

Appendix B

Landscape of the Post-Secondary Sector and Pressures for Change

The Higher Education Landscape

The 2001 Policy Address of the Chief Executive of the SAR outlined three goals for education in Hong Kong. The first goal is to raise the general standards of primary and secondary students through current education reforms to enable every student to enjoy learning, be good communicators, be courageous in accepting responsibilities, and be creative and innovative.

The second goal is to increase the number of post-secondary places, so that 60% of senior secondary school leavers can attain post-secondary education. Included in this goal is improvement to the transition from secondary school to post-secondary education and reforms to the university system to nurture more outstanding post-secondary graduates.

The third goal is to continue promoting lifelong learning as a trend for others to follow, encouraging Hong Kong people to actively enhance their own knowledge and skills, and participate in the development of the knowledge-based economy.

What drives these bold targets is the awareness that Hong Kong lags behind developed countries in terms of average educational level. At present, approximately one-fifth of the population aged 15 and above has post-secondary education, while 48% has an education level up to Secondary Three. About 38% of 17-20-year-olds in the Hong Kong SAR receive post-secondary education, but this includes those students studying overseas. 14,500 first year first-degree places in the universities cater for about 18% of the 17-20 cohort. Sub-degree places are provided for a further 15% of the same age group. The Government has suggested that this long-standing freeze on university degree places (since 1994-95) could be broken, possibly as early as 2007, to cope with the anticipated influx of associate degree graduates.¹

These developments in participation in post secondary education fit closely with the Education Commission's proposal to change the present '5+2' secondary school structure to a '3+3' system, and changing the present three-year university degree structure to a four-year one. This suggests the function, content, focus and modes of teaching of first degree programmes will need to strike a new balance between breadth and depth. Greater emphasis will be put on foundation and generic skills. For that reason the Government is also calling for an expansion of RPG places and the number of taught postgraduate places, on a self-financing basis, with a view to fostering more high quality specialists.

Extending the duration of university programmes from three to four years will require significant additional resources, but the Government believes that the universities, the community and the Government together are capable of bearing the cost.

In conjunction with this development, the system for university admissions is being asked to give more consideration to students' all-round performance besides public examinations

¹ 'Freeze on degree places may be lifted, says education chief,' Gary Cheung of *South China Morning Post*, June 1 2001.

results, including aspects such as internal assessment reports of the secondary schools (including students' academic and non-academic performance), portfolios prepared by students, and interviews. Accompanying this reform of admissions the Government wishes for a flexible and transferable credit unit system to be implemented, to allow more flexibility and mobility for students to learn at their own pace, according to their needs and abilities.

At the same time, the Government has set aside \$5 billion to subsidise those with learning aspirations to pursue continuing education and training programmes. The aim is to help people to pursue continuous learning, thereby preparing for the knowledge-based economy. At the time of the preparation of this report the details of the plan, such as eligibility criteria and the maximum subsidy, have yet to be announced, but this new subsidy is intended to encourage the present trend of people enrolling in courses in their spare time to upgrade themselves.

These developments indicate the scope of the changes affecting higher education in Hong Kong.

The private sector component and regional development

The Education Commission's 1999 review of the overall education system in the SAR, *Learning For Life*, recommended introducing more flexibility and diversity into the higher education sector. In particular, the Commission recommended the development of 'various types of private universities'.² This has been echoed in the Chief Executive's 2001 Policy Address, as an element in achieving the target of 60% participation in post-secondary education.

The only private, self-accrediting university in Hong Kong is the Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK). It has become largely self-financing and has not received any government subsidy for its recurrent expenditure since the 1993-1994 financial year.

Nonetheless, the Government still provides one-off grants for specific purposes, including capital developments, research and financial assistance to low-income students. Currently, the EMB, and not the UGC, is the conduit for policy and systems governance of the OUHK.

Shue Yan College is the only post-secondary college registered under the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance, Section 8 of which prohibits the use of the word 'university' in the name of such colleges. Shue Yan operates on tuition fees that are substantially below university levels. The only government support has been free land in Braemar Hill. A 1995 review by the HKCAA recognised journalism, accounting and psychology as equivalent in standard to a university, though other areas had yet to reach such standards.

In addition to these two established institutions, informed estimates suggest nearly 20 post-secondary colleges or private schools running post-secondary courses could form the basis of new associate degree or degree awarding institutions.

The Caritas Francis Hsu College, for instance, offers full-time programmes at higher diploma level. The College is not self-accrediting. Its programmes are accredited by HKCAA, and are

² 'Bold plan needed to push education reforms,' Gary Cheung of *South China Morning Post*, November 3 2000.

comparable in standing and standard with other Higher Diploma programmes in Hong Kong and overseas.

Chu Hai College represents a different accrediting model. All degrees earned are conferred by an overseas agency - the Taiwan Ministry of Education. Chu Hai College offers undergraduates and postgraduate programmes leading to Bachelor, Master and Doctorate Degrees.

