

**For information
on 4 November 2019**

Legislative Council Panel on Public Service

Grade Structure Review for Veterinary Laboratory Technician and Medical Laboratory Technician Grades

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the findings and recommendations of the Standing Commission on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of Service (the Standing Commission)¹ in relation to the Grade Structure Review (GSR) for the Veterinary Laboratory Technician (VLT) grade of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and the Medical Laboratory Technician (MLT) grade of the Department of Health (DH).

Background

2. In view of the serious recruitment and retention difficulties faced by the VLT grade of AFCD, the Government invited the Standing Commission in June 2018 to conduct a GSR for the grade as well as the MLT grade of DH, which has similar job nature and qualification requirements as those of the VLT grade. The Standing Commission completed the GSR and submitted its Report No. 61: Grade Structure Review for Veterinary Laboratory Technician and Medical Laboratory Technician Grades (the Report) to the Chief Executive on 26 July 2019. The Report can be downloaded via the following web page: <https://www.jsscs.gov.hk/reports/en/61/61.pdf>. We have also provided the Secretariat of this Panel with ten copies of the Report for easy reference of the Members.

¹ The Standing Commission advises and makes recommendations to the Chief Executive on the principles and practices governing pay, conditions of service and salary structure of non-directorate civil servants (excluding judicial officers and disciplined services staff).

Veterinary Laboratory Technician and Medical Laboratory Technician Grades

Grade structure

3. The VLT and MLT grades are Supplementary Medical Professions (SMP) grades under the management of AFCD and DH respectively². Staff of the VLT grade work in the Veterinary Laboratory Division and Equine Disease Division of the Inspection and Quarantine Branch of AFCD³, while staff of the MLT grade work in the Clinical Genetic Service under the Specialised Services Branch, and the Forensic Pathology Service under the Regulatory Affairs as well as the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch under the Centre for Health Protection of DH respectively. They provide services under their respective purviews, such as conducting routine and specialised laboratory tests and examinations; evaluating, validating and updating new testing protocols and methodologies; carrying out maintenance and calibration of laboratory apparatus; and maintaining the day-to-day operation of laboratories. The specific duties of the two grades are set out in Chapters 3 and 4 of the Report respectively.

4. In terms of grade structure, the VLT grade consists of three ranks, namely the VLT II, VLT I and Veterinary Technologist (VT)⁴, while the MLT grade consists of five ranks, namely the MLT II, MLT I, Medical Technologist (MT), Senior Medical Technologist (SMT) and Chief Medical Technologist (CMT)⁵.

Entry requirements and pay scales

5. Both the VLT and MLT grades are classified under Qualification Group (QG) 3 Group II: Diploma Grades. At present, the entry requirement for both grades is the possession of a Diploma in Medical Laboratory Science (or

² Other than the VLT and MLT grades, the SMP grades also include the Occupational Therapist, Optometrist, Physiotherapist and Radiographer grades.

³ There is one Veterinary Technologist posted to the Veterinary Section of the Hong Kong Zoological and Botanical Gardens in the Leisure and Cultural Services Department.

⁴ As at 31 March 2019, the VLT grade had an establishment of 47 posts (25 VLT II, 13 VLT I and nine VT posts), and a strength of 35 staff (16 VLT IIs, 13 VLT Is and six VTs).

⁵ As at 31 March 2019, the MLT grade had an establishment of 261 posts (103 MLT II, 44 MLT I, 95 MT, 18 SMT and one CMT posts), and a strength of 261 staff (130 MLT IIs, 23 MLT Is, 93 MTs, 14 SMTs and one CMT).

equivalent). Candidates should also be registered under Part II of the Register of the Medical Laboratory Technologists Board of Hong Kong under the Supplementary Medical Professions Ordinance (Cap. 359). The existing entry requirements for the VLT II and MLT II ranks are set out at **Annex I** and the pay scales of the various ranks of the two grades are at **Annex II**.

Findings and Recommendations of the GSR

Review findings

6. As in previous reviews, the Standing Commission firmly believes that consultation with stakeholders is crucial for ensuring that adequate opportunities are provided for the staff associations, as well as individual staff members, to express their views to the Standing Commission and its Working Group dedicated to conducting the GSR (the Working Group) so that they will have a better understanding of the operations of the grades under review and a first-hand grasp of staff views and sentiments. In this regard, in the course of the GSR, the Working Group organised four visits to AFCD and DH and met with the staff members of the two grades. It also conducted meetings with the two departmental managements and the staff associations concerned⁶ to listen to their views. When the Standing Commission came to a preliminary view on the submissions after considering the advice of the Working Group, it also invited the two departmental managements and the aforementioned staff associations to further listen to their views before finalising the Report.

