exceeded the establishment.

Remarks: As at 31 March 2013, the establishment of the civil service had a total of 2,630 Workman I posts and 6,404 Workman II posts.

In-service recruitment of civil servants

3.10 *Audit examination of recruitment of Workman Is and Workman IIs.* Audit examined the recruitment exercises conducted by the FEHD, LCSD and EDB for the Workman I and Workman II grades during 2010-11 to 2012-13. Audit also examined the CSB's justifications for selecting the two grades as controlled grades. The audit findings are in paragraphs 3.11 to 3.25.

Only one open recruitment exercise conducted

3.11 According to the CSB, in some circumstances, when vacancies of controlled grade arise, B/Ds may take the opportunity to review the current mode of operation and explore if more effective use of government resources can be achieved through alternative modes of service delivery (e.g. outsourcing) or restructuring of work procedures. As a result, B/Ds may be able to streamline its establishment, and regrade or delete some civil service posts of these grades through outsourcing and other restructuring efforts. However, for the vacancies in the Workman I and Workman II grades, the FEHD, LCSD and EDB spent considerable efforts to conduct recruitment exercises to select suitable candidates to fill the vacancies to meet their operational needs.

3.12 In January 2012, the FEHD obtained the CSB's approval to conduct an open recruitment exercise for Workman II, targeting to recruit 680 officers to fill existing/anticipated vacancies. It placed the recruitment advertisement in March 2012 and received 6,600 applications. The recruitment board recommended 1,481 candidates for appointment/waitlisting. Between September 2012 and January 2014, 852 candidates accepted the FEHD's offers of appointment and 85 declined. Other than this exercise, the FEHD did not apply or conduct any open recruitment exercise for Workman I and Workman II during 2010-11 to 2012-13.

3.13 As regards the EDB and LCSD, during 2010-11 to 2012-13, none of them conducted any open recruitment exercise for Workman I or Workman II (Note 27).

Note 27: *In January 2013, the LCSD obtained the CSB's approval for open recruitment of Workman IIs. The recruitment exercise was launched in September 2013 and was in progress as at January 2014. The EDB did not apply to the CSB for conducting any open recruitment exercise for Workman I or Workman II during 2010-11 to 2012-13.*

Failure to recruit sufficient officers through in-service recruitment

3.14 Between 2010-11 and 2012-13, the EDB, FEHD and LCSD conducted a total of nine in-service recruitment exercises, comprising four exercises for Workman I and five exercises for Workman II (see Appendix C). Audit found that these exercises failed to recruit sufficient officers to fill the vacancies, as follows:

- (a) ***Reduced pool of candidates.*** In all the nine exercises, only serving officers were invited to apply, thus reducing the pool and mix of candidates when compared with open recruitment exercises in which candidates both outside and within the civil service may apply. The impact was particularly significant for the Workman I and Workman II grades because they were in the lower salary bands and few serving officers in other grades were interested in submitting applications. As a result, on average, only 155 applications were received in each exercise; and

- (b) ***High decline rates.*** In its 2011 exercise for Workman I, the LCSD targeted to appoint 256 officers and made offers of appointment to 295 candidates. However, 103 (35%) candidates declined the offers and eventually the 192 appointees was 64 less than targeted. For the other eight exercises, the number of candidates offered appointment was less than the target number of appointees. Coupled with a decline rate of 14% to 80% (46% on average), the number of appointees was 3 to 93 (38 on average) less than targeted.

It is worth noting that Audit analysis of six open recruitment exercises for Workman I/Workman II conducted by six B/Ds during 2010-11 to 2012-13 revealed that, on average, 3,396 applications were received in each exercise. Of the total of 1,127 candidates offered appointment, only 96 (9%) declined the offers.

Civil service vacancies not reduced

3.15 The CSB guidelines specify that in cases where the skills, experience or expertise required can be met by serving officers in other civil service grades with potential surplus staff, in-service recruitment may be preferred for the benefit of the overall manpower planning of the civil service (see para. 3.2). There is assurance that such benefit will be achieved if:

In-service recruitment of civil servants

- (a) an in-service recruitment exercise is restricted to officers in selected civil service grades with potential surplus staff; and
- (b) after any officers in the selected civil service grades are transferred to the recruiting B/Ds, action is taken to delete any surplus posts vacated by such officers.

However, this was not the case in the nine in-service recruitment exercises for Workman I and Workman II because all serving officers could submit applications.

3.16 Where an appointee does not come from a civil service grade with surplus staff, there is still a need to fill the vacancy left by the appointee on in-service transfer. Consequently, the civil service vacancies will not be reduced and the B/D concerned will need to conduct a recruitment exercise to fill the vacancy (see also para. 3.19).

3.17 The problem was exacerbated when an appointee was also of the Workman I or Workman II grade (e.g. a Workman II might apply for a higher paid Workman I post and some Workman Is and Workman IIs might also apply for posts of the same rank for change of working environment). There was no reduction in the total number of vacancies in the Workman I and Workman II grades service-wide. The B/D concerned conducted another in-service recruitment exercise to select a serving officer to fill the vacancy. The competition for candidates among B/Ds therefore continued, resulting in ineffective use of government resources and higher staff turnover. According to CSB records, in 2010-11 and 2011-12, 26 B/Ds conducted a total of 51 in-service Workman I or Workman II recruitment exercises to compete for candidates among themselves. Based on B/Ds' returns submitted to the CSB, there would be an average of 200 Workman I and 460 Workman II vacancies arising each year between 2013-14 and 2016-17.

