

**Notes of the 196th Meeting of the
Advisory Committee on Social Work Training and Manpower Planning (ACSWTMP)
held on Monday, 20 July 2020 at 3:00 p.m.
Conducted by video conferencing**

Present:

Professor Chetwyn CHAN Che-hin	(Chairman)
Mr Albert WONG Shun-ye, MH	
Ms Queenie CHAN Lai-kwan, MH	
Dr Eva DUNN Lai-wah, MH	
Ms Michelle IP Mei-ho	
Mr LO Kin-tak	
Ms Rainbow CHEUNG Kam-hung, JP	Hong Kong Social Workers Association (HKSWA)
Mr Cliff CHOI Kim-wah	The Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS)
Professor Steven NGAI Sek-yum	The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK)
Dr Cherry TAM Hau-lin	City University of Hong Kong (CityU)
Professor Petrus NG Yat-nam	Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU)
Professor Daniel LAI Wing-leung	The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU)
Dr Margaret WONG Fung-ye	Hong Kong Shue Yan University (HKSJU)
Professor NG Siu-man	The University of Hong Kong (HKU)
Mr Matthew CHAN Yuen-yan	UOW College Hong Kong / Community College of City University (UOWCHK)
Mr Andrew TSANG Yue-tung	Principal Assistant Secretary for Labour & Welfare (Welfare)1, Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB)
Mr Derek LAI Chi-kin	Principal Assistant Secretary (Higher Education), Education Bureau (EDB)
Miss Shirley CHUNG Yuk-fong	Principal Executive Officer (Human Resource Management), Social Welfare Department (SWD)
Ms Jacqueline KWAN Pui-yin	Senior Executive Officer (Human Resource Management), SWD (Secretary)

In attendance:

Ms Florence TANG Lai-fan	SWD
Ms Ronnie TSE Bik-san	SWD
Miss Annette YAU Cheuk-hei	SWD
Mr Andrew KWAN Kai-ming	SWD
Mr CHAN Yiu-ming	SWD

Absent with apologies:

Mrs Nancy CHAN LAM See

Item I: Matters arising from the 195th ACSWTMP meeting held on 10 July 2019

1. The meeting noted the actions taken in response to Members' concern raised at the 195th ACSWTMP meeting that the social work training places in the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded universities should be increased to address possible manpower shortage in the social work field. Members' views were brought to the UGC-funded universities, the UGC and the participating organisations including training institutions (TIs) on the possible shortage of manpower supply and the need to increase the social work training places to enable an adequate supply of social work graduates.

2. SWD representative updated the budget initiatives introduced in 2018 and 2019 with significant manpower implications, the meeting was noted that –

- (a) Under the implementation of the “*three-year pilot scheme on social work service for pre-primary institutions (PPIs) in phases*”, 31 social work teams (including 28 full-teams and 6 half-teams), totalling 279 social work personnel (SWPs), were set up in the first two phases in the 2018/19 school year. For the 3rd phase, i.e. the 2020/21 school year, 15 teams with 135 SWPs had been formed and commenced service in August 2020. Under the whole pilot scheme, a total of 414 SWPs would be recruited.
- (b) For the “*one school social worker for each school in primary schools*”, in the 2018/19 school year, about half of the public sector primary schools switched to New Funding Mode (NFM) to employ social workers with degree qualification. In the 2019/20 school year, another 86 schools switched to NFM. The rest of the schools would need to switch to NFM by the 2020/21 school year.
- (c) The new initiative of “*two school social workers for each school in secondary schools*” was fully implemented since the beginning of the 2019/20 school year. In response to the local social incidents, 18 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) had enhanced school social work services in more than 220 secondary schools, which were about half of the secondary day schools, ahead of the original schedule in September 2019. The remaining 16 NGOs also enhanced school social work services as scheduled.

3. Members offered the following views and comments for the matters arising –

- (a) A Member suggested that funding of training places by the UGC on social work discipline should be on par with that for healthcare disciplines.

