

The Hong Kong Institute of Education's Submission to  
LegCo Panel on Education for its meeting on 14 March 2011

**Response to the UGC Report "Aspirations for the Higher Education  
System in Hong Kong"**

<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Response of the Hong Kong Institute of Education</b>
1. Government policy should treat all elements of post-secondary educational provision as a single interlocking system for strategic and planning purposes, including both privately and publicly funded institutions.	We agree to the recommendation and share the view that Hong Kong should have an integrated Post-secondary Education System in which students should have an easy access to the "Credit Accumulation and Transfer System" (CATS). However, the devil lies in the details of implementation of CATS, given the different academic traditions and credit systems of institutions and their academic departments. The Government should therefore carefully explore with the tertiary education sector various issues relating to the logistics and operational details for CATS implementation
2. There should be a single oversight body for the non-publicly funded part of the post-secondary education system.	We have reservations on having a single oversight body as far as those sub-degree programmes provided by UGC-funded institutions are concerned. At present, non-publicly funded sub-degree programmes offered by the UGC-funded institutions are validated by themselves which already enjoy self-accrediting powers, with their sub-degree delivery arms being subject to periodic quality assurance review by the Joint Quality Review Committee (JQRC) established under the aegis of HUCOM (Heads of Universities Committee). If UGC's recommendation will result in self-accrediting institutions surrendering their authority over their own sub-degrees to an external validation body, this would be perceived as undercutting their academic autonomy.
3. There should be a clear differentiation of roles throughout the	In general we accept a differentiation of roles within the post-secondary education system. However, we must add that the delineation of roles should not be

post-secondary education system to ensure full diversity of provision.	a rigid one that ignores the evolving new higher education scene, both locally and internationally. If Hong Kong is to play an active role in higher education as a vibrant regional hub, we must embrace a broader and more strategic agenda when it comes to how our strong cluster of tertiary institutions can beneficially respond to the new demands and challenges coming along with such regional status.
4. There should be greater clarity about the character of the Associate Degree and its place in the structure of the qualifications offered by the post-secondary education system.	We support this recommendation. We concur that in the current system, there is insufficient articulation between the private and public parts of post-secondary education. We hope that the Government will provide more publicly-funded senior-year places to enable Associate Degree graduates to proceed to full-degree education given the limited number of publicly-funded first-year-first-degree (FYFD) places.
5. Pathways for student progression through the whole post-secondary system and between its parts should be made clearer, including for those returning to education at different times.	We support that the pathways for students progressing through the post-secondary system and between its parts be made clearer, and that there is the need for developing a transparent and trustworthy CATS for the whole post-secondary system. This will facilitate students' mobility, especially those who may return to education at different times in life.
6. A transparent and trustworthy Credit Accumulation and Transfer System should be developed for the whole post-secondary system.	
7. Manpower planning requirements in the allocation of first-year, first-degree places should	In principle we have no problem with adopting an outcome-based approach, as suggested by UGC, which would allow tertiary education providers more flexibility to offer programmes that are viable and

be abolished or considerably loosened.	valuable. However, in the case of our Institute, whose bulk of undergraduate programmes is in Teacher Education, we also share the concern that manpower planning would better ensure meeting community needs and not result in under- or over-investment in the training of school teachers given the fact that they are to find employment almost exclusively within the public sector (in government and subsidized schools).
8. There should be a comprehensive review of the future provision and distribution of lifelong learning opportunities throughout the post-secondary system.	The Institute is supportive of this recommendation. As Hong Kong evolves to actively promote lifelong learning, the Institute, among other UGC-funded institutions, has swiftly responded to the Government's policy direction and set up an Elder Academy. We have also launched a Centre for Lifelong Learning Research and Development. In recognition of our capacity in and our commitment to education and development in the region, the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) has approved the establishment of an UNESCO Chair in the fields of "Technical and Vocational Education and Training" and "Lifelong Learning" in January 2011. This is the first UNESCO Chair in the Education area awarded to Hong Kong. The Institute would be most pleased to contribute to the further expansion and diversification of Lifelong Learning in Hong Kong.
9. UGC-funded institutions should review, develop where necessary and implement internationalisation strategies as a matter of urgency. The UGC should monitor agreed Key Performance Indicators in each institution. The Government should adopt a	We support UGC's recommendation to give greater impetus to internationalization and to provide additional resources to fund internationalization initiatives. We see internationalization – in terms of both making the local campus more cosmopolitan and sending out local students overseas for international exposure – as crucial to whole-person development in our undergraduate education. We welcome the Government to adopt suitable strategies as well as a forum for internationalization that includes collaboration with universities.

