

# **Report of the Review Group on the Application for University Title by the Hong Kong Institute of Education**

## **PART ONE: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Background to the Report**

1. The Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIED) submitted an application for university title to the Education Bureau (EDB) in July 2014. The application followed earlier milestones on HKIED's path to the university status it desires:

1. 2003: UGC Institutional Review of HKIED
2. 2009: UGC Review of HKIED's 'Development Blueprint'
3. 2012: HKIED Report to EDB on progress in implementing the recommendations in that 2009 Review and EDB's response
4. 2014: Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) award of Programme Area Accreditation (PAA) status to HKIED in three non-education programme areas.

Following previous practice, the EDB invited the UGC in July 2014 to carry out a special review on HKIED to determine whether it possesses the necessary capacity and qualities to be accorded university title.

### **Terms of reference of the Review Group**

2. In summarised form, the terms of reference of the Review Group were to advise the Government:

- (a) on HKIED's progress in implementing the recommendations in the 2009 Review;
- (b) on whether HKIED should be granted self-accrediting status in the programme areas covered by its existing PAA status;
- (c) in light of (a) and (b), on whether HKIED already possesses the qualities and attributes commonly expected of a university and should be granted the university title at this juncture;
- (d) on whether there are any other actions HKIED should take in

future to further its role and improve the quality of education it provides.

and if necessary to bring to the Government's attention issues of concern, if any, in relation to HKIEd's application for university title.

### **Institutional Profile**

3. HKIEd was formally established in 1994 following the amalgamation of a number of teacher education institutions. It came under the aegis of the University Grants Committee (UGC) in 1996. It has been offering publicly funded bachelor and taught postgraduate degrees since 1998. In 2002, it began offering sub-degree programmes. It is the only institution in Hong Kong with a primary focus on teacher education. Starting in 2010 and with a view to becoming a multi-disciplinary institution, HKIEd has offered a small number of non-teacher education programmes, as well as research postgraduate programmes, with additional resources provided by the Government.

### **Teacher education landscape**

4. The observations on changes in the global landscape in teacher education highlighted in the 2009 Report still hold true in 2015. Similar to its Report in 2007, McKinsey's 2010 follow-up research on the transformation of school system performance continued to emphasise that any successful system of school education would rely heavily on good teachers. Similar findings may be found in the education policy documents of Singapore and China. The League Table of global school rankings published by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in May 2015, which placed Hong Kong in second place globally, provided further evidence of the value placed on education by the community in Hong Kong.

### **Characteristics used worldwide to determine university title**

5. As the terms of reference of the Review Group include providing advice to the UGC on, "whether HKIEd ... possesses the qualities and attributes commonly expected of a university and should be granted university title at this juncture", the Review Group decided that it should re-examine the issue of, "the qualities and attributes commonly expected of a university". It accordingly undertook desk-based research on the common practice in a number of jurisdictions around the world.

6. Common themes emerging from the research echoed the findings of the 2009 Review Group. A university is expected to display most if not all of the following characteristics: sound quality assurance of programmes, procedures and systems; periodic scrutiny by external academic peers; robust governance both in terms of structures and their operation; academic autonomy; student involvement in governance; academic breadth; peer-acknowledged research and scholarship; and possession of self-certification or degree awarding powers.

### **Review process: fact-finding and evidence-gathering**

7. The Review Group already had at its disposal a significant amount of documentary material and data about the Institute, largely sourced from the external scrutiny of HKIEd, which had taken place at various times and by various bodies since 2003. In order to round out its understanding of HKIEd, the Review Group conducted further fact-finding, including seeking supplementary information from HKIEd and the views of the education, academic and business communities in Hong Kong on HKIEd's application.

### **Evidence available to the Review Group**

8. The evidence available to the Review Group included prior documentation (review groups in 2004 and 2009; Legislative Council Brief on the institutional development of HKIEd in 2009; Quality Assurance Council (QAC) Audit Report in 2011 & Progress Report submitted by HKIEd in 2013; PAA 2014), HKIEd's letter to the EDB of 7 July 2014, the HKIEd response to the questions put to it by the Review Group in December 2014, the letter from the EDB to the UGC of 26 January 2015 and views expressed by local associations and other interested stakeholders, along with the responses of HKIEd Council officers, senior management, staff, students and others during the visit made by the Review Group to the HKIEd Tai Po Campus on 9 - 10 February 2015, as well as observations made by Review Group members during that visit.

