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PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1980-1981

Job classification and career development of language staff

Twenty-eighth report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative
and Budgetary Questions

1.   The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has
considered the report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/35/75) on job classification
and career development of language staff.

2.   In his report on the implementation of the classification systems for posts
in the Professional and General Service categories submitted to the General
Assembly at its thirty-fourth session (A/C.5/34/37, paras. 7 and 8), the Secretary-
General indicated that consultations on the final classification results relating
to the language occupational groups (interpreters, translators, verbatim reporters,
copy preparers and editors) within the Department of Conference Services were
still in progress. He further stated that he would establish a special group to
examine all aspects of the question and to submit specific proposals to him. He
would report on those proposals and their financial implications to the General
Assembly at its thirty-fifth session.

3.   The proposals in question were formulated by two study groups, one for
Headquarters and the other for the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG). The
recommendations of the study groups have been fully endorsed by the Secretary-
General (para. 12).

4.   In paragraphs 3 and 6 of his report, the Secretary-General refers to two
reports which were placed before the study groups and which contained conclusions
and recommendations on the basis of which the proposals were formulated. One of
them was the report by Dr. Jiménez de Aréchaga, the former President of the
International Court of Justice whom the Secretary-General had requested to
undertake an inquiry into the question of career prospects for language staff
(A/C.5/34/37, para. 7). It contains the following recommendations:

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(a)   The criteria followed in the classification of posts should be reviewed with full staff participation;

(b)   A more favourable proportion should be established between the P-5, P-4 and P-3 posts in order to provide avenues of advancement and to retain the best staff; and

(c)   The ratios between P-5, P-4 and P-3 language posts should be such that career development for language staff would be no less favourable than that for other Professional staff. 1/

The other report was the evaluation of the translation process in the United Nations system by the Joint Inspection Unit (A/35/294). It draws attention to the limited career prospects of translators in the United Nations system and recommends that organizations should take steps suited to their policies and structure to increase gradually the number of documents that are self-revised and adjust the number and grade of language staff accordingly.

5.   In paragraph 5 of the report by the Secretary-General, it is argued that a larger number of posts at the more senior grades is justified in view of the considerable independence of language staff in the performance of their work. In paragraph 4, reference is made to the difficulties experienced by the Organization in recruiting id retaining suitably qualified language staff. In the special case of the Translation Services, the Secretary-General proposes the gradual introduction of self-revision with a consequential reduction in the number of P-3 posts for translators (see paras. 7 to 12 below). In response to inquiries, the representatives of the Secretary-General informed the Advisory Committee that the proposed grading structure for language staff had been reviewed by the Classification Service of the Office of Personnel Services.

6.   The Secretary-General proposes to implement the new grading structure over the three-year period 1981-1983. The following table provides a summary of the proposed changes by grade for Headquarters and UNOG (a breakdown by function is given in paras. 6 and 8 of document A/C.5/35/75).

1/ Recommendations (b) and (c) were initially made by the interagency meeting on language arrangements, convened by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) and held in July 1974.

Number of posts for language staff	P-5	P-4	P-3	P-2	Total
Headquarters:					
Current	36	163	339	66	604
Proposed	94	223	184	57	558
Increase (decrease)	58	60	(155)	(9)	(46)
UNOG:					
Current	23	100	177	16	316
Proposed	50	126	100	19	295
Increase (decrease)	27	26	(77)	3	(21)
Total:					
Current	59	263	516	82	920
Proposed	144	349	284	76	853
Increase (decrease)	85	86	(232)	(6)	(67)

7.   The net reduction of 67 posts over the three-year period relates to the proposed introduction of self-revision. The Secretary-General is of the view that, by the end of the period, up to 45 per cent of translations will be self-revised (A/C.5/35/75, para. 6). The representatives of the Secretary-General informed the Advisory Committee that the proposed reduction in the number of translator posts was based on the assumption that the workload would remain at its current level.