strategy for internationalisation that includes collaboration with universities. Both should make long-term and sustained commitments to these strategies.	
10. A forum should be established to facilitate collaboration between the Government, universities and the UGC in identifying and implementing effective policies and initiatives, and for spreading best practices regarding internationalisation.	
11. An additional funding stream should be attributed to the UGC to fund internationalisation initiatives and allocated through the Academic Development Planning process.	We welcome this recommendation and look forward to having more information on how UGC plans to allocate an additional funding stream for internationalization through the Academic Development Planning process. Initially this could be based on the FYFD places, though given there will be more senior year/articulation places for students from diverse background, such allocation should eventually be related to the total undergraduate FTE places.
12. Universities should develop appropriate strategies for the recruitment of international students. The Government should actively support this through its official overseas offices.	We agree that the Government should actively support institutions' strategies for the recruitment of international students and hope that the Government will consider establishing an entity similar to the British Council or the Australian Education International to coordinate efforts in promoting "Hong Kong Higher Education" overseas.
13. The Government, working with the institutions, should increase hostel	As the enhancement of internationalization is highly dependent on the infrastructure of the institutions which relates partly to the provision of hostel places,

accommodation for local and non-local students as a matter of urgency.	we strongly support this recommendation and urge the Government to provide its early policy support in this regard.
14. UGC-funded institutions should increase their efforts to provide support resources and opportunities for non-local students to integrate them better with the local student body.	We are supportive of this recommendation. Integration between local and non-local students is dependent on many other factors involving cultural and personality dimensions which should be explored further. We believe institutions have been proactive in promoting integration all along, and more can be done with UGC and Government support.
15. The number and variety of overseas study opportunities for local students should be increased significantly. Funding should be provided for this, and credits should be attached to these programmes.	This recommendation echoes well our Institute's present strategic direction in the development of innovative programmes – including joint programmes with overseas partners - to enable students to “study beyond borders”. Immersion and student exchange activities are becoming two increasingly important features of our undergraduate curriculum.
16. Institutions should make renewed efforts to ensure and enhance students' biliterate (Chinese and English) and trilingual (Cantonese, Putonghua and English) abilities.	We support that greater efforts be made to enhance students' biliterate and trilingual abilities. In this regard, our Institute will implement a new language policy in 2012/13 for all full-time undergraduate students. This vigorous “functional trilingual” policy, with the imposition of language exit requirements, will promote functional proficiency through the principled use of Cantonese, English and Putonghua.
17. UGC-funded institutions should actively maintain the international mix of their faculty.	We support this recommendation. The cost of local accommodation has been on the rise steadily over the years, particularly in the current property boom, making it very expensive for institutions to make attractive offers to (and to retain) some senior academic staff. We would appreciate it very much if the UGC will regularly review its funding mechanism pertinent to the housing element so that Hong Kong will not lose its competitiveness in recruiting internationally renowned academic and professional

	staff.
18. The higher education sector should develop a number of jointly funded and staffed international centres for high quality research and graduate programmes combining Asian and Western perspectives.	<p>To us, internationalization is not just about recruiting foreign students and faculty members, providing appropriate programme places and student facilities, or securing a higher place in so-called world university rankings. More fundamental to internationalization is how to define Hong Kong's role in the process. We agree with UGC that there is a need to combine Asian and Western perspectives in our teaching, research and scholarship. As Hong Kong consolidates its strength as a regional education hub under present Government policy, we believe there will be growing interest in offering joint programmes, especially with Mainland universities.</p> <p>The rise of Asian higher education is concomitant with the growing importance of Asia in the world arena in terms of economic growth and regional modernity. It is partly a result of the globalization logic that sees no national and cultural boundaries, making the transnational and cross-cultural understanding of a globalizing world both easier and all the more imminent. The challenge to Asia lies in what it can offer to the world by way of its academic studies, scientific and humanistic scholarship, and the "Asian Experience". Amid the current critique of international higher education (e.g. that it has been unduly driven by motives of commercialization and marketization), Asian universities should reflect on how Asia's rise in international higher education helps contribute towards a renaissance of the humanistic tradition of university.</p> <p>Internationalization should not be a reason for de-emphasizing writings in the local language or downgrading the value of local or regional studies<sup>1</sup> and publications. The vast Asian scholarship and cultural and social experiences cannot be fully tapped</p>

