

Quality and Quantity

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Abstract

The newly established Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA) has the task of monitoring standards in a rapidly expanding tertiary sector. This task relates both to a large planned increase in tertiary places in Hong Kong, and also to the increase in trans-national educational activities that are developing as commercial enterprises.

The paper gives brief details of tertiary education in Hong Kong and of the HKCM. There follows a description of external accreditation, distinguishing between the accreditation of courses and the accreditation of institutions. Benefits that can result from the use of an external academic accrediting agency, especially one with international links, are suggested. These include assistance with rapid growth in the national tertiary sector, facilitating mobility of students and graduates, monitoring educational commercialism, restraining degree mills, collaboration with professional bodies and development of tertiary institutions. In all these activities, the right balance must be maintained between institutional autonomy and accountability.

Introduction to Hong Kong

Physical

Hong Kong is a 1000 square kilometre enclave on the south coast of the 6 million square kilometre expanse of China. With nearly six million inhabitants, it is one of the most densely populated places in the world. It is the busiest container port, the largest exporter of watches and the second largest exporter of garments and toys. With overseas trade of A\$160 billion in 1989, it has the 11th largest trading economy. Per capita income averages A\$15,000, which makes Hong Kong second only to Japan in Asia. A major presence in the thoughts and actions of all Hong Kong's inhabitants is the knowledge that on 1 July 1997 the territory will revert to being a part of China.

Tertiary Education in Hong Kong

Hong Kong currently has seven degree awarding bodies.

The University of Hong Kong (HKU), founded in 1911, has 8000 full-time equivalent students and offers a wide range of courses in the British university tradition.

The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), with 8000 students, was established in 1963 by the amalgamation of several separate colleges that had been started by successive waves of refugees from China. It is in the American university tradition, and offers four year courses that admit school leavers a year earlier than HKU. Within four years, the CUHK will move into line with HKU (and the polytechnics) in having mainly three year courses.

Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) is in the developmental and building stage, and will admit its first students in September 1991. Many staff have been and are being recruited from the United States (mainly returning Chinese or Hong Kong people), so the HKUST may have an American flavour. Each university is expected to grow to about 10000 full-time equivalent students by the end of the century.

Hong Kong Polytechnic (HKP) was founded 1972. With 13000 students, it is like a British polytechnic or Australian institute of technology, and offers both degree and non-degree courses.

The City Polytechnic of Hong Kong (CPHK) was founded in 1984. With 8000 students it is similar to HKP. It is expected to double in size from 1988 to 1992 and is moving to divide its degree and non-degree activities into separate colleges.

The Hong Kong Baptist College (founded 1956) is more in the American liberal arts tradition with all its 3 000 students in degree courses. HKBC's academic standard has risen dramatically during the 1980s. (For convenience, in this paper, the term 'polytechnics' denotes the three institutions HKP, CPHK and HKBC.)

The Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong (10 000 students) is modelled on Britain's Open University, and admitted its first students in 1989. It is importing much study material from Britain, and some from Canada, New Zealand and Australia as well as developing material in the business and accounting fields.

In addition to these seven tertiary institutions, the Academy for Performing Arts will start to offer degrees in a couple of years, and two small post-secondary colleges are moving in that direction.

The universities and polytechnics are funded via the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee (UPGC), a body similar in purpose to the former Australian Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, but with an international membership. Much power, therefore, resides with its civil service secretariat. The UPGC advises the government on the development and funding requirements of higher education, and administers government grants to the tertiary institutions.

Hong Kong, Britain, and Australia have had similar binary systems containing self-accrediting universities, and polytechnics or institutes the courses of which are or were subject to an external accrediting body. In Hong Kong, the UPGC itself assesses the standard of proposed non-degree courses at the polytechnics, and seeks advice from a professional body on the standard of proposed and existing degree courses. For many years, the UPGC used the services of the United Kingdom's Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) which performs this function in Great Britain.¹ Recently, however, Hong Kong has set up its own Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA).^{2, 3}

Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation

The HKCAA, an independent statutory body, is Hong Kong's advisory and executive body for all matters relating to academic accreditation, including advising the UPGC on degree programs in the polytechnics.

