

18 May 2012

The Honorable Starry Lee Wai-king  
Chairman of the Panel on Education, Legislative Council of the HKSAR

The Honorable Starry Lee Wai-king,

The LegCo Panel on Education on 12 March 2012 presented an appropriate opportunity for the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) to reiterate the prevailing principle of upholding academic freedom and freedom of expression. Following the meeting, HKUST has thoroughly reviewed its mission and position to safeguard academic freedom.

***Academic Freedom as its Cornerstone***

HKUST attaches great importance to upholding institutional autonomy and academic freedom. It has the vision to be a leading university with significant international impact and strong local commitment, and the mission to advance learning and knowledge through teaching and research and to assist in the economic and social development of Hong Kong. The University upholds its autonomy, academic freedom and freedom of expression and considers them to be necessary conditions for achieving its mission.

According to *Britannica Academic Edition*, **academic freedom** is the freedom of teachers and students to teach, study, and pursue knowledge and research without unreasonable interference or restriction from law, institutional regulations, or public pressure.

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) also issued the Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure as early as 1940. It stated that teachers are entitled to full freedom in research and in the publication of the results, subject to the adequate performance of their other academic duties. They are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject.

It was also stated by the AAUP in 1994, **freedom of thought and expression** is essential to any institution of higher learning. Universities inspire debate on social, economic, and political issues. On a campus that is free and open, no idea can be banned or forbidden.

However, it is worth noting that according to AAUP's Statement aforementioned, when university teachers speak or write as citizens, they should be free from institutional



ensorship or discipline, but their special position in the community imposes special obligations. University teachers as scholars and educational officers should at all times be accurate, exercise appropriate restraint, show respect for the opinions of others, and make every effort to indicate that they are not speaking for the institution.

It is with all due respect to academic freedom and freedom of expression that the University made a **statement at the LegCo Panel on 12 March** to reiterate its position on Academic Freedom:

*A university is an institution dedicated to the creation and dissemination of knowledge. It seeks to ensure that teaching and research are unimpeded. It gives students a broad-based university experience that includes advancement in their chosen fields of study; a well-rounded education that enhances their character-building, the development of their creativity, critical thinking, analytical skills, global outlook, and cultural awareness; a campus life that prepares them to be community leaders and lifelong learners. HKUST is committed to building a **liberal and open intellectual environment** with an aim to enhance vibrant intellectual exchange of knowledge, viewpoints and innovative ideas.*

*According to Article 137 of the Basic Law, educational institutions of all kinds in Hong Kong shall retain their autonomy and enjoy academic freedom. Article 16 of the Hong Kong Bill of Rights states that everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference and the right to freedom of expression. Hong Kong should uphold these core values and ensure that they are unimpeded in order to facilitate social development.*

*It is necessary that members of society have respect for heterogeneous viewpoints to enable rational discussions. In this connection, HKUST has a **prevailing culture which supports diversities**, respects and embraces different ideas expressed in peaceful and rational manners, and encourages objective analyses of various viewpoints.*

#### ***Policy as Embodiment of its Principles***

At HKUST, the principle of academic freedom in teaching and research is stipulated in every employment contract of its faculty members. This ensures that their freedom in the classroom to discuss their disciplines, in the conduct of research in their fields of special competence and in the publication of their research results is protected by the University's Terms of Service. HKUST takes pride in the fact that it is the only university in



Hong Kong with a relevant clause related to academic freedom in its Terms of Service. Moreover, the University has a faculty promotion and performance appraisal system which is transparent and merit-based. It ensures that faculty members are assessed according to their competence and performance and that relevant decisions are not interfered by members' stance and viewpoints. This point is being re-emphasized to the Deans and Department Heads.

### *The Way Forward*

Institutional autonomy, academic freedom and freedom of expression are the necessary conditions for the development of higher education. Universities need to uphold these principles to enable the continued development of the higher education sector in Hong Kong.

HKUST considers academic freedom the cornerstone to achieve its mission and vision. HKUST will maintain **an open, conducive policy and culture** and **exercise enhanced vigilance** to safeguard academic freedom and freedom of expression. To better **communicate** with its stakeholders, HKUST President Tony F Chan will reiterate the University's strong emphasis on academic freedom at frequent intervals. The President is reinforcing this fundamental belief with faculty and staff.

In conclusion, HKUST has set an example for upholding academic freedom and will continue with its efforts to uphold and safeguard the most treasured values in Hong Kong. As always, the University emphasizes mutual tolerance and respect for diversities and ideas expressed in peaceful and rational manners. HKUST will continue to proactively communicate with its stakeholders to give them reassurance regarding the University's principle and position.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Eden Y Woon

Vice-President for Institutional Advancement

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology