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Written Responses



MINISTRY OF CIVIL SERVICE

Reference: MCS 12/6

Date: 07 February 2025

The Chairperson
Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence
P O Box 2352
Government Building
Suva

Dear Madam

Re: Ministry of Civil Service 2021-2022 Annual Report

Reference is made to your letter dated 5 February 2025 regarding the Ministry of Civil Service Annual Report, which was referred to you during the December 2024 Sitting of Parliament.

Enclosed is our response to the questions raised during the December Sitting of Parliament.

For further queries, the Policy Development, Implementation, and Monitoring Unit can be contacted via email at mcpolicy.fiji@gmail.com or by phone at 8924329.

Thank you.

Parmesh Chand

Acting Permanent Secretary for Civil Service.

RECEIVED
10 FEB 2025

*All correspondence to be addressed to the Permanent Secretary for Civil Service,
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Ministry of Civil Service

RESPONSE TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

Parliament of Fiji
Government Buildings, Suva

Date: 07/02/25

Question: 1

The Committee is interested to know whether there is a standard reporting template for all Ministries and Government Agencies. Given the backlog of annual reports to Parliament, can this be an output for PSs to ensure that reports are tabled in a timely manner?

The Annual Report is an output for all Permanent Secretaries as it is reflected in all Ministries Costed Operational Plan (COP) and required by the Ministry of Finance under the Financial Management Act 2004. The standard requirements for Annual Reports are reflected in Section 45 of the Financial Management Act 2004.

Question: 2

Is the Ministry Planning to review the General Orders? Given the high cost of living, there is a need to upgrade civil servants' meal allowances and other allowances (including housing, acting, rural and maritime, transfer). When was the last review conducted?

The General Orders 2011 are currently under review in consultation with relevant unions and government ministries, and it is planned to be completed and implemented in August 2025.

Parts of in the General Orders that gave directions on allowances were reviewed in 2024 and submitted to the Ministry of Finance for consideration in the 2024-2025 budget. However, the Ministry of Finance advised that these allowances would not be included in the budget due to funding constraints. The Ministry will be resubmitting the same proposals to the Ministry of Finance for consideration in the 2025-2026 budget.

Question: 3

How is MCS addressing staff retention mechanisms in Ministries and Departments?

To address staff retention mechanisms in Ministries and Departments, the Ministry of Civil Service typically adopts a multi-faceted approach. Below are some key strategies that are being considered:

- Review and adjustment of salary structures and allowances to remain competitive.
- Ensuring that remuneration aligns with the cost of living and market rates.
- Introduction of retention allowances for critical and high-demand positions.
- Providing structured career progression pathways and clear promotion criteria.
- Supporting local and international training programs, scholarships, and professional certifications.
- Enhancing workplace infrastructure, tools, and resources to improve efficiency.
- Providing a safe and conducive working environment to boost morale and productivity.
- Introducing flexible work arrangements where feasible (e.g., remote work, flexi-hours).
- Reviewing performance-based rewards systems.
- Recognizing and celebrating outstanding employee contributions through awards and commendations.
- Engaging unions and staff associations in continuous dialogue to address concerns.
- Enhancing grievance handling mechanisms to ensure staff feel heard and valued.
- Implementing fair and transparent policies to build trust and loyalty.
- Identifying high-potential employees and preparing them for leadership roles.
- Establishing structured mentorship and coaching programs.
- Encouraging knowledge transfer and capacity building.

Question: 4

For better awareness, can MCS also consider utilising the govnet email blast distribution for any circulation of new and current PSC Circulars?

The Ministry of Civil Service (MCS) has been circulating new PSC Circulars to the respective Ministries through the Personal Assistants (PAs) to the Permanent Secretaries and all HR Departments to ensure proper dissemination.

MCS has also uploaded PSC Circulars from 2020 to date on its official website to enhance accessibility. While this provides a central repository for reference, utilizing the Govnet email blast distribution system for new and updated circulars could further improve awareness and ensure timely dissemination to all relevant Ministries and Departments.

