

# The State's Influence over Quality in Higher Education: Quis Custodiet Ipsos Custodes?

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Developments in Hong Kong particularly related to the growth of interest in quality are compared with similar developments within higher education in Britain over the last 30 years with analysis of the reasons for the establishment, and subsequent abolition, of the binary system in Britain. Justification for the evaluation of British policies in providing insight into the Hong Kong situation is provided. Parallels and differences are found and analysed. Finally conclusions are drawn on how the state's view of quality is expressed in Hong Kong.

香港高等教育的發展，特別是愈來愈關注質素問題的情況，與英國過去三十年高等教育的類似發展作比較；並比較香港的情況，分析英國設立及繼而廢除雙體制的原因。關於評估英國的政策可助瞭解香港的情況此一說法，亦提出論據。本文找出各種異同加以分析。最後，香港的教育當局如何提出對質素的意見，本文亦作出結論。

## The Central Authorities: Defining the State

We can best understand the concepts of quality held by the state by reviewing policies and developments in a broad social, economic and political context and by synthesising from that review an understanding of the state's concepts of quality. In this paper "the state" is defined as those agencies, external to the tertiary institutions, which control policies, standards, and funding within higher education in Hong Kong and to whom institutions are accountable. In Hong Kong the central authorities can be viewed in terms of the Hong Kong Government, the Education Commission, the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee (UPGC), the Research Grants Council (RGC) and the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA). The establishment of the Education Commission illustrated how the government attempted to reach outside itself into the established academic and social elite for advice and legitimisation. It could be said to have done so to develop, to confirm and also to make concessions to changing norms within the larger society which needed a larger imprimatur before they could be adopted as policies. Central authorities generally maintain norms which take the form of general judgements about institutional standards (Becher and Kogan 1992). Decisions about which institutions to expand and which courses to maintain and develop, although allocative in their conse-

quences, are themselves a reflection of normative judgements. Elton (1992) describes the purpose of a buffer institution, such as the UPGC, between the providers and the control system, as to minimise the effects of the control while still preventing the abuse of trust. Frackmann (1992) ascribes the existence of such buffer institutions to the total financial dependency of higher education. The question is raised — if the role of government is to represent society as a whole then why do we need another body representing society towards the higher education institutions? In Hong Kong this question is answered by reference to the government's need for legitimacy. Cheng (1991) discusses this in detail. The legitimacy problem arises, he suggests, because of non-democratic policy. Non-democracy, is identified as a symbol of colonialism. The legitimacy of a government which would come forth through election is absent in Hong Kong. In this context the Hong Kong Government has to be very careful to secure popular support in each and every step of policy making. The credibility of the government's policy making is achieved through consultation together with the employment of expertise. Thus, the international expertise, embodied in the membership of the UPGC, acts to legitimize decisions relating to higher education. In Hong Kong therefore, the UPGC is essential to the Government and perhaps also serves to bolster people's trust in educational planning and policy making. This impartiality has also helped the Government to rebut accusations of colonial bias "which is particularly effective in

a Chinese community that traditionally respects rationality more than democracy" (Cheng, 1991, p.106). The increasing selection of the members of UPGC in recent years from countries other than U.K. strongly reinforces this conclusion.

Analysis of policy and practice over the last 40 years has shown that the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee of Hong Kong (UPGC) is clearly the most important body in the assurance and control of quality as it regulates and influences both policy planning, implementation and funding. The Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA) acts for the UPGC at course validation level within the polytechnic sector.

### The Establishment of the UPGC

The principles behind the UPGC system have evolved to give the institutions an assurance of the government support they are likely to obtain, to keep their development responsive to Hong Kong's territorial needs and to maintain the principle of academic freedom and to ensure incentives and safeguard the economical use of government money (UPGC, 1976). The primary purpose of this type of control is to reconcile the need for executive discretion in the running of the institutions with the need for public accountability. Public accountability is defined by the UPGC (1972) as embodying not only questions of financial regularity but also the *relevance and usefulness to the community* of the activities on which money is being spent.

