



Professor Gibson

1973 Volume 5 Issue 5

The Editorial Board

Research or Teaching?

What would be the first priority in this University — research or teaching?

I think we tend to give priority to teaching. I'm sure I do. I don't know about other departments but I think most teachers here feel that they have a considerable amount of responsibility to teaching and this comes before their responsibility to research. This is by no means a straightforward question. Research is justified in a university for a number of reasons and one of these is that it ought to produce and usually it does, more stimulating teachers.

The Honest Search for Truth?

But it appears research here are carried out for promotion of prestige purposes, rather than for the honest search for truth?

This is certainly true. Academic promotion depends to quite a large extent on research output, which is used to judge a man's interest in his subject. Research publications allow you to judge a man rather precisely because you can read his research publication and see what he has made of a particular problem. He is offering in fact evidence of his excellence in one particular area. So research activity is desirable, indeed necessary for people in universities if they seek promotion. But I don't think one should be too cynical about this...

Is the financial assistance offered by the University towards research activity sufficient?

Of course it's not sufficient but one must remember that research is open-ended, a bottomless pit if you like... But I think we are a little below a reasonable allocation...

Has the University provided the minimal basic equipment for research programmes?

In most departments we have the standard apparatus but a person may have some particular project which requires expensive pieces of apparatus which he does not find around. If there is such a thing as a basic acceptable minimal level, we have just about reached it but I am quite sure we haven't satisfied it but I am quite sure we haven't satisfied everyone's justifiable demands.

Equipment for students' use - is there some discrimination between clinical and preclinical departments? Somehow one feels clinical departments appear to be much more well equipped?

Clinical departments are of course departments for teaching in hospitals. The Queen Mary Hospital is a well equipped hospital for dealing with patients... Most of the research of the clinical departments is clinical research and clinical departments cannot fail to meet much of their requirements in ensuring that patients are properly treated. Another aspect of this is that in preclinical areas of research instrumentation is extremely expensive... Research is now a very professional type of activity as so much else... One is accustomed to being told that Fleming discovered Penicillin with a few simple petri dishes and not much other apparatus. The fact that a man can't discover penicillin or something like it with simple apparatus certainly does not show nowadays that he's an incompetent investigator. If you wish to stay ahead in modern advances, you have to have a fair amount of equipment, the nature and cost of which varies from department to department.

Second Class Courses?

We sometimes go into a department to be told that we are not supposed to become a pathologist, pharmacologist or whatever it happens to be. This appears to serve as an excuse to give students a second-class course on that

subject — on the grounds that we are not supposed to specialize in that subject at the moment — and that the main objective will be clinical practice and so anything unrelated to our future career would not deserve our attention?

I'm sure I've made remarks of this sort but I'm sorry if you've picked them up in that way. When a student has done a year of pathology and then come to this department later on as a doctor and when he has spent about five years in the department, he knows a fair amount of pathology. When I say our intention is not to make you pathologists in the undergraduate course, it is a simple realization that it can't be done - you are spending only one-sixth of the total period. We try to give you what will be useful in your other later courses... And to provide you with a background which, though undifferentiated, is nonetheless capable of development...

Granted the limitation in time, we go through our undergraduate course ended up in not knowing too much of this and too little of that.

I think that's a very justified remark in that as soon as you get interested in one subject your are whisked off to something else. But in fact you can't be a good pathologist unless you've done a certain amount of clinical practice, gynaecology and paediatrics included. You need really to get through this basic level of training that covers a wide variety of subjects before you are justified in specializing in any single one...

HKU How Attractive?

Will the quality of research activity affect the standard of staff the University attracts? And the fact that we receive below reasonable allocation for research allowances bears some repercussion? Say for example with a very primitive department we would not expect too many people applying for professorship in the light of the pitifully limited facilities?

I don't think our level of equipment is so low as to make this a major factor. I think as far as individuals coming to Hong Kong are concerned, the important thing to them is whether they want to work in Hong Kong or not... And they are not making the judgment so much on equipment as on any other things. Of course the better equipped a place is the more attractive it would be.

But wouldn't a person consider his professional prospect more seriously

rather than allow the particular geographic environment to be the major basis on which to make his decision ?

People come here or people leave here because there is some attraction somewhere else — equipment is only one of the things that they are likely to consider in this area. One reason for not coming to Hong Kong is that it is very difficult to attend a sufficient number of scientific meetings to keep you in the research swing...

A Second Medical School?

This I think is a political decision in that a second medical school would require a large outlay of government money. I don't know of any other source which would provide a sufficient amount of money to launch a second medical school. The government therefore has to decide whether they want it or not...

As there is a limited pool of qualified personnel the University can cater to, and in view of the fact that we experience so much difficulties in securing a new professor, how would a second medical school affect our faculty?

At that level we have seen it already with the start of the Chinese University. When the Chinese University opened up some of our trained staff went over to posts there. If a second medical school started up tomorrow, some of our trained staff would leave to take posts up there and we should find it difficult to replace them. But I hope this kind of argument will not be allowed to influence too great a decision on the right course.

Quadrennium Plan — Conservative?

Any drastic reform you have in mind during the period of your deanship?

It would be fair enough to say that our plans for the quadrennium 74-78 are fairly conservative. Possibly the most interesting element of these from the students' point of view is that they do contain some stress on improving audio-visual aids as a means of improving and directing attention towards teaching... We are still digesting a large intake, 150. This is still being absorbed into the system as it were. We are unlikely to embark on any of the extraordinary programmes and in many cases ill-thought out experiments in medical education which seem to be taking place in the United States.