

UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMITTEE

HIGHER EDUCATION REVIEW GROUP

Consultation Fora Held on 24 April 2010

Gist of Comments Received

On 24 April 2010, the Higher Education Review Group (HERG) held two consultation fora to gauge the views of the stakeholders from the post-secondary education sector in order to provide further input to the deliberations of the Group for the Higher Education Review 2010 (HER 2010).

2. Prior to the consultation fora held on 24 April 2010, HERG held two consultation sessions in September 2009 and noticed that stakeholders were particularly concerned about such issues as internationalisation, collaboration with Mainland China, quality, and articulation opportunities, *etc.* HERG therefore organized the captioned fora and invited participants' views on those issues, and other issues related to the review.

3. The gist of comments received at the fora in April 2010, and HERG's responses, is set out in the ensuing paragraphs.

Internationalization

- Hong Kong should be more proactive in pursuing internationalization. It should leverage on its relationship with the Mainland, and develop its uniqueness in order to attract high quality students. Internationalization meant more than the recruitment of non-local students, and it was not equivalent to "Westernization".

- The majority of non-local students were from the Mainland China, the same phenomenon was noted in the recruitment of students under the PhD Fellowship Scheme. It was also noted that the staff mix in local institutions had become less internationalized.
 - The recruitment of non-local students might have a displacement effect on the opportunities and resources available to local students, and that resources should be used to provide more publicly-funded first-year-first-degree (FYFD) places for local students instead. Besides, with the increasing number of non-local students, manpower resources of institutions had become stretched.
 - The coordination among government departments in implementing the internationalization policy was problematic, it was unclear which bureau(x) or department(s) was championing the initiative. Barriers e.g. quotas for non-local students should be removed.
 - On whether internationalization should be an issue for the entire sector, or just the UGC sector, different views were heard. Some found the issue relevant for the whole sector, some commented that focusing resources on UGC-funded institutions was the right way to go given the limited resources available. A participant commented that UGC-funded institutions were “lured” by the UGC’s funding mechanism to pursue internationalization.
- HERG’s response:
- Internationalization was a substantial vehicle for Hong Kong’s future. It would be worrying if students became less outward looking.

- Non-local students were admitted on academic merit. Given the large population of the Mainland China, it was natural that a large number of the non-local students in Hong Kong came from Mainland. The PhD Fellowship Scheme was merit-based and the selection was vigorous. Institutions should do more to promote integration between local and non-local students.
- On funding mechanism, HERG clarified that the number of non-local students and faculty members was not a factor that would affect the UGC's funding allocation to institutions. Institutions were free to choose whether to pursue internationalization and if so to what extent.
- While it might be desirable to have more publicly-funded FYFD places, it should also be recognized that the Government had to take into account many different considerations in its funding allocation.
- On the displacement effect of non-local students, HERG clarified that the 20% quota for non-local students represented an upper limit and it was not mandatory for institutions to reach that limit. Within the 20%, only 4% was within the FYFD quota, the remaining 16% was self-financed.
- HERG agreed that Hong Kong should develop its uniqueness, and leverage on its relationship with the Mainland, but it should not blindly follow the western models.

Collaboration with the Mainland China

- The Government should liaise with the Mainland Authorities, especially those in the Pearl River Delta (PRD) region, for some special arrangements in terms of taxation and recognition of part-time post-secondary education programmes.

- HERG's response:
 - HERG noted the present constraints, and commented these were issues to be dealt with at the Government level.

Quality

- There was cross-subsidisation at the UGC-funded institutions, and this might affect teaching quality. On the other hand, the recruitment of self-financed students to UGC-funded programmes might enable institutions to provide more elective courses, which would in turn benefit UGC-funded students.

- It was important to ensure that quality would not be compromised in the development of more private universities.

- The issues of how teaching performance should be measure, and how standards should be set were raised.

- A respondent commented that the current system which comprised three bodies responsible for the quality assurance (QA) of degree and sub-degree (SD) programmes worked well. On the other hand, there were views that many education providers in the post-secondary education sector were

subject to two QA systems, which had resources implications at the system level.

- A respondent said that subsidies for QA/accreditation-related matters should be provided to the operators.
- HER 2010 should recognize the need for a Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS).

