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Bringing in the Global Talents - Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme (16-12-2010)

Since rolling out of the "Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme", I have been frequently asked about whether this Scheme – which aims at attracting top students in the world to enhance the quality of research students in our local institutions – can essentially serve its purpose on strengthening our capacity in academic research, and whether public money spent on the Scheme does benefit the Hong Kong community. It is hard to jump to any conclusion whence the awardees of the first round have just started their Phd studies. Having said that, allow me to share with you some observations on how we have been implementing the Scheme.

To ensure high quality of the awardees, applicants for the Scheme must receive nomination from the institution before they can be shortlisted to the final selection stage. And institutions must make their nominations on the basis of the Scheme's assessment criteria, i.e. academic performance, research ability & potential, communication and leadership ability. Only excellent and outstanding candidates among their peers would be nominated.

148 out of 3,000 applicants selected

The nomination list would then be submitted to a selection panel, comprising professionals from top-ranked institutions around the world as well as local reviewers who were sophisticated in recruiting PhD students, for consideration. To ensure a fair and impartial process, a blind review approach was adopted. The names of the nominating institutions were concealed in the application materials so that local reviewers would only make selections on the basis of merit and quality of each applicant. As for the overseas reviewers, I would ask two questions: whether these candidates are top students among their international peers? If so, will you admit them if they apply for the PhD programs of your institutions? The applicant would meet the basic requirement only if both answers are affirmative.

Having gone through the aforementioned selection process, 148 awardees were selected out of 3,000 applications. It's a shame that 42 have declined the offer in favour of scholarships offered by other leading universities. Nevertheless, we do respect their decisions. In fact, the same situation happens to other renowned scholarship programmes as well.

The stipend awards under Hong Kong PhD Scholarship is comparable to that of our counterparts. For this reason, some people are worried that the awardees, who are not required to stay in Hong Kong, will leave for good upon their completion of their study without making any contribution to our community. Hong Kong is an open economy upholding the principle of academic freedom. We should respect the choice of the awardees. That said, the improving research conditions and environment shall attract the awardees to stay after completion of their study as they are getting to adapt and integrate into the local life. For those who choose to leave Hong Kong, they will serve as a link fostering cooperation between Hong Kong and various regions in the world.

The Scheme to be developed into a Prestigious Brand



We have organized a tea reception earlier so that the awardees, members of the Research Grants Council, and representatives of the institutions could gather together. That was the first time I personally met with the awardees. I was deeply impressed with these sagacious and brilliant individuals from 20 different countries/regions. Among these awardees, one of them is a local student who is under the supervision of the newly conferred "L'OREAL - UNESCO for Women in Science Award" laureate Professor Vivian Yam. Some of the awardees from overseas however did share that, while they could cope well with their studies, they would still need more time and support to adapt to a new environment. Why not showing our hospitality to these overseas students so as to make Hong Kong their home away from homes.

As the first round of awardees getting on well with their studies, we picked up our success this year and visited 24 renowned universities in nine South American and European countries to promote the second round of the Scheme. We will continue to join hands with our institutions to make the Scheme a success; hoping that the "Hong Kong PhD Scholarship Scheme" could be developed into a prestigious brand in the global higher education sector in five to ten years' time, and much sought after by brilliant students around the world; thereby strengthening Hong Kong's status as an international education hub.



Professor Roland Chin
Chairman
Research Grants Council

(Translated from the Chinese version)