

## CHAPTER 3

### EVALUATION OF HKIED's DEVELOPMENT BLUEPRINT

3.1 The Review Group welcomes the Blueprint as an important planning exercise which also helps promote a greater understanding of HKIED within the UGC and across the higher education sector. While the Blueprint was the primary document considered by the Review Group, supplementary materials also were provided by HKIED. Such supplementary information is reproduced at **Annex H** for easy reference. Members of the Review Group also met with HKIED's management team on several occasions.

3.2 The Blueprint offers a vision for HKIED that focuses on enhancing its existing strengths in Education while gradually extending its scope to engage with a wider segment of the community in Hong Kong and in the region.

3.3 The Blueprint presents a new approach to more learner-centered education and life-long learning, and describes an approach to integrating teaching, research and practice that is consistent with international practice. The approach in the Blueprint is also consistent with the underlying principles of the ongoing education reforms in Hong Kong. The Blueprint contains other proposals that, if implemented, may benefit Teacher Education in Hong Kong.

3.4 However, recent and emerging trends and transformational opportunities for Teacher Education institutions, highlighted in Chapter 2, 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. 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.

3.5 This chapter will consider the Blueprint in three parts. First, it will consider the proposal that HKIED become the Hong Kong University of Education, retaining its monotechnic nature. Second, it will address the two key shifts in direction that are proposed to reposition the Institute. Finally, it will evaluate the proposals to enhance the quality of teaching and research at the Institute.

## **PROPOSAL FOR UNIVERSITY TITLE**

3.6 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.

3.7 Although decisions on institutional nomenclature in Hong Kong rest with the Government, the Review Group believes that the issue of university title is not, and should not be the main focus in determining the future development of HKIED. That being said, we are aware that this issue has been given considerable publicity to date. 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.

## **Status of the Teaching Profession**

3.8 The appeal of HKIED to prospective students is closely linked to the appeal of the teaching profession as a career choice. The argument that university title for HKIED of itself would raise the status of teaching or the teaching profession is not accepted with any great force. While there may be merit in the view that university title would initially help HKIED marginally improve the quality of its student intake, we place more emphasis on improving the quality of the learning environment as a way of attracting higher quality students on a sustained basis.

## **Status of HKIED**

3.9 The Review Group believes that the status of an institution draws on a number of different elements, including the quality and quantity of its research; the quality of its academic programmes; the quality of its students; the standing of its academic staff; the achievements of its alumni; and the level of service to its community. Internationally these qualities are recognised in institutions that are called universities (and sometimes in those that do not carry the title).

3.10 The Blueprint argues that many of the regional and self-financing activities that it proposes would be facilitated by acquisition of university title. While the Review Group sees some force in this argument, it believes that the international marketplace will look beyond title to the attributes of the institutions. We prefer that HKIED undergo the substantive changes described in this Report in preparation for an expanded role in regional and self-financing activities.

## **Social and Cultural Factors**

3.11 The Review Group acknowledges that there are some social and cultural factors at play in relation to university title. The relatively short history of HKIED in offering bachelor programmes may also have been a possible factor causing ambiguity about its standing and position in the community. However, HKIED is now well-established and its role is clear. We do not expect that employers, mainly local schools, will suddenly change their attitude in hiring graduates from HKIED because of a name change.

## **Precedents in Hong Kong**

3.12 The Blueprint and some stakeholders have noted that other UGC-funded higher education institutions in Hong Kong (CityU, HKBU, LU and PolyU) were granted university title not long after they received self-accrediting status. However, all the predecessor institutions were multidisciplinary in character at the time they assumed the university title and have retained or extended that attribute since becoming universities. The second key point of difference is that the self-accrediting status of CityU, HKBU, LU and PolyU is not limited to awarding degrees in any particular discipline. The Government has confirmed to the UGC that at present HKIEd's self-accrediting status only applies to 'its own Teacher Education programmes at degree and above levels'. Therefore, the self-accrediting status granted to HKIEd in 2004 by the Chief Executive-in-Council cannot be regarded as covering other programmes, such as BA or BSc, whether such programmes are offered by HKIEd as a component of double degrees programmes or as stand-alone programmes. This is a matter with important implications for some of the proposals put forward in the Blueprint. The processes leading to the formation/upgrading of CityU, HKBU, LU, PolyU, HKSU and OUHK can be found at **Annex E**.

