

Special meeting of the Panel on Education

Comments on the Report on the Phase 2 Review of the Post-secondary Education Sector

Submitted by *Caritas Francis Hsu College and Caritas Bianchi College of Careers*

Introduction

1.1 Caritas Francis Hsu College (CFHC) and Caritas Bianchi College of Careers (CBCC) welcome the Report on the Phase 2 Review of the Post-secondary Education Sector. The report gives an insightful assessment of the higher education arena of the HKSAR. We are pleased to note that the report emphasized **quality**. The 22 recommendations in the report not only provide a holistic approach to create a favorable environment for the sub-degree sector to improve, but the report also paints a conducive setting for the possible development of self-financed universities. It will, in our opinion, help the manpower needs for the special administrative region to maintain our edge in the global knowledge-based society.

Towards a four-tier Community and Higher Education System

2.1 While the University Grants Committee (UGC) funded institutes lead in research and educate the elites, Hong Kong needs additional self-financed degree granting institutes to ease the demand for degree-holding graduates. Some of the progressive recommendations in the report will foster the growth of these institutes. It is in the best interest of the HKSAR if some of these institutes can eventually grow to become universities like Shue Yan University — with each having their own characteristics.

2.2 While educating a full-time student at a UGC-funded institute costs over Two Hundred Thousand Hong Kong dollars a year, self-financed universities such as Shue Yan University and The Open University of Hong Kong cost less than half of that. Though there may be slight differences in the educational experience between the UGC-funded institutes and the self-financed ones, the major difference comes from the teaching load of “teaching universities.”

2.3 We believe that the report — together with the current higher education environment — could give birth to a four-tier structure as shown in figure 1. The top three tiers closely resemble the three-tier higher education system in the state of California in the United States, in which many late bloomers can go through the community college systems and graduate from a teaching or research university with a baccalaureate degree four years after graduating from high school. This lifelong learning pyramid will not only enhance the quality of our workforce, but it will also enrich the quality of the population of our Special Administrative Region.

Figure 1. Towards a 4-Tier Community and Higher Education Structure



The Way Forward

Sustainable Development

- 3.1 The Quality Enhancement Grant Scheme (QEGS) in the report is perhaps the most forward-looking recommendation from the pool of 22. Financial incentives are always welcomed by self-financed institutes, but the whole sub-degree arena would benefit greatly from a *steady* helping hand rather than just receiving *intermittent* encouragement. If the QEGS could become an on-going scheme to boost the overall quality of the sector, providers can embark on worthy initiatives such as improving students' language proficiency or complementing face-to-face teaching with online support.

From Quality Assurance to Quality Enhancement

- 3.2 Quality is no doubt the cornerstone of education — especially higher education. To ensure their exit standards, most providers have elaborate and well-structured systems supported by the The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) as the statutory body to uphold those standards. However, not all providers are subject to the same rigorous, periodic, and objective evaluation. It would be best that the processes engaged by the HKCAAVQ and Joint Quality Review Committee (JQRC) could be standardized and apply universally across all providers.

Developing Teaching Universities

3.3 Figure 1 is somewhat anatomically correct today because, even in the short history of the associate degrees, the total number of sub-degree students far exceeds the number of undergraduate students in UGC-funded schools. The only group that needs a helping hand at this time is the tier labeled “teaching university”.

Educate the public about sub-degree graduates

3.4 The acceptance of associate degree graduates by the public — and especially employers — is still low. Its short history definitely contributes to this phenomenon. The core of the problem, perhaps, is our collective attitude towards public examinations and the concept of **Lenient Entry Stringent Exit**. While no one would ask an associate degree graduate about his or her high school grades in California or in the whole USA, Hong Kong people — even educators — still drill down to our AD graduates HKCEE results as if the three years of AD study did not happen (or matter). If we did not practise this noble **Lenient Entry Stringent Exit** scheme, Mr, Otto Tang (a Fashion Design graduate of CBCC) could not have won the *Hong Kong Young Designer Talent Awards 2007*. By the same token, Dr. Steve Ho (a Computer Studies graduate of CFHC) could not have completed a degree with Honours, *and* a PhD, *and* then become a researcher in Artificial Intelligence at the University of Hertfordshire in the UK.

3.5 What is needed is a change of mentality towards sub-degree graduates. This change, or the promotion of this “in between” A-level and baccalaureate degree qualification, needs time and the leadership of the Government. What is also needed, perhaps, is for employers to be educated in how to select employees, because a selection system based on paper rather than actual outcomes and demonstrable capabilities is doomed to be counter productive.

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