This system is regulated by certain ground rules the most important being the specific topics on which the institutions and the government are allowed to deal directly with each other. Apart from salary levels and land matters essentially all communication between the institutions of higher education and the government must go through the UPGC. This is an important principle in pursuing concepts of quality. It illustrates how the government has passed complete responsibility for all matters of quality of provision to the UPGC. Since the entire responsibility for the block grant system rests with the UPGC, the government relies on that committee to take care of the quality of the tertiary sector. A study of the work of the UPGC therefore provides the most comprehensive indication of the concepts of quality held by the state.

The UPGC describes its function as providing personal judgement of experienced people who are free of the immediate pressures of government.

The role of the non-academics on the UPGC is to explain the institutions' problems in "Government terms" and vice versa. This is seen to be an essential safeguard in preventing Government from judging university requirements in the same way as it judges other primary requirements such as primary schools or public transport while protecting university autonomy.

The UPGC is a public watchdog in planning for and overseeing the effective use of resources in meeting community manpower needs. It described how it can carry out these tasks effectively.

"This is possible because responsibility for arguing out and applying many of the day to day decisions and the detailed work for nearly all of them is forced on to the institutions, with the UPGC taking only the primary decisions as to policies and general forms of development. In practice these decisions are so organised that the institution has almost no discretion as to what should be done and only a limited discretion as to how it should be done; but insofar as choices of action are available, it can meet its tasks with some flexibility. At the same time however it has to produce a great deal of information about what it is doing and this enables relatively close control to be maintained over the block grant period." (Paragraph 24, Appendix C, UPGC Report, July 1970 to June 1972, December 1972)

The Llewellyn Report in 1982 commented on the effectiveness of the UPGC:

"We are not convinced that the UPGC with its geographically disparate membership and relatively infrequent (and very expensive) meetings can do this [i.e. propose the most suitable courses of action at the appropriate times] with the drive and precision which is necessary at this time of rapid and urgent expansion ...., we suggest that the UPGC establish an executive group consisting mainly of local members which can meet more frequently than the UPGC to give views on planning options ... and follow through on monitoring of implementation ..."

This does not appear to have been accepted judging from the location and membership of the various meetings held by the UPGC and its sub-committees in 1983-84 (UPGC, 1985). The UPGC is appointed to act on behalf of the public to ensure that institutions of higher education make effective and efficient use of resources provided to them from the public purse; that the educational provision meets the manpower needs of the community; and to advise on the associated costs. The concepts of quality which it holds can be understood in the context of its function. They relate to perceived manpower needs and the use of qualitative performance indicators which largely reflect how capital resources are utilised.

## The Education Commission

The Education Commission was set up in 1984. It is the highest advisory body to the Government on education and advises on the development of the education system in the light of community needs. Taking account of the authority of the UPGC over the institutions the effects of the Education Commission reports on the quality of provision may be said to be rather remote. One example illustrates this conclusion. In 1983-4 in its annual report the UPGC had come to the conclusion that a local accreditation body should be set up. Three years later this policy became an Education Commission recommendation.

## The Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA)

The binary system in Britain was formally established by the Secretary for State Anthony Crosland in 1965 as a response to the situation in that country at that time. The development in Hong Kong of an accrediting body has reflected similarities and differences. By 1983-84 the UPGC had taken the view that Hong Kong should move as quickly as possible towards the development of its own validation system and in the Education Commission Report No. 2 (August 1986) the endorsement for this recommendation was provided:

“... reliance on the CNA, a British body, to validate local degree proposals will not be appropriate in the long run in view of the future arrangements for Hong Kong after 1997. We consider that a local body should be set up without delay so that it has sufficient time to gain the experience of a complete cycle of validation and revalidation and to establish itself so that the qualifications awarded upon successful completion of courses which it has validated gain the international recognition needed to maintain Hong Kong's status as a major international centre.

We believe that a locally based validation body will help Hong Kong towards greater self sufficiency in higher education without sacrificing quality. *We have therefore recommended that a Hong Kong Council for Academic Awards should be established*”. (Education Commission Report No. 2, p.196)

The UPGC has already adopted this policy at least three years earlier.

