

Head 80 — JUDICIARY

Controlling officer: the Judiciary Administrator will account for expenditure under this Head.

Estimate 2025–26 **\$2,806.2m**

Establishment ceiling 2025–26 (notional annual mid-point salary value) representing an estimated 1 851 non-directorate posts as at 31 March 2025 reducing by ten posts to 1 841 posts as at 31 March 2026..... **\$961.0m**

In addition, there will be an estimated 228 directorate posts as at 31 March 2025 reducing by one post to 227 posts as at 31 March 2026, which comprise 12 directorate civil service posts and 215 posts for Judges and Judicial Officers (JJOs).

Controlling Officer’s Report

Programmes

Programme (1) Courts, Tribunals and Various Statutory Functions These programmes contribute to Policy Area 12: Administration of Justice (Judiciary Administrator).
Programme (2) Support Services for Courts’ Operation

Detail

Programme (1): Courts, Tribunals and Various Statutory Functions

	2023–24 (Actual)	2024–25 (Original)	2024–25 (Revised)	2025–26 (Estimate)
Financial provision (\$m)	1,862.7	2,031.5	2,002.5 (–1.4%)	2,155.9 (+7.7%)
				(or +6.1% on 2024–25 Original)

Aim

2 The aim is to maintain an independent and effective judicial system which upholds the rule of law, safeguards the rights and freedoms of the individual, and commands confidence within and outside Hong Kong.

Brief Description

3 Under this programme, different levels of court and tribunals hear and adjudicate criminal cases and civil disputes. The objectives are to:

- ensure just and expeditious disposal of cases;
- enhance professional standards;
- ensure the Judiciary and the courts keep abreast with changing times; and
- maintain a bilingual court system in Hong Kong.

4 In 2024, the operation of courts and tribunals continued to face the challenges from a persistently heavy caseload at various levels of court; a considerable number of complex civil and criminal cases requiring long trials, including those relating to the 2019 anti-extradition amendment bill incidents (anti-EAB cases) and national security (NS cases); as well as the continual influx of leave applications for judicial review on non-refoulement claims and related appeals at the High Court and the Court of Final Appeal.

5 The Judiciary has been making pro-active and multi-farious efforts in tackling the above challenges through a series of measures. These mainly include engaging additional permanent and temporary judicial manpower, strengthening case management, arranging longer court sitting hours, using alternative means of disposal or dispute resolution where appropriate, making greater use of technology, and enhancing court facilities.

6 To address the persistent shortage of judicial manpower, the Judiciary extended the statutory retirement ages of JJOs since 6 December 2019, following the enhancement of their terms and conditions of service in 2017. As from 2020, the Judiciary has been launching open recruitment exercises for JJOs at more regular intervals, having regard to the judicial manpower situation and operational needs at different levels of court. The recruitment exercises in 2023 yielded positive results. The latest round of open recruitment exercises for different levels of JJOs, starting from Judges of the Court of First Instance of the High Court, was launched in November 2024. This will be followed by recruitment for District Judges and Permanent Magistrates some time in 2025.

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7 Under this programme, resources are also deployed to perform various statutory functions under the Electoral Affairs Commission Ordinance (Cap. 541), the Interception of Communications and Surveillance Ordinance (Cap. 589) and the Legal Practitioners Ordinance (Cap. 159) in relation to the Higher Rights Assessment Board and related matters.

8 The key performance measures in respect of the courts and tribunals are:

Targets

The waiting time targets have been set in accordance with the recommendations of the Court Users' Committees or are laid down in the respective ordinances or court rules.

