

Acute staff shortage in welfare sector

THERE will be a short-fall of about 2,000 staff in the social welfare sector for the coming five years, a field survey on manpower has predicted.

The report on "The Social Welfare Manpower Survey 1981" estimated there would be an accumulated total demand for 1,971 trained social worker graduates, and 1,812 non-graduates in the year 1986-87.

The project convenor, Kay Ku, told a seminar on social welfare manpower yesterday that the supply of

trained social workers in the period would be only 1,109 graduates and 739 non-graduates.

"Thus, there is a discrepancy of 870 trained-graduates and 1,080 non-graduates," she said.

The survey was jointly conducted by the Hongkong Council of Social Service and the Social Welfare Department.

There were 122 organisations with 4,436 social welfare practitioners (about 90 per cent of the welfare work force) which

took part in the study.

The result showed that only slightly over a quarter of the respondents had formal social work training, while 45.5 per cent of the welfare posts required formal training, Miss Ku said.

She said that the drop-out rate for social workers was high.

"During the period 1980-81, 110 trained social workers left their profession - 80 per cent in the voluntary sector and the others in government

sectors," she said.

Last year the average turnover rate of trained social workers was 15.2 per cent. The rate for the voluntary sector was higher than the government sector, which were 21.3 and 6.5 per cent respectively, she said.

Miss Ku said there were too many social welfare organisations which made data collection difficult.

"In the present survey, data collection took five months to complete," she said.

She urged the government to set up a Social Welfare Personnel Information System to collect manpower data systematically.

Miss Ku said that, through the setting up of the system, the annual manpower survey could be discontinued as data could be updated annually.

Also speaking at the seminar was Eva Ko, president of the Hongkong Social Workers' Association.

She said the government should look into the reasons for the high dropout rate.

"If there is something wrong with the existing system, new recruitment could in no way, solve the problem as they would leave the profession gradually," Miss Ko said.

Chairman of the Social Workers' General Union, Mak Hoi-wah, is said to have put forward ten recommendations in the report of the government-appointed Working Party on Social Welfare Manpower.

These recommendations include the setting up of a committee comprising members from social welfare organisations, social work institutes and students to coordinate the training and development of the social welfare sector.

It was also recommended that another committee be set up to assess the qualification of the workers and that chances for promotion be broadened by creating senior social work posts for experienced and dedicated social workers.

They also called on the government to improve working conditions and their terms of employment as a means of keeping social workers in the job.

The seminar was jointly organised by the Hongkong Social Workers' Association, the Hongkong Social Workers' General Union, the Social Work Alumni Association of the Baptist, Shue Yan and the Polytechnic colleges and the Students' Society of School of Social Work.