

Preface

UGC-funded institutions are statutorily autonomous bodies – each with its own Ordinance and governing council. They enjoy academic freedom and considerable institutional autonomy. At the same time, with substantial funding from the public purse, they are accountable to the community. The core values of institutional autonomy and academic freedom – the cornerstones of the higher education system in Hong Kong – balanced with public accountability within the law are underpinned and protected by clear and effective governance of institutions.

The UGC has always understood the importance of robust governance at institutions. It is in this spirit that we have in 2011 through our Financial Affairs Working Group reviewed the financial governance of institutions. We were glad to conclude in 2013 that there were no glaring irregularities in institutions’ financial operations and practices and the public could rest assured that the use and application of public funds by institutions was appropriate. Upon completion of the review and at the request of the Education Bureau in December 2013, we believed it was an appropriate time to consider institutional governance, particularly when most of the follow up review on the composition of the councils pursuant to the recommendations in the earlier UGC Report “Higher Education in Hong Kong – Report of the University Grants Committee” have been completed. This study aims to identify some international good practices in the governance of higher education institutions in order that pointers and advice could be drawn up to help enhance the effectiveness and transparency of the governing councils of UGC-funded institutions and also to better equip council members with the necessary knowledge, skills and protocol with regard to their roles for the proper discharge of their duties.

We are indeed fortunate to have enlisted the assistance of Sir Howard Newby who has rich experience and expertise in university governance and management to conduct the study for UGC. He also has a good understanding of the institutions in Hong Kong through his previous work as a former member of the Quality Assurance Council. We are also grateful to a wide range of key stakeholders of the UGC sector who have provided valuable input and earnest views. They include former and incumbent Council Chairmen, Council members, Council Secretaries, Heads of institutions, senior institutional management, student and staff representatives, as well as Education Bureau officials. I am confident that adoption of the recommendations of this Report will help further enhance the effectiveness of the councils of institutions and further protect the core values of institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

Finally I would like to convey my personal gratitude to Sir Howard Newby for his excellent work in preparing this Report. I believe that the Report will be very useful for our sector and its impact will be far reaching. It is only with a strong and clear governance structure and the mutual trust in practice between the senior institutional management and the council that public trust in institutional autonomy of our funded institutions, and hence its legitimacy, can be assured.

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