Adverse impact on operations of B/Ds with officers transferred out

3.18 According to the CSRs, a B/D with officers who have been offered appointment by another B/D should release them within three months. Where a large number of officers are to be released by the B/D, there may be significant adverse impact on its operations. Audit found that the 192 appointees in the LCSD's 2011 in-service recruitment exercise for Workman I (see para. 3.14(b))

included 141 serving in the FEHD. In the end, the FEHD agreed with the LCSD to release the officers concerned to the LCSD in seven batches from April 2012 to January 2013.

3.19 In addition, according to the CSRs, an officer confirmed to the permanent establishment on in-service transfer to a new office is usually appointed on trial terms and may revert to his former office during the trial period (usually one year). Normally the B/D concerned may not fill the post vacated by the officer until the trial period ends. Therefore, the strength of the B/D may be reduced during the trial period. According to the CSB: (a) similar issues may arise in the case of open recruitment as some of the appointees may be serving officers; and (b) in some circumstances, B/Ds may prefer to fill vacancies through in-service recruitment to ensure that the time and staff costs commensurate with the number of recruits targeted in a recruitment exercise. However, Audit noted that the adverse impact of in-service recruitment where all appointees were serving officers would be much greater than in the case of open recruitment (Note 28). Furthermore, the PSC expressed the view that as a norm, open recruitment should be conducted for basic ranks irrespective of the number of vacancies (see para. 3.2(a)).

Improving the recruitment arrangements for controlled grades

3.20 As mentioned in paragraph 3.6, the CSB's objective of requiring B/Ds to obtain its approval before conducting open recruitment exercises for controlled grades is to ensure that open recruitment will only be conducted where it is fully justified. However, Audit examination revealed that a number of issues arose (see paras. 3.14 to 3.19) where B/Ds conducted in-service recruitment exercises, instead of open recruitment, for controlled grades. In Audit's view, the CSB needs to take on board the audit observations and review the recruitment arrangements for the controlled grades.

Note 28: *For the CSD's and FEHD's open recruitment of Workman IIs in 2011 and 2012 (see items 18 and 41 of Appendix B), none of the 878 appointees was a serving officer.*

In-service recruitment of civil servants

Reviewing the controlled grade selection criteria

3.21 The existing controlled grade selection criteria include: (a) grades where the new intakes normally come from in-service recruitment; and (b) grades requiring skill sets that are commonly available within the civil service or can easily be acquired through training (see para. 3.6(d)). Given the Government's policy that B/Ds should normally conduct open recruitment (see para. 1.4), it is unclear:

- (a) why there are still grades where the new intakes normally come from in-service recruitment; and
- (b) what are the grounds to deviate from this policy for grades requiring skill sets that are commonly available within the civil service or can easily be acquired through training. B/Ds may conduct in-service recruitment to fill vacancies in any grade only under special justifiable circumstances (e.g. when surplus staff have already been identified in another grade and an in-service recruitment restricted to staff in that grade may help absorb the surplus staff).

In Audit's view, the CSB needs to review whether the two criteria need revisions.

Reviewing the controlled grade list

3.22 According to CSB records, the Workman I and Workman II grades have been selected as controlled grades since July 2007 because of meeting the following criteria:

Criterion met by Workman I grade

- (a) grades that have existing or anticipated surplus based on the latest manpower plans prepared by their B/Ds and submitted to the CSB in the annual manpower plan updating exercise (see para. 3.6(a));

Criterion met by Workman II grade

- (b) grades considered by their grade management as being in a state of obsolescence (see para. 3.6(c)); and

Criterion met by both Workman I and Workman II grades

- (c) grades where the new intakes normally come from in-service recruitment, or requiring skill sets that are commonly available within the civil service or can easily be acquired through training (see paras. 3.6(d) and 3.21).

3.23 In preparing manpower plans, each B/D is required to indicate the number of existing or anticipated surplus staff in any grade. According to CSB records, in the 2012 manpower plans, only one department indicated a total of three surplus staff in the Workman I grade up to March 2016, which is insignificant when compared with an establishment of some 2,600 posts in the grade. It is questionable whether the Workman I grade should be selected as a controlled grade based on the surplus staff criterion (see para. 3.22(a)). In Audit's view, for grades selected as controlled grades based on the surplus staff criterion, the CSB needs to monitor their surplus staff situation to see whether the criterion remains applicable.

Audit recommendations

3.24 **Audit has recommended that the Secretary for the Civil Service should:**

- (a) **review the issues relating to the in-service recruitment of controlled grade staff identified by Audit in paragraphs 3.14 to 3.19;**
- (b) **based on the review results in (a) above, improve the recruitment arrangements for the controlled grades;**
- (c) **review and revise as appropriate the following selection criteria for controlled grades:**
 - (i) **grades where the new intakes normally come from in-service recruitment; and**
 - (ii) **grades requiring skill sets that are commonly available within the civil service or can easily be acquired through training; and**

In-service recruitment of civil servants

- (d) **for all grades selected as controlled grades based on the surplus staff criterion, monitor their surplus staff situation to see whether the criterion remains applicable.**

Response from the Administration

3.25 The Secretary for the Civil Service agrees with the audit recommendations. He has said that the CSB will continue to closely monitor the implementation of the controlled grade mechanism and the situation of surplus staff in different grades, and from time to time update the list of controlled grades and examine the set of criteria for control in the light of the latest circumstances. The CSB will take into account the audit recommendations when it next reviews the aforesaid matters.

