

60pc rise in recruits for police

By LUISA TAM

THE number of recruits joining the police force has risen by nearly 60 per cent so far this financial year, and more than twice as many women have started a life in uniform compared with last year.

More than 500 youngsters have also applied to join the force following the release of examination results on Tuesday, a rise of 30 per cent on last year.

Vigorous advertising and an improved pay package have increased the demand for the 1,980 places available in 13 intakes of new recruits this year.

Staff officer of recruitment, Superintendent Mr Simon Leung King-hang, said this was encouraging "as it compares very well with the corresponding period of last year, when we had only sent 363 candidates to the training school".

Although the trend seemed to be moving in a positive direction, it was still too early to know if all places would be filled, he said.

"We still have the remaining intakes to worry about and I would not want to commit myself to say that the situation is satisfactory until our last intake is completed next March," he said.

The five intakes from April to July took in 578

people compared with 363 last year. There were 184 women who started training this year, compared with 86 last year.

Mr Leung said the multi-million-dollar recruitment campaign launched in July, which included better career opportunities for women, also attracted a large number of students who sat for this year's Hongkong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE).

Official figures show that 564 people applied to join the force between Tuesday, when results were released, and Thursday - 29.1 per cent more than over the same period last year after results were announced.

Mr Leung said the number also represented a breakthrough in the recruitment of fifth formers.

"The figure had a special meaning because it was the first time since 1988 when we actually had an increase, the past few years only saw a downward trend," he said.

Mr Leung also attributed the overall increase in recruits to the positive impact of a new image-building campaign.

"This year, we are taking a completely different approach to our recruitment exercise and our strategies in this area seem to have impressed quite a number of people... Parents, who are thought to be a main obsta-

cle, are also said to have received our message pretty well," Mr Leung said.

"The new campaign was launched in July and although everything is still at an initial stage it appears to be fairly positive."

The three-day period was good enough to see a trend of more graduates joining the force, which Mr Leung described as "quite encouraging".

He hoped the number of school-leaver applicants would rise further over the next few weeks.

"This is still not the end of the matter," he said.

"The Police Commissioner has sent out letters to all parents of the students in a bid to remove their negative views about the force so that they would be more encouraging to let their children join us... When that takes effect, we hope more people would come forward."

It was the second year the commissioner had used the direct mail system to reach former five students. This year, 60,000 letters were sent out.

More than 128,000 students sat for the HKCEE this year - about 7,000 less than last year as a result of a drop in the number of private candidates. The overall pass rate also fell slightly, from 63.46 last year to 62.29 this year.