## Public Debate on the Need for the HKCAA

There is no evidence that the alternatives to setting up an accreditation body were seriously considered and certainly no public debate ensued. The obvious alternative for Hong Kong was to

form some kind of liaison between the existing universities and the developing polytechnic. Systems similar to the accreditation of polytechnic degrees by the local universities had been common in Britain for over a hundred years. The Robbins report had suggested that in Britain the universities should take control of higher education. However, this was largely rejected on account of political differences and a struggle for control and influence as a result of the existence in Britain of influential party politics at both national and local level — a political situation which has nothing in common with Hong Kong in 1992. There was obvious expertise in both Hong Kong universities in course and curriculum design at school level as both had Faculties of Education and in addition there was enormous experience of degree level work of international standard in all other disciplines. The possibility of the universities being involved in upholding standards in polytechnics was certainly worth investigating.

Another interesting omission is any comparison of standards of degrees in the university sector or explanation of why members of the Education Commission or the UPGC were convinced of the need to continue, and indeed reinforce, the binary system. The Education Commission seems to take validation as a *sine qua non*:

“It would be unfortunate if the introduction of degree courses, and the consequential increase in degree places, were to be hindered by a shortage of resources for validation.” (Education Commission Report No. 2, August 1986, p. 197)

All CNA validations undertaken up till that time had proved successful and no evidence of the development of the polytechnic in meeting required standards was considered. The Secretary for Manpower and Education spoke in Legco on 8 November 1989. He addressed the issue of maintenance of standards in the context of the proposed large increase in the number of degree places announced the previous month in the Governor's speech. He reassured members that the quality of the expanded provision would be assured

“... because the expansion will be achieved through institutions with proven track records of academic excellence. Secondly, these institutions have well established systems of quality control. In the case of the polytechnics and [the Hong Kong Baptist College] HKBC, there is also assessment by an external accrediting agency which advises the UPGC on whether the degrees they offer reach international standards.” (Report of the Proceedings of Hong Kong Legislative Council, 1989-90, p. 325)

The obvious question which arises is, if the polytechnics already had well established systems of quality control why was it necessary to establish an accrediting body? While this was happening in Hong Kong in Britain the CNAA was being wound down and U.K. Polytechnics with 10 years of successful degree awarding experience (such as was the case with HKP) were well on their way to becoming universities.

### **Differences between UK and Hong Kong**

The initiation of a binary system in Britain was justified on three major differences between the public and university sectors. These were the differences in the community basis between the institutions, their vocational orientation and control over them. Hong Kong, however, is quite geographically compact. A student living anywhere in Hong Kong can travel to virtually any of the tertiary institutions. Thus the concept of the Hong Kong Polytechnic (HKP) serving students from the "Kowloon community" has little meaning and instead it is seen by both the institutions themselves and the UPGC as quite acceptable for, say, design education to be established solely in HKP and thereby serve the entire needs of the community in this field. Secondly the polytechnics certainly do have a strong vocational orientation in their programmes but this is also found in many of the university courses. The vocational nature of HKU is described by the UPGC (1972)

"The University of Hong Kong is a markedly "vocational" institution with, in 1972, 50% of its students enrolled in Medicine, Engineering, Architecture, Law and Social Work." (UPGC Report, July 1970 to June 1972, p. 7)

The Hong Kong Baptist College (HKBC) has a strong liberal arts and social studies programme so the division between vocational and non-vocational courses and their unique links to either the public or university sector cannot be said to apply in Hong Kong. Thirdly, however, the most important difference between the situation in Hong Kong and that in UK when the binary line was created lies in the funding mechanisms. In Hong Kong for many years the UPGC has had responsibility for the funding of all tertiary institutions. There has never therefore been the problem of comparing (or asking for accountability from) two separately funded and controlled systems as was the case in Britain where the LEAs and the UGC were totally separate and pursued individual policies often competing nationally and locally for

students and therefore providing considerable opportunity for competition and duplication of effort as well as leaving open possible areas of complete omission.

In Britain the earlier justification for two systems for two purposes portrayed by Crosland in 1965 has evolved through a process of academic drift in such a way as to make it obvious that what had transpired was two systems for one purpose and the recent reorganisation within higher education in Britain has taken account of these developments.