	2024 Target	2023 (Actual)	2024 (Actual)	2025 Target
<i>Average Waiting Time</i>	(days)			
Court of Final Appeal				
application for leave to appeal				
criminal—from notice of hearing to hearing	45	36	37	45
civil—from notice of hearing to hearing	35	31	31	35
substantive appeal				
criminal—from notice of hearing to hearing	100	89	97	100
civil—from notice of hearing to hearing	120	89	95	120
Court of Appeal of the High Court				
criminal—from setting down of a case to hearing	50	47	47	50
civil—from application to fix date to hearing	90	64	66	90
Court of First Instance of the High Court				
Criminal Fixture List—from filing of indictment to hearing@	—	352	369	—
Civil Fixture List—from application to fix date to hearing	180	158	172	180
Civil Running List—from not-to-be-warned date to hearing....	30	26	16	30
appeals from Magistrates' Courts— from lodging of Notice of Appeal to hearing	90	208	131§	90
District Court				
criminal—from first appearance of defendants in District Court to hearing	100	442	397§	100
Civil Fixture List—from date of listing to hearing	120	115	110	120
Civil Running List—from not-to-be-warned date to hearing....	30	14	14	30
Family Court				
dissolution of marriage—from setting down of a case to hearing				
Special Procedure List	35	35	35	35
Defended List (all hearings).....	110	53	42	110
financial applications—from setting down of a case to hearing	110-140	71	73	110-140
Lands Tribunal—from setting down of a case to hearing				
appeal cases	90	8	6	90
compensation cases	90	15	46	90
building management cases	90	32	34	90
tenancy cases	50	15	18	50

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	2024 Target	2023 (Actual)	2024 (Actual)	2025 Target
Magistrates' Courts—from plea to date of trial ^Ω				
summons	50	74	45	50
charge cases except for Juvenile Court—				
for defendants in custody	30-45	48	40	30-45
for defendants on bail.....	45-60	66	53	45-60
charge cases for Juvenile Court—				
for defendants in custody	30-45	40	54 ^Δ	30-45
for defendants on bail.....	45-60	76	69 ^Δ	45-60
Coroner's Court—from date of listing to hearing	42	34	32	42
Labour Tribunal—				
from appointment to filing of a case ...	30	38	36 ^β	30
from filing of a case to first hearing....	30	23	23	30
Small Claims Tribunal—from filing of a case to first hearing.....	60	35	41	60
Obscene Articles Tribunal—				
from receipt of application to classification	5	2	3	5
from referral by a magistrate to determination	21	—#	18	21

As only ten cases have been set down for trial/substantive hearing in the Competition Tribunal since its establishment, the waiting time is inapplicable. The target average waiting time will be considered when more cases are set down for trial/substantive hearing at the Tribunal.

- [@] The average waiting time for criminal hearings in the High Court remained long mainly due to the impact of NS cases on judicial resources arising from the requirement to field three criminal judges to handle each NS case, and the shortfall in judicial manpower. The listing of other criminal cases has been inevitably affected as priority was accorded to the handling of the anti-EAB and NS cases, quite a number of which required longer trials. The target average waiting time for the Criminal Fixture List will be reviewed later at an appropriate juncture.
- [§] The average waiting time for certain types of criminal cases at the High Court and the District Court in 2024 failed to meet the targets mainly due to the priority accorded to a considerable number of complicated anti-EAB and NS cases requiring longer trials, as well as the persistent shortage of judicial manpower. The court waiting time is also contingent upon some factors which are not fully under the control of the court such as the time required by parties for investigation, seeking legal advice and preparation for trial.
- ^Ω Owing to the design of the case management system in the Magistrates' Courts, the average waiting time shown is calculated on the basis of the duration from plea to the first date of trial and not the first free date which the court can offer to the parties.
- ^Δ The average waiting time for charge cases for the Juvenile Court failed to meet the target mainly due to factors which are not fully under the control of the court such as the need to accommodate counsel's and witnesses' diaries and requests from parties for more time to prepare for the cases.
- ^β The average waiting time for filing cases in the Labour Tribunal failed to meet the target mainly because there was a continuous influx of appointments for claims arising from the substantial surge of closedown cases.
- [#] As there was no application for determination filed, the waiting time was inapplicable.

Indicators

	2023 (Actual)	2024 (Actual)	2025 (Estimate)
<i>Number of Cases</i> ^Ψ			
Court of Final Appeal			
application for leave to appeal	395	229	230
appeals.....	23	24	20
miscellaneous proceedings.....	0	0	0
Court of Appeal of the High Court			
criminal appeals	251	277	280
civil appeals.....	439	577	580
miscellaneous proceedings.....	381	249	250