LWB/SWD should convey this suggestion to the UGC to maintain a stable supply of social work graduates to the market. EDB representative responded that according to the established mechanism, the Government would issue to the UGC a set of broad planning parameters covering “advice on specific manpower requirements” and “general manpower remarks” in various disciplines. Only a small number of disciplines such as healthcare would require “advice on specific manpower requirements”. For the social work discipline, LWB/SWD would provide “general manpower remarks” for the UGC-funded programmes, which EDB would share with the UGC-funded universities through the UGC for preparing planning exercise proposals. According to past experience, universities would take into account the Government’s “general manpower remarks” as far as possible.

- (b) Members noted that there were also self-financing TIs offering social work training programmes in the market. Members should take an exhaustive stock of all available training avenues be the UGC-funded or self-financing in assessing the overall supply situation of social work graduates.
- (c) About Members’ concern on the lead time for increasing the supply of social work graduates by the UGC-funded universities, EDB representative responded that the first cohort under the 2022/23 to 2024/25 triennium would only graduate in 2026. As such, a time gap between manpower planning and actual manpower supply in the UGC-funded sector would be unavoidable. In contrast, self-financing TIs might have more flexibility in meeting the evolving needs of the sector by adjusting the number of social work training places within a shorter period.
- (d) Members agreed that it was important to maintain a good balance between the supply of the UGC-funded training programmes and that of the self-financing sector for sustainable development. A stable supply from the UGC-funded universities would be instrumental to the continuous provision of quality social work training.

Item II: Social Work Manpower Requirements System – Findings of the 2019 annual updating exercise (Paper ACSWTMP/1/2020)

1. SWD representative briefed Members on the major parameters used for projection and findings of the 2019 annual updating exercise. The projection of manpower requirements from 2019-20 to 2023-24 indicated an upsurge in the new demand

for Degree, Diploma and All Social Work Posts, with consequential manpower shortage as projected in the three-year period from 2021-22 to 2023-24. Demand projections for the 3rd to the 5th year, i.e. from 2021-22 to 2023-24 were based on the annual growth rate of the past five years, i.e. from 2016-17 to 2020-21. The leap in projected new demand of the three-year period of 2021-22 to 2023-24 was attributed to the uncommonly high growth rate in 2018-19 and 2019-20, which had factored in around 7% growth rate for Degree Posts and around 5% growth rate for All Social Work Posts. For Members' reference, a different scenario was presented by adopting the average annual growth rate from 2013-14 to 2017-18 as the basis of calculation, i.e. around 3.5%, a consistent trend in these few years. Under this scenario, while a shortage of manpower supply for Diploma Posts could still be anticipated, the projected new supplies for Degree and All Social Work Posts would be able to cover the new demands in 2021-22 to 2023-24. Positive balances of graduates potentially available to join the social work field for Degree, Diploma and All Social Work Posts were also projected from 2021-22 to 2023-24. This scenario would serve as a reference on top of the existing mechanism of the Social Work Manpower Requirements System (SWMRS) in considering the manpower requirements trend for the coming years.

2. SWD representative supplemented that due to rapid recent increase of Degree Posts, the wastage rate of Diploma Posts holders in 2018-19 was particularly high, i.e. 12.2% since more degree graduates in Diploma Posts had switched to Degree Posts. The overall wastage rate of All Social Work Posts holders in the social work field was unaffected. It also explained the scenario of the low wastage rate of All Social Work Posts in 2018-19, i.e. 3.2% with the majority of the 12.2% gross of Diploma Posts leavers in 2018-19 remained in social work field as more job opportunities had arisen.

3. Members offered the following views and comments for the findings –

- (a) The Chairman remarked that a significant manpower shortage was projected from 2021-22 to 2023-24 in adopting the annual growth rate of the past five years, i.e. from 2016-17 to 2020-21 under the existing mechanism of the SWMRS. This uncommonly high growth rate in 2018-19 and 2019-20 could be partially net out by a small buffer on the basis of the projected, consistently average growth rate from 2013-14 to 2017-18. Both possibilities were open to Members for analysis of future manpower requirements.
- (b) SWD representative explained that the System had also captured the inter-grade movement, i.e. number of cases switching from Diploma Posts to Degree Posts and vice versa. Wastage cases for All Social Work Posts would be shown in the Annual Report after discounting the cases involving inter-grade movement to

reflect the wastage rate of the overall social work field. In 2018-19, the wastage cases for All Social Work Posts was 510 or 3.2%, which was on the low side amongst the recent years.

