

Head 48 — GOVERNMENT LABORATORY

Controlling officer: the Government Chemist will account for expenditure under this Head.

Estimate 2024–25 **\$630.5m**

Establishment ceiling 2024–25 (notional annual mid-point salary value) representing an estimated 510 non-directorate posts as at 31 March 2024 reducing by eight posts to 502 posts as at 31 March 2025 **\$350.2m**

In addition, there will be an estimated seven directorate posts as at 31 March 2024 and as at 31 March 2025.

Controlling Officer's Report

Programmes

- | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Programme (1) Statutory Testing | This programme contributes to Policy Area 2: Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Safety (Secretary for Environment and Ecology) and Policy Area 15: Health (Secretary for Health). |
| Programme (2) Advisory and Investigative Services | This programme contributes to Policy Area 2: Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Safety (Secretary for Environment and Ecology), Policy Area 9: Internal Security (Secretary for Security), Policy Area 23: Environmental Protection, Conservation, Power and Sustainable Development (Secretary for Environment and Ecology) and Policy Area 32: Environmental Hygiene (Secretary for Environment and Ecology). |
| Programme (3) Forensic Science Services | This programme contributes to Policy Area 9: Internal Security (Secretary for Security). |

Detail

Programme (1): Statutory Testing

	2022–23 (Actual)	2023–24 (Original)	2023–24 (Revised)	2024–25 (Estimate)
Financial provision (\$m)	264.2	279.0	282.3 (+1.2%)	300.2 (+6.3%)
				(or +7.6% on 2023–24 Original)

Aim

- 2 The aim is to carry out statutory functions as referee analyst under a number of ordinances and regulations.

Brief Description

- 3 The Government Chemist discharges statutory functions as referee analyst under various ordinances and regulations. The work involves the analysis of food products for regulatory compliance; the examination of western and Chinese medicines for registration and quality control; the classification of dangerous goods for compliance with the Dangerous Goods Ordinance (Cap. 295); the testing of dutiable commodities for tariff classification; the assessment of toys, children's products and consumer articles for health and safety hazards; the determination of tar and nicotine yields in cigarettes; the assay of gold and platinum articles for fineness; the analysis of consumer goods in relation to the fitness with their trade descriptions; and the verification of products and equipment for compliance with the Weights and Measures Ordinance (Cap. 68). The Government Laboratory provides 24-hour on-call service to assist the Fire Services Department at scenes of accidents involving hazardous chemicals.

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4 In 2023–24, the Laboratory continued outsourcing some of the routine food testing work to private testing laboratories. The resources released from outsourcing were deployed to take up test method development, new testing work arising from amendments of food legislation and activities related to outsourcing such as organisation of technical seminars as well as chemical metrology development. In another area of health concern, the Laboratory continued to provide full support for (a) urgent investigatory analyses of substandard pharmaceuticals and Chinese medicines; (b) investigation into cases of adverse reaction arising from the consumption of proprietary Chinese medicines and/or health products found containing undeclared western drug ingredients; and (c) intoxication incidents related to substitution or contamination of herbs in Chinese herbal medicines. In addition, the Laboratory continued to provide analytical and advisory support to the Department of Health in the development of Hong Kong Chinese Materia Medica Standards. The Laboratory will continue to provide metrology-in-chemistry support for the development of testing and certification industry in Hong Kong, for example, arrangement of proficiency tests for local laboratories and provision of reference materials.

5 The key performance measures in respect of statutory testing are:

Targets#

	Target	2022 (Actual)	2023 (Actual)	2024 (Plan)
<i>Testing of:</i>				
food complaint cases within 25 working days (%).....	90	99	97	90
urgent samples relating to food incidents within two working days (%)	100	100	100	100
other food samples within reporting time averaging 19 working days (%).....	95	99	99	95
urgent samples relating to pharmaceutical incidents within two working days (%).....	95	100	100	95
other pharmaceutical samples within reporting time averaging 25 working days (%).....	95	98	99	95
urgent samples relating to Chinese medicine incidents within two working days (%).....	95	100	100	95
other Chinese medicine samples within reporting time averaging 30 working days (%).....	95	99	99	95
dangerous goods within reporting time averaging 14 working days (%).....	96	97	100	96
dutiable and other commodities within reporting time averaging ten working days (%).....	95	99	100	95
toys and children's products within reporting time averaging 15 working days (%).....	95	99	99	95
consumer goods within reporting time averaging 35 working days (%).....	95	100	100	95
non-pharmaceutical consumer goods (trade descriptions) within reporting time averaging 35 working days (%).....	92	99	97	92

