



Hong Kong

MARKS FOR MERIT

“Hong Kong is a center of excellence for quality education.”

Michael Wong
Deputy Secretary for
Education

HONG KONG UNIVERSITIES OFFER STUDENTS A TRULY INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION WHILST HELPING TO INCREASE THEIR CAPACITY TO TAKE ON REAL-WORLD CHALLENGES

Hong Kong is best known as a global business hub, an autonomous economy within China that has in recent years benefitted from a direct link to the world’s most prolific industrial region on the mainland. But where China reigns in manpower, Hong Kong is aiming to enhance its academic capacity.

“With the world getting more and more globalized, there has also been increasing recognition that our higher education cannot continue to look inwards, it must look outwards,” says Michael Wong, deputy secretary of Hong Kong’s Education Bureau. In order to posi-

tion Hong Kong as a prime education hub in Asia-Pacific, the Special Administrative Region’s government recently widened its stride by accepting a larger quota of foreign students to its prestigious academic institutions.

“We also introduced a number of supportive measures,” Wong continues, “one of which is the setting up of a HK\$1 billion scholarship fund. It actually allows our universities to grant 150 to 300 scholarships, which give HK\$80,000 (around US\$10,000) for non-locals or HK\$40,000 (around US\$5,000) for locals per academic year.”

In addition, following a non-cumbersome application procedure administered by the Immigration Department, any non-local student graduating from a recognized Hong Kong institution is now allowed to reside and work in Hong Kong for an ensuing 12 months on a non-permanent basis.

“Within that one year,” explains the Immigration Department’s director, Simon Peh, “they can find a job and attend interviews, and from what we have heard it gives students much more convenience and thus facilitates them to remain and work in Hong Kong. Since May 2008, more than 2,500 graduates, including

those graduating in previous years, have been allowed to stay in Hong Kong pursuant to the new, simplified procedure.” Peh adds that Hong Kong also operates a highly liberal visa policy for casual travelers and business people: “About 170 nationalities can come to Hong Kong without a visa to visit for 7 to 180 days, depending on the country of origin.”

The framework allows Hong Kong’s eight institutions funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC) to compete on an equal footing with each other and with private schools. Funded universities are asked to come up with academic development proposals, which the UGC then considers on a merit basis. As an additional

boost to complement Hong Kong’s world-class university faculties with a wide variety of specializations, the government intends to set aside HK\$18 billion (US\$2.3 billion) for an endowment fund devoted to supporting research. Every single measure is geared toward fostering the innovative talent to secure Hong Kong’s future.

ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENTS

Hong Kong sets itself apart by being an amalgamation of modern and traditional, combining the best of East and West. One of the pioneering institutes to support this vision is the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK). For over forty years, the university has been bringing China closer to the West. Upon his arrival from the United States four years ago, CUHK president and vice-chancellor Professor Lawrence Lau introduced the Edu-

cation Without Borders concept to further enhance the institution’s bilingual and international standing. “Today we have about 1,200 full-time non-local undergraduates, and another 1,000 exchange students from all over the world, 50 percent from North America, 25 percent from Europe, and 25 percent from Asia and Australasia. Hong Kong has some tremendous advantages,” notes Lau. “Internet is never blocked, libraries have

everything, and there is total academic freedom at our universities, so many foreigners eager to learn about China come to do their research here.”

Professor Lawrence Lau is also the convener of the Heads of Universities Committee (HUCOM). The consortium represents Hong Kong’s eight public universities: City University; Baptist University; Lingnan University; the Chinese



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University of Hong Kong (CUHK); Hong Kong Institute of Education; Hong Kong Polytechnic University; Hong Kong University of Science and Technology; and the University of Hong Kong (HKU). HUCOM seeks to facilitate the excellence of each one of its affiliates, and Lau doesn't rule out the possibility that Hong Kong institutions may reach global university status, as MIT, Stanford, and USC have managed to do. "If you put enough energy, resources, and effort it is possible within twenty to thirty years to achieve greatness," says Lau.

