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Alleviating a problem

The Social Welfare Department is considering several remedies to the current shortage of trained social workers, the department's Deputy Director, Mrs Anson Chan, said.

She also said that it is now difficult to gauge the impact of the immigrant and refugee influx on social security programmes.

Mrs Chan said the Government "will take these extra numbers into account for planning purposes."

However, she pointed out that the Government is concerned "that if the present level of immigrants is allowed to continue unabated it will place a severe strain on all our social services and will dilute the quality of life here."

Mrs Chan said the social welfare manpower survey indicates a shortage of approximately 400 trained social workers at the university level and approximately 75 at

the lower level.

She termed this manpower shortage "a worrying problem," but said steps are being taken to lessen its impact.

These steps are:

- Training capacities in various institutions will be increased from 10 per cent to 40 per cent during the 1979-80 academic year.

- Making more effective use of trained manpower by switching social workers "to concentrate on work which requires professional expertise."

- Improving conditions of service of the social workers by reorganisation of the Social Welfare Department and implementing the welfare class review — making better use of part-time trained workers.

- Providing in-service training to bring staff members with some social work background up to the fully professional level.

Mrs Chan said that the

various training institutions cannot bridge the manpower gap in a brief period.

Therefore, she asked: "Is there no scope for employing selected untrained personnel, supplemented by in-service training?"

She said the White Paper "lays a firm foundation for the development of social welfare in the 1980s."

It sets right priorities and its programmes are realistic and "sufficiently flexible to be able to respond quickly to rapid changes."

Mrs Chan noted that there had been some criticism of the paper's section dealing with personal social work among young people in that it showed "a negative approach."

This is disputed in the many programmes the Government provides for the community as a whole, "of whom young people are a very significant group," she said.