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	2023 (Actual)	2024 (Actual)	2025 (Estimate)
Court of First Instance of the High Court			
criminal jurisdiction			
criminal cases.....	446	452	450
confidential miscellaneous proceedings.....	749	698	700
miscellaneous proceedings (criminal).....	882	1 012	1 010
appeals from Magistrates' Courts	496	506	510
civil jurisdiction	17 094	20 126	20 130
probate cases	26 298	28 335	28 340
Competition Tribunal.....	3	0	0
District Court			
criminal cases.....	1 331	1 623	1 620
civil cases.....	24 826	30 270	30 270
family cases.....	20 914	20 326	20 330
Lands Tribunal	4 739	5 281	5 280
Magistrates' Courts	386 776	379 547	379 550
Coroner's Court.....	195	138	140
Labour Tribunal	4 348	4 879	4 880
Small Claims Tribunal	52 304	57 454	57 450
Obscene Articles Tribunal.....	14	163	160

Ψ The total caseload of 2024 was higher than the average in the past five years from 2019 to 2023 (including the year prior to the COVID-19 epidemic).

9 The workload of a court depends not only on the number of cases but also on their nature and complexity. In recent years, there has been an increasing number of complex civil and criminal cases, such as the anti-EAB and NS cases, that generally take a longer time to conclude. While ensuring that the administration of justice will not be unduly compromised, the Judiciary will continue to adopt pro-active and multi-farious measures to enhance the efficiency of court operations and increase judicial resources with a view to expediting the handling of court proceedings.

Matters Requiring Special Attention in 2025–26

10 In 2025–26, the Judiciary will:

- continue to monitor the court waiting times and workload at various levels of court, with a view to putting in place timely and effective measures to expedite the processing of cases without compromising on due administration of justice; and
- continue to support the Family Procedure Rules Committee in making a new set of consolidated and streamlined court procedural rules for the family justice system under the Family Procedure Ordinance (Cap. 646).

Programme (2): Support Services for Courts' Operation

	2023–24 (Actual)	2024–25 (Original)	2024–25 (Revised)	2025–26 (Estimate)
Financial provision (\$m)	590.6	604.6	633.5 (+4.8%)	650.3 (+2.7%)
				(or +7.6% on 2024–25 Original)

Aim

11 The aim is to provide efficient and effective services to support the operation of courts.

Brief Description

12 Under this programme, various support services are provided to facilitate the hearing of cases in courts and tribunals at different levels, and to enforce court orders on the application of the plaintiffs. The work involves:

- providing effective recording services for court proceedings and producing transcripts for these proceedings;
- ensuring that both Chinese and English languages can be used in the court system, and providing effective court interpretation services;
- providing efficient bailiff services for the enforcement of court orders and service of court documents;
- keeping comprehensive legal reference books and research materials for the use of JJOs and the legal profession; and
- adopting technology and other modern management tools to enhance the efficiency of court support services.

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13 In 2024, despite the increase in caseload at various levels of court, the overall performance of the programme was generally maintained.

14 The key performance measures in respect of support services for the courts and tribunals are:

Indicators

	2023 (Actual)	2024 (Actual)	2025 (Estimate)
<i>Reporting and Transcription</i>			
cases covered			
criminal	244 494	251 738	251 740
civil.....	79 950	89 521	89 520
cases with transcripts produced			
criminal	5 661	6 030	6 030
civil.....	1 396	1 484	1 480
<i>Interpretation and Translation</i>			
pages of certification/translation processed	188 714	201 924	201 920
<i>Bailiff Service</i>			
executions attempted.....	26 369	29 402	31 000
summons services attempted.....	88 035	82 244	82 240
<i>Library</i>			
library materials acquired and processed	29 761	27 966	27 600
attendance at the Library	42 152	43 196	43 000

Matters Requiring Special Attention in 2025–26

15 In 2025–26, the Judiciary will continue to:

- implement the Information Technology Strategy Plan to provide electronic filing and related services by phases at different levels of court, and make greater use of technology to enhance efficiency of court operations;
- facilitate the greater use of remote hearings for legal proceedings at all levels of court where appropriate, and to develop all necessary technologies for such purposes;
- provide support to unrepresented litigants at various levels of court through various facilities, including the Resource Centre for Unrepresented Litigants, Small Claims Tribunal Information Centre and enhanced counter services at the Family Court; and
- sustain quality management of services to support court operations.

