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23 January 2018

Further Education Division
Education Bureau
7/F, East Wing, Central Government Offices
Tamar, Hong Kong

[Attn: Mr Thomas LI, Assistant Secretary (Further Education)1]

Dear Mr LI

Consultation on Review of Self-financing Post-secondary Education

Thank you for inviting the Institution to provide views on the captioned subject. We are pleased to provide herewith our views and suggestions on the subject matters for your consideration.

Thank you for your attention.

Yours sincerely



Ir Thomas CHAN Kwok Cheung
President
The Hong Kong Institution of Engineers

Enc.

Enclosure

**Views from the Hong Kong Institution of Engineers
on the Review of Self-financing Post-secondary Education**

Foreword

The HKIE echoes with the Chief Executive that “talent is the most important element in Hong Kong’s continued development, and education is the key to nurturing talent” as stated in the Chief Executive 2017 Policy Address. Education, or rather opportunities of receiving one, is fundamental for civic development as well as expediting community growth. With respect to the Paper of the Task Force on Review of Self-financing Post-secondary Education, the Hong Kong Institution of Engineers (HKIE) would like to provide our views and suggestions for consideration.

The Paper

2. The Paper only laid down some statistics, figures and percentages with a view to solicit views on an important topic.
3. But without overall information of policies on, inter alia, manpower forecast and the targeted directions for industries and sectoral perceived needs, the HKIE considers the task on hands is only about administering operational technicalities.
4. Hardly enough to achieve the mission to ascertain how and where the post-secondary education should be placed, let alone why. It does not serve what an important topic as “Education” should deserve.
5. The HKIE can only respond from the perspectives of the quality of information given.

Year 2000 Post-secondary Education Programme

6. The HKIE wishes to take a step back to Year 2000 when the decision of increasing the secondary school leavers’ post-secondary education participation to 60% was made. That was during a time when the wakes of 1998 financial crisis started hitting Hong Kong hard, pushing up the unemployment rates across all spectrums. There were many factors, the HKIE believed, that led to such a highly unprecedented unemployment then, the downturn of construction industries and the lack of infrastructure projects planning were among others.
7. What with concurrent grants put in place for employment skills retraining enrollments and others, the HKIE cannot retract from the impression that the drummed-up emphasis on post-secondary education was also part of the scheme where government funding was then spent to combat disturbed job market stability taken for granted over the past decade with an aim to reduce unemployment statistic when school leavers were encouraged to stay in education and away from employment poll taking.
8. At present, even concern of the unemployment rate is no longer a headliner,

post-secondary education earns its place, juxtaposed or otherwise, in the education hierarchy.

Education Structure

9. Hong Kong has changed its education structure from “11+2+3” to “12+4” for primary up till tertiary education.

10. Previously the Lower and Upper Sixth Forms (L/U Sixth Forms) served as the gap between secondary school and undergraduate degree curricula, definitely a kind of post-secondary education by itself. Concurrently all along, certificate and diploma programmes were offered as supplement or substitutes to grammar school education.

11. The advanced level Higher Certificate (HC) and Higher Diploma (HD) programmes were also popular and many took that as a stopping gap progressing to undergraduate degree education, frequently from overseas as opportunities in Hong Kong were not as ample then. But the consensus that HC and HD graduates would enter into the job market was quite predominant.

12. By and large both L/U Sixth Forms and HC/HD graduates had their respectable places in the job market.

13. With L/U Sixth Forms gone, it does not need a benefit of hindsight to understand the switch to “12+4” education structure would widen the gap between the secondary school leavers and the university/ college graduates.

14. Meanwhile, certificate courses eroded by craft training courses and lately the overly adduced demarcations and designations of construction workers registration under the administration of The Construction Industry Council migrated to diploma courses; and then diploma to HD or Associate Degree (AD), for those not willing to join blue collars work at the entry level.

