

## PART THREE: THE REVIEW PROCESS

### 3.1 Terms of Reference

3.1.1 The terms of reference of the Review Group are as follows:

1. To advise the Government, in the light of the community's needs and the promotion of excellence in the higher education sector, and having regard to the Government's decision on the institutional development of The Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd) on 23 June 2009 (details are set out in the relevant Legislative Council Brief at **Annex B**), the Programme Area Accreditation (PAA) Report on HKIEd issued by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications in July 2014<sup>31</sup>, as well as any other evidence that may be obtained through a special review on HKIEd -

(a) on HKIEd's progress in developing into a multi-disciplinary institution with a focus on teacher education and a good spread of other complementary disciplines and implementing the recommendations made in the University Grants Committee (UGC)'s Report of the Review Group on Hong Kong Institute of Education's Development Blueprint published in February 2009;

(b) on whether HKIEd should be granted self-accrediting status in the programme areas covered by its existing PAA status, having regard to the quality of the relevant programmes and in terms of both teaching and research performance;

(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.

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<sup>31</sup> Accreditation Report on the Hong Kong Institute of Education Programme Area Accreditation – Institutional Review and Discipline Review of Chinese Studies, English Studies and Environmental Studies, Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ), July 2014

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

## **3.2 Fact-finding**

3.2.1 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 (*detailed in paras 2.1.2 to 2.1.8 above*). 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. The list of stakeholders is at **Annex D**. The Review Group also sought the views of the Education Bureau on policy matters relating to the Review.

### **Questions to HKIEd and to Stakeholders**

3.2.2 The questions put to HKIEd covered the following eight key areas:

1. Level and mix of current and potential programmes (relevant to its vision/mission)
2. Internal management structure (relevant to its Governance)
3. Academic standards and quality assurance systems (relevant to its quality assurance structure)
4. Resources (relevant to its overall financial management)
5. Qualifications, quality and motivation of academic staff (relevant to its staff establishment)
6. Quality of students
7. Quality of teaching and learning
8. Research capacity

Stakeholders were asked to respond in writing with any views on:

1. The application from HKIEd to be allowed to incorporate 'University' in its title and the possible effect of that on the Institute's core Education mission;

2. In the event of the application being successful, the benefits of HKIEd becoming a 'University' to their particular sector and to the Hong Kong community in general;
3. Irrespective of the decision on university title, the future direction for HKIEd (e.g. continuing to focus on pre-service teacher education at undergraduate and graduate certificate/diploma levels or supplementing that with a heightened emphasis on higher degrees and research in Education and related disciplines).

3.2.3 A detailed analysis was undertaken of the direct responses from HKIEd and the stakeholder responses to the Group's questions.

### **Visiting HKIEd at the Tai Po campus**

3.2.4 A visit to HKIEd was conducted on 9-10 February 2015 in order to have in-depth discussions with the following groups on issues in the eight key areas (the detailed programme for this visit is attached as **Annex E**):

- Council office-bearers;
- The President and his Senior Management Team;
- Academic and teaching\* staff;
- Support staff
- Students (undergraduate, postgraduate and sub-degree, both full-time and part-time); and
- Others, including external examiners and external stakeholders.

\* Teaching staff are categorised by HKIEd as 'Academic Supporting Staff'

## **3.3 STRUCTURE OF THE REVIEW**

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

3.3.1 The evidence available to the Review Group included the following:

- Prior documentation (UGC 2004; UGC RG 2009; LegCo Brief 2009; Quality Assurance Council (QAC<sup>32</sup> Audit Report in 2011 & Progress Report submitted by HKIEd in 2013; PAA 2014);

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<sup>32</sup> Quality Assurance Council (QAC) is a semi-autonomous non-statutory body set up under the aegis

- HKIEd letter to the EDB of 7 July 2014;
- The response from HKIEd to the questions put to it by the Review Group in December 2014;
- The views expressed by local associations and other interested stakeholders (**Annex D**);
- The responses of HKIEd Council officers, senior management, staff, students and others during the visit 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**

3.3.2 The Review Group developed a set of key criteria, based on approaches used in a number of jurisdictions elsewhere and by, for instance, the QAC and HKCAAVQ in Hong Kong<sup>33</sup>, covering the following seven areas:

1. Vision, Mission and Strategic Direction of HKIEd
2. Academic Breadth and Subject Complementarity
3. Governance
4. Academic Standards and Quality Assurance
5. Research Accomplishments and Capacity
6. Academic and Academic Supporting Staff
7. Resources and Support Structures

3.3.3 In the following sections, the two key criteria which guided the Review Group's evaluation of HKIEd's application in each of the above areas are highlighted. The conclusions and recommendations of the Review Group resulting from its assessment of these criteria against evidence are set out in **Part Four**.

## **3.4 AREA ONE: VISION, MISSION AND STRATEGIC DIRECTION**

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of the University Grants Committee (UGC) in 2007. The QAC assists the UGC in providing third-party oversight of the quality of the institutions' educational provision, including the undertaking of periodic quality audits of the institutions.

<sup>33</sup> see for example the United Kingdom's Quality Assurance Agency guidelines at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/daput>

*Criterion 1.1: Institutional vision and mission are appropriate and clearly articulated*

*Criterion 1.2: Staff and students understand and accept the mission*

3.4.1 The vision of HKIEd is:

“... to be a leading University in the Asia Pacific Region, focusing on Education and complementary disciplines and recognized for our excellence in nurturing competent and caring professionals and (for) the impact of our scholarship”<sup>34</sup>.

3.4.2 The mission of the Institute to fulfill that vision is grounded in Education as its particular area of academic expertise, but complemented by related academic disciplines to create what the Institute describes as, ‘Education-plus’.

