

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF INDIVIDUAL GRADES AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

2.1 During the year, we were invited by the Administration to advise on a number of improvement proposals dealing with individual grades. A summary of our deliberations and recommendations on these proposals are set out in the following paragraphs. The letters to the Governor conveying our advice are reproduced at Appendices D and E.

Salary Scale Revision for the Social Work Assistant Grade in the Social Welfare Department (Appendix D)

2.2 In the 1989 Salary Structure Review, the salary and structure of the Social Work Assistant grade (which belonged to the Higher Diploma, Diploma and Related Grades group) were improved by re-adjusting the pay of the Social Work Assistant rank from MPS Point 10-21 to MPS Point 11-21 and the creation of a new rank of Chief Social Work Assistant to enhance the supervisory structure of the grade. Concurrently, the salary scale of the Welfare Worker grade (which belonged to the School Certificate Grades group) were also improved : from MPS Point 5-16 to MPS Point 7-17 for the Welfare Worker rank and from MPS Point 17-21 to MPS Point 18-23 for the Senior Welfare Worker rank.

2.3 The improvement made to the salary scales of the Welfare Worker grade resulted in the pay maximum of the Senior Welfare Worker rank (MPS 23) having a two-point lead over that of the Social Work Assistant 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 Social Work Assistant grade. Specifically, SWAB requested an improvement of three pay points to both the scale minima and maxima of all the three ranks of the grade, on grounds of relativity.

2.4 These proposals were not supported by the Administration. Under the existing "educational qualification" system, the Administration maintained that pay relativity between grades in different qualification groups were duly reflected in the respective qualification group benchmarks and salary structure patterns. No further valid comparison could therefore be made between individual grades or ranks in different qualification groups. For this reason, the Administration considered that it would be inappropriate, as a matter of principle, to compare the salary scale of the Social Work Assistant grade with that of the Welfare Worker grade.

2.5 After protracted negotiations, agreement was reached between the Social Welfare Department management and SWAB in November 1993 to form a Task Group comprising representatives from both sides, to examine and identify any changes in the job content, work complexity and responsibilities of the Social Work Assistant grade since the 1989 Salary Structure Review. The findings of the Task Group revealed that there had been an overall increase in the complexity and level of responsibilities required of the grade in recent years. On account of this, the Administration proposed for our endorsement in January 1995 an improved salary scale for the Social Work Assistant grade 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

2.6 We considered carefully the review by the Task Group and agreed that with the exception of staff at the Chief Social Work Assistant rank, there had been an overall increase in the complexity and level of responsibilities assumed by staff in the Social Work Assistant and Senior Social Work Assistant ranks in recent years. On account of these changes, we accepted the Administration's case for improving the salary scales of the Social Work Assistant grade as set out in paragraph 2.5 above.

2.7 Our recommendations were accepted by the Administration, with the revised pay scales implemented on 1 April 1995.

Review of the Supervisor of Typing Services Grade (Appendix E)

2.8 The Supervisor of Typing Services (STS) was a one-rank grade created in 1976 when Stenographers (retitled as Personal Secretary IIs since 1989) and Typists were pooled to provide typing, shorthand and audio-typing services to officers who were not served directly by personal secretaries.

2.9 The pooling arrangement was subsequently found to be far from satisfactory. As a result, the Administration decided in 1989 that it 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, however, led to a fresh review by the Administration in 1993 and its subsequent decision that the STS grade and the pooling arrangement be retained.

2.10 Whereupon, 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, the AGSTS 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.

2.11 The Administration undertook the review in July 1994 and, on the basis of the findings, concluded that the existing one-rank structure of the STS grade should remain unchanged. As regards salary scale, the Administration recommended that, in recognition of the enhanced role and responsibilities of the STS grade brought about by office automation since 1989, there was sufficient justification to revise the salary scale of the STS grade from MPS Point 17-23 to MPS Point 17-24. The Administration, however, did not support the AGSTS' request to change the title of the grade, but pledged to keep the matter under review as the secretarial services evolved within the civil service.

2.12 In the course of our detailed consideration of the Administration's proposals, we were concerned that the retention of the pooling arrangement was likely to perpetuate the dissatisfaction of the

Personal Secretary IIs who would continue to be deployed to work with Typists in pools supervised by STSs. This might lead to possible staff relations problems. Furthermore, with the growing use of computer software for typing, the conventional differentiation between a Personal Secretary II and a Typist working in secretarial pools would become blurred and 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 would become imperative.