Post-secondary Education

15. The HKIE proposes to take what we have forward.

16. Post-secondary education could and should serve its role as a gap between the secondary school education and undergraduate degree studies. The Qualifications Framework had reserved Level 4, and Level 3 where appropriate, as designated layers for those having attained relevant knowledge and skill sets beyond secondary school education and hence reaffirmed there is a gap between the secondary school leavers and the undergraduate degree holders.

17. But the programmes themselves should not be generally taken as a stepping stone for those seeking a second chance for admittance to undergraduate degree programmes. The HKIE noted the trend strongly suggests otherwise (Appendix I).

18. Granted this may be against the aspiration of our traditional culture and the practicality in seeking better jobs.

19. Whilst it is difficult and in fact may not be desirable to discourage the cultural aspiration of seeing children graduating with a degree, we can do something on job opportunities.

20. If we wish to retain the names of AD and HD when many of them were just different wine bottles for post-secondary education, the HKIE proposes to generally categorise them with clear identities as below:

- AD should cover more generic topics preferably within the domain of liberal arts studies.
- HD should reserve more skill-based topics typically for STEM students to progress onto professional level.

21. The HKIE has a more in-depth knowledge in the HD programmes, in particular those covering science and technology. This will be the area the HKIE concentrates in this submission.

22. To begin with, the HKIE cannot say the supply of post-secondary education is saturated albeit noting the number of secondary school leavers is dwindling.

23. On one hand, the HKIE was appalled on the poor intakes performance of some (Appendix II).

24. On the other, the HKIE also noted there is a proliferation of recently set up academies¹, principally catered for specific and often proprietary needs. This is a clear indication there are still dominions to accommodate sub-degree workforce.

25. The HKIE can only conclude failed cases could be more due to quality of the programmes and their deliveries. The competing environment may not be the sole cause but certainly it arouses accelerated realisation.

Level-playing

26. The HKIE agrees a level-playing field is essential and fair, not only to the services providers but also to the community at large.

27. As far as offering programmes is concerned, the HKIE considers there is no point to install a clear delineation between subvented higher education institutions and self-financing institutions, for this matter including those UGC-funded institutions.

28. With or without any recurrent subvention, a host of supports were already allotted to both public-funded institutions and self-financing institutions.

29. Except, the scale of supports allotted to the public-funded institutions was far greater than those new comers. Despite the programmes were called self-financed

¹ Hong Kong International Aviation Academy, MTR Academy, Towngas Engineering Academy, CLP Power Academy, The Hong Kong International Aviation Academy, etc.

and operated as such, a lot of sunk costs were not catered in the management accounts. The self-financing accounts simply do not reflect other tangible facilities and provisions offered in a large campus as those attached to some of the UGC-funded institutions.

30. There is never a level playing field by design.

31. Without the advantage of an established branding, self-financing institutions survive by being more readily reacting to market needs. When the general pool of intakes diminishes so are their chances of survival.

32. A truly self-financed account must be pursued. Government subsidies in cash and in kind must be turned into tangible parameters for recouping contribution back to the general coffer, at least for accounting probity and transparency.

33. The HKIE believes this could not only narrow down the gap of unfair competition but would also promote ingenuity and could ensure previous allotments and supports granted by the Government could still be promptly utilised and vigilantly protected.

34. That said, the Government has its role and duty² to monitor the governance and sustainability of all kinds and not only of the self-financing institutions.

Post-secondary Education Programmes

35. The position of post-secondary education must be clearly identified in terms of want of manpower.

36. That is, either as topping up for cohorts entering into junior managerial fields or, in the case of construction industry, supervisors and engineering technologists.

37. There is no intention to block AD and HD cohorts taking further education through a 4-year undergraduate degree programme, but the structure of the post-secondary programmes should not aim at enabling direct transfer to the Year Three of a 4-year undergraduate degree programme.

38. The HKIE wishes to stop here and turns to the 4-year undergraduate degree programmes.

39. The HKIE wonders whether the quest of yearly high progression rates of students across all programmes in universities was marked as success in tertiary education delivery or as success of cohorts' attainment of attributes.

