

Appendix E

4 September 1995

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

Dear Sir,

**Review of the
Supervisor of Typing Services Grade**

We have been invited by the Administration to advise, under clause 1(b) of our Terms of Reference, on the proposed salary scale for the Supervisor of Typing Services Grade.

BACKGROUND

2. The Supervisor of Typing Services (STS) is a one-rank grade created in 1976 when Stenographers (retitled as Personal Secretaries II since 1989) and Typists were pooled to provide typing, shorthand and audio-typing services to officers who were not served directly by personal secretaries. The pooling arrangement gave rise to the need for a supervisory cadre; hence the creation of the STS grade.

3. Subsequent developments indicated that the pooling arrangement was far from satisfactory. Stenographers complained that they could find little job satisfaction working in pools where they spent most of their time typing, with their shorthand and secretarial skills generally under-utilised. Some senior officers also complained that secretarial support provided under the pooling system was inadequate.

4. In the light of these comments, the Administration decided in 1989 that the pooling arrangement should be discontinued, with the Stenographers de-pooled and the STS grade phased out. Practical difficulties encountered in implementing the de-pooling and phasing out proposal, coupled with changed circumstances in departments and strong objection from STSs, however, led to a fresh review by the Administration in 1993 and its subsequent decision that the STS grade should be retained.

ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENT SUPERVISORS OF TYPING SERVICES

5. Upon learning of the Administration's decision not to proceed with the deletion proposal, the Association of Government Supervisors of Typing Services (AGSTS) wrote to us in January 1994 requesting a comprehensive review of the STS grade. In sum, they asked for -

- (a) reinstatement, with retrospective effect from October 1989, of one point at the maximum of the STS salary scale to maintain its pre-1989 relativity with Personal Secretary I;
- (b) recognition of the enhanced responsibilities of STS since 1989 by revising their salary scale from MPS Point 17-23 to MPS Point 18-27;
- (c) creation of senior posts for the grade; and
- (d) retitling of the grade as "Secretarial Services Officer" to reflect more appropriately their role and responsibilities.

Since the Administration was dealing with these proposals at that time, we decided to await the outcome of the Administration's review before considering the AGSTS' submission.

THE ADMINISTRATION'S REVIEW

6. Following its decision to retain the STS grade (promulgated via CSB Circular Memorandum No. 26/94 dated 24 May 1994), the Administration undertook a survey in July 1994 of the duties and responsibilities of the STS grade and of any changes since 1989, with a view to ascertaining whether the existing salary scale, structure and title of the grade were still appropriate.

7. The Administration found that in so far as day-to-day staff management and provision of direct services were concerned, the STSs' duties had not changed drastically since 1989. STS continued to work fairly independently and resourcefully in the supervision of secretarial services, although their scope of *administrative* duties had been considerably widened as they became more closely involved in resource management. However, the rapid installation and upgrading of office automation facilities within the civil service during the period had resulted in a significant enhancement of the role and responsibilities of the STSs. The Administration found that STSs were the key staff on the ground to help departmental management to manage this very rapid development, by learning to master within the shortest possible time the principles and operation of the

facilities and softwares upon their installation, and to serve as a source of expertise for the secretarial pools under their charge, as well as for other secretarial staff in the departments concerned. The specialised knowledge and expertise acquired by STSs and their position as leaders of secretarial teams had gradually turned them into the "Help Desk" in departments, particularly on the use of word processing software, and co-planners and facilitators in office automation.

8. The Government's Management Services Agency has recently completed a pilot study on the implementation of office automation within the civil service. The study, completed in early 1995, has reaffirmed the significant role of the STSs in the implementation of the office automation programme in branches and departments. It has also identified the need for STSs to adopt a more important training role than before, and to assist in developing the right organisational culture and individual attitude as implementation of the office automation programme within the civil service gathers momentum.

THE ADMINISTRATION'S VIEWS AND PROPOSALS

9. On the basis of the review of the STS grade, the Administration has formulated its views and proposals in respect of the AGSTS' submission as follows -

Grade Structure

10. The Administration recognises that the present one-rank structure of the STS grade provides no avenue for advancement. However, it has not been able to find any functional justification for the creation of a senior rank.

Salary Scale and Implementation Date

11. When the STS grade was created in 1976, its salary scale was set at one point above the minimum and three points above the maximum of that for Personal Secretary I (PS I), in recognition of the maturity, supervisory responsibility and skill required for the job.

