

Executive Summary

Good public governance relies on people with outstanding talents performing their duties and exerting leadership skills in their positions. Those in public office, through making good decisions and effectively using public resources to resolve social problems, improve people's livelihoods, gain the public's trust and make society better. Developing a pool of talent for governance is getting more attention, with many governments around the world building talent pools in areas including talent identification, training, practice and experiences retention. Some governments have also strengthened their talent pools through various initiatives and plans to ensure continuity of governance.

Since the handover of Hong Kong in 1997, the Central Government has implemented the principle of "one country, two systems" in the city. Talent for governance has been in high demand. Chief Executive Carrie Lam has repeatedly and publicly emphasised the importance of good governance¹ and her administration has made some arrangements for a new style of governance.

Given the city's increasingly complicated social development, along with the public's higher expectations of people in office, it is understandable that its governance is not an easy job. In 2017, Hong Kong placed 27th in the governance section of an international survey on prosperity; a notable drop from 6th in 2009. A survey by the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups in 2017 noted that 34% of respondents believed that Hong Kong lacked sufficient talent to fill up the posts of Politically Appointed Officials². It is difficult to find people of talent with the passion, capability and commitment to join the field of governance. This has also brought considerable challenges to the development of the governance talent pool in Hong Kong.

This study adopts a broader scope and definition when it comes to discussing the governance situation in Hong Kong. Direct participation

¹ The Chief Executive's 2017 Policy Address. Paragraph 1.

² The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups. Youth I.D.E.A.S. Report No. 19 "Young People's Views on the Performance of Political Appointments". February 2017.

in governance in the Hong Kong SAR Government mainly refers to those who exert various degrees of influence on public affairs through appointment, election or promotion in the civil service.

People who are now young will be the driving force behind governance in future. This research on the one hand makes reference to overseas experiences, and on the other hand grasps the perceptions of Hong Kong youth regarding the criteria and qualities that people need in order to be talented in governing Hong Kong. This research also explores important factors affecting prospective talents' willingness to enter the field. Along with conducting exclusive interviews with experts in the field, this research makes recommendations for nurturing talent for governing the city. It is hoped that this study might drive young people to actively participate in the community and enlighten the SAR Government of good governance.

In conducting this research, data was collected for analysis through an on-site survey of 520 young people aged 18 to 34 from June to July 2018. Five parallel discussion groups were conducted with a total of 22 young people. Interviews with five experts were also conducted during the same period of time.

Main Discussion

- 1. Hong Kong needs more people who are willing to partake in governance. Nurturing talent takes time. It is important to develop a talent pool and provide opportunities for prospective talent.**

Many governments all over the world attach great importance to the nurturing of talent for governance. There is no shortcut for it. Nurturing talent takes time. Drawing from experiences in other places overseas, the earlier the development of talent's work in the field, the better it is for the talent themselves and for society as a whole. Diverse training and exposure are also important to brush up one's capability in this regard.

This study showed that of the 520 young people polled, 77.1% recognised the need for greater governance talent in the city. Close to 69% (68.5%) shared a notion that a lack of talent was a major hindrance to effective governance of the HKSAR Government. Thirty-six percent (36.0%) regarded the greatest benefit of nurturing talent for governance to be its potential to improve people's livelihoods. Some (23.8%) considered keeping Hong Kong moving forward to be the greatest benefit. When asked about the most important condition that a person should possess in order to be in a position of governance in HK, close to 23% (22.7%) referred to experience in policy research as answer.

Good governance requires quality people to engage in leadership and enact quality policies in order to keep society moving towards a more prosperous future. Hong Kong is no exception. There is a pressing need for the city to enrich its pool of available talent.

- 2. Talent is not necessarily an in-born gift. It can be cultivated and trained. Hong Kong has certain advantages in cultivating talent in the field. Further irrigation of the soil is needed to allow the seeds to grow more, so there can be a better harvest.**

Training, practice and exposure are the best ways to train talent for the benefit of future society. Looking at various governments and some international organisations in the world, creating a better environment and atmosphere for nurturing talent in governance appears to be one of the major concerns, and various measures have been put forward for this purpose, such as arranging internship opportunities, strengthening secondment schemes, and promoting cooperation between institutions.

This study showed that young people were open-minded when it came to the sources of talent for governance, with more than three-fourths (75.4%) of respondents taking a view that talent in the field can come from all walks of life as long as they have the passion and the ability. More than two-thirds (67.3%) believed that one can become talented in the field through nurturing. More than half (55.0%) shared the notion that it is a shared responsibility of every sector of society to take part in such nurturing.

The respondents also believed that there are some advantages that Hong Kong clearly enjoys in terms of nurturing potential talent in the field, such as having an international connection (27.5%) and the fact that citizens are keen to participate in public services (19.2%). Nevertheless, shortcomings were voiced as well, particularly limited training channels (37.1%) and poor opportunities for practice (24.2%).

The soil for nurturing talent for governance is available in the city. More irrigation is needed to enrich it so that the seeds of talent can be better nurtured and thus flourish further. All sectors of the community should take a role in this area, such as exploring more platforms for cultivation and strengthening collaboration so that aspirants have opportunities to enter the field at different stages of their lives.

What also attracts our attention is the fact that only 14 Administrative Grade Officers have been seconded to work in outside organisations (i.e. have worked in private sector organisations, or have been stationed in different regional or international organisations) over the past 10 years. The reason for the low number is worth exploring. The Administrative Officers are the backbone of the SAR Government's talent pool. It is worth contemplating how to utilise the advantages of the existing scheme to continue broadening the horizons of the Administrative Officers.

- 3. Society has expectations of the abilities and qualities of people in public office. Governance is becoming more arduous, and setbacks in the process are inevitable. It is worth thinking about how much tolerance or patience society will have for policies intended to nurture talent in the field.**

Governance is a kind of participation in public affairs, in which a spirit of commitment and enthusiasm in serving the community is appreciated. Governance has never been easy while setbacks are unavoidable.

This study showed that respondents had expectations of people holding public office in the city, with 37.9% feeling that a commitment to Hong Kong is the most important quality in office-holders. Regarding ability,

31.7% chose the ability to balance the interests of all sectors as the most important. It is conceivable that the expectations of society as a whole are more or less the same as what the respondents expressed. From the respondents' points of view, the polarisation of society (31.3%) and the prevalence amongst the general public of a negative impression of political figures (26.2%) are amongst the main obstacles that Hong Kong faces when it comes to nurturing talent in the field.

Of the 22 young people who took part in the parallel discussion groups, some voiced a concern that social grievances caused by the improper settlement of various deep-rooted issues to do with people's livelihoods would put pressure on those with noble aspirations, thus scaring them away from entering the field.

Hong Kong has long been a diversified society. In recent years, it has become more politicised. This puts pressure on both those who are in public office and those who have aspirations to enter the field. This also increases the difficulty of maintaining efficient governance. The process of talent cultivation is full of challenges, and setbacks are inevitable. How much tolerance or patience does the society have for nurturing quality talent in the field? This question is worthy studying.

- 4. Young people have various thoughts towards participation in governance. We should help those in the younger generation who are interested in participating in governance. Opportunities should be provided for young people to play an active role in public governance.**

In recent years, we have witnessed what appears to be an ascendance of youth in overseas politics, with some young leaders coming to power. In other places overseas, participation in governance is a profession with a clear career path. In Hong Kong, however, the situation is the opposite.

It is the fifth term of office of the HKSAR Government. The average age of the Secretaries of Departments and the Directors of Bureaux has been on the rise for many consecutive years. This has also been the case for the appointed, non-official members of the Executive Council in recent years. This phenomenon causes concern about the stable replacement of

successors for the governance of the city.

The study showed that 30.2% of the respondents were interested in participating in governance, mainly because they hoped to improve society (24.8%). At the same time, 79.8% of the respondents believed that relevant internship opportunities would help encourage young people to participate in governance. However, for those who were not interested in governance work, some (17.4%) attributed their lack of interest to the perception that the work in governance is in vain. Some participants in the parallel discussion groups said that the career path and the professional image of governance were not clear.

The young generation in Hong Kong has a positive attitude towards participating in public affairs, as evidenced by the encouragingly large number of applications for the "Member Self-Recommendation Pilot Scheme for the Youth" and the "Be a Government Official for a Day" programmes. The government and society more generally should cherish the enthusiasm of youth to serve society, whilst taking concrete actions to address youth's apathy. It is hoped that the potential of youth in the field might be freed on the one hand, and on the other hand the obstacles facing them might be eliminated.

5. The existing political appointment system is not incapable of cultivating talent, but there is also room for improvement.

The SAR Government's further expansion of the political appointment system is capable of cultivating political talent. However, the system also has its shortcomings, including: (1) The existing political parties do not have the opportunity to develop into ruling parties, thus the incentive for political parties' talent to join the government is not strong enough. (2) The rapid changes in society and the complexity of development make the work of the accountability team more arduous, thus the entry barriers for those who are willing to enter the field of governance is higher. (3) The officials who have left the office face many restrictions when they start new work. The society does not provide adequate "revolving doors", thereby reducing the desire of talent to join the government. (4) The authorities do not provide adequate promotion for

the work or recruitment of Political Assistants.

