

LCQ15: Employment of academic staff by post-secondary institutions

Following is a question by the Hon Ip Kin-yuen and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (November 7):

Question:

Regarding the employment of academic staff by universities funded by the University Grants Committee, by departments of self-financing programmes of those universities and by self-financing post-secondary institutions, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it knows if the various institutions have formulated retirement policies applicable to academic staff; if they have, of (i) the retirement ages, and (ii) the policy concerning applications for further appointment by staff members who have reached the retirement age (including the maximum number of years for which they may be further appointed);
- (2) whether it knows the respective highest, lowest and median ages of those academic staff members in the various institutions who retired in each of the past five academic years (with a breakdown by gender, as well as the institution and faculty to which they belonged);
- (3) whether it knows, among the academic staff members on tenure employment in the various institutions, the numbers and percentages of those who departed in each of the past five academic years (with a breakdown by gender, as well as the institution and faculty to which they belonged);
- (4) whether it knows the numbers of academic staff members at the rank of Associate Professor or above newly employed by the various institutions in each of the past five academic years, and their percentages in the total numbers of academic staff (with a breakdown by gender, as well as the institution and faculty to which they belonged); and
- (5) how the Government ensures that the various institutions, when dealing with matters on the promotion of academic staff members and further appointment of those who have reached the retirement age, treat persons of different age, gender, race and family status fairly and in a manner which is free from the influence of political factors?

Reply:

President,

The eight University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded universities (including their self-financing arms) are independent autonomous bodies

established pursuant to their respective ordinances and each has a council to serve as the supreme governing body. The respective ordinances and statutes of the universities set out their objectives, functions and governance structure, and provide the universities with the power to carry out their objectives and functions.

The UGC's Notes on Procedures clearly state that UGC-funded universities enjoy autonomy in the development of curricula and academic standards, selection of staff and students, initiation and conduct of research, internal allocation of resources, etc., and they are accountable for their decisions in these matters. The UGC has all along supported and safeguarded academic freedom and institutional autonomy in accordance with the Notes on Procedures, in the context of appropriate financial and public accountability. Appointment, promotion and retirement of academic staff is a matter within the autonomy of the universities, and the Government and the UGC are not involved.

Based on their individual circumstances, all UGC-funded universities have their personnel policies and mechanisms for handling the appointment, promotion and retirement of academic staff taking into account the merits of the cases and teaching needs, with an appeal mechanism to ensure fairness and impartiality in the conduct of such matter. We understand universities have put in place relevant mechanism and procedures which have been made known to the staff through suitable channels, e.g. publication of internal circulars or the universities' intranets, etc. Universities will, on a need basis, review and enhance the relevant arrangements in a timely manner. Academic staff may convey their views, if any, to the universities and relevant committees through different channels.

As far as the self-financing post-secondary sector is concerned, the institutions are also highly autonomous in internal management. The Education Bureau (EDB) does not collect information requested in this question regularly, and does not issue guidelines to these institutions in relation to the appointment, promotion and retirement of their academic staff. The Committee on Self-financing Post-secondary Education published the "Code of Good Practices on Governance and Quality Assurance" in June 2015 for self-financing institutions' voluntary compliance. The Code contains the following two provisions, among others –

"3.1.1 Institutions should have a fair and transparent human resources system which includes policies such as, but not limited to, recruitment and appointment, appraisal, complaint/grievances, promotion and termination, as well as policies and measures to facilitate staff development and to encourage and recognise good performance.

3.2.2 Institutions should publish annually information on staffing (including academic staff profiles) and learning and teaching facilities available to support programme delivery and student admission targets."

In view of the question raised by Hon Ip Kin-yuen, the EDB has invited UGC-funded universities and self-financing post-secondary institutions to

respond. Information provided by the institutions which have provided responses is at Annex 1 to 21. It should be noted that the information originates from individual statistical systems of institutions. Since individual systems may adopt different basis for data collection, the figures reported by different institutions are not directly comparable.