

**Notes of the 200<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Advisory Committee on  
Social Work Training and Manpower Planning (Advisory Committee)  
held on Monday, 20 May 2024 at 10:30 a.m.  
at Room 920, 9/F., Revenue Tower, 5 Gloucester Road, Wan Chai**

**Present:**

Professor MOK Ka-ho	(Chairman)
Mr LO Kin-tak	
Dr Bessie CHONG Pui-san	
Ms CHAN Siu-lai	
Miss Mandy YAU Tze-man	
Ms Angie CHAN Hiu-yuen	The Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS)
Ms Joyce LEE Yuen-sum	Hong Kong Social Workers Association (HKSWA)
Mr Wilson CHAN Man-ho	HKSWA
Professor NG Siu-man	The University of Hong Kong (HKU)
Professor TO Siu-ming	The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK)
Dr Larry CHAN Chi-tat	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 (HKSYU)
Mr Ivan WONG Yun-tat	UOW College Hong Kong (UOWCHK)
Ms Karen TING Ting-yu	Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB)
Ms Jerry JI Sang	Education Bureau (EDB)
Miss Shirley CHUNG Yuk-fong	Social Welfare Department (SWD)
Mr Roland LEUNG Kam-ming	SWD ( <i>Secretary</i> )

**In attendance:**

Ms Coby CHAN Mei-yi	SWD
Mr Edmund TAM Yuen-sheung	SWD
Miss Wendy MAK Wing-yan	SWD
Mr Andrew KWAN Kai-ming	SWD
Miss Pauline TSANG Wai-yin	SWD

**Absent with apologies:**

Ms Catherine WONG Pui-yee  
Dr Jess LEUNG Lam-ming

## **Item 1: Matters arising from the 199<sup>th</sup> meeting held on 5 May 2023**

### ***Additional analysis for 2022 round exercise***

1. SWD representative reported that in view of the exceptionally high wastage rates for Degree, Diploma and All Social Work Posts at 8.5%, 16.7% and 7.3% respectively in 2021/22 which might persist in the coming year, an additional analysis was made to examine the possible manpower implications by the Social Work Manpower Requirements System (SWMRS) Office for the 2022 round exercise on the assumption that high wastage rates persisted in 2022/23. Subsequent to the endorsement of both the Joint Committee on Social Work Manpower Requirements (Joint Committee) and Advisory Committee, an additional analysis had been included at Part V of the SWMRS Annual Report 2022 which was published on 27 December 2023. As the wastage rates did not show further increase in 2023 round exercise and the currently-adopted projection parameter of three-year weighted average wastage rates had largely reflected the circumstances, additional analysis would not be conducted in 2023 round exercise.

### ***Letters to the Presidents of the five University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded universities providing social work training programmes***

2. SWD representative recapitulated Members' concern over the possible manpower shortage under the high wastage rate and the relatively low level of degree graduates potentially available for taking up Degree Posts. To convey the Advisory Committee's concern over the stringent manpower position in social work field, the Chairman issued letters to the Presidents of the five UGC-funded universities providing social work training programmes on 19 December 2023 and copied to the self-financing teaching institutions (TIs) providing social work training programmes and the remaining three UGC-funded universities not yet providing social work programme and Members for information. Amongst them, HKU responded positively that the University would consider the growing societal demand and projected manpower requirements for social work posts in their deliberation on allocation of UGC-funded undergraduate student places.

### ***Reinstating the specific manpower requirements for the social work discipline***

3. SWD representative reported that the suggestion of the Advisory Committee to reinstate the specific manpower requirements for the social work discipline as discussed in the last meeting was well noted. LWB, had incorporated the SWMRS data in the remarks provided to EDB in the 2025/26 to 2027/28 triennial planning exercise for the UGC-funded First-year-first-degree (FYFD) training places and proposed to reinstate social work as a manpower-planned discipline. Having considered the specific context of social welfare sector, social work would be deemed as manpower-planned programme (MPP) on an exceptional one-off basis for 2025-28 triennium. The arrangement would be reviewed in the following triennium.

