

The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Feedback to the Education and Manpower Bureau
in relation to
Government Consultation Document on
Moving to Six Years of Secondary Schooling
and Four Years of University

17 January 2005

The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) wishes to present its views on the Government Consultation Document on *Moving to Six Years of Secondary Schooling and Four Years of University*. Given that many of the proposals still lack details, the University does not consider it appropriate to seek the views of its Senate formally at this time, and can only respond broadly, generally and at a conceptual level in the present feedback.

1. The overall framework

1.1 CUHK enthusiastically and strongly endorses the proposal to move to six years of secondary schooling and four years of university, and believes that the new structure should be implemented as soon as possible, in any case no later than the date proposed (namely, for the first cohort from the new system to enter university in 2011).

1.2 There are of course many details on which a consensus has not yet been reached, and indeed CUHK itself has reservations on particular aspects of the proposals relating to funding and to the school curriculum. But CUHK urges that these secondary issues not be allowed to delay the in-principle approval of the overall framework or its implementation schedule.

2. University curriculum

2.1 CUHK understands that every subject is to be accorded an extra year at university, so that professional subjects now taking N years will move to a normative curriculum of N+1 years. CUHK welcomes the opportunity to give students a broader and more balanced education.

2.2 CUHK intends to take this opportunity to enhance those components of its curriculum that focus on language, general education and learning skills. CUHK pledges that it will not simply add one extra year of the major subject.

3. Funding

3.1 CUHK is disappointed with the proposal that the unit cost of the additional year will be set at a substantially reduced level (in effect 0.6 of the unit cost for the other years). There is no evidence to suggest that first-year university education can be provided with such a level of resource, and this proposal implies a 10% reduction in unit cost when averaged over the four years of study. Coming on top of a stream of funding cuts (excluding the Civil Service pay cuts, a total 10% cut in the triennia 1998-2001 and 2001-04; a 10% cut in a single financial year 2004/05; a putative 5% cut in 2007/08 if the 0-0-5 formula is adopted; a 2% cut due to conversion of taught postgraduate programmes to self-financing mode and shift in student mix in 2007/08; and the effective 10% reduction in unit cost implied by the present proposal – compounding to an overall reduction of 32% in the unit cost over these years) this will present great difficulties for CUHK and indeed the entire tertiary sector.

3.2 CUHK also believes that the premise of “Government’s fiscal constraints” (paragraph 6.3 of the Consultation Document) is the wrong approach to the problem of funding: the new academic structure is a long-term proposal whereas the fiscal constraint is only a temporary phenomenon. Government should consider separately:

- (a) What is the appropriate level of resources needed for the extra year?
- (b) What is Government’s ability to pay in the short term?

CUHK is willing to consider a lower level of support for an initial period, provided that there is a clear commitment from Government on the proper cost level to be restored when the fiscal situation permits.

3.3 CUHK agrees with Government’s view that the cost should be shared between Government and the user (i.e., the students and their parents). This is not a new principle, and there has always been an agreement that students share 18% of the cost. There are no grounds for altering this formula – under which students would still pay 18%, but of a larger amount. The University is obliged to put on record its serious concern about any extra burden placed on its future students. The University also urges a commitment by Government to financial aid, including long-term low-interest loans, for needy university students.

3.4 Apart from recurrent costs, there will be a substantial transitional cost (in addition to physical facilities discussed separately below). The transition will imply a sudden increase of 33% in the undergraduate student population in 2011, and a consequential increase in the number of courses to be offered as well as in the number of teachers required. The additional teachers have to be in place at least six months ahead of time, and there is significant work to be done in curriculum development. Suitable one-off funding is needed – just as it would be needed for the school sector – in the years straddling 2011.

3.5 Notwithstanding the above reservations, CUHK believes that the proposed reform should go ahead and that these funding issues can and should be addressed between now and 2011.

4. Physical facilities

4.1 CUHK is pleased that Government recognizes the need for physical facilities to accommodate the extra 33% of undergraduate students.

4.2 The extra teachers to be employed must be given the opportunity and the facility to do research, and this has to be factored into the space requirements.

4.3 CUHK believes that Government shares the view that university education is more than classroom teaching, and that hostel life adds a valuable dimension. The present policy caters for residence in hostels one year out of three; in the new structure, it should not be merely one year out of four. Government is urged to reconsider its policy and to bring the provision to a minimum of two years out of four.

4.4 A longer normative curriculum will substantially increase the opportunity for overseas exchange, so vital to the development of young talents. However, if the present de facto hostel policy of a maximum of one-year residency is continued through 2011 and beyond, three out of four outgoing local students will not otherwise be hostel residents, while every incoming exchange student has to be provided with a hostel place. So every exchange pair generates an additional demand of 3/4 hostel place; as exchange increases, this extra demand will also rise, and need to be provided for. The alternative for CUHK is to limit the number of incoming exchange students which in turn limits the number of local students who can go on overseas exchange, despite the additional opportunity offered by the longer four-year curriculum.