12. Noting that the STS grade was due to be phased out, we recommended in the 1989 Salary Structure Review that its salary scale be revised from MPS Point 16-23 to MPS Point 17-23. At the same time, we recommended that the salary scale for PS I be revised from MPS Point 15-20 to MPS Point 16-21.

13. The AGSTS claimed that the pre-1989 relativity should be restored and that STSs should be compensated for the difference in salaries with retrospective effect from 1 October 1989, since their maximum pay had not been adjusted in the 1989 Review in view of the Administration's stated intention to phase out the grade.

14. The Administration does not support this claim. It considers that notwithstanding the phasing out proposal at the time, the pay scale of the grade was reviewed and the relativity superseded by our recommendations in the 1989 Review.

15. However, to recognise the enhanced role and responsibilities of the STS grade brought about by office automation since 1989, the Administration considers that a one-point increase at the maximum of the salary scale is justified. No change to the minimum of the salary scale is recommended on account of the fact that since it was last revised in the 1989 Review, there has not been any change to the entry requirements for the grade. The Administration therefore recommends that the salary scale of the STS grade be revised from MPS Point 17-23 to MPS Point 17-24, with effect from a current date.

Grade Title

16. The Administration does not think that it is now opportune to change the grade title from "Supervisor of Typing Services" to "Secretarial Services Officer" as suggested by the AGSTS.

17. The AGSTS has argued that the existing title fails to reflect the full range of the STS's duties, which include supervising PS IIs working in secretarial pools and indirectly overseeing the work of those outside secretarial pools. The Administration, however, maintains that PS IIs generally only constitute a very small number of the staff supervised by STSs, and some STSs are not involved in the supervision of that rank at all. The Administration further observes that the term "Secretarial Services Officers" may give the wrong impression that STSs are overall in charge of secretarial services in a branch or department and this could create staff relations problems vis-a-vis the independently working secretarial staff, such as Personal Assistants, Senior Personal Secretaries, PS Is and those PS IIs not working in typing pools.

18. The Administration undertakes, however, to keep this matter under review as the secretarial services evolve within the civil service.

AGSTS' LATEST SUBMISSION

19. Following its meeting with the General Grades Office of Civil Service Branch on 12 July 1995, the AGSTS wrote to us setting out their latest views on two specific issues -

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(a) Backdating

They requested that, subject to approval being given to increasing their maximum pay to MPS Point 24, the revised salary scale should take effect from an earlier, instead of a current, date. They proposed that this date should be no later than 24 May 1994 i.e. the date on which the retention of the STS grade was formally promulgated. To support their case for backdating, they cited the precedent that in the 1989 Review, the Finance Committee gave approval for changes to salary scales to take retrospective effect from October 1989, notwithstanding that our Report No. 26 (Third and Final Report on 1989 Salary Structure Review) was published in January 1991.

(b) Pay Relativity

The AGSTS reiterated the pay relativity between the STS and PS grades when the STS grade was created in 1976 and requested that this relativity, upset by our recommendations in the 1989 Review, be restored.

COMMISSION'S VIEWS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

General

20. In retaining the STS grade, the Administration has also retained the pooling arrangement whereby some PS IIs will continue to be deployed to work with Typists in pools supervised by STSs. This arrangement had come under heavy criticism from PS IIs, resulting partly in the Administration's decision in 1989 to discontinue the arrangement and to de-pool the PS IIs. Retention of the pooling arrangement is thus likely to perpetuate the dissatisfaction of the PS IIs, leading to inevitably unnecessary staff relations problems.

21. We understand that the Administration has been in dialogue with the Association of Government Secretarial Staffs (AGSS) - a body representing staff in the Personal Secretary grade - which has expressed concern on the Administration's decision to abandon the de-pooling arrangement and to retain the STS grade. The Administration has sought to reassure the AGSS by pledging to deploy only junior PS IIs to work in pools and to expedite their applications for transfer out of the pools. While these administrative measures may help to contain

the problem, their long-term effect may be marginal.

22. There is one related issue, viz., the optimum utilization of resources. We note from the Government's Management Services Agency study of December 1994 on the impact of office automation within the civil service that with the growing use of computer software for typing in secretarial pools, the conventional differentiation between a PS II and a Typist working in these pools has become blurred. This has pointed to the need for the Administration to give renewed consideration to how these two categories of staff could be better deployed in a pooled working environment. We understand that the Administration has already commenced examination of the issues at the PS II and Typist ranks. We urge it to come to an early decision.

