

Symposium on the Review of the Research Grants Council (Phase I) and Research Impact Fund

14 November 2017

Review of the Research Grants Council (Phase I)

Conclusions and Recommendations

Background

- RGC Review conducted in two phases
- Phase I Review overseen by UGC, conducted by an independent Task Force and assisted by an external consultant

Background (Cont'd)

Consultation and engagement with stakeholders

- questionnaire surveys
- online consultation
- views from Heads of Universities and senior management of self-financing degree awarding institutions
- 18 face-to-face focus groups

Background (Cont'd)

- Task Force submitted report to UGC in May 2017 and UGC accepted
- Heads of Universities (HoUs), Heads of Institutions (Hols) and RGC consulted
- Comments taken into account in UGC's action plan
- Full review report and action plan released on 21 September 2017

Conclusions

- Main Conclusions -
 - Current system works reasonably well, when compared to some other jurisdictions
 - That said, some improvements can be made

Conclusions (Cont'd)

- Major Observations -
 - Communication and engagement
 - Overall Volume of Research Funding
 - Impact and Benefit
 - Portfolio Balance
 - Areas for Future Strategic Consideration
 - Coupling Grant Success to the Calculation of “R” portion
 - Quality of Assessment
 - Towards Phase II

Recommendations

- Task Force sets out 11 recommendations

- 1. The RGC should continue to provide a portfolio of funding and awards of varying amounts and durations and for different career stages and disciplines to ensure both capacity building and some strategic development**

2. The RGC should review the broader societal impact of the research it has funded

3. Government bodies which distribute funding could review opportunities and incentives which would promote and increase the amount of funding and diversity of funding available for research in Hong Kong

4. RGC should consider how it might enhance its engagement activities, with an eye to supporting stakeholder involvement in its strategic direction and decision making

5. The RGC should consider and articulate its position on a number of issues of global strategic relevance to ensure its strategic aims are met by its schemes

6. UGC and RGC should consider whether, in the light of stakeholders' feedback, the 2015 review of the aims, objectives and consequences of the coupling of the value of the R-portion to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and success in RGC grants should be revisited so that both the long and short term consequences of this continue to fit within the strategic aims of the funding

7. The RGC should consider whether the criteria and thresholds on which quality of applications are assessed by different panels are appropriate to ensure they are in line with their strategic aims

8. The RGC should review and enhance its communication activities, with an eye to improving the understanding of RGC processes by all stakeholders

9. HEIs should review internal processes to ensure information from RGC flows down and reaches all staff

10. Researchers should seek out an awareness of RGC processes and input when given the opportunity

11. RGC should review its processes and streamline them to maintain fairness and efficiency

Towards Phase II

- Phase II review to cover less macro issues
 - quality of assessment and monitoring processes
 - means of communication among members of the panels / committees
 - timeline of funding schemes
 - arrangement guarding against conflict of interests in the assessment process
- To be overseen by RGC

Review of the Research Grants Council (Phase I)

Action Plan

1. Communication and Engagement

Actions taken

- HoUs / Hols invited to enhance the dissemination of information from the RGC to front-line researchers, and to suggest new engagement activities
- Deliberations made at the RGC Council meeting in June 2017 posted onto the RGC website

Actions in the coming months

- Chairman of RGC will meet Vice-Presidents (Research) after each RGC meeting starting from January 2018
- UGC, in partnership with the RGC, will develop a communication and engagement policy for the RGC with a view to improving transparency by early 2018
- Reflective reports by Committees / Panels starting from June 2018

2. Volume of Research Funding

Actions taken

- UGC has explored possibility of injecting further resources into the Research Endowment Fund (REF) and will continue to seek additional financial support
- Latest development – proposed additional funding of \$10 billion for university research and \$3 billion injection for Research Postgraduate (RPg) studentship

Actions in the coming months

- Seeking matching funds from UGC-funded universities / industry for the new Research Impact Fund
- Enhancing a closer link with the Innovation and Technology Fund (ITF)

3. Impact and Benefit

Actions in the coming months

- The Research Impact Fund will be launched to encourage more impactful research and foster collaborative efforts with stakeholders beyond academia. Stakeholders will be consulted. The first call is expected to be issued in early 2018
- Research impact as one of the assessment criteria for various schemes. Optional technology transfer plan for General Research Fund, Early Career Scheme and Faculty Development Scheme starting from 2018/19 exercise
- The next Research Assessment Exercise in 2020 will include research impact as one of the elements of assessment

4. Portfolio Balance

Actions in the coming months

- The Research Impact Fund will be launched in early 2018
- The RGC will review the Institutional Development Scheme for the self-financing sector. Result is expected in 2018

5. Strategic Issues

Actions in the coming months

- The UGC is preparing a strategic plan
- The recommendation on alignment among local funding bodies will be brought to the attention of other local funding bodies
- Keep in view the results of the Review on Research Policy and Funding in 2018

6. Research Portion

Actions on on-going basis

- As a response to the stakeholders' concerns expressed in the RGC Review, the UGC approved an interim arrangement to “freeze” the percentage of the competitive part of the Research Portion (R-portion) at the current level, i.e. 26%, until a further R-portion Review was completed and considered

7. Quality of Assessment and Phase II Review

Actions taken

- RGC is developing a new electronic system to manage all the funding schemes online. The new system is expected to be fully rolled out in 2019
- Principal Investigators are no longer required to nominate reviewers. No further instances of alleged misconduct cases due to inadvertent non-disclosure of relationships

Actions in the coming months

- The RGC will discuss the implementation time-table for the Phase II Review

Questions?