

The speech of the President and Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Mathieson to the Court (December 17, 2015).

First, I want to personally thank all the staff, students, alumni and friends of the University for all their support and for all their hard work in advancing the best interests of Hong Kong U. The twelve months since last year's meeting of Court has been a very challenging period for everyone associated with this great University. There has been intense public and media scrutiny of decision-making in the University Council, there have been controversies around many issues and there have been challenges to the core values of the University. Throughout this period, I and the senior management team have stuck to our principles, remained politically neutral and continued to be driven by our commitment to maintain and enhance the high standards of excellence in teaching, research and knowledge exchange which characterize and define Hong Kong U and must continue to do so. The senior management team has been joined by 4 new members in 2015: together with the rest of the team and in consultation with the Faculty Deans, we have initiated bold reforming steps to address the University's future. The draft document that has been provided to Court members for today's meeting describes our current thinking on a high-level vision of the way forward. A previous version of the document has already been shared with Council and at that meeting I appealed to members to contribute to the vision and then to unite around its delivery. I make the same appeal to all members of the University today. I acknowledge that there will be a debate on some contentious issues later in today's meeting; we may have differences of opinion on the priorities or on how to address them: that is healthy, let's have a debate and reach a conclusion and then move on. Let's not have conflict and confrontation. It is time to put divisions behind us, to be unified by our shared passion for Hong Kong U and to move forward. In my opinion there has been far too much focus on individuals: who the Chancellor is and how he is selected, who will be the next Chair of Council, who is awarded honorary degrees, who is appointed to a vice-president post, who the President is and how long he will last etc, and not enough focus on the University as a whole. We must all remember that we are transient in the history of the University of Hong Kong. In another hundred years this University will still be here striving for excellence. Our job is to nurture and protect the legacy of the University, its current activities and its future strategic development. We should shift the focus from individuals and get it back onto the University. The new strategic plan, and the major capital campaign that we propose to mount alongside it, can be the catalysts for a new positive energy, so that we can achieve the aim of making the University of Hong Kong Asia's global university and one of the world's greatest universities.

In my speech to Court a year ago, I commented on the need for greater strategic coordination. You will have seen that the new plan centres around 3+1 Is: Internationalisation, Innovation and Interdisciplinarity, all converging on Impact. With each of the new vice-presidents leading on a key area, we have started work under these headings. A major part of the work that our Vice-President for Teaching and Learning, Ian Holliday, has completed this year was around the assessment visits by the Quality Assurance Council (QAC) which last visited HKU in 2009. Ian and many colleagues did an enormous amount of work preparing the submission documents and interacting with the visiting team, which included local and international experts. We do not yet have their full report but the initial comments were generally very positive. Our

Academic Development Proposal 2016-2019 was submitted to the UGC in February and included bold commitments to provide opportunities in the Mainland and overseas to 50% of our undergraduate students by 2019 and 100% by 2022 and to double our number of joint or dual degrees with highly selected overseas partner universities. These are important planks of the first of the Is, Internationalization, which is an essential component of enhancing our standing in the world. We believe that there are sound educational reasons for ensuring that our students have international experience and that this will help us to ensure that our graduates are equipped to be global citizens. The new opportunities that we will create don't all have to be study exchanges or joint degrees. Living in diverse geographical and cultural settings, working in schools, charities or social enterprises, or doing internships or research attachments can all make massive contributions to personal development. We believe it will be good for our students to get outside their comfort zones, experience adversity, take calculated risks and test themselves in challenging situations. Thus it is that the future global leaders will be born.

However, that is not enough: internationalization must also start at home here on campus. We have a truly international staff and a diverse student body. We have a constant stream of international conferences and symposia in the University, numerous distinguished international professors visiting under our various schemes, huge numbers of international collaborations in research and teaching. We must ensure that we have an international approach to all that we do, bench-marking ourselves against international best practices and aspiring to achieve characteristics which define the world's greatest universities.

