

# Overview and List of Recommendations

The 1996 report from the University Grants Committee (UGC) on *Higher Education in Hong Kong* gave a coherent account of the development of the higher education system in Hong Kong and how the UGC came to be. The present review (subsequently called the Review) builds on that pioneering work. The previous report and subsequent changes demonstrate, clearly and unequivocally, that the higher education sector in Hong Kong has made dramatic advances, both qualitatively and quantitatively, in educating students and in conducting research.

In the course of the Review, the landscape of Hong Kong's higher education has been covered. Our focus is not just local, but also regional and international. When we look outwards, we find that some of our main strategic partners and competitors are changing even more rapidly. For higher education in Hong Kong to be internationally competitive, we will require comparable strength and flexibility in the governance and management of our higher education system and its institutions, so that the achievements in teaching and research can provide the most beneficial service to the wider community.

This report is offered as a contribution to realising these objectives, which I believe will be achieved by several means. The higher education sector will need to diversify its income from private and public sources, and then focus its resources to attain the highest quality of teaching and research. Because resources are always limited, it will be necessary to selectively identify outstanding performance where that occurs in institutions, teachers, learners and researchers, to ensure they receive the support to achieve international excellence in the application of their expertise.

Greater selectivity does not mean narrowing the base of higher education. Hong Kong needs to continue to develop a diverse set of institutions with distinctive missions, acknowledging that the higher education system is greater than the sum of its parts. To build on the ambitious reforms envisaged for other parts of the education system, we will need to do more to link staff and students into a continuum that will include the new associate degrees, where much of the intended expansion of post-secondary education in Hong Kong will occur. Hence this report makes several recommendations about the linkages between the associate degree and degree sectors of post-secondary education. This in turn requires the UGC to reflect on its own role, and assume greater responsibility for steering the strategic development of the degree awarding sector.

It is important, in the new landscape, that Hong Kong continues to connect its diverse institutions by clear articulation arrangements that promote and enable student-centred learning, and by collaborative teaching and research arrangements which best serve teachers and researchers. Technology is challenging us to acquire new skills to harness its powerful but demanding potential to enhance teaching and learning. Accordingly, there are recommendations to assist the higher education system in the transition to the new learning environment.

The further development of Hong Kong's research capacity is part of this changing environment. The defining characteristic of teaching in higher education is that it is informed by research and scholarship, and this wide base of research linked to teaching needs to be nurtured. At the same time, to be internationally competitive, we must focus our resources on selected areas of research strength, and provide the funding and institutional environment to ensure they flourish.

Having explored these themes and made a number of recommendations, it is reasonable for the reader to ask what the sector might look like if the objectives of the recommendations are met. Hence, in the concluding chapter I have offered my aspirations for the post-secondary sector in Hong Kong ten years from now.

Listed below are the key recommendations which have been extracted from the main body of the report.

### **List of Recommendations**

- 1 That a small number of institutions be strategically identified as the focus of public and private sector support with the explicit intention of creating institutions capable of competing at the highest international levels.
- 2 That, as the new landscape of the post-secondary sector is defined, the UGC conduct an internal review of its procedures, and publish a clear statement of its responsibilities in the light of new challenges, emphasising an enhanced strategic role for steering the higher education sector.
- 3 That a Further Education Council be established to oversee the provision of programmes at associate degree and comparable levels by both public and private providers.
- 4 That clear lines of financial accountability be established for all public sector funds used to support programmes at associate degree level, consistent with the Government's intention that associate degrees be predominantly funded by the private sector.
- 5 That an adequate quality assurance system be established to oversee all programmes at associate degree level.
- 6 That the governing body of each university carry out a review of the fitness for purpose of its governance and management structures. Such an exercise will necessarily include a review of the relevant Ordinances and, where appropriate, proposals for legislative changes should be made.
- 7 That the UGC and the institutions jointly assess the need for staff in the sector to develop new skills to respond effectively to technological and other changes in higher education, and jointly support initiatives addressing these needs, including the dissemination of best practice across the sector.

- 8 That the UGC's support for teaching and learning be informed by continued attention to the educational opportunities created by demographic changes in the demand for education, by the economic case for investment in education, and the technological revolution which is reshaping both the means of delivering education, and the opportunities for learning.
- 9 That the dual funding system for research be maintained whereby the RGC, as an integral part of the UGC, plays its part in enhancing the research base in the universities and in promoting research activities outside the UGC sector.
- 10 That institutions should not use the UGC block grant to subsidise externally funded research, whether from private or public sources; and, as a corollary, that bodies funding research should accept their responsibility for funding research at full cost.
- 11 That, in consultation with the institutions, the UGC build on the success of the RAE in allocating research funds on the basis of research performance, and devise means to sharpen the RAE so that the highest levels of research excellence can be identified and funded accordingly.
- 12 That the UGC conduct another review of higher education in Hong Kong five years from now, to assess the progress made in the expansion of the post-secondary sector, the interface with the school sector, the articulation arrangements between the community college and university sectors, and the implementation of specific recommendations in this report.