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ANALYSIS OF FINANCIAL PROVISION

	2023–24 (Actual) (\$m)	2024–25 (Original) (\$m)	2024–25 (Revised) (\$m)	2025–26 (Estimate) (\$m)
Programme				
(1) Courts, Tribunals and Various Statutory Functions	1,862.7	2,031.5	2,002.5	2,155.9
(2) Support Services for Courts' Operation.....	590.6	604.6	633.5	650.3
	2,453.3	2,636.1	2,636.0 (—)	2,806.2 (+6.5%)
				(or +6.5% on 2024–25 Original)

Analysis of Financial and Staffing Provision

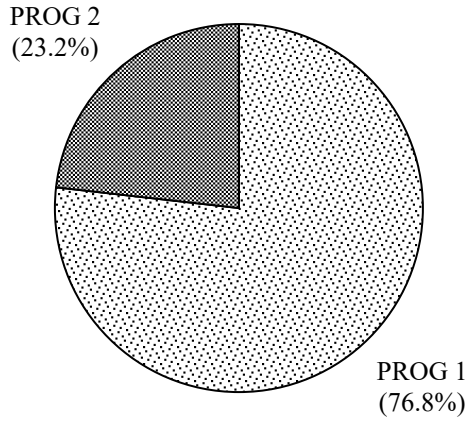
Programme (1)

Provision for 2025–26 is \$153.4 million (7.7%) higher than the revised estimate for 2024–25. This is mainly due to the increased provision for filling vacancies and operating expenses for court operations. There will be a net decrease of nine civil service posts in 2025–26.

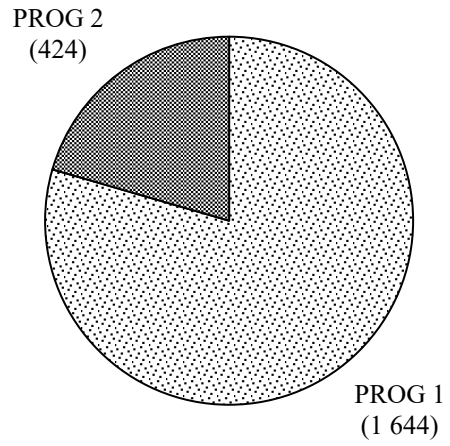
Programme (2)

Provision for 2025–26 is \$16.8 million (2.7%) higher than the revised estimate for 2024–25. This is mainly due to the increased provision for filling vacancies and operating expenses to enhance support services for court operations. There will be a net decrease of two civil service posts in 2025–26.

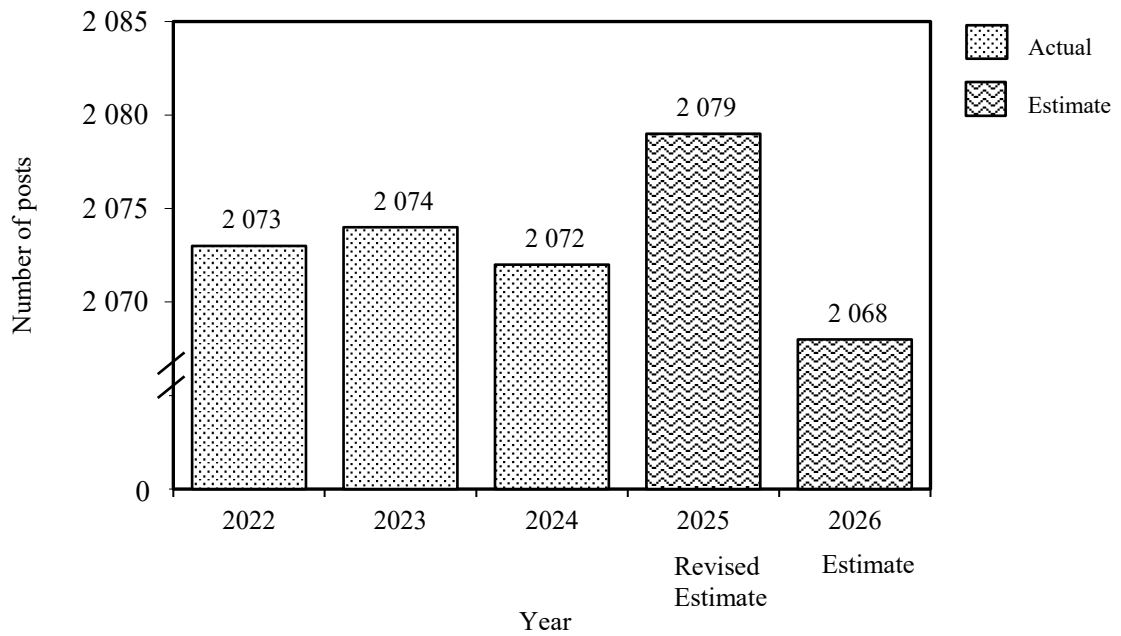
*Allocation of provision
to programmes
(2025-26)*