#### **Review Group Commentary: ‘Education-plus’**

Education-plus is an approach to academic study developed by HKIEd. Based on its long-term expertise in pedagogy/teacher education, the Institute has used the introduction of complementary disciplines as a catalyst for enhancing the curricular content of both teacher education and non-teacher education degrees. It also provides opportunities for cross-programme synergies.

These opportunities enable students to interact academically and professionally across discipline boundaries, thereby enriching their learning experience and broadening their horizons. The exposure to a multi-disciplinary environment has the potential to enhance the quality of future teachers, as well as to provide students with a wider range of subject choices and specialisms, leading to broadened academic and career pathways.

The key to Education-plus is the curricular framework, which is common across all programmes. Four curricular components (General Education; Language Enhancement; Co-curricular Learning; and Overseas Learning Experiences) provide students with a common grounding in each of these areas. Students may also choose a second major or minor from outside their programme area. In addition, all students are required to complete at least one elective course from outside their home faculty.

<sup>34</sup> Vision of HKIEd as expressed in [http://www.ied.edu.hk/web/hkied\\_vision\\_and\\_mission.html](http://www.ied.edu.hk/web/hkied_vision_and_mission.html)

3.4.3 The Review Group sought evidence that the vision and mission were understood and actively supported by senior management, academic and support staff and students, as well as by the Institute's governing body, the Council. The Review Group also considered the question of whether the climate in the Institute was one in which members of the HKIEd community believed their opinions were valued.

3.4.4 The 'Responses to Questions' (attached as Annex G) document submitted to the Review Group by the Institute in December 2014 provided some of that evidence. Nonetheless, it was not wholly clear to the Review Group in advance of its visit to the Institute in February 2015 how the mission (Education-plus) flowed from the vision and, indeed, how the mission was being implemented in relation to teaching and research. Although the vision was clear, the means by which the Institute would achieve it were not well articulated.

3.4.5 Discussions held during the February 2015 visit with Council Officers, Senior Management, staff and students, at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, clarified for Review Group members that 'Education-plus' was seen as the particular characteristic of HKIEd which differentiated it from the other UGC-funded higher education institutions in Hong Kong. Education-plus drew on HKIEd's long-established expertise in and approach to pedagogy but added teaching and research in complementary areas to create what was described by President Stephen Cheung as, "a new brand".

3.4.6 The Review Group was satisfied that this "new brand" represented valuable opportunities for future teachers in Hong Kong to be able to study in a multi-disciplinary environment, contributing to the knowledge base of their field. Such opportunity would previously not have been possible. On the other hand, the number of undergraduates in the complementary areas taking advantage of the Education-plus common curricular structure by adding Education-based classes to their studies was growing on a year-by-year basis<sup>35</sup>. In 2014/15, for example, 19 students from Language Studies, 67 students from Creative Arts and Culture, 68 students from Global and Environmental Studies and 121 students from Psychology were enrolled in at least one Education class (representing a 57% increase over 2013/14). BEd students enrolled in

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<sup>35</sup> Supplementary information requested by the Review Group following the February 2015 visit and supplied by HKIEd in February 2015 contained data on non-teacher education students taking teacher education classes and *vice versa*. The data shows an increase in 'cross-choice' of subjects between 2013/14 and 2014/15.

non-Education classes in 2014/15 were as follows: 287 in Language Studies; 185 in Creative Arts and Culture; 39 in Global and Environmental Studies; and 661 in Psychology. These totals represent a 43% increase over 2013/14.

3.4.7 There is still progress to be made in further exploration and manifestation of the 'Education-plus' concept within the Institute, which reflects the fact that it has only been in operation for a limited time. In general, the Institute would benefit from a clearer articulation of the framework and structures and the resulting benefits of its 'Education-plus' approach, especially for external audiences, not least potential students.

3.4.8 One important aspect of the vision is its international dimension. The Institute has set its sights well beyond Hong Kong, taking in a region (Asia-Pacific), which contains a number of jurisdictions where higher education is well developed and well-resourced, not least in the area of teacher education. Competition for students and for the best researchers has become more intense, as higher education institutions have increasingly looked beyond their local boundaries. It is by any measure a bold step to take what has essentially been a local institution and set it against universities which have developed global reputations for excellence over many years of international activity. Reputations are not developed overnight. However, the Review Group found evidence that HKIED is making rapid progress in developing its reputation as a respected member of the global higher education network. In addition, members were impressed with the adoption of an international element as a core pillar of the Education-plus common structure, as well as by the encouragement and financial support given to students to pursue study abroad as part of their degree programme.

3.4.9 Staff recruited from overseas and the encouragement given to researchers to participate in the international community of scholars in their various disciplines are further evidence that HKIED is developing as an institution which does not feel constrained in its activities by local boundaries. Although global league tables have their shortcomings, the appearance of HKIED in fifteenth place in the top 100 of the 2014/15 QS Top Universities in Education<sup>36</sup>, having improved its position from being between fifty-first and one hundredth in 2013/14, is an indication that the

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<sup>36</sup> Quacquarelli Symonds QS World University Rankings 2015, Page 17 - the improvement in HKIED's position was described as a "standout performance" in the QS media statement accompanying the release of the rankings . See: <http://www.topuniversities.com/qs-world-university-rankings>

strategy of taking HKIEd well beyond the borders of Hong Kong is beginning to pay dividends.

3.4.10 One important aspect of strong governance is the ability of an institution to measure its performance across a wide spectrum of activities and to use the outcomes of that measurement as a cornerstone of a policy of continuous quality improvement. Benchmarking with like organisations or institutions is a useful tool as part of such a policy. While the Review Group was pleased to note that HKIEd had entered into some form of benchmarking arrangements with Tokyo Gakugei University, Beijing Normal University and National Taiwan Normal University (each ‘market leaders’ in teacher education in their respective jurisdictions), the Review Group thought that the exercise needed to be developed beyond the exchange of descriptive information towards sharing and comparison of hard outcomes data. Such a development would increase significantly the effectiveness of the benchmarking exercise as a tool for enhanced performance.

