

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background to the Report

1. The Government has invited the University Grants Committee (UGC) to give expert advice on the development of the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIED) in the context of the HKIED's Development Blueprint. The Terms of Reference provided by the Government request the UGC to consider the Blueprint, having regard to the needs of the Hong Kong community, including the promotion of excellence in the higher education sector. The UGC set up a Review Group to advise on how to respond to the Government's request. This Report presents the findings of the Review Group, and its conclusions, as endorsed by the UGC.

2. Education is the essential foundation of a thriving and innovative society. The quality of education in a society is no less important for economic development. As competition among economies becomes more intense, the importance of education as the key to future success intensifies. Above all, following the structural shift from manufacturing to a service-oriented economy in recent decades, Hong Kong will need to develop strong and appropriate human capital to stay in the forefront of competition, and this will be affected by the quality of education delivered by its schools and teachers. One of the best ways to achieve this is to enhance Teacher Education programmes so as to train high quality teachers for Hong Kong's schools.

3. Where relevant, the Review has sought to advance the interests of higher education students and be attentive to approaches to Teacher Education that –

- attract and retain good quality students for the teaching profession;
- provide a rich learning environment at undergraduate and postgraduate levels; and
- provide flexible career pathways for students throughout their course of study.

Institutional Profile

4. HKIED is a relatively new higher education institution, whose first bachelor degree graduates emerged in 2001. The current strength of HKIED is in the training of teachers for the primary and pre-primary school sectors. Currently about 80% of new primary teachers in Hong Kong are graduates of the Institute. This dominant status is significant in considering changes to the profile of the institution. At secondary level, HKIED provides about 25% of new teachers. In addition, HKIED provides programmes at sub-degree and non-degree levels to a large student body. It has very few postgraduate research enrolments and receives no UGC-funded places for research.

International Trends – Teacher Education Institutions and Teacher Education Reforms

5. After taking account of the historic and recent trends in upgrading Teacher Education institutions around the world, the Review Group is persuaded that there is considerable merit in the path followed in most higher education systems in the developed world. Specifically, there are clear advantages to students, staff and the community in universities providing a multidisciplinary environment. Here students can choose to specialise in one or two disciplines, thus opening alternative career paths to them. In such an environment interdisciplinary research and teaching can also be fostered, and this adds to the richness of the student experience.

6. For teachers and Teaching Education institutions, powerful challenges are being driven by substantial changes in political, social and economic forces. These include the growth of an interconnected, complex global economy, unprecedented developments in communication technologies, and the effect of changing social mores on school and classroom environments. In many countries, education reform is driven by a community's perception of falling educational standards reflected in reduced student learning outcomes.

7. The Blueprint, research literature, and other materials provided by HKIED demonstrate the Institute's awareness of the profound changes in the international environment of Teacher Education, and for previously monotechnic Teacher Education institutions. This examination of international concerns, reforms and policy issues also provides the background against which the Review Group has evaluated HKIED's development proposals.

Evaluation of HKIED's Development Blueprint

8. Recent and emerging trends and transformational opportunities for Teacher Education institutions rather underscore the limitations in the Institute's own transformation agenda. The Review Group is concerned that overall, the direction and the nature of developments identified by HKIED will not genuinely transform the Institute and contribute to significant improvement of Teacher Education in Hong Kong. The Review Group is concerned that the large number of initiatives proposed in self-financing (including non-local) activities may absorb the energy of HKIED's management and staff, deflecting them from more appropriate and important endeavours, particularly in the concurrent implementation of the "3+3+4" reform. We suggest that HKIED should reconsider its development agenda by seeking support for a wider array of cognate disciplines, advancing continuing professional development, shifting its priority from the export market to meeting the needs of Hong Kong, or finding ways efficiently to combine the two. From discussions with the new management team at HKIED, and taking account of the supplementary materials provided, it appears to the Review Group that the Blueprint may represent a more conservative vision than that shared by the current leadership. We hope that HKIED will recognise the confidence being placed in its potential and will see the recommendations in this Report as constructive to its further development.

