In the previous issue of the Convocation Newsletter, I mentioned that the Standing Committee has appointed a task force to independently examine some of the strategic issues and challenges in the future development of the University. The project, code named Project Diamond, has now been completed and we have submitted the results to the University Council and the Senate for further consideration. We hope our recommendations have been constructive, and can be of some use in the strategic planning of the University.

The project has been developed as part of Convocation’s contribution to the University’s Centenary programme. Other Convocation events within the programme, as many of us will recall, have included the Convocation Talk “For China? For Hong Kong! Reflections on a Century of HKU” in March 2011, the Convocation Forum on “The Future of the University” in January 2012, and the Joint Convocation Conference on “The Roles of HKU & CUHK in China’s Development” in March 2012.

Project Diamond has focused on several main areas; namely, Core Values, Governance and Management, Nurturing of Leaders, China and Asia, and Alumni Relations. Some of the issues considered have been inspired by the report of the Council’s Review Panel on the 818 incident. Others have evolved from the Centenary Convocation events and after numerous discussions among alumni leaders and University teachers. A few highlights of the report are summarised in this section of the Newsletter.

This is the first time in years that Convocation has made a submission to the University, and we understand that the Council is taking a serious look at many of the issues we have raised, even setting up a task force to follow up. We commend the University for taking our submission seriously, and shall await its decisions and actions as events unfold. The University Affairs Subcommittee of the Convocation Standing Committee is considering a forum some time this year to further discuss some of the issues within a wider Convocation setting.

Many of us will have watched with interest the election of a Convocation member to the Selection Committee for the New Vice-Chancellor. For a change, the Convocation seat will be filled by direct election this time. I am sure the Selection Committee can help find a most respectable academic and an excellent and experienced administrator to lead the University forward.

The Convocation will shortly be inviting nominations to fill a number of seats on the Standing Committee. If you are willing and can afford the time to serve on our increasingly active Standing Committee, perhaps you could consider putting your names forward. The emphasis is on contribution. I would particularly encourage University teaching staff to consider running for a seat. Convocation is a platform for HKU alumni and academics and we need a stronger representation of teaching staff if we are to perform the roles expected of us. If you only have limited time available, you may wish to join one of our subcommittees, focusing on University, Community, and Alumni Affairs respectively. Do let us know if you are interested.

Convocation will be organising several events in the first half of the year. The University Affairs Subcommittee will be following up on Project Diamond, and is planning a second Joint Convocation Conference in April in collaboration with CUHK. It is hoped that this will gradually become a regular feature in future, possibly also involving the Convocations of other leading local universities. The Community Affairs Subcommittee will shortly start a “Meeting the Ministers” series to provide a platform for regular dialogues between public officials and Convocation members on major community issues of the day. The Alumni Affairs Subcommittee, on the other hand, will organise dinner talks in future to bring University teaching and administrative staff and key officers closer to our alumni leaders and members.

Through our efforts we hope to reach out more to our 150,000 members and help to enhance our alumni bonding with the University. Convocation does not seek to duplicate the excellent work being done by individual alumni bodies, particularly by HKUAA and HKUGA but, as an official body of the University, there are areas where Convocation is best positioned to cover. These relate, for example, to larger scale events or projects across faculty or hall affiliations, or to strategic matters which could proceed better with an official status. If you have any suggestions as to what Convocation could consider in future, please feel free to send us an email. One example, a Convocation Choir – any thoughts?

To all of us and our families, a Happy and Prosperous New Year of the Snake!
While HKU was celebrating its 100th Anniversary in 2011 and 2012, there was a growing urge among some alumni and staff that it was opportune for the University to reflect on its past and to deliberate on its future.

Forum Series on HKU Development

As part of its contributions towards the Centenary programmes, HKU Convocation embarked on a series of activities, which included the Convocation Talk “For China? For Hong Kong! Reflections on a Century of HKU” in March 2011, the Forum on “The Future of the University” in January 2012, and the Joint HKU-CUHK Convocation Conference on “The Roles of HKU & CUHK in China’s Development” in March 2012. These events featured guest speakers and participants who eagerly shared their views and suggestions on the past and future development of the University (the three events were respectively reported in the Summer 2011 and Summer 2012 issues of the Convocation Newsletter). Zealous discussions continued afterwards among different alumni groups.

Project Diamond

The appointment of a task force by the Standing Committee in January 2012 launched a study to explore some of the strategic issues the University is facing. The Task Force on the Future of HKU was mainly composed of current and past members of the Standing Committee, and the project was referred to as Project Diamond for convenience.