3.13 If an institution were to become a university in advance of possessing key qualities and characteristics commonly expected of a university, such might cast doubt on the standing of other universities in the same system. In supporting the granting of a university title to any higher education institution, the UGC is bound to consider whether the new arrangement would serve to promote excellence in the higher education sector. In the view of the Review Group, the acquisition of the appropriate attributes is a condition precedent to any reconsideration of university title. Typical characteristics of a university are considered in the next section.

## **UNIVERSITY CHARACTERISTICS**

3.14 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. We have been persuaded by the evidence presented in Chapter 2 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.

3.15 In summary, the overwhelming majority of universities which were 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, which:*

- Nurtures breadth of knowledge and understanding among students and staff within the institution;
- Exposes disciplinary cultures to the critical gaze of other disciplines;
- Allows transference of methods, techniques, approaches and values between and among disciplines;
- Supports interdisciplinary developments at all levels;
- Provides flexibility for students, including exposure to multiple fields of study and career options;
- Promotes growth of knowledge within and across discipline boundaries; and
- Supports institutional economies of scale.

*Research capability, which:*

- Makes experienced research staff available for research training;
- Provides the facilities necessary for research training;
- Provides a research environment to inform coursework teaching, from the undergraduate level;
- Encourages the development of new knowledge;
- Supports the application of knowledge to the community; and
- Informs the development of curricula within disciplines and in interdisciplinary fields.

*The significant majority of students being enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes (as opposed to sub- and non-degree programmes) which:*

- Reflects the learning hierarchy of the education sector;
- Ensures that the institution remains ‘fit for purpose’ through focus on higher studies and advanced learning;
- Is fundamental to the distinctive culture of the institution, providing the basis for collegiality between staff and students and among student peers;
- Is able to benefit from the research environment in which teaching occurs; and
- Makes effective use of costly resources, including staff and facilities such as research libraries and laboratories.

3.16 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 multi-disciplinarity, or what superior benefits accrue to the monotechnic model which the Blueprint proposes.

3.17 The Review Group sought to understand the perceived benefits and other arguments in favour of a monotechnic institution. In this, we have been assisted by references provided by HKIEd. It has been averred that monotechnic universities optimize efforts in the single discipline, in this case Teacher Education. Two academic papers have developed this point. [4&23] In summary, the strengths of a monotechnic institution of Education appear to be that such an institution would:

- Optimise efforts in Teacher Education, scholarship and research through its strong, single focus;
- Create a critical mass of scholars and experts through clustering;
- Be free of the ‘value conflicts’ experienced in multidisciplinary institutions;
- Protect the resources and efforts of Teacher Education and educators from undue or inequitable competition with the demands of other faculties;
- Protect against the devaluation of professional practice-oriented and other forms of applied research;

- Can be better used as an ‘instrument to regulate and reinforce the supply side of the teaching workforce’; and
- Avoid the over-academisation of Education, described by Prof Ruth Hayhoe, former President of HKIEd, as ‘academic drift’. [23]

3.18 The Review Group observes that a number of the advantages attributed to a monotechnic institution seem to be based on the premise that Education faculties/groupings need protection from other professional schools and disciplines within multidisciplinary institutions. Yet, it is clearly the case that strong faculties of Education are flourishing in many (multidisciplinary) universities around the world and in Hong Kong. Indeed, if HKIEd were to expand its range of disciplines, it could shape a more robust academic culture in the institution. It could draw from local and overseas experiences of good synergy between Education and other disciplines, and put in place strategies to ensure the appropriate recognition of paradigms and outcomes that are fundamental to the development of strong Education programmes and research activities.

3.19 In addition, among problems faced by monotechnic institutions is the limited ability to absorb manpower cycles, which is a lesser problem for multidisciplinary ones. Indeed, the ‘Monotechnic Premium’ awarded to HKIEd in the UGC grants is based on this premise. Further, the single discipline focus can be a barrier to peer recognition by other higher education systems. This is particularly relevant to HKIEd’s ambitions to become competitive in the education market in Mainland China and elsewhere.

