

## **Bauhinia Foundation Research Centre calls for deepening cross-boundary education cooperation**

(7 April 2009) Releasing its “Hong Kong-Shenzhen Education Cooperation” study reports today, the Bauhinia Foundation Research Centre (BFRC) called for enhancing Hong Kong’s long-term competitiveness and consolidating its role as a regional education hub through realizing the potentials of the education markets in Hong Kong and Shenzhen.

The BFRC study commenced in March 2008 with participation of the Department of Education of Hong Kong Baptist University and China Development Institute of Research in Shenzhen. With seven thematic studies conducted in Hong Kong and Shenzhen, the one-year research project included in-depth interviews with education officials, experts, academics, administrators and managers of educational organizations and teachers in both cities. Together with findings from a survey on 1,177 cross-boundary families, in which both the child and parent participated, the study aims at providing a comprehensive, objective and solid basis for informed discussions in the community.

“Hong Kong-Shenzhen Education Cooperation” is a follow-up study on the BFRC’s “Hong Kong-Shenzhen Metropolis” released in 2007. Against the backdrop of Shenzhen’s surging education demand resulting from its rapid development, Hong Kong has a lot to offer in terms of its high quality and internationally recognized education resources.

The BFRC Chairman and Study Group Convenor Mr Anthony Wu Ting-yuk said, “Education is an important component of a city’s long-term competitiveness whether to Hong Kong, Shenzhen or the entire Pearl River Delta region. In spite of the enormous market potentials, there exist legal and regulatory constraints as well as discrepancies in curricula and qualifications, which hinder the development of a Hong Kong-Shenzhen education hub.”

Statistically, many more Shenzhen and mainland students have chosen to study in Europe, the United States or Singapore than in Hong Kong.

“As a world-class metropolis and a regional education hub, it is important that Hong Kong embraces a more inclusive outlook on student intake to capture not only overseas, but also mainland markets,” Mr Wu added.

The report has come up with policy recommendations covering six main areas, namely, laws and regulations, cross-boundary and basic education, university education, vocational education and professional and international examinations.

### **Laws and regulations**

At present, Hong Kong educational institutions set up in the Mainland are governed by foreign-related laws and regulations, which have caused practical difficulties in enrolments and operations. It will be in the best interest of Hong Kong and Shenzhen to find ways to remove such institutional constraints.

Mr Wu said, “The key is to introduce changes to the existing regulatory regime in the Mainland. We suggest taking out Hong Kong and Macao from the ‘foreign’ category and providing adequate legal basis for Hong Kong and Macao’s educational institutes to operate on the Mainland, especially in Guangdong.”

According to the BFRC study, the University of Macau's plan to set up a Zhuhai campus is a case relevant to Hong Kong's educational institutes.

### **Cross-boundary and basic education**

The number of cross-boundary students has increased by 68% over the past six years, from 3,490 in 2001/2002 to 6,869 in 2008/2009. In response to this rapidly emerging social issue, the BFRC has incorporated "cross-boundary students' learning and adaptation" as part of the research to pioneer a quantitative study into the subject.

Our survey on cross-boundary families showed that, on average, 65% of the cross-boundary students and 75% of their parents regard "transport and cross-boundary arrangements" as their primary concern. 70% of cross-boundary primary school students spend less than an hour on traffic while 83% of cross-boundary secondary school students spend 30 minutes to 1.5 hour on the road.

Survey findings showed that 65% of the cross-boundary students and 77% of their parents feel bothered by the need to "adapt to different lifestyles" owing to differences between the two societies. Over 6,000 cross-boundary students are brought to the customs either by their parents or by nanny vans. They are then taken through customs clearance by staff of Hong Kong schools or by nannies. Cross-boundary students also face a range of learning and adaptation problems, including the need to integrate into Hong Kong society, pressure from school, personal growth problems, and the difficulties involved in joining extra-curricular activities.

Mr Wu said, "The Government's improvement measures on cross-boundary students, such as setting up student e-Channels and increasing the quota for cross-boundary buses are indeed effective. But of particular concern to us is the rapid increase in the number of cross-boundary students; a quarter of them are kindergarten students."

The study suggests improving cross-boundary traffic layout to smoothen transportation arrangements of cross-boundary studying. Amongst the measures proposed in the report are setting up of a cross-boundary school bus centre in the port area of Liantang-Heung Yuen Wai and modification of traffic networks for easier passage of coach-sized school buses.

In the meantime, the government should look into the feasibility of some long-term solutions, including providing Hong Kong-style classes or setting up Hong Kong-style schools in Shenzhen, building boarding schools in North District and subsidizing welfare agencies to provide social support services for Hong Kong students residing in Shenzhen.

The report also suggests opening up Hong Kong's basic education market to Shenzhen students along a user-pay principle, as part of the measures to address the issue of oversupply of primary and secondary school places in Hong Kong.

### **University education**

Survey results showed that over 82% of Shenzhen parents are willing to send their children to study in Hong Kong universities. Meanwhile, 31% of the Shenzhen families surveyed can afford an annual tuition expenditure of \$20,000 - \$50,000; some parents (i.e. 3.4%) are willing to pay over \$100,000 on annual tuition. However, over 60% of Shenzhen parents are worried about the

incompatibility of curricula between Hong Kong and Shenzhen, the lack of articulation agreement between the two cities as well as the difficulties their children may face catching up with Hong Kong's pace of learning.

Mr Wu added, "A majority of Shenzhen parents have confidence in Hong Kong's education system, not least because of its English learning environment and the internationally recognized academic qualifications. As a first step, Hong Kong should 'export' education programmes or expert knowledge to Shenzhen and other mainland cities through the establishment of a 'Hong Kong-Shenzhen Education Circle'."

The report also points out that Hong Kong should seek to obtain the Central Government's approval and support from the Guangdong government, enabling tertiary institutes of Hong Kong to set up wholly-owned, autonomous branches or campuses in Shenzhen. Hong Kong and Shenzhen governments can agree on a special enrolment quota specifically for Shenzhen students.

### **Vocational education**

Shenzhen is in great demand for professional talents to match its economic transformation into high-end services, and market demands for vocational training in Shenzhen are enormous. This can become an important market for Hong Kong's vocational training institutes.

The report suggests Shenzhen set up a Shenzhen Vocational Training Council to integrate vocational training institutes and conduct qualification accreditations, making the system compatible with Hong Kong's. Both cities can consider jointly developing a system for vocational training in the region. Hong Kong may "export" vocational training programmes and standards to Shenzhen through cooperation amongst training institutes, schools and enterprises.

### **Professional and international examinations**

Amongst various types of education cooperation between Hong Kong and Shenzhen, survey findings show that Shenzhen parents are most interested in having their children take part in Hong Kong-organized international and professional examinations conducted in Shenzhen; about 80% of Shenzhen parents are willing to let their children sit for such examinations. Professional and international examination services of Hong Kong are scarce educational resources in the mainland with potential market demands.

Mr Wu believed that Hong Kong and Shenzhen should joint hands to develop examination services, there will also be a take-off in examination training services; these will likely enhance Hong Kong's role as a regional education hub.

The report suggests Hong Kong working with the Guangdong Province, forming an examination authority based in Shenzhen and organizing professional and international examinations to people in Shenzhen as well as the Pearl River Delta region. The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority may also consider setting up offices in the Loop area to provide registration and advisory services, enabling Hong Kong and Shenzhen to become important channels of participation in professional and international examinations.

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