Convocation Survey on Sutherland Report of the University Grants Committee (UGC) on Higher Education in Hong Kong – An Executive Summary

1. In the first week of July, 2002, 5,000 randomly selected Convocation members were invited by mail to participate in a Convocation Survey on Lord Sutherland’s Report of the University Grants Committee (UGC) on Higher Education in Hong Kong. A total of 544 questionnaires were returned by July 11, 2002. This exceptionally high response rate (close to 11% with no incentives for response, compared to 1% to 4% response rate to other Convocation Surveys in the past) suggests that the subject of higher education reform in Hong Kong is close to the heart of the Convocation Members. This report highlights the key findings of the survey for the action and recommendation of Convocation to the University.

2. The Convocation members show strong support for the following recommendations:
   - A small number of institutions be strategically identified as the focus for public and private sector support, with the explicit intention of creating institutions capable of competing at the highest international levels (74% support).
     Their support to this recommendation is reinforced by most of the open-ended feedback to Question 12 of the questionnaire. Many members voice the preference for elitist higher education, support the reduction of number of higher education institutions in Hong Kong, and urge for stricter university entrance qualifications. In a nutshell, they call for an emphasis on Quality, rather than quantity.
   - The institutions should increasingly engage themselves with international benchmarks (87% support)
   - The institutions’ remuneration packages should be de-linked from that of civil servants’ (60% support)
   - Students should be allowed to take some courses from universities other than the university with which they have registered as undergraduate (57% support)
• Among those who support the recommendation listed immediately above, 76% also support the proposed CATS even if it entails transfer of funds among the universities

3. Overall, 55% of Convocation members surveyed would have greater confidence in the higher education in Hong Kong if the recommendations in the Sutherland Report were to be adopted.
   • In particular, parents who have children studying at university level or below at present are more likely to have greater confidence if the recommendations were adopted. (67%)

4. The Convocation members, however, are divided in the following recommendations:
   • Associate degree programmes should be predominantly funded by the private sector (while 38% support, another 36% do not)
   • Taught Postgraduate degree programmes should be predominantly funded by the private sector (while 40% support, another 44% do not)
   • The primary significance of university education for most students – improved job prospects - should be featured in the re-calibration of the higher education system (while 47% support, another 29% do not)
   • Procedure should be devised for appointing rather than electing Deans and related senior budget holders (while 41% support, another 29% do not)
   • Accountability and management lines within the institutions should be run to individuals rather than committees (while 42% support, another 32% do not)

5. One major differentiating factor is age. In general, the more mature alumni (graduates before 1980), and parents with children studying at university level or below, are more likely to support a) private funding of the associate degrees and post graduate degrees, b) that Deans should be appointed rather than elected, and c) that accountability within the institutions should be run to individuals rather than committees.

6. The younger alumni who graduated since 1990, nevertheless, are less likely to support these proposals.
7. Another major differentiating factor is whether the Convocation Member has family members working in a local university. **37% of those who have family members working in a local university** (compared to **17% of those who do NOT have**) claim their confidence in higher education in Hong Kong would decrease if Lord Sutherland’s recommendations were to be adopted. Their **major concerns** seem to revolve around the following recommendations:

- **the institutions’ remuneration packages should be de-linked** from that of civil servants’ - **62% of those who have family members working in a local university** (vs **22% of those who do NOT have**) do NOT support this recommendation
- **improved job prospects** should be featured in the re-calibration of the higher education system – **53% of those who have family members working in a local university** (vs **35% of those who do NOT have**) do NOT support this recommendation
- **a small number of institutions** should be strategically identified as the **focus** of public and private sector support – **38% of those who have family members working in a local university** (vs **16% of those who do NOT have**) do NOT support this recommendation
- **CATS should be implemented even if it entails transfer of funds** among universities – **27% of those who have family members working in a local university** (vs **12% of those who do NOT have**) do NOT support this recommendation

8. Those who claim their confidence in the higher education in Hong Kong would decrease seem to be most concerned about the same recommendations except the first one below:

- **students should be allowed to take some courses from universities other than the university with which they have registered as undergraduate** – **62% of those whose confidence would decrease** (vs **26% of the rest**) do NOT support this recommendation
- **a small number of institutions should be strategically identified as the focus of public and private sector support** - **55% of those whose confidence would decrease** ( vs **11% of the rest**) do NOT support this recommendation
- **the institutions’ remuneration packages should be de-linked from that of civil servants’** – **58% of those whose confidence would decrease** (vs **21% of the rest**) do NOT support this recommendation
• CATS should be implemented even if it entails transfer of funds among universities – 30% of those whose confidence would decrease (vs 12% of the rest) do NOT support this recommendation

9. When asked to provide further suggestions or comments on the higher education reform in Hong Kong (Question 12), aside from the call for Quality over Quantity as indicated on Page 1 of this Executive Summary, many Convocation members also urge for a more complete approach to education that does not focus solely on job prospects but also helps develop the mind, spirit and character of students, as well as a creative and innovative culture.

10. Please refer to the full tabulation of response for the detail findings.
Convocation Survey on Lord Sutherland's Report on Higher Education in HK - Summary

Confidence in Higher Education in HK - if Report recommendations were adopted
Appendix – Questionnaire

Convocation Survey

Sutherland Report of the University Grants Committee (UGC) on Higher Education in Hong Kong

Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 5 your degree of support to the statements below by making a “Circle” around the number.

- 1 : ‘I do not support at all’
- 2 : ‘I do not support somewhat’
- 3 : ‘No opinion’
- 4 : ‘I support somewhat’
- 5 : ‘I fully support’
- If you don’t know what the proposed measure is about, please circle ‘0’ meaning ‘Don’t know’.

The relevant sections of the Sutherland Report highlighting the topic raised in the question are stated in brackets, wherever appropriate.

1. A small number of institutions should be strategically identified as the focus of public and private sector support with the explicit intention of creating institutions capable of competing at the highest international levels (Recommendation 1 on page 6 of the Report).

2. Rather than having an internal focus upon Hong Kong, the institutions should increasingly engage themselves with international benchmarks (para 6.31 on page 45 of the Report).

3. Associate degree programmes should be predominantly funded by the private sector (para 2.19 on page 12 of the Report).
4. Taught Postgraduate degree programmes (i.e. all higher degree programmes except those of MPhil & PhD) should be predominantly funded by the private sector (para 4.14 on page 26 of the Report).

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5. The primary significance of university education for most students – improved job prospects – should be featured in the re-calibration of the higher education system (para 4.13 on page 25 of the Report).

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6. In order to recruit and retain staff of the highest standing, the institutions’ remuneration packages should be de-linked from that of the civil servants’ (para 3.19 on page 18 of the Report).

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8. Accountability and management lines within the institution should be run to individuals rather than committees (para 3.39 on page 21 of the Report).

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9. Students should be allowed to take some courses from universities other than the university with which they have registered as undergraduate (para 4.9 on page 24 and Appendix E on page 75 of the Report).

*If you support this statement, please go to Question 10.*

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10. The proposed CATS (Credit Accumulation and Transfer System) should be implemented *even if* it entails transfer of funds among universities.

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11. Assuming the recommendations in the Report were to be adopted, would you have greater confidence in the higher education in Hong Kong? Please indicate your response by making a circle around the appropriate number.

My confidence in the higher education in Hong Kong

- would be substantially increased \( \square \) 5
- would be somewhat increased \( \square \) 4
- would remain the same \( \square \) 3
- would be somewhat reduced \( \square \) 2
- would be substantially reduced \( \square \) 1

12. Any other suggestions or comments on the higher education reform in Hong Kong:

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
Please tell us your profile:

a. Please tell us your First Academic Award obtained from HKU (e.g. BA, PCLL, etc):

_____________________________________________________________________

b. The Year obtaining the above award:

1   Before 1970  
2   1970-1979  
3   1980-1989  
4   1990-1994  
5   1995-1999  
6   2000-2001  

c. Are you or any one of your family members currently working in one of the eight universities in Hong Kong?

1   Yes  
2   No  

c. Do you have children currently studying at university level or below?

1   Yes  
2   No  

Please fax your completed questionnaire to 2517 6351 or mail it to the Convocation Secretariat using the reply envelope provided ON OR BEFORE JULY 6, 2002.

Thank You!