

**Proposal to “Delink” University Salaries from Civil Service Scales**  
**A Preliminary Position: Staff Association of City University of HK**

The Government through the UGC has agreed that salaries and terms and conditions of employment in Hong Kong universities should no longer be linked to civil service scales.

***Why Change?***

The main arguments made for this move are to: (a) provide the university governance “flexibility” in remunerating staff based on merit and performance, and (b) increase the competitiveness of local universities vis-à-vis our overseas counterparts in global recruitment.

In fact the current system:

- Has worked well as local higher education has excelled in the last 10 years.
- Already has great flexibility and transparent criteria in salary offers in staff appointment (in terms of both salary and title).
- Already has a floating bar system so that salary increase is based on performance but not automatic.
- Has successfully attracted a large number of top academics over a wide spectrum of disciplines from all over the world.
- Provides a stable environment for staff, and hence cultivated staff-student relationships.

We fully share the concern of the government that the problem of the budget deficit must be addressed. As responsible citizens, we are more than willing to shoulder the same salary cut as proposed by the government on civil servants, and also do more for less.

Since the government reassures that the plan to “de-link” is not a step towards reduced funding, there is no urgent need for change from a system that works well into a controversial unknown. We strongly believe that at this stage, we should concentrate our efforts in teaching and research, rather than spending our energy in replacing a system which works well with a system which has not been thought out at all, and which is potentially detrimental to the stability of the tertiary education sector.

***Will “de-linking” mean improvement?***

Will de-linking be an improvement on a system that is working well? At this point there is:

- No concrete proposals for replacing current arrangements
- No discussions with staff have been held or are planned to review the current situation or explore alternatives.

One of the outcomes is different salary scales for different disciplines. This is not only divisive, but also highly controversial. This would cause a lot of unrest and arguments within the existing university system and would need to be handled and studied with great care. We also strongly believe that a unified and common salary system must be adopted across all the local universities, in order to prevent excessively high mobility of staff, which may adversely impact upon teaching quality, student-teacher relationships and the sense of belonging.

### ***Government's role***

The Government's position amounts to denying responsibility for the terms and conditions of employment in local higher education. The universities and the UGC are called on the look after the problem. This is not good enough. More than 20,000 people work in the higher education sector in Hong Kong and the Government is the main source of funds. We regret that affected staff are not even consulted and respected in this unilateral proposal.

### ***What next?***

University staff understand that there may be advantages in alternatives to current scales and terms and conditions. University staff also understand that budgetary problems and price deflation may require adjustments in current salaries.

If the Government wants to pursue these issues, let the Government engage in discussion with the universities and university staff. Let us look at the alternatives and the options for change.

**Only when concrete alternatives are available and clearly beneficial can we consider trading in the old system for a new system – not before.**

**Staff Association of City University of Hong Kong  
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