The second I is innovation: in teaching and learning, we are actively developing our electronic learning capability, led by Associate VP Ricky Kwok, including the development of MOOCs (massive open online courses) but also SPOCs (small private online courses), 'flipped classrooms' where students study teaching materials electronically before the classes and then use the class time with the teachers to debate and understand the materials. As we come to the end of the first four year undergraduate cohort, we will evaluate our core curriculum and our general education provision, learning lessons, innovating where necessary to ensure that we provide exactly what our students need.

We must also innovate in research: our work here is being led by our new Vice-President for Research Andy Hor, a Hong Konger with many years of experience in Singapore where innovation and tech transfer are stronger than in Hong Kong. There is a real mood in Hong Kong now for innovation to be the key to the city's future. We have already played a leading role in this. Our Dreamcatchers event in May brought together some of the region's most successful entrepreneurs including Pony Ma with over 1000 students, staff, alumni and friends of Hong Kong U. The event highlighted ways forward that we are following up: the creation of an Entrepreneurship Academy and working with the government, Cyberport and the Science Park to ensure that our students and staff have access to all the opportunities created by the new drive to support Innovation.

The third I is Interdisciplinarity: we prize this in all that we do. We have numerous examples of interdisciplinary teaching and research already, for example the Social Sciences Faculty working with Law on aspects of public policy, the Architecture Faculty working with Medicine and with

Dentistry on the public health implications of urban design etc, but we want more: we are creating budget incentives to favour even greater interdisciplinary working, between departments, across Faculties and with outside parties.

These three intersecting Is, internationalisation, innovation and interdisciplinarity, all converge on the fourth I, impact. Impact is the aim of everything that we do: we have a social and moral responsibility to ensure that this is the case. All of us want our efforts to make a difference: to our subject area, to society and to our own personal and professional development. By assessing impact, we justify the investment of public money in our activities, as well as the massive investment of time and energy that a modern university demands and expects from its members.

So how are we doing? I recently presented to the Senior Management Team and subsequently to Council some analysis of the major international league tables over the last 11 years. I won't reiterate now my views on rankings, which are well-known and on the public record, except to say that I stand by my assertion that we will never set institutional strategy to meet the criteria of any particular league table. However, rankings are here to stay and we all know that they are widely used as a short cut: by prospective students, parents, governments and media. They are a surrogate for a university's international reputation.

The first point to make is that Hong Kong U's position now is quite similar to its position in the first rankings which were published 11 years ago jointly by the Times Higher Education Supplement (THE) and the Quacquerelli-Symonds (QS). We were ranked number 39 in 2004, compared to 30 and 44 in the most recent 2015 rankings from the QS and THE respectively. In the 11 intervening years, there has been quite a lot of fluctuation, some of it undoubtedly explained by the frequent methodological changes which provide one reason why rankings are so controversial and open to various interpretations. Hong Kong U's peak position was eight years ago in 2007 when HKU was ranked number 18 in the world. Stanford that year was number 19, so you can make up your own mind about whether that high point flattered HKU or not. The very next year, 2008, HKU dropped 8 places to number 26 (Stanford rose slightly to 17). In 2010, the two rankings agencies split and used slightly different methodologies but since then both of them show a definite slow downward trend for HKU, starting in 2011 in the QS and in 2010 in the Times Higher. There are various possible contributors to this: student-staff ratios influence the rankings and the 334 transition adversely affected these because the increased number of students was not accompanied by a commensurate increase in staffing. The fact that Chinese U and Hong Kong UST showed similar trends in this time period supports this as a contributor. Hong Kong U also had the possible impact on its reputation of the 818 incident in 2011. The fact that HKUST jumped above HKU in one of the rankings this year (the QS) has caused a lot of comment: in fact QS themselves said that this was largely explicable by a change in methodology, where an adjustment was made for the presence or absence of a medical school because having a medical school was deemed to give an unfair advantage via an effect on citations and other prestige indicators. Accordingly, HKU dropped by 2 places and CUHK by 5 places (it is noteworthy that Yale also dropped by 5 places), with HKUST rising by 12 places: sudden changes like this in rankings usually reflect methodological changes because reputations don't usually change overnight. It is worth noting that in the other major league

table, the Times Higher, between 2014 and 2015, HKU actually did the best of the three local universities, dropping by 1 place compared to a drop of 8 places for HKUST and 9 places for CUHK.

