

**CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY**

**CSTB235**

**(Question Serial No. 1573)**

Head: (95) Leisure and Cultural Services Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified

Programme: (1) Recreation and Sports

Controlling Officer: Director of Leisure and Cultural Services (Vincent LIU)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism

Question:

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) employs not only civil service lifeguards, but also non-civil service contract (NCSC) lifeguards according to seasonal and operational needs, for providing lifeguard services at its public swimming pools, gazetted beaches and water sports centres. In this connection, would the Government inform this Committee:

1. of the respective strengths of the (i) civil service lifeguards and (ii) NCSC seasonal lifeguards under the LCSD at present, and their respective percentages in the relevant staffing establishments;
2. of the total number of drowning cases occurring at the public swimming pools, beaches and water sports centres under the LCSD in each of the past 3 years and, among such cases, the number of those in which the number of lifeguards on duty at the scene at the relevant time was less than the relevant staffing establishment;
3. of the number of swimming pools and gazetted beaches that were not open or were open with restricted access due to the shortage of lifeguards last year;
4. whether the Government has plans to expeditiously conduct a grade structure review for lifeguards and enhance the remuneration package of the grade, so as to retain lifeguards and attract new blood to the grade; if so, of the details and work schedule; if not, the reasons for that; and
5. whether the Government will pay more effort in promotion and education to enhance the image of lifeguards, so as to retain lifeguards and attract new blood to the grade; if so, of the details of and estimated expenditure for the relevant measures; if not, the reasons for that.

Asked by: Hon QUAT Elizabeth (LegCo internal reference no.: 38)

Reply:

1. As at 1 March 2023, the number of lifeguards on long-term employment under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) stood at 1 424. Among them, 1 372 were civil service lifeguards and 52 were ex-council contract lifeguards, making up a total of 93.8% of the relevant staff establishment. Apart from the lifeguards engaged on a long-term basis as mentioned above, the LCSD will employ seasonal lifeguards based on seasonal demand to augment the lifeguard manpower during the swimming season. As at 1 March 2023, there were 129 contract lifeguards. The recruitment exercise of seasonal lifeguards of this year is still in progress.
2. The numbers of drowning cases in public swimming pools and beaches were 22 (2020)<sup>Note</sup>, 71 (2021)<sup>Note</sup> and 77 (2022)<sup>Note</sup> while there was no record of drowning cases in water sports centres in the past 3 years. To guarantee the safety of swimmers, the LCSD will ensure that sufficient lifeguards are on duty at gazetted beaches and swimming pools that are provided with lifeguard services.
3. There were 27 public swimming pools and 24 gazetted beaches that were not open or were open with limited services due to insufficient lifeguards in 2022.
4. Under the Government's current policy, grade structure reviews will only be considered for individual non-directorate civilian civil service grades when the following 2 criteria are met:
  - (a) the grades have proven and persistent recruitment and retention difficulties which cannot be resolved through the regular pay surveys under the Improved Civil Service Pay Adjustment Mechanism; or
  - (b) there are fundamental changes to the job nature, job complexity and level of responsibilities of the grades.

Civil service lifeguards and senior lifeguards belong to the Artisan grade and Senior Artisan grade respectively. The grade has no proven and persistent recruitment and retention difficulties at the moment, and there have been no fundamental changes to the job nature, job complexity and level of responsibilities. There is no need to conduct a grade structure review at this stage.

The LCSD will continue to pay attention to the recruitment and wastage statistics of civil service lifeguards with a view to monitoring whether the grade has proven and persistent recruitment and retention difficulties and taking timely follow-up action.

Note: Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, the LCSD closed its public swimming pools and beaches on several occasions in 2020, resulting in closure totalling 208 days and 248 days respectively. In 2021, both public swimming pools and beaches were closed for a total of 91 days. In 2022, public swimming pools and beaches were closed for 125 days and 118 days in total respectively.

5. The LCSD has adopted a series of measures to attract more qualified persons to work as lifeguards and to retain serving lifeguards, including enhancing the remuneration package of seasonal lifeguards such as increasing by 2.5% the monthly salary which, together with end-of-contract gratuity, may reach over \$24,500 in 2023 depending on their duty posts and the types of lifeguard awards and first aid certificates they hold, and offering an additional end-of-contract gratuity of \$2,000 to subsidise seasonal lifeguards in obtaining/revalidating the related lifeguard awards. The mobility of seasonal lifeguards is higher than that of civil service lifeguards due to their short-term job nature, and the recruitment effectiveness of seasonal lifeguards is more dependent on employment conditions at the time of recruitment when compared to long-term jobs. To improve the stability of the lifeguard workforce, the LCSD will increase 110 full-year full-time lifeguard posts on 2-year contract terms in 2023-24.

To attract new blood to join the profession, the LCSD has stepped up publicity efforts to promote recruitment exercises by placing recruitment advertisements on public transport, in popular newspapers and on social media websites, and displaying recruitment posters at swimming pools/beaches with higher usage rates in the 18 districts. Letters and recruitment posters have also been sent and distributed to secondary schools/post-secondary institutions/relevant organisations to proactively appeal to a wide spectrum of people to join lifeguarding. To further attract more persons without any lifesaving qualifications to participate in lifeguard training and become lifeguards, the LCSD launched the Combined Seasonal Lifeguard Training Scheme in 2023. A “first-hire-then-train” approach is adopted to allow persons without any lifesaving qualifications to take part in full-time mode training and practical training of pool and beach lifeguards, so that they can obtain the Pool Lifeguard Award and/or Beach Lifeguard Award to become lifeguards of the LCSD.

In addition, to further retain lifeguards, a higher end-of-contract gratuity (15% for the whole period) has been offered to full-time seasonal lifeguards who were employed for 6 consecutive months or above in the swimming seasons of the past 3 years. Moreover, the LCSD has sent letters to former seasonal lifeguards inviting their applications for contract lifeguard posts in the coming swimming season, and made an early appeal to serving seasonal lifeguards whose contracts will soon expire to apply for the same.

The estimated expenditure on the publicity and promotion is about \$1.75 million and that on the additional gratuities is about \$1 million.

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