

**Draft Notes of the 198th Meeting of the
Advisory Committee on Social Work Training and Manpower Planning (ACSWTMP)
held on Monday, 18 July 2022 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	
Mr Cliff CHOI Kim-wah	The Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS)
Ms Joyce LEE Yuen-sum	Hong Kong Social Workers Association (HKSWA)
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)
Professor Eric CHUI Wing-hong	The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU)
Dr Steve FONG Fu-fai	Hong Kong Shue Yan University (HKSJU)
Mr Ivan WONG Yun-tat	UOW College Hong Kong (UOWCHK)
Mr Tony YIP Ka-sing	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 Coby CHAN Mei-yi	SWD
Mr Edmund TAM Yuen-sheung	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:

Ms Michelle IP Mei-ho
Ms Catherine WONG Pui-ye

Item I: Matters arising from the 197th ACSWTMP meeting held on 16 July 2021

1. SWD representative reported that the Government announced in the 2022-23 Budget to regularise the “*Pilot Scheme on Social Work Service for Pre-primary Institutions (PPIs)*” (Pilot Scheme), which had been implemented in three phases, to facilitate early identification of and provision of assistance to pre-primary children and their families with welfare needs. The service had been carried out by a total of 57 social work teams, (i.e. 35 full-teams and 22 half-teams, which was equivalent to 46 full-teams) under the Pilot Scheme from 41 participating Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) as service operators with a total of 414 social work personnel (SWPs) providing services to 725 PPIs. As these posts had largely been filled during the three phases of implementation under the Pilot Scheme, and it was projected that there would be an increase by only 0.5 additional team (involving 4.5 SWPs) upon the regularisation of service from August 2022, minimal impact on social work manpower requirements was anticipated.

Item II: Social Work Manpower Requirements System (SWMRS) – Findings of the 2021 annual updating exercise (Paper ACSWTMP/1/2022)

1. SWD representative briefed Members on the projection parameters in the 2021 annual updating exercise. Demands for Degree and All Social Work Posts dropped from 2020-21 to 2021-22 but increased under normal growth rate in 2022-23 and an upsurge from 2023-24 to 2025-26 leading to manpower shortage in Degree Posts. This notwithstanding, potential supplies of graduates from relevant disciplines were still available from 2023-24 to 2025-26. It was remarked that the demand projections for the 3rd to the 5th year, i.e. from 2023-24 to 2025-26 were based on the annual growth rate of the past five years, i.e. from 2018-19 to 2022-23. The leap from 2023-24 to 2025-26 was attributed to the sudden upsurge of growth rates in 2018-19 and 2019-20, resulting in nearly 6% and around 4% increase for Degree Posts and All Social Work Posts respectively.

2. SWD representative depicted another scenario using the average annual growth rate from 2013-14 to 2017-18 as the basis of calculation, i.e. around 3.5%, which was a consistent trend in these years. Under this scenario, a shortage of manpower supply for Diploma Posts was still anticipated but the projected new supply for Degree Posts would be able to meet their new demand from 2023-24 to 2025-26. A consistent positive balance between the projected new demand and new supply for All Social Work Posts was also observed from 2023-24 to 2025-26. A further growth would be projected on the number of graduates potentially available for the social work field for Degree and All Social Work Posts from 2023-24 to 2025-26. Though the rapid growth rates of demand for Degree and All Social Work Posts would slow down as reflected in the above scenario, they remained on a relatively high level and would continue to grow steadily from 2023-24 to 2025-26. With the completion of major

budget initiatives introduced in 2018-19 and 2019-20, this scenario would serve as a realistic reference.