It was noteworthy that students aspiring to become social workers could also take self-financed taught postgraduate (TPg) programmes in the UGC-funded universities to attain the relevant qualifications, and UGC encouraged LWB to consult the UGC-funded TIs on whether more intake places should be added through TPg study level to attract more mature degree holders to join the social work profession. UGC-funded TI representatives were encouraged to take note of this and consider the advice accordingly.

4. The Chairman shared that UGC-funded TIs have completed triennial planning exercise and TIs should have responded positively to the reinstatement of social work as MPP. It was pleased to see the increase in FYFD intake places of social work given the keen competition of resources among different programmes under UGC. UGC-funded TIs were encouraged to further develop self-financing master programmes to attract more potential students.

5. A Member expressed the gratitude to the former Chairman for issuing the letters to the Presidents of UGC-funded universities, which served as an additional reference to better understand the demand for social work manpower and helped to retain the number of places for social work degree programme of TIs in 2025-28 triennium. It was suggested issuing another letter to facilitate the consideration of senior managers at UGC-funded universities on considering the master programmes.

6. Another Member furthered that it had been hard for TIs to secure social work degree intake places in recent years. The letters to the Presidents of the UGC-funded universities served as a useful reference for the universities to consider the need to increase the social work manpower supply. Regarding the social work TPg programmes, as the number of training place was regulated by various authorities, including the Social Workers Registration Board, the universities had to go through the formalities for increasing the number of training places.

7. EDB representative recapped the background for reinstating social work's status as MPP in the 2025-28 triennium, where the number of intake places was based on the reference from the 2015-2016 cohort when Social Work was recognised as a profession with specific manpower requirements. Due to the manpower shortage in various industries, allocation of a fixed pool of 15 000 FYFD places amongst different disciplines had been challenging in that shifting of intake places from one discipline to another are eventually part of a zero-sum game, especially when the targets of having around 35% and 60% of students in the UGC-funded universities pursuing programmes relating to STEAM disciplines and the “eight centres” by the 2026/27 Academic Year as announced in the 2022 Policy Address remained as the overarching priority for the UGC-funded sector. EDB all along encouraged the parallel development of UGC-funded and self-financing TIs and it was noteworthy that self-financing TIs had operated six social work degree programmes to provide over 500 undergraduate intake places.

8. The Chairman highlighted the Government's dedication to develop Hong Kong into a leading post-secondary education hub. Alongside promoting UGC-funded education, the Government aimed to enhance the growth of self-financing TIs to support the collaborative training of highly skilled professionals. In response to the positive effect of the appeal letters and in view of the latest manpower projection, he would issue letters to the Presidents of UGC-funded universities, inviting them to increase the number of social work training opportunities.

*[Post-meeting note: The Chairman issued letters to the Presidents of UGC-funded universities with copy to self-financing TIs on 21 August 2024 to appeal for increasing the number of student intake places (especially TPg programmes) for social work discipline so as to secure stable supply of social work manpower to maintain quality social welfare services in view of the stringent manpower situation.]*

### ***Task Force on reviewing methodology of the Social Work Manpower Requirements System (SWMRS)***

9. SWD representative reported that a Task Force was set up under the Advisory Committee to review data collection method, parameters and assumptions of SWMRS as endorsed in the last meeting. After deliberation on probable alternatives in the meeting, Task Force Members tended to support replacing the collection of HKID Card Number with registration number of registered social workers (RSWs). Collection of registration number of RSWs was considered less privacy-intrusive as it was public information. Feasibility of and detailed arrangement under this proposal would be discussed in the next Task Force meeting to be held in Q3 2024. Alternate parameters, including revising “three-year weighted average wastage rate” to “two-year weighted average wastage rate”, and revising “the number of years for the sum of estimated remaining graduates potentially available for joining the social work field” from six years to three years, were also examined in the meeting. SWMRS Office would conduct analysis on these two parameters and report the results at the next meeting. Besides, Chairperson of Joint Committee issued a letter to TIs and participating organisations on the review of the SWMRS in December 2023 inviting their views on enhancement of the SWMRS and no response was received so far.