### *Conclusion*

3.4.11 The vision, mission aims and objectives of HKIEd are clearly stated and appropriate. 'Education-plus' as a vision is understood by staff and students, serves as a guiding concept in institutional development and, importantly, appears sustainable. Communication of the Education-plus concept to external audiences would benefit from clarification.

## **3.5 AREA TWO: ACADEMIC BREADTH AND SUBJECT COMPLEMENTARITY**

*Criterion 2.1: The range of disciplines is appropriate to its mission*

*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*

3.5.1 The development of complementary disciplines was a key part of the recommendations contained in the Report of the 2009 Review Group. It has already been noted (*see Paras. 2.1.3 to 2.1.8 above*) that the Government’s acceptance of the recommendations set the Institute firmly on its current development path, based on Education-plus. As already mentioned the Government had also stated that such development should not lead to “inappropriate overlaps”.



### **Review Group Commentary: additional subject areas**

The key to the success of the mix of teacher education and non-teacher education programmes in HKIED stems from the common curricular framework. The common framework has allowed programmes to be designed across Education and the additional subject areas of Creative Arts (Creative Arts and Culture); Language Studies (Chinese Studies; English Studies); and Humanities (Global and Environmental Studies; Psychology), thereby providing opportunity for synergies to develop. Evidence from external examiners and assessors, as well as from staff in the Institute, plus statistics on student performance, on the employment of teacher education and non-teacher education graduates and on employer satisfaction with both cohorts shows that the original aim of enhancing the student experience and encouraging synergy is being achieved.

3.5.2 The 2009 Review Group suggested that two or three disciplines additional to Education would provide additional breadth. The choice of disciplines (Creative Arts and Culture, Chinese Studies, English Studies, Global and Environmental Studies, Psychology) needed to be academically sound (links to and from Education would lead to substantive developments in the subject areas), strategic (growth in these areas would be consistent with the longer-term vision of the Institute) and pragmatic (they were extensions of existing interests and strengths within the Institute rather than entirely new disciplines for HKIED). Materials submitted by HKIED suggest that growth since 2009 has been steady and consistent with these recommendations, both across the new disciplines themselves and with Education.

3.5.3 The Review Group was aware of the possibility that enhanced multi-disciplinarity might have led to some distraction from the Institute's primary mission ("to promote and support the strategic development of teacher education in Hong Kong"<sup>37</sup>). However, in the Review Group's discussions at the Institute during the February 2015 visit, there was no evidence to suggest any distraction from the core mission of teacher education. The Review Group noted in particular the

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<sup>37</sup> See Strategic Plan 2013-16 "*Shaping the Future: Excellence in Learning, Teaching and Scholarship*" at [http://www.ied.edu.hk/sp2013-16/1\\_ENG\\_The%20Planning%20Context.html](http://www.ied.edu.hk/sp2013-16/1_ENG_The%20Planning%20Context.html)

commitment to the primary mission and the understanding of its importance to the long-term success of the Institute shown by the senior members of the Council.

3.5.4 It was emphasised to the Review Group during discussion that this primary mission in teacher education was fundamental to any further development of the Institute. As already noted, the new disciplines on offer had been identified on account of their fit with Education and the possible synergies to be gained. That reasoning would be applied to any further additions to the current subject mix. While the Review Group had no specific subjects to suggest, a broadening of interests beyond Education, Humanities and Social Sciences would add richness to the academic make-up of the Institute. In the short run, collaborations in place with other higher education institutions in Hong Kong<sup>38</sup> would be another way of adding further breadth to its activities, including in the potentially capital-intensive Life and Natural Sciences.

3.5.5 The Review Group noted the Institute's further commitment to achieving synergies and stimulating innovative approaches through a requirement for inter-disciplinary collaboration in programme development. During discussions with staff from all faculties in February 2015, the Review Group was impressed with the evidence of a climate characterised by academic cohesiveness and cross-fertilisation across subject areas.

3.5.6 HKIED's senior management are confident that using the mix of disciplines as a means of achieving synergies and interdisciplinary development gives the Institute its particular niche within the higher education sector in Hong Kong. They see "Education-plus" as a strong brand. On the evidence encountered by the Review Group, their aspirations for the Institute's further development seem realistic and attainable.

3.5.7 Future developments, such as the offering of new double degrees or an enhancement of provision related to the teaching of children with special educational needs (SEN), look likely to build on existing structures, rather than necessitating investment in new subject

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<sup>38</sup> Collaboration between the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) and HKIED has resulted in HKUST offering BSc degrees in science subjects (including Biochemistry and Physics) and education, with HKIED providing the education input. Graduates of the programmes are granted Registered Teacher Status (RTS) by the Education Bureau. Such collaborations have allowed HKIED to broaden its activities without a need to invest in provision for (expensive) laboratory-based subject areas. It provides a good model for further collaboration of this kind between HKIED and other universities in Hong Kong.

areas. The Review Group agreed that this approach to development was sensible at the present time.

### *Conclusion*

3.5.8 HKIED meets expectations of academic breadth. The development of complementary disciplines takes into account their potential contributions to the enhancement of teacher education and overall educational practice in Hong Kong. Choices have been consistent with the 2009 Review Group Report.

