

CUHK's MBA Programmes Take Advantage of Hong Kong's Ties with the Mainland

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Stephanie Villemagne, recently appointed as director of MBA programmes at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Business School, has a clear strategy to ensure the school continues to move forward. Villemagne, who previously worked in Singapore as INSEAD's global director, MBA programme, says her new role is also a chance to tell the international community about Hong Kong's multiple strengths.

Q: What advantages does Hong Kong offer as a centre for executive education?

A: Hong Kong is very good at inspiring a sense of dynamism – the spirit of “going forward”. You don't always find that in places like Singapore, which is also keen to become a regional and international hub for executive education. Here, people have to work hard to get things done, and I think that's what makes the difference – in Singapore, it is mainly done with government backing. Also, being right next to mainland China is perfect. We have access to many different industries, and there are a lot of things that we can use as examples. That is what business and MBA students want.

Q: What are the major differences between INSEAD and CUHK Business School?

A: INSEAD is a very diverse school – it's extremely international, which is great for the brand. But it misses a bit on family business orientation. At CUHK, we see more people who want to take their careers and their family business forward. That requires a college with unique qualities. It needs to have a focus on entrepreneurship, and close links with China. We want to keep building the curriculum to act as a bridge between China and the West, and we want to make use of ideas and influences from both directions.

Q: Are you planning to introduce new concepts to the programme?

A: Yes, I hope so, even though it is already a very strong programme. We are a top-tier school, but we still need to progress, so we need to look at what we can do better. That might be to bring in more modules on entrepreneurship, which is an important point of differentiation. Also, finance as an industry is undergoing a transformation at present, both from within and from without. Hong Kong has a huge role to play in financial technology, so we need to look at courses that are relevant to what is happening today. Other newer areas include social impact investing, managing technology and innovation in Asia, and encouraging students and faculty to think creatively about new types of industry.

Q: Is it important to work with corporate partners?

A: We already partner with a lot of companies, but we need to consolidate that and look at it a little bit differently. It's about understanding what makes people want to achieve something by themselves. The companies are important, but we have to rethink the model, so students can also create their own jobs and opportunities.

Q: What other trends will have an impact on executive education?

A: Big data, and knowing how to use the wealth of information which now surrounds us, is one. People talk a lot about big data, but we have to work out exactly what we are going to do with it before we launch ourselves into the “craziness” of the trend. We need to look at who works in this field, and who in industry can help us make sense of it. We do have electives in the subject, and there's a master's which touches on it, but we are not planning to go and launch an MBA in big data tomorrow.

Also, we are ideally placed for anything related to China's “One Belt, One Road” initiative. That's something we still need to study to ensure we give the right information to our students. We plan to recruit more people from the relevant countries, and intend to play our part as an entry and exit point to China.

Q: Can Hong Kong prosper as a hub for finance, technology, start-ups, and education?

A: Yes, in every way. Hong Kong is too timid about telling the world what it can do, and perhaps this reticence is rooted in its culture. But this is the ideal place from so many perspectives, so Hong Kong needs to advertise itself in a better way, and do more to spread awareness of its qualities. As I travel around, I certainly intend to tell people this is a great place to study.