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第 9 屆畢業典禮

It was in early 1993 when I received a telephone call from the then Secretary for Education and Manpower who asked me if I would be willing to help set up the Institute. At that time, teachers in Hong Kong did not have to be graduates. Nor did they need to have professional training. Programmes offered by the then Colleges of Education only led to Certificates in Education at the sub-degree level. It would be the aim of the Institute, based on the recommendations of the Education Commission Report No. 5, to become a tertiary level facility dedicated to producing professionally trained graduate teachers. I saw this as a fundamental condition for improving the quality of education in Hong Kong. I considered myself very honoured to be asked to take part in this important task and I accepted the challenge without hesitation.

In a little over ten years, the Institute has gone far in fulfilling the mission set by ECR5.

Today, the Institute has developed from a post-secondary institution mainly offering sub-degree programmes for Secondary Five school leavers to our present position as a university-level institution, offering close to 20 degree and postgraduate programmes, as well as a number of sub-degree and in-service professional upgrading courses for a community of over 7,000 students.

I am also delighted to learn that despite the current sluggish employment market and a declining school population, 88.2% of our 2003 graduates found jobs or pursued further studies. This is a most powerful testimonial of the strength and competitiveness of our graduates.

All the Institute's programmes reflect a commitment to excellence not only in teaching and learning but also in the development of both our students and our teachers. For example, we place strong emphasis on cultural subjects such as art, music and physical education, subjects which are often sidelined in mainstream teaching, but which are indispensable not only to the well-being of the human body but also as nourishment to the human soul. I believe the lessons of life learned on the playing fields are just as important as the acquisition of knowledge in the classrooms. We need to ensure that opportunities are made available to all pupils in Hong Kong to learn through play.

Successful learning is not possible without quality teaching. This commitment to quality has therefore been an intrinsic part of our philosophy since our establishment. Happily this commitment to quality received a further boost from our peers in the education sector when we successfully completed our Teaching and Learning Quality Process Reviews conducted by the University Grants Committee in 2002. These successful reviews laid the foundations for the Institutional Review conducted by the University Grants Committee, which took place last month, placing us well on the way to acquiring our self-accreditation status.

To dream is the first step to success. My dream for you all is that the Institute, as the major provider of teacher education in Hong Kong, will develop into a leading university-level institution and centre of excellence in the Asia

Pacific region – dedicated to the education of caring and professional teachers. The Institute should aspire to make a positive and visible difference to the education sectors in Hong Kong and in the Region.

To this end, I would like to encourage you all at the Institute to advocate boldly all that is good for teacher education in Hong Kong, from the embracing of the “all graduate, all trained” policy to the implementation of a whole person approach to learning. This will ensure that our students step out into the educational world, proficient in languages, practised in social, technical and communications skills, and professionally prepared as teachers and educators of the 21st Century.

However, no matter how able, well trained and dedicated a teacher is, the teaching and learning process is compromised by large class sizes. Every parent and every teacher in Hong Kong knows that pupils benefit from smaller classes. The research evidence confirms this and stresses that the biggest benefits arise when smaller classes are provided in the early years of primary schooling, especially for those from less privileged backgrounds. We must, therefore, find ways to reduce class sizes in Hong Kong if pupils and teachers are to achieve their potential and if the Government’s pledge to encourage creativity and innovation in a knowledge-based society is not an empty promise.

Recently compiled data show that Hong Kong spends less on education, as a percentage of GDP, than nearly all other countries with a similar level of economic affluence. Only 26 other countries, out of a total of 170, spend less than Hong Kong. The data also show that the proportion of age cohort in tertiary education in Hong Kong is lower than those countries. This means that our children have a lower level of access to higher education.

If Hong Kong continues to invest even less in education because of the budget deficit, we will be making the fatal error of not investing in our most vital assets – our people.

In conclusion, may I share this very great honour that I am receiving today with all of you, who have helped me and supported me through the last 10 years to make this possible. In undertaking this journey, the route has at times been arduous, and the crossroads have often been unmarked. I have had much to learn on the way. Therefore let me take this opportunity to say thank you for your generous support and most of all for your gracious friendship. I wish you all ongoing success on your journey, as the Institute continues to scale new and ever-greater heights into the future.