➤ HERG's response:

- On cross-subsidisation, the UGC was concerned about how public money was being used by the UGC-funded institutions, and the UGC was looking into the matter and would ask for more transparency and public accounting.
- On measuring teaching performance, it was noted that the current trend was to follow a portfolio approach by collecting a body of evidence.
- On setting standards, there ought to be clear, transparent and uniform QA across the whole post-secondary education sector in Hong Kong so that the QA mechanism could help the institution verify whether a particular discipline/school/programme had made a wise choice in selecting benchmarks. The availability of a properly organized CATS would be a powerful instrument to check the adequacy of the QA mechanism.
- Accreditation/QA was a reasonable overheads for operators to bear, especially for market operations.

Structure of the post-secondary sector

- The current post-secondary sector seemed to be dichotomized into the UGC sector and the non-UGC sector, with the former being adequately provided but the latter “neglected” e.g. in the formulation of government policies. HER 2010 should be dealing with the structural issues of the sector.
- There should be a body for the non-UGC sector to look after its interests, and an overarching body to look at the whole sector.
- More should be done to ensure the value of the degrees awarded by the UGC and non-UGC sectors were comparable in the eyes of the public.
 - HERG’s response:
 - The post-secondary education system in Hong Kong had become highly complicated. Issues like whether the non-UGC sector should be looked after, and if so, by what sort of body were being looked into by HERG.
 - On the value of degrees awarded by the UGC and non-UGC sectors in the eyes of the public, institutions had to be stronger in defining themselves and recognizing what they were good at.

Articulation Opportunities

- There should be more articulation opportunities for SD and associate degree (AD) graduates.

- HERG might consider embracing the European Union's model (with reference to the Bologna Process) by treating the eight UGC-funded institutions as a single system to enhance the overall competitiveness of the UGC sector, and the collaboration between institutions in Hong Kong and Mainland.

➤ HERG's response:

- Apart from publicly-funded articulation opportunities, there were also self-financing articulation places available in the sector. Students were different and had different interests/strengths. It was necessary for students to be given better advice on the various opportunities available, and on the uniqueness of different institutions/education providers so that they could make better and informed choices. CATS was necessary as it would allow students to carry credits and help them progress/articulate within the system.
- CATS might help achieve the same purpose as the Bologna Process i.e. a more transparent system with common descriptors.

Governance, grievance and composition of the UGC

- The UGC should facilitate the establishment of an inter-institutional redress mechanism to protect academic freedom.
- The UGC should include representatives of institutions and other interested bodies.
- The issue of the UGC's oversight of the management of funds made from institutions' self-financed activities was raised.

➤ HERG's response:

- On inter-institutional redress mechanism, the UGC had completed research on overseas grievance procedures, and developed a set of “best practices” guidelines, which had been shared with the LegCo and the institutions. The eight UGC-funded institutions had agreed to consider implementing the UGC's recommendations, including the involvement of external parties at the final level of appeal.
- The role and composition of the UGC were determined by the Government. On the suggestion to include representatives of institutions in the UGC, it would be difficult to ensure fairness in funding allocation due to possible conflict of interests.
- Institutions had to be held responsible for the decisions they made regarding the management of private funds. The UGC would look more closely at the non-UGC-funded activities of institutions.

Sub-degrees

- In Hong Kong, both parents and students tended to view SD as a stepping stone to a degree, which explained why most SD graduates would pursue further studies instead of entering the workforce upon graduation.
- After 2012, the SD sector would probably provide more SD places given there would be a double cohort of graduates in 2012. It was not optimistic that the sector would be ready to offer more self-financing first degree places in 2012, as they had to get the necessary accreditation from the Hong

Kong Council for Accreditation for Academic and Vocational Qualifications and the approval under the Post-secondary Colleges Ordinance.

➤ HERG's response:

- SD graduates were free to choose whether to enter the workforce or to pursue further studies. The key issue was for the system to have multiple pathways and the flexibility for students to progress within the system.
- With a CATS in place, students could seek to articulate as long as they have accumulated adequate credits.

Research funding

- A participant asked the possibility of allowing academic staff of non-UGC funded institutions to apply for research funds under UGC's remit.

➤ HERG's response:

- UGC had to concentrate on the UGC-funded institutions in view of the limited resources for research. The UGC would certainly wish to have more research funds, so that consideration could be given to opening up the bidding of research funds to the non-UGC sector.

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UGC Secretariat