Post-secondary courses at local, private, post-secondary colleges and registered schools provide 7,000 degree and sub-degree places, around 20% of which are in full-time, self-financing courses offered by members of the Federation for Continuing Education in Tertiary Institutions (FCE).

4,500 Hong Kong students are pursuing sub-degree and first-degree education overseas. The growing non-government sector of providers in higher education is also reflected in 300 plus institutions outside of Hong Kong that offer higher education courses through partners or agents here, and by various methods of distance learning. The Non-Local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance regulates the standards of distant learning courses.

Providers of management-related programmes (offering certificates and diplomas in specialised areas) include the Vocational Training Council institutions, the Hong Kong Management Association, the Hong Kong Productivity Council, the Hong Kong Institute of Human Resources Management, and the Hong Kong Institute of Marketing.

The Hong Kong Arts Centre offers certificate, diploma and degree courses in Fine Arts, Applied Arts and Media Arts, mainly on a part-time evening and weekend basis. *Alliance Française*, the British Council, the Goethe Institute of Hong Kong, and the Italian Society of Hong Kong provide arts and language programmes.³

This is not a full or comprehensive picture of all the players in higher education, but it indicates the growth in the private higher education sector internal to Hong Kong which can be expected to continue.

An even greater impact can be expected from the Pearl River Delta. Over the past two decades, Hong Kong and the Delta region have complemented each other to develop a highly productive economic region, with a population of over 40 million, including many affluent consumers in a number of cities. Initiatives planned to tie the region together include an Economic and Trade Office in Guangzhou in 2002 to strengthen business liaison between Hong Kong and Guangdong, a new exhibition centre at Sky City, adjacent to the airport, intended to serve the region with a high-speed ferry terminal linking to the Delta, and a 'conceptual' inland logistics facility in Nansha to secure high-value cargo volumes from the rapidly expanding high-technology industries in the Delta. Hong Kong's higher education is expected to be prominent in the development of the region, both in teaching and research. Partnerships are already existent between Mainland universities and Hong Kong institutions, for instance, in the recent development of the Guangzhou Science Park.

³ Education and Manpower Bureau - Legislative Council Panel in Education: Increase in post-secondary education opportunities (April 2001).

Pressures for Change

Rapid economic changes are transforming Hong Kong. The exponential developments in information technology, global political events and financial impacts, and China's accession to the World Trade Organisation are well known. What is perhaps less well known is that the recent shift from a manufacturing economy to a value-added service economy has moved a step further, with the emphasis now on *high value* adding services, while backroom services such as airline reservations are moving off-shore. There is a corresponding demand for knowledge workers who are highly educated, with diverse and adaptable skill sets. The workforce is becoming international and fluid. But while the marketplace is global, there are increasing numbers of younger unemployed, and immigrants from the Mainland, who desire to increase their skills and knowledge.

These changes require a visionary and responsive post-secondary education system capable of managing a very wide diversity of needs. To be Asia's world city, and to maintain its traditional eminence as the logistical hub for East Asia by providing integrated services, means that Hong Kong requires concerted and coordinated strategies to develop, and redevelop, *all* its human resources, not just those fortunate enough to go to university.

In addition to the reforms already mentioned, the Education Commission has put forward further proposals that aim to develop this wide population base. It proposes a 'multi-channelled' senior secondary education, including senior colleges and vocational training schools; widening the curricula and increasing its flexibility, with greater emphasis on practical, vocational skills; reducing the assessment burden while introducing greater validity in assessment (in this respect the Commission wants the HKCEE removed and replaced with one school exit/post secondary entrance examination); and instigating a qualifications framework using credit accumulation and transfer to link the whole post-secondary sector.

Together, these proposals amount to a dimensional, paradigm change for Hong Kong's education system, rather than minor change. It will shift Hong Kong's higher education system from an *elite* system, focused exclusively on academic attainment and aimed at the top 20%, to a *mass* education system. Accompanying this will be a shift in the culture of higher education from closing *gates* (to control supply) to building *bridges* (to drive and meet demand).

This paradigm change is a necessity not a social luxury. UNESCO data shows that a 300% increase in global participation in higher education can be expected between 2000-2020. This means higher education in Hong Kong has to run simply to keep still. The paradigm change is also likely to drive a shift in the role of Government, from concentrating on producing outputs in a local environment, and owning the means of production in order to do so, to *purchasing* outputs internationally. Crudely, it will mark an evolving shift from 'make' towards 'buy' in higher education. This pattern is already becoming apparent in the development of associate degrees. And it is likely to mean that the Government will transfer some of its ownership responsibilities to the universities, as is happening widely overseas. Some universities may become public corporations, to ensure management disciplines go hand in hand with their enhanced self-rule and freedom.