<sup>1</sup> In the case of this Institute, these include action research to inform local school practices and enhance local school development.

	without the understanding of local scholarship and thoughts expressed in the local language. We must transcend the limitations of understanding Asia through Western analysis and perspectives. At present the bridge is weak between Western and Asian scholarship, and between Western modernity and Asian traditions.
19. Institutions should establish a clear strategy for developing different types of relationships with the Mainland, and in particular the Pearl River Delta.	We support this recommendation. As part of the Institute's strategic development, we are actively fostering strong links with the region's leading universities, to make a bigger impact on education development in the Pan-Pearl River Delta Region, and take an active role in the Coalition of Teacher Education Institutions in the Pan-Pearl River Delta.
20. The Government should initiate negotiations with relevant authorities on the Mainland with a view to easing regulatory requirements in teaching and research collaboration with Mainland institutions, especially the portability of research funding.	Regarding joint delivery of programmes on the Mainland, we agree the Government's initial negotiations with relevant authorities on the Mainland will be highly desirable. This is particularly crucial given the different regulatory framework and <i>modus operandi</i> of higher education on the Mainland, as well as other policy constraints such as taxation and exchange control. The Government should consider setting up a special one-stop Mainland Services Unit in the Education Bureau to provide backup service support to local tertiary institutions.
21. The UGC should ensure that it uses the tools at its disposal to assess and reward evidence of teaching excellence, both at the system level and at the funding level. Sector-wide surveys and assessments of student learning outcomes should be developed and published.	We agree in principle to a reward system that looks for quality performance in research and teaching, and welcome the idea stated in paragraph 6.9 of the UGC's Review Report that " <i>UGC-funded institutions are both the creators and disseminators of knowledge ..... teaching should be revitalized as a matter of urgency at the system and institutional levels.</i> " We support that the UGC should ensure that it uses the tools at its disposal to assess and reward evidence of teaching excellence. UGC and institutions should collectively promote sector-wide
22. UGC-funded	collaboration on teaching and learning issues.

institutions should place as much emphasis on the assessment of competence in teaching as they do on research. They should collectively consider the establishment of communities of practice to promote sector-wide collaboration on teaching and learning issues.	Nonetheless, similar to the difficulties in assessing research output, assessment of teaching quality/learning outcomes is no easy task, and we hope to see less cumbersome funding administration and mechanism where demonstrable teaching outputs and learning outcomes can be evaluated without tedious documentation and time-consuming exercises. In addition, more emphasis should be placed on reflective practices in teaching and learning.
23. UGC-funded institutions should seek to adopt the approaches outlined in the Review for the improvement of teaching and learning in areas related to faculty development and the strengthening of the teaching-research nexus. They should report on their implementation no later than 2015.	We support this recommendation and would like to counter-propose that institutions be invited to report in the fall of 2016 as that will be the time when the new “334” undergraduate curriculum will have fully completed its first 4-year round.
24. The Government should further develop its R&D policy and ensure that it dovetails more effectively with the four pillar and six new industries identified by the Government for targeted development.	In general, we support that the Government should further develop its R&D policy and ensure that it dovetails more effectively with the four pillars and six new industries identified by the Government for targeted development.
25. Research funding and resources should be allocated increasingly on a competitive basis.	We do not support the UGC’s view that up to 50% of the “research” portion of the Recurrent Block Grant should be transferred to the Research Grants Council (RGC) in the coming years. We have expressed our strong reservations on such an intended move, as we did not see all tertiary institutions competing on an