9. The aspiration to become a university is a recurring theme throughout the Blueprint. University title is presented as fundamental to many of the proposals contained in the Blueprint, even though it does not appear to be a prerequisite for implementing most of the proposals. It is the view of the Review Group that the Blueprint relies too heavily on the strength of university title to drive improvement and change, rather than on the active acquisition of attributes that would lead to real improvements in the Institute's teaching, learning and research environment. The Blueprint seeks university title in advance of achieving the attributes that would commend consideration of this proposal. In the mind of the Review Group there is an important issue of sequencing here. Those who advocate university title have generally done so based on notions of "status", social and cultural factors, and perceived precedents in Hong Kong. We are in no doubt that these views are strongly held, but we do not believe that the answer commonly suggested – university title now – addresses the key issue, which is the prior development and strengthening of HKIED.

10. The Review Group has given primary attention to the development and strengthening of HKIED as an institution set within the context of the Hong Kong higher education sector. In this endeavour, it has drawn on the experience of a wide range of relevant higher education systems where transformational changes have taken place.

11. In summary, the overwhelming majority of previously monotechnic Teacher Education institutions have gone through some form of transformation in order to establish a learning environment that is characterised by a minimum spread of complementary disciplines, research capability, and the significant majority of students being enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes (as opposed to sub- and non-degree programmes).

12. The Blueprint presents a vision for HKIED to develop as a monotechnic University of Education. However, the Blueprint does not address the issue of how a single discipline environment would off-set the demonstrable benefits of multidisciplinary, or what superior benefits accrue to the monotechnic model which the Blueprint proposes. The Review Group is persuaded that the benefits put forward by HKIED in favour of retaining its single focus are outweighed by the widely recognised benefits of genuine broadening of the discipline range. In addition to the benefits of a broadened learning and research environment, the Review Group believes that the interests of students are better served by the introduction of genuine alternative academic and career pathways.

Recommendation 1

That a university of Education, particularly one of a monotechnic character, not be established in the UGC sector, and that other strategies be followed to lift the capacity of HKIED to best enhance Teacher Education and promote excellence in the Hong Kong higher education sector.

13. While the Blueprint proposes a transformation of HKIEd built on self-financing and regional developments (paragraphs 39-40), the Review Group believes that such an approach should be secondary to the central and primary mission of HKIEd, which is to develop and provide high quality Teacher Education and to be a source of educational research to support Hong Kong's schools. While the UGC encourages institutions to pursue more entrepreneurial activities, it places even greater emphasis on the central roles of its institutions, which is Teacher Education in the case of HKIEd. We are also mindful of the substantial challenge faced by HKIEd in preparing for the changes associated with the "3+3+4" reforms.

Recommendation 2

That HKIEd should give priority to:

- **the strategic development of Teacher Education in Hong Kong;**
- **the development of additional disciplines that are complementary to Education; and**
- **the development of a research and research training environment.**

14. HKIEd has made clear its determination to develop and strengthen the Institute, and the Blueprint contains proposals, other than those discussed above, that would support these goals. The Review Group welcomes the Blueprint's stated commitment, along with appropriate strategies, to develop research and research training capacity, and notes that these are consistent with our concern that HKIEd develop an appropriate research capability.

15. The Review Group also welcomes the Blueprint's proposals on extended involvement in continuing professional development and in-service programmes for teachers. Other sound proposals relate to international benchmarking and the quality of the Teacher Education experience for individual students.

The Future of HKIEd

16. Having examined HKIEd's Blueprint, its 2009-12 *Academic Development Proposal*, and other supplementary information provided by the Institute, and speaking with the Institute's management team, the Review Group believes that HKIEd has the capacity to expand and develop in research and other disciplines if it chooses to take such opportunity. However, more work needs to be done in these areas and enhancing Teacher Education quality should be at the centre of each of these developments.