Of course we have no way of knowing what effect recent events in Hong Kong will have on next year's and the year after's rankings: we will just have to wait and see. However, there is clear evidence that Hong Kong U's position has deteriorated slowly but steadily for the last 4 or 5 years. We need to turn it around by enhancing the University's international reputation: that is one reason why internationalization is so prominent in our plans. The other, better reason, is of course that internationalization will enhance the quality of our teaching and our research.

I am on record as saying that the ranking that matters the most to me is the fact that Hong Kong's brightest and best students continue to vote with their feet and want to come to Hong Kong U as their first choice for their university studies. The 2015 admissions results from the Hong Kong DSE, which accounts for about 75% of our undergraduate intake, were truly spectacular. There was a total of 12 students that scored perfect results, 5** in seven subjects: all 12 of these students were admitted to Hong Kong U. Even more impressively, of the 689 students in the top scoring bracket, nearly 60% were admitted to Hong Kong U, ie only 40% went to all other universities combined. Of those wanting to study Medicine, 82% chose Hong Kong U. Of those wanting to study Law, an incredible 98% (102 out of 104) chose to come to Hong Kong U's Law Faculty rather than the other Law Schools available to them in Hong Kong. This was an outstanding vote of confidence in the educational provision offered by our University. I am proud of the fact that we don't just admit students from privileged backgrounds: our First in Family scheme for all subjects and the Springboard scholarships offered by the Faculty of Medicine are examples of ways in which we ensure that Hong Kong U is accessible to the brightest and best students irrespective of their backgrounds or their family's wealth.

Our researchers have also had an excellent year: numerous high-level publications in the world's top journals, conference presentations at top international events, prizes and awards. To mention just a selected few, the Thomson-Reuters 2015 list of the world's most highly cited researchers included nine academics from Hong Kong U, compared to 5 in the previous year; no other university in Hong Kong had more than 3. Vivian Yam, our Professor of Chemistry was elected Foreign Member of Academia Europaea (The Academy of Europe), the only Foreign Member elected in 2015 under the Chemical Sciences Section of the Academy; she also won the 2015 Ludwig Mond award from the Royal Society of Chemistry. Chi-ming Che, also Professor of Chemistry, completed the licensing of two multi-million US dollar patents to Samsung for his work on organic light-emitting diodes, bringing money as well as prestige to Hong Kong U. Vivian and Chi-ming were amongst the 27 founding members of the newly established Hong Kong Academy of Sciences, together with Malik Peiris and KY Yuen (who were both amongst the top 1% highly cited researchers that I mentioned earlier) as well as two distinguished visiting professors to Hong Kong U, one alumnus of ours and three retired members of HKU staff including of course my predecessor Lap-Chee Tsui who is the founding Dean of the new Academy. Thus HKU has a direct claim on 10 of the 27 Founding members, far more than any other university. Just last night, we announced that Professor So Kwok-fai of our

Department of Ophthalmology, has been named a Fellow of the National Academy of Inventors. Most spectacularly of all, Ngai-ming Mok, our Professor of Mathematics, has just been confirmed as a new member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the only Hong Kong scholar to have been elected this year, our first formal academician for 12 years and the first of any kind for 5 years, bringing to 12 the total number of Hong Kong U staff to have held this prestigious honour. My sincere congratulations to Ngai-ming.