Question: 5

The Committee noted that almost 60 percent of Ministries were not compliant with the OMRS Audit. Can the Ministry provide an explanation? What has been done about these areas?

According to the 2021-2022 Ministry of Civil Service Annual Report, the Open Merit Recruitment and Selection (OMRS) Audit was conducted across 15 Ministries as part of ongoing efforts to ensure consistent compliance with the OMRS Guideline.

The audit revealed that 53% of Ministries scored over 90% compared to the 2020-2021 audits, which were adversely affected by the outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic, resulting in only 30%

achieving above 90% compliance, an increase of 23%. Audits were placed on hold in 2020 and 2021 due to the risks associated with sharing physical files during the pandemic and the protection of staff within the unit.

In the 2021-2022 audits, only 8 Ministries scored over 90%, while the remaining 7 Ministries scored below 90%. Out of twenty, five Ministries were exempted from the audit as they did not conduct recruitment during this period. The following reasons were identified as contributing factors to Ministries not achieving a 100% compliance rating:

- **Benchmarking Not Set Prior to Marking:** According to the OMRS Guideline Clause 3.3, the benchmark is the level required by applicants to be considered suitable for appointment. It should be set in advance of scoring applicants at any stage of the assessment process;
- **Use of Acronyms in Role Descriptions:** As per Clause 5.4.6 of the guideline, language must be in public usage, easily understood, with no acronyms included;
- **Employment Duration Not Stated:** The employment duration was not stated in the advertisement or the role description, which remains an issue in the 2024-2025 audit. According to the OMRS Guideline Clause 6.4.2, it should be clearly stated whether the position is of an ongoing nature or short-term/temporary;
- **Applications Acknowledged but Not Documented:** As per Clause 6.8, all applications must be acknowledged to confirm receipt, in the format approved by the Permanent Secretary; and
- **Regret Notifications Not Documented:** Regret notifications were sent to unsuccessful applicants; however, sample notifications were not documented. According to Clause 9.9, all applicants must be advised of the outcome of their application (whether suitable/unsuitable) within five days of confirmation that they are unsuccessful.

The OMRS Audit recommenced in September 2024 with the aim of continuously auditing recruitment processes as part of ongoing efforts to monitor the implementation of the OMRS Guideline.

Notable improvements in compliance with the OMRS Guideline were observed during the two cycles conducted, covering new appointments from January to July 2024. In Cycle 3, 80% of Ministries were compliant with the OMRS Guideline, scoring over 90%, with an increase of over 10% in Cycle 4, covering 24 Ministries, achieving over 91% compliance.

To address the issues, the Ministry is continuously providing support to Ministries to achieve a culture of excellence with adherence to the OMRS Guideline through ongoing audits, meetings, and continuous feedback to the respective Departments.

Question: 6

How accessible is the HRMIS for civil servants, especially those in the rural and maritime areas?

The Human Resource Management Information System (HRMIS), administrative end (back end), is exclusively accessible via the GOVNET network, which may not extend to certain rural and

maritime regions, potentially limiting access for civil servants in these areas. On the other hand, the Employee Portal which is the front end, is designed for broader accessibility by civil servants, available through any internet connection. This inclusivity ensures that all civil servants, regardless of their location, can access essential services and information via the Employee Portal, even in areas where GOVNET connectivity is unavailable.

Question: 7

Can the Ministry provide an update on the types/reasons for appeals? What sort of appeals are upheld given the numbers for 2019-2021, what was the status in 2021-2022? What are some challenges encountered and the way for the Ministry?

The Public Service Commission (PSC) manages the Procedural Review Process (Appeals). Most of the reasons for the appeals received by PSC include the following:

- Meeting the Knowledge, Experience, Skills, and Abilities (KESA) criteria but not being shortlisted;
- Panel members lacking the required attributes;
- Interview questions not aligning with the KESA;
- Possessing relevant work experience but not being appointed; and
- Prolonged recruitment and selection processes, with completions extending beyond four months.

The following statistics highlight the outcomes of appeals in recent years:

- 2018-2019: 27 appeals upheld out of 128 applications.
- 2020-2021: 22 appeals upheld out of 105 applications.
- 2021-2022: 33 appeals upheld out of 151 applications.

