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Education Bureau
Government Secretariat, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
The People's Republic of China

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Clerk to Panel
Legislative Council Panel on Education
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central
Hong Kong
(Attn: Miss Polly Yeung)

Dear Miss Yeung,

Panel on Education

Work pressure on staff of higher education institutions

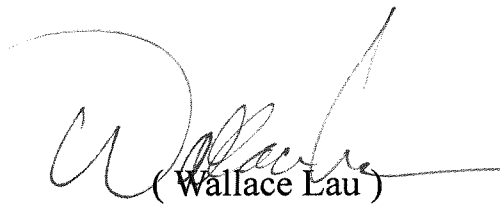
I refer to your letter of 11 December 2013 to the Secretary for Education.

The eight University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions are independent and autonomous statutory bodies. They have their own governing ordinances and statutes which lay down their objectives, functions and governance structures, as well as the powers and freedoms they enjoy. Administrative issues including staff-related policy matters fall squarely within the autonomy of the UGC-funded institutions. That said, institutional autonomy does not exempt them from the public interest. The UGC-funded institutions are mindful of the interests of all stakeholders, including staff and students, as well as the community at large, and are accountable for their decisions. Moreover, as employers, institutions are also obliged to observe all relevant legislation governing conditions of employment in Hong Kong.

In addition to legislative measures, the Government is also committed to promoting the concept of work-life balance and good employment practices to all employers, including the UGC-funded institutions. In terms of staff management, all eight UGC-funded institutions aspire to be caring employers. They recognize that human capital is their core asset and that the quality of faculty and staff will determine the quality of their educational programmes. Management of staff morale is hence of vital importance. It is a common goal of institutions to build a safe, healthy, fair, harmonious, collegial and committed staff community and a professional work relationship with mutual trust, respect and support that is conducive to high productivity and synergy.

According to the UGC-funded institutions, a multitude of measures are in place to promote staff morale and reduce work burden. Besides, they also strive to provide counselling services and promote work-balance. Examples of measures adopted by institutions are set out at Annex for reference.

Yours sincerely,



(Wallace Lau)
for Secretary for Education

cc

Secretary-General, University Grants Committee (Attn: Ms Eva Yam)

**Examples of Employment Practices Adopted by
UGC-funded Institutions**

Managing Staff Morale

In order to boost and sustain staff morale, the following measures are in place in UGC-funded institutions –

- For example, CityU has started to implement a Code of Conduct since January 2011. The Code embraces core values and various principles of CityU, among which upholding civility and respect for others, and be impartial and fair are included.
- At HKU and HKUST, for example, there are in place well-established staff grievance procedures and whistle-blowing policies.
- At PolyU and HKIEd, for example, there are Presidents' Awards and Long Service Award Schemes to show appreciation to staff members, as well as recognition and reward of good performances.
- At PolyU, orientation programme is organized twice a year for new recruits to facilitate a smooth settling-into the new work environment.

Measures to Reduce Work Burden

To ensure that they are appropriately staffed for the 4-year curriculum, each of the eight funded institutions has recruited additional faculty and staff to deal with the increasing workload over the years. Other than that, institutions have also put in place various measures to review and alleviate the work burden of its employees –

- Heads and supervisors of each Department/Unit are tasked to review manpower needs periodically (usually on an annual basis) for them to review the allocation of work duties among staff. They could then suitably decide if additional staff is needed for ad hoc or new projects. These individual Heads could also seek to streamline work processes to enhance efficiency and reduce work burden on staff.
- In relation to such reviews, flexibility is built into the budget management of institutions such that Departments/Units can deploy necessary resources to match operational requirements and new

development initiatives through the engagement of part-time staff or student helpers to ease the pressure of managers and professional staff.

- Institutions also recognize that they need to improve the working environment and enhance administrative support to recruit and retain quality faculty and reduce work burden. They have thus aimed at improving operating efficiency to support academic excellence (e.g. implementing IT initiatives to optimize business process automation). Work-related staff development programmes are also organized to improve the quality of administrative support, such as mediation skills, performance appraisal skills, regulatory compliance issues on disability, discrimination and sexual harassment, managerial competence and personal effectiveness.
- There is the presence of formal committee meeting structure whereby staff members may raise issues of concern to management for consideration and resolution. Staff consultative committees for various types of staff members have also been established with an aim to strengthen the communication between staff and the management.
- Annual staff appraisal process provides a mandatory mechanism for two-way communications between staff and their supervisors.

Counselling Services Provided for Employees

UGC-funded institutions are committed to promoting work-life balance and have made various arrangements in this regard to assist their staff -

- Majority of the funded institutions are providing a 24-hour counseling and consultation hotline service run professionally for staff members who are in need. Such services offer assistance in stress/emotion management, career development concerns, physical and mental health issues and other psychological issues. The provision of such services is on a voluntary basis while being confidential and free.
- Staff interest groups and activities are organised for staff and family members, including workshops and seminars on stress management. Staff support services and activities, such as fellowship and staff choir; seminars on physical wellness, family relationship, parenting skills and personal development *etc* are also provided.

- Work-life balance programmes (or weeks) are regularly conducted to promote the emotional, psychological and physical well-being of staff members. Examples of such programmes include “the charm of positive psychology”, “breathing therapy for anxiety and insomnia”, “Chinese medicine for healthy life”, “Chinese paper cutting”, “mental health first aid training”, “positive leadership”, “managing change with balance in work and life”, “fatigue management” and exercise sessions such as Yoga, Qigong and Badminton.
- Many institutions have in put in place the 5-day work week, flexi-time scheme and family friendly leave provisions (such as paternity leave and compassionate leave). Some institutions provide insurance coverage not only to staff members, but their immediate family members as well.
- Some institutions have embarked on positive workplace initiatives to provide more support to staff to cope with or thrive on stress. CUHK, for example, reconstituted the staff training and development committee into the Committee on Positive Workplace and Staff Development to foster positive workplace and staff development and oversee the initiatives on staff wellness. It also establishes dedicated personnel at the Personnel Office to support staff in need. HKIED on the other hand, introduced a preventive health check-up scheme in 2013 to enhance staff members’ health consciousness.
- There is also the provision of space such as staff clubs that provide dining facilities and meeting places for recreational activities of staff.