

Chapter 10 - Communications and Correspondence

Introduction

10.1 The UGC (and the UGC Secretariat) is the principal channel of communication between the Government and the UGC-funded institutions. The UGC communicates with the Government mainly through the Education & Manpower Bureau (EMB). The Secretariat, as a Government department, comes under the policy and housekeeping responsibility of the EMB. The Secretary-General and Secretariat staff are, however, responsible both to the UGC and the Secretary for Education & Manpower (SEM).

10.2 Direct formal contacts between the institutions and the Government are normally limited to the following areas -

- (a) legislative matters regarding the institutions' ordinances;
- (b) performing functions and exercising powers as provided for in the institutions' ordinances;
- (c) land matters;
- (d) contracts for services rendered; and
- (e) course/programme (other than the ones which are totally self-financed) commissioning.

In all these areas, however, the UGC should be kept informed by copying correspondence and should, when appropriate, be consulted before final decisions are taken, particularly on matters which are likely to have funding implications for the institutions.

10.3 Government Secretariat Bureaux and Departments may have specific requests for the institutions to provide academic courses or training to meet specific manpower needs, and they may discuss possibilities for such courses or training informally with individual institutions. However, any formal request for the introduction of an academic course or a training programme which affect UGC student number targets may only be made to SEM in the first instance, and should be copied to the UGC Secretariat and the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau. SEM shall then decide whether such request should be formally conveyed to the UGC.

10.4 Informal contacts, sounding-out sessions, exchanges of information, etc. between individuals or groups in the institutions and Government officers, on a wide range of subjects, are of course inevitable and acceptable. It is, however, essential to

recognise in good time whether these are likely to become formal, because at that point the UGC must be brought in. In case of doubt, it is always preferable to err on the side of caution and involve the UGC sooner rather than later.

10.5 When engaged in informal discussions, it is important that both sides should recognise the extent to which they differ in respect of formal responsibilities. A Government officer normally has a clear idea of how far his responsibilities extend, how far he has to refer to senior officers (and to which senior officers), and what their reactions are likely to be. He is required to assess these factors, and normally does so, independently of his personal views; but it is difficult, in informal discussions, to keep personal views wholly to one side. There is therefore a danger of the institution person misreading the Government officer's apparent views and subsequently being surprised by the more formal outcome.

10.6 The likelihood of this happening is increased by the fact that the institution person may not have, in the Government sense, a senior officer able directly to confirm or overrule a decision; and even where this is so, personal views and commitments may play a bigger part. Plans or ideas in an institution have to be developed in the context of internal institutional politics, and the personal opinion and personal standing of their sponsors play a relatively large part in their success or failure. These factors cannot, of course, be excluded from Government decision making, but they have a different balance. It is not uncommon for Government officers to be surprised by finding views expressed to them with apparent authority by an institution person subsequently being seriously modified, or even overturned in Senate, Academic Board or Council decisions.

10.7 Furthermore, it must be recognised that the UGC, as an independent advisory body, may take a different position from both parties. It cannot therefore safely be assumed that the UGC will automatically support either party. In these circumstances, it is essential to follow the guidelines in GR 760 - 762, and outlined in paragraphs 10.2 and 10.3 above, regarding formal contacts between the institutions and Government.

Incoming Correspondence

10.8 Official correspondence addressed to the Chairman of the UGC should normally be addressed to him c/o UGC Secretariat. Since such correspondence will be opened by staff of the UGC Secretariat first, before submission to the Chairman with comments/ recommendations for action as appropriate, correspondence intended for the Chairman's eyes only should either be addressed to him at his private office or clearly marked "Personal and Confidential" (or both). In the case of letters addressed to the Chairman at the UGC Secretariat, a photocopy goes to the Chairman while the original is retained for filing.

10.9 All other correspondence to the UGC should be addressed to the Secretariat. The decision whether to use a formal or informal mode of address rests entirely with the Government officer or institution officer concerned. The UGC Secretariat is a Government office and all correspondence normally goes on official files. It will therefore be dealt with regardless of how it is addressed, although letters addressed personally to the Secretary-General or other Secretariat officers (either by title or by name) will be seen by the officer concerned personally first.

10.10 If the correspondence is intended for distribution to members, then it is convenient if sufficient copies are provided. The number of required copies will normally be specified by a letter calling for such documents. Every effort will be made to keep the number to a minimum. This is however only essential if large reports or similar documents are intended for circulation to members. This requirement will usually have been specified in the letters calling for such reports. (Submission of annual CDCF data returns is dealt with in Chapter 8)

Electronic Mail

10.11 The UGC Secretariat may be contacted via e-mail for purposes of informal communications and exchanges of views/information. The e-mail addresses of Secretariat staff will be separately notified to the institutions and Government Bureaux/Departments as required. Formal correspondence should, however, be sent to the Secretariat by mail or fax, unless specifically stated otherwise.

UGC Website

10.12 The UGC also disseminates information through its web site www.ugc.edu.hk. The UGC web which is in both English and Chinese is updated regularly and contains the following types of information -

- About the UGC
- Terms of Reference
- Committee Structure
- UGC Secretariat
- UGC Policy
- UGC Activities
- Statistics
- Related Sites
- UGC-funded Institutions
- Higher Education Forum
- About the RGC

Contact List

10.13 The UGC Secretariat has produced, in consultation with the institutions, a contact list of UGC Secretariat and UGC-funded institutions by subject and by institution. The list is distributed among the UGC Secretariat and the institutions. It is updated regularly by the UGC Secretariat based on the information provided by the institutions.