In the Ordinance setting up the HKCAA,⁴ the following definitions are used:

- "Academic accreditation" means any evaluation or assessment to determine whether the academic standards of an institution of higher education are comparable with internationally recognised standards. It includes course validation, course revalidation, institutional review and institutional accreditation.
- "Degree course" is a program of post-secondary study, the successful completion of which is marked by the conferring of a degree (or equivalent award).

¹ Council for National Academic Awards, *CNAA Handbook, 1988*, CNAA, 1988.

² Hong Kong Government, *Progress Report of the Provisional Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation*, Government Printing Department, Hong Kong, 1989.

³ Hong Kong Government, *The Report of the Planning Committee for Academic Awards*, Government Printing Department, Hong Kong, 1987.

⁴ Hong Kong Government, *Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation Bill, 1990*, Government Printing Department, Hong Kong, 1990.

- “Validation” is an evaluation of a particular degree course conducted or proposed to be conducted by an institution of higher education to determine whether or not the academic standard of the course is comparable with internationally recognised standards.
- “Revalidation” is an appraisal of the progress of a degree course, which has been evaluated and found to be of a standard comparable with internationally recognised standards, to determine whether it continues to be so comparable.
- “Institutional review” is a review of the academic and general standards of an institution of higher education.
- “Institutional accreditation” is an assessment to determine whether an institution of higher education is competent to validate or revalidate degree courses conducted or proposed to be conducted by it.

In these terms, the HKCAA’s central role is:

- a. to provide independent authoritative advice on academic standards in institutions of higher education by carrying out academic accreditation, that is: (i) validating or revalidating any degree course conducted by an institution; or (ii) reviewing the general academic standards of the institution;
- b. to recognise an institution as having the ability to validate or revalidate any degree course conducted by it, subject to periodic reviews conducted by the Council;
- c. to undertake any process of evaluation required for the purpose of paragraph (a); and d) to advise and make recommendations on the basis of conclusions reached by the Council in any exercise of academic accreditation.

However, since the HKCAA has been established as the territory’s authority on accreditation, it is expected to carry out a wider range of activities also, such as:

- to establish and maintain relationships with accrediting agencies outside Hong Kong and to keep under review the systems of academic accreditation of the Council and of agencies outside Hong Kong;
- to disseminate information on academic standards of degree courses and good academic accreditation methods and practices;
- to conduct seminars, conferences and other forms of developmental activity, and to assist in maintaining and monitoring academic standards;
- to develop a system of credit transfer; and
- quite generally to advise the Governor on all matters pertaining to academic accreditation; and
- to carry out such other functions connected with academic accreditation as may be permitted or assigned to the Council by the Governor.

To carry out its responsibilities, the HKCAA:

- has a policy-making Council of 22 local and overseas academics and lay members, meeting biannually;
- has a permanent professional staff in Hong Kong; and
- uses ad hoc panels of specialists from all over the world for its validations and reviews.⁵

⁵ Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation, *HKCAA Handbook, 1990-91*, Government Printing Department, Hong Kong, 1990.

Aspects of Accreditation

External Accreditation

As defined in the HKCAA Ordinance, academic accreditation can refer to the validation of an individual degree course or program, or to a review of a whole institution. Such accreditation can be carried out internally or externally. Internal accreditation is when the institution reviews itself and/or its courses through some mechanism(s) it has established. External people (academics or others) may be involved in the accreditation, but this is at the behest of the institution itself. Traditionally, universities in Hong Kong, Australia and elsewhere have used total internal accreditation.

External accreditation is when the institution and/or its courses are reviewed by an external body, possibly involving some staff of the institution itself. This has been the typical situation for non-universities in Hong Kong, Australia and elsewhere. A midway stage allows institutions full responsibility for their own courses, but still requires periodic external institutional review. Such reviews therefore inspect the efficacy of the institution's own quality control systems.

In the United Kingdom, all institutions are tending towards the middle ground. The polytechnics are being given responsibility for their own courses, but will still be subject to periodic external review by a restructured CNAA.⁶ Also, the universities have responded to increasing governmental demands for public accountability by establishing an Academic Audit Unit,⁷ which will stand in a similar relationship to the universities as does the new CNAA to the polytechnics.