In-service recruitment of other civil servants

3.26 For grades other than the controlled grades, B/Ds should normally conduct open recruitment to cast the widest net for candidates. However, between 2010-11 and 2012-13, the CSD conducted a total of 12 in-service recruitment exercises for grades other than the controlled grades. Of these 12 exercises, four failed to recruit sufficient officers to fill the vacancies. Table 8 shows the details of the four exercises.

Table 8

Four in-service recruitment exercises conducted by CSD

Rank	Date of vacancy circular	No. of applications	No. of appointees		
			Target	Actual	Shortfall
Technical Instructor (Garment)	31 December 2010	35 (Note 1)	9	1	8
Technical Instructor (Leather Work)	31 December 2010	6 (Note 1)	1	—	1
Instructor (Construction and Maintenance)	17 June 2011	11 (Note 1)	1	—	1
Technical Instructor (Garment)	27 March 2012	5 (Note 2)	20	3	17

Source: CSD records

Note 1: The recruitment exercise was restricted to all serving officers in the Government.

Note 2: The recruitment exercise was restricted to serving Instructors in the CSD.

Remarks: The ranks in all the four exercises were outside the purview of the PSC.

3.27 Table 8 shows that for all the four in-service recruitment exercises, the CSD received only a small number of applications and failed to recruit the target number of officers. Audit is particularly concerned that although the 2010 in-service recruitment exercise for Technical Instructor (Garment) was unsatisfactory, the CSD still conducted another in-service recruitment exercise in 2012. Furthermore, since January 2012, B/Ds have been required to seek the advice of the CSB before conducting in-service recruitment (see para. 3.3). However, the CSD has not done so in respect of the March 2012 recruitment exercise for Technical Instructor (Garment).

In-service recruitment of civil servants

3.28 Audit noted that for the post of Instructor (Construction and Maintenance), after the unsuccessful 2011 in-service recruitment exercise, the CSD conducted an open recruitment exercise in 2012 and eventually appointed one of the 200 applicants (see Figure 1 in para. 2.8). In Audit's view, the CSB needs to regularly remind B/Ds that open recruitment is the norm for filling civil service vacancies, and in-service recruitment should only be conducted under special justifiable circumstances in accordance with the CSB guidelines.

Audit recommendations

3.29 Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for the Civil Service should regularly remind B/Ds that:

- (a) **in-service recruitment should only be conducted under special justifiable circumstances in accordance with the CSB guidelines; and**
- (b) **the advice of the PSC or CSB should be sought before conducting in-service recruitment for the specified grades.**

3.30 Audit has *recommended* that the Commissioner of Correctional Services should:

- (a) **recruit staff through open recruitment as a norm and conduct in-service recruitment only under special justifiable circumstances; and**
- (b) **seek the advice of the PSC or CSB, where required by the CSB guidelines, before conducting in-service recruitment.**

Response from the Administration

3.31 The Secretary for the Civil Service agrees with the audit recommendations in paragraph 3.29.

In-service recruitment of civil servants

3.32 The Commissioner of Correctional Services agrees with the audit recommendations in paragraph 3.30. He has said that the CSD will adopt open recruitment as a norm. Should in-service recruitment be considered the most suitable mode of recruitment, the CSD will seek prior advice/approval from the PSC or CSB as appropriate.

Concessionary in-service appointment requirements

3.33 For some civil service ranks, the B/Ds concerned have set in-service appointment requirements which are lower than the entry requirements for open recruitment. The concessionary in-service appointment requirements aim to provide serving officers in specific grades with an avenue for advancement and lift staff morale. In examining the CSB's recruitment of Administrative Officers, Executive Officer IIs and Assistant Clerical Officers, Audit noted that concessionary in-service appointment requirements were set by the CSB. Table 9 shows the details.

In-service recruitment of civil servants

Table 9

Concessionary in-service appointment requirements set by CSB

Rank	Entry requirements for open recruitment	Concessionary in-service appointment requirements	
		Serving officers	Requirements
Administrative Officer	A first or second class honours bachelor's degree or postgraduate degree	Executive Officers, Labour Officers, Management Services Officers, and Trade Officers	An ordinary bachelor's degree
		Other serving officers	An ordinary bachelor's degree and three years government service
Executive Officer II	A bachelor's degree or equivalent	Clerical Officers and Personal Secretaries	<p>(a) A specific number of years of government service;</p> <p>(b) for Senior Clerical Officers with less than three years' service in their present rank, Clerical Officers and Personal Secretaries, pass in five subjects in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination, with Level 3 or above in either Chinese Language or English Language; and</p> <p>(c) very effective or above performance</p>
Assistant Clerical Officer	Pass in five subjects in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination or equivalent	Clerical Assistants	<p>(a) Pass in three subjects in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination or equivalent and three years government service; or four years government service; and</p> <p>(b) very effective or above performance</p>

Source: CSB records

3.34 In April 2007, in a circular to B/Ds, the CSB stated that:

- (a) in view of rising education standards and public expectations, the PSC was of the view that B/Ds should consider raising the in-service appointment requirements set by them for the ranks concerned to bring them on a par with the entry requirements for open recruitment. The CSB agreed with the PSC; and
- (b) B/Ds should review the concessionary requirements for the ranks concerned. If, upon review, there were any special reasons to retain the requirements, B/Ds needed to advise the CSB.

