

Special Meeting of LegCo Panel on Education held on 6 July 2009

CityU supports the position of HUCOM in maintaining institutional autonomy in handling complaints and disputes. We believe that this will be more effective, efficient and sustainable and it will also lead to better improvements in the long run.

The recent experience of CityU in dealing with staff complaints and disputes concerning personnel reviews raised in April this year can serve as an illustration. There were a total of 79 teaching staff and faculty members who were dissatisfied with the decision outcomes of the exercise. This led to a lot of negative sentiments and strong protests. The University was aware of the need to respond to their concerns and feedback with careful consideration and speed, and promptly set up two review committees to reconsider the affected cases. The entire process took around two months. By early June, all the reviews were completed and the disputes settled, except for 11 staff members who are still unhappy with the outcome of the reviews. Their cases are currently being handled by the University's appeal procedures.

The University recognized that these were only treatment of symptoms and that there would be a need to re-examine and review its mechanisms and procedures through critical self-reflection to bring about more sustained improvements. In May, a special Task Force was set up to review the personnel decision making procedures and appeal procedures of the University. This is the first step of a continuous process to review and refine the rules and mechanisms of the University. If this learning experience were taken out of the hands of the University, there would be less dialogue, less communication, less interaction and thus less positive energy generated among senior management and the different stakeholders within and outside the University, to support the motivation and the impetus to self-reflect and to self-improve for self advancement.

Universities are dynamic, evolving institutions. They are not perfect, neither are their systems or structures. They should continuously seek to self-improve and to be self-critical in order to be accountable and move with the times. Complaints and disputes are often regarded as negative and divisive experiences. But they can also be turned into positive valuable growth experiences for institutional learning and capacity building. Universities will be deprived of such growth opportunities if the resolution of complains and disputes were taken outside of the universities and placed under some externally imposed mechanisms not integral to the universities.

Submission from City University of Hong Kong