7. The Standing Commission considers that the VLT grade is facing persistent and serious recruitment and retention difficulties. In the five recruitment exercises for VLT II conducted between 2014 and 2019, AFCD could only identify candidates to fill around 8% to 14% of the vacancies each time. The average vacancy rate of the VLT grade in the past three years stood high at 26%. As at 31 March 2019, the vacancy rate of the VLT II rank was as high as 36%. Given the relatively small establishment of the grade and with the aforesaid problems, extra workload inevitably has to be shared out by the existing staff which may, in turn, aggravate the problem of staff turnover due to huge work

⁶ The staff bodies concerned were the Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association and its Medical Technicians & Technologists Branch.

pressure. Regarding the succession arrangements for the grade, most of the VLT IIs are within the age bracket of 36 to 45. AFCD has failed to recruit the younger generation to join the grade. This may give rise to a succession problem for the grade in the long run if the recruitment problem persists. The Standing Commission is of the view that the problem, if not properly addressed, will be detrimental to the efficient operation of AFCD, which will in turn adversely affect its role in the protection of public health.

8. As for the MLT grade, the Standing Commission understands that DH indeed encountered difficulties in the recruitment for the entry rank of MLT II a few years ago. However, the situation has improved in recent years. Seen in this light, and coupled with the low vacancy rate of the grade at present⁷, the Standing Commission is of the view that there are no proven persistent recruitment difficulties for the grade. Yet the MLT grade has been experiencing some slight turnover problems, as evidenced by a resignation rate which is higher than that of the whole civil service⁸. If not properly addressed, the turnover rate in DH will deplete the department's training and recruitment resources which is detrimental to the provision of testing and validation services necessary for the maintenance of public health in Hong Kong. Moreover, the Standing Commission has noted that the career progression of the MLT II rank is not favourable. On average, it takes an MLT II some 21.2 years to be promoted to the rank of MLT I. The Standing Commission acknowledges the need to improve the career development opportunity for the entry rank of MLT II in DH so as to boost staff morale and keep them in the service of the grade.

9. In so far as job nature is concerned, the Standing Commission considers that, with technological advancement and social changes, the responsibilities and job complexity of the VLT and MLT grades have indeed increased over the past decades. Nevertheless, there are no fundamental changes in the job nature of the two grades.

⁷ According to the Report, the average vacancy rate of the MLT grade in the past three years (i.e. as at 31 March of 2017, 2018 and 2019) was 1.16%. In the latest recruitment exercise for MLT II conducted in December 2017, all vacancies were filled.

⁸ The average resignation rate of the MLT grade in the past five years was 1.81%, which is higher than the figure for the whole civil service in the same period at 0.69%.

Recommendations of the Standing Commission

10. After reviewing the manpower positions of the VLT and MLT grades, the views and proposals put forward by the two departmental managements and the staff side, as well as the principles and key considerations⁹ guiding the GSR, the Standing Commission has made a series of recommendations as summarised at **Annex III** and highlighted below –

- (a) re-classifying the qualification grouping of the VLT and MLT grades from QG 3 Group II: Diploma Grades to QG 3 Group I: Higher Diploma or Associate Degree Grades and raising their entry requirement to Higher Diploma level, so as to be in line with the QG of the other SMP grades mentioned in paragraph 3 above. Both departmental managements consider that setting the minimum entry qualification at the Higher Diploma level is sufficient for the competent performance of the jobs of the grades concerned;
- (b) merging the VLT II and VLT I ranks to form a new entry rank of Associate Veterinary Technologist (AVT) and merging the MLT II and MLT I ranks to form a new entry rank of Associate Medical Technologist (AMT)¹⁰. The proposed pay scales are set at Master Pay Scale (MPS) Points 14 – 24, with an omitted point at MPS Point 17. The Standing Commission is of the view that this revision will make the pay scales for the entry rank of the VLT and MLT grades more comparable to that of the Medical Laboratory Technologist grade of HA¹¹, with a view to addressing the manpower problems of AFCD and DH;

⁹ These principles and considerations include the Government's civil service pay policy, the established pay principles, public expectation, situation of the grades, implications that the recommendations may have on the existing staff and staff of related grades and beyond, as well as the wider community interests such as financial and public health considerations.

¹⁰ The rank merger will bring the structures of the two grades be more consistent with that of most of the other SMP grades (except for the single-rank Optometrist grade) and be similar to that of the Medical Laboratory Technologist grade of the Hospital Authority (HA).

