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24 March 2000

Dr. Alice LAM
Chairman, University Grants Committee
c/o University Grants Committee Secretariat
7th Floor, Shui On Centre
6-8 Harbour Road
Wanchai, Hong Kong

Dear Madam,

Funding for the PCLL course

I write in my capacity as Chairman of the Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services of the Legislative Council. The key area of responsibility of the Panel is to monitor and examine Government policies and issues of public concern relating to the administration of justice and legal services. Ensuring adequate legal professional training to provide the required level of legal services to meet Hong Kong's needs as an international business centre is a matter to which the Panel attaches great importance.

In this connection, the attention of the Panel has been called to recent reports suggesting that the University Grants Committee (UGC) is in the process of considering to make recommendations to withdraw public funding for the PCLL course. Representations have been received from law students and law teaching institutes expressing great anxiety. Accordingly, the matter was discussed at a meeting of the Panel which was held on 21 March 2000 and attended by representatives from the Department of Justice, the Faculty of Law of the University of Hong Kong, the School of Law of the City University, the Hong Kong Bar Association and the Law Society of Hong Kong. Members are aware that no decision has yet been made by the UGC, and are not making any assumption as to your position or that of other members of the UGC on the question. However, in view of the importance and possible urgency of the matter, they wish me to apprise you of the consensus of the Panel and those who attended the meeting.

We believe that the PCLL course is the wrong target for consideration of withdrawal of public funding. The PCLL course is an integral part of the 4-year programme of university legal education, and also a statutory requirement for professional qualification. It is therefore entirely distinguishable from purely academic or stand-alone postgraduate courses, and rather more on a par with the 4th and 5th years of the 5-year course for the training of doctors, dentists and architects.

We foresee that the withdrawal of public funding will inevitably mean a substantial increase in fees for the PCLL course, with the result that a legal career will be reserved for the well-to-do. This is not only socially undesirable, but also contrary to the policy of attracting the best talents to the profession so as to maintain the highest standard of legal services. A high professional standard is vital to Hong Kong's competitiveness and essential to the rule of law.

Initiated by the two professional bodies and supported by the Law Schools of both universities, the Department of Justice and this Panel, a much needed comprehensive review of legal education and training is currently being conducted with the help of expert consultants. We believe that this is not the time to consider the withdrawal of public funding from the PCLL course, because such a move may have the effect of pre-empting the eventual recommendation for improvement.

The Panel would be most interested to hear from you on the matter and would welcome an opportunity to discuss the matter further with you or other members of the UGC in our meeting should you wish to do so.

Yours sincerely,

(Hon Margaret NG)
Chairman
Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services