Accountability in Higher Education –
A Hong Kong Perspective

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Abstract

Accountability, as an important element of the Public Sector Reform has gained particular status and importance in Hong Kong’s public service in recent years. It has been given a prominent position of importance by the Governor in his policy addresses in the past two years, with its emphasis on an open and responsible government. Indeed, accountability provides the impetus for opening up a bureau to provide a more responsive and improved service and arouse greater awareness for good resource management. Accountability has gradually taken its grip on higher education of Hong Kong, as has been the trend extant in western countries. The opening up of access to higher education and higher level of appropriations to higher education institutions in recent years are the complementing factors.

Against the above background, the thesis examines the accountability in higher education of Hong Kong. It starts with a review of the goals of universities to illustrate how these goals have changed over the years in tune with development of society needs and expectations on universities. The development of the Public Sector Reform is then examined and the concept of accountability as an important element of the Reform is explored. The discussion of accountability is then focused on its implications in higher education.

The theoretical framework developed in the first three chapters provides the necessary foundation for the empirical study of accountability in higher education of Hong Kong. A major accountability move taken by the University Grants Committee is to conduct Teaching and Learning Quality Reviews (TLQPR) in the seven institutions funded by UGC. An evaluation of their effectiveness as an accountability instrument is made and other initiatives taken by institutions as excited by the reviews and as a response to demands on accountability are also examined. The effect of the reviews and initiatives on the institutions will also be evaluated in terms of their being a threat to the traditional values and goals of universities, particularly academic freedom and institutional autonomy. In addition, the concept of market in higher education provides another horizon on which accountability in higher education is assessed.

The study not only provides a new perspective to evaluate accountability but also a benchmark to assess the development of higher education of Hong Kong.
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