

Legislative Council: Panel on Education

Meeting on 11 July 2011

Comments on the “Allocation of Research Funding and Undergraduate Student Places”

Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

Madame Chairman, Honorable LegCo members:

HKUST would wish to affirm, at the outset, that we fully support UGC in its independent work to plan, manage and fund the university sector in Hong Kong.

In this case of research funding, HKUST in general endorses the principle of enhanced competition on the basis of merit in the allocation of research funding – in research postgraduate places and the research portion of the block grant. This is a step in the right direction of encouraging excellent research and elevating Hong Kong universities to yet a higher level of performance.

We are pleased to see UGC has taken into account some of the earlier concerns expressed by Hong Kong academics through a more gradual phase-in, the introduction of the Early Career Scheme to nurture junior/new academics, additional funding for humanities and social sciences research, and a review by end of the first triennium. The need for a timely review of the new system cannot be over-emphasized; it will give an opportunity to fine tune the funding allocation system – particularly in areas related to a meaningful definition of the performance indicators.

Research universities have a role to play in the social and economic development of Hong Kong – particularly in the development of the six new industries such as innovation and technology and creative industries. In addition to using the success rate of RGC projects as a basis to inform

research funding, it is our view that other high level external peer reviewed funding such as those from the Innovation and Technology Commission (ITC) should also be taken into account in the evaluation of performance.

In a world class university that we aspire to be, research is tightly integrated with education, and it is of paramount importance to achieve a critical mass and research strength in depth across all disciplines – to achieve our educational aims, and to maintain our international standing.

There is an assumption that the more or less status-quo research funding allocation is sufficient to cover the on-costs of institutions for current staff as well as additional new staff for 334. With the addition of 1000 new staff across the higher education sector after 334, it is foreseeable that the basic research funding available per academic will decrease in Hong Kong. The allocation of only 62.5 percent of the marginal additional year funding for the 334 also reflects the oversight of the need to support the research-active top academics needed for our universities. There is a need to increase the additional year funding to enhance or even maintain our research vitality and international competitiveness in the region.

Under the proposed policy, greater funds will be allocated to support theme-based research that will benefit a relatively small number of researchers in thematic areas across all institutions. This will have a fundamental impact on the conduct of basic research. Over time, there will be mounting pressure to look for alternative sources of funding from the Mainland and overseas. The government needs to take a more proactive role to facilitate the bid of alternative research funding from beyond our borders.

Thank you.