



Postgraduate Student Association
The University of Hong Kong

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Postgraduate Student Association

P407, Graduate House

The University of Hong Kong

Mr. Yeung Yiu Chung, BBS
Chairman of Panel on Education
Legislative Council
Hong Kong SAR, PRC

Dear Mr. Yeung Yiu Chung, BBS:

Dispute on recent proposed education funding cut

On behalf of Postgraduate Student Association (PGSA, hereafter) of The University of Hong Kong who serves all postgraduate students in the university, I am writing to share our views on the proposed education funding cuts and its negative effects to the study of postgraduate students in our university.

In facing the problem of fiscal deficit, HKSAR Government proposed to cut the budget on the tertiary education in the coming years. Much dispute was arisen among the students and different parties in the institutions of Hong Kong. As an important part of the Hong Kong community, we, the postgraduate students of HKU, understand that it is our responsibility to share with the deficit crisis facing by the Hong Kong government. Therefore, we do not totally object to the education funding cuts to help with the relieving of the burden of fiscal crisis that the government had met. However, we feel disappointed that we are imposed with the drastic and sharp funding cuts, proposed up to 11% in the coming 5 years, without comprehensive consultation on the exact criteria and amount of the funding cuts and the evaluation of its possible effects to the development of education in Hong Kong before it takes action. We do worry that such drastic and sharp cutting without comprehensive consultation would bring a lot of negative even fatal effects to the education of Hong Kong, which would inevitably reduce the competitive capability and shackle the development of Hong Kong.

Firstly, the negative effect of the funding cuts is now on the study life of postgraduate students in the University of Hong Kong. For example, the studentship of postgraduates in HKU was cut down from HK\$15,500 per month in 1999 to HK\$13,000 in 2003, which is about 16%, though



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there is no official scheme. This sharp funding cut on the postgraduates have greatly sunk the morale of the current postgraduates and affected their study life in the university. Some of the postgraduates, especially the married ones, have to cut their own living expense, such as living in a poor environment, eating less food, resulting in poor health and less outputs in the academic results. The further but dramatic extent of the proposed funding cuts, e.g. proposed funding cuts from year 2005 to 2008, would make the status worse and would prevent more excellent students from joining Hong Kong universities from mainland China and other countries, which would inevitably lead to the turning-down of the quality of education in Hong Kong.

Another negative effect of such funding cuts is that it may make the accommodation situation of postgraduate students in HKU worse. According to the report of the survey on the accommodation situation of current postgraduates in HKU carried out by PGSA in early November of 2003 and the relevant report from Graduate School, only 5% full-time postgraduate students are provided publicly hostel places. This is in contrary to the government policy in 1996 on the provision of student hostels in the UGC-funded institutions which stipulates that all research postgraduate students and all non-local students should be granted student hostel places. Though the government sees a specific need for hostels for research postgraduate students who work long and irregular hours and non-local postgraduate students (more than 38% in HKU) whose homes are not in Hong Kong, the proposed education funding cuts might postpone the resolution of this accommodation problem for our postgraduate students.

Thirdly, the dramatic funding cuts would also affect the teaching quality and research outputs of the universities. As we know, subsidiary from the government is always essential and necessary to make high-quality outputs from the universities, especially when the local universities are still unable to privately operate. The Government must consult with the universities more carefully, such as on the exact amount of budget cut, the allocation of funding and subsidiary under new policy and the prospect and pathway of tertiary education, in order to maintain the high teaching quality and academic outputs, as well as the further development of local universities.

Finally, the drastic education funding cuts would lower down the competitiveness of Hong Kong and it may not be a true cost saving in a long term. The proposed funding cuts may lead to higher fees for university students then less people would enroll in university courses. Thus more people would miss out on the opportunity to develop their skills at University and instead resorting to unskilled / low-paid employment. Not only there is a negative influence on Hong Kong's image, but also weaken their contributions to the finances of Hong Kong through taxes and consumer spending, which in the end do not help with the solution of the budget crisis at all. Thus drastic cuts in tertiary education funding, although desirable as a short-term measure, will prove counter-



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productive in improving the economy of Hong Kong in the long term.

So, we do suggest that the government must have more detailed consultation on the education funding cut, before taking any action.

Thanks for your kindly consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Welson Xian

Chairperson of Postgraduate Student Association

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