

Should general grades be decentralised / departmentalised in the civil service reform?

Yes.

Background

General grade officers are required to accept postings from one department to another when they climb up the ladder of seniority. These grades include Executive Officers, Accounting Officers and professionals like IT people. Although these are 'general' grades just like the Clerical Officers, their posting mechanism and career prospects differ from one another.

An Appendix is prepared setting out the pay of some of the general grades, with salary ranging from approximately \$8,000 to \$46,000 per month, which could be used as a quick reference for consideration. The comparison contains the various scales of lower to middle rank officers. The average number of increments of the grades is around twenty composed of two or more tiers.

Trend

In order to meet the task of maintaining a small government, to enhance the quality, efficiency and to simplify the structure of the civil service, and at the same time tighten the internal bonding of each department, to decentralise the general grades is comprehensible.

With the government's educational policy and enormous allocation of resources to this sector, there will be more and more youngsters becoming degree holders. In fact, many departments' temporary clerks receiving \$8,000 a month are degree holders when in the commercial world, a degree holder would only be able to get about \$6,000. What would be the difference in qualification, in the near future, of temporary clerks and Executive Officers, or Accounting Officers? Having said the above, the establishment of the clerical grade need to be reviewed. Instead of making up a major part of the civil service, the establishment of the clerical grade should be kept to a minimum. What should be put in place are degree holders for general grades support staff.

Proposals

Middle rank general grade officers could be merged into a new grade, the "General Operational Officer Grade", and absorb within which the existing Clerical Officer, Executive Officer, Accounting Officer, Statistical Officer etc. The pay scale proposed is as follows:

Entry point	MPS 6	\$12,000 (approx. figure)
First promotion	12	\$17,000
Second promotion	19	\$26,000
Third promotion	26	\$35,000
Maximum point	33	\$46,000

The pay at point 6 of \$12,000 per month is already twice the income of a fresh graduate in the private sector, and it is only two points higher than the minimum of an Assistant Clerical Officer. After serving the probation and agreement terms of six years, when the officer joins the permanent establishment, he gets his first promotion. When he reaches the second time promotion, he will be able to supervise some of the lower rank staff. In addition to the possible stoppage of an annual increment, there would be an efficiency bar before each promotion. The more an officer gets posted with relevant exposures and excellent performance, the higher chance of his getting promoted faster by jumping points. An officer who has stable performance and reaches the maximum point in his early fifties will still get the chance of being promoted to the next higher rank, a section's head, with pay scale starting from point 34.

Fresh graduate degree holders could apply for General Operational Officer posts in the Finance Division, or posts in the Administration Division, or even posts of the Planning & Research Division. They could stick to the department they first join the civil service, or apply for transfer to posts of other departments, or apply for grades of higher ranks any time they feel ready and well prepared.

Even section heads and division heads could be departmentalised if the department's specific needs so warrant. They are to be assisted by the General Grade Operational Officers, and are free to hire temporary clerks outside the permanent establishment of the government as and when necessary.

One of the existing general grades which should be considered to join the General Grade Operational Officers and be attached to departments is the Accounting Officers Grade. The duties of Accounting Officers vary to a large extent from department to department. Not like the Assistant Assessors of the Inland Revenue or the Executive Officers, the Accounting Officers' career path to the higher rank (Treasury Accountant), however, are not guaranteed because there are always recruits from the outside to fill the vacancies or new posts. To upkeep the morale of these hundreds of staff seems to be a priority of the management. After all, no matter what grade the staff joins when he takes up employment with the Government, his sense of belonging and management's assurance of his contributions are closely related.

Opportunities

Under the Education Reform, schools are in need of qualified administrative support so as to reduce the burdens of teachers. To second or to share a department's general grade operational officer to school or with school will strengthen this area of support, and this posting or arrangement will definitely be a solid training experience for the staff, and also enhance his understanding of various aspects of the department's activities.

Concerns

It is now the existing practice that Clerical Officers be attached to a 'mother' department from the date of joining the civil service unless they ask for transfer out of the department, whereas other general grade officers serve career postings throughout the duration of their service. The beauty of maintaining clerical staff with a department is to build up a team of supporting staff who are familiar with the daily routines and operations. While it is sometimes difficult for these staff to understand or accept new ideas or methodologies of other 'general grade' supervisors transferred from other departments, their loyalty to the department on the other hand urges them to provide assistance and backup to compromising supervisors fresh to the department or new to the civil service.

This situation happens also to departmental professional officers under the command of a general grade officer. The departmental culture or practice

simply being part and partial of their professional pride are what they will surely defend and what they could not bear to be challenged. However, supervisors who promote their interests might get their support. It would be easier to get closer to the departmental officers or obtain their trust if the general grade officers are members of the department. Support to other general grade professional officers as peers could also be solicited if these professionals become departmental staff, and share the joy and criticism with the rest of the department.

Stronger bonds of the working level within a department would mean that the heads, including the section heads, division heads, and department head need to polish their leadership skill and the communication channels throughout in order that the laid down policies could be carried out as originally planned.

Ends.

June 2002

	<u>MPS</u>	<u>Strength</u>	<u>\$'000</u>
MPS	1-49		8-88

Some general grades selected

Accounting officer	11-33	300	16-46 (SAO excluded, pay start at pt.34, strength of 30)
Clerical officer	2-27	13,000	9-35
Clerical assistant	1-10	7,000	8-15
Computer operator	4-39	300	10-60
Data Processor	1-21	200	8-27
Executive officer	12-33	1,200	17-46 (SEO excluded, pay start at pt.34, strength of 500)
Statistical officer	6-33	450	12-46
Statistics supervisor	5-33	30	11-46
Sup. of typing service	16-24	50	21-31
Supplies assistant	1-10	300	8-15
Supplies supervisor	2-27	700	9-35
Typist	1-15	2,900	8-20
		<u>26,130</u>	

Other grades' pay scale for reference

Administrative officer	22-44
Education officer	12-49
Education officer(Admin)	18-49
Statistician	22-49
Treasury accountant	25-49