¹¹ At present, the starting salary for the entry rank of the Medical Laboratory Technologist grade of HA (i.e. AMT) is set at HA General Pay Scale Point 13 (equivalent to MPS Point 13).

- (c) revising the pay scales of the VT and MT ranks from MPS Points 29 – 33 to MPS Points 25 – 33A¹²;
- (d) creating a new promotion rank of Senior Veterinary Technologist with a pay scale of MPS Points 34 – 39;
- (e) the pay scale of the SMT rank should remain unchanged and the CMT rank should be retained; and
- (f) the normal conversion arrangements¹³ should be adopted for the merging of the ranks and pay scale conversion in accordance with the established practice. It also sees merit in DH's proposal of making a special conversion arrangement¹⁴ under particular circumstances.

11. The Standing Commission trusts that the above proposed measures will not only help arrest the manpower problems of the two grades, but will also help bring about a more attractive career for the VLT and MLT grades. Other recommendations put forward by the Standing Commission include encouraging the departments concerned to promulgate clear promotion requirements for the various ranks of the two grades, improve the physical working conditions at those remotely located laboratories, consider the need for introducing specific job-related allowances for the officers concerned, and consider if there is any room for flexible deployment of staff to share out the heavy testing duties during seasonal disease outbreaks. The Standing Commission supports the Government's continued efforts in monitoring the manpower supply situation for the medical laboratory technologist profession.

¹² The dollar value of MPS Point 33A is identical to MPS Point 34, but officers remunerated at MPS Point 33A are not entitled to relevant housing benefits enjoyed by officers remunerated at MPS Point 34.

¹³ The overriding principle for normal conversion arrangements is that no officer should receive less pay on conversion to the new scale.

¹⁴ The special conversion arrangement proposed by DH, as set out in paragraph 5.46 of the Report, mainly seeks to ensure that the newly-promoted MLT Is will not be worse off when compared with the senior MLT IIs upon conversion.

Stakeholders' Views

12. The Chief Executive has tasked the Civil Service Bureau to study the findings and recommendations made in the Report in consultation with the relevant parties. In this connection, AFCD, DH and staff side of the grades concerned have been invited to offer their views for consideration.

Way Forward

13. After consolidating and considering all comments received, we will submit proposals on how to take forward the findings of the GSR to the Chief Executive-in-Council for a decision. Should the decision result in any changes to the pay and grade structure of the VLT and MLT grades, the endorsement of the Establishment Subcommittee and the approval of the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council will be sought.

Advice Sought

14. Members are invited to note and offer comments on the findings and recommendations made in the Report.

Civil Service Bureau

Food and Health Bureau

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Department of Health

October 2019

**Existing Entry Requirements of
the Veterinary Laboratory Technician II and
Medical Laboratory Technician II Ranks**

Veterinary Laboratory Technician II rank

Entry requirements:

- (a) have a Diploma in Medical Laboratory Science (MLS) of the Hong Kong Polytechnic/Polytechnic University or equivalent;
- (b) be registered under Part II of the Register of the Medical Laboratory Technologists Board (MLTB) of Hong Kong; and
- (c) have met the language proficiency requirements of Level 2 or above in Chinese Language and English Language in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSEE) or Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) or equivalent.

Medical Laboratory Technician II rank

Entry requirements:

- (a) have a Diploma in MLS from an institute recognised by the MLTB of Hong Kong, or equivalent;
- (b) have registered in Hong Kong as a Medical Laboratory Technologist in Part II of the Register of Medical Laboratory Technologists under the Supplementary Medical Professions Ordinance (Cap. 359);
- (c) have a valid Practising Certificate issued by the MLTB of Hong Kong; and
- (d) have met the language proficiency requirements of Level 2 or above in Chinese Language and English Language in the HKDSEE or the HKCEE, or equivalent.