3.20 The Blueprint proposes some ‘restrained’ expansion of areas, still seen as broadly in the domain of Education. However, in supplementary materials and further discussion, HKIEd has further expanded its broadening concept, which it describes as ‘Education Plus’. While acknowledging some of the benefits of a wider range of disciplines, HKIEd’s vision appears to describe an institution with the majority of students completing the BEd and a small minority having access to double degrees, combining Education with another field. The concern of the Review Group is that this vision may not be sufficiently flexible to provide enough of its graduates with career paths other than teaching nor to derive the benefits described in paragraph 3.15 above.

3.21 In summary, while the Blueprint does provide evidence on the existence of some successful monotechnic Teacher Education institutions, it does not provide strong, coherent and persuasive arguments on how the Hong Kong community and its higher education sector would be better served by a university of monotechnic character. In particular, it is not at all clear how such a development would serve to enhance Teacher Education and promote excellence in the higher education sector.

3.22 Against this background, 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.**

## **PROPOSAL FOR THE REPOSITIONING OF HKIED**

3.23 We now turn to the two key revisions of direction proposed in the Blueprint to underpin major reshaping and development of HKIED. The Blueprint argues (paragraphs 39-40) that HKIED's proposed repositioning be built on two key shifts:

1. From a reliance on public funding to an exploration of additional private sources of funding, which is described as an international trend in higher education; and
2. From a dominant concern with local issues and priorities to a concern with regional, national and global opportunities.



3.24 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.

3.25 Diversification of financial sources is a prudent goal for any UGC-funded institution. But in the context of the Blueprint, pursuit of the proposals to support self-financed activities could draw HKIEd away from its strengths, changing the student profile and deflecting the focus of staff and facilities to non-degree-awarding projects. This, in turn, carries the potential to change the balance of students and activities away from degree level programmes.

3.26 The Review Group views with concern the scope of change proposed over a short period, particularly the milestones for self-financing and regionalisation set out at paragraph 97 of the Blueprint. We believe that the substantial challenges in meeting the very diverse and ambitious goals proposed by HKIEd within the stated timeframe cannot be underestimated.

3.27 In summary, it appears that the direction of the transformation proposed by HKIEd does not give sufficient priority to the strategic development 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. Specifically, the Review Group prefers that HKIEd direct its energy and expertise to the type of research growth and disciplinary expansion laid out in this Report.

## **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.**

3.28 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 its concern that HKIED develop an appropriate research capability.

### **PROPOSALS TO DEVELOP A RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT**

3.29 As the Blueprint demonstrates, HKIED has some capacity for research, primarily through the doctoral qualifications of its staff, the supervisory experience of a number of staff and the improving trend in research performance, albeit starting from a relatively low base among UGC-funded institutions.

3.30 Specific proposals in the Blueprint are for: the allocation of Research postgraduate places from UGC (paragraph 88); prioritising research and scholarship into seven broad areas (paragraph 74); and creating research centres and teams (discussed as milestones in paragraph 97). These specific proposals are to be supported by the proposal to increase resource allocation to research (paragraphs 71 and 75 of the Blueprint).

3.31 While in principle these are worthwhile items for a blueprint agenda, the Review Group is concerned about the lack of specific strategies to support these proposals. We are also concerned about the Blueprint's lack of specific proposals for creating and sustaining a quality research training environment and research collaboration.

3.32 The Review Group sought additional information on these points from HKIED and their detailed response is at **Annex H(4)**. The prioritization of key research areas (paragraph 74 of the Blueprint) is an important basis for nurturing research developments. The Review Group also welcomes the proposed introduction of annual performance goals for research activity of academic staff and commends the proposed research development strategies for staff starting out on research careers. On the other hand, HKIED's proposals on research collaborations appear to lack depth at this point. The involvement of a large number of new senior research academics who bring their own research networks to the Institute appears promising.

