

15 September 1992

The Right Honourable Christopher Patten  
Governor of Hong Kong  
Government House  
Hong Kong

Dear Sir,

Future of Liaison Officer Grade

We have been invited by the Administration to advise, under clause 1(b) of our Terms of Reference, whether matriculation should remain the entry qualification of the Liaison Officer grade.

Background

2. The Liaison Officer (LO) grade of the City and New Territories Administration (CNTA) performs liaison work in the New Territories (NT) while liaison work in the urban areas is undertaken by the Executive Officer (EO) grade. In the 1989 Salary Structure Review, both the LOs and CNTA management requested that the entry qualification of the LO grade should be upgraded from matriculation to degree level. Since the Administration was carrying out a review of the EO grade, which belongs to the Degree Grades group, at the time and its outcome might have implications for the LO grade, we considered it inappropriate to take a decision on the long term future of the LO grade then. However, having regard to the increase in the responsibilities of LOs and the need for an officer at a higher level to co-ordinate liaison work in CNTA headquarters, we recommended that the starting pay of the Liaison Officer II rank should be raised by one point and that a new rank of Chief Liaison Officer should be created. These recommendations have been accepted and implemented by the Administration.

Review of Executive Officer grade

3. We have now been informed that the Administration had completed its review of the EO grade. Amongst other things, the review concluded that liaison work was not a core function of the EO grade. As most liaison duties in CNTA were not commensurate with EOs' qualifications and

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aspirations, EOs should be deployed only on those liaison duties which called for the qualities they possessed and the grade's involvement in liaison work should be reduced as far as practicable.

Future of Liaison Officer grade

4. In the light of the review's findings, the Administration re-examined the long-term future of the LO grade. Its conclusions are set out in paragraphs 5 to 7 below.

Performance of liaison work

5. The Administration considered unsatisfactory the existing situation where liaison work in the New Territories and in the urban areas is performed by two grades with different rates of pay. It identified three possible solutions, namely, maintaining the status quo; executivisation, i.e. having all liaison work performed by EOs; and departmentalisation, i.e. removing EOs from liaison duties which would henceforth be undertaken by LOs alone. The Administration ruled out the first option as it is inequitable and has given rise to staff management problems. It did not favour executivisation because:

- (a) the review of the EO grade (paragraph 3 above) has concluded that liaison work is not a core function of the grade;
- (b) this option would entail the transfer of over 100 LOs to the EO grade. Not all LOs would be able to perform the core duties of EOs because of their lower qualification and lack of exposure to duties other than liaison work; and
- (c) the EO grade association is strongly opposed to such a move.

6. The Administration considered departmentalisation to be the best option as it would ensure that liaison work in the urban areas and in the New Territories would be carried out at the right level and by one grade of officers. It would facilitate the building up and retention of expertise in such work. The Administration therefore intends to phase out the deployment of EOs on liaison work in CNTA.

Entry qualification

7. Although it remains the long-term aim of CNTA to upgrade the LO grade to degree status, the Administration concluded in its review that the entry qualification of the LO grade should stay at matriculation level for the time being for the following reasons:

- (a) Entry qualifications are set at the minimum necessary for the competent performance of the duties concerned. There is no evidence that the scope and complexity of the duties of the LO grade have changed to such an extent that they are beyond the capacity of a matriculant;
- (b) Although liaison work in the urban areas is currently carried out by the EO grade whose entry qualification is pitched at degree level, the EO grade review has already concluded that such work is not commensurate with the grade's qualifications and aspirations and that the grade's involvement in liaison work should be reduced. There is therefore no justification for upgrading the entry qualification of the LO grade to that of the EO grade; and
- (c) Raising the entry requirement of the LO grade may result in recruitment difficulties and less job satisfaction for degree holders.

Comments and recommendation

8. We share the Administration's view that the existing arrangement whereby liaison work is performed by two grades of officers with different levels of pay is unsatisfactory. Since liaison work is the core function of the LO grade and there is no essential difference between the nature and content of such work in the New Territories and that in the urban areas, it is logical that the LO grade should be expanded to take up liaison work in the urban areas. This would ensure the retention of the necessary experience and expertise in the LO grade and release a considerable number of EOs for deployment to other duties. We consider departmentalisation a sensible solution to this problem and support the Administration's decision to phase out the EOs now engaged in liaison work in CNTA.