Some of the challenges encountered include the following:

- Inconsistencies among Ministries in adhering to the Open Merit Recruitment and Selection (OMRS) Guideline;
- Delayed submission of Selection Reports to the Secretariat for review; and
- Appellants lacking clarity on the basis of their appeals.

The Ministry recommends that Ministries conduct annual refresher trainings on the OMRS guideline for their panel members to ensure compliance and understanding.

Question: 8

How effective is the Ministry in meeting the training needs analysis of Ministries/Departments? How fair is the selection process in selecting civil servants to attend training?

The Ministry of Civil Service (MCS) conducts an annual Training Needs Analysis (TNA) survey across all Ministries to identify specific training and development requirements. Each Ministry designates a training focal point who collaborates with MCS to communicate these needs. Based on the findings, MCS engages with development partners to secure relevant training opportunities and scholarships. Additionally, MCS offers local training programs to address core skills development for civil servants.

The Ministry also provide in-house training to Ministries and Departments to meet their specific needs.

The selection process for training is fair and transparent, based on the training needs identified by Ministries. Nominations are made through the respective Ministries, ensuring that civil servants who require the training most are prioritized. MCS also ensures that opportunities are equitably distributed among Ministries to enhance workforce capacity across the public sector.

Question: 9

Can the Ministry provide the contents of the Leadership Development Training and the level of civil servants who attended?

The Leadership Development Programme is designed to equip senior Civil Servants with essential leadership skills while also fostering networking opportunities within the public sector. This program is open to Civil Servants at Band H and above. Additionally, technical staff at Band G may also participate based on nominations from their respective Ministries.

The training covers key leadership competencies such as emotional intelligence, leadership styles, conflict resolution and problem solving, effective communication and feedback, change management, governance, and team management. It is structured to enhance leadership effectiveness and strengthen the public service's overall capability.

Question: 10

Can the Ministry provide an update on the cost involved in scholarships/short training attended by civil servants? How much is borne by the government and by the development partner? How does the MCS measure the return on investment for the government?

Most scholarship and training programs offered through development partners are fully funded, typically covering tuition fees, airfare, accommodation, and meal allowances.

The Ministry usually covers transit allowances for civil servants traveling abroad to manage expenses during layovers. In instances where a training program does not cover specific costs, such as airfare, the Ministry may choose to fund these expenses at the discretion of the Permanent Secretary.

To assess the return on investment, the respective Ministry monitors the performance and impact of trained civil servants upon their return using the Learning Contract Proposal. This process involves the individual completing a form, which is approved by their supervisor both before departure and after returning to the office. The assessment focuses on the individual's contribution to capacity building, policy implementation, and overall service delivery improvements within their Ministry.

Question: 11

Under this program, how are civil servants bonded after successfully attaining the offered scholarships? In circumstances where the awardee has to resign from the civil service or migrate, are there mechanisms in place to hold the person accountable? What are some of the challenges and way forward for MCS?

For any Government initiated training more than six months, local or overseas, Civil Servants approved by their respective Ministries are required to sign a bond agreement. The bond period is calculated based on the training duration, typically multiplying the length of study by 1.5. Under the delegation of powers, the receptive recipients' agencies monitor the bond arrangements.

If a Civil Servant resigns or migrates before completing their bond period, they are required to repay the government an amount equivalent to the cost of the training or scholarship received. This is managed by the individual ministry.

Challenges include the following:

- Tracking and Monitoring: Keeping accurate records of bonded employees and ensuring compliance with the terms of the agreement; and
- Retention Issues: Some Civil Servants leave the service despite receiving training, leading to a loss of investment for the government.

The proposed Way Forward are as follows:

- Implementing stricter monitoring systems to track compliance with bond agreements; and
- Enhancing career development opportunities to retain trained Civil Servants within the Civil Service especially after the bonded period is over.

Question: 12

How effective is this system of complaints when it reported to the relevant ministries or department? What is the turn-around time for a complaint/suggestion to be addressed/considered? What are some of the challenges? In terms of awareness to the general public, how is MCS advocating for the use of this line to lodge complaints/register suggestions? How much of the budget was allocated towards this program?

