

Panel on Education,
Legislative Council,
HKSAR

Dear Honourable Panel members,

Funding for the Hong Kong Institute of Education in the 2005-08 Triennium

Members of the Hong Kong Institute of Education are shocked and anguished over the greater than expected funding cut on our Institute from \$632 million in 2004/05 to \$422 million in 2007/08, as recently announced by the UGC. In the past ten years, the HKIED has secured a lot of remarkable achievements, such as obtaining an excellent report in the Teaching and Learning Quality Process Review, gaining self-accrediting status, and building up a professional teacher training force with 60% of the academic staff now possessing a doctorate degree. We are deeply saddened to see all these efforts and achievements, which could have turned into positive energy for the future education reform in Hong Kong, being disregarded in the recent UGC budget proposal. We therefore would like to seek your kind help in ameliorating the drastic funding cut on us, and more importantly, in reducing the huge damaging effect it will cause to teacher education in the future.

Although we understand well that reduction in funding is somehow inevitable given both the decline in the number of school-age children and the difficult financial situation of the government, however, a cut of 33% of the total funding will undoubtedly be devastating to the development of our young institute. The extent of this cut, which much exceeds those suffered by other institutions, also gives the unfortunate impression to the public that the Government takes teacher education to be something of little import, at the same time as it is professing that teacher education is the most effective, among a number of educational measures, to raise the quality of school education and ensure success in the education reform.

For your information, the breakdown of the 33% reduction in funding, according to our own estimate, is as follows:

1. Reduction in student number – 15%
2. Complete removal of the front-end loading – 7%
3. Reduction of student unit cost in 07-08 – 5%
4. Reduction of staff salary following the civil service in Jan. 05 – 3%

While we have no objection to the salary cut (i.e. Item 4), we would be grateful if the Legco Panel on Education could do us better justice on Items 1-3.

Reduction in student number – 15%

In view of a drop in birth rate and hence in the number of required school places, we accept that the demand for pre-service teacher education places, under the existing teacher-student ratios, may not be as high in the next three years as in the previous triennium. On the other hand, in the light of the tremendous changes brought about by the education reform, including preparation for the senior secondary

reform, we envisage that the demand for professional support for practising teachers will be huge in the coming years. Examples of areas in which serving teachers require continuing professional education include preparation for teaching new subjects such as Liberal Studies and Career-oriented Studies, school-based assessment, pupil-centred pedagogical strategies required by small-class teaching and inclusive education, curriculum leadership, induction and mentoring of novice teachers, and skills required for school-based management. The HKIEd, which has all along been active in teacher education initiatives to meet the needs of education reforms, is well placed to meet the above new challenges of teachers' continuing professional development.

However, we are disappointed to find that, despite this evident need to provide continuing professional development opportunities for teachers, 60% of the total cut in our student numbers falls in the area of in-service professional upgrading. Specifically, the number of FTE (full-time equivalent places) for the professional development of serving teachers is cut by over 25% from 478 in 04/05 to 350 in 07/08, while that for the in-service upgrading of early childhood teachers is reduced by more than 50% from 780 in 04/05 to 340 in 07/08. Such a serious cut in in-service teacher development and upgrading will undoubtedly present a great hurdle to the professionalization of the teaching force and to the success of the education reform.

Complete removal of the front-end loading – 7%

According to the experience of other universities, front-end loading could be removed more gradually over a longer period of time to allow the institution sufficient time to smoothly absorb the cut rather than suffer a sudden financial shock. Given the fact that HKIEd is a relatively young institution, having just acquired self-accrediting status, and starting to develop postgraduate courses, a deep cut in funding will not only curtail our capacity to support the upgrading of the teaching profession, but also inevitably affect the daily operations of the Institute.

In the past year, the Institute has already adopted stringent measures to reduce expenditure, many of which have regrettably affected our students. We anticipate that, with this further steep funding cut, additional services will inevitably be taken away from our students, including technical support in the production of teaching aids, easy access to internet service and library reference materials, and subsidy for student immersion in the Mainland and overseas, etc. This will be particularly harmful to our students, who are going to be teachers, if they are to be deprived of the chance to experience quality education themselves when being a student. We therefore propose that the target date for the complete removal of the front-end loading be extended by one more triennium to 2011.

Reduction of student unit cost in 07-08 – 5%

Being a single-purpose institution specializing in teacher education, HKIEd is different from other universities, in that a lot of the teaching takes the form of coaching instead of mass lecture, and field work makes up almost 1/3 of students' learning at HKIEd. In addition, in order to ensure education quality, teaching and learning mostly take place in the form of small groups and mentoring. For this reason, it is obvious that academic staff's teaching load is much heavier at HKIEd than that at other universities. On top of this, academic staff has a heavy load in conducting Teaching Practice supervisions. Taking last year's experience as an example, each

lecturer at HKIEd conducted an average of about 50 supervision visits in an academic year. Each visit to a student, which includes travelling time and also pre- and post-observation conferences, normally takes up half a day. All of the above in reality requires a higher student unit cost for teacher education. In this regard, we would like to plead for a fairer calculation of our student unit cost relative to other disciplines.

In addition, the Government has all along said it is upholding the principle of student fees making up 18% of the cost of their studies. However, we estimate that the proposed deep cut means that HKIEd students will have to bear 26-27% of the overall cost. This is particularly unfair to HKIEd students, who are on average the least well off among the students of all UGC-funded institutions in Hong Kong.

For all the above reasons, we wish to make a plea to all members of the Legco Panel on Education for your support for reducing the funding cut, both in scale and timing, on the HKIEd. In summary, we would like to propose the following:

- 1) increase, rather than cut, the current student numbers in the area of in-service teacher education to support the professional development of all teachers and the upgrading of early childhood teachers, so as to guarantee the success of the wide-ranging education reforms;
- 2) extend the year for the complete removal of front-end loading to 2011;
- 3) re-consider the cut in student unit cost so that the contribution of HKIEd student fees to the total cost of their studies can be capped at 18%.

In addition, we are of the view that funding cuts in higher education in the next triennium should warrant informed public debate rather than hasty decisions. Therefore we would request that ample time be given to the Panel on Education to hear and consult the views of the education sector and the public in general so that a more informed decision can be made on this important issue.

In case members of the Panel of Education would like to have more information or exchange views with us, please do not hesitate to contact Leung Yan Wing or Wong Ping Ho.

Yours sincerely,

Leung Yan Wing, Dr.
President
Academic Staff Association of HKIEd