

**Notes of the 197th Meeting of the
Advisory Committee on Social Work Training and Manpower Planning (ACSWTMP)
held on Friday, 16 July 2021 at 10:30 a.m.
Conducted by video conferencing**

Present:

Professor Chetwyn CHAN Che-hin	(Chairman)
Mrs Nancy CHAN LAM See	
Ms Queenie CHAN Lai-kwan, MH	
Dr Eva DUNN Lai-wah, MH	
Mr LO Kin-tak	
Ms Catherine WONG Pui-yee	
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)
Dr Celia CHAN Hoi-yan	The University of Hong Kong (HKU)
Professor Steven NGAI Sek-yum	The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK)
Professor Shirley HUNG Suet-lin	Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU)
Dr Cherry TAM Hau-lin	City University of Hong Kong (CityU)
Dr Jessica LI Chi-mei	The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU)
Dr Margaret WONG Fung-yee	Hong Kong Shue Yan University (HKSYU)
Mr Ivan WONG Yun-tat	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
Miss Sammi HUI Kwai-fan	SWD
Ms Iris WONG Yuk-ling	SWD
Miss Annette YAU Cheuk-hei	SWD
Mr Andrew KWAN Kai-ming	SWD
Mr CHAN Yiu-ming	SWD

In attendance for agenda item 1:

Ms Agnes HO Yuen-ming	SWD
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Absent with apologies:

Ms Michelle IP Mei-ho

Item I: Sharing on the Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care

1. SWD representative briefed Members on the major work of the Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care (I&T Fund). The \$1 billion I&T Fund was set up in December 2018 and would be progressively disbursed in the five-year period starting from 2019-20. It aimed to subsidise elderly and rehabilitation service units to procure, rent and trial use technology products so as to improve the quality of life of service users as well as reduce the burden and pressure of care staff and carers. As at June 2021, over \$290 million grants had been approved for more than 1 100 elderly and rehabilitation service units to procure or rent over 7 000 items of technology products. A mid-term evaluation on the application of the I&T Fund had been completed and most of the participants agreed that the procurement and renting of technology products could enhance the quality of life of the service users, reduce the risks for care staff and carers and enhance the overall effectiveness of care in return. Another large-scale evaluation for the I&T Fund would be conducted by end 2021 to discuss the way forward. It was also observed that senior frontline staff might find less familiar with the new practices with the use of technology products. To help them adjust and learn such skills, service units were encouraged to fully utilise the I&T Fund and arrange staff training conducted by professional staff or product suppliers.

2. SWD representative supplemented that due to the reduction of physical contacts amid the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, service units had been utilising technology products such as video conferencing tools to communicate with service users and maintain rehabilitation training as far as possible. It would be an opportune time for service units to integrate gerontechnology in their services provided. To facilitate the integration of technology in welfare service provision, students of the social work training programmes should enhance their exposure on technology at the early stage and prepare themselves to lead the technological application in corporate governance and service delivery. Some events promoting gerontechnology, for instance, the Gerontech and Innovation Expo cum Summit (GIES) jointly hosted by the Government and The Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS), would be a suitable avenue for students in acquisition of knowledge about the global development of gerontechnology in service delivery, and perception of the opportunities and challenges for introducing technology products in welfare service.

3. A Member opined that although time might be taken for frontline staff to recognise and accept the application of technology products in service delivery, it was beneficial for improving the quality of lives of the service users in the long run. To keep abreast of the latest development of gerontechnology, it was suggested to review the Reference List of

Recognised Technology Application Products under the I&T Fund regularly. It was also hoped that SWD could provide subsidies for headquarters of the service units to integrate technology in their service management and enhance staff training in technological advancement.

Item II: Matters arising from the 196th ACSWTMP meeting held on 20 July 2020

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

- (a) In view of class suspension arrangements for pre-primary institutions (PPIs) under the COVID-19 epidemic, the “*Three-year Pilot Scheme on Social Work Service for PPIs in Phases*” originally scheduled for completion by January 2022 would be extended for six months, i.e. by July 2022. All 46 social work teams (including 35 full-teams and 22 half-teams), totalling 414 social work personnel (SWPs) were set up. Upon completion of the evaluation study for the Pilot Scheme, the way forward of the service would be determined.
- (b) For the “*One School Social Worker for Each School in Primary Schools*”, an addition of 23 primary schools had switched to New Funding Mode (NFM) in the 2020/21 school year, totalling 332 primary schools to employ or hire services provided by social workers with degree qualification. Schools receiving Student Guidance Service Grant who were not able to switch to the NFM owing to the need for more time to handle personnel matters might discuss with Education Bureau (EDB) separately for necessary arrangement.
- (c) Since 1 September 2019, “*Two School Social Workers for Each School in Secondary Schools*” had been fully implemented and creation of all additional Degree Posts had been completed.