Not all Ministries have a robust feedback system; therefore, the Government Feedback Call Centre serves as a central hub for collecting feedback across all Government Ministries.

The Call Centre provides Ministries with real-time feedback on the services they deliver, helping them identify areas for improvement. Focal points within Ministries can view and act on feedback through predefined forms, making report generation simple and efficient.

Additionally, the Call Centre relieves key employees from handling customer service issues, allowing them the flexibility and resources to focus on their core responsibilities.

The turnaround time for feedback resolution depends on its nature such as:

- Simple inquiries (e.g., health center opening hours) are addressed immediately by call agents;
- Complex feedback, such as complaints, varies in turnaround time depending on the nature of the issue and the Ministry's response timeframe;
- Email notifications are sent to focal points;
- The first notification is sent as soon as feedback is recorded;
- A second reminder is sent after five days if the feedback remains unresolved; and
- The Ministry of Civil Service (MCS) regularly monitors and follows up with Ministries on pending feedback.

Some of the challenges faced include:

- Lack of support from Ministries in providing updated information to call agents;
- Lack of cooperation from focal points in closing feedback on time; and
- High turnover of focal points, affecting continuity.

To enhance public awareness of the Government Feedback Call Centre, the following methods are used:

- Displaying posters at key service points in Government Ministries, Departments, and Health Centres;
- Distributing flyers to the public; and
- Posting updates and announcements on social media platforms.

The budget allocated to Customer Service in 2021-2022 was \$353,400.00 and actual expenditure was \$311,775.00.

Question: 13

Why do Ministries and Departments have different interpretations and inconsistencies of policies, for example, long-service leave entitlements with Ministry of Health and Medical Services?

The Ministry of Civil Service (MCS) through the Public Service Commission serves as the central agency responsible for issuing and circulating circulars related to amendments in Acts, Guidelines, Regulations and Policies governing working conditions and the General Orders 2011 in line with the Civil Service Act 1999. The Ministry of Civil Service encourages Ministries to seek advice from MCS on matters pertaining to terms and conditions of employment including leave.

In 2016, the Government implemented a significant policy shift by transitioning civil service employment from permanent tenure to a contract-based system. As part of this reform, the Government also decided to revoke long service leave, granting a one-time pay out to all civil servants who were eligible and qualified for long service leave at the time.

Since 2017, civil servants employed under the contract system were no longer entitled to long service leave. However, employees who opted to remain on permanent employment and those who continue to serve under permanent terms and did not sign a contract remain eligible for long service leave benefits as stipulated in the General Orders 2011.

Question: 14

What are the guidelines for deciding which positions are to be evaluated and moderated?

The government through PSC formulated and implemented the Civil Service Remuneration Setting Guideline (JECSR). The methodology that has been adopted to evaluate positions in the civil service is the SP10 method.

The SP10 Job Evaluation Methodology was designed by Strategic Pay Limited, a New Zealand-based remuneration and job evaluation consultancy. Strategic Pay specializes in job evaluation, remuneration consulting, and salary benchmarking across both public and private sectors.

Section 4 of the Job Evaluation and Civil Service Remuneration Setting Guideline (JECSR) states that the Fijian Civil Service will apply a proprietary points-factor methodology for job evaluation.

The Permanent Secretary will determine whether a job is to be evaluated or not and each Ministry is required to establish its Job Evaluation Committees, effectively to evaluate all:

- Vacant positions that have never been evaluated;

- Vacant positions where there has been a substantial change to the Job Description since it was last evaluated;
- Positions where the supervisor / manager / Permanent Secretary identifies that the work required of the post has substantially changed since the last evaluation; and
- Positions where the job holder requests a review of the level of the job and can demonstrate that the job has substantially changed or that the level of the job is not comparable to similar jobs in their or other Ministries.

Question: 15

Can the Ministry update the Committee on the status of government quarters in all the Divisions? How many require repair? How many are vacant because of the state of disrepair and how many are occupied despite safety issues? What are the rental rates for quarters? How is this determined?