In Hong Kong, the universities were asked if they wished to be involved in institutional reviews with the HKCAA, along with the polytechnics. There will be no prizes awarded for guessing their answer! However, the Ordinance has been so phrased that the universities may be reviewed by the HKCAA, if the government so decides. It may be, therefore, that over a period of time, Hong Kong will move in the same direction as the United Kingdom, but with one accrediting body, not two. In this case, as the polytechnics acquire responsibility for validating their own courses over the next five years (subject to occasional institutional review by the HKCAA), the universities will retain their autonomy but be involved in occasional review with the HKCAA.

In the United States, extensive external accrediting activities take place. There are over 100 different accrediting organisations with different philosophies and standards. Those unfamiliar with the United States scene may find this statement incompatible with the extreme variability of standards across American tertiary institutions. However, this is explained by the philosophy behind the American accreditation process which is to assess an institution *not* in relation to some universal standard but in relation to its own goals and objectives (its self-declared mission).

Against this background, Australia can be seen to be quite out of step with developments elsewhere, as (almost) all non-universities disappear, and external accreditation disappears with them. University autonomy has now spread willy-nilly to (almost) all institutions with little consideration for the preparedness of some institutions to take this step. Nominally, the government monitors institutions via educational profiles, but these are mainly quantitative, and vetted by government. The evident need for quality assessment is being handled in a piecemeal and fashion by both the Department of Employment, Education and Training and the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee. The DEET discipline reviews are falling into disfavour because of their cost. However, quality assurance, management and control do cost money. It would be inconsistent of the government to urge such practices on industry yet balk at making a similar commitment. A more serious problem with the reviews is their size. Everyone involved in one heaves a sigh of relief afterwards, and hopes it will not return for 20 years. This reaction does not encourage continual attention to quality management. The AVCC academic standards panels seem as if they may be more effective, and should certainly be extended to include pass degree, as well as honours,

⁶ R Bird, *Report of the Review of the Council for National Academic Awards*, Department of Education & Science, United Kingdom, 1990.

⁷ CVCP, *Academic Standards in Universities*, Reynold report, 1986.

courses. These panels could then form part of a more coherent approach to quality assessment, supported through the activities of the Register of Australian Tertiary Awards.

Advantages and Disadvantages of External Accreditation

Course validation and institutional review by an external agency have some advantages and some disadvantages.

Institutions subject to an external agency also have an internal process to prepare proposals for approval by the Senate or Academic Board before external submission. In this context, possible disadvantages of external accreditation include:

- repetition of arguments at internal and external review stages;
- double call on the time of some members of staff of the institution;
- increased lead time to implementation; and
- lack of awareness by the external agency or its panels of the characteristics of the institution or the culture of the country.

Possible advantages include:

- the incentive to have a formal internal review and assessment process;
- disinterested review of course proposals;
- dissemination between institutions (via the members of the validation panels) of information on new developments, new methods and good teaching practices;
- contribution by the external agency to staff development;
- contribution by the external agency to institutional development;
- assurance of comparability of standards across institutions (nationally and internationally); and
- enhancement of (national and international) esteem for the institution.

These advantages heavily outweigh the disadvantages. In subsequent sections, we develop specific instances of the benefits of external accreditation.

Professional Accreditation

Most professional associations certify their members as competent to practice the profession. This certification is usually based on minimum levels of knowledge and experience. In many cases, the knowledge requirement may be met by the satisfactory completion of a formal tertiary qualification. Therefore, professional associations *accredit* certain courses as meeting their knowledge requirement for membership. Such professional accreditation is similar, but not identical, to academic accreditation.

In many cases, the most noticeable difference is professional accreditation relates mainly to the content of the course, while academic accreditation takes a much broader view of the academic standard and environment of the course. Professional associations can be quite rigid in their requirements and conservative in their attitudes, so their strong influence can discourage institutions from innovation in content or method.

