

Research Endowment Fund

Financial statements for the year ended 31 August 2024

Report of the Director of Audit



Audit Commission

The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

Independent Auditor's Report

To the Permanent Secretary for Education Incorporated

Opinion

I certify that I have audited the financial statements of the Research Endowment Fund set out on pages 4 to 14, which comprise the statement of financial position as at 31 August 2024, and the statement of comprehensive income, statement of changes in equity and statement of cash flows for the year then ended, and notes to the financial statements, including material accounting policy information.

In my opinion, the financial statements give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Research Endowment Fund as at 31 August 2024, and of its financial performance and cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with Hong Kong Financial Reporting Standards ("HKFRSs") issued by the Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants ("HKICPA") and have been properly prepared in accordance with section 8(3) of the Permanent Secretary for Education Incorporation Ordinance (Cap. 1098).

Basis for opinion

I conducted my audit in accordance with section 8(5) of the Permanent Secretary for Education Incorporation Ordinance and the Audit Commission auditing standards. My responsibilities under those standards are further described in the *Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements* section of my report. I am independent of the Research Endowment Fund in accordance with those standards, and I have fulfilled my other ethical responsibilities in accordance with those standards. I believe that the audit evidence I have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my opinion.

Responsibilities of the Permanent Secretary for Education Incorporated for the financial statements

The Permanent Secretary for Education Incorporated is responsible for the preparation of the financial statements that give a true and fair view in accordance with HKFRSs issued by the HKICPA and section 8(3) of the Permanent Secretary for Education Incorporation Ordinance, and for such internal control as the Permanent Secretary for Education Incorporated determines is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the Permanent Secretary for Education Incorporated is responsible for assessing the Research Endowment Fund's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting.

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

My objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes my opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with the Audit Commission auditing standards will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

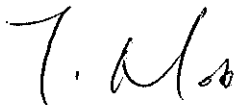
As part of an audit in accordance with the Audit Commission auditing standards, I exercise professional judgment and maintain professional skepticism throughout the audit. I also:

- identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control;
- obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose

of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the Research Endowment Fund's internal control;

- evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by the Permanent Secretary for Education Incorporated;
- conclude on the appropriateness of the Permanent Secretary for Education Incorporated's use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the Research Endowment Fund's ability to continue as a going concern. If I conclude that a material uncertainty exists, I am required to draw attention in my auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify my opinion. My conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of my auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the Research Endowment Fund to cease to continue as a going concern; and
- evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial statements, including the disclosures, and whether the financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

I communicate with the Permanent Secretary for Education Incorporated regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that I identify during my audit.



Terry Mok
Assistant Director of Audit
for Director of Audit

25 February 2025

Audit Commission
6th Floor, High Block
Queensway Government Offices
66 Queensway
Hong Kong

RESEARCH ENDOWMENT FUND
STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2024
(Expressed in thousands of Hong Kong dollars)

	Note	2024	2023
INCOME			
Interest income from placement with the Exchange Fund		1,908,004	2,206,251
Other interest income		80	52
		<u>1,908,084</u>	<u>2,206,303</u>
EXPENDITURE			
Research grants	3	<u>(1,807,633)</u>	<u>(1,619,259)</u>
SURPLUS FOR THE YEAR		100,451	587,044
OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME		<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>
TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR		<u>100,451</u>	<u>587,044</u>

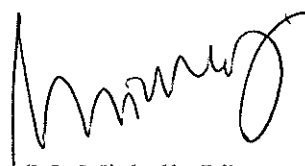
The accompanying notes 1 to 7 form part of these financial statements.

RESEARCH ENDOWMENT FUND
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION
AS AT 31 AUGUST 2024
(Expressed in thousands of Hong Kong dollars)

	Note	2024	2023
ASSETS			
Cash at bank		107,366	127,406
Accounts receivable		6,426	3,707
Accrued interest from placement with the Exchange Fund		1,280,871	1,275,835
Placement with the Exchange Fund	4	51,089,782	50,970,714
		52,484,445	52,377,662
LIABILITIES			
Accounts payable		(6,494)	(162)
NET ASSETS		52,477,951	52,377,500
Representing:			
FUND BALANCE			
Accumulated surplus		52,477,951	52,377,500

The accompanying notes 1 to 7 form part of these financial statements.