- (c) Some Members observed that with increased service needs, a number of organisations had recently created more Degree Posts, providing opportunities to Diploma staff with degree qualifications to switch to Degree Posts. It was believed that the increase of Degree Posts in the social work field had contributed to the large number of turnover cases in 2018-19. There was also a concern about the high turnover and wastage rates of Diploma Posts holders throughout the years which might have affected the stability of services and advocated maintenance of adequate SWP to take up Diploma Posts in the market. This manpower suggestion should be pursued alongside with a review of the degree and diploma social work training programmes.
- (d) Some Members considered that the increase of Degree Posts could enhance the stability of the manpower in the social work field as it provided incentive and aspiration to SWP currently occupying Diploma Posts for better career prospects. Due to recent increased complexity of service requirements, there was corresponding demand for quality service which employing organisations believed degree holders should be competent to deliver. It was also observed that the high turnover and wastage rates of Diploma Posts holders representing a positive escalation of SWP to Degree Posts in the social work field.
- (e) In response to enquiry about whether the SWMRS Office could provide qualitative data such as manpower requirements in terms of service types and the specialisation of SWP, SWD representative replied that since there was no clear-cut classification of the “service type” provided by the SWP in the sector, participating organisations might have practical difficulty in providing such additional information to the SWMRS Office. This could frustrate the response rate of the updating exercise.
- (f) A Member remarked whether the future demand for social work posts would be as rapid as in 2018-19 and 2019-20 or as slow down by the SWMRS Office scenario would depend on the latest development of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) Pandemic. Risks might arise as new demand might slow down due to stringent financial policies of organisations amid the epidemic. However, additional social problems such as family conflicts and unemployment might arise pursuant to the epidemic. While the demand in coming years might be close to the projection under the SWMRS methodology,

it was also enquired if such projection was supported by similar historical trends. In view of imminent service needs, it was suggested that resources should be evenly distributed between the UGC and the self-financing sector.

- (g) In response, the meeting was informed that the social work manpower demand-supply data over the past 20 years were available in the SWMRS Annual Reports. Two major declines in demand occurred from 1997-98 until after the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic in 2003 and after the global financial crisis in 2008. The historical data and the scenario prepared by the SWMRS Office might be an additional reference to assist Members realistically assess the demand projection. Generally speaking, the demand for social work posts recorded a fluctuating but upward trend throughout the years. Despite intermittent slowdowns, the overall demand was still on a gradual increase.
- (h) A Member opined that under normal circumstances, i.e. without major changes in the Government policies, the annual average growth rate of around 3.5% for Degree, Diploma and All Social Work Posts under the scenario prepared by the SWMRS Office could be a reference for Members to consider the future demand. It was also anticipated that TIs might be early alerted for the manpower trends so that they could respond in a timely manner.
- (i) A Member remarked that the Task Force for Review on Enhancement of Lump Sum Grant Subvention System (LSGSS) had been discussing the service review for notional staffing establishments, in particular for those complicated cases calling for services from degree graduates. The Government should early alert the sector in case the reviews would carry any implications for better manpower planning. With the possible increase of service demand, it was agreed to increase the number of the UGC-funded social work training places as it was reasonable to apply government resources for the increased publicly-funded services. Another Member agreed that graduates from both the self-financing and the UGC sectors were registered social workers (RSWs) recognised by the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) and could take up social work posts for publicly-funded or non-publicly-funded services.
- (j) SWD representative shared that in the SWMRS annual updating exercises, participating organisations would provide figures of anticipated new posts for the planned projects for the next two years to be reflected in the SWMRS projections. SWD would also conduct an internal exercise to project the creation of posts for the 3rd to 5th year although these figures were still fluid.

Subject to its outcome, manpower implications brought by the Review on Enhancement of LSGSS might be captured in the SWMRS projections under the existing methodology. In addition, the number of non-subsidised social work posts, such as those for the social enterprises, was also increasing. The SWMRS Office had included these organisations with SWP in the database of the updating exercise to expand the pool and enhance its representativeness.