3.35 As at December 2013, the CSB had not yet completed reviewing the concessionary in-service appointment requirements for all the three ranks shown in Table 9. The audit findings are as follows:

- (a) **Administrative Officer.** In 2005, the PSC recommended that the CSB should review whether it was necessary to keep the concessionary requirements in the long run having regard to the experiences gained in future recruitment exercises. Since then, the CSB has kept in view the concessionary arrangements in rolling out each recruitment exercise and considered that they should be retained in the interest of attracting the talents of other grades. According to the CSB, the review will be finalised in 2014;
- (b) **Executive Officer II.** In 2009, the CSB undertook to conduct an overall review of the concessionary requirements after completing the 2010-11 recruitment exercise. Up to December 2013, the CSB had not yet completed the review. According to the CSB, it has kept in view the concessionary arrangements and considered that they should be retained. The review will be finalised in 2014; and
- (c) **Assistant Clerical Officer.** In 2010, the CSB decided to continue the concessionary requirements. However, it undertook to conduct a further review on the requirements. Up to December 2013, the CSB had not completed the review. According to the CSB, there should be no change to the concessionary arrangements and the review will be completed shortly.

In-service recruitment of civil servants

3.36 In Audit's view, the CSB needs to complete reviewing the concessionary in-service appointment requirements for the three ranks as soon as possible. It also needs to find out whether all B/Ds concerned have completed their reviews of the concessionary in-service appointment requirements set by them and take appropriate follow-up action (see para. 3.34(b)).

Audit recommendations

3.37 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for the Civil Service should:**

- (a) **complete reviewing the concessionary in-service appointment requirements for the Administrative Officer, Executive Officer II and Assistant Clerical Officer ranks as soon as possible; and**
- (b) **find out whether all B/Ds concerned have completed their reviews of the concessionary in-service appointment requirements set by them for the ranks concerned and take appropriate follow-up action.**

Response from the Administration

3.38 The Secretary for the Civil Service agrees with the audit recommendations. He has said that the CSB has kept in view the concessionary in-service appointment requirements. The CSB will complete the relevant reviews in 2014.

PART 4: RECRUITMENT OF NON-CIVIL SERVICE STAFF

4.1 This PART examines the following issues relating to the recruitment of non-civil service staff:

- (a) open recruitment of non-civil service staff (paras. 4.5 to 4.18); and
- (b) restricted recruitment exercises for non-civil service staff (paras. 4.19 to 4.23).

Non-civil service staff

4.2 In addition to civil servants, B/Ds may employ non-civil service staff to meet service needs, as follows:

- (a) ***Non-civil service contract (NCSC) staff.*** The NCSC scheme was introduced in 1999 to replace the previous arrangement for employing temporary staff. Under the scheme, B/Ds may, subject to availability of funding, employ NCSC staff for the following purposes:
 - (i) to meet service need that is short-term or does not require keeping staff on a long-term or permanent basis;
 - (ii) to meet service need that requires staff on a part-time basis;
 - (iii) to meet service need where the mode of delivery of the service is under review or likely to be changed (e.g. pending contracting out of the service); or
 - (iv) to meet service need which is subject to market fluctuations or requires tapping expertise in a particular area; and
- (b) ***Other non-civil service staff.*** B/Ds may recruit other non-civil service staff under justifiable circumstances, such as performing urgent time-limited assignments.

Recruitment of non-civil service staff

As at 30 June 2013, there were 14,759 full-time non-civil service staff, comprising 12,900 NCSC staff and 1,859 other non-civil service staff.

4.3 Non-civil service staff do not occupy posts on the establishment of the B/Ds and are not counted towards the establishment or strength of the B/Ds. Their appointments are separate and distinct from the system for making civil service appointments. Subject to the requirements specified in the CSB guidelines, B/Ds have the full authority to decide on the employment of non-civil service staff, and are held fully accountable for the funding and employment of these staff.

4.4 The CSB guidelines on the recruitment of non-civil service staff include the following:

- (a) ***Using non-civil service staff.*** Where the service need is long-term and the duties can be aptly performed by civil service staff, civil servants rather than non-civil service staff should be used as a norm;
- (b) ***Recruitment procedures.*** In general, the norm for recruiting non-civil service staff is open recruitment. B/Ds should draw up appropriate recruitment procedures, having regard to the principle of openness and fairness and the need to minimise the risk of corruption or allegations of such;
- (c) ***Direct appointment.*** Direct appointment (i.e. without conducting a recruitment exercise) is permitted where there are special circumstances justifying the arrangement, such as appropriate expertise is urgently required or the expertise/experience/skill required is not readily available in the open market. B/Ds should ensure that a due process has been followed in arriving at the conclusion of direct appointment. Selection based on pre-determined criteria can help ward off any perceived conflict of interest or favouritism being given to a particular candidate or group of candidates; and
- (d) ***Appointing retired civil servants.*** B/Ds may appoint retired civil servants to non-civil service positions. However, B/Ds should ensure that such appointments should not be, or should not be seen as, an extension of service for those reaching retirement, and that retired civil servants should

not be appointed to take up duties which are essentially the same as those of their pre-retirement positions.

In practice, B/Ds' procedures for the open recruitment of non-civil service staff are generally the same as those in an open recruitment exercise for civil servants (see para. 2.2).

Open recruitment of non-civil service staff

4.5 Audit examination revealed room for improvement in the open recruitment of non-civil service staff. Details are in paragraphs 4.6 to 4.18.

Use of job application system

4.6 The CSB has implemented a job application system to allow candidates to complete and submit application forms online. B/Ds may use the system in conducting open recruitment exercises for civil servants or non-civil service staff. However, Audit examination of the recruitment advertisements placed by 30 B/Ds for 80 NCSC positions around mid-2013 revealed that online applications were accepted for only 18 (23%) of the 80 positions. In Audit's view, the CSB needs to find out why many B/Ds did not use the job application system and take appropriate measures to facilitate their use of the system to enhance efficiency.