2.13 Turning to the specific proposals by the AGSTS, we felt that, notwithstanding the Administration's view, which we endorsed, that the existing one-rank structure of the STS grade should remain unchanged, the matter deserved further probing in the light of the growing convergence and interaction of the work of secretaries, typists, clerical officers and clerical assistants as the pace of office automation within the civil service quickened. These developments were likely to produce significant impact on the Administration's thinking about the role and future structure of the STS grade and, indeed, about the larger issue of the future organisation and deployment of the entire secretarial and office support services within the civil service.

2.14 As for the salary scale of the STS grade, we agreed that, having regard to the findings of the Administration's recent review, there was a case for granting a one-point increase at the maximum of the STS salary scale, thus revising the salary scale of the STS grade from MPS Point 17-23 to MPS Point 17-24. However, given that office automation within the civil service was currently being developed, the duties and responsibilities of the STS grade were thus likely to evolve further. In view of this, we recommended that the Administration should consider undertaking more frequent and timely reviews in future to ensure that the salary scale of the STS grade would be commensurate with their enhanced responsibilities.

2.15 On implementation, we endorsed the Administration's proposal that this should take effect from a current date, rather than from an earlier date. Backdating of salary scale adjustment only applied in the case of a major service-wide pay review exercise. In all other cases, the established practice was that implementation of any revised salary scale normally took effect from a current date.

2.16 On grade title, we agreed with the Administration that this was not the right time to change the title of the grade. We noted that the Administration had pledged to keep the title of the STS grade under review.

2.17 Our recommendations were accepted by the Administration which is taking steps to implement the proposals.

Secretarial Services in Government

2.18 In our letter to the Governor dated 1 February 1994 on Proposed Alternative Appointment Requirements for Personal Secretary II, we recommended, inter alia, that the Administration should examine the overall provision of secretarial services in the civil service with a view to maximising their productivity. We asked that the Administration should provide us with a progress report in a year's time.

2.19 At our meeting in August 1995, we took note of the Administration's progress report, in particular, its view that the longer-term outlook on the provision of secretarial services in Government could only be assessed in the light of the phased progress of office automation within the civil service with full implementation scheduled for March 1998. The Administration maintained that the office automation programme would produce a major impact on the evolution of working habits for both the secretarial staff and their principals. In so far as the secretarial staff were concerned, this would lead to an enhancement of their capability and

productivity with consequential effect on the ultimate organisation and deployment of secretarial services within the civil service.

2.20 We were informed at the same time that the pace of office automation in the various branches and departments differed, depending on the availability of financial resources and the varied pace with which office automation systems were being installed. As at mid-1994, only eight departments/branches were advanced enough in office automation to enable the Government's Management Services Agency (MSA) to conduct a detailed study of the impact of office automation on the provision of secretarial services. In the event, the MSA surveyed the situation in four of these departments/branches.

2.21 The findings of the MSA survey showed that both the efficiency and quality of secretarial services could be significantly enhanced through the use of word processing software. On the other hand, at the present stage of development, the full capability of office automation had not yet been realised. As a result, savings of staff resources identified so far had been rather limited. The MSA study did not, therefore, consider it opportune for the Government to reduce the number of Personal Secretaries.

2.22 On the basis of the MSA study, the Administration came to the view that it was premature at this juncture, to contemplate any significant changes to secretarial services as a whole.

2.23 Our observation on the MSA survey was that while it was comprehensive, it had not produced any immediate answers to the questions posed by us of "how reliance on secretarial staff can be reduced and their productivity maximised". We were concerned, in particular, that it would take considerable time before the Administration could formulate concrete proposals. By its own reckoning, it would not have a full grasp of the

situation until the end of 1998, viz six months after the completion of the entire office automation programme in March 1998. This was unsatisfactory.

2.24 In conveying our views and concern to the Administration through a letter to the Secretary for the Civil Service, we had therefore asked that the Administration should report to us again, in no later than a year's time, on the further development of the office automation programme and its impact on the provision of secretarial services within the civil service. This has been accepted by the Administration. We will continue to take an active interest in this matter.