Permanent Secretary for Education Incorporated
Trustee of the Research Endowment Fund


(Ms Michelle Li)

Permanent Secretary for Education
25 February 2025

RESEARCH ENDOWMENT FUND
STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN EQUITY
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2024
(Expressed in thousands of Hong Kong dollars)

	2024	2023
ACCUMULATED SURPLUS		
Balance at beginning of year	52,377,500	51,790,456
Total comprehensive income for the year	<u>100,451</u>	<u>587,044</u>
Balance at end of year	<u><u>52,477,951</u></u>	<u><u>52,377,500</u></u>

The accompanying notes 1 to 7 form part of these financial statements.

RESEARCH ENDOWMENT FUND
STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2024
(Expressed in thousands of Hong Kong dollars)

	2024	2023
CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES		
Surplus for the year	100,451	587,044
Adjustments for:		
Interest income from placement with the Exchange Fund	(1,908,004)	(2,206,251)
Other interest income	(80)	(52)
Increase in placement with the Exchange Fund	(119,068)	(1,151,280)
(Increase) / Decrease in accounts receivable	(2,719)	2,440
Increase / (Decrease) in accounts payable	6,332	(30,737)
Interest received from placement with the Exchange Fund	1,902,968	2,816,381
Other interest received	80	52
NET CASH (USED IN) / FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES	(20,040)	17,597
CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS AT BEGINNING OF THE YEAR	127,406	109,809
CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS AT END OF THE YEAR	107,366	127,406
ANALYSIS OF CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS		
Cash at bank	107,366	127,406

The accompanying notes 1 to 7 form part of these financial statements.

RESEARCH ENDOWMENT FUND

Notes to the financial statements

(Amounts expressed in thousands of Hong Kong dollars, unless otherwise stated.)

1. General

The Research Endowment Fund (the Fund) was established by a declaration of trust made on 6 February 2009 by the Permanent Secretary for Education Incorporated (the Trustee). The Fund provides stable research funding to the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions and the self-financing tertiary institutions.

2. Material accounting policies

(a) Statement of compliance

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with section 8(3) of the Permanent Secretary for Education Incorporation Ordinance (Cap. 1098), accounting principles generally accepted in Hong Kong, and Hong Kong Financial Reporting Standards (HKFRSs), which is a collective term that includes all applicable individual HKFRSs, Hong Kong Accounting Standards and Interpretations issued by the Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants (HKICPA). Material accounting policies adopted by the Fund are set out below.

The HKICPA has issued certain new or revised HKFRSs that are first effective or available for early adoption for the current accounting period of the Fund. Note 2(c) provides information on the changes, if any, in accounting policies resulting from initial application of these developments to the extent that they are relevant to the Fund for the current and prior accounting periods reflected in these financial statements.

(b) Basis of preparation of the financial statements

The measurement basis used in the preparation of the financial statements is historical cost.

The preparation of financial statements in conformity with HKFRSs requires management to make judgements, estimates and assumptions that affect the application of policies and the reported amounts of assets, liabilities, income and expenditure. The estimates and associated assumptions are based on historical experience and various other factors that are believed to be reasonable under the circumstances, the results of which form the basis for making judgements about the carrying values of assets and liabilities that are not readily apparent from other sources. Actual results may differ from these estimates.

The estimates and underlying assumptions are reviewed on an ongoing basis. Revisions to accounting estimates are recognised in the period in which the estimate is revised if the revision affects only that period, or in the period of the revision and future periods if the revision affects both current and future periods.

There are no critical accounting judgements involved in the application of the Fund's accounting policies. There are also no key assumptions concerning the future, and other key sources of estimation uncertainty at the reporting date that have a significant risk of causing a material adjustment to the carrying amounts of assets and liabilities in the next year.

(c) Changes in accounting policies

The HKICPA has issued certain new or revised HKFRSs that are first effective for the current accounting period of the Fund. There have been no changes to the accounting policies applied in these financial statements for the years presented as a result of these developments.

The Fund has not applied any new standard or interpretation that is not yet effective for the current accounting period (note 7).

(d) Financial assets and financial liabilities

(i) Initial recognition and measurement

The Fund's financial assets comprise placement with the Exchange Fund, accrued interest from placement with the Exchange Fund, accounts receivable and cash at bank.

The Fund's financial liabilities comprise accounts payable.

