

Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Chairman, Legislative Council
Panel on Public Service
c/o Legislative Council Secretariat
8 Jackson Road, Central
Hong Kong

17 December 1999

Dear Mr TAM,

LegCo Panel on Public Service
Meeting scheduled on 20 December 1999
Staff Consultative Machinery of the Civil Service

Thank you for inviting the Staff Side of the Senior Civil Service Council (SCSC) to present its views on the staff consultative machinery of the Civil Service, which covers both the central level and departmental level.

- (1) The Staff Side, SCSC, does not consider there are circumstances which necessitate any fundamental changes in terms of its composition, constitution or modus operandi as specified in the 1968 Agreement, signed between the Administration and the three constituent staff associations, namely, the AECS (Association of Expatriate Civil Servants of Hong Kong), the HKCCSA (Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association) and the SNEOA (Senior Non-Expatriate Officers' Association). Moreover, the criteria for considering admission of civil service staff unions to the SCSC has functioned well over the years. The Staff Side therefore does not see the need for any fundamental change.
- (2) What is most important of all is the spirit of good and genuine staff consultation in general, and in particular under the SCSC machinery as enshrined in the 1968 Agreement. Regrettably, this spirit has deteriorated markedly in recent years.
- (3) We must point out that over the past few years, there has been virtually no prior staff consultation before the Administration formulates and lays down its

policies/proposals/plans/packages/changes. Such changes are usually thrown open to the Staff Side for consideration only about the same time when they are made known to the mass media or on occasions, even before they are made known to the Staff Side. And when the Staff Side is informed its response is invariably required under very tight time constraints. We find this mode of consultation unnecessarily rushed, superficial and thus insincere. We believe this approach is deliberately aimed at achieving the effect of pressuring the Staff Side into making hasty decisions on important issues which is not to the ultimate good of the Civil Service. The Administration's attitude and way of handling the Civil Service Reform proposals and the various related working groups are very vivid examples.

- (4) Another example is the failure of the Administration and the Standing Commission to conduct prior consultation before the Starting Salaries Review. The Staff Side had requested the Administration to conduct a comprehensive consultation of the civil service unions and staff associations of the various grades throughout the Civil Service before the review was launched. This request was turned down.
- (5) At the departmental level, the spirit of consultation varies. We understand that there are many problems/disputes in staff consultation and communication between the departmental management and staff unions on important issues, such as the implementation of EPP and privatization/corporatization plans in departments such as the Housing Department. Unresolved disputes have already prompted staff unrest and a deterioration in staff relations which is detrimental to the necessity of maintaining stability in the Civil Service.

We are strongly of the view that the Administration and Departmental/Grade managements should adopt a more positive approach in staff consultation and treat civil servants as their true partners. In this way they can formulate feasible and practicable ways and means to improve their services to the public.

Yours sincerely,

(Barry J Brown)
Staff Side Chairman

Senior Civil Service Council