17. Transformed along the lines suggested by the Review Group, HKIEd would offer a broadened scope of academic disciplines, while continuing to focus on its core Education programmes. We would anticipate particular strengths in early childhood and primary education, expansion in secondary education, postgraduate activities in provision of Postgraduate Diploma in Education, continuing professional development of teachers and expanding research programmes at the doctoral level. All of these changes are consistent with the proposals put forward by HKIEd in its Blueprint and other supporting materials.

18. To help HKIED move forward, the Review Group proposes that the Institute expand its degree-level student load, research capability and discipline base. We understand that HKIED wishes to retain its core identity with the discipline of Education, in an expanded and enhanced context.

19. The Review Group believes that the inclusion of other disciplines at HKIED will enrich the teaching, learning and research environment and provide flexible academic and career pathways for its students. We are confident that, appropriately planned, the Institute can develop strategies to ensure that such disciplinary expansion does not undermine educational coherence or deflect resources and focus from its academic goals.

20. The Review Group is well aware that HKIED wishes to follow a path that leads to university status. For this reason, we considered the attributes generally demonstrated by higher education institutions in a number of relevant jurisdictions that carry the name 'university'. Clearly, HKIED does not have those attributes at this time. However, the Review Group believes that by implementing the proposals set out in this Report, HKIED can strengthen its case for a re-consideration at some point in the future for university title. More importantly, these developments would provide a richer learning environment, broaden research opportunities, provide access to more diverse programmes and greater flexibility and career pathways for students. A further benefit would be the promotion of excellence in Hong Kong's higher education sector.

21. We have been persuaded by evidence that throughout the developed world, higher education institutions have been strengthened by broadening or partnering with other institutions in order to provide superior benefits to students, staff and the communities that they serve.

Institutional Integration Option

22. As our review of world-wide developments of Teacher Education institutions has shown (Chapter 2), most cases of upgrading of Teacher Education involved mergers with other monotechnic or multidisciplinary institutions. Such mergers and other forms of institutional integration have been expressed through the formation of faculties of Education or other federated structures that allow Education academics to pursue discipline-specific goals within a broader scholarly setting.

23. The Report describes some of the benefits to HKIED, Teacher Education in general and the Hong Kong higher education sector that are likely to flow from institutional integration. These include the immediate opening of access to an array of established, accredited, academic disciplines to enrich the Institute's Education programmes; the attainment of university status for the Education programmes and their staff and students in a relatively short time frame; and the inclusion in an active research community with opportunities for interdisciplinary research.

24. Compared to developing into a stand-alone multidisciplinary institution, partnership with an established university would allow HKIED to implement the majority of this Report's proposals while pursuing its own Education-focused goals in a relatively short time frame and at a reduced cost to the Hong Kong community.

Stand-Alone Option

25. HKIED could also address all of the recommendations in this Report to strengthen the institution and Teacher Education in Hong Kong by developing into an Education-focused, multidisciplinary institution with research capability. With this option, HKIED could work toward a unique and distinctive vision. The new institution could add value to the Hong Kong higher education sector if it develops in a planned and coherent manner. Such planning must take account of the education needs of Hong Kong as well as the academic, research and employment opportunities for its students.

26. The Review Group proposes that if the stand-alone option is chosen, HKIED would be expected to develop into an institution offering a good spread (for example, at least three) of discipline areas in addition to Education. This prerequisite of a minimum discipline spread in the academic footprint of a university reflects established practices in other jurisdictions, including Mainland China.

