



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部教育局
Education Bureau
Government Secretariat, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
The People's Republic of China

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Clerk to Panel
Legislative Council Panel on Education
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central
Hong Kong
(Attn: Ms Angel Wong)

Dear Ms Wong,

Legislative Council Panel on Education
Follow-up to the Meeting on 1 March 2019

At the meeting on 1 March 2019, Members of the Panel on Education requested the provision of supplementary information and response to the three motions passed under the agenda item of “New resources to further support the research conducted by the higher education sector and the funding policy of the Research Grants Council”. The Government’s reply is set out below.

Research Funding for Different Disciplines Provided by the Research Grants Council

The University Grants Committee (UGC) and the Research Grants Council (RGC) attach great importance to supporting the research work conducted by the higher education sector and place equal emphasis on all types of academic research when such proposals are assessed. Academic merit is the overriding criterion in assessing research proposals by RGC committees/panels. All research proposals are subject to rigorous assessment by international experts and compete on equal footing.

The UGC and RGC are also aware of the uniqueness of Humanities & Social Sciences (HSS) research projects and have implemented the following additional measures to provide better support for HSS researchers with effect from the 2012/13 academic year –

- extending the scope of “employment of relief teacher” under the General Research Fund from four disciplines to all disciplines of HSS, and the duration of teaching relief from the minimum of four months to a full academic year. As such, applicants may be granted teaching relief of six to 12 months for a 24 to 36-month research project; and
- launching the HSS Prestigious Fellowship Scheme (HSSPFS) for outstanding researchers under HSS disciplines, so that academics with exceptional merit can be granted extended teaching relief for conducting research and writing research papers, as well as supporting funds such as travel expenses, subsistence allowance and costs required for publishing research outputs. In 2019/20, a total of \$10 million has been earmarked for HSSPFS.

Putting Equal Weight on Teaching and Research in the Universities’ Development

Teaching and learning as well as research are both core missions of UGC-funded universities. Recurrent grants provided by the UGC to each UGC-funded university comprise a Block Grant, which is calculated based on three elements including teaching (about 75%), research (about 23%) and professional activity (about 2%).

The Government has all along attached great importance to the quality of teaching and learning in universities. Additional to the teaching portion of the Block Grant, the UGC has also encouraged and enhanced universities’ teaching and learning through various teaching and learning initiatives, including the annual provision of the Teaching Development and Language Enhancement Grant (TDLEG) to universities to enhance teaching quality and students’ language proficiency; organisation of the annual UGC Teaching Award to honour those who excel in teaching in the UGC sector; and implementation of the Funding Schemes for Teaching and Learning Related

Proposals in the 2012-15 and 2016-19 triennia to incentivise universities to explore and promote development in sector-wide strategic areas of teaching and learning, language enhancement and internationalisation. The amount of TDLEG to be provided for universities in the 2019-22 triennium will amount to \$781.2 million, representing an increase of \$268.4 million over the previous cycle. The increased provision will enable universities to focus on efforts to bring funded projects to conclusion, and continue to implement meaningful initiatives identified in previous funding schemes.

On the disbursement of the research portion (R-portion) of the Block Grant, after the UGC's consultation with universities, the funding of the R-portion, from 2012/13 academic year onwards, has been driven by two engines: the results of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and the universities' success in obtaining peer-reviewed Earmarked Research Grants (ERG) from the RGC. RAE is part of the UGC's commitment to assessing the performance of UGC-funded universities in research, and is intended to drive excellence and encourage world-class research. RAE results reflect the research edge of each university, provide guidance for each university to pursue research excellence/development, and strengthen the synergy effect between activities in research and those in teaching and learning. At present, about 17% of the Block Grant is disbursed to UGC-funded universities with respect to their RAE performance.

Appointment System of University Grants Committee-funded Universities

The eight UGC-funded universities are independent autonomous bodies established pursuant to their respective ordinances, and each has a council to serve as the supreme governing body. The respective ordinances and statutes of the universities set out their objectives, functions and governance structure, and delineate the power that universities may exercise to carry out their objectives and functions. The UGC Notes on Procedures (NoP) clearly state that UGC-funded universities enjoy autonomy in the development of curricula and academic standards, selection of staff and students, initiation and conduct of research, internal allocation of resources, etc, and they are accountable for their decisions on such matters. Observing the NoP, the Government and UGC have all along supported and safeguarded academic freedom and institutional autonomy on the premise that universities demonstrate appropriate financial and public accountability.

Matters concerning the appointment, promotion and remuneration of academic staff fall within the autonomy of UGC-funded universities, neither the Government nor the UGC plays a part in it. In fact, the Government deregulated the salary scales of UGC-funded universities in 2003 to ensure their competitiveness in recruiting talents. All UGC-funded universities have established personnel policies and mechanisms appropriate to their circumstances for handling the appointment of academic staff in light of actual situations and teaching needs. Also, these universities have an appeal mechanism to ensure fairness and impartiality in the conduct of such matter. As far as we know, universities have put in place relevant mechanisms and procedures, which have been brought to the attention of their staff through suitable channels, for example, internal circulars and the universities' intranets. When necessary, universities will review and refine the relevant arrangements in a timely manner. Academic staff may convey their views, if any, to the universities and relevant committees through various channels. The UGC will also convey to the universities Members' views on the appointment system of UGC-funded universities.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Sharon Ko', written in a cursive style.

(Sharon Ko)

for Secretary for Education

c.c. Secretary-General, University Grants Committee