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

- (a) A Member echoed that since major policy initiatives with significant manpower implications would be unlikely in the coming years, the scenario prepared by the SWMRS Office, i.e. with a stable growth rate of demand at around 3.5% and a positive balance projected between the new demand and new supply in the social work field might better reflect the manpower situation in the future.
- (b) In response to enquiry about the wastage cases, SWD representative clarified that wastage rate under the SWMRS referred to SWP leaving the social work field for whatever reasons in the specified period, and “emigration” was already included as a reason of leaving. The wastage rate of 2020-21 was based on manpower figures collected from the participating organisations in the 2021 annual updating exercise and the wastage rates collated recent years remained relatively stable. While emigration would decrease the supply of SWPs, it would also increase the demand for social work posts as replacements for wastage effectively created new demand for the social work field.
- (c) The Chairman remarked that the number of emigration cases was reflected in the aggregated number of wastage cases under the existing methodology of the SWMRS and as the reasons for wastage were not collected by the SWMRS Office, no breakdown could be made available. Indeed there might be practical difficulties to collect data specifically related to emigration as the respondents might be reluctant to respond. SWD representatives supplemented that since participating organisations had been providing considerable amount of information under the existing mechanism, a prudent manner should be upheld as any collection of extra data, such as detailed reasons for SWPs leaving the sector, might warrant unnecessary concerns and adversely affect both the responding time and response rate. In fact there were practical difficulties to verify the reasons for departure and the data collected might not be accurate. The participation and supply of data were entirely voluntary. Hence it was paramount to strike a balance between the collection of sufficient information and the maintenance of high participation rate for the updating exercise. Though the SWMRS did not consolidate data specifically related to emigration, Members were welcome to share their observations at the meetings.

- (d) The Chairman and some Members observed that the competition for Degree Posts was keen under a moderate growth rate of demand, as most of the degree graduates could only occupy Diploma Posts. It was observed that training institutions (TIs) tended to provide degree and master degree training programmes to supply SWPs for the market which might intensify job-level mismatch in the future. Since the social work posts newly created were pegged at degree level both within and outside public sectors in light of the increasing complexity of service requirements, a review to rectify the aforesaid job-level mismatch was necessary for better utilisation of public resources for the sector. TIs should also critically review their social work training programmes and to top up sub-degree graduates to degree level in a prudent manner. SWD representatives shared that since a large number of Degree Posts created under the budget initiatives in 2018-19 and 2019-20 had been filled, the issue of job-level mismatch re-emerged in the social work field. In view of the situation, systematic service reviews for government-subsidised services covering notional staffing establishments (including the academic qualifications / seniority requirements of posts) were being conducted by phases starting from 2022-23 according to the recommendation of the Review Report on Enhancement of Lump Sum Grant Subvention System (LSGSS). The SWMRS Office would keep in view the progress of the service reviews and to timely capture any new factor for the updating exercise.
- (e) Some Members observed that the current manpower implications brought by the emigration tide, in particular the significant number of wastage cases in NGOs, were not yet covered in the 2021 annual updating exercise, i.e. from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 as the number of SWPs leaving the sector due to emigration increased significantly from 2020-21 to 2021-22 and its manpower implications would persist in the subsequent years. Most SWPs left the sector due to emigration were degree social workers at the middle or senior management levels and the high turnover for senior social work posts might adversely affect the continuity of services. Since SWPs tended to focus on developing expertise on specific service type for career development, employers had difficulties in finding suitable SWPs to fill the vacant posts in view of the limited number of applications. A Member echoed that TIs also encountered the implications brought by emigration tide with some academic staff leaving the institution. It was difficult for TIs to fill the teaching vacancies in a short period of time as they were obliged to meet the specific requirements on academic qualifications and practice experiences set by the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB). Hence the positive balance projected between the new demand and new supply in the 2021 annual updating exercise might not keep pace with the current market

situation.