## **3.6 AREA THREE: GOVERNANCE**

*Criterion 3.1: Inclusive academic planning and management processes, which facilitate the implementation of HKIED's mission*

*Criterion 3.2: Robust and effective financial planning and resource allocation*

3.6.1 Strength in governance is universally recognised as an essential element in institutional success at all educational levels. In higher education, evidence of such strength is explicitly demanded in many jurisdictions as a pre-requisite for self-accreditation or the right to use the title 'University'<sup>39</sup>. The Review Group was keen to test that strength within HKIED at all levels from the Institute's governing body down to its departments (academic and support).

3.6.2 The Institute provided the Review Group with extensive material on its governance structure. The Review Group also had as background material observations made by the earlier UGC Review Group in their 2009 Report, the QAC Audit Report on HKIED in 2011 and the progress report submitted by HKIED in 2013 and the HKCAAVQ July 2014 PAA Report. This material allowed the Review Group to tailor the questions it put to the Institute, both in advance of its February 2015 visit and during the visit. For example, while there was clarity in respect of the structures in place (the Council, the Academic Board and so on), the Review Group was keen to establish how the different elements within the overall structure interact with each other, how effective they were in ensuring that there is sound governance within the Institute and how individuals at HKIED perceived the effectiveness of governance

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<sup>39</sup> For example, the Finland Universities Act, 2009 or the New Zealand Education Act of 1989 in Section 2.3.

processes, including the extent to which they believed their views are taken into account during decision-making.

3.6.3 The Review Group sought assurance on these elements, as well as on the overall management and financial control being sufficient both to manage existing operations effectively and to support future developments in pursuit of the Institute's vision and mission. Reference has been made above (see Para 3.5.3) to the discussion held between Council Officers and the Review Group. As strength of governance relies fundamentally on the quality of an institution's governing body, the Review Group was particularly impressed by the grasp demonstrated by the senior members of the Council of the current and future issues facing the Institute, both locally within Hong Kong and in the region.

3.6.4 For an institute of higher education, effective academic governance is as important as good financial and operational governance to institutional success. The Review Group accordingly met with members of the Institute's Academic Board and with staff and students to discuss academic governance at faculty and departmental level.

3.6.5 The Review Group found the climate of governance in the Institute to be collaborative, not least because of a commitment to transparency at all levels. Structures in place to facilitate staff and student participation are key to their success. Evidence emerged during discussions with staff and students that they placed their confidence and trust in such structures. When asked a direct question about the extent to which the Academic Board (or, at a lower level, a faculty board) was a 'rubber-stamping body', the answer was that there are often active debates within the Academic Board, both on broader academic issues and more specific course development proposals. Such debates often lead to rejection or revision of proposals, rather than unquestioned acceptance.

3.6.6 Comments had been made in previous reports that the academic decision-making structures at faculty and departmental levels seemed unduly complex. The Review Group noted that structures had been simplified, thereby increasing effectiveness. The Institute had also acted on comments made by the QAC in 2011 about a lack of clarity in academic leadership at sub-institutional level. There had accordingly been a clarification of the role of the deans, who now bring academic leadership to their respective faculties. The meetings at HKIEd in February 2015 provided the Review Group with clear evidence that this development had been beneficial.

3.6.7 The Review Group considers that the Institute has in place transparent policies, sound governance structures and a climate of governance and management characterised by the following:

- Responsive structures and sufficient institutional controls that are sustainable;
- Transparent and coherent governance and management systems at institutional, faculty and department levels;
- Strong academic leadership;
- Involvement of staff and students in the development, implementation and communication of policies and systems;
- Understanding of and support for the overall mission among staff and students;
- Regular monitoring of performance in relation to policies and systems and of action being taken as a result of such monitoring.

### *Conclusion*

3.6.8 HKIED demonstrates robust governance and management of its activities. It has implemented decision-making practices that incorporate participation by various campus constituencies and external stakeholders, allowing for oversight and for feedback to its benefit. Strong financial planning and transparent resource allocation have allowed HKIED to build on opportunities, such as the expansion of its international activities.

## **3.7 AREA FOUR: ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ASSURANCE**

*Criterion 4.1: Academic standards are appropriate and rigorous*

*Criterion 4.2: Quality Assurance is integral to HKIED's academic activities, including quality enhancement based on QA outcomes*

3.7.1 High academic standards, consistently maintained and validated through robust quality assurance of teaching and of student performance, are rightly expected of any successful higher education institution. In the case of HKIED, it has in place a structure of external examination and assessment of student attainment. There has been rigorous examination of its academic standards and of its quality assurance processes and procedures since 2003 (these reviews and audits

are summarised above in Paras 2.1.2 to 2.1.8, to which might be added work undertaken by the QAC in 2011<sup>40</sup>).

3.7.2 As well as documentation from these reviews and audits, HKIED supplied additional material to the Review Group. In short, the Review Group had a wealth of evidence to support its assessment of the quality of the Institute's academic standards and the robustness of its processes and procedures to maintain such standards. The Review Group also spoke directly to a number of external examiners. They unanimously confirmed that the standards attained by HKIED students were at least on a par with students in other institutions of which they had experience, including their 'home' institutions.

3.7.3 Criteria used to evaluate appropriate academic standards and whether institutional quality assurance procedures are fit for that purpose commonly include the following:

- Quality of student performance, as measured in areas such as examination performance, graduation rates and employer satisfaction;
- Clear and consistent policies and procedures in setting and maintaining academic standards, including the adoption of external reference points and benchmarking with peer institutions;
- Arrangements for assessing and ensuring that academic programmes meet stated objectives and learning outcomes;
- Inherent cultures of critical self-assessment and quality enhancement;
- Evidence of actions to address identified weaknesses in performance, to promote strengths and to encourage continuous quality enhancement;
- Programme design, approval, monitoring and review procedures which are enriched by ideas and expertise from colleagues within the institution, as well as from global developments in their areas of academic specialisation; and
- Resource allocation processes and mechanisms which are focused on academic development in keeping with the institution's agreed role and mission.