### **Determination of assessment criteria**

9. The Review Group developed a set of key criteria covering the following seven aspects of HKIEd: vision, mission and strategic direction; academic breadth and subject complementarity; governance; academic standards and quality assurance; research accomplishments and

capacity; academic and academic supporting staff; and resources and support structures.

## Criteria and Review Group findings

10. The Review Group findings are summarised as follows:

<b>REVIEW CRITERIA</b>	<b>REVIEW GROUP OVERALL FINDINGS</b>
<p><b>VISION, MISSION AND STRATEGIC DIRECTION</b></p> <p>Criterion 1.1: Institutional vision and mission are appropriate and clearly articulated</p> <p>Criterion 1.2: Staff and students understand and accept the mission</p>	<p>The vision, mission, aims and objectives of HKIED are appropriate and sustainable. 'Education-plus' as a concept is widely understood by staff and students</p>
<p><b>ACADEMIC BREADTH AND SUBJECT COMPLEMENTARITY</b></p> <p>Criterion 2.1: The range of disciplines is appropriate to its mission</p> <p>Criterion 2.2: Complementary disciplines meet stakeholder expectations of their having been chosen strategically and of their success in enhancing teacher education in Hong Kong</p>	<p>HKIED meets expectations of academic breadth. The development of complementary disciplines takes into account their potential contributions to the enhancement of educational practice in Hong Kong. Choices of discipline have been consistent with the 2009 Review Group Report.</p>
<p><b>GOVERNANCE</b></p> <p>Criterion 3.1: Inclusive academic planning and management processes, which facilitate the implementation of HKIED's mission</p> <p>Criterion 3.2: Robust and effective financial planning and resource allocation</p>	<p>HKIED demonstrates robust governance of its academic activities which incorporate participation by campus constituencies and external stakeholders. Strong financial planning and transparent resource allocation have allowed HKIED to build on opportunities.</p>
<p><b>ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ASSURANCE</b></p> <p>Criterion 4.1: Academic standards are appropriate and rigorous</p> <p>Criterion 4.2: Quality Assurance is integral to HKIED's academic activities, including quality enhancement based on QA outcomes</p>	<p>Academic standards set by HKIED and attained by students are appropriate to a higher education institution of good standing. Indicators of student quality are comparable to students on teacher education programmes in other universities in Hong Kong. Employer satisfaction with graduates is strong. Quality Assurance is fit for purpose, with assessment outputs used to enhance practice.</p>
<p><b>RESEARCH ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CAPACITY</b></p>	

<p>Criterion 5.1: Research and scholarly activity are fostered and supported among academic staff, postgraduate and undergraduate students</p> <p>Criterion 5.2: Research draws on academic strengths from across HKIEd and contributes to innovation in curriculum design and content</p>	<p>Investment from 2009 has brought significant dividends in terms of research outcomes and the quality of the student experience. Engagement with and success in research among staff shows a clear upward trend. Collaboration across disciplinary boundaries is evident. HKIEd has enhanced the research capacities of students by broadening their participation in courses and projects.</p>
<p><b>ACADEMIC AND ACADEMIC SUPPORTING STAFF</b></p> <p>Criterion 6.1: A significant proportion of the Academic and Academic Supporting staff have gained higher degrees/doctorates or equivalent qualifications and actively contribute to the advancement of knowledge in their fields</p> <p>Criterion 6.2: A coherent and comprehensive strategy for staff recruitment, development and retention</p>	<p>Recognition of the quality of its research is spreading to regional and international arenas. Academic staff members indicate a commitment to remain at HKIEd, with positive retention data as illustration. Workload is planned in a systematic way to ensure that staff have time to pursue scholarly endeavours. Student evaluations and external assessment indicate satisfaction with the quality of teaching.</p>
<p><b>RESOURCES AND SUPPORT STRUCTURES</b></p> <p>Criterion 7.1: Campus resources (financial, physical, IT, library) are well managed and are appropriate, given HKIEd's aims and objectives for its future development</p> <p>Criterion 7.2: Systems and services provide support for both teaching and research</p>	<p>Adequacy of resources and a flexible support structure for teaching and research are evident in HKIEd. Improvements to existing facilities and new building projects are scheduled. Planning is underway to ensure that HKIEd keeps pace with changes in teaching and research that require ongoing upgrades in library facilities, educational technology and in computing resources and support.</p>