Item III: Social Work Manpower Requirements System – Findings of the 2020 annual updating exercise (Paper ACSWTMP/1/2021)

1. SWD representative briefed Members on the major parameters used for projection and findings of the 2020 annual updating exercise. The projection of manpower requirements dropped significantly from its peak in 2020-21 and remained steady in 2021-22 in the new demand for Degree and All Social Work Posts due to the completion of new projects introduced in the 2018 and 2019 Budgets. However, an upsurge in the new demand for Degree and All Social Work Posts was projected in the three-year period from 2022-23 to 2024-25 which led to consequential manpower shortage for Degree Posts and a narrowing

positive balance between the projected new demand and new supply for All Social Work Posts. The demand projections for the 3rd to the 5th year, i.e. from 2022-23 to 2024-25 were based on the annual growth rate of the past five years, i.e. from 2017-18 to 2021-22. The leap in projected new demand of the three-year period from 2022-23 to 2024-25 was attributed to the uncommonly high growth rates in 2018-19 and 2019-20, which had factored in nearly 7% growth rate for Degree Posts and around 5% growth rate for All Social Work Posts.

2. SWD representative presented a different scenario for Members' reference 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 supply for Degree Posts would be able to cover the new demand in 2022-23 to 2024-25. A growing positive balance between the projected new demand and new supply for All Social Work Posts was also observed from 2022-23 to 2024-25. As a result, there would be a continuous growth on the number of social work graduates potentially available for joining the social work field for Degree, Diploma and All Social Work Posts projected from 2022-23 to 2024-25. Though the rapid growth rates of demand for Degree and All Social Work Posts would slow down as reflected in the above scenario, they were still on a relatively high level and would continue to grow steadily from 2022-23 to 2024-25. The first year of projection, i.e. 2020-21, might suggest a moderate growth rate for the next few years as most major budget initiatives introduced in 2018-19 and 2019-20 were completed by 2020-21. This scenario would serve as a reference on top of the existing mechanism of the SWMRS in considering the manpower requirements trend for the coming years.

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

- (a) The Chairman and some Members remarked that the scenario prepared by the SWMRS Office might better reflect the consistent growth rate taking into account the entire situation including the completion of budget initiatives, the possible manpower implications arising from emigration tide and economic downturn. Under the scenario, the positive balance between the projected new demand and new supply for All Social Work Posts by 2024-25 would be 300, resulting in 7% overall manpower surplus out of the estimated strength.
- (b) While the University Grants Committee (UGC) sector would provide a steady supply of social work graduates, the supply from the self-financing sector might be more flexible to meet the evolving needs of the market. However, the tuition fee of the self-financing programmes was relatively high and might cause financial burden to students.

- (c) Some Members considered that the emigration wave might have already emerged in the social work field which might adversely affect the social work manpower planning in the coming years, in particular for those social workers at the middle management level or above. SWD representative remarked that the reference year of the 2020 round SWMRS annual updating exercise was from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 and all wastage cases caused by respective factors including emigration had already been reflected in the exercise, including the drop-out cases of the new supply of social work graduates for the five projection years based on the return from all social work TIs.
- (d) Some Members concerned that the SWMRS annual updating exercise might not be able to timely reflect the changing situation of the social work field, and suggested adopting a more frequent updates and a forward-looking approach to collect the manpower figures. Members should also have any updated information and carry out interim measures when necessary in between the annual updating exercises to keep abreast of the latest development of the sector. SWD representative replied that the SWMRS updating exercise was conducted on an annual basis to keep track of the manpower situation in the social work field and facilitate manpower planning. Having regard to the large number, i.e. over 1 000 local organisations involved in the annual updating exercise, it would take a comparatively long time in liaising with all these organisations to collect the necessary data for compiling the projection statistics. This issue was particularly acute for many of the small-size participating organisations which largely depended on manual updating work and hence, a more frequent updating might not be feasible. Nevertheless, the SWMRS Office would continue to keep in view the manpower situation and capture any new factors timely that would affect the manpower requirements when necessary. The Chairman opined that owing to the complexity of manpower projections, the time gap, i.e. not more than one year, between the updating exercise and the actual situation was considered reasonable. To facilitate better manpower planning, it was hoped that the Government could early alert the sector on any future policy initiatives with significant manpower implications.
- (e) Some Members considered that there would still be a growing demand for SWPs in view of the pressing social issues in the society, including the service needs generated from medical-social collaboration for the healthcare sector, mental health concerns, service enhancements in elderly, rehabilitation and child protection. SWD representative also shared that

upon the completion of budget initiatives introduced in 2018 and 2019 with exceptional number of posts created, the new demand projected in 2020-21 and 2021-22 were still on a relatively high side, i.e. around 900 new Degree Posts created in each year. As announced in the 2021-22 Budget, the government spending in social welfare would not be reduced and therefore a consistent demand for new or enhanced social services was expected. For instance, there would be creation of posts for the Integrated Community Centre for Mental Wellness (ICCMW) providing mental health services, outreaching teams providing youth services, Integrated Home Care Services (IHCS) providing elderly services and on-site pre-school programmes providing rehabilitation services. As such, a stable supply of social work graduates would be essential to meet the continuous service needs.