### ***Sharing session on the SWD's initiatives for representatives from TIs***

10. SWD representative reported that a sharing session on welfare initiatives, including support measures for persons with mental health needs; elders and persons with disabilities and their carers; encouraging social work graduates to work in residential child care services; and Residential Care Service Voucher and Community Care Service Voucher, was held on 18 September 2023 for Advisory Committee's Members and representatives from TIs. The sharing session aimed at strengthening communication with TIs providing social work programmes on the latest development of social welfare sector and updates on the social welfare initiatives to facilitate their planning of social work teaching programmes.

47 participants from 14 TIs offering social work training programmes and SWD attended the session. Having studied the views of participants, another sharing session, likely with the theme of early identification and intervention in suspected child maltreatment cases, would be organised tentatively in September 2024. Members appreciated the arrangement of sharing sessions and the sharing material was useful reference for TIs. It was suggested that the coming sharing session could be scheduled after early September to avoid the busy back-to-school period.

*[Post-meeting note: The Sharing Session for Training Institutions providing Social Work Programmes – Handling of Suspected Child Maltreatment and Elder Abuse Cases was held on 12 September 2024 (am) at the Louis Koo Cinema of Hong Kong Arts Centre, with 93 participants from TIs and 8 from SWD.]*

*Views of the TI participants on topics of future sharing sessions and other activities to be organised by SWD were collected in the sharing session and further views were collected vide the sharing session evaluation forms. Some TI participants suggested SWD to arrange visits to local welfare facilities, e.g. Community Living Room, Residential care homes for the elderly and Correctional homes. SWD was suggested to consider sharing the details of mandatory reporting of child abuse in the future sharing session. Some TI participants also suggested SWD to organise short visit tours to the Mainland for social workers of TI's to strengthen their understanding of the latest development of the welfare services in the Mainland. To facilitate their participation, the visit tours were suggested to be organised during term breaks of the semester.]*

## **Item 2: SWMRS - Findings of the 2023 annual updating exercise** ***(Paper ACSWTMP/1/2024)***

1. SWD representative briefed Members on the projection parameters and major findings of the 2023 round annual updating exercise (2023 round exercise). Since some TIs did not provide HKID Card Number while another one only provided partial HKID Card Number of their graduates, there might be overestimation of the number of degree graduates potentially available.
2. A Member shared that some students did not agree to share their personal data despite the university's repeated efforts to assure graduates of the security of data collection and hence, the requested data could not be provided. SWD representative reiterated that the "Statement of Collecting Purpose" in the annual updating exercise had clearly outlined the purpose of data collection, and appealed to TIs to assist in clarifying any questions or concerns regarding this matter.
3. The Chairman appreciated the difficulties faced by the TIs over the past few years and

noted that the Task Force had been looking into the matter.

4. A Member shared that TIs had been referring to the projected data in planning training places and raised concerns about the estimated new supply of social work graduates and new demand for All Social Work Posts in 2025/26 – 2027/28. SWD representative drew Members' attention to the limitation of the SWMRS that the projected data would be affected by a number of factors and change of circumstances.

5. Another Member shared that it was very difficult for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to hire suitable social workers in recent years, especially for the Diploma Posts, though a number of diploma graduates were available statistically every year. The Member asked if the annual updating exercise had taken into account the non-entry rate of diploma graduates. SWD representative shared that there was assumption in the exercise about the entry rate of degree and diploma/associate degree graduates as detailed in the Annual Report. Taking 2022 graduates as an example, the proportion of diploma / associate degree graduates obtained social work post and that of degree graduates was 47% and over 70% respectively at the first year after graduation.