- (f) A Member opined that the emigration tide also created more job opportunities for degree graduates occupying Diploma Posts to take up the vacant Degree Posts, resulting in more Diploma Posts available in 2022 for diploma graduates. Nevertheless, while most part-time diploma graduates would enter the social work field after graduation, about half of the full-time diploma graduates might decide to switch to other disciplines to pursue degree qualifications. SWD representative shared that the wastage from diploma graduates had already been captured by calculating the non-entry rate on supply for diploma graduates, i.e. 16.7% for the 2021 annual updating exercise. The respective non-entry rate was estimated on actual wastage cases collected in the past seven years and excluded the diploma graduates who would not enter the social work field in the coming year due to various reasons, such as change in career aspiration and further studies.
- (g) Some Members opined that the social work field was evolving rapidly and more updated manpower figures were vital for TIs to plan training programmes in the coming years. For better manpower planning, it was necessary to shorten the time gap between manpower data collection and the sharing of analysis and projection results at the ACSWTMP meeting. To optimise the existing mechanism, a Member suggested collecting the manpower data by batches to receive responses earlier and holding additional meetings to focus on the prospects of the social work sector so that the ACSWTMP could better advise the Government on the policies of social work training and manpower planning. Some Members also suggested utilising Information Technology (IT) system to enhance the data collection process for a timely analysis. SWD representatives shared that the SWMRS Office had been utilising IT to facilitate the collection of data, such as providing tailor-made electronic templates for the participating organisations to reduce their workload and streamline the updating procedure. Participating organisations were already very familiar with the data collection mechanism of the SWMRS after years of participation. Members might need to consider the readiness of the organisations to adopt a brand new information system, if set up, for submitting their returns as they might have their own constraints to adapt to a new IT system.
- (h) SWD representatives remarked that under the current methodology, the manpower figures and projections were provided by the participating organisations voluntarily. After SWD issued the invitation for providing updated manpower data in early July, certain lead time was required for

participating organisations to finalise their estimation as the resources for posts creation and supply of social work training places could only be confirmed in a later stage. The Chairman opined that it was reasonable to allow a time gap of 12 to 18 months, between the data collection and sharing of findings in view of the complexity of manpower projections. SWD might consider revisiting the time schedule, including the meeting date of the ACSWTMP but sufficient time should be allowed for nearly 1 000 participating organisations to provide their returns to the SWMRS Office. In the meantime, participating organisations were encouraged to provide their data to SWD at their earliest convenience to facilitate a timely compilation of projection figures.

- (i) Some Members shared that under the mechanism of the triennial planning exercise for the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded universities, an on-going reduction of first-year-first-degree (FYFD) social work training places allocated was noted since the lift of the specific manpower requirements for the social work discipline in the 2016-19 triennium. As observed, around 6% to 10% UGC-funded FYFD social work training places might be reallocated to other disciplines by the universities. Hence a shift in the supply of social work degree graduates from the UGC sector towards the self-financing sector was resulted. The Chairman echoed that according to the 2021 annual updating exercise, around 280 (or 45%) and 350 (or 55%) degree graduates from the full-time social work undergraduate programmes of the UGC-funded universities and the self-financing TIs respectively would be provided by 2025. The decrease of FYFD social work training places allocated for the UGC-funded universities would persist in the coming years as the UGC had been advising the universities to critically consider the number of training places provided taking into account the capability of self-financing TIs to supply manpower for the social work field. Some Members remarked that it was necessary to strike a balance between the supply of the UGC-funded training programmes and the self-financing ones to reduce the financial burden for students to pursue their studies. Social work discipline should be on par with other professions, such as medical profession, and public money should be committed to secure sufficient social work manpower provided by the UGC sector.
- (j) EDB representative shared that under the mechanism there was a standard practice for each UGC-funded university to set aside 6% of FYFD training places for competitive allocation. Such mechanism would facilitate the UGC to enhance the competitiveness in the allocation of scarce resources, specifically to secure sufficient resources for the newly established non-manpower-planned training programmes that were strategically developed by universities to respond

to the manpower trend. Since the social work discipline was no longer subject to the specific manpower requirements of the Government, EDB would collect the “general manpower remarks” from LWB and SWD on the manpower trend and the demand for graduates from social work-related undergraduate programmes. The remarks served as a reference for the UGC-funded universities to prepare their planning proposals for the UGC’s consideration. The UGC-funded universities enjoyed institutional autonomy to deliberate the number of FYFD training places allocated to the non-manpower-planned disciplines, including the social work discipline. It was noted that Members advocated for a balance between the supplies from the UGC-funded programmes and the self-financing ones and EDB would continue to collect views from LWB and SWD on the social work manpower planning through the triennial planning exercise.

