



職業訓練局教學人員協會

Vocational Training Council Academic Staff Association

By Post and Fax (2771-8752)

Hon IP Kin-yuen
Deputy Chairman, Panel on Education, Legislative Council

10 November 2013

Dear Mr Ip,

Longitudinal Study on VTC Students

The LegCo Panel on Education will meet tomorrow Monday 11 November to consider a funding request of \$19.48 million for the captioned research study proposed by the Vocational Training Council (VTC). We wish to offer our humble opinions on the funding request as follows.

Our Association welcomes a research to critically examine the VTC study pathways and the learning experience of VTC students, in order to “improve the pedagogical and curriculum design, student counseling and campus life enhancement programmes”. However, we have serious doubts about the value-for-money of setting up a full-time, in-house research team to conduct the study and about its achievement of the project goals. We think it would be much more cost-effective for the study to be contracted out to an external researcher, and the money saved should be used directly for improving teaching and learning in the frontline.

VTC is not a research institute. The staff has yet to build up a research profile that can secure a research grant in tens of millions for one project. Some colleagues have studied the learning experience of vocational students, but their work would be of a much smaller scope and depth than the proposed study. Faculty members in the university arm have to prove their worth in research proposals that are scrutinized in the finest detail by the funding body. If funding for the captioned study comes in through a less competitive route, there is still the problem of completing the study to a standard commensurate with the funding amount. The most effective solution would be contracting out the study to an external, independent researcher who has the proven track record of designing and conducting cohort studies at similar scale and level for pedagogical and curriculum improvements. A \$20 million budget should be more than enough to attract top researchers in Hong Kong and elsewhere. The independence of an external researcher, and his/her leading position in the field, will be very useful in establishing a strong credibility for the study outcomes.

The public and the VTC staff members are appalled at the funding request of \$19.48M, which will be used to set up a full-time research team to conduct the study. This budget has been described as super-luxurious (“超豪研究”) in the newspaper. The extravagance is due to the use of a five-member research team (led by one part-time consultant) working full-time on one single project. If conducted by experienced researchers outside, the study would not require such a luxurious team and extravagant budget; this view can be easily confirmed or otherwise by obtaining budget quotes from reputable research organizations or individuals.

We cannot understand why the VTC management refused to obtain a budget quote from an external researcher for value-for-money comparison with that of an in-house research team. In an open meeting on 20 June 2013, the project initiator argued for the research to be done in-house by referring to the confidentiality and quality issues in contracting out a research. We are baffled by his argument because bad experience with a tenderer cannot negate the need to tender, and also one cannot assume an external investigator will break confidentiality which must be one of the contract requirements.

Please note that the funding request has come to you as one for a research study, not for administrative measures to implement the pedagogical and curriculum improvements to be identified by the study. Kindly consider asking the project proponent to justify the “super-luxurious” budget, and requiring the justifications to be based on concrete evidence such as a detailed research proposal and a budget quote from other researchers.

We wish that VTC could be granted the \$20 million fund and would use only a portion of it to pay the researchers’ salaries, leaving a good portion to actually improve teaching and learning in the frontline. We hope that the research will not turn into a self-congratulating account of the VTC study pathways.

We offer the above opinions in good faith for the best interest of VTC and our students.

For and on behalf of
VTC Academic Staff Association



Mr Yeung Wai-keung, Frankie
President

Cc: Mrs Carrie Yau, ED/VTC
Ms Pecvin Yong, PAS/EDB