

For information

Legislative Council Panel on Education
Academic Research Advisers
funded by the Research Endowment Fund

Purpose

This note informs Members of the plan to engage two Academic Research Advisers (ARAs), to be funded by the Research Endowment Fund (the Fund).

Background

2. Established in 2009, the \$18-billion Fund was set up as a trust under the Permanent Secretary for Education Incorporated to provide stable research funding to the eight University Grants Committee (UGC) -funded institutions. Out of the \$18 billion, investment income from \$14 billion will be used to replace the \$506 million annual earmarked research grants to the Research Grants Council (RGC). The investment income from the remaining \$4 billion will be deployed to support theme-based research, thus allowing the institutions to work on research proposals on themes of a longer-term nature and strategically beneficial to the development of Hong Kong.

3. The Fund is established and managed in accordance with a trust deed which stipulates the framework and salient features concerning its management and administration. The trust deed allows the Trustee to, inter alia, employ any consultant, professional person or financial institution to advise the Trustee or provide services on any matter arising out of or in connection with the duties of the Trustee.

Justification

4. The RGC was established in 1991 under the aegis of UGC. It is a non-statutory advisory body responsible for advising the Government the needs of Hong Kong's higher education institutions in the field of academic research and for the distribution of funding for academic research

projects undertaken by academic staff of those UGC-funded institutions. The Chairman (an unpaid position filled by a local academic on a part-time basis) and Chairs of its subject Panels (overseas academics visiting Hong Kong twice a year) will provide academic input to the operation of RGC. The Panel Chairs for example will give expert advice on various funding schemes, assign research proposals to panel members for assessment and chair panel meetings to determine successful projects. The UGC Secretariat provides administrative and executive support to RGC.

5. The above mode of operation has been effective in the past but recent changes have called for stronger academic support to the operation, including –

(a) *Theme-based Research Scheme*

The first round of Theme-based Research Scheme was launched in 2010. The nature of the projects (mostly large and long term) calls for continuous professional monitoring to ensure successful implementation, e.g. by keeping close liaison with the Project Coordinators, visiting the projects, monitoring the collaboration; and reviewing the scheme regularly.

(b) *Early Career Scheme*

The Early Career Scheme will be launched in August 2011 to nurture the development of promising research talents by supporting the research projects of junior scholars at the beginning of their academic career. The Scheme requires academic input to work out the details and to communicate effectively with institutions and academic staff to ensure smooth implementation.

(c) *Increase in General Research Fund applications*

The number of research applications in various schemes under RGC has been increasing steadily and is expected to increase yet further. The number of research applications dealt with by RGC has increased from around 2 300 in 2006/07 to about 3 200 in 2011/12, an increase of some 40% over five years. With the implementation of the New Academic Structure in 2012/13, 1 000 more academics will be added eventually. Hence, the number of applications and the workload of the Panel Chairs such as in assigning applications to external reviewers are expected to increase tremendously. As Panel Chairs are full time overseas academics who can only spend a

limited amount of time on RGC Panel work, it would greatly relieve their work load if the Secretariat, with the appropriate academic expertise, can perform the first round of assignment.

(d) Expansion of RGC's network of collaborative research schemes with overseas counterparts

RGC launched two new joint research schemes, with the Netherlands and Spain respectively, in 2010. Denmark has also approached RGC on the possibility of establishing a joint scheme with them. With Hong Kong excelling further in its research work, more countries are expected to approach us to set up joint schemes. Further, given that Hong Kong has positioned itself as an education hub, it is desirable for the RGC to take a proactive approach to seek more joint partners. This will involve much work in negotiation and liaison and require adequate academic support for the Chairman of RGC. Professional knowledge on local curriculum and research programmes will be particularly useful in designing new modes of collaboration with overseas partners.

Arrangement

6. As set out above, more academic input is required in the operation of RGC and it is considered necessary to engage two academics with academic knowledge in different fields and teaching and research experience in the UGC-funded institutions as ARAs in the UGC Secretariat to share the work of the RGC Chairman and Panel Chairs. In light of the current workload, we plan to engage two ARAs (one full-time and one part-time) starting from the 2011/12 academic year, one in the science field and the other in Humanities and Social Sciences. The two ARAs will be pitched at full professor level with expert experience in their related fields. The duty lists are at Annex.

7. The ARAs will advise and report to the Chairman of RGC and partly to the Secretary-General of the UGC on administrative matters. They will be supported by the UGC Secretariat. As the ARAs handle matters arising from the Fund, it is appropriate for the two ARA positions to be funded by it. A review will be conducted in due course to assess the effectiveness of the engagement. Although the engagement does not involve additional financial resources, the fund manager is to report to the relevant LegCo Panel cases of such engagement.

8. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

Education Bureau
July 2011

Duty List of ARAs
(one full time and one part-time)

Title: Academic Research Adviser (Humanities/Social Sciences/
Business)

Report to: Chairman, Research Grants Council and for administrative
matters, the Secretary-General, University Grants Committee

Duties:

1. To implement new initiatives:
 - (a) Set up a new prestigious fellowship scheme for outstanding investigators under the disciplines of the Humanities and Social Sciences Panel and work out details concerning the assessment criteria and monitoring mechanism;
 - (b) Provide advice and support to the Chairman and Panel Chairs in the implementation of the Early Career Scheme and organise experience sharing seminars for awardees; and
 - (c) Work out the details of the extension of the scope of the teaching relief grants, which is part of the General Research Fund grants, from the existing four disciplines to all disciplines under the Humanities and Social Sciences Panel.
2. To liaise with the RGC and its Panel Members, academics and institutions to develop such funding schemes as may be thought necessary to bring Hong Kong's humanities, social sciences and related research in line with international best practices.
3. To conduct research and advise on the re-structuring and future development strategies of the RGC arising from the Research Endowment Fund and the increase in the number of funding schemes administered by the RGC, in particular in respect of humanities, social sciences and related disciplines.
4. In respect of general RGC work, particularly in humanities, social sciences, business and related fields, for example:
 - (a) assist the Chairman in various areas, such as clearing the simpler

RGC papers/minutes/newsletters on his behalf;

- (b) assist the Chairman in giving steer and direction on academic policy issues before putting them forward for deliberation by the Council;
 - (c) assist the Panel and Sub-Panel Chairs in the initial assignment of applications to external reviewers;
 - (d) assist the Panel and Sub-panel Chairs to improve the assessment and monitoring mechanism of funded research projects, to scrutinize the progress and completion reports, to identify significant strengths/opportunities or weaknesses/problems and to identify Knowledge Transfer opportunities in completed projects; and
 - (e) organise workshops and briefing sessions for Theme-based research scheme with ARA (Sciences).
5. In respect of publicity and related issues, particularly those related to humanities, social sciences, business and related fields, to provide professional leadership in, for example:
- (a) publicising Hong Kong's institutions, PhD programmes, Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme (and leading the delegations in overseas visits);
 - (b) engaging the press and dealing with local Public Relation issues;
 - (c) consulting local academics on RGC issues; and
 - (d) meeting and briefing overseas consuls, academics and visitors on the research environment in the higher education sector in Hong Kong.
6. Any other duties as assigned by the Chairman, RGC and Secretary-General as appropriate.

Title: Academic Research Adviser (Sciences)

Report to: Chairman, Research Grants Council and for administrative matters, the Secretary-General, University Grants Committee

Duties:

1. To provide support to the Chairman and Panel Chairs in the implementation of the Early Career Scheme and organise experience sharing seminars for awardees.
2. To oversee the implementation of the proposed enhancement to the electronic system of research funding schemes.
3. To liaise with the RGC and its Panel Members, academics and institutions to develop such funding schemes as may be thought necessary to bring Hong Kong's sciences research in line with international best practices.
4. To conduct research and advise on the re-structuring and future development strategies of the RGC arising from the Research Endowment Fund and the increase in the number of funding schemes administered by the RGC, particularly in respect of the sciences disciplines.
5. In respect of general RGC work, particularly in the sciences disciplines, for example:
 - (a) assist the Chairman in various areas, such as clearing the simpler RGC papers/minutes/newsletters on his behalf;
 - (b) assist the Chairman in giving steer and direction on academic policy issues before putting them forward for deliberation by the Council;
 - (c) assist the Panel and Sub-Panel Chairs in the initial assignment of applications to external reviewers;
 - (d) assist the Panel and Sub-panel Chairs to improve the assessment and monitoring mechanism of funded research projects, to scrutinize the progress and completion reports, to identify significant strengths/opportunities or weaknesses/problems and to identify knowledge transfer opportunities in completed projects for referral to the Innovation and Technology Commission; and

- (e) organise workshops and briefing sessions for Theme-based research scheme with ARA (Humanities/Social Sciences/Business).
6. In respect of publicity and related issues, in particular those related to the sciences disciplines, to provide professional leadership in, for example:
- (a) publicising Hong Kong's institutions, PhD programmes, Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme (and leading the delegations in overseas visits);
 - (b) engaging the press and dealing with local public relation issues;
 - (c) consulting local academics on RGC issues; and
 - (d) meeting and briefing overseas consuls, academics and visitors on the research environment in the higher education sector in Hong Kong.
7. Any other duties as assigned by the Chairman, RGC and Secretary-General as appropriate.