

For information
on 10 January 2011

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Aspirations for the Higher Education System in Hong Kong Report of the University Grants Committee

Purpose

This paper informs Members of issues relating to University Grants Committee (UGC)'s report "Aspirations for the Higher Education System in Hong Kong" released in early December 2010.

Background

2. The Report of the Higher Education Review 2002 suggested the UGC conduct a further review in five years' time. The UGC formed the Higher Education Review Group (HERG) under the convenorship of Sir Colin Lucas, former Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University and a long-serving UGC Member, to take forward the review in early 2009.

3. The Group consulted widely in Hong Kong. In response to an invitation issued in May 2009, more than 30 organisations and individuals provided written views. Individual face-to-face discussions were held with the key stakeholders in the sector, including the heads of institutions (both public and private, degree and sub-degree) and heads of quality assurance bodies, to solicit their views on the development of the sector. The Group also held two rounds of consultations in both September 2009 and April 2010 for stakeholders, including staff and students in the sector.

4. The report was discussed in detail and fully endorsed by the whole UGC. The report was submitted to the Education Bureau (EDB), and simultaneously released to the public on 1 December 2010. The Bureau has said it will study and examine the recommendations in the report and would consult stakeholders in the post-secondary education sector before coming to a view for implementation.

Key Themes of the Report

5. The report is not premised upon any identified need for a major

system reform. However, the UGC considered it important for Hong Kong at this stage to strive for excellence through discerning the world trends and challenges facing the sector, and then refining our strategies. The report has three key themes, details of which are set out below.

Need for Improved System-level Structure

6. We see a flourishing post-secondary education sector where more students than ever before have the opportunity to pursue further education after secondary school, brought on as a result of Government's initiative to meet changes in socio-economic needs and community aspirations. We also see real advances by UGC-funded institutions. However, the expansion over a period of time has also resulted in a complex and fragmented post-secondary education system, which is difficult for current and prospective students to navigate. The UGC is convinced that all elements of post-secondary educational provision should be treated as a single interlocking system with better transparency, coherence and mobility.

7. We believe that the improved structure should provide clearer progression pathways for students to articulate between different levels and across different parts of the system. This should be facilitated by a comprehensive Credit Accumulation and Transfer System, and a single quality assurance body to ensure more coherence in the quality of the system. There should also be a new body to provide advice to the EDB on the needs and development of the non-publicly funded part of the post-secondary education sector.

The Role of the UGC Sector

8. UGC-funded institutions are the direct beneficiaries of significant amounts of public funds. We thus believe the UGC sector has unique roles to play. The report emphasized the need to press ahead with ensuring the UGC-funded institutions have excellent teaching, research and community engagement. This is being pursued through the recently started reforms within the UGC sector, e.g. the goal to encourage institutions to put greater focus on teaching and a focus on outputs and outcomes (rather than inputs) and a move to a more competitive research funding regime.

Internationalization and Collaboration with Mainland China

9. The report emphasises the importance of internationalization in

the higher education sector, with a view to helping Hong Kong retain its uniqueness as an international city, and at the same time maintain a close relationship with the Mainland system. We believe this is one of the features which gives Hong Kong its niche to remain competitive in a highly globalised world. It is also what distinguishes Hong Kong from other Chinese cities. Internationalization does not mean that we should neglect our traditional value and local needs. These are not mutually exclusive. Internationalization means much more than the recruitment of non-local students. It should permeate the whole gamut of institutional activity, including the internationalization of the faculty and broadening the curriculum, providing local students with more opportunities in overseas exchange programmes, the integration between local and non-local students and other means.

10. For a matter as essential as internationalization to Hong Kong generally and to the higher education sector, it should be actively pursued by the Government and the institutions and – importantly – backed by society. We hope that our report can provide useful material that will initiate rational and constructive discussion and promote a good understanding and consensus between the Government, institutions' stakeholders including staff and students, and the community on the purposes of internationalization and the steps needed to promote it.

Way Forward

11. “Aspirations for the Higher Education System in Hong Kong” is a report to the Government. Should the directions and recommendations of the report be endorsed by the Government, we envisage that the operational details will be fleshed out with input from concerned parties. Meanwhile, we are glad to note that the report has already stimulated interest and discussion on the future direction of post-secondary education in Hong Kong.

12. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

UGC Secretariat
3 January 2011