

LegCo Panel on Education – Response from the University of Hong Kong

As a leading international institution of higher learning in Asia, the University of Hong Kong strives to attract and nurture outstanding scholars from around the world through excellence and innovation in teaching and learning, research and knowledge exchange. There are, however, various constraints within which the University has had to operate in order to achieve its aspiration.

The most important asset of the University is its talents. To attain international distinction, the University must continue to recruit academics and professionals globally and to retain them. This task has become increasingly difficult over the years. The key issues are the insufficient school places and the high cost of such places in Hong Kong.

For obvious reasons, staff members from overseas have to enrol their children in international schools instead of local schools. They often find it difficult to secure international school places, in light of the fact that many places are taken up by locals who prefer international schools over government schools or subsidized schools. Competition for international school places is invariably keen.

In addition, the fees of international schools are very high. For instance, international school tuition can reach HK\$183,000 per annum (for grade 12). Additional costs may include a non-refundable application fee, a reservation fee that can be up to half of the annual tuition and an annual capital levy. Staff at Assistant Professor or Associate Professor level very often cannot afford it with their existing remuneration package, as they also need to pay a large portion of their income for housing, in view of the exorbitant housing costs in Hong Kong and the fact that they are not eligible for University accommodation. The problem is especially acute for those with a young family and when only one parent is working.

In connection with the above, the cost of education was undoubtedly a factor that influenced the departure of a number of young professoriate staff with small children in the past year or so. We envisage that the University will have continuing international recruitment and retention difficulties unless something is done to address this problem.

Against the above background, the University hopes that measures could be in place as soon as possible to help local universities recruit globally and retain talents, with a view to enhancing academic excellence and promoting internationalization.

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