3.33 It is highly desirable that research students not become isolated from researchers and other students. The Review Group notes that the proposal to attach research students to research centres/teams will go some way in addressing this point. Building networks of research students with other Hong Kong universities would be a practical way of developing collaborative networks, especially through research seminars.

3.34 The Review Group welcomes the proposal in the supplementary material for the international benchmarking of HKIED's Research postgraduate programme. An important aspect of benchmarking is to begin the process in collaboration with peers, or near-peer institutions, to ensure that all parties derive benefit from the exercise. HKIED may wish to identify the characteristics of good, sustainable benchmarking arrangements before seeking relationships with universities whose profile fits with the Institute's aspirations. Finding appropriate partners for benchmarking is often the key to sustaining the relationship and generating useful longitudinal data.

3.35 The proposed appointment of a Dean of Graduate Studies, with oversight responsibility for academic policies and programmes, is an important initiative. Supplementary information provided by HKIED (Appendix III of Attachment B to **Annex H(4)**) on supervisory arrangements may need to be expanded to include the development of policies and procedures on student candidature, progress management, thesis submission, external examination and award/non-award of degrees. In addition, the Institute may need to develop new policies or refine and expand existing policies for research students on conflict of interest, intellectual property, concurrent employment and appeals processes. Again, partnering with compatible universities can be a major boon to developing strong research processes and quality assurance.

3.36 The supplementary material describes strategies for the provision of additional resources to support research, particularly with the recruitment of a large number of experienced researchers to senior academic positions. The Review Group expects HKIEd to demonstrate rigorous financial planning to ensure that an appropriate level of resources to support their ambitious research developments can be sustained into the future.

3.37 While the Institute proposes to address the resource-intensive nature of transforming a teaching institute into a teaching and research institution, it must take account of the pressure that it will face in effecting the transformation. Before allocating Research postgraduate places to HKIEd, the UGC would need to understand how the Institute will balance the increased staff commitment to supervision and research, with proposals for growth in other core teaching areas.

## **PROPOSALS TO INTRODUCE DOUBLE DEGREES**

3.38 The most fully developed proposals in the Blueprint are for the introduction of double degrees, together with a request for UGC-funded senior year articulation places (paragraphs 80-86 of the Blueprint).

3.39 The Blueprint proposes to offer over an unspecified time within the next decade seven types of double degrees in BEd with:

- BA – Child Studies, Visual Arts, Music, English Studies, Chinese Studies, and Social Science\*; and
- BSc – Maths, Science & IT\*

with a further five awards in specialist areas:

- BA – Counselling, and Development Psychology
- BSc – Special Education, Environment and Heritage\*, and Information Technology\*

(\*Note: To be co-organised with another institution)

In its February 2008 *Academic Development Proposal* to the UGC for the 2009-12 triennium, HKIED set out that it wished to introduce from 2009/10 onwards double degrees in Chinese language, English language, Creative Arts and Liberal Studies. Other double degrees were being discussed with other local institutions.

3.40 The Review Group considers the scope and suggested speed of this change to be very challenging, placing significant demands on both academic staff and management. HKIED has not proposed an extension to the length of study for double degrees. The Review Group is concerned about the perceived coverage and quality of double degree programmes, especially given the Institute's lack of experience in developing full degree programmes in fields other than Education.

3.41 A significant issue in relation to double degrees is that HKIED lacks the authority to award such degrees on its own – its self-accrediting powers are limited to 'Teacher Education' programmes only, although the Institute could continue to offer double degrees jointly with other higher education institutions, as it has done in the past.

3.42 In the context of a monotechnic institution described in the Blueprint, the Review Group has concerns as to how HKIED's existing staff (both in terms of number and experience) will be able to handle such a dramatic development. HKIED has not indicated in the Blueprint that additional resources would be needed to achieve this transformation, or how it could be carried out without additional resources. We are also concerned about the impact of such large numbers of double degrees on the perceived quality, not only of the double degrees, but also of the perceived worth of obtaining the stand-alone BEd.

