UGC 大學教育資助委員會
University Grants Committee

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22 January 2010

The Honourable Cyd Ho Sau-lan
Chairman
LegCo Panel on Education
c/o LegCo Secretariat
1 Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road
Central
Hong Kong

Dear Chairman,

Education Panel Meeting on 11 January 2010

I was pleased to have the opportunity to exchange views with Members at the recent Education Panel Meeting. I should now like to respond to the two questions raised – including one from your good self – which there was no time to deal with at the meeting.

Private Universities

2. On the question of which body would be responsible for assessing and assuring the quality of programmes of private universities (raised by your good self), as matters stand this is the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ). The quality of the programmes offered by private universities/self-financing degree-awarding institutions registered under the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap. 320) is assured by the HKCAAVQ, during its institutional review, programme area accreditation (PAA) process and the periodic review of institutions' PAA status.

3. The Quality Assurance Council (QAC) formed under the UGC covers degree programmes offered by UGC-funded institutions which have obtained self-accreditation status and are therefore not subject to HKCAAVQ's accreditation. Although there is no formal relationship between the QAC and the HKCAAVQ, both bodies share information and cooperate on matters of mutual interest.

4. In our Higher Education Review 2010, the UGC will look into the question of whether the current array of quality assurance bodies still best suits Hong Kong's needs. But it is too early to say whether we shall propose any changes.

Fairness of Research Grants Council (RGC) Assessments

5. Dr the Hon Priscilla Leung had been given to understand that the RGC gave preference to science disciplines over arts disciplines when considering research proposals. Please allow me to provide some background in order properly to respond that this is not the case.

6. There are four subject panels under the RGC namely : Engineering (E); Physical Sciences (P); Biology & Medicine (M); and Humanities, Social Sciences & Business Studies (H). The subject panels are responsible for the assessment of the grant applications falling under their subject disciplines. The arts disciplines mentioned by Dr the Hon Priscilla Leung are under the purview of the H Panel of the RGC. The H Panel has a Business Studies Sub Panel.

7. The General Research Fund (GRF) scheme is the main research funding scheme under the RGC. In the GRF 2010/2011 exercise (currently ongoing), we received a total of 2,463 applications seeking an amount of $2,962M. The breakdown of the number of applications received, amount sought and the number of panel members in each subject panel is listed below:

Subject Panel	**Number of applications/ (% of total)**	**Amount Sought ($M) / (% of total)**	**Number of Panel members/ (% of total)**
Engineering	738 (30%)	919.9 (31.1%)	48 (31.6%)
Physical Sciences	304 (12.3%)	400.5 (13.5%)	18 (11.8%)
Biology & Medicine	588 (23.9%)	979.5 (33.1%)	29 (19.1%)
Humanities, Social Sciences & Business Studies	833 (33.8%) Humanities and Social Sciences: 533 (21.6%) Business Studies: 300 (12.2%)	662 (22.4%) Humanities and Social Sciences: 490 (16.6%) Business Studies: 172 (5.8%)	57 (37.5%) Humanities and Social Sciences: 34 (22.4%) Business Studies: 23 (15.1%)
Total	2,463 (100%)	2,961.9(100%)	152 (100%)

8. The size of the subject panels is dependent upon the number of grant applications they have to handle. Among the four panels, the H Panel has to deal with the largest number of applications (33.8% of the total number of applications received). To recognise the heavy workload of the H Panel, starting from the GRF 2009/2010 exercise, we have set up a Business Studies Sub-Panel under the H Panel to assess applications in the Business Studies discipline, thus releasing the H Panel to focus on their assessment of applications in the Humanities and Social Sciences disciplines. The RGC has appointed 57 panel members to handle all the applications under the H Panel. It is the largest among the four panels.

9. The success rate of the applications assessed by the H Panel in 2009/10 was in line with that of the E Panel and M Panel (about 30%). The success rate of the applications in the P Panel was the highest among all subject panels (about 57%).

10. The RGC is aware that not all disciplines have the same needs and has given special attention to the Humanities, Social Sciences & Business Studies disciplines. Under the GRF Scheme, special funding support is provided to applicants in these disciplines. For instance, the "Individual Research Grant" is tailored better to support research conducted by individual researchers through the institutional arrangement for granting time-off. This scheme is only applicable to arts, humanities, social

sciences and business studies which often require the researchers' personal efforts, rather than assistance rendered by their research assistants. The "Employment of Relief Teacher under Humanities Panel" specially caters for four disciplines, namely, anthropology; humanities and arts; literature, languages and linguistics; and law. Employment of relief teachers under these four disciplines will be considered more favourably in order to free up the applicants' staff time for personal research and writing.

11. Starting from 2005 and 2008, the Public Policy Research Funding Scheme and Strategic Public Policy Research Funding Scheme were respectively introduced to encourage the institutions to submit grant applications which addressed the local needs of the community. The applications submitted under these two schemes fall largely under the Humanities and Social Sciences disciplines.

12. On the membership of the RGC itself, there are currently 24 members. One third of them are from the Humanities and Social Sciences disciplines. We consider that the representation of Humanities, Social Sciences & Business Studies disciplines in the RGC and RGC Subject Panels is currently well balanced. We will adjust the membership in the light of future changes in the relative number of applications received in different disciplines.

Grievance Procedures

13. As regards the Panel's request for written information on the UGC's work on grievance procedures and our interactions with UGC funded institutions on the issue, we are currently consulting institutions on our findings and recommendations. We shall provide a paper for the Panel when this is completed.

Yours sincerely,

(Laura M Cha)
Chairman