

Chapter 6

Organisation, Administration and Staffing



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 2021, the Department had 549 staff members comprising 85 professional officers, 177 law clerks and 287 supporting staff. Two Legal Aid Counsel and 19 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.



Mr Chris Chong Yan-tung
Deputy Director of Legal Aid
(Policy and Administration)

Professional Training

To keep our professional officers abreast of the changes and development in the relevant legislation and law, the Department sponsored 54 professional officers to attend external webinars including Workshop on Data Protection and Data Access Request, Practical Workshop on Data Protection Law, Update on Personal Injuries Claims, Update on Family Law and Practice, Informal Interests in Property: Presuming Interests and Illegality, Intestate Succession, Testate Succession, Property Law Cases 2021, Recent Developments in Hong Kong Civil Procedure, The Law and Practice on Children Issues and New Practice and Procedure in Family Courts, Mainland Judgements in Matrimonial and Family Cases (Reciprocal Recognition and Enforcement) Bill 2021, Mental and Testamentary Capacity: The Law and Practice – An Update, Water Leakage, Building Management Disputes: Landlord and Tenant Law Update.

To promote exchanges with the Mainland counterparts, 4 professional officers attended National Studies Programme for Government Lawyers (Module 1: Lectures in Hong Kong) coordinated by the Department of Justice.

Management and Communication Training Courses

To strengthen staff's management and communication capability, 14 professional officers were nominated to attend management and communication training organised by the Civil Service College, Civil Service Bureau (CSC, CSB) including Workshops on People Management in the Public Sector, Executive Workshops on Behavioural Insights and Public Policy, Practical Workshop on Crisis Management and Communication, Executive Series on Social Media for Engagement: Audience-centric Social Media Campaigns, and Social Media Communication – Global Trends and Best Practices, The Art of Public speaking, Leading by Influencing for Middle Managers – Negotiation for Result, Social Media Strategies for Policy Advocacy: An Insider's Perspective, and Presentation Skills in the Workplace.

For executive development, 5 professional officers were nominated to attend executive development programmes organized by CSC, CSB, namely Advanced Leadership Enhancement Programme, Leadership in Action Programme and Innovative Leadership 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 workshop on How to Communicate with Customers with Emotional / Mental Problems. A total of 49 colleagues attended the workshop.

We also nominated staff of different ranks to attend relevant courses held by CSC, CSB. In 2021, 14 staff members, including general grade staff, attended courses including Workshop on Handling Confrontational Situations, Effective Putonghua for Quality Service, Effective Putonghua Telephone Skills, Seminar on Accessibility Issues and Make Service Visible Seminar Series: Communication and Problem Solving.

Staff Well-being and General Training

The Department is committed to promoting staff well-being. In 2021, 4 in-house workshops on Dancing with Stress, Effective Time Management, The Pursuit of Happiness at Work and in Life & Appreciation of Praise, and Enhancing Emotional Intelligence were held, with an attendance of 78 staff members.

Apart from the above, 204 staff members were nominated to attend courses and seminars organized by CSC, 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, National Security, Foreign Affairs, The Common Law Offence of Misconduct in the Public Office, Design Thinking, Big Data, Smart City and Technology Applications, Problem Solving and Decision Making, First Aid, Automated External Defibrillators, Occupational Safety and Health, GRS Records

Management, Government Financial Management, Induction Courses, Chinese and English Official Writing, and Putonghua 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 and information technology, etc.



Mr Steve Wong Yiu-fai
Assistant Director of Legal Aid
(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. The funding bid for the revamp of the CM&CAS was approved by LegCo in April 2021. An open tender was issued with a plan 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 was enhanced to adopt the government

e-initiative iAM Smart for user authentication for legal aid applicants and aided persons in checking the application or case status and update of personal information in July 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 was established in November 2021 for remote hearings of criminal proceedings.

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 completed in April 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 view 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 equipping the Information Service Station with internet access and means test calculator as well as adding foldable tables and chairs at public areas, etc.

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 COVID-19 pandemic, the Staff Club was unable to organise any activity in 2021. The Staff Club will resume to organise staff welfare activities when the pandemic situation eases.

The Volunteer Service Group, which was formed in 2002 with an aim to encourage staff to get involved in volunteer services, participated in various fund raising activities such as Skip Lunch Day, Love Teeth Day, Green Low Carbon Day and Dress Casual Day organised by The Community Chest, MSF Day organised by Medecins Sans Frontieres, Orbis World Sight Day organised by ORBIS Hong Kong and the Warmth Giving Project organised by St James' Settlement. In particular, 11 pieces of winter clothing and 10 boxes of surgical masks were donated to St James' Settlement. It was noteworthy that the Department attained the overall 3rd Top Fund-raiser and the 3rd Highest Per Capita Contribution Award in the Civil Service Category of Dress Casual Day organized by The Community Chest in 2021.

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 2021 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 data maintenance of the Legal Aid Panel and the cases settled by Civil Litigation Section 1 which mainly undertakes cases related to personal injuries litigation. 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 2021 concerned the payment to Aided Persons and Panel Lawyers in civil cases. The objective was to review whether the payment were properly supported and authorised in accordance with the relevant guidelines and manual. The scope of the review covered the compliance check on the release of payment to respective parties across different teams handling the civil cases. The audit review will stride across 2022.

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, assignment limits of lawyers and details on the proposed enhancement measures to the Legal Aid System.