40. The quality of intakes is a good benchmarking to gauge how likely students would successfully graduate with required and desirable attributes. It is marked by examinations.

² Audit Commission - The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. (2016). Assistance schemes for self-financing post-secondary education institutions. Retrieved from Report No. 67 of the Director of Audit: http://www.aud.gov.hk/pdf_e/e67ch07.pdf, 28 October 2016

41. The current trend of accreditation assessment adopted by the HKIE³ is based on outcomes-based approach.
42. The HKIE is interested to verify whether a high progression rate would fail an accreditation assessment when significant numbers of less than marginal case were allowed to progress diluting the overall outcome average when an otherwise good programme is being accredited.
43. To recap, the general experience is (and reinforced by many street-wise advice, publications and media programmes) – that it is difficult to get admitted to a desirable undergraduate degree course but once getting in the sailing would be smooth.
44. As such passing an entrance examination is all it counts and the marks will decide whether a student would become a general and not a foot soldier. But the society also needs colonels and lieutenants.
45. The HKIE is not advocating it is necessary to introduce a high failure rate in the earlier years of the 4-year undergraduate programmes. As a truly high progression rate is always good.
46. But the present flow of migration does in some way encourage post-secondary qualification serving as alternate entrance examination.
47. Nor the Administration had made any effort to correct this perception. The availability of student grants had an effect to augment favourable decisions, more often than not by those from lower-income households, along this line.

Placement

48. The HKIE opines AD and HD should be career-based principally preparing cohorts taking up placements.
49. But the market statistic was anywhere encouraging with a higher unemployment percentage for students with post-secondary education than those of primary and high schools (Appendix III).
50. Unfortunately, this message is not clearly conveyed, creating a market demand for courses designed to ultimately synchronise with the undergraduate degree programmes.
51. In June 2017 when the membership of the HKIE as a signatory to Sydney Accord was reviewed, the report raised a concern of our HD courses⁴, that they should not be viewed as an articulation pathway to degree programmes.

³ The HKIE is a signatory of Washington Accord for accreditation of professional engineering bachelor degree programmes.

⁴ *“Recommend that HKIE work with advisory panels and industry to develop clear and appropriate career paths for graduates of the HD program...HD program should not just be viewed as an articulation pathway to degree programs by educational institutions.”*

52. And for those failed to catch on this pathway, chances are the missed journey fuels bitterness among some graduates torn between agonies of wasted effort, wasted time, now over qualified for available jobs and perhaps the burden of a student loan.
53. The Technical Officer grade under the civil service payroll is a good exemplar for graduates being benefitted by taking post-secondary education.
54. The top grade of Technical Officer closely matches the remuneration of a senior engineer. They are all professional with their shares of the career pride and both are indispensable to complete projects.
55. Some of them did in the end migrate to professional status by job in training and not by structured academic studies.
56. The Government should continue taking an active role to provide appropriate job opportunities for AD and HD cohorts in recruitment, statutory provisions or contractual obligations.
57. As an impetus to turn the tide around providing extensive internship opportunities for these cohorts taken lead by the Government could have much facilitating impact.
58. The HKIE is confident the industrial sector will follow suit.
59. The HKIE reiterates due correction is imminent. The grade of HKIE Associate Members, a class for HD graduates, fell close to 70% whilst the total membership grew double in the last decade.
60. The question is what is the use in discussing the merit of an education programme if we would not care about placements of the cohorts?

Quality Assurance

61. Prompt accreditation of programmes is necessary to ensure quality assurance; to introduce timely corrective and administrative measures and for the potential students to distinguish among accredited programmes.
62. The HKIE is instrumental to accredit the professional relevance of engineering degrees under various Accords⁵.
63. With the HKIE being one of the signatories of Sydney Accord Accreditation, accredited HD and AD programmes will be recognised by ten jurisdictions⁶. The Accord greatly helps job mobility of our cohorts.
64. To ensure Hong Kong retaining this privilege, the HKIE would take appropriate measures in assessing and accrediting AD & HD curricula and deliveries.