	<p>equal footing. Our detailed views have been related to the UGC and the Education Bureau. (Please see <b>Appendix I.</b>)</p>
<p>26. The access of private universities to competitive research funding should be reviewed periodically.</p>	<p>While in principle we do not object to the access of private universities to competitive research funding; we think the Government should make available more research funding, and also, on parity grounds, allow non-UGC funded academic personnel in UGC-funded institutions to have similar access as well.</p>
<p>27. There should continue to be role differentiation between UGC-funded institutions to ensure the best deployment of public resources.</p>	<p>Among the eight UGC-funded institutions, there exist different histories, trajectories and hence role missions. While we see the need to ensure the best deployment of public resources through role differentiation, paragraph 6.60 of the UGC's Review Report has plainly stated the fact that "<i>[mandates on role] are blunt weapons that would inhibit growth and development, for which we believe a university must have scope.</i>" The present role mission statements of the various UGC-funded institutions were adopted back in 2004. We think it is time that such statements be revisited to ensure they fully reflect the latest developments, both of the institutions themselves and of the local, regional and global scenes in which they operate.</p>
<p>28. The funding regime should assess and reinforce role differentiation and performance in role within the UGC-funded sector.</p>	<p>As a general principle, we support this recommendation. However, it should be applied with sufficient sensitivity to the evolving needs of the community and the changing local, regional and global higher education scenes. Although the measurement tool(s) could well be uniform, there should not be only a single yardstick (be it in research, or teaching and learning) applied to all institutions which are given different roles and different targets.</p>
<p>29. The UGC should transition to a funding regime based on the</p>	<p>Although we agree in principle to a more competitive funding regime, we would advise caution in its interpretation and implementation in light of the</p>

assessed quality of outputs and outcomes, reducing the current regulatory burden.	possible downside of unstable funding, especially given the current disparity between “large” and “small” institutions, and between “developed” and “developing” ones (such as this Institute), and the present grants allocation patterns of the RGC that appear to be in favour of medicine and the hard sciences, at the expense of the humanities and liberal arts. Any rigid implementation of competitive funding of a large scale will be harming the growth of those institutions wholly or predominantly in the liberal arts, humanities and social sciences areas.
30. The funding regime should reflect high-quality teaching outcomes.	
31. A thorough review of the practical effectiveness of the periodic Research Assessment Exercise should be undertaken before it is held again.	
32. Means of assessing the quality of research postgraduate students emerging from the system should be implemented to inform decisions on the allocation of research postgraduate places.	Regarding the allocation of Research Postgraduate places (RPg), we are in broad agreement with UGC on moving away from the “historically based” allocation, so as to give room to the “new” universities including this Institute to have a legitimate role to play in research education. We support factoring in the past award results of RGC/UGC funding schemes and the results of the RAE or an equivalent assessment exercise under a new allocation mechanism.
33. Public funds should not be used by UGC-funded institutions as cross-subsidies for self-financing educational activities. There should be greater transparency in the financial relationship between UGC-funded institutions and self-financing courses either within the institution or in an affiliate, such as a community college.	We agree in principle to this recommendation. On the part of this Institute, we have all along taken due diligence to ensure there are no such cross-subsidies. Nonetheless, granted that the costing structures are properly recognized, we are of the opinion that the no-cross-subsidies principle should not be interpreted so literally as to disallow students from UGC-funded and self-financed undergraduate programmes attending shared classes and other educational activities on the same campus, which may facilitate synergy and enhance the pedagogical impact on student learning.
34. The community college operations of UGC-funded institutions should be	We generally have no difficulty with this recommendation. Nonetheless, we are concerned about how far the proposed “separation” will go. If

completely separated from their parent institutions within three years of the acceptance of this recommendation.	the objective is to totally disassociate community college operations from the parent institutions even in terms of name ties (such that the community college can no longer mention the name of the parent institution), we would wonder if that would serve the education sector any good.
35. There should be a single quality assurance body for the whole post-secondary system.	Recommendations 35 and 36 seem to have premised on the need for a robust Qualifications Framework and CATS. We do not necessarily see that <i>“the existing quality assurance system, with different players each responsible for certain parts of the system, may have become too fragmented to remain fit for its purpose.”</i> (paragraph 8.10). Conceptually, it may not be unreasonable to subject all institutions offering the same level of programmes to the same quality assurance mechanism. However, even now, among the self-accrediting institutions, they do grant credit transfers/exemptions despite each having their own different internal validation and quality assurance processes which are not bound by any uniform external requirements or templates. The implementation of CATS may rely less on a unified quality assurance framework than on a clear and transparent Qualifications Register as well as the academic policy of institutions. On the other hand, a single quality assurance body may tend to use the same standards applicable to non-self-accrediting institutions to evaluate self-accrediting institutions that already have long years of academic experience and enjoying high international standing.
36. The single body should integrate the methods and approaches of quality assessment, validation and accreditation across the system.	
37. The development of a Credit Accumulation and Transfer System for the whole system requires it to be appropriate for articulation between different levels and across different institutions at the	We support Recommendations 37 and 38, and the need for greater transparency and public discourse of quality assessment so that the public may make better-informed choices in undertaking programmes and courses.