Proposed Improvement to Technical Inspectorate Grades

2.25 The Technical Inspectorate grades were last reviewed by the Commission in the context of the 1989 Salary Structure Review. However, staff of the Technical Inspectorate grades and the Works Supervisor grade, as represented by the Joint Working Group for Salary Structure Review on Technical Inspectorate and Related Grades (JWG) had been campaigning vigorously for a review of their pay scales ever since the 1989 Review.

2.26 The main issues raised by the JWG, in its letter to the Commission dated 24 January 1991 and in its numerous subsequent representations to the Administration, were -

- (a) there should be a higher entry point for Assistant Inspectors who were required to possess a Higher Certificate plus three years' post-qualification experience for appointment, and that a benchmark should be established for the qualification of a Higher Certificate;

(b) the Commission was being inconsistent in not broadbanding the maximum pay point of the Senior Inspector rank at MPS Point 39, and Chief Technical Officer rank at MPS Point 44;

(c) job factors which applied to Technical Inspectorate grades had not been taken into account in their pay scales;

(d) Chief Technical Officer should be retitled as Superintendent of Works and not Chief Inspector as suggested by the Commission; and

(e) a fifth tier rank of Senior Superintendent of Works at MPS Point 45-49 should be created.

2.27 The Administration, after repeated negotiations with the JWG, was prepared to support only three of the proposals involved. These included -

(a) revising the appointment requirements for the Assistant Inspector rank to either a Higher Certificate plus four years' relevant experience (of which at least one should be post-qualification); or a Diploma plus three years' relevant post-qualification experience;

(b) changing the current title of Chief Technical Officer to Superintendent of Works; and

(c) creating a fifth-tier rank of Senior Superintendent of Works for grade management duties.

The Administration did not support the JWG's request for a fresh review of the pay scales of the Technical Inspectorate grades for reasons that - first, there had been no apparent change to the nature of the duties performed by the staff concerned and secondly, there was no evidence to show that their responsibilities had been significantly increased to justify a revision of the pay scales.

2.28 This had resulted in repeated negotiations between the JWG and the Administration over a prolonged period. As a concession to obtaining the JWG's agreement to move forward with the three improvement proposals outlined in paragraph 2.27 above, the Administration had agreed to forward to the Commission, both the JWG's proposals and the Administration's objections, for our consideration.

2.29 At our meeting in October 1995, we undertook a thorough examination of both the JWG's proposals and the Administration's recommendations. No decision was reached at the conclusion of our discussion. It was however clear to us that the proposed title of Superintendent of Works was not an appropriate replacement for the title of Chief Technical Officer because of its pay implications when related to other Superintendent grades, notwithstanding the Administration's assurance that it had reached an understanding with the JWG that the proposed title change would not carry any pay implications. The Administration undertook to seek further confirmation from the JWG.

2.30 We also requested a more detailed account from the Administration on how the comparison between the proposed Superintendent/Senior Superintendent of Works and professionals/senior professionals had been made which had resulted in the Administration's view that senior professionals (with a salary scale of MPS Point 45-49) were in fact performing a more important job than the proposed Senior

Superintendent of Works for the Technical Inspectorate grades and that, therefore, the salary scale for the latter could not be set on a par with that for the senior professionals.

2.31 With regard to the Administration's specific proposals for the Technical Inspectorate grades as set out in paragraph 2.27 above, our preliminary view was that we saw no objection to changing the appointment requirements for the Assistant Inspector rank as proposed. We were also content with the proposed creation of a fifth tier rank for grade management duties but we would like to be further advised by the Administration on the title and salary scales to be proposed for this new rank, after the Administration had completed reconsideration.

2.32 We understand the Administration is reconsidering the JWG's submission, in the light of our preliminary comments.

Informal Discussions with Major Staff Associations

2.33 In addition to tendering advice on improvement proposals to individual grades, we also carried out a series of informal discussions with major staff associations during the year so as to be apprised of issues of concern to them and enhance communication on the basis of the good rapport already achieved with them through similar meetings in previous years. The major staff associations included the Staff Side of the Model Scale 1 Staff Consultative Council, the Association of Expatriate Civil Servants of Hong Kong, the Senior Non-Expatriate Officers Association and the Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association. We find these discussions highly useful and hope to continue to hold similar discussions as and when required.