3.43 While HKIED has reiterated that double degrees would not be available to all students and in its supplementary material has considerably extended the proposed timeframe for introduction of double degrees, the Review Group believes that there are significant challenges to what is proposed. HKIED should carefully consider the minimum critical mass for establishing the BA/BSc programmes detailed. Also bearing on the dimensions of a sensible timeframe is how long it will take to acquire necessary facilities and to recruit needed academic staff capable of delivering the equivalent of stand alone BAs/BScs in the proposed disciplines, especially in a period when other institutions in Hong Kong will be actively recruiting because of "3+3+4".

3.44 In May 2008, UGC wrote to HKIED to reflect these concerns about double degrees (and its readiness for research supervision, which is covered in a separate section below) in the context of the 2009-12 *Academic Development Proposal* exercise. HKIED's response is at **Annex H(4)**.

3.45 In summary, the Review Group believes that proposed developments in double degrees are problematic in the Institute's current environment. A better approach for HKIED would be to go forward in the context of the institutional broadening or integration proposed in the next chapter.

## **PROPOSALS FOR SELF-FINANCING ACTIVITIES**

3.46 The Blueprint contains a wide range of self-financing activities, including self-financing undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and vocational education for Hong Kong, the Mainland and the region (paragraphs 89-91). Also covered are professional upgrading courses for non-teaching staff in schools (paragraphs 27-28), professional training of teaching staff in higher education institutions (paragraph 29) and a number of non-award training activities for non-school organizations and members of the community at large (paragraphs 28-33). The Blueprint does not indicate how HKIED would achieve these proposals in more specific terms.

3.47 The Review Group understands that HKIED is committed to developments in Education that go well beyond its traditional professional boundaries, such as to corporations, the elderly, citizenship groups and non-teaching school staff. Care would need to be taken that the development of such programmes in HKIED does not cause confusion about the role of HKIED and the status of the programmes, particularly at a time of major transformation.

3.48 To put the point simply, the Review Group considers the proposals for self-financing to be of a second order of importance. More critical are HKIED's proposals to enhance Teacher Education quality and develop a research environment. As stated earlier, to pursue too many training activities carries the potential to distort the student and programme profile of HKIED and distract it from its core role.

## **PROPOSALS FOR ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE HONG KONG**

3.49 The Blueprint proposes a large number of international activities, and sets the ambitious goal of becoming one of the major Teacher Education universities in the greater China region and the Asia-Pacific Region by 2012 (paragraph 97). The range of programmes proposed for the Mainland in the Blueprint includes joint programmes, staff exchange arrangements, credit transfer systems and student exchanges (paragraph 94). In addition, the Blueprint proposes to supply the Mainland with in-service Teacher Education programmes and accrediting services for qualifications of serving teachers on the Mainland, Macau and the Asia-Pacific Region (paragraphs 19-26). However, the Blueprint is silent on how HKIED intends to attract non-local students, particularly in light of its proposals for activities outside Hong Kong.

3.50 We are conscious of the substantial staff and financial resources that would be required for any institution to achieve these goals. As is evident from other institutions' experiences in international expansion, it is necessary to be prepared to deal with internal resource pressures, keen external competition, and interface issues in each of the jurisdictions or markets it intends to enter.

## **OTHER KEY PROPOSALS**

3.51 The Blueprint also sketches a number of proposals focused on the quality of the Teacher Education experience for individual students, including the provision and creation of resources for whole-person development (paragraphs 77-78) and a proposal for the provision of greater overseas experience for students (paragraph 79). The Blueprint begins with several proposals that reflect the international Teacher Education reform agenda (paragraphs 7-14) with initiatives in continuous professional development (paragraph 8) and research-based teaching (paragraph 9). These are worthwhile ideas, but would be better developed as part of the Institute's broadening or integration proposed in the next chapter.

## **CONCLUSION**

3.52 The Review Group is of the view that of the wide range of proposals put forward in the Blueprint and its supplements, emphasis should be placed on those elements that articulate HKIEd's strategies for the development of an active research culture, the expansion of its programme offerings and a significant role in improving teaching and related research for the primary benefit of the Hong Kong community. We appreciate that the new leadership in HKIEd is refining and augmenting the proposals in the Blueprint that would steer more in this direction.