

# Review and Prospects

An interview with the Vice-President

Mr. John Dockerill joined the former City Polytechnic in 1983 as the first Associate Director (Resources Planning). Today he is the Vice-President (Planning and Information Services) of the City University of Hong Kong. Witnessing the ups and downs over the past 17 years in CityU, the Vice-President, or the walking history, tells us about his views on the education system of Hong Kong, the changes made in CityU during these years and the new plans of the University in the future.

## Educational Reforms

Over the past few years, there have been some significant reforms and changes in the education system in Hong Kong especially in the higher education sector. Mr. Dockerill believes it is high time that reforms were carried out in the primary and secondary schools because the current secondary school seven-year education system does not produce the right number of students who are able to benefit from the tertiary education. "I don't think you can expand the higher education anymore at the moment until you've done something on the secondary schools." He further anticipates that it will take more than ten years for the reforms fully to bear fruits.

For the development of the tertiary

education, Mr. Dockerill thinks that after the higher education experienced rapid growth in the last decade, it is quite clear that the next step is to consolidate. He suggests that tertiary institutions are recognising more clearly the needs of students, and CityU is trying to give our students more choices in their studies with the introduction of the Credit Unit System.

The move to found the community college, according to our Vice-President, is a very good idea to allow students to take an associate degree first and move on to a bachelor's degree later. "In America, they have hundreds and hundreds of community colleges and hundreds of universities, and it works there," he believes that the idea is feasible in Hong Kong.

Regarding UGC funding, Mr. Dockerill predicts that the government would like to see the institutions to be more entrepreneurial in generating more income for themselves rather than solely relying on the grant from the government.

He also foresees that there will be more cooperation between institutions in the future, for example universities will accept credits transfer from different institutions in the territory.

When discussing about how to get stu-

dents well prepared for the new era, the Vice-President notices that students in Hong Kong are being educated for very narrowly-defined careers and the programmes offered in the universities are really too specialised in bringing the students up to certain levels in specialist areas. However, one should also realise that people would probably change their career several times, so it is not desirable to concentrate too much on getting students prepared for their first jobs. Mr. Dockerill suggests that institutions should give the students more general education, so they will possess the ability to develop and move or change because everything is changing so rapidly in the IT era. "You can be out of date the moment you leave the University certainly so after a couple of years," warned the Vice-President. He believes that it is important for students to acquire the ability to keep learning, to change to develop communication skills, as well as continually upgrade these professional skills. "And they have to come back for further studies."

### **Changes in CityU**

Believing that the ultimate direction on tertiary education is to broaden students' scope of knowledge, Mr. Dockerill says that City University is in fact moving towards this destination.

Under the leadership of the present President - Professor H.K. Chang, the first and most important change is the implementation of Credit Unit System. Students can freely choose elective modules other than their own

discipline. It is undeniable that the Credit Unit System helps broadening students' knowledge. As the Vice-President said, "City University is trying to get rid of the name of polytechnic. We want our students to possess different skills and be more rounded in their abilities and outlook. "This is what society will need in the 21st century".

Besides, the President also introduced the EEC (English Enhancement Course), CCIV (Chinese Civilisation Course), web-teaching and so on. Mr. Dockerill holds a very positive view over all these changes in the University. He thinks that EEC serves its purpose to improve students' English proficiency which is a crucial advantage in job-seeking, regardless of the controversy over its implementation. As for CCIV, he believes that it is necessary to learn one's own cultural heritage, even though he is "not a Chinese". And that web-teaching allows quicker and more efficient learning. "It changes how people communicate and how things worked in the past."

### **Difficulties to overcome**

Mr. Dockerill admits that there are physical constraints while remaining optimistic. The most obvious one is the small campus of the University. "It is absolutely incredible how well the campus works. 15,000 FTE (full-time equivalent students) in the building...". Limited space causes problems and constraints in the planning process.

Sometimes difficulties are opportunities. Although the history of City University is rela-

tively short, it is also an advantage to be young, new and energetic. It's easier to launch new initiatives and plan. "It is easier to change than older universities" because the older ones are used to the traditional system.

Apart from that, the location of the University is good for further education. Like the name of the University, it is in the centre of the "city". Transportation is convenient. There is no reason why a University which has an urban campus cannot be very successful. (The London School of Economics and MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) are good examples). "These universities have urban campuses and very close to town. But they have worldwide reputations."

When asked how he thinks when people teasingly say that CityU is MIT in Kowloon Tong, our Vice-President jokingly replied, "no, it's KIT (Kowloon Institute of Technology)," showing his wit and humour necessary to realise deeply that it is not going to be easy to plan for CityU, yet... "We do what we can".

### **Still Ambitious**

What are the new plans of CityU on its physical structure? "We've started building the student hostels, Phase I." Student Hostels Phase II has just been approved. Phase III of the student hostels, a building for the School of Creative Media, a landmark building (a 20-storey one at the University's main entrance) and some other smaller items have been "approved in principle".

The planning team is still very ambitious

to expand the University further. All the above constructions will help add to a more colourful campus life. And these plans would be set off if "the economy is picking up and the government is generous".