Clearly, paradigm shifts do not occur overnight, and what often divides the critics from the supporters of higher education are their definitions of change. Advocates for radical change want the institutions to change what they do, altering their basic assumptions to transform

themselves, rather than continue what they do, albeit in different ways. However, history indicates that universities are creations of their past, and that they only change in ways that are congruent with their intellectual purposes and missions. At the same time it is also clear that Government and the public want the change to the universities to be both intentional and continuous. Intentional, because conscious strategies and behaviours involve charting a deliberate course, which differs from the actions that emerge from unplanned change. Equally, the change needs to be *continuous* because it is not sufficient to accomplish several alterations and stop there. Re-assessing the environment, and deciding whether, when, and how to act is a never-ending activity.

Impacts on the Institutions

Universities are becoming one part only of a spreading post-secondary education system, itself linked to a much wider knowledge community operating across society. In this respect universities are becoming more porous institutions, with fewer gates and more revolving doors than in the past when they served a selected and elite membership. Some have likened them to holding institutions, where a core of faculty is employed who link to a wider periphery of experts, because it is impossible to keep in-house all the resources needed.

The wider knowledge community is increasingly rating the universities by their connectivity to the community, and by their ability to augment their human capital with others. Increasingly therefore, universities are becoming less autonomous, self-contained and self-referential than in the past, and they are embracing a business enterprise culture. Senior management teams, strategic plans, line managers, cost centres and similar corporate patterns are influencing the traditional domain of academic hierarchies and collegiality. Paradoxically, this often means that universities are becoming more administratively centred, while their products of teaching and research have become more diverse in nature.

Teaching and research are also undergoing significant change. They are evolving from largely self-contained activities, carried out in relative isolation within academic discipline communities. The new focus is on knowledge produced and used in living and applied contexts. In research, this change is marked by a shift from ‘publish or perish’ to ‘partnerships or perish’. Rather than basic research being abandoned in favour of commercial, commissioned research, this development recognises that partnership (teamwork) is crucial to most advances, even in basic research. The discovery end of the knowledge-commerce chain (which universities have traditionally separated from application) is expanding to include development, production, marketing and sales.

Teaching too is changing from the transmission of knowledge by instruction in controlled environments, to facilitating processes of learning wherever they occur. This acknowledges the paradox that the only viable skill in the modern age is that of learning new skills. In a similar fashion, equipping knowledge-workers to *reconfigure and reshape* knowledge to solve local problems differs from the tradition of acquiring a body of passive knowledge.

What this means for education overall, is that the learning experience is evolving from a once-only founding experience for youth, to a continuum accessed by people at all stages of life. Teaching now deals with the dilemma of equipping people for difficult and intense jobs, while at the same time teaching them that they will soon change these jobs, and need to find new, and sometimes unknown, skills.

This is a challenge to universities – to be knowledge institutions firmly linked to society, and serving it rather themselves. It calls for extensions to their traditional boundaries. In response they may need to develop a wider range of contractual employment arrangements to achieve the diversity and outreach of networked organisations; to promote and reward interdisciplinary and group activities, going beyond the current focus on the individual teacher or researcher who is linked to an academic discipline. Increasingly the universities are being asked to act as curriculum developers and configurers, accrediting others to provide the actual teaching. In this they may act as standard setters and assessors of teaching provided by others, including self-directed teaching/learning. And in so doing, they become closer to the world of vocational training which has long practised assessment independent of teaching.

Is This Happening in Hong Kong?

A number of questions can be legitimately asked about the post-secondary education system in Hong Kong.

Are the universities linking to the secondary system by developing relationships that are more than a physical supply relationship – by contributing to school curriculum and pedagogical reform to widen the base of future students? Similarly, are the universities articulating with Hong Kong's vocational education and training sector to encourage people to move freely between the sectors with bridging programmes, or common systems of credit recognition and transfer?

Further, do the UGC-funded universities extend their academic and research community to include the OUHK, the Academy for Performing Arts (APA) and private institutions like Shue Yan? This inclusion could, perhaps, promote and reward interdisciplinary and group activities by offering incentives for partnerships outside the institutional walls. But there appear to be few examples of partnering and accrediting other education provision in private sector enterprises, where valuable learning and application experiences can be offered. Nor are there examples of assessors working off-campus to verify learning where it is happening, for example, in IT workplaces, engineering design or in private laboratories.

A similar set of questions can be asked about institutional operations. Can students complete degrees in 18 months, rather than the standard 36 months, acknowledging that teaching does not equate to learning? Is the provision for learning structured so that different learning abilities are recognised and addressed? Are university programmes defined by outcomes, with that focus, external to the input hours of lectures and tutorials, directing the learning?

Again, the public can ask legitimately whether the governance of the universities is placing service to the public at the heart of their mission, reciprocating the compact with society that provides their mandate and funding? Is 'service' being activated in a meaningful manner, with targets and performance assessment linked to rewards and sanctions, so that it is as prominent as teaching and research?

The public can ask whether the universities recognise that they are public assets, from which the beneficial owners can expect a reasonable return. This translates into very practical questions of the efficient use of public money, for example, whether declining courses in the universities are being managed through inter-institutional amalgamations, or courses closed in view of alternative demand in other areas?