In planning a course, an institution takes into account all relevant accreditation requirements, whether the accreditation is to be internal or external. Professional accreditation is, by definition, external. However, the differences between professional and academic accreditation can make it difficult to have a joint academic/professional accreditation activity. Some professional bodies refuse on principle to have joint activities, while others are unwilling to adapt their procedures and will only hold joint activities on their terms. A joint activity is not a simple matter, because it must be so structured as to permit two different outcomes. However, it is worth attempting joint activities to reduce the time demand on institution staff for accreditation matters, and avoid an iterative process in which a course is successively adapted to satisfy one body, and must then be re-checked by the other.

If only internal academic accreditation is being used, there is only one external body to satisfy, and this appears to be an advantage. However, this can leave the professional body with undue influence on an

institution's courses. An external accrediting body can be a powerful ally of the institution in its relations with the professional association, can provide a strong external justification for aspects of a course that may be queried by the professional association, and can save the institution's time by negotiating directly with the professional association.

Facilitating Mobility

Mobility of Students and Graduates

The academic profession has for many years been an international one. This, of course, is what makes the use of international validation and review panels feasible, although very few countries have taken advantage of this possibility. Hong Kong has done it to some extent, and the involving academics from a wider range of countries in its accreditation activities will be a major feature of the HKCAA's operation.

In recent years, the mobility of academic staff has begun to be matched by the mobility of students between institutions, both within and across national boundaries. It is therefore necessary for tertiary institutions, governments and employers to take a more explicit, coherent and international approach to the recognition of both partial and completed qualifications.

Credit Transfer

Credit transfer is the current "in" phrase in Europe as the European Community moves closer to the single market of 1992. Schemes have been set up to fund the movement of students between institutions in different countries, and codify courses so credit can be awarded for work already done. In the United Kingdom itself, the CNAA has developed the Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) to provide a system for assessing all forms of learning for credit towards CNAA awards. CATS enables students to undertake further courses to add to their existing credit and eventually gain an academic award. The tariff system developed by CNAA is applicable in all universities and other tertiary institutions. Credit can also be given for work experience, and commercial firms now seek CATS credit for their in-house training schemes.

In Hong Kong, the aim is to develop a credit transfer system using similar parameters so Hong Kong credit is transferable internationally both inwards and outwards. As 1997 approaches, there is a noticeable increase in the flow of emigrants from Hong Kong, and a credit transfer system will assist students continue their studies overseas. Conversely, it will be easier to attract Hong Kong people to return from overseas if they can retain credit for partial studies and experience.

Recognition of Qualifications

Another aspect of facilitating mobility is to offer international recognition for completed professional qualifications. In Australia, we should reflect on the disservice done by downgrading or completely rejecting the foreign qualifications brought by immigrants. The former Committee on Overseas Professional Qualifications tended to err on the side of conservatism, which is commendable. However, the error was often too great, so the country lost valuable skills unnecessarily, and the holders of those skills became disillusioned and, not surprisingly, started "whingeing". Realistic appraisal of foreign qualifications can more easily be achieved by relations between a small number of external accrediting agencies, than by each education system trying to know everything about every discipline at every overseas tertiary institution.

The HKCAA is planning an international conference in 1991 which we believe to be the first conference specifically for accrediting bodies. In addition to providing an opportunity for sharing experiences, ideas and plans for the benefit of accreditation worldwide, it will start to establish relations between accrediting agencies. It may be a more formal and permanent sort of collaboration may develop, for example, through the establishment of an international federation of accrediting agencies.

Education as an Industry

Multi-Nationals in Education

While there have been, and still are, peripatetic teachers and scholars, the principal 20th Century image of formal education has been of something done in a particular physical location: if one wants a degree or diploma one travels to such institutions as Hong Kong Polytechnic or Sydney University. More recently, however, this concept has broken down. One step in this breakdown was distance learning, which retains the concept of an institution being fixed in one place but removes the need for students to travel to it. In a further step, the concept of education staying within the borders of one country is now disappearing also.

The most obvious cause of the spreading of education across borders is the profit motive. Education has been recognised as a potential export industry. The thirst for knowledge in Asia has become an opportunity for Australian and other educational institutions to sell their wares overseas. This overseas activity can take many forms, such as:

- marketing only, with all students coming to the home campus;
- transborder distance learning;
- sending staff for short periods to teach overseas using local facilities (such as a college or school building, or the offices of International Development Program or the British Council); or
- setting up an overseas campus.

