

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF INDIVIDUAL GRADES

2.1 During the year, we were invited by the Administration to advise on a number of proposals dealing with individual grades. The gist of our deliberations and recommendations are set out in the following paragraphs.

#### Upgrading of Entry Qualification of the Land Inspector grade in the Lands Department

2.2 The proposal to upgrade the Land Inspector (LI) grade from a grade not requiring a full School Certificate to a School Certificate grade was first examined by the Commission in the context of the 1989 Salary Structure Review. There was, however, insufficient evidence to justify the proposal.

2.3 In 1992, the upgrading proposal was reviewed by the then Buildings and Lands Department which focused on the new responsibilities assumed by LIs since 1989 as well as the increased complexity of existing duties. The Department's conclusion was that the upgrading proposal could be supported. Following detailed examination by Civil Service Branch, the Administration submitted the upgrading proposal to the Commission.

2.4 The Administration recommended that the LI grade be upgraded to Group I of the School Certificate group, with new entry requirement set at passes in five subjects in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education including English Language (Syllabus B), Chinese Language and Mathematics. Since the existing pay scale of the LI grade was set at two points above norm in recognition of special job factors such as working in remote areas and possible confrontation with members of the public, the Administration proposed that the new pay scales of LIs upon upgrading be set at one point above the norm as follows -

	<u>Existing Scale</u>	Pay Norm for Group I of School <u>Certificate Grades</u>	<u>Proposed Scale</u>
LI/II	MPS 3 - 12 (currently \$8,655 - \$15,135)	MPS 3 - 15 (currently \$8,655 - \$17,710)	MPS 4 - 16 (currently \$9,215 - \$18,595)

LII	MPS 13 - 17 (currently \$16,050 - \$19,535)	MPS 16 - 21 (currently \$18,595 - \$23,725)	MPS 17 - 22 (currently \$19,535 - \$24,850)
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2.5 At the Commission's meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> March 1996, we accepted that the duties of LIs had become more arduous over the years and that enhancement of entry requirement and pay scale would assist in the retention of LIs and upgrade the quality of new recruits. We endorsed the Administration's proposal that the LI grade be upgraded to Group I of the School Certificate group with revised salary scales as set out in paragraph 2.4 above. Our views and recommendations on the upgrading proposal were conveyed to the Governor in a letter dated 25<sup>th</sup> March 1996 (Appendix D). The upgrading proposal and the revised pay scales were implemented on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1996.

### **Replacement of Existing Age Requirements by General Attributes Required of Candidates**

2.6 On 16<sup>th</sup> August 1994, Civil Service Branch issued Circular Memorandum No. 51/94 asking Heads of Departments/Heads of Grades to replace existing age requirements for appointment purposes by general attributes required of candidates, unless the age requirements could be exceptionally justified, such as for health or safety reasons. A Private Member's Bill, the Equal Opportunities (Family Responsibility, Sexuality and Age) Bill, was introduced into the Legislative Council in June 1996. The Bill made it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against a person on the ground of, inter alia, age at the time of recruitment.

2.7 Among the grades under the Commission's purview, the pay scales of the following ranks in seven respective grades took account of, inter alia, age requirement -

	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Pay Scale</u>	<u>Age Requirement</u>
(a)	Social Security Assistant	MPS 7-17	at least 21
(b)	Welfare Worker	MPS 7-17	at least 21
(c)	Assistant Census and Survey Officer	MPS 7-17	at least 21

(d)	Transport Inspector	MPS 9-19	at least 25
(e)	Labour Inspector II	MPS 9-21	at least 21
(f)	Tax Inspector II	MPS 10-19	25 - 35
(g)	Land Executive	MPS 15-33	25 - 35

2.8 Having reviewed the job requirements of the grades and the attributes of successful applicants, the Heads of Departments of these seven grades all proposed to replace age requirements by general attributes such as maturity, inter-personal or communication skills and working experience. They further proposed that, notwithstanding the removal of the age requirement, the existing pay scales should be retained. This was supported by the Administration.

2.9 The implication of this proposal on other civil service grades was examined. The Administration could not find any other grade which required the general attributes mentioned above but did not have a corresponding adjustment in pay scales. The Administration also considered that cases where a particular grade would claim additional pay points on account of requiring such general attributes of its staff would be few and far between.

2.10 At the Commission's meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1996, we endorsed the Administration's proposal to remove age from the entry requirements of civil service grades. As regards the seven ranks concerned, we agreed that their existing pay scales should be retained. We were satisfied that this arrangement would not give rise to claims for pay revision by other grades. Our views and recommendations were conveyed to the Governor in a letter dated 16<sup>th</sup> September 1996 (Appendix E). The new arrangements were implemented with effect from 31<sup>st</sup> October 1996.

### **Secretarial Services in Government**

2.11 The Administration submitted a second report to the Commission on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1996 on "Secretarial Services in Government". Its first report was submitted to the Commission in June 1995.

