Annex 1 – Internationalisation and Diversification of Hong Kong Education Strategy

Speeches and Articles by Secretary for Education

22 June 2010 (Tuesday)

Managing University Reputation in a Competitive World – Education for a Globalised World

Speech by Mr Michael M Y Suen, GBS, JP
Secretary for Education

Professor Tsui, honourable guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning. It is my great pleasure to address such a distinguished group of academics and community leaders from different parts of the world. Let me first extend a warm welcome to those of you who have travelled thousands of miles to Hong Kong. I hope you will be able to spare some time here after the seminar to enjoy the vibrancy of our city.

Commitment to education

The theme of this seminar strikes a chord with Hong Kong's agenda. Technological advances have brought fundamental changes to many aspects of our lives and removed barriers among cities and countries. Businesses and trades are now conducted at a much faster pace. Enterprises and governments need to make decisions from a global perspective in order to fully grasp the opportunities available. Indeed, we are living in an extremely competitive world. Individuals should be able to create and apply knowledge in an innovative way to strive for success.

In Hong Kong, we are not blessed with a bountiful supply of natural resources. People are our greatest asset. We count ourselves very fortunate to have a human workforce which is assiduous, vivacious and venturesome, keeping us competitive in an increasingly globalised world. To continue to upgrade our human capital, the Hong Kong Government has taken education as our top priority. For every four dollars we spend, one dollar is on education. Our basic strategy is to enhance the quality of our education. There are three essential elements.

Strategy 1: Keep on updating and rejuvenating ourselves

First, we keep ourselves abreast of the changing needs of modern society. The education system of Hong Kong has served us well. Nevertheless, we must ensure that the system can stand the test of time.

A decade ago, at the turn of this century, we started to conduct a critical examination of the mission and function of our education system. We were firmly of the belief that education in the 21st century should enable everyone to be in charge of their own life and chart their own destiny. We came up with an ambitious, but essential, reform of our education system. Our goal is for all students to develop into balanced individuals who can contribute in meaningful ways to society. We expect to enable every student to attain all-round development in the domains of ethics, intellect, physique, social skills and aesthetics. We want to equip our youngsters with a broad knowledge base, an aptitude for life-long learning and the readiness to venture into new frontiers of knowledge whenever necessary.

Last September, our education reform progressed to a new phase. We have moved away from our old system of five-year secondary education, two-year matriculation and three-year undergraduate studies. Under the new system, we provide six years of secondary education, followed by a four-year undergraduate curriculum. Instead of having two public examinations, equivalent to the "O Levels" and "A Levels" of GCE examinations in the United Kingdom, we will have one public examination after Year 12, leading to the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (or HKDSE, in short) starting from the year 2012.

In terms of curriculum, all students study a broad and balanced senior secondary curriculum, including four core subjects, namely, Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics and Liberal Studies. Our goal is to nurture our students to become proficient in English and Chinese, have a good analytical mind, and be able to think creatively, inquisitively and critically from different perspectives. Most important of all, we instill into our young people's mind the right attitude to pursue lifelong learning so that they can live up to challenges and opportunities throughout their lives.

Apart from the four core subjects, students will be able to select two to three electives from a wide spectrum of 20 subjects spanning the arts, humanities and sciences, including other foreign languages and Applied Learning, that suit...
their interests, aptitudes and abilities. Other learning experiences (say in arts education and community services) are a key component to complement the core and elective subjects. They aim further to widen students' horizons, to develop their lifelong interests and more importantly, to nurture positive values and attitudes.

Our new senior secondary curriculum and the HKDSE are internationally benchmarked and recognised. In particular, the HKDSE has been included in the Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) Tariff system, which can provide a useful reference for application for various programmes in UK universities. The Australian Government has also recognised HKDSE as comparable to the Australian Senior Secondary Certificate of Education. These will give a better comparison between HKDSE and other overseas qualifications, such as the International Baccalaureate (IB), and facilitate the next phase of the benchmarking exercise with more international agencies and other countries like Canada and the USA. Indeed, we have been receiving very encouraging responses from the academic communities in the UK, USA, Canada and Australia that our new curriculum will better prepare our students for university education and other pathways in the knowledge-based economy.