Parry⁸ expresses this variability in a single context as follows:

At present, it is possible to study for an American degree in Britain without ever setting foot in the United States. Let me give some examples.

Institution A located in Britain, is accredited in its own right by a regional accrediting body recognised by the American Council on Post-Secondary Accreditation (COPA).

Institution B is the associate campus in Britain of an American university accredited by a regional accrediting body recognised by COPA. It offers its academic programs under the auspices of the American university and is included in that university's accredited status as granted by the regional accrediting body. As an associate campus it is subject to the general policies and procedures of the American parent institution.

Institution C has a centre in Britain and in a number of European countries. It has no American campus but is accredited in its own right by the American Accrediting Commission of the Association of Independent Colleges and Schools, an accrediting agency recognised by COPA.

Institution D is not itself accredited by an American accrediting body; nor is it the associate campus of an accredited American university. It offers courses and programs, however, which lead to accredited American degrees. These degrees are awarded by institutions in the United States accredited by different regional accrediting bodies themselves recognised by COPA.

Institution E offers programs leading either to its own, internal awards or to the external awards of various recognised British examining bodies. These awards are granted credit towards an American degree by a college located in the United States which is accredited by a regional accrediting body recognised by COPA. The American college 'offers its students the opportunity to ... gain credit toward their degrees through exams, courses at other institutions (such as our Institution E), approved licence, certificate or training programs, and prior learning assessment.' The American college itself does not, however, offer any instruction of its own. 'Its primary mission', with regard to overseas students '... is the testing and assessment of learning obtained outside the formal classroom setting.' This enables our Institution E to claim 'a unique advantage of this degree program is the specialisation requirement of the degree program can be obtained by passing some British professional institute examinations.' As a consequence, students attending this institution are able to obtain both an American degree and a British professional qualification at the same time.

⁸ D Parry, *International Conference Assessing Quality in Higher Education*, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 68-87.

Institution F provides tuition leading to its own awards. These awards are, in turn, granted 100 per cent credit towards the degree of a university having 'full institutional approval as a degree granting institution in the State of California'. Full institutional approval is conferred on a institution which, according to the California State Department of Education, has 'been evaluated favourably as being consistent with accredited institutions in terms of curricular quality and verifiable evidence of graduates' academic achievement.' The California State Department of Education, unlike the New York State Board of Regents, is not, however, on the US Secretary of Education's list of nationally recognised accrediting agencies.

Finally, institution G provides tuition leading to degrees granted by an institution registered in the State of Louisiana under Act No 225 of the State. According to Section 4 of that Act 'the registration required by this section does not constitute State approval to any such institution.' Indeed, so diffident is the State about the extent and rigour of its registration procedures Section 4 also stipulates 'the fact of registration shall not be used in any form of advertisement' by the institution!

This description relates only to studying for an American degree in Britain. The number of possible variations world-wide must be a thousand times greater, and poses tremendous problems for quality assurance. The Hong Kong government, for example, is considering tightening its legislation to control tertiary education offered in its territory. However, even if a country has laws controlling its tertiary institutions, or about the operation of foreign tertiary institutions on its soil, the host of possible structural variations make it possible for less reputable institutions to evade detection or, if detected, to evade retribution.

Of course, one does not come from a disreputable institution oneself, but commercial angles can skew academic considerations. A little more service is provided for the fee-paying student, a little more credit is offered for previous study or experience, excessive recognition is given to first degrees or diplomas in admission to postgraduate study, and so on. Such actions can not only compromise the standards of the accepting institution, but also allow the institution providing the initial study or degree or diploma to acquire and publicise an inflated opinion of its own standards. Again, we have an excellent case for external accreditation, and a world-wide network of such agencies.

Degree Mills

Adapting a definition in Spille and Stewart⁹ we define a degree mill as a person or organisation selling or awarding degrees without an appropriate academic base, and without requiring a sufficient level of prior academic achievement. The breaking of ties between an educational institution and a particular site or sites, the breaking of the restriction of educational provision within state or national boundaries, and the increasing commercialisation of education have fostered the growth of degree mills. Most degree mills rely on people's acceptance that degrees can be obtained from an institution one has never seen. One solution, of course, is for people to patronise only "well-known" institutions. This, however, is rather unfair to new and/or innovative institutions that may in some respects be offering a much better education. Another solution is to have external accrediting bodies.