CSD's open recruitment of NCSC staff

4.7 ***Recruitment procedures not drawn up.*** The CSB guidelines require B/Ds to draw up appropriate procedures for the recruitment of NCSC staff (see para. 4.4(b)). Audit noted that the CSD has not drawn up specific procedures for the recruitment of NCSC staff. According to the CSD, the procedures used were the same as those in an open recruitment exercise for civil servants where applicable. However, Audit examination of one CSD recruitment exercise for NCSC staff revealed exceptions (see para. 4.8).

4.8 ***Selection interviews not conducted.*** Audit found that in recruiting a part-time NCSC staff (Museum Assistant) in March 2011, after ranking the

Recruitment of non-civil service staff

applicants according to their academic qualifications and experience, the CSD selected the top one for appointment without conducting any selection interview. Such selection process was not in line with the procedures for the recruitment of civil servants. According to the CSB guidelines, conducting selection interviews is a key process in civil service recruitment. The selection interviews aim to select persons best fitted for the job, not necessarily the best qualified or most experienced candidate. In Audit's view, the CSD needs to draw up appropriate procedures for the recruitment of NCSC staff and ensure that CSD staff conduct recruitment exercises properly in accordance with such procedures.

LCSD's open recruitment of NCSC staff

4.9 Due to high staff turnover, the LCSD had conducted frequent exercises for recruiting certain NCSC staff, as follows:

- (a) ***Music Officers.*** The Music Office has been manned by 62 Music Officers on NCSC terms since the establishment of the LCSD in 2000 (Note 29). Between 2010-11 and 2012-13, 14 Music Officers left the Office and the LCSD conducted a total of 15 recruitment exercises to fill the vacancies in various work streams and levels; and

- (b) ***Stage Management Officers and Stage Technicians.*** Since 2000, the LCSD has engaged Stage Management Officers and Stage Technicians on NCSC terms for providing stage-related services for its 16 performing arts venues (Note 30). Between April 2010 and December 2013, the LCSD conducted a total of eight recruitment exercises for filling 47 vacancies at various levels arising from staff turnover.

Note 29: *The Music Office was established by the Government in 1977 to promote knowledge and appreciation of music in the community. In 2000, in taking over the Office from the two ex-municipal councils, the LCSD offered contract positions to 57 staff of the Office on ex-council contract terms and the remaining 5 staff on NCSC terms. Upon the departure of any such staff, the LCSD's practice has been to recruit NCSC staff to meet the service needs. For simplicity, staff on ex-council contract terms, being non-civil service staff, are also referred to as NCSC staff in this Audit Report.*

Note 30: *As at 31 December 2013, there were 54 Stage Management Officers and 26 Stage Technicians (37 and 11 respectively on 1 July 2001).*

4.10 The high staff turnover may indicate that the LCSD had difficulties in retaining Music Officers, Stage Management Officers and Stage Technicians on NCSC terms. However, the LCSD had taken a long time to review the NCSC positions, as follows:

- (a) **Music Officers.** In 2006, the Committee on Performing Arts (Note 31) studied the long-term mode of operation of the Music Office, and recommended the transfer of the Office to an outside organisation. Since then, the LCSD had conducted rounds of consultation with the staff and stakeholders on the recommendation, which was met with objection. In late November 2013, after reviewing the alternative modes of operation of the Office, the LCSD came up with a staffing proposal for the longer term development of the Office and consulted the CSB on the principles of the proposal. As an interim measure, the LCSD also restructured the NCSC positions of Music Officer with a view to retaining the serving officers and reducing the high staff turnover; and

- (b) **Stage Management Officers and Stage Technicians.** In 2007, the LCSD set up a working group to review stage-related services and the way forward for the NCSC positions. As at January 2014, the LCSD was finalising its proposal for the long-term manpower plans and had consulted the CSB on various issues of the proposal.

4.11 While NCSC staff may be used to meet service need that is short-term or where the mode of delivery of the service is under review (see paras. 4.2(a)(i) and (iii) and 4.4(a)), the LCSD has employed Music Officers, Stage Management Officers and Stage Technicians on NCSC terms for some 14 years since 2000. In Audit's view, the LCSD needs to closely monitor the staff turnover of the NCSC positions and agree/finalise with the CSB on the way forward for the positions at an early date.

4.12 **Non-local qualifications not authenticated.** According to the LCSD's Manual on the Employment and Management of Contract Staff (non-civil service), the recruiting office should authenticate non-local qualifications obtained by

Note 31: *The Committee on Performing Arts was established in 2004 to advise the Secretary for Home Affairs on the provision of performing arts services.*

Recruitment of non-civil service staff

candidates. Of the 15 recruitment exercises for Music Officers conducted between 2010-11 and 2012-13, in eight exercises there were candidates holding non-local qualifications. However, there was no documentary evidence that the LCSD had taken action to authenticate their qualifications. In Audit's view, the LCSD needs to remind its staff to authenticate candidates' non-local qualifications in accordance with its guidelines.