### **The Continued Existence of a Binary Line in Hong Kong**

In Hong Kong the justification for the creation or continuation of two systems has not been so obvious. Both sides of the binary line have for many years been jointly funded by the UPGC. In the Hong Kong polytechnics there is no HKCAA validation of research degrees — in Britain this was not the case as the CNAA validated an institution's research degrees as well as its taught courses. In an extract from a progress report of the Provisional HKCAA published in 1989 the reasons for this were given. It was considered that the effectiveness of procedures and regulations of postgraduate degrees by research would normally form part of the institutional review process or be done by correspondence.

Even the clear difference between what can rightly be termed a university, and what should not, finds no clear enunciation in Hong Kong. The proposal by the polytechnic sector to be renamed as universities has already been put to the UPGC. It is based on the argument that these institutions fulfil the criteria which identify a university. These are that they have the authority to grant their own degrees, they are not monotronics, the majority of their work is at degree and postgraduate degree level, and they can achieve the aims of a university (as set out by eminent writers in both Britain and the USA). In Britain this would certainly qualify them for university status.

The polytechnics also use the funding argument to support their case to become universities. The British Government White Paper of May 1991 includes three proposals: namely, that there should be a unitary funding council covering universities and polytechnics, that polytechnics should award their own degrees and that they be given the title of universities. Since the first two conditions apply already in Hong Kong the poly-

technics argue that the third, namely the title of university, is a natural corollary. The issue of parity of salary scales with the universities for polytechnic staff teaching on degree courses has already been agreed by the UPGC.

The different approach to ensuring quality of degree provision between polytechnics and the universities does not seem to be based on the important criteria which justified such developments in Britain. In Britain these criteria have disappeared and with them has gone the need for the binary system. In Hong Kong the binary system lives on although the educational system here has never had the characteristics to serve which the binary system was created. Although many similarities between educational policies developed in Britain and then later in Hong Kong the underlying rationale for establishing a binary system relating to quality in Hong Kong is not apparent.

Taylor (1990) advises that to understand concepts of quality and their assurance we must see these as a response to the conditions under which the government and management of contemporary societies are carried on. If we accept this statement it still does not help us understand why there should exist a binary system in Hong Kong. It is safe to say that the state in Hong Kong sees the quality of the university and polytechnic sectors as quite different, with the polytechnic sector being possibly lower and certainly less consistent since it is seen to require constant monitoring. Perhaps another valid explanation which would be simpler. A holistic importation of the British system of quality assurance of polytechnic programmes to Hong Kong because "if it was all right for England it must be all right for Hong Kong" may reflect the reality of the colonial government's views on quality assurance. We can conclude that there has been clear evidence of the view of the state of the unreliability or inability of the polytechnic sector in assuring the standard of their degree programmes themselves. This distrust in the ability of the polytechnics by the state has not been described in detail or identified as rooted in specific characteristics. However some indications of how differences between the two sectors appear to influence the quality of the degree provision in the views of the UPGC can be identified and these are discussed below.

### **Interest in Quantitative Performance Indicators (PIs)**

The economic and social factors which had

led to an early interest in issues of evaluating quality in Britain are well documented (Moodie 1988, Sizer 1989, Taylor 1990, Frazer 1991, Fulton 1991). Since the election in 1979 of the Conservative party to power the British Government has been committed, not only to reducing public expenditure and to a market economy but also to justifying their activities and accounting for their use of resources and their performance in terms of economy in the acquisition and use of resources, efficiency in the use of resources and effectiveness in the achievement of institutional plans. The situation concerning the relationship between higher education and the state in Hong Kong in the early 1990s closely resembles that described in Britain from 1945 to 1970 (Fulton, 1990). Performance indicators have appeared on the Hong Kong scene in various guises for thirty years at least. It is apparent that the UPGC's interest has been in assuring the optimal use is made of expensive real estate and in ensuring classrooms remain relatively full by UK standards. In their report issued in 1984 the UPGC agreed that it was timely to consider developing their own space standards as "at present space requirements are assessed using UK planning norms" (UPGC, 1985). There is no mention of progress on this in later reports.

