

1 February 1994

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

Dear Sir,

**Proposed Alternative Appointment Requirements  
for Personal Secretary II**

We have been invited by the Administration to advise, under clause 1(b) of our Terms of Reference, on a proposal to introduce alternative appointment requirements for the Personal Secretary II rank of the Personal Secretary grade.

**BACKGROUND**

2. The Personal Secretary (PS) grade is a School Certificate grade with the following five-tier structure :

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Pay Scale (MPS)</u>
Personal Secretary II	4-15
Personal Secretary I	16-21
Senior Personal Secretary	22-27
Personal Assistant	28-33
Senior Personal Assistant	34-39

3. PS II is the basic recruitment rank of the grade. Entry qualifications for this rank are a pass in five subjects including English Language (Syllabus B) at the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination, shorthand speed of 70 wpm and typing speed of 50 wpm. In recognition of the shorthand and typing skills required for appointment, the entry pay is set at MPS 4, one point above the benchmark for the School Certificate grades group. Posts in the PS I rank are filled by the promotion of PS II who meet the required English standard and have a shorthand speed of 110 wpm.

Appendix D (Cont'd)

4. The Administration has advised us that despite the improvement made to the pay scales of the grade following the 1989 Salary Structure Review, recruitment difficulties at the PS II level persisted. The lowering of the required shorthand speed from 80 wpm to 70 wpm in May 1992 has not improved the situation to any significant extent. A shortfall of 465 PS II, representing 32% of the existing establishment of the rank, is expected by early 1994. The Administration attributed the problem to a shortage of candidates with the stipulated shorthand skill. Contacts with the Vocational Training Council and commercial schools revealed that fewer students were learning shorthand as most junior secretarial jobs in the private sector did not require this skill.

5. The Administration has also informed us that it had carried out a survey in early 1993 to gauge the technical skills required of PS II in the service. The findings indicated that over 70% of the 1,130 principals served by substantive PS II never or very seldom gave shorthand dictation. Almost all the principals surveyed regarded word-processing skill as essential and most would accept audio-typing as a substitute for shorthand skill.

**THE ADMINISTRATION'S PROPOSAL**

6. Having regard to the diminishing use of shorthand and the increasing demand for word-processing skill in the service, the Administration proposed to modify the entry requirements of PS II by accepting word-processing or audio-typing skill as an alternative to shorthand skill. It considered that in spite of this modification, the entry pay for the rank should remain at MPS 4 because word-processing or audio-typing should, like shorthand, be regarded as an additional skill required for appointment. The Administration believed that the introduction of these alternative recruitment requirements would attract a larger number of qualified candidates for appointment to PS II.

**COMMISSION'S VIEWS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

7. We agree with the Administration that as office automation, including the use of personal computers, becomes more prevalent, the reliance on shorthand skill is diminishing. This reduction in demand and the decline in English proficiency of secretarial trainees have led to a shortage of candidates with shorthand skill. However, we do not totally agree that word-processing or audio-typing can replace shorthand. Indeed, as audio-typing is not very popular, we doubt whether such training is readily available.

8. We are also concerned that the Administration's proposal would eventually lead to a dilution of standards at the PS I level where shorthand is still required and posts are filled by the promotion of PS II. The Administration has

Appendix D (Cont'd)

assured us that such a problem would not arise as there was at present a large pool of PS II with the required shorthand skill to meet the demand at the higher rank in the foreseeable future. It would also continue to recruit candidates with shorthand skill and provide in-service shorthand training for other staff.

9. With the exception of one Member, we accept the introduction of the proposed alternative appointment requirements as an interim measure to address the current recruitment problem. We consider that in the meantime the Administration should look for longer-term solutions by examining the overall provision of secretarial service in the civil service with a view to reducing the reliance on secretarial staff and maximising their productivity.

10. We have received representations from the Association of Government Secretarial Staff which considered the Administration's proposal unfair to serving officers and damaging to their image and morale. The Association advocated the merging of the PS II and PS I ranks into one rank with a lower shorthand requirement and a revised pay scale of MPS 6-22. The Association further proposed the granting of a special allowance to attract recruits. The Administration has observed that the Association's proposals were impractical and would not address the cause of the recruitment problem. We share this view.

11. In conclusion, we support as an interim measure the Administration's proposal to accept word-processing or audio-typing as an alternative requirement to shorthand skill in recruiting Personal Secretary II rank. We recommend that the Administration should carry out a more detailed study of the problem to identify longer-term solutions. We would like to receive a report on the position from the Administration in a year's time.

Yours sincerely,

(Sidney Gordon)

Chairman

For and on behalf of

Members of the Standing Commission