

Academic Staff Association of The Hong Kong Institute of Education
Stance on Budget Cut against HKIED
30 January 2005

- (1) A funding cut of 33% in three years (05-08) or 47% in four years (04-08) is detrimental to the operation of The Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIED) and severely handicaps the Institute's capacity to contribute to school support and education reforms in Hong Kong.
- (2) The drastic cut is a result of simultaneous reductions of four funding sources, which can be avoided. In particular, over 60% of the cut in student numbers is in in-service teacher education, which is against the rising demand for in-service teacher education to support the professional development of teachers amidst Hong Kong's educational reform. It sends a very negative message to society that teacher education is not important.
- (3) We note that the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) proposes to minimize the detrimental effect of the funding cut against the Institute by means of project money, the details of which have yet to be disclosed. However, we have to point out that these measures provide only stop-gap non-recurrent funds and should not be used to replace recurrent funds. A university simply cannot function properly, not to mention sustain its growth, if the recurrent funds are replaced by non-recurrent funds.
- (4) These non-recurrent funds, which usually appear as project money, are always very task-specific and cannot be used for purposes that are not directly related to the specific project. In this regard, the money can hardly be used for the Institute's core activities related to teaching, research, supporting student development, and community services, which are crucial to teacher education but not directly related to the tasks of the project. Neither could it be used for the maintenance and upgrading of the Institute's crucial supporting services and facilities, such as library services and information and educational technologies. As a result, the long-term development of the Institute will be irreversibly jeopardized.

HKIED has approached teaching and learning from a "holistic perspective" that views each of its programme as integrated and interdisciplinary to form a coherent curriculum. The drastic budget cuts and a forced and increased reliance on the project-oriented and bidding approach will fragment and destroy this holistic-approach to teacher learning and development.

- (5) Subjecting the Institute to constant bidding “wars” will impact the stability and continuity of its strategic plans and long-term curriculum planning. Uncertainty in funding sources will threaten the quality of teaching and learning along with student and staff morale.
- (6) Another problem with bidding is that it is difficult to ensure the quality of the output because it is a very common practice that the ‘cheapest wins the bid’. This probably would lead to poor quality of teaching services because the ‘winner’ is forced to employ staff of lower qualifications, mostly on part-time basis, or through outright outsourcing, so as to minimize the cost of managing the programmes.
- (7) HKIEd has an impressive 80% success rate in competitive bidding. A major reason for its record of success is the availability and support of the recurrent grants that has established HKIEd as an Institute of academic excellence. The elimination of 33% of its recurrent grants will place the Institute in a compromised and disadvantaged position, rendering it much less competitive.
- (8) In the long run, the dependence of the Institute on non-recurrent grants from the Government or other sources will inevitably affect its capacity to maintain its current status as an autonomous academic institution—a vision that is shared by the Hong Kong society and mandated in the Education Commission Report Number 5. More ominously, this might set a negative precedent for similar autonomy-threatening measures for other higher education institutions.
- (9) Specifically we request:
- (a) Reducing the 33% cut in recurrent funding in the year 2007/08 through the following measures:
- i. Reducing the cut in student places for in-service education, i.e. in both professional upgrading courses and in-service kindergarten teacher education courses.
 - ii. In line with all other seven institutions, the UGC should assign undergraduate senior-year places to HKIEd for admitting high-achieving and committed Associate Degree graduates to teacher education.
 - iii. Extending the year for the complete removal of front-end loading to 2011.
- (b) Replacing the “0-0-5” funding model by the “0-0-0” model
- The Government promised that the UGC-funded institutions will be funded on the “0-0-X” model for the three years from 2005 to 2008, with the actual figure X to be determined in due course with reference to the financial situation at the time. In view of the present positive economic trends, we suggest that the “0-0-0” model be adopted.