Our universities are also reengineering their undergraduate programmes with the addition of one more year under the new system. Traditionally, it was considered that degree programmes in professional domains should be highly specialised and needed not involve knowledge in other domains. In the face of rapid globalisation and information explosion, it is no longer realistic to expect a first degree student to acquire all the knowledge required for his future career. It is instead much more useful to teach them how to find solutions to problems on their own.

A four-year undergraduate programme will give universities more time and space to provide a broader and more diversified curriculum and multi-disciplinary learning experiences. This will widen students' horizons and expose them to both specialised and broad knowledge for a more balanced whole-person development. I am confident that our universities will make use of this golden opportunity to further improve their quality of education.

Strategy 2: Internationalisation

The second strategy we have adopted is internationalisation.

Parallel to the curriculum reform, our universities are pressing ahead with their internationalisation efforts. With the staunch support of the Government, our universities have become home to scholars from every corner of the globe. Their presence has enriched the academic life at our institutions and made our higher education system all the stronger. Indeed, our new academic structure for higher education will open up more teaching and research opportunities in our institutions. We welcome more scholars and academics from other places to join our system.

In the age of globalisation, our students have to work or compete with their peers around the globe after graduation. It is better to let them have an early taste of different cultures, values and perspectives so that they can start immersing themselves in a pluralistic and diverse environment. Not everyone can afford to pursue study overseas, but we can encourage short-term exchange programmes and bring the experience on campus.

Currently, about 13% of the students in our publicly funded programmes are from places outside Hong Kong. Another 3,000 students come to Hong Kong every year on exchange. This is an area in which the Government can play a more supportive role. We have set up a Government Scholarship Fund to sponsor non-local students to come to Hong Kong. We have so far awarded scholarships to 155 non-local students. We have introduced new immigration measures to allow students to take internships and stay upon graduation to seek jobs. We have increased the quota for non-local students in publicly funded institutions to 20%.

I believe Hong Kong is well placed to further internationalise its higher education sector and develop itself as a regional education hub. As Asia's World City, Hong Kong does have much to offer, including an excellent geographical location and unique position in blending Chinese and Western cultures. We are the gateway to Mainland China, the fastest growing economy in the world. We are also home to thousands of offices of multinational companies. All these provide tremendous opportunity for students who pursue their studies in Hong Kong.

More importantly, we have world class institutions. I note that rankings will be one of the topics for today's plenary discussion. I am pleased to share with you that our institutions enjoy excellent rankings - The University of Hong Kong was ranked the first in Asia. Together with another two universities, we have a total of three universities in the top five in Asia and top 50 in the world. Another two universities are within the top 200 in the world. Hong Kong universities host the world's best executive business management programmes. The EMBA programme offered by The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, in collaboration with Kellogg School of Management of the Northwestern University, was ranked first by the Financial Times in 2007 and 2009. However, we are not complacent. Our universities will continue to enhance quality and build up their visibility in this part of the region.
Strategy 3: Diversification

Our third strategy, running in parallel to our internationalisation efforts, is “diversification”. Currently, taking into account places offered by the publicly funded sector and the self-financing sector, around 27% of our youngsters between the ages of 17 to 20 have access to tertiary education. We believe there is tremendous scope for the self-financing sector to complement the public sector in Hong Kong. We have put in place a number of facilitating measures in this regard.

Recently, we have reserved six pieces of land for institutions to build new or expand their campuses. These include one piece which can provide over 100,000 square metres in gross floor area for some 8,000 self-financing degree places. Also, start-up loans for the building works are made available. We also provide funding support to our institutions for their quality assurance measures.

In pursuing diversification at the sector level, we encourage individual institutions to identify and develop their “niche areas”. It is unrealistic to expect all our universities to be comprehensive universities with top rankings in all disciplines. Instead, we encourage our institutions to excel in their niche areas and develop their brand names. For instance, our Hong Kong Polytechnic University is the world’s number two in research on Hotel and Tourism Management, after only Cornell. Its design school is among the top in this region.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen, I have given you an overview of what Hong Kong is doing to enhance our education in this globalised world. It is our strong belief that closer international collaboration will enable us to learn from our international peers to strive for excellence. We fully support exchange forums like this seminar. I am sure our institutions will benefit from the discussions these two days on their road to further upgrading the quality of education.

In closing, I would like to thank the University of Hong Kong for inviting me to join you this morning. May I wish you all a very fruitful seminar.