

Legislative Council Panel on Education Meeting on 11 July 2011

Written Submission from City University of Hong Kong on the proposed changes in the allocation of research funding to the UGC-funded institutions

On behalf of City University of Hong Kong, I thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on UGC's plan to transition up to half of the "R-portion" of the UGC-funded institutions' funding on a purely competitive basis.

At the highest level we applaud this transition as I firmly believe, through my 26 years' experience as a line faculty member, a senior research administrator, and a director of a large-scale international university-industry-government research center, that inherent competition is critical to achieving our collective greatest successes. It is the crucible of competition that produces the best proposals, the best research and integrated education of graduate students, and the best research outcomes whether they are fundamental research papers or technologies and ideas transitioned to the real world.

We further applaud UGC's plan to implement a new faculty integrated research and education grant competition inspired by NSF's CAREER awards for faculty in the early stages of their academic careers. Because funding application evaluation panels can be swayed by a senior faculty member's reputation based on many years of achievement, this new program will enable our young faculty who are so critical to our institution's and Hong Kong's future, to compete on a level playing field.

Returning to the R-portion transition, we would like to communicate our significant reservations with the methodology in evaluating the relative competitiveness of UGC-funded institutions in Hong Kong. Our understanding is that the sole competitiveness performance metric to be utilized is the success rate in GRF, CRF and Theme-based Research grant applications. Our primary concern is as follows. Whereas this proposed metric is indeed one valid measure, it is limited in that it essentially measures competitiveness in the free market of ideas and articulation of those ideas in a grant application format. It fails to measure direct competitiveness in the area that really matters – that of ultimate impact in terms of research outcomes and products including educated graduates for Hong Kong. We understand that there is simplicity in this approach, and we should not include too many outcome metrics, but we believe there is a consensus among the universities that a small number of traditional and generally-accepted outcome measures (e.g., publications in journals, books and monographs, patents) should be included.

We have several secondary concerns. If success rate is used as the metric, there could be an inhibiting effect on taking greater risks in the grant proposals (risk-taking in terms of either unconventional, unproven ideas and methods or unconventional interdisciplinary teams). We believe we should be doing all we can to encourage risk-taking in the research funded by UGC. In addition we would like to see ITF success be considered as well, since this funding program is complementary to UGC programs and captures a large body of research activity (tending to the applied end of the spectrum) the universities are pursuing that is not captured by the UGC grants.

This concern could be allayed by including some outcome measures in your estimate of competitiveness, since outcomes of the ITF research would be captured.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to provide our input, and I look forward to working with you and my colleagues to advance the future of Hong Kong in a most positive direction.

Professor Gregory B Raupp
Vice-President (Research and Technology)
For and on behalf of City University of Hong Kong