For targets where reporting time is mentioned, different samples require different analytical procedures, hence different reporting time. The quoted number of working days required represents an average of reporting time for the different types of samples and test requests within the category, while the target (in percentage) is the total compliance rate of the concerned samples and test requests within a particular category against their respective targets.

Indicators

The key indicators for statutory testing are the numbers of tests performed on the various categories of services.

	2022 (Actual)	2023 (Actual)	2024 (Estimate)
<i>Tests performed</i>			
food complaint samples	5 001	5 751	6 000
urgent samples relating to food incidents	183	147	N.A.‡
other food samples	190 238	194 631	190 000

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	2022 (Actual)	2023 (Actual)	2024 (Estimate)
urgent samples relating to pharmaceutical incidents	10	106	N.A.‡
other pharmaceutical samples	52 099	52 575	51 000
urgent samples relating to Chinese medicine incidents ..	44	30	N.A.‡
other Chinese medicine samples	82 612	86 133	86 000
dangerous goods	6 503	5 203	5 000
dutiable and other commodities	7 356	6 252	6 000
non-pharmaceutical consumer goods (trade descriptions)	5 100	5 259	5 000
cigarette samples	13 596	13 536	13 000
toys and children's products	22 553	21 957	21 500
consumer goods	12 530	12 050	12 000

‡ As the testing requirements for urgent samples relating to food, pharmaceuticals and Chinese medicine incidents respectively fluctuated in previous years, it is difficult to estimate the occurrence of the type of incidents or the number of tests required.

Matters Requiring Special Attention in 2024–25

- 6 During 2024–25, the Laboratory will continue to provide:
- professional advisory and analytical services to support the enforcement of various food safety ordinances and regulations, including the Harmful Substances in Food (Amendment) Regulation 2021 and the Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) (Amendment) Regulation 2021. The services will cover analysis on different food samples on both routine and ad hoc bases;
 - analytical and advisory support to the Department of Health for the formulation and development of Hong Kong Chinese Materia Medica Standards for Chinese herbal medicines commonly used in Hong Kong; and
 - professional advisory and analytical services to support the enforcement of the various orders and regulations under the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (Cap. 362). The services will cover analysis and authenticity tests on consumer goods, in particular those related to valuable goods such as jewellery, seafood products and Chinese medicinal products where their authenticity is of public concern.

Programme (2): Advisory and Investigative Services

	2022–23 (Actual)	2023–24 (Original)	2023–24 (Revised)	2024–25 (Estimate)
Financial provision (\$m)	101.5	107.4	109.2 (+1.7%)	113.7 (+4.1%)
				(or +5.9% on 2023–24 Original)

Aim

7 The aim is to provide a wide range of primarily chemical testing and advisory services to other government departments and public institutions.

Brief Description

8 The Laboratory provides comprehensive analytical and advisory services to the Government in the management and monitoring of the environment and in the enforcement of various pollution control measures. Chemical testing of air, water and waste samples for a variety of pollution indicators constitutes the main activity under this programme. It provides on-site investigations and advisory services for specific incidents of emission or leakage of hazardous chemical substances into the environment. Analytical support is provided to the Hong Kong Observatory's Environmental Radiation Monitoring Programme as well as the Daya Bay Contingency Plan. Other activities include the examination of seepage and swimming pool water samples for the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, the analysis of samples related to evaluation of exposure to occupational hazards for the Labour Department, the testing of government supplies for conformity to tender specifications and the identification of products made from endangered species.

