

Some Possible Concerns about the Supervision of the Administration of Lingnan College

With full recognition of Lingnan College intentions and efforts made in institutional improvements in recent years, we notice that there is still room for further improvement.

(a) Membership and Accountability of the Governing Bodies

i) Composition/Membership of Governing Bodies and Inclusion of LegCo Members

We support the idea of including Legco member(s) in the governing bodies of all UGC-funded tertiary institutions. We believe Legco member(s) can serve to monitor and facilitate proper functioning of the governing bodies.

We suggest that a reasonable proportion of staff representatives who are elected in general elections be included as full members of the governing bodies and their standing committees. In view of the fact that even the president of the student union is granted membership in the governing bodies, we suggest that **at least a representative of the Staff Association should be included as ex-officio member(s) in the governing bodies.**

ii) Appointment of the President/Chancellor/Vice-Chancellor and Senior Management Group Members

We suggest the Search Committee for appointing important personnel to include a Legco member as its member.

iii) Attendance Rate of Members of the Governing Bodies at Meetings

We urge the attendance rate of members of the governing bodies at meetings be published and the attendance rate be taken into consideration for membership re-appointment.

iv) Authority for Determining the Terms of Employment

The mechanism for determining the terms of employment seems to be without fault on paper. However, we express the concern that in some institutions where most staff are employed on a contract basis, the terms of employment can be altered during contract renewals and the staff usually are relatively helpless in resisting unfavourable changes.

We believe that the current government practice that changes in the terms of employment affect new recruits only is fair and should be extended to staff in tertiary institutions.

v) Mechanism for Dealing with Appeals and Objections to Decisions Made by the Administration or the Governing Bodies

In the case of Lingnan College, the appeal mechanism for contract termination seems to be functioning well. However, such a mechanism is limited only to contract termination and not applicable to other important decisions such as promotion, retitlement and substantiation.

One notable practice of disabling the appeal mechanism for contract termination is to set unreasonably stringent conditions for contract renewal (bearing in mind that condition setting for contract renewal is not subject to appeal). An example of the stringent conditions is to require a junior faculty member to publish two articles in international refereed journals in a year. The staff is unable to meet the conditions upon contract expiry. There is a “perfect” appeal mechanism for contract termination but *according to the contract terms*, conditions have not been met. Therefore, the staff has to leave.

We suggest the appeal mechanism for contract termination be extended to other important personnel decisions including promotion, retitlement, substantiation and condition settings during contract renewals.

(b) Staff Recruitment and Administration of Employment Contract

i) Membership of the Staff Review Committee

We suggest that the Staff Review Committee should include *elected* staff members (instead of *appointed* staff members) as members and representative(s) of the Staff Association as ex-officio member(s).

ii) Appraisal Mechanism for General Personnel Exercises

Lingnan College has a fair and transparent mechanism for annual appraisal of staff performance. The Head writes the appraisal which is to be countersigned by the appraised staff. The staff may disagree with what is written and talk to the Head. The Head may or may not agree to revise the appraisal. In the case where the staff does not agree with the final appraisal, he/she may submit a rebuttal.

However, such a mechanism is *limited only to annual appraisal of staff performance which is for staff development purposes only* and is not applicable to other important personnel exercises such as substantiation, retitlement and contract renewal. In these latter exercises, the staff has no access to the Head's comments and recommendations. There is also no mechanism to check whether there are substantive discrepancies between these comments and recommendations and those in the annual appraisal (which are accessible to the staff). Therefore, **we urge the fair and transparent mechanism for annual appraisal of staff performance be extended to other personnel exercises including substantiation, retitlement and contract renewal.**

iii) Academic Staff Appointments

Under the current arrangement, the initial decision of appointing normal academic staff is made by the Head or a small panel of staff appointed by the Head (perhaps in the form of a panel). The Head or the panel shortlists and interviews the applicants, makes recommendations and sometimes makes the final decisions.

Such a practice is not transparent and subject to manipulation. Therefore, we urge the following:

- **All application information should be open to the whole department for inspection;**
- **The whole departmental board, and not the Head or a small departmental committee, should make the decisions about academic staff recruitment; and**
- **Staff recruitment should be in the best interest of students and the programme and in accord with the principle of excellence.**

iv) Visiting Professor Appointments

We are concerned about the increasingly popular practice of tertiary institutions in Hong Kong to appoint visiting professors on a short-term basis. No doubt, visiting professors have contributed to academic exchanges between local and overseas institutions. However, these appointments may not be in the best interest of the long-term development of the institutions in Hong Kong. Visiting professors are sometimes appointed to important administrative and/or leadership positions which require commitment to Hong Kong and devotion to long-term departmental development. Most of the visiting professors retain their tenure positions in overseas universities and they may lack commitment and devotion during their short stay in Hong Kong.

Therefore, we suggest the following:

- **Except under very special circumstances, the appointment of visiting professors should be limited to temporary posts for academic exchange purposes and should not be applicable to permanent posts with an administrative and leadership role (e.g. Department Head).**
- **The criteria for and process of making visiting professor appointments should be as open and stringent as, if not more stringent than, those for academic posts under normal establishment.**

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