2.12 The Commission's views on the first report were published in our Progress Report for 1995 (paragraphs 2.18 to 2.24). Briefly, we considered

that while the Administration's report was comprehensive, it did not put forward any solutions to the questions of how reliance on secretarial staff could be reduced and their productivity maximised. In conveying our views to the Administration through a letter to the Secretary for the Civil Service dated 1<sup>st</sup> September 1995, we asked the Administration to report to the Commission, no later than in 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.

2.13 In the current report, the Administration gave a detailed account of work undertaken since August 1995. There were three studies respectively on the progress of phase one of the Government Office Automation (GOA) Programme, on the impact of office automation in three Secretariat branches and on the feasibility of developing multi-skilling in the secretarial and clerical grades. On the basis of these studies, the Administration considered that the GOA Programme had produced changes in the mode of operation of secretaries and their principals. It was clear that the future direction for the secretarial and clerical grades would lie in the development of multi-skilling. Training in the use of word-processing software and computer equipment was necessary. In the longer term, the secretarial and clerical grades should be reorganised into a general office support grade. According to the Administration, two additional studies would be carried out in September and October 1996 respectively on office automation in all Secretariat branches/agencies, and on the development of multi-skilling among the secretarial and other office support staff in the Education Department.

2.14 At the Commission's meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1996, we noted that useful ground work had been laid for the future. We were concerned, however, that the Administration had taken an inordinate period of time to study problems while the rapid pace of technological development might render obsolete the findings of a lengthy review. We strongly urged the Administration to complete all the necessary studies before the end of 1998 (the scheduled date for the full implementation of the GOA Programme) and to evolve a firm strategy, accompanied by a realistic time-table, on the overall development of secretarial services in Government. We also requested that an update report should be submitted to the Commission, in a year's time, on the progress of the review, with particular reference to the interface between the various studies and the GOA Programme.

2.15 Our views and recommendations were conveyed to the Administration via a letter to the Secretary for the Civil Service dated 11<sup>th</sup>

October 1996 (Appendix F). Our recommendations were accepted by the Administration. We will continue to monitor the further development of this issue.

### **Dialect Allowance for Interpreter (Simultaneous Interpretation) Grade**

2.16 Dialect allowance is a job-related allowance classified under the category of Extraneous Duties Allowance. It is currently payable to staff in the Chinese Language Officer (CLO), Court Interpreter (CI) and Police Interpreter (PI) grades who have passed Government examinations on dialect proficiency and who are partly or wholly engaged in interpretation duties using the approved dialects which include Amoy, Chiu Chow, Foo Chow, Hakka, Hainan, Hoklo, Putonghua, Shanghai and Toishan.

2.17 Eligibility for job-related allowances is determined by reference to a salary cut-off point. Currently, this is MPS Point 33 (\$41,140 per month). Staff on salaries above MPS Point 33 are not eligible for the allowance even though they may be required to perform similar duties. However, the eligibility cut-off rule does not apply to the CLO, CI and PI grades where eligible staff at all ranks have collected the dialect allowance(s) long before this rule was introduced.

2.18 The Interpreter (Simultaneous Interpretation) [I(SI)] grade is a degree grade with two ranks. The entry pay for the I(SI) grade is set at MPS Point 34 (currently \$42,320 per month), in contrast to the normal entry pay for degree grade set at MPS Point 16 (currently \$18,595 per month), to recognise the specialist skills required for simultaneous interpretation. Unlike interpretation staff in the CLO, CI and PI grades, Simultaneous Interpreters (SIs) who are called upon to perform in Putonghua are not paid any allowance.

2.19 The Administration proposed that a dialect allowance, similar to that paid to staff in the CLO, CI and PI grades, be granted to SIs, subject to them passing the Government dialect examination and being engaged partly or wholly in Putonghua interpretation duties.

2.20 At the Commission's meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> November 1996, we noted that the present issue arose because 67 senior officers in the CLO and CI grades at salaries above MPS Point 33 received the dialect allowance, thus giving rise to the claim for parity treatment by SIs. We considered that the right approach to tackle this issue would be for the Administration to stop the payment of dialect allowance to CLOs and CIs who were above the eligibility

cut-off point, rather than to make SIs another exception to the eligibility rule. We were firmly of the view that the following principles stated by the Commission in the past should be upheld -

- (a) job-related allowances should not be allowed to proliferate; and
- (b) eligibility cut-off limits for job-related allowances should be respected, except for very compelling reasons.

2.21 We decided therefore that the SIs' claim for the dialect allowance(s) should be rejected and that the Administration should be asked to review the case of all senior CLOs and CIs currently receiving the dialect allowance(s) in disregard of the cut-off point to see if this arrangement should cease. As a related issue, we urged the Administration to review whether Putonghua, the national language of China, should, after 1997, be listed as a dialect qualifying for an allowance, especially in view of Government's declared aim to make the civil service biliterate and trilingual. Our views and recommendations were conveyed to the Administration via a letter to the Secretary for the Civil Service dated 20<sup>th</sup> November 1996 (Appendix G).