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9 In 2023–24, the Laboratory continued to render analytical support and professional advice to the Government in improving the quality of the environment of Hong Kong and engage in scientific research to further enhance its analytical capabilities in environmental analysis. In addition to its routine commitments, the Laboratory was actively involved in various environmental impact studies and ad hoc projects including the analysis of environmental samples for organic and inorganic pollutants under the Toxic Substances Monitoring Programme. To support the implementation of the Air Pollution Control (Volatile Organic Compounds) Regulation (Cap. 311W), the Laboratory continued to provide analytical services for determining the content of volatile organic compounds in regulated products including architectural paints, vessel paints and pleasure craft paints, printing inks, fountain solutions and printing machine cleaning agents, adhesives and sealants, vehicle refinishing paints and consumer products. Method development and validation work for the analysis of new persistent organic pollutants was continued. In 2023, the Laboratory also provided over 30 pieces of professional advice relating to over 40 items for the classification under the Dangerous Goods Ordinance and over 670 pieces of advice relating to over 1 110 items supporting the implementation of the Chemical Weapons (Convention) Ordinance (Cap. 578) and the control of strategic commodities.

10 The key performance measures in respect of advisory and investigative services are:

Targets#

	Target	2022 (Actual)	2023 (Actual)	2024 (Plan)
<i>Testing of:</i>				
air pollution monitoring samples within reporting time averaging 20 working days (%).....	95	99	99	95
field investigation (air pollution) samples within reporting time averaging 12 working days (%).....	96	100	100	96
air pollution samples for litigation purposes within reporting time averaging 18 working days (%).....	97	99	100	97
water quality monitoring samples within reporting time averaging 20 working days (%).....	96	99	99	96
environmental waste monitoring samples within reporting time averaging 27 working days (%).....	95	99	99	95
environmental waste samples for litigation purposes within reporting time averaging 12 working days (%).....	97	100	100	97
radioactivity monitoring samples within reporting time averaging 12 working days (%).....	95	99	99	95
pesticides formulation samples within reporting time averaging 36 working days (%).....	93	100	100	93
seepage and swimming pool water samples within ten working days (%).....	96	99	98	96
other samples within reporting time averaging 25 working days (%).....	90	100	99	90

For targets where reporting time is mentioned, different samples require different analytical procedures, hence different reporting time. The quoted number of working days required represents an average of reporting time for the different types of samples and test requests within the category, while the target (in percentage) is the total compliance rate of the concerned samples and test requests within a particular category against their respective targets.

Indicators

The key indicators for advisory and investigative services are the numbers of tests performed on the various categories of services.

	2022 (Actual)	2023 (Actual)	2024 (Estimate)
<i>Tests performed</i>			
air pollution monitoring samples	63 090	62 456	63 000
air pollution samples for litigation purposes.....	2 355	2 759	3 400
field investigation (air pollution) samples	455	450	440
water quality monitoring samples	121 471	128 148	126 000

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	2022 (Actual)	2023 (Actual)	2024 (Estimate)
environmental waste monitoring samples	11 609	10 868	11 000
environmental waste samples for litigation purposes	452	307	320
pesticides formulation samples	316	300	310
seepage and swimming pool water samples	55 653	62 712	60 000
miscellaneous			
radioactivity monitoring samples	4 637	4 926	4 700
other samples	15 044	17 783	16 600

Matters Requiring Special Attention in 2024–25

11 During 2024–25, the Laboratory will continue to provide:

- analytical services in support of the implementation of the Air Pollution Control (Marine Light Diesel) Regulation (Cap. 311Y); and
- support to government departments in relation to the implementation of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants and the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade.

