

Hong Kong Baptist University

**Written submission to LegCo Panel on Education
(18 Mar 2014)**

Hong Kong Baptist University welcomes the government's policy in providing more post-secondary education opportunities for youngsters on a self-financing basis during the past decade. Such policy has proven to be an important powerhouse to produce the needed human resources for Hong Kong's knowledge-based economy.

The government is urgently requested to tighten quality control. The lack of common standards for regulating institutions offering the 2- and 4-year programmes and the lack of comprehensive, long-term commitments by the government to the development of this sector have raised community-wide concerns about the discrepancies in the quality of programmes and graduates among different institutions. Thus, the government is urged to consider the following views and recommendations both at the system and at the funding level to ensure the minimum quality and value of self-funded post-secondary education provided.

1. Common standards for regulating 2-year and 4-year self-financing post-secondary education institutions.

Statistics from HKBU's self-financing post-secondary education provision show that more than 75% of Associate Degree graduates further their studies each year locally or overseas while the remaining 25% join the workforce. Majority of Higher Diploma (HD) graduates entered the workforce after completion of their HD studies which are intended to equip students with the specialized knowledge/ skills as well as the necessary generic skills for initial employment at the para-professional level and further studies usually in part-time mode. Territory-wide statistics also confirm the positive prospect of graduates of self-financing post-secondary programmes for further studies or work.

It is very essential that when expanding the post-secondary education, emphasis must be placed on quality of programmes and graduates rather than quantity so that graduates are well-equipped for the workplace and for post-sub-degree and postgraduate studies internationally.

Guidelines on both hardware and software standards need to be clearly set for institutions offering sub-degree and degree programmes for quality education and whole-person development.

On the hardware side, the facility requirements should include the average minimum physical space per student and staff to determine the maximum student capacity allowed. This should include facilities for teaching/learning (e.g. number of classrooms, lecturer theaters and learning commons), library (e.g. volume of printed and digital book titles and electronic resources), information technology infrastructure, computing laboratories (e.g. number of computers), special laboratories (e.g. science laboratory, communication studio, press conference room, psychology laboratory), sports facilities (e.g. gymnasiums, fitness training room, swimming pool), student development center (e.g. student supporting and experiential learning activities, counseling and career guidance services, administrative offices), etc. Requirements for basic teaching/learning equipment, number of library books for each programme to be accredited, etc. need to be satisfied before a programme is approved for commencement.

On the software side, requirements and standards for 2-year and 4-year programme institutions such as number of full-time teaching staff and administrative staff, the ratio of students to full-time teaching staff, teaching/research workload, numbers of full-time guidance counselors with professional qualifications, staff development resources, programme duration in terms of hours of instructions/self-study need to be established and monitored.

2. Healthy development of self-financing post-secondary education

The government has to provide financial support if tuition fees of self-financing post-secondary education are to be set at a reasonable and affordable level. It is not equitable that post-secondary students in and outside the government-funded sector should be treated so very differently in terms of resources support. Such a great discrepancy in investment in different groups of students tends to work against the overall development of post-secondary education in Hong Kong, especially in terms of competition, accessibility and diversity. The government should provide more than land grants and interest-free loans to institutions but also look at ideas like “student vouchers” with sufficient, direct financial subsidies that would help approved post-secondary education institutions to meet the basic standards and requirements set out in paragraph 1. The government should examine the rationale of its current policy of heavily subsidizing the universities and the schools (as well as the pre-schools being proposed) sectors, while leaving the middle-layer, the sub-degree sector, with limited direct support. Overall, the issues to be addressed are the healthy growth of the self-financing post-secondary sector and the financial burden on students and institutions.