4.5 All these physical resources must be in place before 2011, and given the long lead time for approval and construction, it is imperative that policy and funding support be provided immediately.

5. Admission requirements

5.1 CUHK recognizes that university policy on student admission will be of interest to schools in their curriculum planning. However, CUHK respects the position often emphasized by the Education and Manpower Bureau that university entrance should not dictate public examination requirements, and in turn public examination requirements should not dictate the school curriculum. For this reason, the broadly indicative views that CUHK expresses below are premised on the assumption that the school curriculum (in particular the range of core and elective subjects studied) will be as described in the Consultation Document.

5.2 Student admission is a matter within the autonomy of each university. Nevertheless, CUHK agrees that the four core subjects in the proposed senior secondary school curriculum (Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics and Liberal Studies) provide a useful foundation to suit the wishes, needs and abilities of all students. For university entrance, CUHK concurs that all four core subjects should be considered as requirements for entry.

5.3 It is the intention to recommend to the Senate that the minimum requirement for eligibility to apply for admission to CUHK (“matriculation requirement”) should also include one additional (unspecified) elective subject.

5.4 Each individual programme at CUHK will set its own requirement, which will in general be higher and/or more specific than the minimum University-wide requirement, and may include a number of (specified or unspecified) elective subjects. Having regard to the number of elective subjects to be studied (paragraph 3.7 of the Consultation Document), the University expects that each programme will require one to three elective subjects.

5.5 While admission to a faculty rather than a department may not be possible in general, the University will make every attempt to harmonize the different programme requirements, so that students can apply to a reasonably large number of programmes on the basis of a small number of specified elective subjects.

5.6 It is premature to consider the standard (level) that students are expected to achieve in these subjects.

5.7 While the above comments address the academic subjects studied and/or examined, CUHK does not wish to leave the impression that these are the only factors which affect student admission. CUHK has for many years adopted a broad set of criteria in determining student admission, including recommendations from principals and teachers, evidence of extracurricular activities, achievements and awards, as well as interview performance. Thus, CUHK is in this regard in agreement with the recommendations in paragraphs 4.27 and 4.29 of the Consultation Document.

5.8 The comments on admission requirements should also be understood to refer only to candidates presenting the HKDSE. CUHK will admit students from all other parts of the world based on other academic credentials as well, for example, SAT, IB, UK A Levels, or the joint university entrance examination on the mainland; local students presenting similar credentials will also be considered.

6. School curriculum

6.1 CUHK does not wish to unduly influence the debate on the school curriculum through its admission policy, but does wish to put on record its collective opinion as a group of educational experts. Many individual teachers will have their personal views, especially in relation to specific subjects; these should be given serious attention.

6.2 CUHK is concerned that even two to three elective subjects in addition to LS may be too narrow for students aspiring to university study, not so much in terms of the prerequisite knowledge for the future major subject in university, but simply in terms of the broad exposure to the spectrum of human knowledge. CUHK hopes that some further consideration will be given to providing more elective subjects for the best students who have the aspiration and capacity to take on a broader curriculum.

6.3 One possibility for broadening the school curriculum is to distinguish between the number of subjects *studied* and the number *examined*; thus individual students may choose to study some additional subjects up to SS1 or SS2, thus gaining broader exposure. In this connection it should be noted that in the US, it is the norm for students to study (and for universities to require) many more subjects than are presented for examination in the SAT II subject tests.

7. Liberal Studies

7.1 CUHK strongly endorses the concept of Liberal Studies (LS). The LS Areas of Study have many features in common with CUHK's General Education Programme, which comprises four areas: (A) Our Own Heritage, (B) Nature, Technology and the Environment, (C) Society and Culture and (D) Self and Humanities.

7.2 However, CUHK also recognises that there is concern, indeed anxiety, about many aspects of the particular model proposed, in terms of the detailed curriculum and the ability of teachers to deliver in a new mode of teaching. CUHK trusts that many different views will be heard and taken on board as the details of actual implementation are worked out.

7.3 CUHK is prepared to offer its considerable expertise and experience in this area to help in the design, implementation and evaluation of LS.

7.4 CUHK is also prepared to offer its strengths and facilities in the professional training of school teachers to meet this new challenge.

7.5 The concerns about the details should not affect the early adoption of the overall curriculum framework in general and LS in particular.

8. Conclusion

8.1 CUHK strongly endorses the broad principles and urges their early adoption.

8.2 Once the broad framework and implementation schedule are accepted, CUHK would welcome the opportunity to be further consulted on the details.