



**TONY R. EASTHAM**

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**Education:**

BSc (Physics), University of London, UK, 1965.  
PhD, University of Surrey, UK, 1969.

**1. Give us a snapshot of your professional career and how you ended up at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST). What are the most rewarding aspects of your positions?**

After completing a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Warwick, UK in 1972, I felt the desire for international experience. I moved to the Canadian Institute for Guided Ground Transport on a 2-year contract. My short anticipated sojourn in Canada eventually extended to 24 years after I accepted a faculty position at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. In 1985, I was offered the position of Director of Research Services at Queen's University; a position I held for 10 years, concurrent with Director of International Programs.

During a year of administrative leave, first at the University of Tokyo and then with Industry Canada in Ottawa, I realized that I enjoyed and could be more effective in helping other researchers secure the resources they need, rather than being a bona-fide researcher myself. I therefore sought opportunities in research administration and, wanting an Asian experience, moved to The Hong Kong University of Science & Technology in 1996, first as Director of Contract & Grant Administration, then as Associate VP for Research & Development, and now as Acting VP for Research & Development. Concurrently, for the past 8 years, I have also served a President / CEO of HKUST R and D Corporation Ltd; the University's wholly owned subsidiary for contracting, licensing and assisting spin-off companies.

**2. What are your research and development (R&D) responsibilities, both on a daily and "as needed" basis?**

Formally, the Office of Contract & Grant Administration and the Technology Transfer Center report to me. I also look after HKUST R and D Corporation Ltd, the research Institutes and Centers, and the University's Central Research Facilities. I also interact with the external

funding organizations, potential donors and visitors on regular basis. The nice thing about my position is that no two days are the same – always a new situation to deal with.

**3. What are the key qualities required in your position as Acting Vice President for Research and Development?**

In addition to knowing the basics of research administration, I think that the key qualities required in my position are related to people – an ability to be friendly, listen, talk with, be flexible, positive and helpful, and network externally.

**4. Do you have any recommendation for research managers/administrators starting out in their careers?**

Be prepared to commit yourself to research administration as a profession. Put in the time necessary to do the job well.

**5. What do you see are the key challenges in administering research, both in general and in Hong Kong?**

The research funding environment in Hong Kong is quite different from that in North America. No overhead (except on contracts). There is one major source of competitive research funding (Research Grants Council). Hong Kong is spending less than 0.8% of GDP on R&D. The major challenge is therefore building world-class excellence in the face of limited resources.

**6. What are the key issues facing Hong Kong research managers/administrators at the present time?**

A major challenge over the next 3-5 years, as the university system in Hong Kong moves from a 3-year to a 4-year undergraduate program, is finding 800 – 1000 new research-oriented faculty for its eight UGC-funded institutions. Great opportunities for young faculty in Hong Kong!

**7. Is it advantageous for institutions to recruit academics into senior managerial roles?**

It is perhaps inappropriate to generalize, but I would say YES. I feel that my own role as a research administrator is strengthened by my having been a respectable academic.

**8. In your capacity as President/CEO of HKUST R and D Corporation Ltd., what are the major intellectual property and technology transfer issues you are seeing today?**

The main issues are the cost of securing quality intellectual property protection and finding the resources to effectively market the University's technology, expertise and facilities in Hong Kong and the region.

**9. What are your interactions with the Mainland China Government and/or the Mainland Chinese universities?**

Traditionally, Hong Kong institutions have not had access to Mainland China sources of funding. Hong Kong institutions are now establishing entities in the Mainland to offer education/training services to students and R&D services to industry. HKUST has established a graduate campus in Nansha, just south of Guangzhou. Consequently, interactions with Mainland China Government are growing. HKUST has established relationships with a number of leading Mainland universities for collaborative research and faculty/student exchanges.

**10. What have been your greatest successes and challenges while working at HKUST and what can your international colleagues learn from them?**

I'm going to side-step this one by saying that I have maintained a steady hand on the tiller of research administration for over a decade in Hong Kong. No huge successes – nor major disasters!

**11. In what directions – in Hong Kong and elsewhere – do you see international research management/administration moving in the next five to ten years?**

Over the next few years, I see the biggest challenge as being to convince Hong Kong that R&D in universities is a good investment. We need to refine the methodology by which a timeline of return-of-investment is assessed in a credible manner, because Hong Kong is a very bottom-line focused society.