

A pledge to look into passage row

The new Director of the Hongkong Polytechnic, Dr Keith Legg, yesterday pledged to give serious attention to the growing dissension between staff and management caused by disagreement over passage arrangements for the institution's 114 expatriate staff.

"I am not too familiar with the details, but I will certainly give it first priority," said Dr Legg, who arrived on Monday to take up his appointment as the new director.

Speaking at a press conference, Dr Legg said there were bound to be such problems in an institution growing as fast as the polytechnic.

Dissatisfaction over the passage arrangements reached a point that the Polytechnic Staff Association decided on Wednesday to take legal action against the management over the issue.

Following an extraordinary general meeting, members described the issue as "the latest of the series of difficulties which have arisen within the polytechnic as a result of the inadequate consultative processes available."

The chairman of the staff association, Mr Keith Oldfield, said it was not the only, nor necessarily, the most important issue faced by the institution, but it was virtually the last straw for the staff.

The Board Chairman, Dr S. Y. Chung, who was present at the conference said: "The ball is not in our court. It is now in the hands of the staff association."

He pointed out, however, that the board had not yet received any representations from the association nor had they expressed any grievances.

"The passage arrangements which came into effect several weeks ago are identical to those being enjoyed in the civil service.

"After all, we are spending public money and one of the directives from the Government is that fringe benefits for the staff of the polytechnic must be comparable to that enjoyed by those in the civil service," he explained.

The passage arrangements were introduced to cater for the large number of expatriate staff recruited two years ago who would be due their home leave this summer.

The scheme comprises a passage agreement with Jardine, Matheson and Co Ltd, and British Airways along the lines of the Government's agreement with the two companies.

This agreement gives the polytechnic a substantial rebate on standard passages between the United Kingdom and Hongkong.

"This year alone, this system would save the polytechnic approximately \$350,000," one of the officials said.

"The only snag is that if UK-based staff wish to go on leave to some other country, or take a route other than directly to the UK, they can only make travel arrangements at the polytechnic's expense up to the amount that it would have cost to get him directly home," he said.

On the other hand, the staff association proposed a scheme which it claimed would save even more money.

As to the staff association's charge of "inadequate consultative processes," Dr Chung said the decision on the passage arrangement was made after "a long period of consultation between the staff and the management through a special consultation committee consisting of four members on each side."

As for the future, Dr Legg said the aim would be to produce vocationally-oriented young people who could think clearly for themselves, and who would have the beginnings of a professional approach to whatever field they choose to undertake.

It was important, he said for the polytechnic to develop close relations with the two universities and the technical institutes at one end of the spectrum, and commerce and industry on the other in order to remain relevant.

Prior to taking up his new post, Dr Legg was the Director of the Lancaster Polytechnic, one of the biggest and most prestigious polytechnics in the industrial midlands of England.

Over the past seven years, he has served on occasion as a consultant and as a chairman of the Road Transport Industrial Training Board in Britain.

Dr Legg is taking over from the first director, Mr C. L. Old, who left last June on completion of his three-year contract.