

Our People

Our people talk about how they worked flexibly and collaboratively to maintain our operations and carry out our regulatory functions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Safety first

The safety and wellbeing of colleagues was a paramount concern when the outbreak first began. "Safeguarding health is always a top priority for us," Winnie Tam explained. Bonnie Chow agreed, observing that the protective measures adopted early on, including split-team arrangements and conducting meetings online, provided for physical distancing and ensured that urgent issues were handled quickly.

Maintaining business as usual required close coordination with team members as well as external parties. "When we worked in split teams, we had much less face-to-face interaction with colleagues," noted Zarina Curreem. To stay vigilant in monitoring funds offered to the public, it was very important for Cherry Fung and her team members to keep in frequent touch to avoid potential gaps in communication.

Being flexible was key. As a supervisor, Michelle Leung appreciated the need to attend to health conditions and she ensured staff rotations accommodated colleagues' individual circumstances. Winnie Tam was also mindful of keeping up team spirit and made sure her colleagues knew they could reach out to her whenever necessary.

Being proactive was also essential. Colin Lau kept in close communication with the stock exchange and clearing houses to ensure the markets remained open and orderly. "We stayed on top of their operations and contingency arrangements through constant calls and daily reports."

Naturally, some adjustments had to be made for routine operations, such as on-site searches and inspections, which require visits to other premises. Gary Chow stated that search operations are an integral part of the SFC's enforcement work but they inevitably involve personal contact. "We quickly came up with a comprehensive protocol to protect the health of everyone involved in these operations."

Working from home presented new challenges but staff adapted quickly to the new normal. Because Kenneth Choi's work involves reviewing paper files, he made sure to plan ahead for those tasks he could do more conveniently when it was his turn to go to the office. It took a while

for Zarina Curreem to get used to reading on screens and commenting digitally rather than on paper, but she found herself doing it even after she returned to the office. "It's much more environmentally-friendly," she said.

While working from home seemed isolating at first, Chevonne Chan discovered that it brought people closer. "When everyone is doing work calls from home, we naturally get to know more about our colleagues and counterparts, like the musical instruments their children play and what is for dinner. This helps us understand each other better and facilitates closer collaboration."

The SFC's own contingency measures helped our daily operations run smoothly, Michelle Leung related. "Our business continuity plan was devised well before the pandemic specifically to cope with unexpected, extreme circumstances."

Depending on technology

Technology became more important than ever when travel restrictions and social distancing measures were introduced. For Colin Lau, video conferencing allowed him to hold meetings with overseas counterparts when business travel was no longer possible. Gary Chow agreed, adding that modern technology could make virtual meetings just as effective as physical ones.

Making sure staff were properly equipped was a big job, especially when overseas shipments were delayed due to lockdowns. "As a team, we worked extra hard to quickly expand the capacity of our infrastructure, security, and applications to support working from home, including remote access and online meetings," recalled Jeff Lai. "We also made sure colleagues were kept informed of the new applications and services available to them."

Although demand for technology services rose when remote working was first implemented, Yvonne Yip observed that colleagues were very adaptive and they made good use of the online platforms and upgraded systems she helped develop to enable collaborative ways of working even when outside the office.

For Michelle Leung, the experience showed the importance of the new online licensing process¹, initiated in 2018. "In addition to minimising the impact of sudden disruptions, a fully digitalised platform is more efficient and cost-effective."

¹ See sidebar on page 48.

Our People



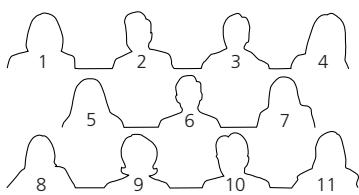
Access to upgraded technology made working from home more convenient and productive than Kenneth Choi had expected. "Our team was able to finish urgent projects on short notice and management was able to stay on top of the progress remotely and in real time."

Nonetheless, it was a particularly challenging day for Ada Lee when the electricity supply to her flat was suspended due to scheduled maintenance. "To be safe, I prepared extra laptops and mobile devices and made sure they were all charged the night before."

A sense of mission

For Ada Lee, it has been a challenging time but she now felt well prepared to deal with any situation. Chevonne Chan added that above all it is a sense of mission and public service which drives us. This was echoed by Kenneth Choi, who said: "I felt the mission behind our regulatory duties most strongly during the time of crisis, and I feel very privileged to be a part of the SFC and work for the greater good of our society."

1. Winnie Tam, Senior Manager, Intermediaries Supervision, Intermediaries
2. Kenneth Choi, Manager, Intermediaries Supervision, Intermediaries
3. Jeff Lai, Deputy Chief Information Officer, Information Technology, Corporate Affairs
4. Chevonne Chan, Senior Manager, Licensing, Intermediaries
5. Michelle Leung, Director, Licensing, Intermediaries



6. Colin Lau, Associate Director, Supervision of Markets
7. Cherry Fung, Manager, Investment Products
8. Yvonne Yip, Manager, Information Technology, Corporate Affairs
9. Zarina Curreem, Director, Corporate Finance
10. Gary Chow, Senior Manager, Enforcement
11. Bonnie Chow, Associate Director, Corporate Finance

Not pictured: Ada Lee, Senior Manager, Supervision of Markets