**Pay Scales of
the Veterinary Laboratory Technician and
Medical Laboratory Technician Grades**

<u>Veterinary Laboratory Technician</u>	
Rank	Master Pay Scale
Veterinary Laboratory Technician II	Points 8 – 21
Veterinary Laboratory Technician I	Points 22 – 28
Veterinary Technologist	Points 29 – 33
<u>Medical Laboratory Technician</u>	
Rank	Master Pay Scale
Medical Laboratory Technician II	Points 8 – 21 (omitted point at Point 12)
Medical Laboratory Technician I	Points 22 – 28
Medical Technologist	Points 29 – 33
Senior Medical Technologist	Points 34 – 39
Chief Medical Technologist	Points 40 – 44

(Extracted from Report No. 61 of the Standing Commission on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of Service:
Grade Structure Review for
Veterinary Laboratory Technician and Medical Laboratory
Technician grades)

Summary of Recommendations

Paragraph

The Veterinary Laboratory Technician Grade

Qualification Grouping and Entry Requirements

- (1) The qualification grouping of the Veterinary Laboratory Technician (VLT) grade should be re-classified from Qualification Group (QG) 3 Group II : Diploma Grades to QG 3 Group I : Higher Diploma or Associate Degree Grades. 5.12
- (2) The entry requirement of the VLT grade should be raised to Higher Diploma level. The Government should consider whether other academic qualifications recognised by the Medical Laboratory Technologists Board (MLTB) should be further accepted. 5.12 & 5.13
- (3) The Government's attention would be drawn to the need to consider the issues of qualification grouping of the VLT and Medical Laboratory Technician (MLT) grades in the wider context of the civil service QG framework in light of the findings of future pay surveys. 5.14

Merging of Ranks

- (4) The VLT II and VLT I ranks should be merged to form a new entry rank of Associate Veterinary Technologist (AVT). 5.25

Associate Veterinary Technologist Rank

- (5) The pay scale of the AVT rank should be set at Master Pay Scale (MPS) Points 14 – 24 with an omitted point at MPS Point 17. 5.31 & 5.35

Veterinary Technologist Rank

- (6) The pay scale of the Veterinary Technologist rank should be set at MPS Points 25 – 33A. 5.39

Creation of the Senior Veterinary Technologist Rank

- (7) A new promotion rank of Senior Veterinary Technologist should be created with a pay scale of MPS Points 34 – 39. 5.42

Conversion

- (8) Normal conversion arrangements should be adopted for the proposed adjustments to the pay scale of the VLT grade. The Government should consider drawing up any special conversion arrangements as appropriate. 5.48

The Medical Laboratory Technician Grade

Qualification Grouping and Entry Requirements

- (9) The qualification grouping of the MLT grade should be re-classified from QG 3 Group II : Diploma Grades to QG 3 Group I : Higher Diploma or Associate Degree Grades. 5.12
- (10) The entry requirement of the MLT grade should be raised to Higher Diploma level. The Government should consider whether other academic qualifications recognised by the MLTB should be further accepted. 5.12 & 5.13
- (11) The Government’s attention would be drawn to the need to consider the issues of qualification grouping of the VLT and MLT grades in the wider context of the civil service QG framework in light 5.14

of the findings of future pay surveys.

Merging of Ranks

- (12) The MLT II and MLT I ranks should be merged to form a new entry rank of Associate Medical Technologist (AMT). 5.25

Associate Medical Technologist Rank

- (13) The pay scale of the AMT rank should be set at MPS Points 14 – 24 with an omitted point at MPS Point 17. 5.31 & 5.35

Medical Technologist Rank

- (14) The pay scale of the Medical Technologist rank should be set at MPS Points 25 – 33A. 5.39

Senior Medical Technologist Rank

- (15) The pay scale of the Senior Medical Technologist rank should remain unchanged. 5.44

Chief Medical Technologist Rank

- (16) The Chief Medical Technologist rank should be retained. 5.44

Conversion

- (17) Normal conversion arrangements should be adopted for the proposed adjustments to the pay scale of the MLT grade. The Government should consider drawing up any special conversion arrangements as appropriate. 5.48

Other Issues

Promotion Requirements

- (18) The departmental managements of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and the Department of Health (DH) are encouraged to promulgate clear promotion requirements for the various ranks in the VLT and MLT grades after the Grade Structure Review. 5.50

Working Environment, Job-Related Allowances and Compensation for Overtime Work

- (19) The departmental management of AFCD is encouraged to consider administrative means to improve the physical working conditions at those remotely located laboratories as soon as possible. 5.52
- (20) The departmental managements of AFCD and DH are strongly encouraged to consider further if the special circumstances faced by staff of the VLT and MLT grades in certain laboratories warrant the introduction of specific job-related allowances. 5.52
- (21) The departmental managements of AFCD and DH should carefully monitor the amount of overtime work required and compensate staff accordingly, as well as consider any room for flexible deployment of staff to share out the heavy testing duties during seasonal disease outbreaks. 5.53

Continuous Monitoring of the Supply of Healthcare Manpower

- (22) The Government's continued efforts in monitoring the manpower supply situation for the medical laboratory technologist profession are fully supported. 5.54