Spille and Stewart⁹ have an entertaining description of the fictitious but typical "Heavenlike University".

There are no entrance requirements: not even a bachelor's degree is necessary for entry to the graduate programs. The only form that is challenging for the applicant is one on life experience, but that's worth the effort because it is likely to result in an award of credits amounting to nearly three-fourths of the number needed for graduation.

After reviewing the life experience application form, the admissions counsellor states completion of the entire degree program can be accomplished in six months maybe less. There is no nonsense about going to class regularly either. Several telephone conversations with one's faculty adviser plus an 'intensive seminar'

⁹ H A Spille and D W Stewart, "The New Breed of Diploma Mills: Numerous, Tough & Aggressive", *Educational Record*, Spring 1985, pp. 16-22.

lasting for one week at a nearby motel should be all that is necessary for the student to earn that coveted piece of parchment.

The price is right, too: just \$800 for a bachelor's degree. A master's degree (in any one of 45 subjects) is a bit dearer at \$1,250. At only \$2,300, the PhD is the real bargain, especially since so many of its holders may then qualify for promotion or a salary increase in their present jobs or for new positions.

To make everything perfect, all of this largess comes from a university that is perfectly legal. Isn't Heavenlike University officially listed as 'state authorised' in public records for anyone who cares to check it out? It's even accredited by an organisation with a very impressive sounding name.

So much for appearance. But let's move a bit further into the ramshackle academic structure that lies behind the elegant facade. To be sure, Heavenlike University was 'state authorised' in 1980 under a law that [then] permitted anyone to start a college or university by showing net assets of at least \$50,000.

The academic program, such as it is, is conducted by faculty who generally hold PhDs from Heavenlike University or similar institutions. Some faculty members listed do hold degrees from legitimate universities, but all of them are employed full-time in other jobs. The organisation's physical facilities consist of two rooms in an office building located in a run-down shopping centre. There is no library nor are there any arrangements under which non-owned library facilities may be used by Heavenlike students.

But what about Heavenlike University's "accreditation"? Unfortunately, this was done by its own "accreditation mill" (same people, same dilapidated office, maybe a different post office box)! Again, a network of accrediting agencies would be a useful antidote to such spurious agencies. In the United States, the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA) exists specifically to attest the bona fides of accrediting organisations!¹⁰

Institutional Development

Cooperation for Development

Accreditation agencies are sometimes seen as analogous to examining boards: their role is to receive submissions relating to a course or institution, and pronounce a verdict of pass or fail. Although some academic accreditation agencies have acted in this way (and a few still do), it is much more common for the agency to act in a cooperative fashion with the institutions within its scope. It can usefully be involved in advising on the preparation of submissions, in training institutional staff in accreditation so as to improve the institution's internal accreditation procedures, and in working with the institution through accreditation exercises until the institution gains appropriate experience to take on self-validation. Such cooperation in academic development can be of great assistance in improving the quality of tertiary education.

Achieving Rapid Yet Orderly Growth

A major aspect of this cooperation for the HKCAA over the next few years is to assist the Hong Kong institutions as they plan to meet the government's ambitious targets for increase in student numbers. The increases are intended to meet the growing demand for a highly qualified work force, and to offset the loss of graduates through emigration. The UPGC funded institutions are growing rapidly, from 36000 FTE students in 1988-89 to a figure of 49000 planned for 1993-94. In October 1989, the government announced a major upward adjustment to these targets, and is now aiming for 59000 students in 1994/95. This will more than double the number of first year first degree places from 7000 to 15000 between 1990/ 91 and 1994/95 and provide degree places for 18 per cent of the 17-20 age group.

Pause a moment and contemplate just what such relative increases entail in academic and support staff, extra laboratory places, library seats and computers. Certainly Hong Kong is not short of money: the

¹⁰ G Chernay, *Accreditation and the Role of the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation*, COPA, 1989.

surplus for the 1989/90 financial year was HK\$11 billion (A\$2 billion). Furthermore, education is a high priority, with 17 per cent of government spending (HK\$13 billion) going on education in 1989/90. However, even if the money is available, providing the new buildings, staff and equipment takes time (and HKU and CUHK are not well-endowed with space for expansion).