Audit recommendations

4.13 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for the Civil Service should:**

- (a) **find out why many B/Ds did not use the CSB's job application system in conducting recruitment exercises for NCSC staff; and**
- (b) **take appropriate measures to facilitate B/Ds' use of the system to enhance efficiency.**

4.14 **Audit has *recommended* that the Commissioner of Correctional Services should:**

- (a) **draw up appropriate procedures for the recruitment of NCSC staff; and**
- (b) **ensure that CSD staff conduct recruitment exercises for NCSC staff properly in accordance with such procedures.**

4.15 **Audit has *recommended* that the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services should:**

- (a) **closely monitor the staff turnover of the NCSC positions of Music Officers, Stage Management Officers and Stage Technicians, and agree/finalise with the CSB on the way forward for the positions at an early date; and**
- (b) **remind LCSD staff of the need to authenticate candidates' non-local qualifications in conducting recruitment exercises for NCSC staff.**

Response from the Administration

4.16 The Secretary for the Civil Service agrees with the audit recommendations in paragraph 4.13. He has said that the CSB will remind B/Ds to make more use of the CSB's electronic job application system in conducting recruitment exercises of NCSC staff and, where appropriate, take measures to facilitate B/Ds to use the system.

4.17 The Commissioner of Correctional Services agrees with the audit recommendations in paragraph 4.14. He has said that the CSD already commenced a comprehensive review of the overall recruitment processes in mid-February 2014, which covers the recruitment procedures for NCSC staff. The CSD will take appropriate measures, in consultation with the CSB where necessary, to ensure compliance with the relevant CSB guidelines.

4.18 The Director of Leisure and Cultural Services agrees with the audit recommendations in paragraph 4.15. She has said that:

- (a) the LCSD has engaged Music Officers, Stage Management Officers and Stage Technicians on NCSC terms in the past years to provide services in the Music Office and performing arts venues where the mode of service delivery is under review. The LCSD has completed these reviews and is consulting the CSB on the manpower proposals. Where the work involved is of a permanent nature, the LCSD will work with the CSB to replace the NCSC positions by civil service posts in accordance with the established procedures. In the interim, the LCSD has restructured the NCSC positions of Music Officer and improved their pay package with a view to retaining the serving officers; and
- (b) for the recruitment of Music Officers, the LCSD authenticated non-local qualifications of candidates through written test, audition and interview by qualified professionals in the Music Office. The LCSD has reminded the recruiting office to authenticate non-local qualifications of candidates with the issuing institutions, in addition to the test, audition and interview to be conducted.

Restricted recruitment exercises for non-civil service staff

FEHD's restricted recruitment exercises for NCSC staff

4.19 According to the CSB guidelines, the norm for recruiting non-civil service staff is open recruitment. However, between 2010-11 and 2012-13, the FEHD conducted four restricted recruitment exercises for NCSC staff confining to selected groups of retired civil servants (Note 32). Table 10 shows the details.

Table 10

**FEHD's restricted recruitment exercises for NCSC staff
(2010-11 to 2012-13)**

Year	Position	No. of applications	No. of appointees
2010-11	Food Traders Registration Officer	54	15
2011-12	Food Control Assistant	24	24
2012-13	Coordinator	2	1
	Food Control Assistant	29	12

Source: FEHD records

Remarks: All the four exercises were confined to selected groups of retired civil servants.

4.20 Audit examination of the recruitment of Food Control Assistants in 2011-12 revealed that, unlike the other three restricted recruitment exercises, there was insufficient documentation of the recruitment process and decisions. For example, Audit could not find from FEHD records details about the entry requirements, vetting of applications, selection interviews and assessment form. In February 2014, upon enquiry, the FEHD informed Audit that:

Note 32: *According to the FEHD guidelines on the recruitment of NCSC staff, if it is considered necessary, direct or restricted appointments should be put up with full justifications through the Appointments Section to the respective Directorate officer for consideration and approval.*

- (a) after the Fukushima nuclear power plant incident in March 2011, the FEHD was committed to conducting radiation tests on foods imported from Japan. Hence, the FEHD needed to recruit 24 Food Control Assistants on NCSC terms urgently to cope with the additional workload;
- (b) in view of the urgent need of recruiting sufficient experienced staff, arrangement had been made to contact by phone (being the most expeditious and effective means in the circumstances) ex-Health Inspector grade officers who retired within the last 10 years, possessed a diploma in Meat and Other Foods Inspections and had good track records/food control experience. With essential background information of the retired officers already in possession, the FEHD tried to call all the ex-Health Inspector grade officers who met the selection criteria. In the event, only 24 of them were successfully contacted and they agreed to take up offers of appointment; and
- (c) since the number of candidates available was the same as the target number of appointees, no further selection process was considered necessary. All of them were then appointed.

4.21 While restricted recruitment/direct appointment is permitted where there are special circumstances justifying the arrangement, it is important that a due process is followed and there is no perceived conflict of interest or favouritism being given to a particular candidate or group of candidates (see para. 4.4(c)). In Audit's view, the FEHD needs to ensure that proper documentation on the recruitment process and decisions is maintained for review and accountability purposes.

Audit recommendation

4.22 **Audit has *recommended* that the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene should ensure that, in conducting restricted recruitment exercises for non-civil service staff under special justifiable circumstances, proper documentation on the recruitment process and decisions is maintained.**

Response from the Administration

4.23 The Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene agrees with the audit recommendation. She has said that for subsequent similar exercises, documentation has been done properly.