The table below illustrates the no. of quarters in the respective divisions and no. of quarters on market rent in Suva.

DIVISION	DISTRICT	TOTAL
Northern	Labasa	173
	Savusavu	73
	Nabouwalu	15
	Saqani	12
	Tukavesi	8
	Taveuni	86
Total		367
Western	Tavua	29
	Ra	22
	Nadi	70
	Ba	22
	Sigatoka	31
	Lautoka	192
Total		366
Central	Korovou	58
	Serua/Namosi	34
	Naitasiri	49
	Nausori	50
	Suva (Market Rate)	213
	Colo – I -Suva	40
	Delainamasi	4
	Koronivia	70

Total		518
Eastern	Vunisea	90
	Koro	10
	Levuka	55
	Kadavu	29
	Gau/Nairai/Batiki	13
	Rotuma	20
Total		217
Grand Total		1468

The Divisional Housing Board with the Commissioners Office take the lead role in the management of quarters in respective divisions, where they allocate adequate housing for eligible officers and also provide housing allowance as per Ministries/Departments request on a case by case basis in all divisions.

For any major or minor, urgent maintenance request, the Ministry of Public Works and Ministry of Civil Service are consulted through the respective Divisional Commissioners to seek necessary approvals to carry out the necessary works in line with the Procurement Regulation and depending on the funding allocated.

Most quarters that are currently occupied are in livable conditions. However, the Ministry is consulted for any renovation works required which is planned according to the nature of the request and renovation programme.

There are currently seven (7) quarters in the Western Division which are vacant due to termite infestation and structural damage. There are currently three (3) quarters in the Northern Division which are vacant also due to termite infestation, structural damage and fire.

The quarters that are located in Suva are managed and administered by the Ministry of Civil Service –Office Accommodation and Government Housing Unit (OAGU).

For any major or minor, urgent maintenance request in Suva, the OAGU office is consulted by the tenants to seek necessary approvals and carry out the necessary works in line with the Procurement Regulation in place and depending on the funding allocated.

Most quarters are occupied and those not occupied are going through the tender process for major renovation works, thereafter the same will be occupied. Regular monitoring and routine maintenance works take place as planned with funding availability.

There are currently 18 quarters in Suva which are vacant due to structural damage and fire.

The total quarters renovated and maintained from the last financial year to date including urgent maintenance works is provided in the table below:

Division	No. of Quarters Renovated
Suva	153
Northern	35
Central	36
Western	84
Eastern	0
Total quarters renovated	308

The following table illustrates the number of quarters audited and requires major renovation works which the team is currently doing the scope of works for the new fiscal year and ongoing years with respective agencies concerned:

Division	No. of Quarters Audited
Northern	60
Central	50
Western	75
Eastern	40
Total	225

The following table illustrates the number of quarters audited and requires major renovation works which the team is currently evaluating through the tender process:

Locations	No. of Quarters Audited
Quarters 224, Ratu Sukuna Road (Old PM's Residence)	1
Veiuto Flats and Maids Quarters	12
Quarters 19,20 and 44 Allardyce Road Quarters 17,18 and 60 Richards Road Quarters 77, 79 Berkeley Crescent Quarters 141, Domain Road Quarters 126 Statham Road, Vatuwaqa Demolish and rebuilt burnt Quarters, 196, Veiuto Road	11
Total	24

The rental of quarters located in Suva, is based on the market rate approach whereby the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources conducts a valuation of the properties and provides a report that indicates the rental rate which is thereafter offered to tenants. The rental rates are around \$1,200 to \$5,000 depending on the grade of quarters.

The Divisional quarters are offered at 4% and 8% subsidised rent deduction on basic annual salary from Civil Servants tenants as per the Housing Policy in place.

Question: 16

Going forward, is the Ministry considering having renewal energy for government quarters?

Currently the Ministry is has installed 61 quarters with solar systems in respective divisions leading towards green energy growth to further assists in cost savings, energy independence and environmental sustainability.

The Ministry will continue to invest towards renewal energy in the coming years in collaboration with the department of energy.