Some mention of staff student ratios (SSRs) occurs; for example, those in the HKP in 1975/6 (13.3:1) were considered "somewhat high for the tertiary level" (UPGC, 1976). However, no further comment on these statistics is recorded and it is assumed that they are therefore taken to be of interest for institutional planning and resourcing purposes rather than as any indication of the quality of the educational *process*. The UPGC's fondness for statistics of this nature was indicated some time later

"The HKP has established what is in many ways one of the more interesting developments in Hong Kong higher education, its Management Information Unit . . . which produces a very large amount of detailed information about the Polytechnic, its teaching programmes, students' progress, staffing, accommodation requirements, etc. It has positively demonstrated its value." (UPGC Report, July 1976 to June 1978, p. 20)

More recently the question of performance indicators was raised by the Chairman of the UPGC at a meeting in September 1986. This was the first time that the UPGC institutions had tackled such fundamental questions as understanding each others methods of calculating full time equivalents (FTEs) and staff student ratios (SSRs). A2-page report issued in November 1990 summarised the findings of the Working Party. It had met four

times in 1987 and had not reconvened. No agreement had been reached nor had any set of performance indicators been decided upon.

The outcome of the Working Party's work suggests that while institutions and perhaps the UPGC itself wished to be seen to be attending to monitoring quality in the ways which were familiar to them and which were widely used in Britain (the permanent home of a number of UPGC members) nevertheless in Hong Kong issues of quality and performance measurement had nothing like the same place on the political and social agenda as in Britain. Funding for higher education was never under the same financial restrictions in Hong Kong as in Britain; nor was there any democratically elected and accountable government. There was little need to adopt unpopular monitoring devices or to interfere too closely with what each institution did with the money after it had received its UPGC grant.

### Analysis of UPGC Interest in PIs

It is not apparent that the UPGC or the government yet has a serious interest in performance indicators relating to quality of output or process in deciding how to allocate resources to higher education in future or to justify differences in resource distribution although the RGC has recently indicated it may conduct a research assessment exercise. Given the current activity in UK relating to HEFC, HEQC and the research funding and assessment debate it is of no surprise to find similar suggestions appearing in Hong Kong. The huge difference in cost per capita for a University of Hong Kong (HKU) FTE compared with an HKP FTE (98% higher in recurrent funding per FTE in 1990/91) may be seen by the UPGC as paying more and getting more in terms of quality both of staff and of students. Polytechnics may be considered to be so cheap that they cannot be assumed to be of an acceptable standard without some external confirmation of their achievements and monitoring of their processes.

The accumulated amount of investment put into the universities over the decades since the war greatly exceeds that put into the polytechnics. This has resulted in the development of excellence in university education, staffing and research which could not possibly be seen as directly comparable in the relatively new and fast developing polytechnics. What is more important than direct comparisons, however, is whether the institutions are fulfilling their own mission well. The universities are

apparently doing this to the satisfaction of the state or at least are given the autonomy to take care of their own standards. The polytechnics, on the other hand, play a different but equally important role in educational provision and their competence to meet what is demanded of them is deemed to be only guaranteed when subject to external quality control. However, with present financial constraints in Hong Kong and cutbacks in the planned funding of higher education the study of whether resources are being effectively and efficiently used in producing high quality education to suit community needs must surely be imminent.

### Identification of Manpower Needs

In July 1987 in a debate in the Legislative Council the Secretary for Education and Manpower made the Government's position clear on its own role in manpower planning:

"... tertiary institutions are free to teach what subjects they want without government interference. It does not mean they have financial autonomy because they are funded entirely by the tax payer. The Government is responsible to the tax-payer for the levying of those funds, and therefore has a duty to ensure that those funds are expended in the most efficient manner possible. To this end, it has the advice of the UPGC, who are experts in what is and what is not required academically..."

The UPGC certainly exercises control over course planning approval. This exercise of control over the institutions is taken by the UPGC to be in fulfillment of its function to offer advice to the Government.

The manpower planning data supporting the issuance of such guidelines is hard to find. The UPGC acts "in accordance with the Government's advice on special manpower requirements" (UPGC Report for 1985-88 Triennium, p. 12) in determining the areas to which priority should be given. However, on p. 30 of the same report we read

"In 1988 the Committee again conveyed to the Administration its continuing concern regarding lack of co-ordinated manpower planning within the Government."