8.   The following table provides a breakdown of the proposed changes in the grading of translators:

Number of posts for translators	P-5	P-4	P-3	P-2	Total
Headquarters:					
Current	21	103	226	41	391
Proposed	60	146	103	36	345
Increase (decrease)	39	43	(123)	(5)	(46)
UNOG:					
Current	12	56	110	7	185
Proposed	28	69	60	7	164
Increase (decrease)	16	13	(50)	–	(21)
Total:					
Current	33	159	336	48	576
Proposed	88	215	160	43	509
Increase (decrease)	55	56	(173)	(5)	(67)

9.   The Committee understands that the Classification Service of the Office of Personnel Services conducted a study of the grading of translation staff in 1979-1980, taking into account, in particular, the need for career development. Subsequently, the special study group on job classification and career development of language staff, established by the Secretary-General, worked from May to August 1980 to produce a revised grading structure in the language services that would provide language staff with better promotion prospects. The new criterion of self-revision was introduced and the job descriptions were modified accordingly.

10.   The following grades for translators were established:

Associate Translator	P-2
Translator	P-3
Translator (self-revising)	P-4
Reviser	P-4
Senior Reviser	P-5
Chief of Service	D-1

Based on the classification results, the special study group in its final report made concrete recommendations on the number of translator posts required at each established grade level. Those recommendations have been reflected in the Secretary-General's report.

11.   Information provided to the Advisory Committee indicates that the classification of translators' posts according to the standards proposed by the Secretary-General varies from what is being developed by the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) in its current work on tier II standards for translators with respect to the classification of self-revising translators at the P-4 level. The Advisory Committee trusts that these differences can be resolved through consultations with the ICSC.

12.   In response to inquiries, the representatives of the Secretary-General confirmed that self-revision would be introduced gradually so as to ensure that it is performed only by competent and experienced translators. Furthermore, the more sensitive documents such as draft resolutions would continue to be revised. The Advisory Committee agrees with this approach.

Reclassifications proposed for 1981

13.   The Secretary-General proposes that the following changes in the staffing table of the Department of Conference Services at Headquarters and Conference Services, Geneva, be approved for 1981:

(a) Reclassification of posts:

(i)   From P-4 to P-5: 34 posts (24 at Headquarters and 10 in Geneva)

(ii) From P-3 to P-4: 66 posts (46 at Headquarters and 20 in Geneva)

(iii) From P-3 to P-2: 6 posts (all in Geneva).

(b) Posts to be abolished:

20 P-3 posts (15 at Headquarters and 5 in Geneva).

The breakdown by function is given in paragraphs 13 and 14 of document A/C.5/35/75.

14. In paragraph 12 of his report, the Secretary-General states that, for 1981, the reclassifications and abolition of posts requested for Headquarters and Geneva "will require no additional appropriation, as the additional cost of the former are balanced by the savings which arise from the latter". In this connexion, the Advisory Committee notes that in paragraph 11 of his report, the Secretary-General observes that the Headquarters review group had concluded that its recommendations could be implemented without incurring additional costs at Headquarters "and indeed may result in fairly substantial savings".

15. The Secretary-General also states in paragraph 12 of his report that, should the General Assembly approve his recommendations for 1981, he would request the remainder of the reclassifications and reductions of posts in his proposed programme budget for the biennium 1982-1983.

16. With regard to language posts at other United Nations duty stations, the Secretary-General states in paragraph 15 that he is not yet in a position to report to the General Assembly either on steps which might be taken to introduce the practice of self-revision or on the optimum structure of the language services concerned. The Secretary-General therefore requests the General Assembly that he be given the authority in 1981 to take such measures as he deems appropriate, along the lines proposed for Headquarters and Geneva, and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session through the Advisory Committee.

17. The Advisory Committee has no objection to the Secretary-General's request for 1981 (see para. 13 above). However, as regards the proposed elimination of P-3 translator posts, (assuming the current translation workload does not increase) the Committee recommends that it should go hand-in-hand with the gradual introduction of self-revision, due consideration being given to the number of experienced translators in each language service.

18. Furthermore, the Advisory Committee points out that self-revision will have an impact on the workload standards for the production of pre-session, in-session and post-session documentation. In particular, it should be possible to reduce the number of language staff sent to meetings held away from Headquarters or Geneva, by ensuring that such meetings are covered to the extent possible by self-revising translators.