

Our Ref : HW/W 18/6 (94) Pt. 19
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Secretary General
Legislative Council Secretariat
(Attn : Ms. Doris Chan)
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Citibank Tower
3 Garden Road
Hong Kong
(Fax No. 2509 9055)

Dear Ms. Chan,

At the meeting of the Panel of the Welfare Services on 14 February and 10 April 2000, Members requested for further information on the manning level of Social Security Field Units (SSFUs) and the Support for Self-reliance Scheme.

Manning Level of Social Security Field Units (SSFUs)

The number of Social Security Assistant posts (including Senior Social Security Assistant and Social Security Assistant) and the caseload under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme and Social Security Allowance (SSA) Scheme in recent years are summarised below.

	95/96	96/97	97/98	98/99	99/00
No. of Social Security Assistant posts	623	754	784	880	1 013
No. of CSSA cases	136 201	166 720	195 645	232 819	228 015
No. of SSA cases	498 166	510 091	517 865	526 742	535 452

It would be misleading to assess the workload of the SSFU staff simply by comparing changes in the total number of social security cases with changes in the number of SSFU staff, without looking at the composition of the social security caseload.

In fact, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) is planning its manpower requirement in SSFUs according to projected case activities (i.e. the number of new applications, review and closure of existing cases, etc.) rather than projected total caseload. I trust you will recognise that the amount of work relating to handling a CSSA unemployment case will be quite different from handling a CSSA elderly case. It would be even more misleading to lump CSSA cases together with SSA cases. As the two types of cases involve very different handling procedures in terms of requirement for home visits, need for periodic reviews, payment of supplements and special grants, etc.

Report on Review of the Manning Requirements of SSFUs

I enclose a copy of the report of the Review on Manning Standard of the Social Security Field Units (SSFUs) conducted by the Management Services Agency (MSA) in 1995. As we have pointed out before, the review report is outdated because there have been lots of changes in policies and procedures after the review. Some of the significant changes that have affected the manpower requirement of SSFUs include:

- auto-extension of payment for CSSA old age cases;
- introduction of a flat rate grant for school related expenses;
- relaxation of review cycle of CSSA unemployment cases;
- implementation of the Support for Self-reliance Scheme; and
- re-shuffling of duties of the SSA ranks.

As SWD will re-engineer the existing workflow and procedures in SSFUs when the new Computerized Social Security System becomes operational in October 2000, SWD has plans to conduct another overall review of the manning requirement of the SSFUs. We believe this will provide a more relevant basis for the planning of manpower requirement in SSFUs in future.

Active Employment Assistance Scheme

We recognise that many CSSA recipients would require more assistance in seeking jobs. And vocational training and retraining programmes are useful in preparing them to rejoin the workforce. Under the Active Employment Assistance (AEA) Scheme, SSFU staff will interview the participants regularly and help them identify their training needs. The staff will also provide them with information on training opportunities available and make necessary referrals. In the first year after the AEA Scheme was

introduced, SWD referred 3 300 participants to various training organisations (e.g. Employees Retraining Board, Construction Industry Training Authority, etc.). ERB's records show that about 2 700 CSSA recipients took part in its training courses between June 1999 and January 2000. This showed a 42% improvement over the same period before introduction of the AEA Scheme. It also demonstrates that many participants in fact enroll at vocational training and retraining programmes at their own initiatives.

We will continue to encourage CSSA recipients to receive retraining where appropriate. Under the Promoting Self-reliance Strategy to be introduced later this year, we will commission NGOs to provide tailor-made employment assistance programmes to cater for the needs of different categories of CSSA recipients. The planned services include training and retraining programmes, job counselling, job placement and job attachment.

Salary Profile of AEA participants who have found jobs

Between June 1999 and January 2000, about 900 AEA participants had found jobs. Their salary profile is as follows :

<u>Monthly Income</u>	<u>Share (%)</u>
\$1,500 – 3,499	18
\$3,500 – 5,499	32
\$5,500 – 7,499	31
\$7,500 – 9,499	10
\$9,500 – 11,499	5
\$11,500 – 13,499	3
\$13,500 – 15,499	1
Total	<u>100</u>

However, SWD do not maintain the statistics on how many of them had sequently quitted their jobs and applied for CSSA again.

Yours sincerely,

(C H L O)
for Secretary for Health and Welfare

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