This was eventually rectified in 1990 with the publication of a report of the Manpower Committee entitled "A statistical projection of manpower requirements and supply for Hong Kong". The timing of this was fortuitous as it may have been marginally useful in informing the planning work of the UPGC as to how best to meet the greatly increased number of degree places announced in

the Governor's speech in late 1989. The problem in seeing how the survey helps the UPGC lies in its terms of reference. These are

“ . . . to assess the requirement for the supply of manpower at different educational levels . . . the projection is concerned only with assessing *the desirable educational mix* to meet the needs of the economy . . . ”

The survey commissioned by the Hong Kong Government was designed to project *numbers* of degree holders needed; its publication *followed* the Governor's speech which had already defined the new degree target numbers - the increase in provision of first year first degree places from 12.9% to no less than 18% of the relevant age group for the year 1994-95 (UPGC, 1991). The UPGC had asked for assistance in assessing Hong Kong's manpower requirements - apart from totals by different levels of awards the survey offered *no* insights into the *type* of degree programmes which would best meet future needs. Even in its limited area of projection the results of the survey appeared to be fundamentally unreliable. The methodology assumed that the mix of sub-degree/ degree / postgraduate holders in any industry would remain the same over time. What they modelled in their calculations was the projected shift in the whole economy from manufacturing to service industries. When we consider the limited availability of postgraduate places in Hong Kong prior to 1986, to use the actual numbers of postgraduates in certain sectors in 1986 as an indicator of future demand *ten years later* would appear to be of questionable reliability.

### Social and Economic Issues

The major expansion in tertiary education in Britain commenced with the publication of the Robbins Report in 1963. Its best known principle was the so-called Robbins principle that places in higher education should be provided to satisfy expressed demand. This was based on perceived economic and sociological needs - the need for national investment for Britain to catch up with its competitors and the expectation that participation would lead to a less socially skewed pattern of participation. Labour market policy - the supply of graduates to meet employers' needs was rejected by Robbins on the basis that student demand should take priority and that effective manpower planning was not possible. This explicitly suggested that not only higher education's size but its subject balance too should be demand-led. In Britain, as has been the case in Hong Kong, this

principle has not been accepted by the government.

In Hong Kong a major and unexpected expansion of degree level places was announced by the Governor in October 1989. This expansion was ambitious. It was stated that this was to allow the percentage provision of degree places in Hong Kong to catch up with that in other places, to meet a need for more skilled managers resulting from the continuous shift away from manufacturing industries and to fill gaps left in the workforce due to emigration. The other (unstated) reason for this boost to higher education was also commonly considered to be the Government's response to boost people's morale and faith in the future of Hong Kong in the wake of the turmoil which had taken place in China a few months before.

This would seem to be a more credible reason than those given by the Governor as the economic factors which he cited had not changed so much in the year since his last speech to Legco. In addition the UPGC and all the tertiary institutions had put a huge amount of effort into preparing their academic plans for the 1991-94 triennium in 1989 in response to the 1988 "start" letter. This "start" letter advises each institution of its planning FTE's for the next 3 year triennium period. The institutions will plan courses to fulfil their targets FTE's which will be broken down into taught and research postgraduate numbers, undergraduate numbers and for the polytechnics, a specific sub-degree quota. With the lifting of the ceiling on degree places in the polytechnics from 40% to 65% in October 1989, much of the planning work done by the entire higher education sector was wasted and a fresh start had to be made. It therefore seems clear that the Government saw major political capital to be made out of such a policy decision despite the hidden cost to the community of a year of wasted planning efforts by the institutions of higher education.

### Institutional Inspections

Other quality control measures adopted are the various visits of the UPGC to all the tertiary institutions. These visits involve a detailed if high level inspection of the institution, its management structure, the views of staff and students etc. The institutional review visit is not made to the universities but only to polytechnics. The aim of this type of visit is to assess the overall academic envi-

ronment of the institution and to confirm that this is conducive to the setting and maintenance of procedures and standards appropriate to degree level work and to postgraduate and research activities. The reasons why such visits are good for the institutions to whom they are made is explained.