6. SWD representative recapped that the Task Force was set up to review the SWMRS, and among others, a study on the parameter of the entry rate of graduates would be conducted to examine whether the existing assumption (i.e. parameter is estimated by using six years data) could better reflect the actual situation. Further analysis would be conducted for deliberation in the coming Task Force meeting. In response to the concerns about data privacy, legal advice was sought in 2022 which confirmed that participating organisations could consider applying the exemption under the Section 62 of the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance for providing the data to SWMRS annual updating exercises in the absence of the prescribed consent of the relevant data subjects. Besides, the Task Force was working on the alternate mechanism to replace the collection of HKID Card Number.

7. A Member shared that only around 20-30% of sub-degree graduates of a TI joined social work field after graduation, in contrast to SWMRS' estimation of 40-50%. Some social work diploma graduates chose to pursue further studies after graduation to pursue further development in the social work field. Besides, noting that full-time students working at part-time posts were counted as new supply in the SWMRS, it was worried if the new supply of social work graduates was overestimated. SWD representative responded that in the system both part-time posts and full-time posts were included and there were limitations in projections.

8. Another Member concurred with the observation regarding the full-time students taking up part-time posts that diploma graduates pursuing degree programs often worked as part-time social workers. SWD representatives responded that the SWMRS Annual Report only highlighted manpower projections in the next two years. The projected results were

based on the information collected, such as the establishment of new posts and degree programmes. The accuracy of the projected results for next three to five years that was fully supported by statistical data and was subject to many factors. They served as reference to understand the overall trends rather than the definitive outcomes. Only the projections for 2023/24 and 2024/25 were published in the SWMRS Annual Report 2023, while the projections for 2025/26 – 2027/28 were for Members' reference only. There was limitation in the projection under the prevailing methodology and parameters / assumptions, the Task Force was reviewing the related matters and hopefully the accuracy of projected data could be enhanced.

9. A Member inquired whether the new supply and new demand in SWMRS included non-subvented posts and the related SWPs, noting that NGOs had been operating non-subvented services employing SWPs. SWD representative shared that as stated in the Annual Report, data collected by SWMRS included both subvented and non-subvented posts. Various organisations, such as local training institutes, NGOs, self-financing welfare organisations, private child care homes, elderly homes, and others, were invited to provide information. This comprehensive approach ensured that a wide range of data sources were considered in the compilation of SWMRS, providing a more holistic view of the social work landscape.

10. A Member observed that a significant number of non-degree graduates pursued further studies to enhance their professional and career prospects and the related turnover rate was high. It was crucial to take this into account when planning for manpower needs.

11. Another Member observed that there was perceived disparity between the presented figures and the actual challenges faced by NGOs. There were high turnover and vacancy rates for both degree and diploma posts in organisation and difficulty had been encountered in filling up the posts particularly over the past two years. Some fresh graduates left their posts shortly after joining social work field and some full-time social workers changed to take up part-time posts or even left the social work field, due to varied reasons such as pursuing further studies and stress from heavy workload. It was considered that the SWMRS could not reflect the circumstance of part-time posts and short-term stay in social work field. While many diploma posts were filled up by degree graduates, many degree holders taking up diploma posts actively sought better job opportunities and left the diploma posts for degree posts, which contributed to the high turnover rate in social work field. To tackle the challenges in recruiting and retaining staff so as to provide services to meet the complex service needs, some NGOs upgraded the diploma posts to degree posts to attract talented individuals. However, NGOs might no longer upgrade the posts in recruiting staff due to funding cut in subvention.

12. A Member would like to learn more about the service reviews, such as the planned schedule, methodology and process. It was essential of having transparency and participation of stakeholders of social work field in the review process, so that social work manpower

demand could be early identified and planned.

*[Post-meeting note: The views of the Member were conveyed to the Subventions Branch which liaised with the concerned Member in June 2024 to clarify the views and restate the channels of communication between SWD and relevant NGOs regarding the schedule, methodology and process of service reviews. The Member was reassured that the social work manpower demand, if any, arising from service reviews would be reflected by SWMRS when and where appropriate.]*

13. SWD representative shared that similar to other government departments, SWD's budget would be cut starting from 2024-25, and notwithstanding the LSG subvention to NGOs would not be reduced in 2024-25. As announced earlier, NGOs with annual LSG over \$50 million in 2024-25, funding would be reduced by 2% in 2025-26 and then 3% in 2026-27. While NGOs had the flexibility in deploying their resources in arranging manpower, should there be any change in manpower demand of individual organisations, the SWMRS annual updating exercise could capture the manpower implications. As to the notional staffing establishments of various types of subvented services, upon the completion of the Review on the Enhancement of the LSG Subventions System (LSGSS), the Review Report was published in 2021. Among others, SWD was recommended to conduct systematic reviews on notional staffing establishments, service targets, etc. to keep pace with the needs of users of various types of social services. SWD had been communicating closely with the social work sector to work out the implementation schedule of the service reviews, including giving high priority to services not yet been reviewed for years, services involving substantial number of service units or services with notable developmental needs. Systematic reviews on the Funding and Service Agreements has been commenced in phases since 2022-23. The SWMRS Office would keep in view the progress and probable implications on social work manpower.

14. EDB representative shared that the allocation of FYFD intake places to social work discipline under MPP for the 2025-28 triennium was an exceptional arrangement which would be subject to review. Noting a decreasing trend in students' enrolment to FYFD and senior year intakes of social work programme of UGC-funded TIs from 2018/19 and 2022/23, UGC-funded TIs were encouraged to monitor the number of students enrolled in social work programmes closely and maintained the quality of social work graduates.

15. Some Members responded that as social work was not a discipline of MPP in past years, reduction in the number of intake places for social work in UGC-funded TIs had resulted in the decrease in number of students. As social work would be an MPP discipline for 2025-28 triennium, the number of social work students would likely increase accordingly. Besides, the competition for resource was fierce in the universities, so it was very difficult to maintain the number of FYFD intake places and number of students when social work was not an MPP discipline in the past years. Regarding the quality of graduates, the universities



should adhere to various key performance indicators for upkeeping the quality. Data on students' performance, such as cumulative grade point average, had been provided to EDB for monitoring purpose.

16. The Chairman highlighted the significance of social workers' knowledge and skillset in addressing the needs of aging population and mental well-being in the society, and emphasised that their expertise was valuable across industries, not just within the social work field. The market was actively seeking out persons with social work background for their professional counselling and interpersonal skills. Given the challenges Hong Kong was currently facing, it was essential to provide top-notch training to the new generation of social workers to make a meaningful contribution to the society.

17. A Member concurred with the Chairman's view that mental well-being has become a prominent topic in human resources industry. Both public sector and private companies were actively employing counselling professionals, including social workers, and offering competitive salary packages to them competing for the limited supply of social workers. Social workers were one of the major sources of counselling professions. Although the meeting focused on statistical data, the Advisory Committee should also consider other factors, such as latest development of market, in considering the demand for social work manpower.

18. SWD representative noted Members' concern of projected supply and demand of social workers. While the actual new supply and new demand could be affected by various unpredictable factors, SWMRS Office updated the manpower statistics annually to keep track of the manpower situation and Members could rest assured that the manpower projections could capture the latest development.

### **Item 3: Any other business**

#### ***Cultural sensitivity in social work curriculum training***

1. SWD representative reported that after the announcement of the survey findings on mental health conditions of children and adolescents aged 6 to 17 who were currently attending school in November 2023, the Advisory Committee on Mental Health (ACMH) discussed the follow-up actions on the mental health survey in its meeting, and followed up the implementation of enhanced measures.