same level.	
38. There should be greater transparency and public disclosure of quality assessment so that the public may make better-informed choices over time.	
39. A coordinating committee comprising the chairpersons of the various oversight bodies in the post-secondary education sector should be established under the chairmanship of the Secretary for Education.	We support Recommendations 39 and 40. We welcome the Government to provide more resources and policy support to both the UGC and non-UGC sectors, to facilitate their concerted efforts in consolidating Hong Kong's position as a premier education hub in the region.
40. The Education Bureau should be provided with appropriate and sufficient human/financial resources to allow it to fulfil an expanded role in overseeing the whole post-secondary sector.	

End

## The Hong Kong Institute of Education's Views regarding the Allocation of Research Funding and Research Assessment

- a. It is important that the growth of higher education institutions be viewed as a holistic process, integrating research, teaching and professional and community contributions so as to enhance overall scholarly impact. The present practice to provide a research portion within the Block Grant underpins such an integrative approach, so that it is well accepted within the culture of all institutions that all academics have to engage in research activities on a day-to-day basis and are remunerated as such through funding by the Block Grant. The proposition of removing up to 50% of the research portion from the Block Grant to the RGC will seriously erode this, particularly hampering the overall strategic growth of those “developing” institutions such as our Institute.
- b. The allocation of the research portion of the Block Grant is currently based on the institutions’ overall Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) performance, while the RGC grants are allocated on the merit of individual academic’s project proposals, which though peer-reviewed, have yet to deliver results. We believe a research funding system grounded in actual research performance would be more equitable than a system based on RGC grant allocations (such as GRF – General Research Fund), which in our view largely favours the hard-science-based comprehensive universities.
- c. The removal of up to 50% of the research portion of the Block Grant will seriously affect those institutions wholly or predominantly in the liberal arts, humanities and social sciences areas, although the UGC proposes to make reimbursement of some “indirect costs” back to institutions. For these institutions, the individual research grant money that could be obtained from RGC-funded projects is by far much smaller than that secured by the science-focused universities, partly because the latter’s research projects are more equipment-heavy and laboratory-based, and hence money-intensive.
- d. The proposed transfer-out of the research portion will particularly harm the “small” and “developing” institutions. With the removal of a substantial part of the research portion as presently built into the Block Grant, junior academic staff members in these institutions would no longer benefit from such research support, which once was there to deepen their research skills and grant application skills. We believe that the research portion should form the threshold funding for all institutions.
- e. While the dollar amount of research funding to be “transferred out” from the smaller non-science based institutions under the proposal will only be marginal compared to the total UGC funding to all UGC-funded institutions, the adverse impact on the staffing level (and thus morale) of small institutions would, however, be enormous.

We are in support of continuing some form of RAE as a means to evaluate institutions' performance in research. We believe that institutions in Hong Kong should strive to meet domestic needs and undertake work that is of local and international relevance and hope that the future RAE with implications for research funding should:

- a. be sensitive to the diversity within a wide range of academic disciplines and avoid any cultural, regional or disciplinary biases in assessment methods and tools;
- b. reflect the sustainable quality and long term impact of research processes and outputs not only in the academic field but also for the profession and/or the community at large;
- c. value the cultural and local relevance to Hong Kong, China and the region;
- d. take the unique roles and missions of institutions into consideration when assessing research performance and allocating research funding so as to achieve a more balanced growth in knowledge creation opportunities and intellectual pursuits; and
- e. facilitate institutions in developing their unique strengths and character in research development and performance in both the local and global contexts, instead of measuring all of them with one single standard.

**End**