

**For information on
14 May 2012**

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

**Workload of and Work Challenges Faced by
Staff of the Social Security Assistant Grade**

Purpose

The Social Security Assistants (SSA)' Branch of the Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association has written to the Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services, requesting discussion on the manpower situation of the SSA grade staff of the Social Welfare Department (SWD). This paper provides the background information on the above issue and the Administration's response to the concerns raised by the SSA Branch.

Background

2. There are currently 38 Social Security Field Units (SSFUs) under SWD. These SSFUs are responsible for processing Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) and Social Security Allowance (SS Allowance) (including Old Age Allowance and Disability Allowance) applications and cases. There are both departmental grade and general grade staff in each SSFU. The departmental grade staff comprise staff of the Social Security Officer (SSO) grade and the SSA grade. The SSA grade staff are mainly responsible for conducting investigation and assessment of cases, while the SSO grade staff are responsible for authorising cases and office administration.

Manpower issues of the SSA grade

3. SWD understands the concerns of the SSA grade staff about the manpower situation, workload and work pressure, and has been actively

seeking appropriate human resources and implementing various improvement measures according to service needs. SWD implemented the Computerised Social Security System (CSSS) in October 2000 and re-engineered the workflow of SSFUs. Since then, the procedures for handling cases have been substantially improved and the time required has been largely shortened. In the past five years, the total number of CSSA and SS Allowance cases increased by 6.94% (comparing 938 620 cases in 2011-12 with 877 678 cases in 2006-07) (see Annex I) and the total number of recipients by 0.36% (comparing 1 086 676 recipients in 2011-12 with 1 082 760 recipients in 2006-07) (see Annex II). Meanwhile, the establishment of the SSA grade increased by 25.87% (231 posts in total) (comparing 1 124 posts in 2011-12 with 893 posts in 2006-07), representing a net increase of 5.64% in manpower (60 posts in total) after discounting the 171 posts created to replace non-civil service contract staff (see Annex III).

4. In addition, various measures which help relieve the workload of SSAs have been implemented by SWD in recent years. These include:

- (a) implementing risk management and streamlining work procedures to optimise resources and enhance efficiency;
- (b) strengthening the CSSS;
- (c) re-engineering resources by setting up a centralised unit to handle special cases, including cases involving debt recovery as well as fraud investigation and assessment, etc.; and
- (d) commissioning 32 non-governmental organisations to provide employment assistance services for CSSA recipients through 77 projects.

Taking up duties of other colleagues

5. Same as the practice of other government departments, if a substantive officer is absent from duties (including on vacation leave and sick leave, etc.) or a vacancy arises, SWD may, according to actual needs, arrange

for other colleagues to take up the duties to meet the service demand. According to the existing mechanism, if the arrangement lasts for 30 days or above, the officer concerned can receive an acting allowance. SWD understands that staff of the SSA grade are concerned about the arrangement of taking up the duties of other colleagues, and has been closely monitoring the vacancy situation and evaluating the service manpower requirement. Every effort has been made to expedite the recruitment process for filling vacancies. A new round of recruitment exercise for SSAs has commenced, and interviews are arranged to be conducted starting from May 2012. We hope that the vacancies can be filled as soon as possible.

Per capita workload indicator

6. Owing to the different natures and levels of complexity of various types of social security cases (for instance, the complexity and workload for handling unemployment CSSA cases are different from those for elderly CSSA cases) and SWD's responsibility to provide timely assistance and services for all clients in need, SWD cannot simply impose a cap on the number of cases to be handled by each staff of the SSA grade per month. At present, SWD already has an established mechanism to review the workload of frontline staff of SSFUs on a half-yearly basis. Upon calculation of the required manpower of each SSFU, SWD will, according to circumstances, deploy manpower and examine the need for additional posts as appropriate.

Training courses

7. SWD always attends to the training needs of staff of the social security grades. Training courses and support programmes are organised regularly so as to enhance staff's knowledge and skills at work, facilitate their performance of duties, foster team spirits and maintain healthy work-life balance, and at the same time enhance their awareness of stress management and strengthen their skills in handling stress at work. SWD will continue to

explore practical and feasible measures to streamline workflow, and organise training courses and support programmes to meet staff's needs.

Way forward

8. In the 2012-13 financial year, SWD will increase 11 posts in the SSA grade. It will also split one of the SSFUs so as to redistribute manpower and strengthen the support for SSFU frontline staff in various aspects (such as supervisory and clerical support). In addition, SWD will explore the possibility of deploying internal resources with a view to increasing the manpower of SSFUs within the limited room for manoeuvre.

9. SWD will also review the working environment of frontline staff on an on-going basis, with a view to making improvements whenever feasible, and will continue to maintain close communication with staff and staff unions so as to provide them with appropriate assistance.

Social Welfare Department

May 2012

The Caseload of Social Security Field Units
of the Social Welfare Department

Financial Year ⁽¹⁾	Type of Cases		
	CSSA	SS Allowance	Total
2006-07	294 204	583 474	877 678
2007-08	285 773	594 341	880 114
2008-09	289 469	612 128	901 597
2009-10	287 822	627 816	915 638
2010-11	282 732	642 979	925 711
2011-12	275 383	663 237	938 620

Note (1): Figures of each financial year are those as at the end of the financial year.

The Number of Recipients handled by Social Security Field Units
of the Social Welfare Department

Financial Year ⁽¹⁾	Type of Recipients		
	CSSA	SS Allowance	Total
2006-07	517 875	564 885	1 082 760
2007-08	490 243	576 462	1 066 705
2008-09	478 562	597 433	1 075 995
2009-10	479 167	612 946	1 092 113
2010-11	462 564	629 020	1 091 584
2011-12	439 216	647 460	1 086 676

Note (1): Figures of each financial year are those as at the end of the financial year.

Establishment of the SSA Grade
in the Social Welfare Department

Financial Year ⁽¹⁾	Rank		Total
	SSA	Senior Social Security Assistant	
2006-07	406	487	893
2007-08	486	487	973
2008-09	577	487	1 064
2009-10	598	509	1 107
2010-11	599	519	1 118
2011-12	604	520	1 124

Note (1): Figures of each financial year are those as at the end of the financial year.