- (k) SWD representative shared that the “general manpower remarks” provided by LWB and SWD had taken into account the projections from the SWMRS annual updating exercises and deliberations at the ACSWTMP meetings. LWB and SWD would continue to relay Members’ concerns on the social work manpower requirements to EDB via this mechanism. It was noted that as projected under the scenario of the 2021 annual updating exercise, there would be a stable growth of new demand in the coming years. Meanwhile, social welfare had also secured the largest proportion of expenditure, about 20% of Government’s overall recurrent expenditure, amongst different policy areas in the 2022-23 Budget. Despite the uncertainties in economic outlook, the Government still placed great emphasis on social services and would continue to implement the project initiatives as planned. Both LWB and SWD attached great importance to maintaining a stable supply of social work graduates and would continue to strike a balance between the supplies from the UGC-funded programmes and the self-financing ones.
- (l) In response to enquiry about the Government’s support to the students with financial difficulties in pursuing social work studies in view of the decrease in the UGC-funded training places, EDB representative shared that the Government had implemented the Non-means-tested Subsidy Scheme (NMTSS) to subsidise students studying the undergraduate or top-up degree offered by the self-financing TIs which covers social work training programmes. In the 2022/23 academic year, a non-means-tested annual subsidy up to \$33,200 could be provided to each eligible student.
- (m) The Chairman remarked that the ACSWTMP had issued letters to the Chairman

of the UGC and the Presidents of the UGC-funded universities providing social work training programmes in 2019 to highlight the projected upsurge in demand for social work manpower and appeal for maintaining the number of FYFD social work training places for a stable supply of graduates from the UGC-funded universities. In view of the imminent need to sustain the supply of social work degree graduates from the UGC sector, it was suggested that the ACSWTMP might issue another letter to the Presidents of the UGC-funded universities to advocate for an increase or maintenance of the FYFD social work training places at the present level for the years to come and the 2025-28 triennium in view of the substantial manpower implications brought by emigration tide. A Member echoed that after the issue of letters in 2019, the supply of the UGC-funded FYFD social work training places had been stabilised in the 2019-22 triennium. However, substantial reduction in both the numbers of senior year intake and FYFD training places for the UGC-funded universities since the 2022/23 academic year was observed. The Chairman opined that while the UGC strived for optimising the allocation of public resources from a holistic approach, one of the key considerations to define whether a discipline should be subject to the specific manpower requirements would be the capability of the self-financing sector to provide equivalent training and the readiness of potential students for such training programmes. A concerted effort was hence necessary from both the welfare associations including the HKCSS and TIs to voice out their concerns on the manpower supply to the UGC-funded universities.

4. After deliberations, the Chairman concluded Members' views as follows –
- (a) In view of the rapid changes in the socio-economic situation, some exceptional manpower implications such as wastage caused by emigration tide might not be timely reflected in the SWMRS annual updating exercise. An enhancement of the existing mechanism might be considered to narrow the time gap between the data collection and release of projection analysis to facilitate the planning for social work manpower requirements as far as possible;
- [Post-meeting notes: SWD conducted a thorough review on the meeting schedule and proposed that the meeting date of the ACSWTMP be advanced from July to April/May and some major findings of the SWMRS annual updating exercise could be shared with the ACSWTMP after endorsement at the meeting of Joint Committee on Social Work Manpower Requirements.]*
- (b) It was noted that the major supply of degree social work graduates had been switching from the UGC sector to the self-financing sector. To ensure a stable

manpower supply to the field, the balance between the UGC-funded and the self-financing training programmes should be maintained; and

- (c) With the assistance of the ACSWTMP Secretariat, the Chairman would send a letter to the Presidents of the UGC-funded universities providing social work training programmes to appeal for increasing the number of FYFD social work training places.

[Post-meeting notes: Letters to the Presidents of the UGC-funded universities providing social work training programmes were issued by the Chairman of the ACSWTMP on 5.1.2023 where the projected demand for social work manpower was highlighted and the universities were appealed to increase the number of FYFD social work training places for a stable supply of graduates.]

ACSWTMP Secretariat

January 2023