

Roles of the Research Grants Council in Providing Research Support to the UGC Sector

10 December 2015

Content

1. RGC's Operation
2. Funding for the RGC
3. RGC's Research Funding Schemes
4. Assessment and Monitoring

1. RGC's Operation

Research Grants Council (RGC)

<http://www.ugc.edu.hk/rgc/>

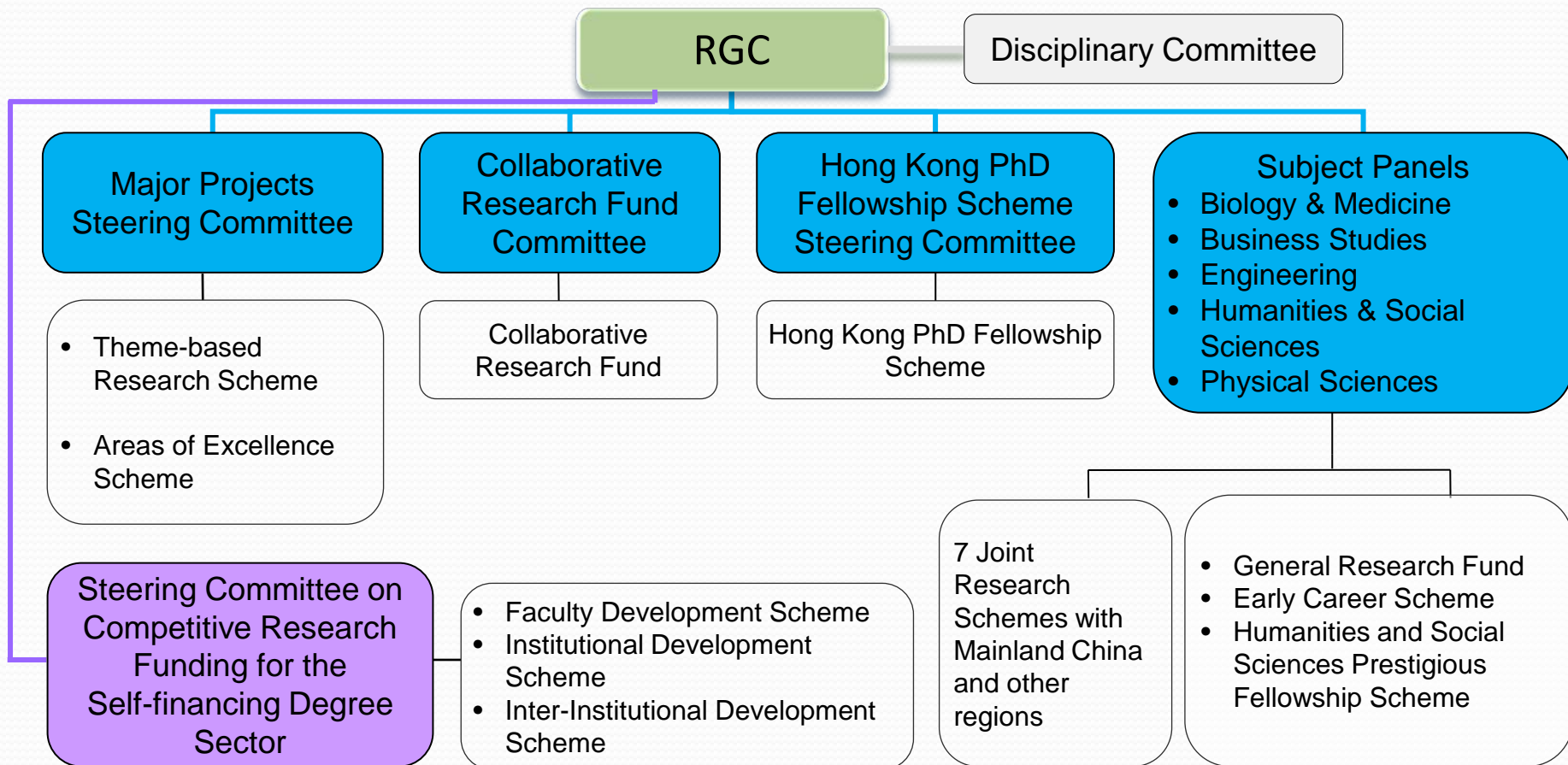
- Established on 1 January 1991
- To **advise** the Government, through the UGC, on the **academic research needs** of UGC-funded higher education institutions
- To **review** research proposals and **monitor** the outcome of such projects
- To **review** and **approve** award of fellowships
- To **operate** new research funding schemes for the **local self-financing degree sector**

