

ISSUES RELATED TO THE GOVERNANCE AND REGULATION OF THE SELF-FINANCING POST-SECONDARY SECTOR. SUBMISSION BY HKSYU TO THE PANEL ON EDUCATION 18 MARCH 2014

As Hong Kong's first and thus far, only, private University regulated under the Post-Secondary Colleges Ordinance (CAP 320), Shue Yan is grateful for the opportunity to address the Panel.

The Ordinance was first enacted in 1960. Its provisions reflect the conditions that prevailed in those days. The technical amendments proposed by the Administration in November 2012 would have removed a number of anomalous requirements that bear little or no relevance to post-secondary education providers in Hong Kong today.

Shue Yan was granted university title by the Chief Executive in 2006, after having undergone a rigorous institutional review process. It should be noted that the rigour of the process and the time taken to complete it are such that to date no other institution has been able to fulfil all the requirements for the award of university title.

Self-financing post-secondary institutions registered under CAP320 can never become self-accrediting. This means that Shue Yan is subject to a thorough-going, evidence-based external review by the HKCAAVQ of all aspects of the institution, including governance, management, academic programmes, staffing, finance, facilities and future plans every five years in order to confirm continuation of its Programme Area Accreditation status.

As a university we must continue to develop and expand our provision by offering programmes at post-graduate level in our niche areas of expertise. Hong Kong adopts the 'user-pays' principle in respect of taught post-graduate programmes, and self-financing taught Master's degrees in Hong Kong are exempt from quota restrictions on the admission of Mainland students. The market for such programmes is thus very competitive. More than 450 self-financing taught post-graduate programmes are currently offered by local universities.

At Shue Yan, we must seek HKCAAVQ accreditation for every single new Master's programme that we wish to offer. The entire process, from developing a preliminary programme proposal, to receiving the final accreditation report, takes on average 18 months. Under the terms of CAP320, once the accreditation status of the proposed programme has been confirmed by the HKCAAVQ, we must make a further submission to the Chief Executive in Council via EDB for approval to offer the programme. We must reiterate the case for approval in terms of market demand and likely graduate employment outcomes, together with institution-wide data on admissions and graduate employment outcomes for all of our programmes. It is EDB who makes the recommendation to ExCo for programme approval. Until the approval of the Chief Executive in Council has been received, we are not allowed to confirm that the programme will be offered or accept applications to it.

The problem that arises here is that while ExCo usually meets on a monthly basis, it has a heavy agenda and the approval of taught Master's programmes does not, of course, rate highly on its list of priorities. In a recent case, a request for programme approval that we submitted to EDB at the beginning of January this year for consideration at the January ExCo meeting, has twice been 'bumped' from the ExCo Agenda and will now not be considered until later this month. As the programme was due to launch in June, this setback represents a serious disruption to our planned schedule. If final approval under CAP 320 had been delegated by the CE to the Permanent Secretary for Education as proposed last year, this additional 3 month delay, which reflects badly on the institution, would not have occurred.

The self-financing post-secondary sector is very diverse. CAP320 applies to only six institutions, all of whom are subject to rigorous external accreditation by the HKCAAVQ and oversight by EDB to ensure the quality and relevance of the degree programmes they offer. We would strongly request that the Panel revisit the proposals to amend the Ordinance and to make it more relevant to the needs of society for a responsive higher education system and more reflective of the realities of the education landscape in Hong Kong today.