

Index Page

Replies to initial written questions raised by Finance Committee Members in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2021-22

Director of Bureau : Director of Administration
Session No. : 6

Reply Serial No.	Question Serial No.	Name of Member	Head	Programme
CSO002	2814	CHENG Chung-tai	142	(2) Government Records Service
CSO019	2349	MA Fung-kwok	142	(2) Government Records Service

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

CSO002

(Question Serial No. 2814)

Head: (142) Government Secretariat: Offices of the Chief Secretary for Administration and the Financial Secretary

Subhead (No. & title): (000) Operational expenses

Programme: (2) Government Records Service

Controlling Officer: Director of Administration (Daniel CHENG)

Director of Bureau: Director of Administration

Question:

Please list the following information for last year:

1. the number of cases on the loss of confidential records of bureaux/departments and the number of records lost;
2. the titles of missing non-confidential programme files of bureaux/departments;
3. the number of cases where it was impossible to identify who should be held accountable for the loss of records and the bureaux/departments involved; and
4. bureaux/departments involved in the cases of unauthorised destruction of records and non-confidential programme files.

Asked by: Hon CHENG Chung-tai (LegCo internal reference no.: 20)

Reply:

In accordance with the General Circular No. 2/2009 "Mandatory Records Management Requirements" issued by the Government in April 2009, any loss or unauthorised destruction of records should be immediately reported to the Departmental Records Manager (DRM) of the bureau/department (B/D) concerned and a copy of such report sent to the Government Records Service (GRS) simultaneously. Upon receipt of the report, the DRM should:

- (a) ascertain the facts (including the types, numbers and storage media, etc. of the records involved) and identify the circumstances leading to the loss or unauthorised destruction of records;
- (b) reconstruct the records where necessary;
- (c) take steps to prevent recurrence;
- (d) consider whether any disciplinary action or other administrative measure is necessary; and
- (e) report his findings and actions on (a) to (d) above to GRS within 3 months.

The above measures enable GRS to monitor whether the follow-up actions taken by B/Ds for investigating cases of loss or unauthorised destruction of records are appropriate, and to make recommendations for improvement from the perspective of records management.

As revealed from the cases handled, loss or unauthorised destruction of records is mainly due to negligence, insufficient monitoring or improper handling of records, etc.

Our reply in response to the request for information in the question is as follows:

- (1) GRS did not receive any report on loss of confidential records from B/Ds in 2020.
- (2) In 2020, GRS received 3 cases of loss of non-confidential programme files of B/Ds and completed processing 1 of them. The case in question involved the loss of 1 case file relating to child abuse, 1 programme file relating to seminar on fall prevention of elders and 1 loose minute of the Social Welfare Department (SWD).
- (3) Upon receipt of a report of the loss of records, the relevant DRM will ascertain the facts and identify the circumstances leading to the loss under the mechanism set out in the first paragraph of this reply, and consider whether disciplinary action or other administrative measure is necessary. If a government officer is found to have violated the mandatory records management requirements and/or displayed negligence in records management duties, the B/D concerned will take disciplinary action or other administrative measures commensurate with the circumstances and gravity of the case. GRS will also review the decisions made by B/Ds.

In 2020, GRS received 56 cases of loss of records of B/Ds. Among the 28 cases which had been processed, the officers responsible for the loss were identified in 7 cases in which disciplinary action or other administrative measures were taken against 4 officers in 4 cases. In another case involving a staff of a contractor and 2 other cases in which the losses were attributed to factors beyond the control of the government officers concerned, no disciplinary action or administrative measure was taken. Among the remaining 21 cases, 20 were related to the loss of stores vouchers of the Fire Services Department (FSD), and 1 related to the loss of non-confidential programme files of SWD. As no responsible officers could be identified after investigation, no disciplinary action or administrative measure was taken in these 21 cases. Nevertheless, the B/Ds concerned had taken appropriate improvement measures (such as regular checks) and reminded staff members to perform records management duties properly and ensure safe custody of records. As for the remaining 28 outstanding cases, GRS will maintain close liaison with relevant B/Ds to complete the investigation as soon as possible.

- (4) Under the mandatory records management requirements, B/Ds should, in carrying out the disposal of time-expired records, assign a senior officer not below the rank of Senior Executive Officer or equivalent to consider and endorse in writing the disposal decision. B/Ds must obtain the prior agreement of the GRS Director before they destroy any government records. Upon receiving a report on unauthorised destruction of records, the DRM will investigate into the case according to the procedures set out in the first paragraph of this reply. In 2020, GRS received 6 cases of unauthorised destruction of records and completed processing 3 of them. These 3 cases were related to the Hong Kong Police Force and FSD without involving any non-confidential programme file.

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CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

CSO019

(Question Serial No. 2349)

Head: (142) Government Secretariat: Offices of the Chief Secretary for Administration and the Financial Secretary

Subhead (No. & title): (000) Operational expenses

Programme: (2) Government Records Service

Controlling Officer: Director of Administration (Daniel CHENG)

Director of Bureau: Director of Administration

Question:

1. Did the Government procure any archival records relating to Hong Kong from other places in 2020-21? If so, what are the contents of the records and the related expenditure?
2. What is the estimated expenditure for the procurement of archival records relating to Hong Kong from other places in 2021-22?
3. What are the plans to implement further the digitisation of archival records of Hong Kong, so that certain government records or reports open to the public can be made available for access on-line?

Asked by: Hon MA Fung-kwok (LegCo internal reference no.: 58)

Reply:

1. In 2020-21, the Government Records Service (GRS) procured 559 archival records relating to Hong Kong from The National Archives of the United Kingdom and the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum, incurring about \$600,000. The details are set out as follows:

	Archival Institute	Number of records	Expenditure (HK\$)
1	The National Archives of the United Kingdom	549	599,000
2	George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum	10	3,900
	Total	559	602,900

These records cover a range of subjects relating to the history of Hong Kong, including the future of Hong Kong, politics and leaders, visits of Chinese and British principal officials, the Sino-British Joint Declaration, the Basic Law, economic and financial development of Hong Kong, nationality and citizenship, Vietnamese boat people, political environment and international relations, port and airport development, etc.

These records are subject to quality checking, handling and records description by GRS and are expected to be made available for public inspection gradually starting from the second quarter of 2021.

Besides, GRS has confirmed with the Second Historical Archives of China (SHAC) a list of records relating to Hong Kong. Discussions are now underway with SHAC on the drafting of terms and conditions for the procurement of copies of the records. Upon finalising the details, GRS will purchase the copies of these records in batches.

2. To enrich its holdings, GRS has earmarked \$600,000 in 2021-22 for the procurement of copies of archival records relating to Hong Kong from the archival institutes of other places. GRS is consolidating the list of records for procurement.
3. GRS has endeavoured to digitise its holdings with a view to enhancing their accessibility by the public and better protecting archival records. In 2020, GRS produced about 340 000 digital images of the holdings, bringing the total number of digital images to about 2.39 million.

Upon digitisation, GRS will gradually make available digital copies of those records that can be open for public access. Digital copies will also be uploaded onto GRS' on-line catalogue "@PRO" as far as possible subject to the principles of protecting copyright and personal privacy. Besides, GRS will regularly prepare digitised holdings/photo albums and on-line exhibitions on various topics, and upload them to GRS's website. A dedicated Facebook page was also launched for the Public Records Office in 2020 for sharing its holdings with the public. GRS will continue to strengthen the above work in the future.

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