Grade Structure

23. The Administration has taken the view that since no functional justification could be found for the creation of a senior rank, the existing one-rank structure of the STS grade should remain unchanged.

24. We feel, however, that the question of the structure of the STS grade deserves further probing. As the Administration has observed, the role of the STS grade has undergone substantial changes and is poised for even greater changes as the work of secretaries, typists, clerical officers and clerical assistants begin to converge and interact with each other as the pace of office automation quickens. These developments are likely to produce significant impact on the Administration's thinking about the role and future structure of the STS grade and, indeed, about the much larger issue of the future organisation and deployment of the entire secretarial and office support services within the civil service.

25. We, therefore, recommend that the structure of the STS and other secretarial and office support services grades be kept under regular review by the Administration, in the light of the progress of office automation within the civil service.

Salary Scale and Implementation Date

26. We note the AGSTS' request for the restoration of the pay relativity between the STS and PS grades established in 1976, and the Administration's view that this relativity was superseded by our recommendations in the 1989 Review.

27. We have looked at this issue again. We do not think that the Commission, in undertaking any fresh review of an individual grade, should necessarily be bound by past relativity. This is particularly so in the present case where rapid development of office automation in Government in recent years has

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resulted in substantial changes to the role and duties of the respective grades of staff concerned. Past relativity, in the circumstances, provides a useful, but not the overriding, reference point. The essence of any pay review must centre on the worth of the job itself. Whether the salary scale of the STS grade is appropriate or not can only be assessed through a thorough examination of the current duties and responsibilities of the grade.

28. In the light of the above considerations and having regard to the findings of the Administration's recent survey of the STS grade, we accept that there is a case for granting, at this stage, a one-point increase at the maximum of the STS salary scale as proposed by the Administration, in recognition of the enhanced role and responsibilities of the grade brought about by the advancement of office automation.

29. We would, however, like to make one observation. Given that the current development of office automation within the civil service is in a state of flux, the duties and responsibilities of the STS grade are thus likely to evolve further as the pace of development quickens. In view of this, the Administration should consider undertaking more frequent and timely reviews to ensure that the salary scale of the STS grade will remain commensurate with their increased responsibilities in future.

30. As for the starting pay of the STS grade, we agree with the Administration that since there has not been any change to the appointment requirements when the starting pay was last increased to MPS Point 17 in the 1989 Review, there is no justification for any increase at this stage.

31. We support, therefore, the Administration's proposal to revise the salary scale of the STS grade from MPS Point 17-23 to MPS Point 17-24.

32. We note the AGSTS' argument for backdating. We would like to point out, however, that backdating only applies in the case of a major service-wide pay review exercise. In all other cases, the established practice is that implementation of any revised salary scale normally takes effect from a current date. Accordingly, we recommend that the revised salary scale of the STS grade, if approved, should take effect from a current date.

Grade Title

33. We agree with the Administration that this is not the right time to change the title of "Supervisor of Typing Services" to "Secretarial Services Officer" or indeed to any other title which, for want of preciseness, may create even more confusion. On the other hand, we share the AGSTS' misgivings that the existing title does not adequately and accurately reflect their full range of duties.

34. To begin with, the term "typing services" may already have become a misnomer, judging by the Administration's account of the development of office automation within the civil service. These on-going developments will not doubt confer new meaning and function on the "typing pools" supervised by the STSs. Whether they should be described as "office secretarial services pools", "office support services pools" or by any other name would depend on the Administration's thinking on how the secretarial and other office support services grades are to be re-organised as the office automation programme gathers momentum.

35. We note that the Administration has pledged to keep the title of the STS grade under review as the secretarial services evolve within the civil service. We agree to this approach.

CONCLUSION

36. In conclusion, we support the Administration's proposal to revise the salary scale of the STS grade from MPS Point 17-23 to MPS Point 17-24 and that this new salary scale, if approved, should take effect from a current date. We also urge that the Administration should keep the STS as well as the other secretarial and office support services grades under review and, in the light of the further development of office automation in Government, to propose prompt and suitable adjustment to the structure, title and salary scale of the various grades involved to reflect these changes.

Yours faithfully,

(Sidney Gordon)
Chairman

for and on behalf of
Members of the Standing Commission
on Civil Service Salaries & Conditions of Service