

Position Paper on ‘Self-financing Post-secondary Education in Hong Kong’ by HKACMGM

The Hong Kong Association of Careers Masters & Guidance Masters (HKACMGM) is the only teacher association which aims at providing professional support on career and life planning (individual student planning) for all front-line student guidance and career guidance teachers in secondary schools in Hong Kong. Currently, we have a membership of over 410 schools, covering 90% of all Hong Kong schools. In 2011/12, dozens of training sessions and information seminars were held in collaboration with various tertiary institutions or organizations to meet the needs of the first cohort of students under the new academic structure (NAS). From our front-line experience, to ensure the effectiveness of tertiary education in Hong Kong, our Association agrees to the joint call of the Administration, the Legislative Council and the general public for a serious and comprehensive review and even monitoring of self-financing post-secondary education, especially the admission practices and the programme quality of those self-financing institutions.

Current Situation and the Problem

As regards the 2012 admission status, half of the NAS graduates who wished to pursue further studies were enrolled in self-financed post-secondary programmes, manifesting the huge demand of the majority of our NAS students for information related to those programmes and the subsequent guidance needs.

Chaos in Admission Practices

The effort of the Further & Higher Education Branch of the Education Bureau (EDB) to set up the Electronic Advance Application System for Post-secondary Programmes (E-APP) platform was commendable. However, self-financing post-secondary institutions are adopting various admission practices requiring student applicants, teachers and schools to take extra admission tests, provide extra credentials to obtain information that is repetitive and already available from the E-APP platform. These high-sounding yet unnecessary and unwelcomed gestures have resulted in mounting grievances and chaos among secondary schools. We are of the view that only by setting up a one-stop platform integrating application, admission, allocation of offers, confirmation and acceptance can various malpractices and chaos be minimized. It is expected that the Administration should take lead to further put this proposal into reality.

Over-enrolment and the Issue of Programme Quality

The recent serious over-enrolment (up to 50%-60%) of some post-secondary institutions has sparked off the issue of programme quality of these institutions. Our Association holds the belief that post-secondary institutions should not regard student admission purely as a source of income at the expense of students' learning quality and their articulation paths upon graduation while neglecting their own social or public responsibility.

Lack of Information Transparency

Various malpractices of institutions regarding the 2012 admission were reported to our Association. They include admitting students failing to attain 3322 to degree programmes provided that a result in the IELTS equivalent can be presented, and withdrawing an offer given to applicants shortly before the commencement of a new school term due to an alleged mismatch of the elective subject requirement. The lack of information transparency in the 2012 admission exercise regarding the detailed admission requirements and formulae has necessitated the urge need for self-financing institutions to communicate clearly with students, school teachers and the general public.

Recommendations

Encouraging Spontaneity of Tertiary Institutions in Self-improvement

Our Association respects the academic freedom and the administrative autonomy of the tertiary education sector; yet the success experiences of the JUPAS in Hong Kong and the UCAS in the UK are two vivid examples of an 'all-win' situation. More transparency and student support are indispensable to break the current "cult of brands".

Strengthening the Co-ordinating Role of the EDB & Bringing in Public Surveillance

More work on resources allocation, co-ordination and liaison from the EDB is expected and recommended, especially in channeling resources for establishment of the one-stop E-App system; while the public (including front-line educators, professional associations, student guidance organizations and the media) is expected to have a larger involvement in reporting various irregularities and malpractices. Some market strategies such as the preparation of annual league table involving public participation in the UK education could be introduced to monitor this highly-marketized education sector.

Discovering & Meeting Special Needs of Different Student Groups

Relatively less attention has been given to this group of students with special needs. With the popularization of tertiary education, every effort has to be made to ensure that they are not deprived of appropriate and fair education and training opportunities and support measures.

Implementing a Necessary and Sufficient Career Guidance Policy

Tertiary education is to foster youths' academic and career development, and their work readiness. In a highly sophisticated education establishment, career and life planning alongside with career guidance is an integral part that is in place as soon as in the early schooling years. In Hong Kong, career guidance has long been off the EDB's agenda, and institution-wise is a marginalized item within the Administration. Over the past few years, with the advent of the NAS, we were glad to see extra efforts and steps taken by various EDB officials and front-line educators. Thanks to the joint efforts of those parties, the implementation of the NAS enjoyed a soft-landing in 2012. Building on the existing good practices, it is believed that now is the opportune time to recognize and step up career guidance and education from an institutional and policy level so that the traditional vicious circle of 'results-orientedness' can be broken.