2. The key findings of the survey in respect of societal aspect were as follows –
- (a) non-ethnic Chinese adolescents were associated with a higher risk for anxiety disorders;
  - (b) high rate of unrecognition (and under-reporting) particularly among non-ethnic Chinese;
  - (c) establishment of policy initiatives and framework that place strong emphasis

- on inclusion and diversity, e.g. culturally sensitive policies; and
- (d) need for more “new”, “engaging” or “innovative” ways to convey the concerns to the public.

3. The research teams of the aforementioned survey suggested that it was necessary to address cultural differences and recommended SWD to invite TIs providing social work programmes to consider adding “cultural sensitivity” in the curriculum training.

*[Post-meeting note: The Secretariat issued an email on 4 June 2024 to other TIs providing social work programmes with copy to TI Members inviting them to consider and design the social work curriculum to enhance “cultural sensitivity” and address the needs of ethnic minorities (EM). In response to Members’ enquiry for details of the survey, supplementary information and key findings of the survey were provided for Members’ consideration.]*

4. Some Members agreed to the suggestion of incorporating “cultural sensitivity” in the curriculum training. With EMs to attend social work training programme for becoming registered social workers, addressing the challenges of language barriers and financial constraints were also crucial. It was suggested to relax the Chinese language requirements for EM to enrol for social work programmes, and arrange them to attend fieldwork placements where English was used as the major medium of Instruction. Self-financing TIs had the flexibility to give priority to EM students in admission, so as to have more EM social workers to serve the community.

#### ***Survey on Employment Situation of Social Work Graduates***

5. SWD representative shared that SWD had been conducting the “Survey on Employment Situation of Social Work Graduates” (Survey) annually since 1997 to have an overview of the employment situation of local fresh graduates (including full-time / part-time and degree / sub-degree) in the social work field and the readiness of those not working in the field to enter the social work profession. The response rate of the Survey was all along low and further decreased to 30% in 2022 and 26.8% in 2023. According to the Research and Statistics Section of SWD, the low response rate created significant non-response bias for the Survey since the responding graduates were not the majority.

6. At present, all of the 15 TIs having social work degree / sub-degree graduates were conducting their own surveys on employment situation of their graduates, while UGC was conducting graduate’s employment survey (including social work graduates) as well. In view of the low response rate and non-response bias of the Survey and given the presence of surveys conducted by individual TIs and UGC which duplicated with the one by SWD, SWD planned to cease the conduction of the Survey upon the completion of 2023 exercise in December 2024.

7. Members from the TIs appreciated the difficulty in collecting information from the

graduates and had no objection to the proposal.

*[Post-meeting note: SWD contacted the remaining eight TIs who did not have representatives attending Advisory Committee to obtain their views on the proposal of cessation the conduction of Survey in June 2024. All of the eight TIs had no objection to the proposal. SWD would inform the participating TIs of the cessation when the Survey Report 2023 would be distributed to them in December 2024.]*

***Major projects involved in new posts in Social Welfare Department (SWD) and the SWD-subvented sectors in 2023/24 and 2024/25***

8. SWD representative provided an overview of the social welfare initiatives proposed in the Budget 2024 and presented the new developments in the social work sector during the meeting. In order to facilitate TIs to arrange their training programmes, the estimated number of new posts with a breakdown of service areas created in both SWD and SWD-subvented sector in NGOs with funding allocated from SWD had been included in the Annual Report 2022. The SWMRS Annual Report 2023 would include the related data of 2023/24 and 2024/25.

9. A Member suggested that apart from SWD, HKCSS should actively engage TIs in policy formulation and latest development in social work field to facilitate the TIs to teach their students. HKCSS representative mentioned that HKCSS had held quarterly agency meetings and invited Members, including TIs, to participate in discussions on topics related to the social work field. This provided a platform for Members to keep abreast of the latest development of the sector.

10. The meeting concluded at 12:13 p.m.

**Advisory Committee Secretariat  
February 2025**