Programme (3): Forensic Science Services

	2022–23 (Actual)	2023–24 (Original)	2023–24 (Revised)	2024–25 (Estimate)
Financial provision (\$m)	216.6	212.4	215.9 (+1.6%)	216.6 (+0.3%)
				(or +2.0% on 2023–24 Original)

Aim

12 The aim is to provide comprehensive and unbiased forensic science services to the criminal justice system.

Brief Description

13 The Laboratory provides comprehensive and impartial forensic science services to the law enforcement departments, which include mainly the Hong Kong Police Force, the Customs and Excise Department, the Immigration Department and the Fire Services Department. The services include crime scene investigation, traffic accident reconstruction, fire investigation, DNA profiling, drugs of abuse examination, toxicology analysis and questioned documents examination. A 24-hour and express service is also provided for these scientific examinations to fulfil the Departments' immediate need.

14 Additionally, the screening and monitoring, through urine testing (urinalysis), of the drug abuse behaviour of persons under imprisonment, rehabilitation or probation is conducted for the Department of Health (Methadone Maintenance Scheme), the Social Welfare Department, the Correctional Services Department, the Hong Kong Police Force and other organisations requiring this service.

15 The targets are defined to be the percentage of completed cases whose individual case-completion time does not exceed a specified number of working day(s). The key performance measures in respect of the forensic science services are:

Targets

	Target	2022 (Actual)	2023 (Actual)	2024 (Plan)
<i>Cases for:</i>				
biochemical grouping (DNA profiling) - non-complicated cases completed within 60 working days (%)	90	94	96	90
complicated cases completed within 130 working days (%)	90	82	92	90
DNA database (DNA profiling) completed within 22 working days (%)	90	87	93	90
parentage testing (DNA profiling) completed within 22 working days (%)Δ	90	99	98	90

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	Target	2022 (Actual)	2023 (Actual)	2024 (Plan)
trace evidence completed within				
66 working days (%).....	90	91	97	90
accident reconstruction completed within				
66 working days (%).....	90	87	94	90
video/image analysis completed within				
88 working days (%).....	90	78	100	90
illicit drug seizures completed within				
11 working days (%).....	90	91	92	90
major illicit drug seizures and				
manufacturing completed within				
44 working days (%).....	90	78	91	90
other illegal drug activities completed				
within 120 working days (%).....	90	87	97	90
analytical toxicology completed within				
33 working days (%).....	85	84	90	85
drug urinalysis -				
methadone clinics completed within				
11 working days (%).....	90	92	91	90
judicial-confirmation (routine)				
completed within				
22 working days (%).....	85	88	88	85
judicial-confirmation (enhanced				
probation) completed within				
six working days (%).....	100	99	100	100
drug-driving completed within				
33 working days (%).....	85	100	100	85
drink-driving completed within				
11 working days (%).....	90	96	100	90
handwriting examination completed within				
66 working days (%).....	85	100	100	85
counterfeiting/forgery completed within				
30 working days (%).....	90	97	97	90
express counterfeiting/forgery service				
completed within				
one working day (%).....	99	100	100	99

Δ The figures represent the number of working days lapsed between the reception by the Laboratory of samples for genetic testing and the issuing of genetic data after completion of DNA analysis of these samples within the Laboratory.

Indicators

Key indicators for the forensic science services are the number of cases investigated in each category, statutory certificates or technical reports and witness statements issued and crime scenes attended.

	2022 (Actual)	2023 (Actual)	2024 (Estimate)
<i>Criminalistics and Quality Management Group</i>			
cases investigated			
DNA database	2 839	2 751	2 900
biochemical sciences -			
non-complicated.....	880	922	950
complicated	1 165	1 336	1 400
parentage testing	283	524	500
chemical sciences.....	614	575	600
physical sciences.....	756	838	880

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	2022 (Actual)	2023 (Actual)	2024 (Estimate)
<i>Drugs, Toxicology and Documents Group</i>			
cases investigated			
controlled drugs.....	4 706	3 759	4 200
analytical toxicology	2 340	2 333	2 400
drug urinalysis -			
methadone clinics.....	3 808	4 596	4 300
judicial-confirmation (routine).....	14 076	12 585	13 000
judicial-confirmation (enhanced probation).....	1 147	1 534	1 300
drug-driving	62	42	50
drink-driving	62	38	50
questioned documents	181	238	240
<i>Forensic Science Division</i>			
statutory certificates issued	4 939	3 944	4 400
technical reports/statements	10 265	11 805	12 000
crime scenes attended.....	403	440	460

Matters Requiring Special Attention in 2024–25

16 During 2024–25, the Laboratory will continue to provide impartial forensic science support to government departments to combat crime and drug abuse.