*Staff by programme
(as at 31 March 2026)*



*Changes in the size of the establishment
(as at 31 March)*



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Sub-head (Code)	Actual expenditure 2023–24	Approved estimate 2024–25	Revised estimate 2024–25	Estimate 2025–26	
	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	
Operating Account					
Recurrent					
000	Operational expenses	2,418,975	2,588,381	2,593,264	2,765,345
206	Expenses of witnesses and jurors.....	11,120	13,700	10,270	11,710
	Total, Recurrent.....	2,430,095	2,602,081	2,603,534	2,777,055
	Total, Operating Account	2,430,095	2,602,081	2,603,534	2,777,055
Capital Account					
Plant, Equipment and Works					
661	Minor plant, vehicles and equipment (block vote).....	23,167	34,002	32,485	29,118
	Total, Plant, Equipment and Works.....	23,167	34,002	32,485	29,118
	Total, Capital Account.....	23,167	34,002	32,485	29,118
	Total Expenditure	2,453,262	2,636,083	2,636,019	2,806,173

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Details of Expenditure by Subhead

The estimate of the amount required in 2025–26 for the salaries and expenses of the Judiciary is \$2,806,173,000. This represents an increase of \$170,154,000 over the revised estimate for 2024–25 and \$352,911,000 over the actual expenditure in 2023–24.

Operating Account

Recurrent

2 Provision of \$2,765,345,000 under *Subhead 000 Operational expenses* is for salaries, allowances and other operating expenses of the Judiciary.

3 The establishment as at 31 March 2025 will be 2 079 posts (comprising 1 863 civil service posts and 216 posts for Judges and Judicial Officers). It is expected that there will be a net decrease of 11 posts in 2025–26. Subject to certain conditions, the controlling officer may under delegated power create or delete non-directorate posts during 2025–26, but the notional annual mid-point salary value of all such posts must not exceed \$960,970,000.

4 An analysis of the financial provision under *Subhead 000 Operational expenses* is as follows:

	2023–24 (Actual) (\$'000)	2024–25 (Original) (\$'000)	2024–25 (Revised) (\$'000)	2025–26 (Estimate) (\$'000)
Personal Emoluments				
- Salaries.....	1,347,439	1,512,341	1,434,807	1,520,559
- Allowances.....	39,698	38,676	39,712	41,864
- Job-related allowances.....	1,581	1,345	1,484	1,685
Personnel Related Expenses				
- Cash allowances.....	25,038	26,644	28,679	31,404
- Mandatory Provident Fund contribution.....	3,954	4,727	4,380	5,010
- Civil Service Provident Fund contribution.....	67,891	75,459	78,180	84,242
Departmental Expenses				
- Hire of services and professional fees	451,817	518,788	539,153	579,893
- General departmental expenses	481,557	410,393	466,861	500,680
Other Charges				
- Magistrates poor box	—	8	8	8
	2,418,975	2,588,381	2,593,264	2,765,345

5 Provision of \$11,710,000 under *Subhead 206 Expenses of witnesses and jurors* is for the expenses of witnesses in hearings in criminal cases and in coroners' inquiries, and jurors in both criminal and civil cases and in coroners' inquiries. The increase of \$1,440,000 (14.0%) over the revised estimate for 2024–25 is due to increased requirements for allowances for jurors and witnesses.

Capital Account

Plant, Equipment and Works

6 Provision of \$29,118,000 under *Subhead 661 Minor plant, vehicles and equipment (block vote)* represents a decrease of \$3,367,000 (10.4%) against the revised estimate for 2024–25. This is mainly due to decreased requirement for minor plant and equipment in court buildings.