RGC (Cont'd)

- Council Members
(appointed by Hong Kong Government)
 - Local academics (10)
 - Local lay members (3)
 - External academics (12)

RGC Structure

The RGC has set up Panels/Committees/Working Group to handle various funding schemes :



Manpower in Processing Grants Applications from Researchers in the UGC Sector

Secretariat Support

- A team of about 30 non-academic staff
- Electronic system

Assessment Panels/Committees

- 5 Subject Panels & 2 Committees comprising about **140** local and **130** overseas experts
- Process over **3 000** applications under **13** funding schemes from a pool of about **4 500** eligible academics every year
- Annual budget of about **\$1.1 billion**

External Review Support

- Over **13 000** external reviews are solicited every year by invitation

Remarks: Figures above do not include the funding schemes for self-financing degree sector.

2. Funding for the RGC

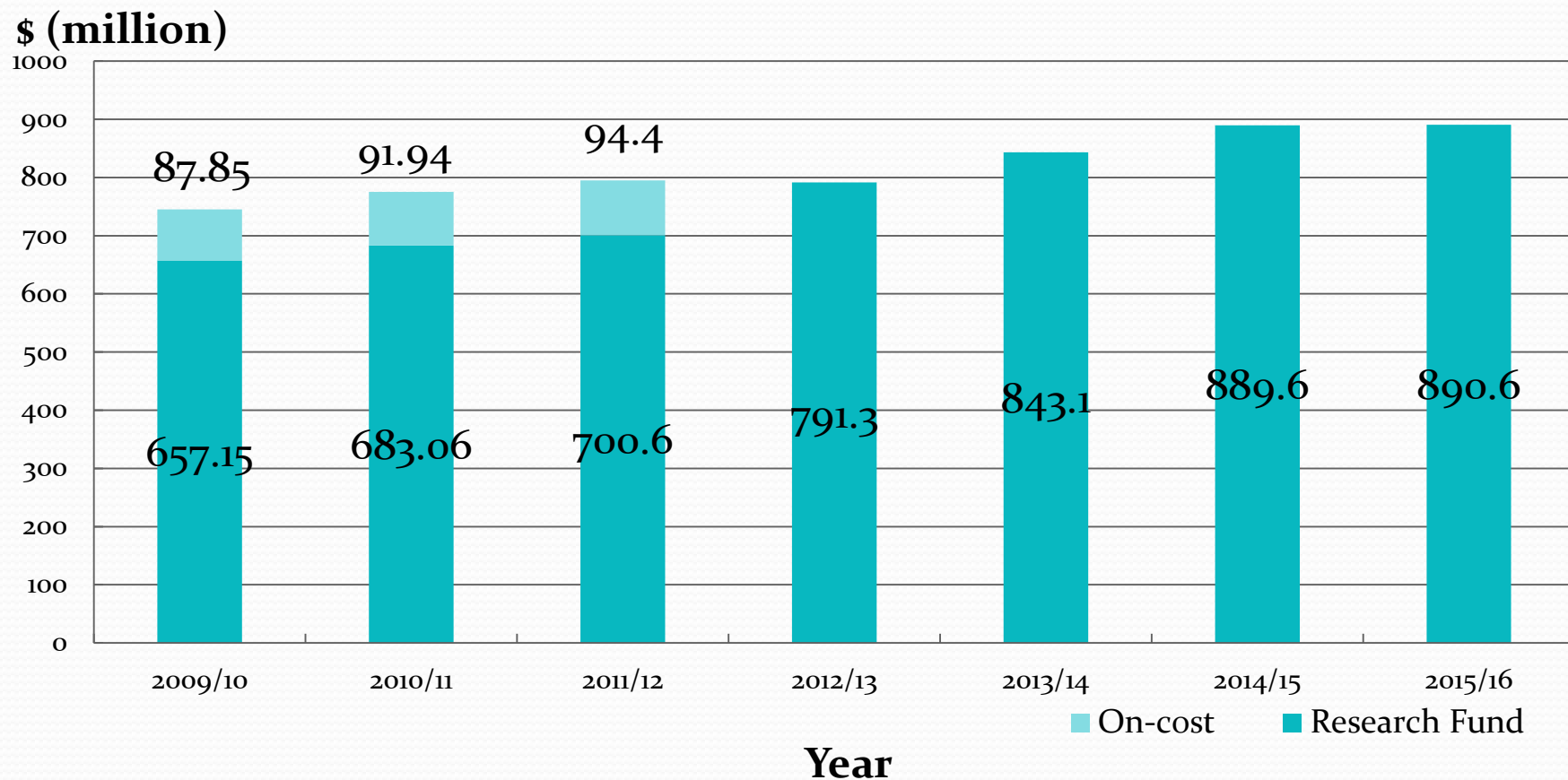
Funding for the RGC

Research Endowment Fund

- Set up in 2009 with \$18 billion endowment
- Topped up by \$5 billion in 2012/13, of which \$3 billion is designated for the self-financing degree sector

Sector	Fund	Estimated Investment income per year
UGC-Funded	\$ 20 billion	\$ 1 billion
Self-financing	\$ 3 billion	\$ 150 million

RGC Earmarked Research Grant Budget



3. RGC's Research Funding Schemes

Subject Panels

Subject Panels

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graph TD; A[Subject Panels] --> B[Joint Research Schemes]; A --> C["• General Research Fund<br>• Early Career Scheme<br>• Humanities and Social Sciences Prestigious Fellowship Scheme"]
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Joint Research
Schemes

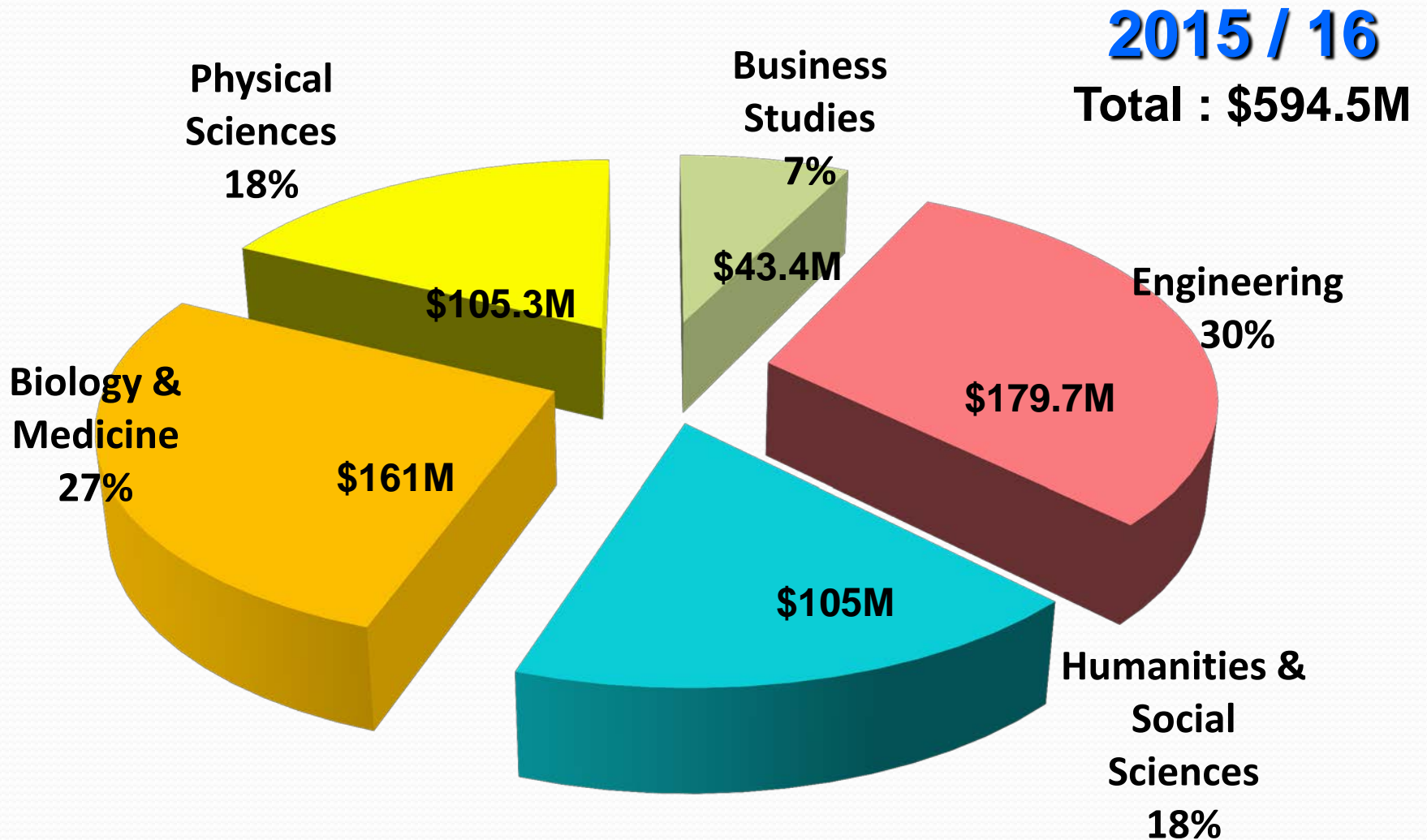
- General Research Fund
- Early Career Scheme
- Humanities and Social Sciences Prestigious Fellowship Scheme

