

Installation of President
City University of Hong Kong
Speech by Professor Freddy Boey

Pro-Chancellor, Chairman, Members of the Council, Honoured Guests, Colleagues, and most important of all, our fellow students,

May I begin by first giving an exceptional tribute to Professor Way Kuo for his 15 years of leadership, during which time City University of Hong Kong became one of two universities in the world that has achieved the fastest upward trajectory in global university rankings. I have indeed been given the greatest honour by the Council to receive the baton from Professor Kuo.

I joined CityU in January 2023, more than four months before this installation. That allowed me to informally visit all 10 colleges and schools, including each of the 28 departments and individual faculty members of different seniority. I have also randomly chatted with undergrads and graduate students across the campus to understand their aspirations and concerns better. I also had a very interesting two-day retreat with a dozen administrative leaders. While there have been issues of concern, I observed in many staff and students a strong sense of pride and deep commitment to CityU.

While universities remain one of the most stable institutions in the world, universities worldwide face a future like no other before. Our students face a world today where the knowledge cycle has been dramatically shortened and digitisation has pervaded just about every aspect of our lives. They cannot be walking into lecture theatres and tutorial rooms to be immersed in traditional pedagogies and teaching methods that have not changed for centuries.

Universities today face the danger of educating students for tomorrow with yesterday's pedagogies and facilities. For centuries, we have assumed that good teaching is what matters. We conduct teaching feedback and design teaching pedagogies; effective learning would invariably follow. I don't think we can make that assumption today. Technology today has given learners huge levers to quickly acquire and even process content faster than we can lecture. If we are to prepare our students for a sustainable lifelong career and future, CityU must become more **learning centric than teaching centric**, embracing not just traditional institutional learning by lectures and tutorials,

but also inspirational learning, interactive learning and innovative learning. Inspirational learning sparks a passion that self-motivates students to learn, not to pass exams but to satisfy their curiosity. In my first month as an undergraduate, bored stiff by my chemical engineering lectures, out of curiosity, I ventured into the next-door class of just 10 students. This tall professor, Ian Polmear, was talking about how aeroplane wings actually bend in flight. I was so fascinated and inspired by this new knowledge that I stayed until the end of the lecture and switched to this course, Materials Science and Engineering. This inspiration has powered me all the way through my academic and inventive career till today, and I'm still going strong!

One of the greatest values we can impart to our students is to help them learn to work with and to learn from their future colleagues and peers. That is **interactive learning**: when *how* we learn is as important, and in future may be more important, than *what* we learn. In their future work life, our graduates' ability to work and learn within a team will help them in their careers to no end. Learning inside lecture theatres helps to pass exams, but learning outside helps to educate for life. **Innovative learning** exposes students to explore beyond academic boundaries and embrace inventions. You cannot lecture or set exams for these things, but you can empower students to experience them through internships. I have every intention to ensure CityU's students learn effectively institutionally, inspirationally, interactively and innovatively. It is my intent that CityU's students will not just get a great degree but also a wonderful and enduring education while here.

In the past, we differentiated between basic and applied research, the former perceived as more noble. Today, there is applied and yet to be applied research. Both for faculty and students, we need to encourage and incentivise research that leads to technological, economic or social impact. CityU cannot do research in everything, but whatever research our staff and students do, CityU will increase their batting average in translating into economic or social use.

CityU resides within probably the densest city in the world. Space will always be a problem. We will do what we can innovatively to mitigate this problem. Many top universities experience as severe a space problem as we do, but that has not stopped them from becoming the very best. Caltech, UCL and Imperial College London come to mind. They excel in their ability to draw and keep great faculty and student talent, despite their severe space constraints.

CityU is already a globally connected university, as befits its namesake, “Universe-city”. CityU also belongs to the local Hong Kong society she is in and from whom she receives funding. Engagement with the local community should not be only an option, but a core value, both to benefit the community around us and for us to educate our students about their social responsibilities. I hope to increase engagements with local schools and less advantaged communities.

In the spirit of Hong Kong’s enterprising mindset, I hope to transform the challenges we face into opportunities for CityU to lead rather than follow, and in so doing, redefine the role of universities for a future world. We will strive to find more space, hire better faculty and attract better students, produce better research and innovation outcomes, increase our international ranking all round, and move from a teaching- to a learning-centric environment. But all these are only the means to an end. And that end is to give hope to Hong Kong’s young people and others who join them from the region to realise their aspirations for a better future for themselves and the society they belong to.

Thank you.