⁵ Washington Accord, Sydney Accord and Seoul Accord

⁶ Australia, Canada, Chinese Taipei, HKSAR China, Ireland, Korea, New Zealand, South Africa, United Kingdom and United States.

65. In addition, the HKIE had also promoted qualification and assessment of engineering technologists in the Pearl River Region, so far three times this year. A further one to three neighboring Southeast Asian countries is arranged under the Belt & Road Initiative.

66. The HKIE would pledge decision on the post-secondary education should bear these activities in mind where quality of our cohorts is a paramount factor for acceptance by others.

CONCLUSION

67. Continual support of post-secondary education is essential. But the education progression must be pyramid shaped and not a type of funnel.

68. The current drop in student leavers gives a convenient opportunity to the public-funded institutions to divert more resources to the tertiary programmes and researches.

69. The diminishing number of high school students may open up the opportunity for a holistic review of the post-secondary education in Hong Kong. Perhaps revisiting the proposition education could be developed as one of the pillars in attracting revenues aboard.

70. The image that self-financing courses are second-class must be corrected.

71. Firm endowment from the Administration is required to ensure quality output.

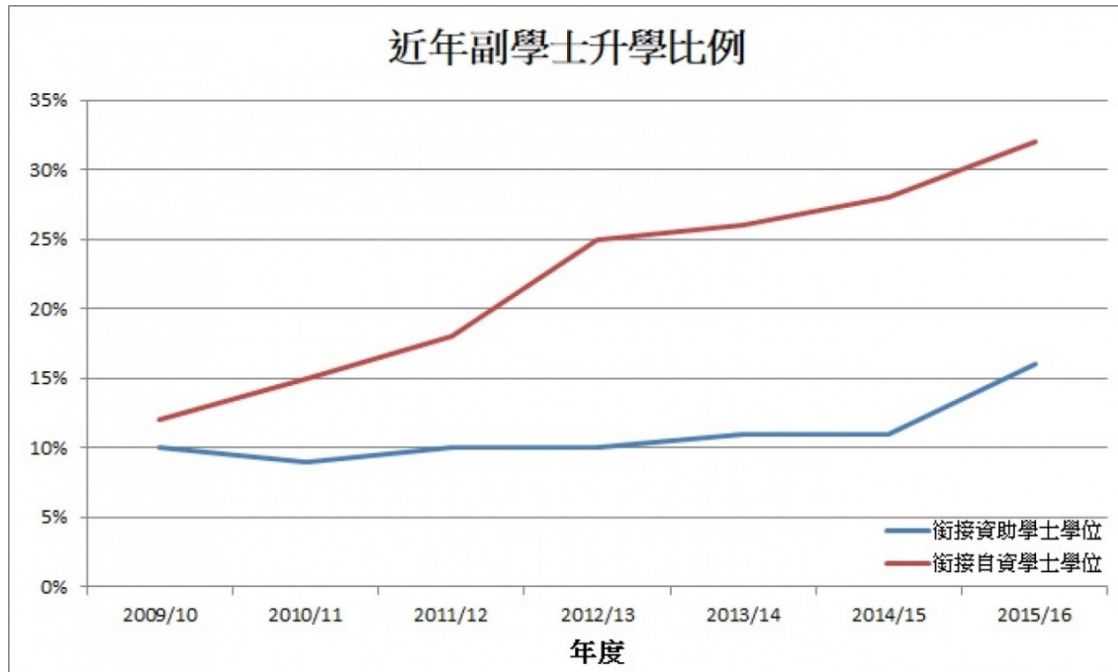
72. Correct attitude that sub-degree graduates are also capable to take on professional career must be instilled and backed up by more job placements.