PART 5: WAY FORWARD

5.1 This PART outlines the major audit observations and examines the way forward.

Summary of observations

5.2 In PART 2, Audit has found that the CSB does not have an established mechanism to collect information on recruitment exercises conducted by B/Ds and monitor their completion time. Audit analysis of the completion time of open recruitment exercises conducted by B/Ds in 2010-11 and 2011-12 has revealed that some 20% of the exercises took over eight months to complete. In the examination of 50 open recruitment exercises conducted between 2010-11 and 2012-13 by five B/Ds including three with the largest number of vacancies and one having taken a long time to complete some of its recruitment exercises, Audit has found that one department took on average 382 days to complete its 18 open recruitment exercises, with the longest exercise having taken 714 days. Audit has also found room for improvement in the recruitment processes, including vetting applications, shortlisting candidates and holding skill tests/examinations.

5.3 In PART 3, Audit has reported various issues relating to the in-service recruitment of staff in controlled grades, notably Workman I and Workman II. As at 31 March 2013, the EDB, FEHD and LCSD had a total of 435 Workman I and 497 Workman II vacancies. Audit examination has revealed that during 2010-11 to 2012-13 they conducted a total of nine in-service recruitment exercises for Workman I/Workman II. However, due to the reduced pool of candidates and high decline rates, these nine exercises failed to recruit sufficient officers to fill the vacancies. Such in-service recruitment exercises generally did not reduce civil service vacancies service-wide but resulted in ineffective use of government resources by B/Ds to compete for staff and high staff turnover in such B/Ds. Additionally, since there is a requirement on the part of the B/D which has lost staff due to such in-service transfers to keep the post of the departed staff open during his trial period in the recruiting B/D, those B/Ds with large number of officers transferred out would have a prolonged period of vacancies during which they are restricted from recruiting new staff to fill the posts. This would have an adverse impact on the operations of these B/Ds.

5.4 In PART 4, Audit has found room for improvement in the recruitment of non-civil service staff by B/Ds, including using the online job application system, drawing up recruitment procedures, conducting selection interviews and reviewing the NCSC positions.

Audit recommendations

5.5 According to the 2014-15 Budget, the civil service establishment is expected to expand by 2,556 posts in 2014-15 (50% up from that of 2013-14). Based on the CSB's estimate, around 6,000 civil servants will retire each year from 2013-14 to 2017-18 and the number will further increase to around 7,000 a year from 2018-19 to 2022-23. **To fill vacancies arising from wastage and creation of posts in a timely manner, Audit has recommended that the Secretary for the Civil Service should work with the PSC to:**

- (a) **keep a closer monitoring of the recruitment efforts among the B/Ds;**
- (b) **assist Controlling Officers to speed up recruitment exercises, analyse long period of vacancies and devise solutions, and enhance/improve the mechanism in gathering recruitment statistics; and**
- (c) **review the controlled grade arrangements.**

Response from the Administration

5.6 The Secretary for the Civil Service agrees with the audit recommendations. He has said that:

- (a) the CSB would, on top of the ongoing efforts in monitoring the filling of civil service vacancies, work with B/Ds in considering suitable refinements to the arrangements for monitoring and streamlining the recruitment process; and
- (b) the CSB will continue to closely monitor the implementation of the controlled grade mechanism and examine the set of criteria for control in the light of the latest circumstances.

**Time taken to complete open recruitment exercises
(2010-11 and 2011-12)**

No. of days taken to complete exercise	No. of exercises									
	2010-11			2011-12						
	Within the PSC's purview	Outside the PSC's purview	Total	Within the PSC's purview	Outside the PSC's purview	Total				
60 or less	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)				
61 to 120	7 (9%)	14 (14%)	21 (12%)	5 (7%)	6 (6%)	11 (7%)				
121 to 180	21 (27%)	36 (37%)	57 (32%)	34 (46%)	36 (39%)	70 (42%)				
181 to 240	33 (43%)	24 (24%)	57 (32%)	20 (27%)	26 (28%)	46 (27%)				
241 to 300	11 (14%)	13 (13%)	24 (14%)	9 (12%)	18 (19%)	27 (16%)				
301 to 360	3 (4%)	16 (21%)	8 (8%)	24 (24%)	11 (6%)	5 (7%)	15 (20%)	2 (2%)	25 (27%)	7 (4%)
Over 360	2 (3%)	3 (3%)	5 (3%)	1 (1%)	5 (6%)	6 (4%)				
Total	77 (100%)	99 (100%)	176 (100%)	74 (100%)	93 (100%)	167 (100%)				

Source: Audit analysis of CSB records

Remarks: 1. The recruitment exercises for each year were those with recruitment advertisements placed in the year.

2. The time taken to complete each exercise was counted from the date of placing an advertisement to the date of making the first offer of appointment. Therefore, the above figures do not include all-year-round recruitment exercises (e.g. those for Inspector/Superintendent of Police and Police Constable conducted by the Hong Kong Police Force) which do not have definite dates of placing advertisements and making offers of appointment.

3. The above figures do not include exercises for the recruitment of judges and judicial officers, Independent Commission Against Corruption officers and locally engaged staff working in Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices because they were not covered in the CSB's studies of attractiveness of civil service jobs.