The government plans to achieve the increase by spreading it across the six UPGC-funded institutions and upgrading a currently diploma-awarding post-secondary college. In the case of the CPHK and HKP, some of the increase will be extra students, and some will be at the expense of current non-degree places, which will be taken up by the Vocational Training Council, the equivalent of TAFE which therefore has to be funded for expansion in turn.

It would theoretically be possible to achieve the increase without introducing new courses, by simply increasing class sizes in existing courses. While there will be such increases, it would be irresponsible of the institutions not to introduce new courses needed by Hong Kong and, of course, the institutions all have pet projects they are longing to introduce. Such a large, rapid and widespread change can be quite destabilising. Institutions can lose a feel for what they are doing, and standards can slip. The HKCAA can help here by providing external reference points. As a practical expedient, the HKCM will often use the same panel for validating similar courses at different institutions, and this is a valuable means of ensuring comparability between institutions (compare the AVCC standards panels).

Degrees and Diplomas

The polytechnics in Hong Kong aspire to university status and merit it as much as some of Australia's brand new universities. The universities in Hong Kong have no sub-degree programs, and there are very few such programs in any British universities or polytechnics. The Hong Kong polytechnics therefore hoped to pass on all their sub-degree work to the Vocational Training sector in the short term, and have been disappointed by the government's decision to permit them to increase their numbers of degree students to a maximum of only 65 per cent by 1994/95. It is interesting to note in the Unified National System there is a large amount of non-degree work in universities, even though this is incompatible with the AVCC's definition of a university.¹¹ The definition emphasises the search for knowledge, free enquiry, publications, and the research record and capabilities of the staff. If the staff of an institution are appropriate to meet these criteria, it is not appropriate for the institution to have more than a small proportion of non-degree programs. At least one of the Hong Kong polytechnics is proposing to restructure itself into a degree and a non-degree college: just the opposite of Australia's current drive to amalgamate unlike institutions!

Enhancement of International Prestige

Some institutions have been established for centuries and have built individual reputations they are unlikely to lose at least in the short term, even if the quality of some of their programs does deteriorate. Conversely, newer institutions established in the last 30 years can find it difficult to establish an international, or even national reputation, even if they concentrate their efforts in a few disciplines. If, for example, a new college or university develops a good geography department, it can take a long time for this to become known to people outside the academic geography fraternity. If, however, a country has an accrediting agency with clear goals and procedures and internationally recognised standards of assessment, this will be reflected in the acceptance of and attitude towards the institutions it accredits, and will assist the more rapid recognition of new institutions.

This benefit is certainly a central aspiration of the Hong Kong government in establishing the HKCAA and encouraging it to develop contacts with the Hong Kong universities. It is important for all the Hong Kong tertiary institutions to become known, accepted and respected on the world scene, and to build up a network of contacts with other institutions before 1997 to avoid their being submerged in the Chinese tertiary system thereafter.

Autonomy versus Accountability

¹¹ Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, *The Nature of a University*, 1989.

It is sometimes claimed an external reviewing agency of whatever kind is inimical to the autonomy of the tertiary institution. Ultimately, there is no one correct resolution to this dilemma, which is analogous to the dilemma of the rights of the individual versus the rights of society. Just as in this analogous situation, the emphasis will be different in different societies, and will move with time even in one society. Again, as in the analogy, institutional autonomy cannot be absolute. This having been admitted, it is to the institutions' advantage to take the initiative in proposing or establishing their review or control mechanisms. This is what the United Kingdom universities have done in setting up their Academic Audit Unit. Any degree-granting institution should be willing to take part in the sort of review proposed by the AAU.

Conclusion

A responsible external accrediting agency, not involved in individual course validation but carrying out periodic institutional and/or subject reviews, would have the benefits of quality assurance and institutional development and a coherent approach to these matters. It is the HKCAA's aim to realise these benefits, as well as achieving the other goals outlined above. It is hoped the international approach adopted in doing this will establish the quality of Hong Kong tertiary education as an undisputed feature of the world higher education scene.