73. The Government's role in managing the post-secondary education development should not be diminished. The notion of simply allowing institutions to operate on the self-financing principle sans monitoring should only cover the form and not the substance.

74. Current mechanism on vetting and monitoring the operations and governance of post-secondary institutions does now need to be re-assessed by the Government after around two decades from Year 2000.

Appendix I

The ratio of associate degree students entering UGC-funded Universities have raised from 10% (2009/10 academic year) to 16% (2015/16 academic year), whereas self-financing top-up degree students have raised from 12% (2009/10 academic year) to 32% (2015/16 academic year).



Source: Information Portal for Accredited Post-secondary Programmes
University Grants Committee (UGC)

Appendix II

2016 New Admission of Self-financing Institutions

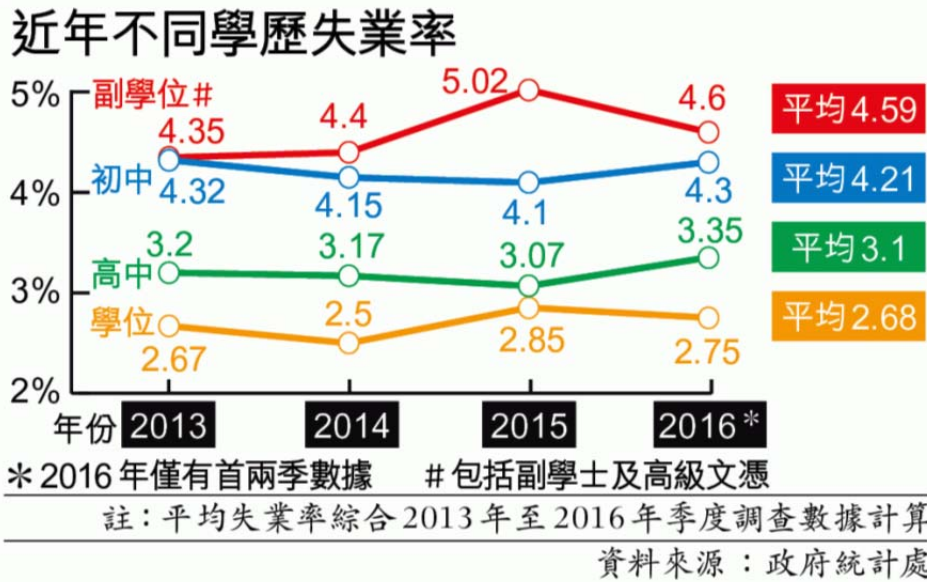
	實際收生人數	收生達標率
恒生管理學院	1174	90.31%
明愛專上學院	277	83.94%
樹仁大學	817	65.62%
東華學院	350	53.03%
珠海學院	166	15.96%
宏恩基督教學院	18	10.00%
香港能仁專上學院	12	6.67%
明德學院	25	5.68%
港專學院	院校沒有提供	院校沒有提供

Source: 自資認受較八大副學位低 人力顧問：資助安排不現實 (6 July 2017), HK01, Retrieved from

<https://www.hk01.com/%E6%B8%AF%E8%81%9E/102804/-%E6%95%99%E8%82%B250%E5%84%84-%E8%87%AA%E8%B3%87%E8%AA%8D%E5%8F%97%E8%BC%83%E5%85%AB%E5%A4%A7%E5%89%AF%E5%AD%B8%E4%BD%8D%E4%BD%8E-%E4%BA%BA%E5%8A%9B%E9%A1%A7%E5%95%8F-%E8%B3%87%E5%8A%A9%E5%AE%89%E6%8E%92%E4%B8%8D%E7%8F%BE%E5%AF%A6>

Appendix III

Profile of Unemployed Population in Hong Kong by Education Level from 2013 to 2016



Source: 斥董建華當年只顧谷大專生比例 恒管校長：「副學士違教育原意」
 (9 January 2017), Apple Daily, Retrieved from
<https://hk.news.appledaily.com/local/daily/article/20170109/19890925>