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<sup>40</sup> 2011 UGC Quality Assurance Council First Cycle Quality Audit of HKIED - <http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/qac/publication/report/hkied201109e.pdf>

3.7.4 The Review Group had heard speculation that the entry requirements for HKIED students were lower than at other higher education institutions in Hong Kong. However, evidence indicates that the minimum achievement levels required of entrants to HKIED are in fact broadly comparable to the standards required in universities in Hong Kong admitting students to comparable programmes.

3.7.5 In relation to the quality of graduates, the Review Group explored with external examiners, among others, their views on HKIED in comparison with other higher education institutions. In response to a specific question on how HKIED students in Global and Environmental Studies compared to those elsewhere, the answer was that the HKIED students were of comparable quality on graduation to students in other Hong Kong institutions and that the Education aspect of their degree might have made a positive difference to their knowledge base. Conversations with other external assessors confirmed that there was equivalent quality between HKIED students and students in other higher education institutions in their subject areas, including institutions beyond Hong Kong. Evidence from employers and school principals, cited below in 3.7.6, confirmed this view.

3.7.6 The Review Group's discussion with a group representing employers and internship advisors during its February 2015 visit to HKIED provided further evidence of the high regard in which HKIED graduates were held, both in teaching positions and in other professions such as arts administration. The general view was that, "the performance and aptitude of HKIED graduates were on par with graduates from other universities in Hong Kong, if not better".<sup>41</sup>

3.7.7 The Review Group was impressed with the rigorousness of the academic quality assurance in the Institute. Commitment started at the most senior level, with the procedures and processes in place being well resourced and fit for purpose. Staff had embraced the centrality of quality assurance to institutional activity, using its outcomes to ensure that continuous quality enhancement ran through the Institute. The praise given by the QAC and in the PAA exercise were further evidence for the Review Group that HKIED was exemplary in relation to its quality assurance.

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<sup>41</sup> Comment made during the discussion between members of the Review Group and certain HKIED External Examiners held as part of the visit to HKIED, Tai Po Campus, 9 - 10 February 2015

3.7.8 The use of data to create a suite of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) by HKIEd was commendable, although the Review Group could see that their use in the Institute was something of a ‘work in progress’ at this stage. Developing the use of KPIs to incorporate clear targets against which actual performance might be measured is fundamental to continuous quality improvement. Setting ambitious but realistic targets requires skill: it is easy to fall into the trap of aiming too high. It was not clear to the Review Group whether the Institute had set such targets. If not, the view of members was that there would be benefit in so doing.

### *Conclusion*

3.7.9 Academic standards set by HKIEd and attained by its students are appropriate to a higher education institution of good standing, as are its quality assurance processes and procedures. Traditional indicators of student quality (e.g. examination scores and class standing) are comparable to those in universities in Hong Kong also engaged in the preparation of teachers. Employer satisfaction with graduates is strong. The quality assurance system is fit for purpose, with assessment outputs used to enhance practice.

## **3.8 AREA FIVE: RESEARCH ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CAPACITY**

*Criterion 5.1: Research and scholarly activity are fostered and supported among academic staff, postgraduate and undergraduate students*

*Criterion 5.2: Research draws on academic strengths from across HKIEd and contributes to innovation in curriculum design and content*

3.8.1 A major recommendation of the 2009 Review Group was the enhancement of research activity and the development of a research training environment in HKIEd. In accepting the view that a deepening of HKIEd's research activity would greatly strengthen the Institute, the Government agreed in 2009 to provide through the UGC a total of 30 Research Postgraduate places, to be spread over three years<sup>42</sup>. These places were contingent on the UGC being satisfied that HKIEd had in place a coherent research plan, including a research framework which allowed for proper supervision and support of full-time research students.

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<sup>42</sup> Legislative Council Brief - Institutional Development of the Hong Kong Institute of Education (Annex B to this report). It can also be found at [http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/about-edb/press/legco/others/legco%20brief%20on%20hkied%20development%20\\_eng\\_.pdf](http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/about-edb/press/legco/others/legco%20brief%20on%20hkied%20development%20_eng_.pdf)



The present Review Group noted that by 2014/15 the number of RPg places allocated had increased to 46 places overall, with a further increase to 50 places planned for 2015.

3.8.2 The decision to award these places acted as a catalyst for HKIED, enabling the Institute to enhance its research capacity alongside its development of complementary disciplines. There was a deliberate policy of recruiting research-active staff. The growth in the number of research active staff has had a commensurate impact on HKIED's performance in the UGC's Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)<sup>43</sup>.

3.8.3 When the Institute first came into being as a teacher education institution in 1994, "research used to be seen as something of an individual sideline or hobby". By 2014, 98% of the-then 327<sup>44</sup> staff categorised as Academic Staff (i.e. active in teaching and research) were in possession of a higher research degree. The brisk increase in recent years of HKIED's grant applications and successes is evidence of the growing strength of its research performance. In the case of competitive Research Grants Council (RGC) funding, HKIED stands in favourable comparison with other UGC-funded institutions in terms of both the number of proposals submitted and the proportion of proposals being funded.<sup>45</sup> Both these outcomes offer clear evidence of the positive effect of the Government's original decision to invest in the enhancement of HKIED's research capacity.

3.8.4 An observation made by one of the external academics who spoke to the Review Group in February 2015 was that HKIED had in the past lacked confidence in its research capabilities and capacity, evidenced by some reluctance among staff to submit their papers to top-rated journals. The Review Group considered that the Institute's encouraging performance in the RAE 2014 should both enhance HKIED's reputation as a research institution and lead to increased confidence of academic

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<sup>43</sup> In the RAE 2014, the aggregate overall quality profile at institutional level of HKIED shows that 93% of the Institute's research activity was judged to meet the standard of "regional standing" (i.e. 1\*) and above, which is comparable with the sector-wide level at 96%. Twenty-six percent of its research activity was judged to meet the standard of "internationally excellent" and "world leading" (i.e. 3\* and 4\*), as compared to 46% at the sector-wide level.