Recommendation 3

That HKIED should seek to implement the proposals set out in this Report by one of two options:

- (a) develop into a multidisciplinary institution with a focus on Education and other complementary disciplines, primarily offering undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes and undertaking research and research training; or**
- (b) partner with an existing university in order to provide a multidisciplinary learning and research environment and flexible career pathways for its students while developing other proposals that are congruent with the mutually agreed development plans of HKIED and the partner university.**

Financial Implications

27. Several recommendations in this Report carry financial implications. The Review Group considers that Teacher Education is such a vital area within the overall Education policy that it is worth additional investment by the Government. It would not be desirable or reasonable if extra funding to HKIED is to be at the expense of the other UGC-funded institutions. However, beyond whatever additional Government funding becomes available to HKIED, the UGC also welcomes private funding or other innovative income sources, and is open to new strategies towards that end. While the financial implications of the integration or stand-alone options are difficult to project,

we appreciate that the public and the Government will wish to have some idea of the costs, and these are provided in the Report.

Manpower Planning

28. HKIED, like other Teacher Education institutions, is subject to the Government's goal of balancing teacher supply with demand. Given that this can profoundly affect HKIED, since all its UGC-funded programmes are currently shaped by manpower planning considerations, the Review Group invites the Government to continue to take a flexible approach towards balancing teacher supply and demand. This will enable HKIED to make longer-term plans, whether it goes forward as a stand-alone institution or as an institute partnered with an existing university.

Recommendation 4

That Government:

- **approach the institutional development of HKIED as a matter requiring additional funding, over and above existing levels of funding provided to UGC; and**
- **continue to take a flexible approach in planning the manpower dimension in Teacher Education.**

The Challenges Ahead

29. The Review Group is confident that HKIED's management is committed to advancing the Institute and has the vision and capacity to implement far-reaching changes. That being said, the Review Group emphasises that the changes proposed, whether implemented in the context of institutional integration, or as a stand-alone institution, are very challenging and likely to consume the human and financial resources and creative energy of the Institute for several years to come.

30. The Review Group sees great potential for HKIED to advance to a significant new level of achievement and standing. We believe that becoming a monotechnic university (of Education) would set the sights too low, and would not be in the longer term interests of HKIED or its graduates. Beyond this, such a path would not serve to promote excellence in the higher education sector. HKIED does not have an appropriate spread of attributes of a university, including multidisciplinary, deep research capability and self accrediting status beyond its Teacher Education programmes. Unless it achieves university status through institutional integration, HKIED would need to demonstrate that it had undergone a significant transformation before seeking re-consideration of its status by taking the stand alone, multidisciplinary option. The Review Group recognises that this transformation is a serious and arduous exercise made more so by the concurrent demands of the implementation of "3+3+4".

31. In considering the challenges and opportunities set out in this Report, the Review Group proposes that HKIED be provided with the support it may need to examine and explore the options proposed. The Council of HKIED is encouraged to

supplement its own counsel with advice from external experts with experience of institutional change of the types proposed. UGC will endeavour to provide all reasonable support and advice to the HKIEd Council while it develops a planned and coherent approach to its development opportunities.

Conclusions

32. The Review Group's suggestions are made with the student learning experience at the forefront of our deliberations. If the suggestions of this Report are implemented, graduates of HKIEd will have a greater variety of courses to choose from, either at HKIEd itself, or in a programme organized jointly with a partner institution, and be better equipped for tackling real world problems and accessing more career options.

33. The output of an active research environment at HKIEd will inform undergraduate programmes, and influence policy and curricula in Hong Kong's schools. Proposals included in the Blueprint and the supplementary materials should ensure that research students will work in research teams and will enjoy regular interactions with fellow research students through local and international research networks.

34. The Blueprint lays out a vision for the future of HKIEd based on changes to the title and direction of the Institute. After evaluating that vision, and engaging with the management of HKIEd, the Review Group supports the development of research and research training at the Institute, and proposes the further development of HKIEd into a multidisciplinary institution. The Review Group believes that its suggestions will promote excellence in the Hong Kong higher education sector and will provide a strong foundation going forward for HKIEd and Teacher Education in Hong Kong. This also will serve the institution well in the event it decides in the future to re-submit itself for consideration for the university title.