Subject Panels (Cont'd)

- **General Research Fund (GRF)**

- to supplement institutions' own research support
- accounts for 69% of the Earmarked Research Grant budget
- normally 2-3 years
- 2 725 applications received in 2015/16
- funded \$594.5 million for 946 research projects, success rate is 35%
- \$0.1M to \$1.7M per project

GRF Research Fund Allocation



Remarks: The figures does not add up to total due to rounding

Subject Panels (Cont'd)

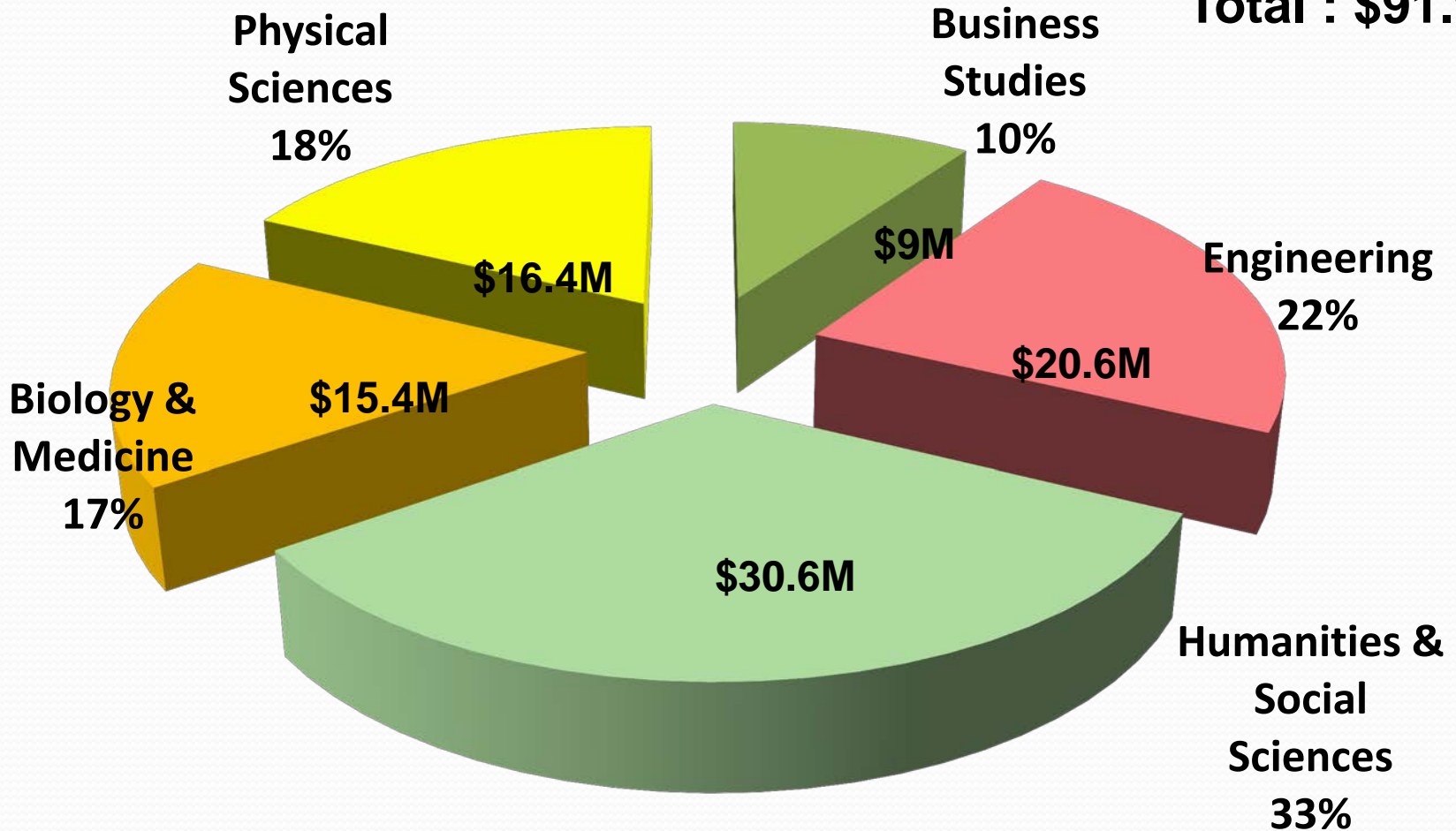
- **Early Career Scheme (ECS)**

- introduced in 2012/13
- to nurture junior academics and to prepare them for a career in education and research
- Up to \$100,000 per project awarded to those awardees with a satisfactory Education Plan
- normally 2-3 years
- 381 applications received in 2015/16
- funded \$91.9 million for 151 research projects, success rate is 40%
- \$0.1M to \$1.9M per project

ECS Research Fund Allocation

2015 / 16

Total : \$91.9M



Remarks: The figures does not add up to total due to rounding

Subject Panels (Cont'd)

- **Humanities and Social Sciences Prestigious Fellowship Scheme**
 - To recognise the outstanding HSS academics
 - To provide resources for employment of relief teachers to relieve teaching and administrative duties; and the costs of travel, subsistence and dissemination of outputs
 - Up to \$1M per fellowship award
 - Maximum 10 awards per year

Subject Panels (Cont'd)

- **Joint Research Schemes**

RGC has collaborations with organisations in the Mainland China and other regions, including:

- Mainland China –
 - **National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC)**