<sup>44</sup> That number had increased to 343 by January 2015 with there being a comparably high percentage of staff with a higher research degree.

<sup>45</sup> For example, allocation of the Research Grants Council's 2015/16 General Research Fund saw HKIED win 16 of the 35 projects supported in Education (HK\$7.952M of HK\$17.553M awarded), 5 of 69 in the Humanities and Creative Arts, 1 of 59 in Computer Science and IT, 6 of 26 in Psychology and Linguistics and 2 of 102 in the Physical Sciences. 30 projects supported compares with 11 in 2009/10 and 15 in 2012/13 (<http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/rgc/result/grf/grf.htm>)

staff, with a commensurate lifting of sights in relation to the publication of scholarly papers.

3.8.5 The Review Group examined the question of research support, notably the research training environment, raised in the QAC quality audit progress report in 2013 and as part of the PAA exercise of 2014. What interested the Review Group in particular was how research policies and the support infrastructure worked in practice. Questions during the February 2015 visit directed to a cross-section of staff and students covered such topics as the mentoring of junior academic staff, supervision of graduate students, incentives to publish, formal training in research methods and how the cross-disciplinary nature of Education-plus had impacted on research activity. The impression gained by the Review Group from these discussions was positive. The stated aim of the Institute in creating a, “culture that encourages self-improvement, trust and mutual support whilst being responsive to change”<sup>46</sup>, showed itself at all levels in relation to research activity and scholarship. Staff described examples of multi-disciplinary research projects, for example one involving Education and Global and Environmental Studies, and a project on educational leadership which had a strong input from Health Studies<sup>47</sup>. Students spoke of the accessibility and supportiveness of faculty and the autonomy they were permitted in identifying research issues to pursue.

3.8.6 Review Group members were shown research projects in a number of discipline areas, which served to illustrate the ethos underpinning research in the Institute. Expressed in simple terms, the research outputs are expected to lead to social impact or benefit. This grounding in current social issues and educational needs in Hong Kong and the surrounding region gives a particular flavour to HKIED’s research activity. An external assessor described it during discussion in the February 2015 visit as an, “interesting thematic approach”<sup>48</sup>. A number of other external academics who met the Review Group in February 2015 also explicitly recognised the value of such an approach. The external academics also suggested that the involvement of undergraduate students in research projects gave value both to the students and to the research outcomes.

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<sup>46</sup> HKIED Strategic Plan for 2013 - 2016 - [http://www.ied.edu.hk/sp2013-16/1\\_ENG\\_SA\\_TOC.html](http://www.ied.edu.hk/sp2013-16/1_ENG_SA_TOC.html)

<sup>47</sup> Details of cross-disciplinary research projects are included in HKIED’s website - [http://www.ied.edu.hk/web/hkied\\_research.html](http://www.ied.edu.hk/web/hkied_research.html)

<sup>48</sup> Comment made during the discussion between members of the Review Group and certain HKIED External Examiners held as part of the visit to HKIED, Tai Po Campus, 9 - 10 February 2015

3.8.7 The Review Group was in no doubt about the quality and value of what HKIED had achieved so far in developing its research capabilities. The RAE results and the HKIED’s relative success with RGC funding showed HKIED to be an institution where research is becoming a fundamental element in its corporate identity. The focus on applied research with a strong emphasis on pragmatic outcomes adds to the ‘Education-plus brand’, not least through providing experiential learning opportunities for students.

*Conclusion*

3.8.8 Investment from 2009 onwards in boosting the research capacity within HKIED has brought significant dividends in terms of quantifiable research outcomes and of the quality of the students’ overall education. Indicators of research engagement (e.g. the increased number and success of RGC applications from 2009 to 2015; RAE 2014 performance) showed improvement among Academic and Academic Supporting staff. Collaboration across disciplinary boundaries in key areas such as Special Education and Psychology is evident. HKIED has enhanced the breadth of knowledge and outlook of students by broadening their participation in courses and projects, both in Education and in the complementary disciplines.

**3.9 AREA SIX: ACADEMIC AND ACADEMIC SUPPORTING (TEACHING) STAFF**

*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*

*Criterion 6.2: A coherent and comprehensive strategy for staff recruitment, development and retention*

3.9.1 The Review Group noted that the headcount of staff in the Institute at 31 January 2015 was as follows:

Staff Type	Grade	Female	Male	Total
Academic, Senior <sup>[1]</sup>		30	70	100
Academic, Junior <sup>[2]</sup>		125	118	243

Academic Supporting Staff <sup>[3]</sup>	77	38	115
Technical Research Staff <sup>[4]</sup>	1	0	1
Non-academic, Senior <sup>[5]</sup>	4	9	13
Non-academic, Junior <sup>[6]</sup>	482	225	707
TOTAL	719	460	1 179

- [1] including Chair Professor, Research Chair Professor, Professor, Associate Professor and Principal Lecturer
- [2] including Senior Lecturer, Assistant Professor and Lecturer
- [3] including Senior Teaching Fellow, Teaching Fellow I, Teaching Fellow II, Senior Instructor, Instructor I and Instructor II
- [4] including Post-doctoral Fellow, Senior Research Assistant and Research Assistant
- [5] including senior administrative staff at the highest salary bands of the Institute, e.g., Directors, Associate Directors and Senior Assistant Registrars of central administrative units
- [6] including all other administrative and support staff not included in Note 5 above, ranging from middle management level (e.g., Assistant Registrar, Finance Manager, Assistant Project Manager, Executive Officer I), officer level (e.g., Property and Facility Officer, Communications Executive, Assistant Computer Officer) to supporting staff level (e.g., Clerical Officer I / II, Office Assistant and Workshop Attendant)

3.9.2 It has already been noted (see Para. 3.8.3 above) that the great majority of the 343 staff in the Academic Staff category possess a higher degree. The Review Group was supplied with a list of these staff, showing details of individual qualifications. The Institute also supplied information on the scholarly activities and achievements of senior staff. The external examiners whom Review Group members met during the February 2015 visit to HKIEd spoke very positively about the quality of the academic staff in the Institute.