- (f) In response to enquiry about the way forward of the “*Three-year Pilot Scheme on Social Work Service for PPIs in Phases*”, SWD representative replied that the Pilot Scheme was completed by 2020-21 and all Degree Posts created under the Pilot Scheme had been reflected in the SWMRS. While the evaluation study for the Pilot Scheme would be conducted in 2022, positive feedbacks had been received from the participating NGOs, PPIs and the service users. The Government attached great importance to child protection services at PPIs and such policy direction would be carefully considered in the evaluation study. Given the substantial number of SWPs involved in the Pilot Scheme, SWD would keep track of the outcome of the evaluation study and keep Members informed of the latest arrangement.

[Post-meeting note: As announced in the 2022-23 Budget, the Government would regularise the Pilot Scheme and the service provision for PPIs would be continued with the 46 social work teams, i.e. totalling 414 SWPs already set up under the Pilot Scheme.]

- (g) A Member opined that the Review on Enhancement of Lump Sum Grant Subvention System (LSGSS) would be one of the key initiatives affecting the future demand for social work manpower. According to the Review Report published by the Task Force for Review on Enhancement of LSGSS in July 2021, one of the recommendations was to conduct systematic service reviews on the notional staffing establishments for the government-subvented social services. It was noted that the service reviews could pose significant implications on the manpower requirements in terms of the number of SWPs as well as their academic qualifications required for the social work posts. As observed by some welfare associations, there was an acute need to

increase manpower supply for the social work field to address the possible manpower shortfall. On the other hand, the professional associations of the sector had been advocating strongly for upgrading the social work posts to degree level in view of the increasing complexity of service requirements. As such, TIs might take into account the possible implications brought by the service reviews for planning the future supply of social work graduates. The Chairman echoed that a clear difference between the requirements for Degree and Diploma Posts should be identified to facilitate manpower training of TIs as well as to avoid job mismatch. SWD representative supplemented that the service reviews recommended in the Review Report would cover all types of social services provided. SWD was currently working on the detailed implementation plan and would progressively take forward the recommendations.

- (h) In response to the future manpower supply to the social work sector, EDB representative briefed Members on the mechanism of the triennial planning exercise. Since the social work discipline was no longer subject to the specific manpower requirements of the Government, there was no designated number of first-year-first-degree (FYFD) social work training places specified for the UGC-funded universities. Instead, EDB would collect the “general manpower remarks” from the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) and SWD on the demand for graduates from social work-related undergraduate programmes. The remarks would be a reference for the UGC-funded universities to prepare their planning proposals for the UGC’s consideration. In view of the fluctuating supply and demand situation in the social work field in recent years, EDB would continue to communicate closely with LWB and SWD to facilitate the UGC-funded universities to plan for their social work training programmes in the next triennial planning exercise.
- (i) On the recent trend of students from the relevant age cohort participating in the tertiary education, some Members shared that the number of students enrolled for the social work discipline remained stable in the recent cohorts. In the recent academic years, a substantial amount of students had chosen the social work training programme in their Band A choices of Joint University Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS) and hence the competition for the training places was keen. Despite certain drop-out cases in local TIs due to various reasons including emigration, most of the social work students in recent admissions had demonstrated their outstanding quality to pursue their professional career even under the current social situation.

- (j) A Member expressed concern over the supply of UGC-funded social work graduates to the social work field. The number of FYFD training places was no longer subject to the specific manpower requirements for the social work discipline since the 2016-19 triennium. As such, it was concerned that both the number of FYFD and senior year intake training places would be substantially reduced in the next triennium, i.e. from the 2022/23 to the 2024/25 academic years. It was noted that the decrease of the UGC-funded FYFD social work training places might deter students from choosing the social work discipline. Despite the fact that the self-financing TIs had been increasing their supply of social work graduates to the market, the supply from the UGC sector should also be safeguarded to maintain the stable supply and quality of the social work graduates. Another Member echoed that the reduction of the UGC-funded training places would affect the overall manpower supply in the sector and there was a need to strike a balance between the supply of the UGC-funded training programmes and the self-financing ones. Nevertheless, both social work training programmes from the UGC and the self-financing sectors were accredited and reviewed by the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB), and therefore the quality of social work graduates from both settings had been safeguarded.

4. After deliberations, the Chairman concluded Members' views as follows –

- (a) Following the completion of budget initiatives introduced in 2018-19 and 2019-20, the demand for social work services was likely to be consistent with a stable growth rate. However, the manpower implications and factors would be kept in view. A stable supply of social work graduates would be essential to meet the continuous service needs in the future; and
- (b) The social work training places provided by the self-financing TIs were increasing which provided flexibility for the sector to meet the evolving needs of the market. Nevertheless, equal importance should be attached to the balance between the UGC-funded and the self-financing training programmes to ensure a stable manpower supply to the field.