

17 January 1995

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

Dear Sir,

**Proposed Salary Scale Revision
for the Social Work Assistant Grade
in the Social Welfare Department**

We have been invited by the Administration to advise, under clause 1(b) of our Terms of Reference, on its proposal to revise the salary scales of the Social Work Assistant grade in the Social Welfare Department.

BACKGROUND

2. The Social Work Assistant (SWA) grade is classified under Group II of the 'Higher Diploma, Diploma and Related Grades', entry to which requires a Polytechnic diploma in Social Work. Members of the grade are deployed mainly on relatively simple welfare casework and counselling duties, and on assisting in the day-to-day operation of social work institutions as well as in organising and implementing community and youth programmes.

3. To address the retention and recruitment problems experienced by the grade, a one-point increase in the starting pay from MPS 10 to 11 and an omitted point at MPS 13 were introduced to the salary scale of the SWA rank by this Commission in the 1989 Salary Structure Review. In addition, a new rank of Chief Social Work Assistant (CSWA) was created to improve the supervisory structure of the grade. The structure and salary scales of the SWA grade before and after the 1989 Salary Structure Review are as follows -

Appendix D (Cont'd)

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Salary Scale (MPS)</u>	
	<u>Pre-1989</u>	<u>Post-1989</u>
Social Work Assistant (SWA)	10 - 21	11 - 21 (Omitted Point at 13)
Senior Social Work Assistant (SSWA)	22 - 28	22 - 28
Chief Social Work Assistant (CSWA)	-	29 - 33

4. In the 1989 Salary Structure Review, this Commission also recommended that the salary scales of the Welfare Worker (WW) grade, another Social Welfare Department (SWD) departmental grade, be revised. The WW grade belongs to Group I of the School Certificate Grades. It was created in 1983 to take over duties requiring little social work training from the SWAs. The revised salary scales for the WW grade are as follows -

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Salary Scale (MPS)</u>	
	<u>Pre-1989</u>	<u>Post-1989</u>
Welfare Worker (WW)	5 - 16	7 - 17
Senior Welfare Worker (SWW)	17 - 21	18 - 23

5. The improvement made to the salary scales of the WW grade resulted in the pay maximum of the SWW rank (MPS 23) having a two-point lead over that of the SWA rank (MPS 21), whereas before the 1989 Salary Structure Review, the scale maxima of the two ranks had been identical (MPS 21). This aroused strong objection from the Social Work Assistant Branch (SWAB) of the Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association which, since October 1991, had made repeated representations to the Administration for a review of the salary structure of the SWA grade. It demanded an improvement of three pay points to both the scale minima and scale maxima of all three ranks of the SWA grade, on grounds of relativity.

6. The Administration considered SWAB's request and concluded that it was not justified because -

(a) under the existing "educational qualification" system, pay relativity between grades in different qualification groups are duly reflected in the respective qualification group benchmarks and salary structure patterns. No further valid comparison can be made between individual grades or ranks in different qualification groups. It would be inappropriate, as a matter of principle, to compare the salary scales of the SWA grade and the WW grade which belong to separate qualification groups; and

(b) the overall salary structure of the SWA grade which has three functional ranks does not compare unfavourably with that of the WW grade which comprises two functional ranks. Moreover, SWW is a promotion rank for WWs. It would not be appropriate to compare in isolation the salary scale of the second rank of the WW grade with that of the first rank of the SWA grade.

7. In September 1992, SWAB lodged another request for a salary structure review based again mainly on grounds of relativity between SWA and SWW. The submission was not supported by the Administration since no fresh justification had been adduced.

8. In October 1993, SWAB mounted a series of protest action against the Administration's decision, including a three-day sit-in. After protracted negotiations, SWD management and SWAB agreed in November 1993 to form a Task Group (TG) comprising representatives from both sides, to examine and identify any changes in the job content, work complexity and responsibilities of the SWA grade since the 1989 Salary Structure Review. On the basis of the TG's findings, the Department would take a view on the way forward.

THE TASK GROUP'S FINDINGS

9. The TG conducted a comprehensive examination of the duties and responsibilities of the members of the SWA grade working in the five major service settings in SWD, viz. family services, youth and group work, correctional homes, elderly and medical social services, and rehabilitation. The TG's study revealed an overall increase in the complexity and level of responsibilities required of the SWA grade in these SWD service settings in recent years. The increase is attributable to the following developments -

Appendix D (Cont'd)

(a) changes in social values have raised the divorce rate and increased the number of single parents, broken families, unmarried mothers, child abuse cases and incidents of youth with behavioural problems. Increased emigration has resulted in more abandoned elderly persons with complicated problems; and

(b) members of the public have become more aware of their civic rights. They expect better quality social work service within the shortest possible time, thereby placing an additional burden on frontline social workers.

10. The Director of Social Welfare (DSW) has accepted the TG's findings which clearly indicate that in virtually all the service settings, the duties and responsibilities of the SWA and SSWA ranks have become more complex and demanding. This change does not, however, have a significant bearing on the job content of the CSWA rank where the bulk of the duties involved is supervisory and managerial in nature. The new job factors identified in the SWA and SSWA levels do not, therefore, apply to the same extent to the CSWA rank.