3.9.3 The proportion of staff in the Non-academic staff categories (i.e. defined as 'support' staff) to staff in the Academic and Academic Support staff categories (i.e. staff defined for this purpose as 'academic') was roughly 1.57 to 1.0 (i.e. 721 support staff and 458 academic and teaching staff). The proportion of the former to the latter seemed quite high relative to similar institutions known to members. It was explained

that this ratio was a legacy from the Institute's constituent colleges. Part of the agreement with staff at the time of amalgamation was a guarantee of job security. With individuals gradually reaching retirement age, it is expected that the number of support staff will decline.

3.9.4 The expansion of the Institute to allow for the development of the complementary disciplines has seen a significant influx of new academic staff since 2009. As was noted by the QAC quality audit in 2011<sup>49</sup> and in HKIED's submission of progress report in 2013<sup>50</sup>, the development of support mechanisms to ensure that these staff are properly managed and encouraged in their teaching and research was a task approached with commendable thoroughness by the Institute.

3.9.5 The Institute supplied the Review Group with extensive documentation on staff development mechanisms and measures, including mentoring, funding to allow for conference attendance and travel, training in teaching and research techniques and the development of other skills (e.g., people management, management of resources), all of which constitute a comprehensive staff development programme. The visit to the Institute in February 2015 gave Review Group members an opportunity to test the effectiveness of that programme. Through discussion with staff at all levels, it was clear that staff felt valued, that junior staff appreciated the mentoring they received from more senior staff and that there was a strong sense of collegiality in the Institute.

3.9.6 An issue which arose during the visit was that of workload planning. Time is often cited as the most precious of resources for academic staff because it is needed both for quality teaching and for the achievement of research outputs. Finding an appropriate balance of those activities is a challenge for every university. The Review Group asked how the formal approach to workload planning operated, to which the response was in tabular form as follows:

Staff Category	Minimum Proportion of Time Allocation for Teaching	Minimum Proportion of Time Allocation for Research	Minimum Proportion of Time Allocation for Service
Chair Professor	20%	50%	20%
Professor	20%	50%	20%
Associate	30%	30%	15%

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/qac/publication/report/hkied201109e.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.ied.edu.hk/qac/view.php?m=3962&secid=3994>

Professor			
Assistant Professor	40%	20%	10%
Principal Lecturer	30%	30%	20%
Senior Lecturer	30%	25%	15%
Lecturer	40%	10%	10%

Notes:

*\*For the definition of staff grades, classifications are adopted from the Common Data Collection Format (CDCF) Guidance Notes. At HKIEd, the posts for respective staff grades are as follows:*

<b>Staff Grade</b>	<b>HKIEd Post</b>
A	Chair Professor and Research Chair Professor
B	Professor
C	Associate Professor
D	Principal Lecturer
F	Senior Lecturer
G	Assistant Professor
H	Lecturer (old academic title)
I*	Lecturer (new academic title)

*\*The Institute considers this grade as an entry rank to the academic track. Incumbents are expected to advance to the staff post classified under Staff Grade G after completion of one contract of three years or earlier if they perform well in the three domains of Teaching, Research and Service.*

3.9.7 The Institute has defined the normal teaching load for academic and teaching staff. The establishment of these norms was designed to ensure that the time of all academic and teaching staff members was allocated in an equitable fashion. The details included the following ‘rules of thumb’:

- For Academic Staff at Professor/Chair Professor level: 2 to 4 courses\* per year, plus academic research and a leading/mentoring role in relation to research;
- For Academic Staff up to Associate Professor level: 6 courses per year, including Teaching Practice supervision; and
- For Teaching staff: 9 courses per year, including Teaching Practice supervision.

\* a course for this purpose is defined as 39 hours teaching per semester

3.9.8 The Review Group noted that these norms allowed for a range of emphases in workload. It was informed that the Dean or the Head of Department – as part of the formal staff appraisal process – had

the flexibility to discuss and agree on variations with individual members of staff to reflect their particular circumstances.

3.9.9 It was also noted that Faculties and Departments were “given a free hand to make slight variations due to their individual situation in terms of discipline areas and programme involvement. Faculties/Departments may also formulate their own criteria for teaching allocations in the best interests of both the programme and the Faculty/Department, and to cater for the strategic and special manpower needs of the Faculty/Department. For example, the balance of effort between teaching and research could be adjusted to enable individual staff to develop or enhance their research profile or to allow a staff member to focus on teaching”<sup>51</sup>.

3.9.10 Evaluations of teaching made by external assessors as part of the quality assurance process were made available to the Review Group, as well as feedback from students. On the basis of these evaluations, members of the Review group judged that there was a high standard of pedagogy within the Institute. These evaluations also encouraged the Review Group to consider issues such as the extent to which cross-disciplinary connections were encouraged and supported at HKIED, in view of the strongly interdisciplinary identity captured by the phrase ‘Education-plus’. The Institute produced evidence to show that staff across the disciplinary spectrum teach on both teacher education and non-teacher education programmes.