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ANALYSIS OF FINANCIAL PROVISION

	2022–23 (Actual) (\$m)	2023–24 (Original) (\$m)	2023–24 (Revised) (\$m)	2024–25 (Estimate) (\$m)
Programme				
(1) Statutory Testing.....	264.2	279.0	282.3	300.2
(2) Advisory and Investigative Services	101.5	107.4	109.2	113.7
(3) Forensic Science Services.....	216.6	212.4	215.9	216.6
	582.3	598.8	607.4 (+1.4%)	630.5 (+3.8%)
				(or +5.3% on 2023–24 Original)

Analysis of Financial and Staffing Provision

Programme (1)

Provision for 2024–25 is \$17.9 million (6.3%) higher than the revised estimate for 2023–24. This is mainly due to increased requirement for procurement of equipment and specialist supplies, and other operating expenses. In addition, there will be a decrease of four posts.

Programme (2)

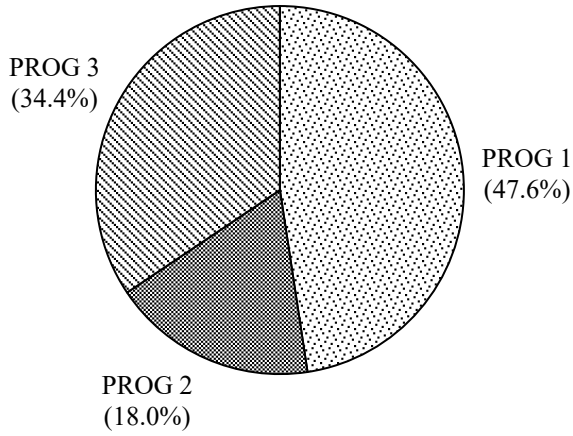
Provision for 2024–25 is \$4.5 million (4.1%) higher than the revised estimate for 2023–24. This is mainly due to increased requirement for procurement of equipment and specialist supplies, and other operating expenses.

Programme (3)

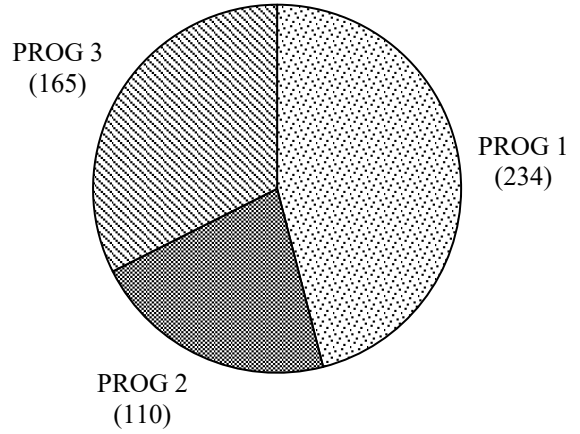
Provision for 2024–25 is \$0.7 million (0.3%) higher than the revised estimate for 2023–24. This is mainly due to increased requirement for operating expenses. In addition, there will be a net decrease of four posts.