After a general scan of current issues of importance, the Task Force mapped out an overall approach and identified four focus areas for the project: i) core values; ii) governance and management; iii) positioning and direction; and iv) alumni relations. Its members set about to seek input from a large number of stakeholders, including current university leaders, academics and alumni of various generations, and they consulted relevant documents and reports, such as the Niland Report and the 818 Review Panel Report, among others. The aim was to build on ideas and recommendations made by various parties so as to present a studied and balanced view and to make useful recommendations.

Submission of The Report on The Future of HKU

The Task Force completed ‘The Report on the Future of The University of Hong Kong’, which was adopted in August 2012 by the Convocation Standing Committee. The Report was then submitted, in early November, 2012 to the Senior Management Team (SMT) and subsequently to the Council towards the end of the same month. We understand that both the SMT and the Council welcome the efforts made by the Convocation Standing Committee, and the Council has appointed a working group to recommend any follow-up actions in the coming months.

Recommendations on The Future of HKU

‘The Report on the Future of The University of Hong Kong’ by the Standing Committee, HKU Convocation starts off with a statement that the University must identify its potential for unique contributions to Hong Kong, China and the world. To sustain its leadership position, it must capitalise on its strengths as one of the most globally orientated institutions of higher learning in Asia. Indeed HKU must strive to be proactive, relevant, and on the cutting edge as an institution capable of survival and growth. This reflection and deliberation must be conducted with reference to its core values, vision and mission, and in the context of the global changes in the 21st century.

The following is a summary of the major recommendations in the report. The Report, together with the formal feedback from the SMT and the Council, will be available on the Convocation website after the Chinese New Year, 2013.

Consensus Building on the Core Values

1. Throughout its past one hundred years, HKU has never had an official core values statement. This has not prevented the University’s major stakeholders from upholding and practicing some shared core values like liberty, freedom, and diversity. With the increasing complexity and rapidity of global changes since the start of the 21st century, it is important that...
the University should conduct a consensus-building exercise through full consultation to formulate a clear core values statement with linked behaviours and actions. This statement can also serve as some form of Charter between the University and the community.

A Panel to Review Governance and Management Issues

2. There is an urgent need for the University to seek improvements in its governance and management, as some fundamental weaknesses have recently been exposed. This will help HKU better equip itself to meet the many challenges of the new century. The direction should be towards adapting the best practices and experiences of the corporate model coupled with the public governance model of accountability, transparency, efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness, and forward vision, so as to complement the traditional collegial model of shared governance. The Council should appoint an independent panel or a consultant firm as soon as possible to conduct a study in 2013 to come up with recommendations covering the Court, the Council, the Senior Management Team, Faculty Deans, Chair Professors, the administrative units, as well as the whole management system.

Nurturing 21st Century Leaders for Hong Kong, China and Asia

3. As a leading international university nurturing leaders in many fields, the University is required to regularly review its vision, mission and strategy in developing leaders to meet the changing needs of the globalised world. The importance of liberal education must be upheld, and its proportion and content areas in the overall curriculum can be further developed. It is recommended that the University should study the feasibility of adopting new ways, including the setting up of a new structural body such as a school of government, to develop 21st century leaders for Hong Kong, China and Asia through integrating the best elements of Eastern and Western civilisations.

Enhancing the Importance and Culture of Undergraduate Teaching and Learning

4. With the increasing worldwide recognition given to university rankings, research has become a dominant factor in the development strategy of excellent universities. But the importance of the fundamental purpose of university education for knowledge transmission, transformation and exchange, and character formation cannot be belittled. While HKU continues to seek excellence as a research-led university, it should place due emphasis on the development of innovative and effective strategies, policies and mechanisms to reinforce and enhance the importance and culture of undergraduate teaching and learning for whole-person development.

Potential to Excel in China and Asia Studies

5. The rise of Asia, in particular China, will be a dominant feature of the 21st century. As a leading international university, HKU is best positioned to capture the opportunities in the next decades to scale new heights and create impact in the future development of China and the neighbouring regions of Asia. Longer-term strategies should be formulated on the University’s “engagement with the rest of China”, while innovative and effective ways must be worked out to enable HKU to excel in China and Asia Studies, including the setting up of new institutes or units.

New Strategies to Develop Alumni Relations

6. The role of alumni in supporting the development of the University is well-recognised. To enhance the bonds with alumni, HKU needs to review its alumni affairs work and mechanisms for longer-term strategic development, which may include adopting new policies such as faculty-based alumni relations development, developing facilities like an Alumni Clubhouse, and further improving the Convocation Newsletter by changing it into a more relevant publication and an intellectual platform for alumni.