The political appointment system of the SAR Government works without the participation of party politics. Therefore, the political parties cannot fully play their role of absorbing and resupplying talent to the governance team. Besides, the political work that the accountability team needs to deal with is becoming more and more arduous, and the development of "revolving doors" in Hong Kong society has not yet matured. These circumstances reflect the fact that the political appointment system has not achieved satisfactory results in cultivating talent for governance and politics. From the perspective of talent cultivation, it is worthwhile to further explore how to make good use of the current system as well as how to make improvements.

6. The retention of know-how regarding governance is important for the transfer and continuity of wisdom and experience. This provides valuable references for political successors.

Since the handover, Hong Kong society has experienced many ups and downs, and this has brought considerable challenges to and impacts on the governance of the SAR Government. Additionally, since the implementation of the "one country, two systems" principle, Hong Kong has accumulated a lot of practical experience of governance. If these experiences could be sorted out and analysed, the governance experience of the SAR over the past twenty years would turn into valuable heritage. This would not only provide valuable references for political successors in the future, but also bring inspiration for the SAR Government to maintain good governance.

Recommendations

With the above findings and discussions, this study proposes the following recommendations for the aim of developing a pool of talent for governance and promoting youth participation.

1. **Increase young people's understanding of governance and related career prospects as early as possible.**

This study found that some young people do not know much about governance. They also have worries about the effectiveness of governance and prospects for career development.

Young people recognise the importance of nurturing. This study recommends improving youths' understanding or familiarity with the concept of governance, starting as early as at secondary school stage. Current or former government officials can be invited to visit schools, explaining their work and sharing their experiences in career development. This could on the one hand increase young people's understanding of governance, and on the other hand broaden their horizons for participating in public services. This would also be helpful for the life-planning of the younger generation.

The study also recommends expanding the scale of the "Be a Government Official for One Day" scheme to the Under Secretary and the Political Assistant levels, so that more young people can have opportunities to experience the government's work.

2. **Provide systematic and in-depth college internship opportunities.**

The study found that young people value internship opportunities, and they are interested in applying for internships in government departments. With reference to experiences of other places overseas, the study recommends that different departments, statutory bodies and Councils of the SAR Government provide one-year internship opportunities in public affairs management to university students. This could provide them with more systematic and in-depth training.

3. **Retain the experience and wisdom of former Politically Appointed Officials.**

The retention of governance experience is very important. An effective and systematic way is needed for passing on such wisdom.

The study recommends that the government collaborate with universities to systematically collect and organise the governance experience of Politically Appointed Officials, thereby retaining their experience and wisdom, and even documenting or analysing the information into records and compiling them into teaching materials. This would provide valuable references for political successors.

4. The Policy Innovation and Co-ordination Office should regularly organise policy exchanges or seminars.

This study found that many young people consider policy research experience an important quality for those engaged in the governance of Hong Kong.

This study recommends that the Policy Innovation and Coordination Office regularly hold seminars on policy research and exchanges of views. It should invite officials, think tanks and scholars to discuss and exchange views on specific research topics to drive the government and society to pay attention to public policy research. This could also open up new ways for the government to identify potential governance talent.

This study also recommends that the Policy Innovation and Coordination Office arrange internship opportunities for university students so as to demonstrate its role in nurturing talent with quality policy research.

5. Strengthen the secondment scheme by encouraging more Administrative Officers to take on work in the private and public sectors.

The Administrative Officers have always been considered the backbone of the talent pool in the administrative structure of the SAR Government. The Government has a secondment scheme with private institutions to expand the vision of Administrative Officers, and for

them to gain governance experience form outside the government structure. However, information shows that only a very small number of Administrative Officers have participated in the scheme over the past 10 years.

This study recommends that the Government revitalise and strengthen the secondment scheme so that more Administrative Officers could be arranged to work in the private and public sectors. In the long run, it would be necessary to set targets for the number of people in the scheme each year so that the talent pool of the Government could keep pace with Hong Kong's ever changing society.

6. Expand the scale of the existing political appointment system.

This study found that quite a number of young people were interested in entering the field of governance. From the perspective of talent cultivation, this study recommends expanding the scale of the existing political appointment system, including increasing the number of Political Assistants. A political team made up of people with diverse professional backgrounds would help increase the ability of the Government to deal with challenges in an increasingly complicated society, where political work is becoming more difficult. Practice makes perfect. This could provide more opportunities for aspirants to practice in the real world, and thus to gain practical experience.

This study also recommends that the Government make good use of various media to enhance the promotion of relevant posts under the political appointment system, in particular the recruitment of the post of Political Assistant. The Government can take the initiative in holding briefing sessions at tertiary institutions.