

Chapter 6

Organisation, Administration and Staffing



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The Department has three Divisions, namely the Application and Processing Division, the Litigation Division and the Policy and Administration Division, each headed by a Deputy Director. The organisation chart can be found at the departmental website at <http://www.lad.gov.hk/eng/ginfo/oo.html>.

Staffing

At the end of 2020, the Department had 547 staff members comprising 86 professional officers, 178 law clerks and 283 supporting staff. Three Legal Aid Counsel and 24 Law Clerks were newly recruited.

Training and Development

The Department is committed to developing and maintaining a highly-motivated and professional work team to provide quality services to our customers. Every year the Department arranges various general and professional training courses for our staff of all levels to equip them with the latest knowledge and skills needed to face the challenges ahead. The Training Unit, which is headed by a Senior Training Officer, is responsible for formulating, implementing and reviewing the Department's training and development policies and plans to meet the operational and development needs of the staff.



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(Policy and Administration)*

In 2020, training was affected to a great extent due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure provision of ongoing training to our staff, different delivery formats were adopted including webinars, production of video clips and small class training.

Professional Training

To keep our professional officers abreast of the changes and development in the relevant legislation and law, the Department sponsored 52 professional officers to attend external webinars including Workshop on Data Protection and Data Access Request, Practical Workshop on Data Protection Law, Civil Law Talk on Mental Health Law in Hong Kong, Webinars on various topics including Personal Injuries – Difficult Cases with Calculations, Personal Injuries Litigation – Serious Injuries and Fatal Accident Claims, Plastic Surgery Claims, Psychological Claims and Understanding Medical Reports, Protecting the Children: Fostering, Adoption and Child Protection Order, and Recent Developments in Company Law.

Management and Communication Training Courses

To strengthen staff's management and communication capability, 14 professional officers were nominated to attend management training organised by the Civil Service Training and Development Institute, Civil Service Bureau (CSTD, CSB) and in-house communication courses including Workshops on People Management in the Public Sector, Performance Management Appraisal Writing in English and training on enhancing interpersonal relationships in the workplace.

For executive development, 5 professional officers were nominated to attend executive development programmes organised by CSTD, CSB, namely Advanced Leadership Enhancement Programme, Leadership in Action Programme, Innovative Leadership Programme, and Leadership Essentials Programme.

Customer Service Training

The Department places great importance in nurturing a customer focused culture. To enhance staff's skills in delivering quality service to the public, the Department organized an in-house Customer Service Workshop. The workshop focused on the significance and key elements of quality customer service, and appropriate customer service skills to resolve confrontational situations. A total of 17 colleagues attended the workshop.

We also nominated staff of different ranks to attend relevant courses held by CSTDI, CSB in 2020, including Workshop on Workshop on Customer Service Skills on the Telephone, Workshop on Handling Confrontational Situations in Customer Service, Serve with Excellence Seminar Series: Embracing Diversity and Inclusion, and Serve with Excellence Seminar Series: Engaging the Public for Result.

Staff Well-being and General Training

The Department is committed to promoting staff well-being. In 2020, an in-house workshop on positive thinking was held, with an attendance of 14 staff members.

Apart from the above, 93 staff members were nominated to attend courses and seminars organised by CSTDI, CSB and other departments on a wide range of topics that aimed at enhancing staff's work capability and career development. Topics included Basic Law, The Constitution and the Basic Law, Public Service Innovation, Design Thinking, Big Data, Smart City and Technology, First Aid, Automated External Defibrillators, Occupational Safety and Health, Discrimination Ordinance, Racial Equality, Techconnect Forum, Pro-innovation and SPR Practices in Government Procurement and Supplies, GRS Records Management, Government Financial Management, Induction Courses, Chinese and English Official Writing, Putonghua and computer-related courses.

Promoting Self-Learning and Development: In-house Learning Resource Centre

To cultivate the culture of continuous self-learning, the Department maintains a comprehensive collection of books available to our staff. The collection covers a wide range of topics including general management, communication, use of language, national studies, personal development, positive thinking, stress management and healthy lifestyles. Every year, new books are added to the Learning Resource Centre to further enrich the collection.

To facilitate easy access to self-learning materials by staff, resources on IT tips as well as reference materials on training courses are uploaded onto the departmental portal. Staff also have direct access to CLC Plus, the e-learning portal for civil servants, which contains a variety of self-learning resources, toolkits and job aids on management, language, Basic Law, communication, information technology, etc.

Mr Steve Wong Yiu-fai
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(Policy & Development)



Information Systems

The Department's Case Management and Case Accounting System (CM&CAS) supports over 500 staff users in handling day-to-day legal aid business processes such as processing applications, monitoring assigned out cases and handling legal aid payments. To cope with technology advancement and to improve the system to meet future operational needs, a feasibility study for revamping the system was conducted and completed in October 2020. A major funding bid was submitted for the revamp of the CM&CAS. The Department planned to seek funding approval from LegCo in the first quarter of 2021 and to commence the revamp project in the third quarter of 2022.