- (k) In response to Member's concern on whether the "*Special Scheme on Privately Owned Sites for Welfare Uses*" might bring manpower implications to the sector, SWD representative replied that the majority of projects under the Special Scheme were still in progress and it was understood that these anticipated posts would involve in the health-related professionals/manpower for such services as elderly and rehabilitation. The SWMRS Office would continue to keep in view of the latest development of the projects under the Special Scheme and factor in any manpower implications in its projections.
- (l) SWD representative supplemented that on the basis of estimated number of posts submitted by the participating organisations, projections for the first year should be more accurate. Besides, a modified approach would be adopted for calculation of the net additional staff requirements for the 2nd year in order to take into account the more conservative approach adopted by most of the data suppliers in the estimation. The net additional staff requirements for the 3rd to the 5th year would be covered by SWD's internal exercise. However, since such projected figures were usually low, the moving weighted average of establishment growth rates of recent five years would be adopted to project the manpower requirements for the 3rd to the 5th year in a general approach. The scenario prepared by the SWMRS Office for the average annual growth rate from 2013-14 to 2017-18 had already smoothed out exceptional factors which could significantly affect the projections. Under this scenario, Members could project the manpower requirements in the coming years with a steady growth rate with a clearer picture of the real situation.
- (m) A Member reminded the paramount importance to maintain a stable supply of social work graduates to the field. In view of the economic uncertainty, Members should stay cautious when reviewing the manpower situation to avoid oversupply of social work graduates which might deter students from enrolling for the social work programmes. The Chairman agreed and supplemented that the projected balance between the new supply and new demand for All Social Work Posts in 2023-24 varied from around -190 to around 230 under the two projection methodologies prepared by the SWMRS Office. Taking into

account the possible economic recession in the coming years, Members should critically review the data and the manpower requirements.

- (n) A Member considered that the manpower shortage forecasted under the SWMRS methodology had factored in the budget initiatives with the upsurge of social work posts introduced in 2018-19 and 2019-20 so that an exceptional high growth rate of around 7% was projected for the Degree Posts from 2021-22 to 2023-24. However, since there were no signs of major projects involving large number of SWP in the coming years, it was believed that the scenario prepared by the SWMRS Office, which had projected the demand under a natural growth rate derived from 2013-14 to 2017-18 of about 3.5%, would be a better reference for Members to conduct manpower planning.
- (o) Another Member remarked that manpower shortage during economic recession in 2002-03 and from 2004-05 to 2008-09 might imply greater demand for social services. It was observed that the mental health review recently conducted by the Review Committee on Mental Health under Food and Health Bureau also suggested that the demand for mental health social services might increase in the coming years. The gradual increase in overall demand for social services throughout the years indicated a corresponding need to increase the overall supply of graduates in the social work field and to maintain a slight buffer for additional services in future.
- (p) The Chairman indicated that ACSWTMP's appeal last year for the increase of social work training places should have been taken heed and positively followed up starting this year. A steady increase of supply of social work graduates in coming years might not call for drastic further increase at this juncture. With the completion of the budget initiatives introduced in 2018-19 and 2019-20 which brought exceptional increase in social work posts, the demand for further growth for the coming years should become steadier. Thus it was also believed that the SWMRS Office's adoption of steady growth rate of about 3.5% derived from 2013-14 to 2017-18 and the slight buffer of social work manpower projected in the market would serve as a better reference. The Chairman reiterated that the oversupply of manpower should be avoided as this could deter students' enthusiasm to pursue studies in the social work discipline and would pose a negative effect on the future manpower planning. Should there be any future government projects that required large number of SWP, the ACSWTMP would be alerted for early deliberation.

4. After deliberations, the Chairman concluded Members' views as follows –
- (a) With increasing service needs pitched at degree level, it was observed that a large number of degree graduates occupying Diploma Posts had switched to Degree Posts. While there was a need to maintain certain level of Diploma Posts in the market to deliver the required service, future training should focus on degree graduates;
 - (b) With the completion of budget initiatives introduced in 2018-19 and 2019-20, the demand for social work manpower in the coming years was likely to stabilise at the level of natural growth rate in the past. However, as the future manpower demand would hinge on the economic situation, the manpower planning should be conducted in a prudent manner to avoid significant oversupply of social work manpower to the market; and
 - (c) Equal importance should be attached to the balance between the UGC-funded and the self-financing training programmes to ensure stable supply of social work graduates into the field.

ACSWTMP Secretariat
May 2021