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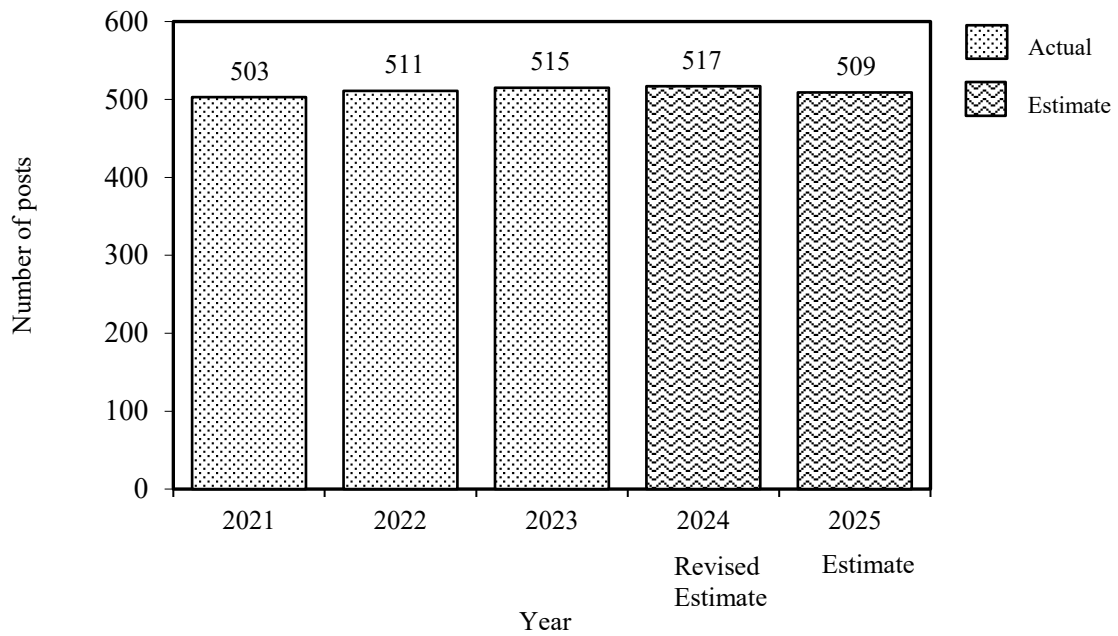
Allocation of provision to programmes (2024-25)



Staff by programme (as at 31 March 2025)



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



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Sub-head (Code)	Actual expenditure 2022-23	Approved estimate 2023-24	Revised estimate 2023-24	Estimate 2024-25	
	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	
Operating Account					
Recurrent					
000	Operational expenses	519,776	539,041	547,660	570,269
	Total, Recurrent.....	519,776	539,041	547,660	570,269
	Total, Operating Account	519,776	539,041	547,660	570,269
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Capital Account					
Plant, Equipment and Works					
661	Minor plant, vehicles and equipment (block vote).....	62,522	59,726	59,726	60,220
	Total, Plant, Equipment and Works.....	62,522	59,726	59,726	60,220
	Total, Capital Account.....	62,522	59,726	59,726	60,220
<hr/>					
	Total Expenditure	582,298	598,767	607,386	630,489
		<u>582,298</u>	<u>598,767</u>	<u>607,386</u>	<u>630,489</u>

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Details of Expenditure by Subhead

The estimate of the amount required in 2024–25 for the salaries and expenses of the Government Laboratory is \$630,489,000. This represents an increase of \$23,103,000 over the revised estimate for 2023–24 and \$48,191,000 over the actual expenditure in 2022–23.

Operating Account

Recurrent

2 Provision of \$570,269,000 under *Subhead 000 Operational expenses* is for the salaries, allowances and other operating expenses of the Government Laboratory.

3 The establishment as at 31 March 2024 will be 517 posts. It is expected that there will be a net decrease of eight posts in 2024–25. Subject to certain conditions, the controlling officer may under delegated power create or delete non-directorate posts during 2024–25, but the notional annual mid-point salary value of all such posts must not exceed \$350,190,000.

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

	2022–23 (Actual) (\$'000)	2023–24 (Original) (\$'000)	2023–24 (Revised) (\$'000)	2024–25 (Estimate) (\$'000)
Personal Emoluments				
- Salaries	366,552	378,561	387,081	394,989
- Allowances	2,619	2,610	2,709	2,760
Personnel Related Expenses				
- Mandatory Provident Fund contribution	1,018	976	976	929
- Civil Service Provident Fund contribution	28,492	33,129	33,129	36,458
Departmental Expenses				
- General departmental expenses	121,095	123,765	123,765	135,133
	519,776	539,041	547,660	570,269