3.9.11 Statistics for staff turnover (7.1% in 2013/14) suggest that the Institute’s staff profile is relatively stable. Institute staff, responding to questions from the Review Group about how they saw the Institute both now and beyond 2015, made a convincing case for the attractiveness of HKIED as a place to work. HKIED is seen as an enlightened employer, where staff want to further their careers. It has well-resourced strategies in place to ensure the continuous development of academic staff and of staff in academic support roles. As noted earlier, staff workload is planned and negotiated in a systematic way, which plays to staff competencies and strengths as well as to institutional needs and priorities. The Institute has acted to simplify the previously complex and time-consuming staff appraisal process and has expanded its role in staff development. It was reported that senior management listen to junior staff, who in turn feel free to contribute to debate on the development of their particular department (or faculty), as well as the Institute itself.

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<sup>51</sup> Extracted from the supplementary information provided by HKIED in response to a request from the Review Group, following its February 2015 visit.

## *Conclusion*

3.9.12 The HKIEd justifies its confidence in the quality of its staff. It has successfully recruited academic staff with doctorates at various ranks. Recent international rankings indicate that recognition of the quality of its research is spreading from the local to regional and international arenas. Academic staff show a commitment to remain at HKIEd, with positive retention data as illustration. Workload is planned and negotiated in a systematic way to ensure staff time to pursue scholarly interests. Student evaluations and external assessment indicate satisfaction with the quality of teaching.

### **3.10 AREA SEVEN: RESOURCES AND SUPPORT STRUCTURES**

*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*

*Criterion 7.2: Systems and services provide support for both teaching and research*

3.10.1 The Review Group noted the sound financial position of HKIEd. It has benefitted from the financial oversight of the Council, as well as careful control of expenditure by senior management. It has been returning surpluses, which have allowed its reserves to be built up to a satisfactory level. This position represents a positive turnaround for the Institute, which had experienced financial deficits up to 2010.

3.10.2 Self-funded activities in the Institute (i.e. activities not funded by the UGC) represent 24% of its overall income. The Review Group noted that income from self-funded activities was used in part to provide financial support enabling students to study abroad.

3.10.3 The UGC is encouraging an increase in income from other non-UGC sources as an important goal for all higher education institutions in Hong Kong. HKIEd recognises that an important source for such income may lie in philanthropy. By nature of the career path of most of its graduates, the size of gifts from alumni is likely to be modest, albeit potentially significant in number. The strong public service ethos of the Institute might also be used to generate interest among philanthropic organisations and wealthy individuals in Hong Kong and the Mainland. While the Institute does not yet have a fully functioning Development



Office, the Review Group was interested to hear the views of the senior members of the Council on plans for this activity. HKIEd had responded strongly in recent years to the UGC's 'Matching Grant Initiative', with the Council providing much of the impetus underlying that response. Senior members of the Council expressed their confidence in the ability of HKIEd to build on what it had achieved through the UGC initiative, which would require the initial investment of resources against a plan for their best use to increase 'giving' to the Institute.

3.10.4 One issue raised in the 2014 PAA Report<sup>52</sup> related to development funding for new programmes. Such seedcorn funding was used throughout higher education worldwide but did not seem to be present in HKIEd at the time of the PAA Report. The Review Group noted that the Institute now sets aside a percentage of its income (about 5% of the total recurrent funds received from the UGC each year) as a Central Reserve for strategic development. Review Group members considered that 5% should allow the Institute sufficient resources to explore areas for future development, without disadvantaging its current activities.

#### Review Group Commentary: the HKIEd Student Portal

The Review Group was provided with first-hand experience of the infrastructure in place where students and staff demonstrated the function of a portal developed by the Institute, using the student record system as a development platform (itself based on Banner proprietary software). In an era where the use of information and communication technologies is a key element in enhancing institutional effectiveness, as well as driving a more efficient use of scarce resources, the successful launch of the portal as an everyday tool for staff and students was a positive indication of the Institute's capacity to develop educational technology tools.

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<sup>52</sup> Accreditation Report on the Hong Kong Institute of Education Programme Area Accreditation – Institutional Review and Discipline Review of Chinese Studies, English Studies and Environmental Studies, Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ), July 2014

3.10.5 The 2011 QAC Audit Report highlighted the need to develop a closer alignment of the ICT infrastructure with the teaching and research activities of the Institute by developing (“...a pedagogically-based policy and strategy for the development of the ICT infrastructure to support learning...”) <sup>53</sup>. Evidence was forthcoming of the development of this policy and strategy, both in relation to the Institute’s library facilities and the access enjoyed by both students and staff to the student portal.

3.10.6 The February 2015 visit gave the Review Group the opportunity to experience the Institute’s Tai Po campus at first hand. Although its location (in the New Territories) and its relative distance from the MTR system make the journey relatively time-consuming and costly for some non-resident students, the Institute ensures that there is a good bus service connecting the campus and the MTR network.

3.10.7 Set against such relatively minor disadvantages is the attractiveness of the campus location with its proximity to both countryside and the sea. Although the topography places some constraints on expansion, there is room for further development and expansion of facilities without compromising the park-like quality of much of the campus environment. Members visited the Library, the Learning Commons and various classrooms and laboratories. While minor issues with building maintenance were observed, there was little difference from what might be experienced in higher education institutions elsewhere. In the Review Group’s discussion with the Director of Estates and other senior administrative staff, it was clear that there was a sound estates strategy in place and that regular building maintenance conforming to UGC norms and expectations formed part of that strategy.

### *Conclusion*

3.10.8 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 instruction and research that require upgrades in library facilities, educational support technology and in computing resources and support.

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<sup>53</sup> Page 4, Para 8 of 2011 UGC Quality Assurance Council First Cycle Quality Audit of HKIED - <http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/qac/publication/report/hkied201109e.pdf>