

HKU programme is Asia's first to train professionals as leaders for cultural sector.

Linda Yeung reports

The government has pledged to make Hong Kong's cultural and creative industries one of the six new pillars of the city's knowledge economy. But where will the leaders of the new arts companies and cultural venues come from?

One possible source is being established by the University of Hong Kong, which last month unveiled plans for a new certificate programme that aims to turn out 100 cultural leaders within five years.

The Advanced Cultural Leadership Programme, offered in association with Britain's Clore Leadership Programme, will groom 20 students a year for leadership roles through intensive residential courses, overseas field trips and tutorials.

The one-year, part-time programme, which is the first of its kind in Asia, is aimed at senior professionals with at least five years' experience in the arts and related fields. Non-local students are limited to 15 per cent of admissions. Fees are HK\$160,000.

The programme is modelled on the Clore Leadership Programme, which was set up in 2002 by the Clore Duffield Foundation after a study commissioned by the grant-giving body called for an overhaul of training to address a crisis of arts leadership in Britain.

The West Kowloon Cultural District Authority announced this month a HK\$1 million grant to fund scholarships for seven students on the HKU programme that will cover more than 75 per cent of their fees.

In a signal of official acceptance of the programme, the grant was the first made by the authority from the HK\$10 million fund that it set aside for the training of arts administrators.

However, critics have accused the Advanced Cultural Leadership Programme of having an all-British faculty and promoting a "British perspective" on the arts and cultural leadership.

Programme director Daniel Chua, who is also the head of humanities at HKU, defended the choice of a British model, saying it provided cutting-edge expertise, especially through the association with Clore.

Chua, who was a music professor at King's College London until 2008, also said he had witnessed the British capital undergoing a "cultural renaissance" over the past 15 years, and believed there was a lot that Hong Kong could learn from it.

"Hong Kong is in the right place and at the right time for something similar," he said. "The whole region is thriving with culture."



New vision for future arts leaders

But for the arts to develop in the city, a critical mass of leaders who had a broad vision of what they were aiming to do was needed right across the field – and not just for the West Kowloon Cultural District.

"The modern view of culture is one where you want it to do very important things like regenerating cities, have a huge social impact by creating a sense of place and meaning or give people a sense of well-being and iconic places to be proud of," he said.

"This is a very different view of culture from what has been happening in Hong Kong. So we need something different. We decided to have a cultural leadership rather than an arts management course.

Arts management is necessary, but what we are talking about is transformational leadership.

"Culture is no longer confined to a single sphere, and it is not just to do with the arts faculty. You have to align everyone together to get to the heart of what cultural leadership is all about. Even business has to be aligned with it."

Senior academics from several HKU faculties will be brought into the programme as tutors to broaden students' perspectives. They include the first director of the Cultural Affairs Bureau of Taipei, Professor Lung Ying-tai, who is Hung Leung Hau Ling distinguished fellow in humanities; Journalism and Media Studies Centre

Daniel Chua says Hong Kong needs more arts venues and cultural leaders. Photo: Dale de la Rey

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Daniel Chua, director, Advanced Cultural Leadership Programme, HKU

director Professor Chan Yuen-ying; and Professor Lui Tai-lok, an associate dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences.

Chua said students would also receive virtually "personalised consultancy" through tutorials from world-class experts such as Benson Puah, the chief executive of Singapore's National Arts Council, and Sir John Tusa, the chair of the Clore Leadership Programme and former managing director of London's Barbican Centre, Europe's largest multi-arts venue.

With 30 teaching staff on the programme, the faculty will outnumber the students, he said.

Students have to attend three residential courses lasting three to four days, including one in Shanghai, and complete a "new vision project" during the programme, which is designed to be taken alongside a full-time job. "The idea is to invigorate, regenerate, re-envision people and give them very practical skills and cutting-edge strategy to make the vision happen," Chua said.

An alumni network to help students find jobs and share useful information – similar to those fostered in MBA programmes – is another novel aspect of the programme. Once they complete the course, participants will become members of HKU's Cultural Leadership Academy, which will include tutors and alumni. They will also be connected with fellows of the Clore Leadership Programme through a buddy scheme.

Chua said Hong Kong needed more arts venues where culture could be experienced at first hand, and cultural leaders within the government – for instance, a minister of culture.

London's Tate Modern gallery provided an example of this new kind of arts venue. From its massive bookshop to innovative exhibits and diverse children's activities, there were ample opportunities for visitors to experience culture.

"You need to create places where people can experience and understand culture because, at the end, it's a reflection of yourself or your own society," he said. "This is a challenge for Hong Kong."