The Fund recognises financial assets and financial liabilities on the date it becomes a party to the contractual provisions of the instrument. At initial recognition, financial assets and financial liabilities are measured at fair value plus or minus transaction costs that are directly attributable to the acquisition of the financial assets or the issue of the financial liabilities.

(ii) Classification and subsequent measurement

The Fund classifies all financial assets as subsequently measured at amortised cost using the effective interest method, on the basis that they are held within a business model whose objective is to hold them for collection of contractual cash flows and the contractual cash flows represent solely payments of principal and interest. The measurement of loss allowances for financial assets is based on the expected credit loss model as described in note 2(d)(iv).

The effective interest method is a method of calculating the amortised cost of a financial asset or a financial liability and of allocating and recognising the interest income or interest expense over the relevant period. The effective interest rate is the rate that exactly discounts estimated future cash receipts or payments through the expected life of the financial asset or financial liability to the gross carrying amount of the financial asset or to the amortised cost of the financial liability. When calculating the effective interest rate, the Fund estimates cash flows by considering all contractual terms of the financial instrument but does not consider the expected credit

losses. The calculation includes all fees received or paid between parties to the contract that are an integral part of the effective interest rate, transaction costs and all other premiums or discounts.

The Fund classifies all financial liabilities as subsequently measured at amortised cost using the effective interest method.

The Fund reclassifies a financial asset when and only when it changes its business model for managing the asset. A financial liability is not reclassified.

(iii) Derecognition

A financial asset is derecognised when the contractual rights to receive the cash flows from the financial asset expire, or where the financial asset together with substantially all the risks and rewards of ownership have been transferred.

A financial liability is derecognised when the obligation specified in the contract is discharged, cancelled or when it expires.

(iv) Impairment of financial assets

For financial assets measured at amortised cost, the Fund measures the expected credit losses to determine the loss allowance required to be recognised.

Expected credit losses are a probability-weighted estimate of credit losses. They are based on the difference between the contractual cash flows due in accordance with the contract and the cash flows that the Fund expects to receive, discounted at the effective interest rate. They are measured on either of the following bases:

- 12-month expected credit losses (for financial instruments for which there has not been a significant increase in credit risk since initial recognition): these are losses that are expected to result from possible default events within the 12 months after the reporting date; and
- lifetime expected credit losses (for financial instruments for which there has been a significant increase in credit risk since initial recognition): these are losses that are expected to result from all possible default events over the expected life of the financial instruments.

In assessing whether the credit risk of a financial instrument has increased significantly since initial recognition, the Fund compares the risk of default occurring on the financial instrument assessed at the reporting date with that assessed at the date of initial recognition. In making this assessment, the Fund considers that a default event occurs when (i) the borrower is unlikely to pay its credit obligations to the Fund in full; or (ii) the financial asset is 90 days past due. The Fund considers both quantitative and qualitative information that is reasonable and supportable, including historical

experience and forward-looking information that is available without undue cost or effort. A financial asset is written off when there is no reasonable expectation of recovering the contractual cash flows.

(e) Revenue recognition

Interest income is recognised on an accrual basis using the effective interest method.

(f) Research grants

Research grants are recognised as expenditure when they are approved in principle and approved for payment when the conditions for release of grant are met.

(g) Cash and cash equivalents

For the purpose of the statement of cash flows, cash and cash equivalents comprise cash at bank.

3. Research grants

	2024	2023
Research grants paid/due for payment	1,987,028	1,711,382
Refund of unused grants	(179,395)	(92,123)
	<u>1,807,633</u>	<u>1,619,259</u>

4. Placement with the Exchange Fund

The balance of the placement with the Exchange Fund amounted to HK\$51,090 million (2023: HK\$50,971 million), being the principal sums of HK\$45,550 million (2023: HK\$45,550 million) plus interest paid but not yet withdrawn of HK\$5,540 million (2023: HK\$5,421 million). The term of the placement is six years from the respective date of placement, during which the amount of principal sums cannot be withdrawn.

Interest on the placement is payable at a fixed rate determined every January. The rate is the average annual investment return of the Exchange Fund's Investment Portfolio for the past six years or the average annual yield of three-year Government Bond for the previous year subject to a minimum of zero percent, whichever is the higher. The interest rate has been fixed at 3.7% per annum for the calendar year 2024 and at 3.7% per annum for the calendar year 2023.

