

Legislative Council Panel on Education

**ONE-OFF GRANT TO THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
FOR THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

Purpose

This paper sets out background information on the Administration's proposal to provide a one-off dollar-for-dollar matching grant of up to \$50 million to the Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK) in support of its Information Technology (IT) Development Plan (2000-2002).

Background

2. The OUHK (formerly known as the Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong) was established in 1989 to provide, through open access and distance learning, tertiary education opportunities for adult learners who did not have the opportunity of receiving tertiary education when they left school. It is also the key provider of continuing education and retraining to upgrade the work force to adapt to technological, economic and social changes.

3. The OUHK has achieved self-accrediting and university status within a short span of eight years. It complements the formal tertiary education system and promotes life-long learning in Hong Kong. Starting with only 4 200 places in 1989, the OUHK's student population has increased by more than six times to over 25 000 in 2000. The growth of enrolment is expected to continue, as more people engage in life-long learning. The OUHK operates on a self-financing basis. In the past few years, the Administration provided a total of \$220 million capital grants to support worthwhile initiatives of the institution, including the establishment of a Regional Learning Centre (1999-2000) and an electronic library (1996-97).

4. The quality and achievements of the OUHK are recognised by the regional and international academic and professional communities. It has received three more international awards in 1999 and 2000 for its excellence and achievements in open and distance learning as well as its

electronic library.

OUHK's IT Development Plan

5. The advancement of information technology poses new challenges and provides fresh impetus to the development of open and distance learning. The OUHK has been making efforts to apply telecommunications and information technology to modernise its distance education system. The establishment of an electronic library, a multimedia laboratory and an information centre has made OUHK courses more user friendly, effective and easily accessible for students.

6. With the advent of information technology, education has moved beyond traditional models of classroom-based instruction. An increasing number of tertiary institutions are offering web-based programmes so that students have more flexibility in learning at their own time and pace. To enhance the interest of students in learning, the development of interactive multimedia course materials is on the rise. This facilitates effective interaction between teachers and students.

7. To cope with the world trend and to maintain a leading position as a centre of excellence in distance and adult learning in the Internet era, OUHK has drawn up an IT Development Plan (2000-2002). The Plan will enhance OUHK's teaching, learning and administrative support for the benefit of students and staff. We estimate that the Plan will cost \$100 million. In support of this worthwhile project, the Administration announced in the 2000 Policy Objective Booklet on Quality Education a proposal to provide a matching grant of \$50 million to the OUHK for implementation of this IT Development Plan, subject to the approval of the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council.

8. The Plan will create a more flexible, interactive and student-centred learning environment that is IT-enhanced, web-enabled and multimedia enriched. Specifically, the Plan will achieve three objectives:

- (a) ***Enhancing the IT component of programmes and IT literacy of students:*** All course information will be put on line. Students will be able to access information whenever and wherever they like. The OUHK proposes to develop at least 100 courses with online components and 10 courses with extensive hypermedia materials and online interactive learning activities. This will facilitate students' interest in learning. Moreover, the OUHK will develop and provide an IT literacy programme free of charge to students to improve their IT

survival skills and knowledge in the Internet era. With more hands-on experience in the use of IT, students will have greater confidence in using IT in their daily lives.

- (b) ***Using IT for student support services:*** An integrated system for student support service will be developed to allow online transactions, for example, course registration, tuition fee payment and student loan application. This will provide a one-stop service for students, who are mostly working adults. Students will also benefit from the new features to be provided in the electronic library, including web-based inter-library loan system, e-text centre with digitized version of books, enhanced browsing and searching capability.
- (c) ***Enhancing development opportunities for OUHK:*** For the OUHK as a whole, the Plan will lead to improved operation efficiency and service, more expansion and collaborative opportunities, and making the University an exemplar in the use of IT in distance learning. Other examples of relevant deliverables are set out in the Enclosure.

Encl.

9. The IT Development Plan serves as a blueprint for the systematic and coordinated development of IT at the OUHK for three years starting from mid-2000. As IT is changing rapidly, the plan must be a dynamic one, reacting to the constantly changing IT trend, the changing needs of students and staff, and the feedback of initial development. The implementation schedule and details will be reviewed on a regular basis, and modifications made accordingly.

Financial Implication

10. We estimate that the project will cost \$100 million. The OUHK has advised that it will finance the project in part through private sources but Government support is essential. Subject to Members' approval, we will make the grant of \$50 million to the OUHK in one single payment in 2000. The grant will be expended on a matching basis, which means that if the project turns out to cost less than \$100 million, and thereby requiring less than \$50 million contribution from Government, the OUHK will return the balance to the Government. The OUHK is content with this arrangement.

Finance Committee Submission

11. We will submit a paper to the Finance Committee on 1 December 2000 seeking its approval for a one-off dollar-for-dollar matching grant of \$50 million in 2000-01 under Head 176 – Subventions: Miscellaneous New Capital Account Subhead to the OUHK for the IT Development Plan.

Education and Manpower Bureau
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Deliverables of OUHK's IT Development Plan

Wider use of technology is the key to the future development of distance learning. To continue to excel in the new century, the OUHK has mapped out an IT Development Plan.

2. The IT Plan will benefit students in the following ways –
 - (a) A flexible, interactive and student-centred learning environment. Examples of relevant deliverables are –
 - to provide online course information for all OUHK courses (about 300 in 2000 academic year);
 - to develop at least 100 courses with online components. The target is to have all courses with online components in due course;
 - to develop 10 courses with extensive hypermedia (multimedia plus hypertext) materials and online learning activities. Audio and video streaming technologies will be used to deliver the audiovisual course materials in those courses;
 - to webcast over 75 hours of “The World of Learning” television programme;
 - to apply speech recognition technology to enhance language learning in some language courses; and
 - to try out synchronous interactive distance learning (multi-point, multi-cast video conferencing) on a few courses with such needs.
 - (b) Round-the-clock transaction and access to information and learning resources. Examples of relevant deliverables are –
 - an integrated system for student support service to allow online transactions, e.g. loan application, registration, tuition payment, etc;
 - online interactive tools for student enquiry and counselling;
 - online submission and return of assignments to save money and time;

- new features in the electronic library, e.g. web-based interlibrary loan system, e-text centre with digitized version of books, etc; and
- call-centre and web technologies in the Information Centre to enhance communication with students.

(c) Enhanced training in IT and communication

- an IT literacy programme to be provided free of charge to students to improve their IT skills and knowledge; and
- one-stop technical help and online support services to help students in the use of online learning environment and various online support services.

3. For the OUHK, the workflow will be completely re-engineered. Examples of relevant deliverables are –

- (a) A new student record and administration system for the benefit of students to reduce the record processing time, effectively linking up time-table and room allocation, examination management;
- (b) Web-based information management systems to assist students in enrolment, payment of course fees, course and programme selection, provision of tutorial schedule, provision of information on employment opportunities, processing of students' applications including transcript; and
- (c) Hong Kong's first integrated, Internet-based, multimedia interactive call centre system in its Information Centre to cope with the increase in public enquiries.