

The Government Local Civil Engineers Association

P.O. Box 28515, Gloucester Road Post Office, Wan Chai, Hong Kong.

Annual Report for 2001/02

1. Introduction

1.1 *The Council was elected on 8 June 2001 at the 22nd AGM. During the 2001/02 term, 6 council meetings were held to discuss and administer the affairs of our Association. There were also meetings and close liaison with other staff associations concerning affairs affecting the common interests of professionals in the civil service.*

1.2 *We received many valuable feedback and suggestions from members. These views were forwarded to the grade management through our meetings and correspondences with DCE and DWS. Close contacts were also made with our Hon. Adviser, the Hon. Ir Dr. Raymond Ho Chung-tai to exchange views concerning the engineering profession. The Council also met representatives of the Civil Engineering Graduates (CEGs) and Assistant Engineers (AEs) whose major concern is their career prospects.*

1.3 *There is no question that there are uncertain times around us. The Council has devoted much effort to the controversial subjects of the pay review mechanism and the accountability system. We have closely monitored and will continue to address the "Pay Cut" issues which are haunting us.*

2. Civil Service Issues

Review of Civil Service Pay Policy and System

2.1 *In Dec. 2001, the Government decided to conduct a comprehensive review of civil service pay policy and system. We are of the view that the civil service salaries should be sufficient to attract candidates of the right calibre and the Government should not adopt a salary structure that is built on "supply and demand". The review is a complex and comprehensive exercise with far-reaching implications to the civil service. We are against any hasty decisions. Any changes must have the support of the staff unions and should be introduced gradually. We consider that the Government should not just copy overseas practices without regard to our unique position. We have written to CSB and forwarded a submission to the Joint Secretariat for the Advisory Bodies on Civil Service to express our views.*

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Pay Cut

2.2 *Soon after the Financial Secretary delivered his maiden Budget, 18 civil service staff unions sent a joint statement to the Chief Executive, Chief Secretary and Financial Secretary to express their dissatisfaction over the pay cut assumption. We are of the view that since there is an established mechanism and timetable for civil service pay adjustment, the Government should not have made such a hasty and unfounded assumption. It is definitely a departure from the well established practice and would cause major controversy within the civil service.*

2.3 *In response to the Government's announcement of a pay cut on 22 May 2002, we have written to SNEOA to express our views. We are against the enactment of legislation to provide for such reduction. Such legislation, if passed, would have long term implications on the civil service salary structure. We support the request made by the Senior Civil Service Council on 28 May 2002 — all staff unions should drop the plan for legal action against the Government; the dispute should be settled through an Independent Committee of Inquiry.*

Public Criticism

2.4 *We have noted that criticizing the civil service is a gamemanship which many legislators nowadays love to play. The leaders of the business community have no idea of a workable solution to Hong Kong's economic problems resulting in their claim that the civil service is the main cause of the economics woes. We have urged SNEOA to come out to defend us, and we, senior civil servants, should not be made the scapegoat and become the target of criticisms.*

Ranking of Engineer Grade

2.5 *Arising from the ongoing review of civil service pay policy and system, there have been ill-informed remarks about the professional rank in the civil service bureaucracy. From the accountability viewpoint, we do not want to see any changes being made to the ranking of the Engineer grade, i.e. from engineer to senior engineer to chief engineer. The present system is well defined and would ensure that professional practices are regularly monitored, checked and verified under a well tried management/command structure.*

Outsourcing

2.6 *We are happy to note that the proposals to privatize water supply services have been shelved and would be reviewed in 2004. The WSD staff unions have taken appropriate actions to protect members' interests. We pay high regard to the WSD administration to maintaining a harmonious management/staff relation.*

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Infrastructure Investment

2.7 We responded to the Budget speech and requested adequate “resources” be made available for infrastructure developments. We noted that the Government would continue to spend about \$25 to \$30 billions per annum on capital works. We supported the initiatives of our Hon. Adviser who had contributed to the development of “our roadmap to the future”.

Accountability System

2.8 Major changes will be made to the government portfolios under the new accountability system. What these will mean for WB, TB & HB are yet to be seen. Specifically, we have **suggested to the Chief Executive** the following :-

- (a) For the Accountability Official overseeing Works & Transport, a person with engineering background should be picked in view of the sophistication and complexities involved in this portfolio.
- (b) The Permanent Secretary for Works should remain **an engineer** to support the work of the new “minister”.

2.9 We also support the merging of the environment portfolio with Works and Transport. This linking would enhance co-ordination and streamline the administrative system.

3. Review of the Administrative System

3.1 It is time to review the “Administrative System” of the civil service. Our Hon Adviser, the Hon Ir Dr. Raymond C.T. HO, in his speech to the LegCo on 14 March 2002, suggested the establishment of a committee on reviewing administrative procedures. We support this move which will help strengthen the communication among bureaux and departments.

3.2 We have also suggested a review of the desirability of a generalist-dominated civil service. Government should consider if professionals with administrative skills should be appointed to head those bureaux/departments which require heavy professional input. These include Works, Transport, Planning, Environment, Building, Health and Lands, and Information Technology. We believe Administrative Officers are more suitable for policy bureaux relating to humanities (like district administration, welfare, recreation and culture). The present administrative system was introduced in UK in the mid-19th century (the Northcote Trevelyan reforms). It was transplanted to the Hong Kong Government for historical reason. It is high time for a Review.

