



City U Substantiated Staff Union (SCOPE)

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Dear Hon. Cyd Ho,

Inter-institutional Redress Mechanism for the Higher Educational Sector – Some Illustrated Events to Support Why an Independent Ombudsman Is Necessary

1. What is Good Governance at Universities?

In order to achieve good governance, there requires a set of processes, customs, policies, laws and institutions affecting the way a university is directed, administered or controlled. The principal stakeholders of universities are the members of public, students, teachers, and management.

One important element of good governance is to ensure the accountability of management, as they are involved in the daily operational activities, in a university through mechanisms that try to reduce or eliminate the stakeholder-agent (management) problem.

The problem is “can the existing mechanism solve the stakeholder-agent problem?” – OBVIOUSLY NOT!

2. Some Illustrated Events

One would wonder how the senior management would react to the following illustrated, but real, events. Moreover, one would expect the Education Bureau to provide answers to the following events as to how they should be addressed:

- a. Should university management invent financially disastrous assumptions to persuade staff to have their salaries cut?
- b. Subsequent to question (a) above, should university management release adverse financial information just simply to keep staff in the dark, but the fact is there is a super normal profit earned?
- c. Should university management refuse, if requested, dialogues with staff to clarify (a) and (b)?

If there is any “yes” to the three questions, it signals severe crisis in governance, as well as moral deficit, of the university. Universities deliver to our next generation not only academic knowledge, but also good moral and ethical foundation. The university management should not and must not use “have sought legal advice” to hide behind the veil, and refuse to admit their “social and public accountability”

3. Concluding Views

The above-illustrated events are not fictions. They are real! Perhaps the Education authorities can advise on what to do when there are cases, like Enron and Madoff cases, happening in universities. The people, who breach good governance practice and procedures, playing tricks, are those at the senior management (or even Council) level. What to do when there are grievances that staff wants to channel up, even to the Council level but all the doors within the university are shut and would not listen. What to do when the independent non-executives are, cannot deny such possibility, only rubber-stamping operating management decisions, and are not prepared to rectify past decisions even when there is strong evidence pointing towards rectifications are needed.

These are just some of the “what to do-s”, and there are no doubt many more “what to do-s” in various stakeholders’ mind. The university management just refuses to address, not to mention accountable, many of these “what to do-s”. If these problems cannot be dealt with internally, either unwillingly or outright refusal, an independent Ombudsman is an obvious and an unavoidable answer to address many of these “what do do-s” and to uphold the public accountability of the universities.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Kelston Wong
Vice-chairman
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