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9. We have received a letter from the Association of Liaison Officers advocating the upgrading of the grade's entry qualification to degree level, thus restoring it to its previous position. We understand that by this the Association was referring to the situation in 1959-1968 in the then New Territories Administration (NTA) and the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs before the establishment of the City District Officer scheme. At that time, liaison staff had a much wider remit. Following a review in 1968, the staffing of district offices was revised and the entry qualification of the LO grade revised to matriculation level.

10. The recent review carried out by the Administration found that the grade's work has not changed in terms of scope and complexity to the extent that matriculants are incapable of performing the full range of liaison duties. We therefore support the views expressed in paragraph 7 above that the entry qualification of the LO grade should remain at matriculation level.

Yours faithfully,

(Sidney Gordon)  
Chairman  
For and on behalf of  
Members of the Standing Commission

30 November 1992

The Right Honourable Christopher Patten  
Governor of Hong Kong  
Government House  
Hong Kong

Dear Sir,

Creation of New Rank of  
Principal Liaison Officer in Liaison Officer grade

We have been invited by the Administration to advise, under Clause I(b) of our Terms of Reference, on a proposal to create a new rank of Principal Liaison Officer in the Liaison Officer grade.

Background

2. Liaison Officers in the City and New Territories Administration are at present responsible for liaison work in the New Territories while liaison work in the urban area is undertaken by Executive Officers. In our letter dated 15 September 1992, we supported the Administration's decision to departmentalise liaison work by replacing the Executive Officers currently engaged in liaison work with Liaison Officers. We also recommended that the entry qualification of the Liaison Officer grade should remain at Matriculation level. We understand that our recommendation has been accepted for implementation.

The Administration's proposal

3. We have recently been advised by the Administration that when Liaison Officers assumed responsibility for all liaison work connected with district administration and community development in the territory, the establishment of the grade would have to be increased from 157 to 336 posts. The Administration considers that with the expansion of the grade's responsibilities and establishment, an officer at an appropriate level would be required to perform the following functions:

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- (a) to assist the Head of the Liaison Officer grade, the Deputy Regional Secretary for the New Territories, in grade management, including staff deployment, discipline, training and development and manpower planning;
- (b) to play a leading role in the overall planning, co-ordination and monitoring of territory-wide liaison activities;
- (c) to advise on the formulation of a liaison strategy which would reflect the rapid social and political developments in the territory and greater contact with officials from China; and
- (d) to liaise with and provide feedback on political organisations.

4. Having regard to the level and complexity of these duties, the Administration is of the view that they should be carried out by an experienced member of the grade in a new rank of Principal Liaison Officer with a pay scale of MPS 45-49.

Existing grade structure

5. The Administration has further advised us that the Liaison Officer grade comprised the following four ranks:

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Pay Scale (MPS)</u>
Chief Liaison Officer	40-44
Senior Liaison Officer	34-39
Liaison Officer I	28-33
Liaison Officer II	13-27

Liaison Officers II assist Liaison Officers I in carrying out liaison work and organising community activities. Liaison Officers I are normally responsible for organising community activities or taking charge of liaison work in a sub-district. These include general liaison with local residents and organisations, collection and dissemination of information, management of a public enquiry service and formation and servicing of Mutual Aid Committees and Area Committees. Senior Liaison Officers are responsible for liaison work in a district, serving as advisers to District Officers on local politics, traditional practices and local personalities, and assisting in planning, co-ordinating and

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monitoring district community involvement and development efforts. We have been informed that there was only one post of Chief Liaison Officer the incumbent of which was responsible for the planning and co-ordination of liaison matters and regional functions in the New Territories, analysing feedback from the districts and assessing its implications, and servicing major well-established organisations. A second post of Chief Liaison Officer would be created to handle similar duties in the urban area.

Commission's views and recommendation

6. We agree with the Administration that with the departmentalisation of liaison work and the expansion of the Liaison Officer grade, there is a need for an experienced officer of the appropriate seniority to assist in setting the overall direction of liaison work, in co-ordinating it and monitoring its effectiveness, and to discharge the functions of a grade manager. Having regard to the level and complexity of his duties, we consider that a new rank of Principal Liaison Officer should be created to accommodate such an officer. We are also satisfied that the pay scale of MPS 45-49 proposed by the Administration is in line with the general pattern in the Matriculation Grades group which encompasses the Liaison Officer grade.

7. In conclusion, we recommend the creation of a new rank of Principal Liaison Officer with a pay scale of MPS 45-49 in the Liaison Officer grade.

Yours faithfully,

(Sidney Gordon)  
Chairman  
For and on behalf of  
Members of the Standing Commission