Appendix B
(paras. 2.6 and 3.19 refer)

50 open recruitment exercises examined by Audit

	Rank	No. of vacancies	Date of placing advertisement	No. of applications received	No. of days taken after placing advertisement to	
					submit board report to PSC	make first offer of appointment
CSB						
1	Assistant Clerical Officer	1,435	10/12/2010	24,244	Not required	141
2	Simultaneous Interpreter	2	18/2/2011	247	187	202
3	Training Officer I	5	25/2/2011	1,057	193	210
4	Administrative Officer	40	3/9/2011	15,141	206	216
5	Executive Officer II	200	3/9/2011	22,169	210	224
6	Official Languages Officer II	26	16/12/2011	2,206	217	253
7	Simultaneous Interpreter	1	29/6/2012	250	190	217 (Note 1)
8	Administrative Officer	30	8/9/2012	13,973	208	221
9	Executive Officer II	140	8/9/2012	21,053	202	214
10	Training Officer I	4	25/1/2013	950	209	249
CSD						
11	Officer	51	25/6/2010	11,695	322	342
12	Dispenser	3	30/7/2010	162	Not required	246
13	Technical Instructor (Printing)	1	6/8/2010	169	Not required	628 (Note 2)
14	Technical Instructor (Sign Making)	1	6/8/2010	137	Not required	440
15	Technical Instructor (Construction and Maintenance)	1	10/9/2010	477	Not required	714
16	Assistant Officer II	329	17/9/2010	10,367	Not required	243
17	Instructor (Carpentry)	3	17/12/2010	96	Not required	309
18	Workman II	26	28/1/2011	1,602	Not required	188
19	Assistant Lecturer (Food and Beverage Services)	1	24/6/2011	210	Not required	371
20	Assistant Education Officer	8	29/7/2011	1,937	390	424
21	Assistant Officer II	283	19/8/2011	9,731	Not required	125
22	Technical Instructor (Building Renovation)	1	9/9/2011	163	Not required	482
23	Technical Instructor (Building Services)	2	9/9/2011	312	Not required	496
24	Officer	25	28/10/2011	6,592	225	258
25	Instructor (Construction and Maintenance)	1	15/6/2012	200	Not required	551
26	Instructor (Garment)	10	15/6/2012	303	Not required	449
27	Works Supervisor II	1	3/8/2012	746	Not required	356
28	Officer	25	30/11/2012	6,900	196	245

Appendix B
(Cont'd)
(paras. 2.6 and 3.19 refer)

	Rank	No. of vacancies	Date of placing advertisement	No. of applications received	No. of days taken after placing advertisement to	
					submit board report to PSC	make first offer of appointment
EDB						
29	Specialist (Education Services) II	3	28/8/2010	129	166	249
30	Assistant Education Officer (Admin)	18	2/10/2010	2,134	196	238
31	Assistant Inspector (Graduate)	47	2/10/2010	4,394	180	215
32	Specialist (Education Services) I	12	12/2/2011	29	74	108
33	Assistant Education Officer	61	24/9/2011	3,620	166	238
34	Specialist (Education Services) I	12	17/3/2012	30	90	158
35	Assistant Education Officer (Admin)	42	31/3/2012	2,271	220	259
FEHD						
36	Laboratory Attendant	5	30/4/2010	1,951	Not required	169
37	Assistant Pest Control Officer	3	17/9/2010	1,277	Not required	180
38	Pest Control Assistant II	8	17/9/2010	1,850	Not required	172
39	Health Inspector II	157	24/9/2010	5,131	Not required	158
40	Student Pest Control Assistant	5	21/1/2011	1,176	Not required	175
41	Workman II	680	23/3/2012	6,600	Not required	187
42	Assistant Hawker Control Officer	170	13/4/2012	6,206	Not required	197
43	Health Inspector II	65	25/5/2012	5,051	Not required	235
LCSD						
44	Assistant Curator II (History)	19	23/4/2010	1,253	116	138
45	Assistant Manager, Cultural Services	24	24/9/2010	10,332	203	242
46	Amenities Assistant III	114	8/10/2010	11,460	Not required	134
47	Assistant Leisure Services Manager II	9	25/2/2011	2,873	Not required	200
48	Cultural Services Assistant II	92	13/5/2011	18,100	Not required	315
49	Assistant Librarian	21	11/11/2011	7,926	214	234
50	Assistant Librarian	17	17/8/2012	11,523	266	305

Source: Audit analysis of CSB, CSD, EDB, FEHD and LCSD records

Note 1: As no suitable candidate was identified, the time between the date of placing advertisement and the date of the PSC's endorsement of the notification of the results is shown.

Note 2: As the CSD decided not to appoint any candidate after completing all recruitment formalities, the time between the date of placing advertisement and the date of the decision is shown.

Appendix C
(para. 3.14 refers)

Nine in-service recruitment exercises examined by Audit

B/D	Date of issue of vacancy circular	No. of applications received (a)	Target no. of appointees (b)	No. of candidates offered appointment (c)	No. of candidates accepting appointment (d)	Decline rate (e) = $\frac{(c) - (d)}{(c)} \times 100\%$	Shortfall in no. of appointees (f) = (b) - (d)
<i>Recruitment exercises for Workman I</i>							
FEHD	14/1/2011	182	110	93	63	32%	47
	22/2/2013	142	56	51	26	49%	30
LCSD	13/8/2010	257	254	187	161	14%	93
	28/10/2011	358	256	295	192	35%	64
<i>Recruitment exercises for Workman II</i>							
EDB	19/8/2011	91	18	5	1	80%	17
	22/2/2013	56	46	18	10	44%	36
LCSD	1/12/2010	99	8	7	5	29%	3
	10/10/2011	128	22	21	7	67%	15
	22/3/2013	78	45	17	6	65%	39

Source: Audit analysis of EDB, FEHD and LCSD records

Acronyms and abbreviations

Audit	Audit Commission
B/D	Bureau/department
CSB	Civil Service Bureau
CSD	Correctional Services Department
CSRs	Civil Service Regulations
EDB	Education Bureau
FEHD	Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
LCSD	Leisure and Cultural Services Department
NCSC	Non-civil service contract
PSC	Public Service Commission