

Anger at advert for Secretary of Works

By JACQUELINE LEE

GOVERNMENT engineers yesterday warned that the civil service appointment system might be open to abuse after 1997, as the administration went ahead with plans to advertise the position of Secretary for Works for open recruitment.

Despite strenuous opposition from staff, the Government has placed an advertisement in today's *South China Morning Post* inviting applications for the job.

The chairman of the Government Civil Engineers Association, Mr Tung Shu-shing, said: "The move sets a very bad example for the future Special Administrative Region [SAR] government to exploit.

"If, for whatever reasons, the future SAR administration wants to put a particular outsider into a secretary position, all it needs to do is to put the job up for open recruitment."

Mr Tung said staff had warned the Government of the political implications in a letter to the Chief Secretary, Sir David Ford, in December, but had yet to receive a reply.

They also feared damage to staff morale and warned that an outsider would not have the trust and support of the professional officers.

Staff have threatened to resign *en masse* over the open recruitment, which they say will deprive senior staff of promotion prospects that would come with the retirement of Mr Kenneth Kwok Wai-kai, a professional engineer, later this year.

While staff want a professional to head the branch, the Government considers a qualification in engineering, architecture or related fields as preferable, not essential.

The ideal candidate must have a proven record of planning and implementing major public or private sector works projects.

"A seasoned and highly-motivated leader, commanding the respect of his peers, he should have outstanding administrative ability combined with a clear understanding of engineering, management and financial issues. A high degree of political sensitivity is also essential," it says.

Apart from general works and water supply policy matters, the successful candidate will also take up Mr Kwok's work as the overall co-ordinator for implementing the works projects connected with the port and airport project.

The package includes a monthly salary of \$97,000, subsidised housing, passages, leave and "other benefits commensurate with a position of such seniority".