

Dr Alice Piera Lam Lee Kiu-yue GBS, JP

DOCTOR OF LAWS *honoris causa*

Address

Chancellor, Council Chairman, President and honoured guests,

I am privileged to address you, on behalf of all recipients of this wonderful gesture of recognition—an honorary degree from Lingnan University. It is a great honour to be granted an honorary degree and we all wish to thank the University for its generosity and for the very kind words spoken about each of us.

Being given this opportunity to speak, I should like to focus on two important elements in the progress of higher education in Hong Kong. Higher education has long been close to my heart and I must say Hong Kong has come a very long way in the last 15 years or so. We really can hold our heads up and look other world class systems in the eye. This has been due to the hard work of all concerned in higher education—and due to the strong support of the government in providing a decent level of funding which universities can rely on. In a small way, I believe I have been able to help in two important elements of this success—elements which I think will be crucial in maintaining and advancing our position as a world class system. These are internationalisation and quality assurance.

Internationalisation has long been one of my interests and concerns. It is vital—both for Hong Kong and for students' personal development—that Hong Kong students are exposed to other cultures and realities. We need this if we are to nurture mature, outward-looking residents who will feel comfortable—and be effective—in engaging not only with mainland China but also the rest of the world. Having an internationalised campus environment and the opportunity to go on student exchanges is crucial to that personal student development. The faculty—the academic staff—has an important role here. Faculty need to identify with the internationalisation theme, need to adjust the curricula to embrace it, and need to be aware of the different cultural needs of a mixed student population.

I started the push for internationalisation when I was the Chairman of the University Grants Committee (UGC) and I have been pleased to note that the UGC made internationalisation a central theme of its recent Higher Education Review, entitled “Aspirations for the Higher Education System in Hong Kong”. It is indeed a crucial area for our universities to focus on. As a small, intimate university, I think Lingnan has great potential to excel here: with the close interaction between your multicultural staff and the student body; with hostel life for almost all students, local and non-local alike; and with the opportunity for local students to go on overseas exchanges, probably at a level well beyond what bigger universities may be able to achieve. This will give Lingnan students an extra edge—and a more rounded character.

Quality assurance is a key element to the success of any education system and higher education is no different. It is more complex in universities because one of the important defining characteristics of universities is precisely that they are free to set their own curricula and standards. But the public must be assured that universities are setting appropriate goals and outcomes—and achieving them. Large amounts of public money are being invested, and the careers and opportunities of countless students depend on rigorous quality assurance. It is an inconvenient truth, however, that universities (and faculty) tend to judge themselves in terms of their research quality and output, rather than on teaching quality and output or outcomes. The Quality Assurance Council (QAC) is an essential factor in ensuring balance between research and teaching, as it is focused solely on the taught programmes being offered.

The UGC has a long history of working with institutions to drive quality, but I believe we made a considerable breakthrough with the establishment of the QAC a few years ago. This relatively new Council for Hong Kong has quickly made its mark in reviewing the quality of all UGC-funded institutions—the last review just being completed. It is a partnership relationship with institutions, designed to encourage them to strive for the best they can achieve, and to put the student at the centre of the institutional endeavour.

Putting the student at the centre of the institutional endeavour is something Lingnan takes firmly to heart. It is wonderful that in Hong Kong we have a true liberal arts university whose mission is to provide, and I quote from your Mission Statement: “a whole person approach to education which enables its students to think, judge, care and ultimately, act responsibly in the changing circumstances of Hong Kong, the region and the world.”

I can think of no more fitting way to conclude my thanks to the University for the honour it has bestowed on us recipients today.

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