5. Commitments

As at 31 August 2024, grants approved in principle but not yet approved for payment (note 2(f)) amounted to approximately HK\$3,230 million (2023: HK\$3,052 million).

6. Financial risk management

(a) Investment management and control

The Trustee may invest moneys of the Fund in accordance with section 5 of the Permanent Secretary for Education Incorporation Ordinance.

Under the declaration of trust, UGC may, directly or via UGC Secretariat, advise the Trustee on the policies and procedures governing the operation and development of the Fund, and the policies governing the investment of the Fund.

The income from placement with the Exchange Fund should in general be able to fully cover the cash flow requirements for funding research as well as the disbursements incidental to its administration on an ongoing basis.

The investment management and control of the Fund are set out in a documented risk management and investment strategy and are reviewed on a regular basis by UGC.

(b) Market risk

Market risk is the risk that changes in market variables, such as interest rates and currency exchange rates, may affect the fair value or cash flows of a financial instrument.

(i) Interest rate risk

Interest rate risk is the risk that the fair value or future cash flows of a financial instrument will fluctuate because of changes in market interest rates. This can be further classified into fair value interest rate risk and cash flow interest rate risk.

Fair value interest rate risk is the risk that the fair value of a financial instrument will fluctuate because of changes in market interest rates. Since the Fund's financial instruments are stated at amortised cost and not at fair value, changes in market interest rates will not affect their carrying amounts and the Fund's surplus/deficit for the year.

Cash flow interest rate risk is the risk that future cash flows of a financial instrument will fluctuate because of changes in market interest rates. The Fund does not have a significant exposure to cash flow interest rate risk because it has no significant floating-rate financial instruments.

(ii) Currency risk

Currency risk is the risk that the fair value or future cash flows of a financial instrument will fluctuate due to changes in currency exchange rates.

The Fund does not have an exposure to currency risk as all of its financial instruments are denominated in Hong Kong dollar.

(c) Credit risk

Credit risk is the risk that an issuer or a counterparty will cause a financial loss to the Fund by failing to discharge an obligation.

The Fund's credit risk is primarily attributable to placement with the Exchange Fund, accrued interest from placement with the Exchange Fund, accounts receivable and cash at bank. The Fund selects counterparty with good credit standing, strong financial strength and sizeable capital. The Fund also limits the individual exposure, in accordance with a documented risk management and investment strategy, and monitors credit risk on a continuous basis.

While the financial assets measured at amortised cost are subject to the impairment requirements, the Fund has estimated that their expected credit losses are immaterial and considers that no loss allowance is required.

The credit quality of cash at bank at the reporting date, analysed by the ratings designated by Moody's or their equivalents, is shown below:

	2024	2023
A3 to A1	<u>107,366</u>	<u>127,406</u>

The maximum exposure to credit risk of the financial assets of the Fund at the reporting date is equal to their carrying amounts.

(d) Liquidity risk

Liquidity risk is the risk that the Fund will encounter difficulty in meeting obligations associated with financial liabilities. The Fund monitors the liquidity requirements on a continuous basis and maintains a level of bank balances to pay grants as necessary. Hence the Fund does not have significant exposure to liquidity risk.

As at 31 August 2024, the remaining contractual maturities of all financial liabilities, based on contractual undiscounted cash flows and the earliest date on which the Fund can be required to pay, were six months or less (2023: six months or less).

(e) Other financial risk

The Fund is exposed to financial risk arising from changes in the interest rate on the placement with the Exchange Fund which is determined every January (note 4). As at 31 August 2024, it is estimated that an increase/decrease of 50 basis points in interest rate, with all other variables held constant, would have increased/decreased the surplus for the year by HK\$255 million (2023: HK\$255 million).

7. Possible impact of amendments, new standards and interpretations issued but not yet effective for the year ended 31 August 2024

Up to the date of issue of these financial statements, the HKICPA has issued a number of amendments, new standards and interpretations which are not yet effective for the year ended 31 August 2024 and which have not been early adopted in these financial statements. These include the following which may be relevant to the Fund.

**Effective for accounting
periods beginning on or after**

HKFRS 18 “Presentation and Disclosure in Financial Statements”	1 January 2027
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The Fund is in the process of making an assessment of the expected impact of these amendments, new standards and interpretations in the period of initial application. So far, it has concluded that the adoption of them is unlikely to have a significant impact on the financial statements.