

**For meeting on
14 February 2000**

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

**An Information Note on
Manpower Situation of Social Security Assistants**

Introduction

The Social Security Assistants' Branch (SSA Branch) of the Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association, comprising the Social Security Assistant (SSA) and Senior Social Security Assistant (SSSA) ranks of staff of Social Welfare Department (SWD), met with members of the Legislative Council on the manpower situation of Social Security Assistants.

2. This paper provides the background information and the Administration's response on the issue.

Background

3. SWD operates 38 Social Security Field Units (SSFUs) which are mainly responsible for processing applications for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA), Social Security Allowance (SSA) and Fee Assistance (FA). There are both departmental and general grade staff in each SSFU. The departmental grade staff of SSFU comprises Social Security Officers (SSO) and Social Security Assistants. In general, the SSA grades are responsible for conducting investigation and assessing the assistance payable on various types of social security cases while the SSO grades are responsible for authorizing the payment of cases and office administration.

Staffing Position

4. To meet the increasing number of CSSA applications and cases, SWD has been providing additional staff to SSFUs. In the period between 1995/96 and 1998/99, 257 posts have been added to the original

623 in the SSA grade, representing a 41% increase in the number of posts (Annex I). In 1999/2000, another 133 posts in the SSA Grade were created. In other words, the establishment of the SSA Grade was expanded by 63% within four years. The provision of additional staff were meant for implementing a new Support for Self-reliance Scheme to provide additional assistance for unemployed CSSA recipients, strengthening investigation to combat fraud and meeting increase in caseload. The establishment and strength of SSA grade staff as at 1.1.2000 is at Annex II.

5. Despite these developments, the SSA Branch opined that the increase in staff was insufficient to meet the increase in workload. They pressed frequently for more staff, overtime allowance, etc.

6. As a result of the implementation of the Support for Self-reliance Scheme, the workload of SSSA rank has become heavier because they will provide employment assistance to unemployed CSSA applicants when handling their applications for financial assistance. In order to relieve the work pressure of the SSA grade staff, SWD has introduced a range of measures, including:

- (a) re-shuffling the duties of SSSA and SSA so that SSA can take up part of the investigation work related to simple cases;
- (b) deploying staff flexibly in accordance with the workload of individual SSFUs;
- (c) relaxing the review cycle from 6 months to 12 months for CSSA unemployment cases with job seekers at the Active Employment Assistance (AEA) programme under the Support for Self-reliance (SFS) Scheme;
- (d) simplifying the statistical reports on the Support for Self-reliance Scheme to reduce manpower involved in collecting data and preparing the reports; and
- (e) extending the review cycle of Normal Disability Allowance cases by matching them with the validity period of the relevant medical reports.

The Way Forward

7. The total number of new CSSA applications from April 1999 to December 1999 had dropped by 31% (from 75915 to 51880) compared with the same period in 1998 (Annex III). The total number of CSSA cases also stabilized at around 235 000 and started decreasing continuously since June 99. This, to a great extent, has reduced the work pressure of the SSA grade.

8. Nevertheless, SWD will implement the following to further alleviate staff's work pressure:

- (a) create additional posts when resources are available;
- (b) conduct risk management study to improve resources allocation and efficiency;
- (c) re-write the operational manual of procedures before April 2000 to streamline work procedures and provide clear guidelines for staff;
- (d) implement a new computer system, the Computerized Social Security System (CSSS), in October 2000 to simplify work process and enhance service quality; and
- (e) conduct an overall review of the manning requirement of the SSFUs after implementation of the CSSS.

Conclusion

9. SWD will maintain close dialogue with the SSA Branch on manpower and operational issues and continue to monitor the staffing position in the SSFUs to ensure efficient service to the public.

Social Welfare Department
February 2000

Approved Establishment of SSA grade in SSFUs

Rank	95/96	96/97	97/98	98/99	99/00
SSA	395	405	420	452	510*
SSSA	228	349	364	428	503
Total	623	754	784	880	1013

* Including 73 new posts to be created.

**Establishment and Strength of SSA Grade Staff in SSFUs
as at 1.1.2000**

(a) Total no. of posts for SSFUs

	SSSA	SSA	Total
Establishment	503	437	940
New posts to be created		73	73
		Total	1013

(b) Total no. of staff in SSFUs

	SSSA	SSA	Total
Strength	503	343	846
Add : non-civil service contract staff		122	122
Doubling sideways posts		45	45
		Total	1013

(c) Staff shortfall = (a) – (b) = 0