



大學教育資助委員會
University Grants Committee

Symposium on the Review of the Research Grants Council (Phase II)

15 July 2019

Review of the Research Grants Council (Phase II)

Findings and Preliminary Recommendations

Background

- Phase I Review covered macro issues such as portfolio balance of the RGC funding schemes, the RGC and assessment panels / committees' structure
- Phase I Review conclusion –
 - current system had worked well and kept pace with comparable jurisdictions
 - recommendations on various aspects of work, such as communication and engagement, data collection and impact and benefit.

Background (Cont'd)

Phase II Review

- Overseen by RGC
- Working Group set up in February 2018
- Consultant – Research Consulting Limited
- Consultation and engagement with stakeholders
 - 19 face-to-face interviews and focus groups
 - 4 sets of questionnaires
 - over 5,000 written responses and comments

Background (Cont'd)

- Working Group on the Review of the RGC (Phase II) considered the consultant's findings and prepared an interim report, covering preliminary observations and recommendations.
- Interim report accepted by RGC and UGC in May 2019, and released in early July
- Consultation and engagement activities from July to mid-August 2019
- Symposium facilitates face-to-face exchange of views

Key Findings of Consultant

- RGC operates to rigorous standards in line with international good practice
- Handles increasing numbers of schemes, applications and awards each year with great efficiency, but is under strain
- Challenges brought by increases in funding and new schemes announced by the Government

Major Observations of the Working Group

- Portfolio of funding schemes
 - Recent injection of \$20 billion to the Research Endowment Fund (REF)
 - addressing the recommendations of the Task Force on Review of Research Policy and Funding
 - review of the three collaborative research funding schemes
 - introduction of new fellowship schemes
 - rationalization of the deployment of the investment income of REF

Major Observations of the Working Group (Cont'd)

- Application, assessment and monitoring processes
 - trial arrangements of “right of reply”
 - time commitment of investigators
 - guidance notes and forms
 - electronic system

Major Observations of the Working Group (Cont'd)

- Transparency in operation
 - Documentation of processes
 - Information available on the RGC website
- Open access
 - Need to establish effective policies

Recommendations

The Working Group sets out 13 recommendations in the Interim Report -

1. Establish and define clear strategies, aims and objectives for the operation of RGC

Recommendations (Cont'd)

2. Review the entire RGC funding portfolio with the intent to distribute and rebalance the budget for the various activities, particular in light of the recent injection of \$20 billion to the REF

Latest development:

Following the LegCo's Finance Committee's approval on 28 June 2019, it is expected that the new funding generated from investment income would be available for deployment a year later. RGC would consider using existing resources to boost research funding on an interim basis

Recommendations (Cont'd)

3. Revisit the formula used to divide the annual General Research Fund (GRF) budget among the panels

Recommendations (Cont'd)

4. Implement a one-time trial of right of reply for the 2019/20 TRS exercise

Latest development:

A trial of “right of reply” procedures was implemented in the TRS 2019/20 exercise. Comments of external reviewers (ERs) were released to the Project Coordinators (PCs) and they were requested to respond in one week. The responses from the PCs, together with the assessments from the ERs were submitted to the readers for evaluation.

The RGC decided to continue the trial arrangements in the next TRS (i.e. 2020/21) exercise and extend them to the Areas of Excellence (AoE) Scheme to collect more data for further consideration.

Recommendations (Cont'd)

5. Require PIs to specify time commitments to various funded projects as well as for teaching and administrative duties in all applications

Recommendations (Cont'd)

6. Increase substantially the staffing level of the Secretariat in view of the expanding workload

Recommendations (Cont'd)

7. Monitor the progress of the new electronic system for handling applications and reviews

Recommendations (Cont'd)

8. Review and revise, perhaps with the engagement of a consultant, RGC forms and documents ranging from policy statements, application forms, assessment forms, etc.

Recommendations (Cont'd)

9. Make available on the RGC website explanations and descriptions of all aspects of the RGC operations, including forms and documents, budgets and allocations, funding results, procedures and processes, for the sake of transparency

Recommendations (Cont'd)

10. Subject to availability of additional Secretariat staff, establish a communications and engagement committee to develop and oversee implementation of relevant strategies, to undertake a fundamental review of the website, its structure, and the information it provides

Recommendations (Cont'd)

11. Review and revise the open access policy, including guidance to universities and investigators and defining open access requirements for accepting RGC funding

Recommendations (Cont'd)

12. Clarify and remind universities, researchers and reviewers of ethical guidelines and procedures for handling conflicts of interest and misconduct

Recommendations (Cont'd)

13. Simplify and streamline approval of routine project variations, such as minor changes in staff and budget

Next Steps

- Consultation period: July to 15 August 2019
- Written comments welcomed
- Final report for UGC's approval in October 2019
- Action plan to be formulated by RGC in late 2019



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Questions and Answers Session