## **HKIEd's progress since 2009**

11. HKIEd has made commendable progress since 2009 in developing into a multi-disciplinary institution. Its traditional strength in teacher education has broadened to reflect the wider development of Education as an important professional field. That strength has been enhanced through the successful development of the complementary disciplines. In addition, the Institute has rapidly developed its research capabilities, using the funding and other support made available to it to build a solid foundation for further growth in its research activity. The Review Group

**RECOMMENDS** that the UGC note the satisfactory progress made by HKIEd since 2009 in developing into a successful multi-disciplinary institution.

### **Self-accreditation in the 2014 PAA subject areas**

12. HKIEd has had the authority to self-accredit the courses it offers in Education since 2004. As such courses constitute the major part of the Institute's activities, the Review Group considers that the processes and structures in place to satisfy external scrutiny by the QAC are as mature and well-founded as in the other UGC-funded institutions in Hong Kong. In view of this maturity and of the ample evidence of high quality teaching and research performance, the Review Group

**RECOMMENDS** to the UGC that HKIEd be granted self-accrediting status in the three programme areas covered by its existing PAA status.

### **Grant of University title**

13. The Review Group considers that HKIEd already possesses the qualities and attributes commonly expected of a university. It is fully worthy of joining the ranks of the other UGC-funded universities in Hong Kong and sharing their status as institutions with full powers of self-accreditation. The Review Group

**RECOMMENDS** to the UGC that HKIEd should be granted university title at this juncture.

### **Self-accreditation**

14. Evidence suggests that there is no substantive difference between HKIEd and the other UGC-funded universities in relation to the quality of internal academic processes underpinning the validation and award of degrees and sub-degree qualifications. Student outcomes in terms of graduate quality are also comparable to the other UGC-funded universities. Bearing that in mind, the Review Group considers that University title with full powers of self-accreditation is appropriate for the Institute. The phasing of the move to the new status of full self-accreditation would need to be a matter for more detailed consideration but the move to self-accreditation in the three PAA programme areas should be initiated as soon as is practicable.

## **Possible 'mission drift'**

15. Now and into the future, formal safeguards to preserve the core mission lie in the strong governance of the Institute. It should be made explicit in the formal enabling instruments that HKIEd's core activity will remain the education of teachers and that the programmes it offers must be directly relevant or complementary to such an end.

## **Institutional title**

16. The Review Group considers that it will be a matter for the HKIEd Council, staff and students to decide on an appropriate title for the Institute, signifying that it has University status. Analogous to the question of the preservation of the core mission in the enabling instruments, the Review Group believes that the future title should refer explicitly to the core mission of education and thus should contain the word "Education".

## **Areas for further improvements**

17. The use of 'University' in its title will bring with it heightened external expectations of the Institute. In this context, the Review Group proposes a number of actions, which it believes may help the Institute to respond to such expectations. These include clearer articulation and further development of the vision and mission, planning for changing external circumstances, enhancing research co-ordination and support, establishing a small International Advisory Forum, and strengthening fund-raising efforts.

## **Conclusion**

18. The right to use university in its title has long been an ambition of HKIEd. Since the first meeting in October 2014, the Review Group has had an extensive opportunity to learn about HKIEd - its current activities, its achievements and its potential. The Review Group has concluded that the award of this right to the title of 'university' is now fully warranted. The Review Group has been impressed by the importance that Hong Kong places on education and the critical role played by HKIEd in ensuring that the teachers, in whose hands that education lies, are of the highest quality. As well as the strong evidence of the primacy that the HKIEd gives to the quality of its teaching and research, the Review Group was consistently impressed with the enthusiasm and commitment of staff at all levels within HKIEd and, it

should be added, of its students. The Review Group wishes the HKIED a long and prosperous future as the eighth UGC-funded campus-based university.

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