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4. Meetings with Works Directors and the Hon. Adviser

4.1 *One of our key tasks is to serve as a channel of communication between staff and the top management as we strongly believe communication is the key to fostering relationships. We had separate meetings with DCE and DWS in Nov. 2001 and Jan. 2002 respectively to discuss and exchange views on professional issues and grade management matters. Other than the above, the council also maintained informal contacts with the Works Directors throughout the year.*

4.2 *We have also been working closely with our Hon. Adviser, the Hon. Ir Dr. Raymond Ho, on many issues for the last 12 months. We maintain a close tie with him and treasure his invaluable advice throughout.*

5. Civil Engineering Graduates (CEGs) and Contract Assistant Engineers (CAEs)

5.1 *The employment prospect of our CEGs/AEs has been an area of growing concern. It becomes obvious that prospective university graduates have shunned themselves from joining the government due to fear of unemployment upon completion of their training. In the long term, the industry will suffer due to the failure of recruiting and retaining quality graduates in the civil engineering profession, particularly for the civil service.*

5.2 *The government has been recruiting the best graduate engineers in the past years. These talented young engineers, if retained, are there to serve the community. Being the largest civil engineers staff association, we have acted as a contact point for the young engineers working in the government. We are of the view that it is not only undesirable from moral/motivation viewpoint if they lose their jobs after completing their training, it is also a failure of our human resources management and a waste of public resources.*

5.3 *The Chief Executive said that one of Hong Kong's strength was its infrastructure. To build upon this strength, the Government should ensure that future generations of engineers are of a world-class standard. Works Departments have taken the lead in this regard, and should continue to do so.*

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6. Quality Drive

6.1 *The Council has been following with great interest the progress in raising the quality of public construction works. We have written twice to the South China Morning Post supporting the Government's drive to raise the quality standard and improve the procurement system. The fierce fee competition among consultants is not conducive to the quest for excellence in engineering designs and creativity of professionals. We are glad that Works Bureau will soon issue guidelines to facilitate our engineers to determine whether a fee is reasonable or not.*

6.2 *The Council was glad to note that DSD had successfully completed the Phase 1 of the SSDS and HyD was awarded the HKQAA's ISO 9001:2000 certification last year. The Council had, on both occasions, sent our congratulations to them.*

7. Partnering

7.1 *Our Council members participated actively in HKIE and SNEOA to promote our reputation and networking, fostering a closer link and cooperation between government engineers and other stakeholders. We support the partnering approach which enhances the communication and co-operation amongst the stakeholders in the construction industry.*

7.2 *We always take pride in our members' immense contributions to Hong Kong. This hard-earned reputation requires constant effort and sustained improvement. Uncertainty is around the Hong Kong society, we must stand united and contribute our best efforts towards the well-being of the society. We pledge friendliness and mutual support of all government engineers in the work environment, cutting red-tape and **working as a coherent team to further enhance our efficiency**, which will create greater savings than just relying on the budgetary strings and staff cut-backs.*

7.3 *We all should respect and nurture our chosen career. Civil engineers are the keepers of our environment and help make citizens' lives easier and more enjoyable. **The society should also pay us a reasonable remuneration to upkeep our standards.***

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7.4 *Our Hon. Adviser spoke about community spirit and family problems in the LegCo on 27.2.02 and 15.5.02. We share his thoughts — our members need to share and care, maintaining a high spirit of camaraderie. We also need stability and solidarity to face the challenges and changes with one heart and one mind.*

8. HKIE Activities

8.1 *The Annual General Meeting of the HKIE has been scheduled for 24 June 2002 (Monday). The election for the post of Elected Ordinary Members (EOM) for the 2002/03 session will also be held on the same day. The Council appeals to all members to **show your support** by attending the AGM and casting your vote.*

8.2 *Our Hon. President, Ir Ching Kam-cheong, will run for the election for the post of EOM in partnership with Ir Andrew K C Chan, chairman of Ove Arup & Partners Hong Kong Ltd. Ir Ching participates actively in both the activities of the Association and the Institution. Ir Chan is a renowned practicing professional. He is also actively involved in educational issues of University and academic institutions. **Your council appeals to all members for your strong support.***

8.3 *Several engineers (Ir Patrick Yuen, Ir P K Lee and Ir Henry Leung) had also discussed with our Council and expressed their intention to run for the election of the EOMs.*

8.4 ***Your vote really really matters.** We hope that the our voice is constantly heard in the HKIE Council. The fact that several past Chairmen were successful in the past elections speaks volumes for the importance of your vote.*

9. Membership Drive

*Given the uncertainties, we need a strong and united Association to cope with the instability surrounding our profession today. However, the growth of membership is limited due to the trend of EPP and downsizing. Once again, we appeal to members to **encourage more fellow engineers to join our Association** to boost our representative power. Please contact the Hon. Secretary at the st.ip@housingauthority.gov.hk or your department's representative in Council for membership application.*

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10. End-Piece

10.1 *In accordance with the Constitution, I have to step down from the Chairmanship after 3 years' service. I like to take this opportunity to **thank you** all for your support and also wish to thank the Council members for their hard work and devotion to the affairs of the Association.*

10.2 *During my 3-year term, I am delighted to see the promotion of our two past chairmen Ir Dr. C K Lau (as DCE) and Ir William C G Ko (as DWS). I am however disillusioned to witness the dim prospect of our CEGs/AEs. Hopefully, after I hand over the reins to the new chairman, some changes (for the better) could be accomplished for our next generation of engineers – an issue of sustainability!*

10.3 *The Council is delighted to see the appointment of Ir Raymond T K Cheung as Director of Drainage Services. We have an outstanding group of engineers serving for the common good. My best wishes go to all members for a better future.*

Lastly, I look forward to seeing you all at the AGM on 13 June 2002 to make this a memorable event.

By Order of the Council

Martin Cheung

(Ir Martin CHEUNG Kin-keung)

Chairman

28 May 2002