I said last year that we would make progress on our work in the Mainland. One example is the HKU-Shenzhen Hospital: I have worked hard with colleagues here and in Shenzhen to improve the understanding of the aims and methods that will help both HKU and the Shenzhen government to achieve their goals. The first repayment of HKU's financial contribution has now been made by the hospital and a repayment schedule has been set that will see the debt fully repaid as the hospital's activity levels continue to rise and diversify. I am delighted that Hong Kong U medical, nursing and pharmacy students are now regularly benefiting from the teaching opportunities available to them at our hospital in Shenzhen. Research opportunities in Shenzhen are also growing. Our new Vice-President (Global) John Kao is working hard on our partnerships in the Mainland as well as other links all around the world. Our Vice-President (Institutional Advancement Douglas So has produced a new branding and marketing strategy and is working on the more proactive communications approach that I talked about last year. Our Executive Vice-President (Administration) Steve Cannon is addressing some of the issues that I highlighted last year by bringing forward radical reforms of various aspects of human resources policy and practice as well as new approaches to providing equitable access to staff accommodation for as many of our staff as possible. We are making progress on gender equity issues: we have improved our maternity leave provision, we are working on improving facilities for breast-feeding on campus and we are actively planning a nursery for children of staff and students. Our most recent appointment to the senior team, our new Associate Vice-President for Research, is female (Mai Har Sham). We are working with the other UGC-funded institutions to understand why the gender balance at the highest levels of the universities in Hong Kong is so poor. We need culture change across the sector to address this and I will continue to work with the United Nations Women HeForShe initiative to learn from other universities and from corporations across the world about how we can adopt best practices in this domain. UN Women's next meeting on HeForShe will be at the World Economic Forum in Davos next year. I have also been invited to the main Forum in Davos and it will be the first time that Hong Kong U has been represented at this prestigious gathering of thought leaders from politics, business, academia, media and international society. This follows from my attendance at the so-called "summer Davos" meeting of the World Economic Forum in Dalian in September and is a marker of Hong Kong U's international recognition.

I want to finish by saying something about academic freedom and institutional autonomy. These two terms are often confused or used interchangeably and they should not be, because they are different. Academic freedom is the critical underpinning of university life: the freedom to study, research, read, write and/or talk about whatever subjects that we find most interesting, stimulating or important, no matter how controversial they might be or how the findings may challenge dogmas or official viewpoints. In my opinion, academic freedom is alive and well at Hong Kong U. We do not however have complete institutional autonomy and nor

can we expect it. We are a publicly funded institution and it is entirely appropriate that we are responsible to the public, and hence to the government that represents them, to assess, justify and adjust our activities according to societal impact and need. Publicly-funded institutions all over the world have similar responsibilities: look at recent events in universities in the UK, the US, Canada and Japan or schools in Korea: none of them have complete institutional autonomy, so no-one in Hong Kong should think that this issue is purely a local matter. We have to work within existing rules, regulations and governance structures to ensure that the University of Hong Kong achieves its potential. It is healthy to have debate about whether any of those structures should be changed, but structural change takes time and the University cannot stand still whilst these debates take place. We are not doing so: as I have illustrated to you, substantial progress is already being made and we have a detailed plan for the strategic direction that we believe is in the best interests of the university going forward.

My last word is on our students. There seems to be a widespread belief in Hong Kong that school and university students, and perhaps Hong Kong U students more than most, are difficult, rebellious, subversive trouble-makers: this is just not true and I need all of you to join me in countering this misinterpretation. The vast majority of Hong Kong students are hard-working, conscientious and respectful of authority. They are talented individuals working to improve themselves and society. No-one in Hong Kong should think that student activism is only a Hong Kong issue. In recent months there have been massive student demonstrations in universities in the United States about issues of race and fossil fuel divestment and in South Africa about issues of tuition fees, closing universities down in some cases. Our young people are passionate and idealistic and they care about the world that they are inheriting. We may disagree with some of their methods, but we should work with them, understand them, help to mould them into a generation of mature adults that can address the challenging issues facing their world. We must ensure that Hong Kong U is a place where complex and sometimes controversial issues can be debated, where differences of opinion can be respected, where diversity is celebrated, and intellectual, personal, professional and political advances can be achieved.

Our strategy document uses the strapline “Asia’s global university”. I have outlined some of the ways in which we are working to justify that title. Your input will help me and the rest of the senior management team to achieve our vision. Our university is already great: let’s make it one of the greatest.

We are on our way: please join us!

Thank you.