There have indeed been some significant research breakthroughs emerging from Hong Kong's universities. CUHK scholars Dennis Lo and Samuel Sun pioneered noninvasive Down's Syndrome testing and the development of rice and grass grown with seawater, respectively. The former will enable pregnant women of around age thirty-five to conduct a test merely by analyzing their blood, and the latter may well lead to agricultural and leisure developments in arid areas such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. In addition, crucial studies conducted by HKU

society. The government is giving us 800 more research postgraduate places, 17 percent more than we have now, which will help our universities attract good academicians."

So far, the unity of these diverse institutions has been highly beneficial not only in enhancing Hong Kong's educational reputation but, more importantly in helping to formulate and adopt common policies, in close cooperation with the government. Recently, after a five-year debate period, Hong Kong is switching from the British-inherited three-year undergraduate system to a four-year system. According to Education Bureau deputy secretary Michael Wong, the current consensus is that this extra year will be devoted to broadening the education of the city's university students. "Because of the additional year, and also because we are revamping the entire curriculum, the new senior secondary curriculum (NSS) will be much broader than what it is now. It will also cater for the needs of those students who may not excel academically, but who can adopt our applied-learning component," he says.

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Professor Lawrence Lau, president and vice chancellor of CUHK

That approach is already bearing fruit: the London Times Higher Education-QS World University Rankings 2008, published in October, placed HKU, CUHK, and HKUST in the world's top 50 educational institutions.

have led to the ground-breaking discovery of the cause of the SARS epidemic. "It is very important to have a vibrant higher education sector," says Michael Stone, secretary-general of the University Grants Committee. "It makes for a more well-rounded

EDUCATION AND INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING

What do these recent developments mean for U.S.-Hong Kong relations? In a recent speech, the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte estimated that American companies have invested over US\$68 billion in Hong Kong, home to 55,000 U.S. citizens. Dr. Glenn Shive of the Hong Kong-America Center says foreign students coming to Hong Kong will have an additional advantage in comprehending the Chinese market. "There is growing interest in Hong Kong's

high-quality, English-medium, and open academic environment," he says. "Flexibility exists for students to take various courses without being put in a bubble. If an American student comes here, the mainlander next door will be a highly selected person, so if you want to rub shoulders with the next leaders of mainland China, a lot of them are here."

A survey of local and international academics, opinion leaders,

businesspersons, and professionals concluded that Hong Kong is synonymous with five core values: progressiveness, freedom, stability, opportunity, and high quality. "That makes up our most important DNA," observes Mary Leung, assistant director of the HKSARG Information Services Department, who oversees Brand Hong Kong. "It is cosmopolitan because of its international community, foreign students, mainland Chinese students, and entrepreneurs. It has



54 countries on campus, constituting 18 percent of the total student population. The vice chancellor and president of HKU, Professor Lap-Chee Tsui, remarks: "Education promotes mutual understanding and reduces conflict." Where U.S.-Chinese and U.S.-Hong Kong relations will be headed in the coming years depends highly on today's students, and with U.S. president Barack Obama's commitment to improving U.S. education across the board, the future looks bright on all fronts.

"Education promotes mutual understanding and reduces conflict."

Professor Lap-Chee Tsui
vice chancellor and president of HKU

Michael Wong of the Education Bureau concludes by highlighting Hong Kong's vision, which is not limited to education alone; it transcends into all walks of life in this unique metropolis. "We think that by looking outward we can achieve a win-win situation, whereby it's not just our economy that will benefit, or not just our culture, but our students will also benefit—from the opportunity to broaden their horizons, to meet more people from the outside world, and actually to understand the world better. We are very diversified, very professional, and we welcome international talent, whether they want to come to study or to live. Once they come I hope they will find it difficult to leave."

connectivity due to its transport and telecommunications infrastructure and unique strategic location in East Asia and southern China. There is an enterprising spirit, which means a lot of creation and innovation, and all of this makes Hong Kong a leader with great achievements in many areas." Senior Brand Hong Kong Officer Evani Au-Yeung says this colorful correlation is a prime reason for students and businesses to travel to and invest and settle in Hong Kong: "We hope people will agree that we are a world city located in Asia, a gateway to China and China's window to the world."

Hong Kong University's internationalized student profile alone speaks of the city's attractiveness. There are more than 4,000 non-local students from

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