The Legal Aid Electronic Services Portal (LAESP) provides an online gateway through which members of the public and Panel lawyers can gain access to information and transact certain legal aid business with the Department online. Members of the public can access the LAESP to download and submit legal aid Pre-application Information Forms to the Department as a first step towards making an application for legal aid. The system will be enhanced to adopt the government e-initiative iAM Smart for user authentication and digital signing. The enhancement is planned to put into production by mid 2021.

A set of video conferencing system was established in July 2020 in accordance with the technical specifications of the Judiciary for remote hearings of civil court cases. Another set of video conferencing system will be established for remote hearings of criminal proceedings in 2021.

The Department relies heavily on the CM&CAS for its day-to-day operation. To ensure that the operating system can cope with the ongoing business needs and applications of the Department, the Department works closely with the Audit Commission in the regulatory system review exercise. The most recent biannual system review was kicked started in September 2020 and will stride across 2021.

Staff Relations and Communication

The Department maintains effective communication with staff through regular meetings with various staff representative bodies such as the Departmental Consultative Committees, the Law Clerks Association and the Legal Aid Counsel Association. Resulting from the discussions at these meetings, improvements have been made concerning office accommodation, streamlining of working procedures, indoor air quality and human resources planning, etc.

The Director of Legal Aid visited each section throughout the year with a view to exchanging ideas with staff of all levels including professional officers and receiving their views on work arrangements and procedures for further review and improvement. Divisions/Sections continued to implement their respective internal communication strategies in consultation with staff. Informal meetings were also held between the Deputy Director of Legal Aid (Policy and Administration) and Senior Law Clerks I and II and general grades staff regularly to collect their views on work and to explore areas for improvement.

Staff Suggestions Scheme

Staff Suggestions Scheme was launched to encourage colleagues to make suggestions to the Department. It aims to facilitate the improvement and streamlining of the Department's operation and management, promote Department's image, arouse staff morale and occupational safety, thereby enhancing work efficiency. Our colleagues provided many useful and practical suggestions such as enhancement of the CM&CAS and online interview with applicants, etc. The suggestions were carried out in the Department accordingly.

Staff Welfare and Charitable Activities

The Department values the general well-being of its staff. The objective of the Staff Club is to promote staff welfare by organising a wide range of activities and to provide opportunities where staff can meet and interact whilst engaging in relaxing and enriching activities.

Affected by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic since February 2020, the Staff Club was only able to organise a mini bazaar in January 2020 to celebrate Chinese New Year prior to the outbreak of COVID-19.

On a more encouraging note, the Volunteer Service Group, which was formed in 2002 and aims to encourage staff to get involved in volunteer services, participated in various fund raising activities such as Skip Lunch Day and Dress Casual Day organised by The Community Chest, MSF Day for COVID-19 and Its Impacts Campaign organised by Medecins Sans Frontieres, World Sight Day organised by ORBIS Hong Kong and the New Year Gift Packs Collection Program organised by St James' Settlement. 18 pieces of winter clothing were also donated to St James' Settlement. It was noteworthy that the Department attained the Top Fund-raiser and the Highest Per Capita Contribution Award in the Civil Service Category of Dress Casual Day organized by The Community Chest in 2020.

Environmental Initiatives

The Department is committed to ensuring its operations and activities are conducted in an environmentally responsible manner. The Department makes efforts to minimise waste, conserve energy, promote "reuse" and "recycle" of resources and enhance staff awareness and participation in protecting the environment.

The Department undertakes regular reviews to ensure that the use of its resources is in an efficient and green manner. Details of the Department's environmental initiatives in 2020 can be found in the Department's Environmental Report at the departmental website <http://www.lad.gov.hk/eng/ppr/publication/enr.html>.

Internal Audit

The Internal Audit Section (IAS) is an independent team established to assist management to ensure that adequate control procedures and systems are in place to safeguard the Department's assets. It also carries out reviews of the various activities of the Department in order to ensure an economical, efficient and effective use of the Department's financial, human and other resources.

During the year, IAS reviewed the procedures in procurement and inventory of goods and the profit costs in litigation handled by the Litigation Division. It also carried out audits on the use of the Integrated Registration Information System provided by the Land Registry for conducting land searches in legal aid cases and performed periodical checks on means investigation reports, petty cash, imprest, etc.

One of the major audit review conducted by Internal Audit in 2020 concerned the Legal Aid Panel (LAP). The objective was to review whether the data of the LAP were properly handled and maintained in accordance with the relevant guidelines and manual. The scope of the review covered the handling and recording of the panel lawyers' information and the effectiveness of internal control on data integrity of the LAP. The audit review will stride across 2021.

Support Service to the Legal Aid Services Council

Legal Aid Services Council (the Council) is a statutory body set up under the Legal Aid Services Council Ordinance, Cap. 489 to oversee the provision of legal aid services. The Council is responsible for advising the Chief Executive on matters of policy relating to legal aid. The Council is chaired by a non-official who is not a lawyer by profession. There are a total of 10 members comprising the Director of Legal Aid, representatives of the two legal professional bodies and lay members chosen from other fields not connected with the practice of law. Representatives of the Department attend meetings of the Council and its working party and participate in its activities in promoting public awareness and understanding of the role of the Council and its relationship with the Department.

During the year, the Department provided the Council with regular progress reports and information on different aspects of legal aid services, such as information relating to the expansion of the Supplementary Legal Aid Scheme and assignment of lawyers.