"Reviews are based on the institution's self-evaluation . . . [which] leads the institution to a greater knowledge and understanding of itself, which may well result in a revision of its goals and activities." (HKCAA Handbook, 1991-92, p. 30)

What is not stated, either by the UPGC or by the HKCAA, is why the same benefits would not accrue to the universities if they were also to be the subject of a similar visit or indeed why the universities are unquestionably to be considered competent in all the degree and postgraduate work they do. This inconsistency is reinforced when the topics discussed in an institutional review visit are considered. They certainly do not concentrate on aspects of a polytechnic which are different from a university. Two examples of the purposes of some of the meetings will indicate the tenor of the institutional review visit: to test whether the academic management structure and procedure were effective and were understood by staff at all levels; to test with the members the impressions gained by the Group (i.e. the UPGC visitors) of the effectiveness of the Polytechnic's academic policies. While the UPGC says that its "academic advisory function applies equally to the five institutions" (UPGC, 1988) this obviously does not include parity of treatment.

## Conclusions

Interest in quality has been seen as a political tool in disarming special interest monopolies using monopoly positions for purposes of economic advantage. Margaret Thatcher's policies in curbing the power of the trade unions in Britain were certainly supported by the voters as a result of the evidence of turbulent industrial relations and the erratic performance of public services. The academic profession may be seen by some as a special interest monopoly; criticism of unwillingness to respond to national need and market conditions are often legitimated by reference to quality. It is true to say that the Government, through the UPGC and the HKCAA, exercises greater control over what actually happens in the polytechnics than it does over the universities.

A wish to secure value for money cuts across all levels of education and social and cultural dif-

ference stressing common purpose and diminishing the significance of value pluralism. It also assists in managing the politics of complexity. While there may be evidence that within institutions qualitative judgements do influence for example allocative formulae there is little evidence of such thinking as yet on the part of the Hong Kong government. The absence of the true influence of market forces within higher education makes it vulnerable to accusations of inefficiency and bureaucracy. Setting standards and criteria, and undertaking accreditation can be used as a means of maintaining customer satisfaction while lowering expenditure. It can also allow early identification and therefore remedial intervention in cases of poor performance. All these aspects of how interest in quality can be used to implement or complement or inform government policy appear valid.

The recently established Research Grants Council (RGC) is developing its own concepts of the true indicators of the quality of research. Its requests for research related statistics change from year to year and the RGC itself admits that the lack of consistent definitions being adopted across the institutions which report to it makes useful analysis difficult. Recent visits to institutions by members of the RGC to inspect the research being carried out lead us to expect developments in how the quality of research will be perceived and in what methods or instruments the RGC will adopt in monitoring the quality of research.

The UPGC has delegated responsibility for quality to the institutions themselves to an extent which varies between the university and polytechnic sectors. The quality of the taught degree work done in the polytechnics is taken care of on behalf of the UPGC by the HKCAA. The standards of all other aspects of the work of the institutions of higher education is looked at by the UPGC through continual dialogue, institutional visits and the use of performance indicators primarily to ensure financial regularity and usefulness to the community. Other than by those means the quality of that is actually delivered in terms of courses or what is done as research is left to the judgement of the institutions.

The effectiveness of the UPGC is ensuring that manpower needs for Hong Kong are met has been hampered by a lack of any statistical basis on which to plan. At times the institutions have been given responsibility to sort things out between themselves and at other times the UPGC has exercised very strict and detailed control over what should be offered and to what extent. The basis for

their interference in this level of detailed planning would appear to be the professional judgements of the members of the UPGC, many of whom are not Hong Kong residents, rather than being based on more fundamental and quantitative projections of need. Nothing is done by the UPGC to see where gaps in graduate provision affect the employment situation year to year although research has indicated that many fresh graduates are employed in sectors of industry far removed from their undergraduate training. In monitoring the institutions' use of resources the UPGC has adopted quantitative performance indicators which are seen in other countries to provide information as a background to quality. Little interest has been shown either within the UPGC or the institutions themselves to change this situation although the signs are that this is likely to change in the short term. The effectiveness of the UPGC's work has not been publicly evaluated. Some criticism has been made of its overseas membership, lack of ability to respond quickly to important issues and the expense incurred by having meetings of many people from around the world.

The quality of provision of higher education is important for the future wellbeing of Hong Kong. This means that money has to be well spent and plans have to be carefully drawn up. However, the process of higher education itself is no less important and the quality of this process should not be left to chance or assumed to be assured through measures of input and output.

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