11. DSW considers that as members of the SWA grade are regularly in direct contact with a growing number of clients with a mix of personality, behavioural, psychological, emotional and/or relationship problems, their work has become more onerous, stressful and contentious. With the changes in social environment, what used to be simple welfare casework and counselling have become increasingly challenging, requiring greater personal input and more in-depth social work intervention. To give due recognition to this job factor which has become more prominent since the last salary review, DSW has recommended that the salary scales of the SWA grade should be improved.

THE ADMINISTRATION'S PROPOSAL

12. The revised salary scales proposed by the Administration are as follows -

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Salary Scale (MPS)</u>	
	<u>Existing</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
SWA	11 - 21 (Omitted point at 13)	11 - 22 (Omitted point at 13)
SSWA	22 - 28	23 - 29
CSWA	29 - 33	30 - 33

13. The above proposal would pitch both the starting and maximum pay of the SWA rank and the SSWA rank at one point above the group norm as the job factor identified applies equally to these two ranks. The starting pay of the SWA rank would remain unchanged as it is already one point above the group norm and would continue to serve the purpose of assisting recruitment. To pitch the starting pay of the SWA rank beyond MPS 11 would have undesirable knock-on effects and is likely to cause relativity problems within the qualification group. As for the CSWA rank, where the new job factors identified do not directly apply, only the starting pay of the rank is to be adjusted as a consequential change, but not its maximum pay.

IMPLICATIONS FOR OTHER SWD GRADES

14. The Administration does not expect that the proposed revision of the salary scales of the SWA grade will have any undesirable knock-on effects on other departmental grades in SWD. These include the Social Work Officer grade (a Degree grade), the Social Security Officer grade (a Matriculation grade), the Social Security Assistant grade (a School Certificate grade) and the Welfare Worker grade (a School Certificate grade). The Administration considers that the increase in complexity of work since 1989 has not significantly altered the nature and complexity of the work of Social Work Officers who are already required to handle difficult clients and complex cases. As for members of the Social Security Officer and Social Security Assistant grades, an increase in the complexity of social work would not have a direct impact on their work since they are deployed on social security functions. Similarly, the increase in complexity of social work cases would not have any material effect on the work of members of the Welfare Worker grade.

WAY FORWARD

15. The Administration has indicated that, subject to its present proposal being endorsed by this Commission, the staff concerned will be informed of the rationale behind the proposal and the benefit these improvement measures will bring to them, as follows -

- (a) SWA : one point increase at the maximum - enabling staff to receive a pay improvement either immediately or in the longer term; and making them eligible on reaching MPS 22 for assistance under the Home Purchase Scheme (without having to meet the 20-year service criterion).
- (b) SSWA : one point at the minimum and at the maximum - all staff will receive an immediate pay improvement.

Appendix D (Cont'd)

- (c) CSWA : one point at the minimum - since the serving officers in this rank have not yet reached the maximum of the scale, they will all receive an immediate pay improvement.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

16. The estimated full year cost of the proposal is \$10.1 million, inclusive of the subvented sector. DSW has already made a successful bid for funds in the 1994 Resource Allocation Exercise to implement the proposal in 1995/96.

COMMISSION'S VIEWS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

17. Despite repeated attempts by SWAB to petition the Administration for revision of the salary scales of the SWA grade on grounds of relativity with the WW grade, the Administration has not found it possible to accede to SWAB's request. In upholding the existing "educational qualification" system, the Administration is right in pointing out that no valid comparison could be made of the salary structure between individual grades or ranks in different qualification groups. In this regard, we endorse the Administration's position and agree that it would be inappropriate, as a matter of principle, to compare the salary scales of the SWA grade and the WW grade which belong to separate qualification groups.

18. The detailed and comprehensive review by the TG has established beyond doubt that, with the exception of staff at the CSWA rank, there has been an overall increase in the complexity and level of responsibilities assumed by staff in the SWA and SSWA ranks in recent years. On the basis of these findings, we agree that a case for improving the salary scales of the SWA grade has been established by the Administration and that the revised scales should be as set out in paragraph 12 above.

19. We note, however, that the proposed increases have fallen short of SWAB's expectation of a three point across-the-board increase for all the three ranks in the SWA grade. Indeed, we have received representations from SWAB explaining the background to their claims and their dissatisfaction with the TG's findings. However, despite careful examination of SWAB's submissions, we have not been able to find any strong justifications for its claims.

20. We note the Administration's intention to revert to staff with an explanation of the rationale behind the proposal. This we strongly support.

CONCLUSION

21. In conclusion, we support the Administration's proposal to revise the salary scales of the SWA grade as set out in paragraph 12 above.

Yours faithfully,

(Sidney Gordon)
Chairman
for and on behalf of
Members of the Standing Commission
on Civil Service Salaries & Conditions of Service