

# GTC : All Hands To The Pump

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On the 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2008, 28 members of the Teacher's Council of Thailand paid a visit to our Union at our Mongkok Venue. The Teacher's Council of Thailand, known as Khurusapha, is the only one Teachers and Educational Council in Thailand established as enactment of the Teachers and Educational Personnel Council Act 2003. It is a professional organization, not a union. Its purpose is to lead and develop the profession of teaching in Thailand. Its functions include : to determine Professional standards and code of ethics, issue licences to teachers, suspend or revoke licences, certify degrees , diplomas or certificates of various institutions in accordance with the Professional standards and promote education and research relating to the practice of the profession etc. In short, the Council's work covers almost every aspect of the education sectors in the country.

“To ensure compliance with such law, the teachers Council of Thailand has thus issues Regulations of the Teachers Council of Thailand on Professional Practice License B.E.2547 (2004) ; Regulation of the Teachers Council of Thailand on Professional Standards and Ethics B.E. 2548 (2005) and several relevant notifications of the Teachers Council of Thailand Board , as guidelines for compliance by the educational professional practitioners and the parties concerned in the professional practice.” ( 《 Laws on Practice of Educational Profession 》 published by the Secretariat Office of the Teachers' Council of Thailand )

**Compared with Thailand, Hong Kong is way behind as regards the establishment of a General Teaching Council (GTC). We have experienced a lengthy and painful process and the GTC is still nowhere to be seen in Hong Kong.** It started in 1982 when an international panel of experts proposed in its report entitled “ A Perspective on Education in Hong Kong” that the professional status of teachers be promoted by setting up a Hong Kong Teaching Service. In 1984, Education Commission (EC) Report No. 1 recommended the drafting of a Code of Practice and the setting up of a teachers' centre to promote professionalism and development. The Hong Kong Teachers' Centre was opened in 1989 and the Code of Practice was published in 1990. In 1994, the Council on Professional Conduct (CPC) was set up following the recommendation of EC Report No.5. Eventually in 1997, EC Report No. 7 decided that “ We consider it essential for school practitioners to be totally committed to providing quality education for students. In this connection, the EC set up a Working Group in mid-1995 to study the formation of the GTC.” It was also reported that “ We accepted in May 1997 the Working Group's proposal to set up a GTC to enhance the standard of teaching and professional development of teachers, to maintain the integrity of the profession and to raise the professional esteem of teachers.” **Thus, in 1997 The Chief Executive announced in his policy address that the GTC should be established in 1999 and immediately a Preparatory Committee was set up under EC to consider the implementation details and start to collect the public's view on the proposal. The Chief Executive even allocated \$20 million to set up the GTC in his 1998 Policy Address.**

Everything seemed to go well until in 2001 when the Mr. Tung Chee-hwa announced in his Policy address that “ The establishment of the GTC may have to be delayed due to manpower and time constraints as many other aspects of work relating to the Education Reform are in active progress.” Clearly, this is but an excuse for delaying the setting up of the GTC. **The absurdity of Mr. Tung's statement can be easily detected due to its illogicality. Education reform and the establishment of the GTC are complementary to one another, not mutually exclusive.** In fact, it is only when we have the GTC can we implement education reform policies professionally and effectively. **Without a professional body to ensure professionalism and maintain professional conduct, talking about “quality education” would simply be empty talks leading to all sorts of**

**confusion and unnecessary disputes in the education sectors.** Just re-contemplate what has happened during the past decade in our education sectors and you would recollect all those painful memories and have to agree with me that something did go wrong and it is time we hastened the establishment of the GTC. **Without a GTC, we have experienced the government's amateurism, obstinacy and brutality : from the Language Benchmark farce to the obstruction of academic freedom court case, from the nullification of teachers' acquired qualifications to the "recommendations" of teachers' retraining programmes, from the budget cuts in the tertiary education sector to the kindergarten voucher scheme, from the school closure policy to teacher redundancy arrangements, from the preposterous associate degree policy to the integrated education hypocrisy and the most recent medium of instruction compromise etc. The list can go on and our friends can all point to the multifarious dreadful plight they have been dumped into by the government.**

Countries all over the world realize the importance of a professional body, ie GTC, to govern the education sectors and ensure quality education for their children. In Hong Kong at the present moment, the urgency of setting up a GTC has never been so pressing. We have the consensus on this issue ; a survey conducted in 2002 showing the majority of frontline teachers supported the establishment of a GTC. We have the money, \$20 million, allocated for this cause in 1998. Last but not least, the Council on Professional Conduct (CPC) has just set up a special committee, the General Teaching Council Preparatory Committee, to hasten its establishment. As the convener of this Committee and the Vice-chairman of the CPC , my appeal to you is : **this is a case of all hands to the pump. Let's join hands and make it work.**

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