

政 府 總 部

一 般 職 系 處

香港中環雪廠街十一號
中區政府合署西座九樓

GENERAL GRADES OFFICE
GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT

9th Floor, West Wing
Central Government Offices
11 Ice House Street
Central, Hong Kong

本署檔號 Our Ref.: (22) in GG/14/008 Pt. 3

電話 Tel: [REDACTED]

來函檔號 Your Ref.: JS/CSP/TF

傳真 Fax: [REDACTED]

Secretary General
Joint Secretariat for the Advisory Bodies on Civil Service
and Judicial Salaries and Conditions of Service
Room 701, 7th Floor
Tower Two, Lippo Centre
89 Queensway
Hong Kong

Dear Secretary General,

Review of Civil Service Pay Policy and System

I refer to the letter dated 25 April 2002 from the Chairman of the Task Force on Review of Civil Service Pay Policy and System inviting views on the consultation paper of their Phase I Study. As head of the Executive, Clerical and Secretarial Grades (known collectively as the General Grades), I would like to offer my comments on the question raised in para. 3.51(c) of the paper on whether some or all of the current general grades should be departmentalised to facilitate department-based management.

The General Grades have existed for a good number of years to provide a common service throughout the Government in resource and system management, secretarial and general office support. Because of the commonality in the nature of duties in each grade, its establishment as a general grade under central management facilitates the recruitment, deployment, training and career development of the staff, the mobilisation of resources to meet contingency service needs and the redeployment of surplus staff in the event of departmental downsizing.

There are, at present, over 29,000 General Grades posts under the management of the General Grades Office (GGO) as detailed in the annex. The GGO is responsible for the central management functions as outlined above, while individual departments are responsible for day-to-day frontline management and the bulk of the personnel administration duties relating to these staff. While the current arrangements have been working effectively to meet the needs of the service over the years, I agree that, with the change of times, it is opportune for the situation to be reviewed.

The implementation of the accountability system in the Government will place a heavy burden on Principal Officials to maximise the use of their staff resources to achieve their policy objectives. With the General Grades staff constituting one-sixth the size of the civil service and a large proportion of many departmental establishments, there are indeed valid grounds for further devolution of their management responsibilities to heads of department/bureau to provide them with greater flexibility in the deployment of such staff resources. However, in this connection, a distinction would need to be made between the basic office support services provided by the clerical and secretarial staff and the wider management role of the Executive Grade.

From the human resource management point of view, there are persuasive arguments in favour of fully decentralising the management of Clerical and Secretarial Grades to those departments which can offer sufficiently broad job experience and a reasonable career structure for the development of such staff. The nature of the clerical and secretarial duties and the size of their establishment are such that departmentalisation of these services may well be feasible in the major departments. On the other hand, it must also be recognised that the economy of scale in recruitment, training and promotion would be lost if each department would have to carry out these functions individually.

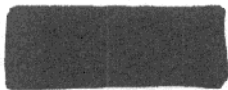

However, the major problem to be addressed in the consideration of departmentalisation is the arrangement to be made for the serving officers. When staff are consulted on this issue, they have expressed grave concern over the loss of the 'freedom of transfer' among departments and the 'common promotion prospect' that they currently enjoy as members of the General Grades because, in practice, advancement opportunities do vary considerably among different departments. They are also worried over a greater risk of being made redundant after departmentalisation, if a department should decide to

out-source or corporatise its services. These are central issues that the management will need to address and it is of paramount importance that a fair and equitable transitional arrangement is worked out in consultation with the staff and departmental management for any scheme of departmentalisation to be viable and acceptable to all concerned.

As regards the Executive Officer Grade, the case for departmentalisation is much less forceful. This is one of the core management grades in the civil service with a broad range of responsibilities in the management of systems, financial and human resources, in project planning and development, and in public administration duties in district offices, bureaux and agencies. As such, grade members need to gain wide exposure to different work situations and a clear understanding of central initiatives and directions to develop their versatility to cope effectively with changes in job demands and provide the necessary leadership in their managerial role. Confining the career development of an Executive Officer to one departmental setting would not provide him with the exposure needed.

To conclude, I would agree that the feasibility of departmentalising general grades should be further explored. Conceptually, the move is in the right direction for those departments which can provide the necessary exposure and grade structure for the career development of the staff concerned. However, the more difficult practical problem to be resolved will be the arrangements to accommodate the serving officers and their aspiration and eligibility for career advancement, upon which the successful implementation of departmentalisation will largely depend.

Yours faithfully,


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Director of General Grades

Establishment of General Grades
under the Management of the General Grades Office
(as at 1.5.2002)

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Establishment</u>
Executive Officer	2,179
Clerical Officer	12,621
Clerical Assistant	9,303
Office Assistant	1,436
Personal Secretary	2,368
Typist	767
Supervisor of Typing Services	52
Confidential Assistant	355
Telephone Operator	45
TOTAL	<hr/> 29,126 <hr/> <hr/>