- European countries –
 - **The Consulate General of France in Hong Kong**
 - **The French National Research Agency (ANR)**
 - **German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)**
 - **The Scottish Government**
 - **Scottish Funding Council (SFC)**
 - **European Commission's Horizon 2020**
- The United States – **Fulbright Scholar Programmes**

Subject Panels (Cont'd)

- **Joint Research Schemes (Cont'd)**
 - Increasing budget for Joint Research Schemes from \$25M in 2011/12 to \$42M in 2015/16 (68% increase)
 - Three types of grants:
 - Project Grants
 - Travel/Conference Grants
 - Fellowships

Collaborative Research Fund Committee

**Collaborative Research
Fund Committee**

Collaborative Research Fund Scheme

Collaborative Research Fund Committee (Cont'd)

● Collaborative Research Fund (CRF)

- Medium scale, normally 3-5 years
- \$2M to \$10M per project
- Success rate is 19%

Major Projects Steering Committee

Major Projects Steering Committee

- Theme-based Research Scheme
- Areas of Excellence Scheme

Major Projects Steering Committee (Cont'd)

- **Theme-based Research Scheme (TRS)**

- Large scale, up to 5 years
- \$13M to \$75M per project; success rate is 18%
- To focus academic research efforts on themes of strategic importance to the long-term development of Hong Kong
- Around \$200 million per year (investment income from up to \$4 billion from Research Endowment Fund)

Major Projects Steering Committee (Cont'd)

- **Areas of Excellence (AoE) Scheme**

- Large scale, longer-term projects, up to 8 years
- \$23M to \$92M per project
- Success rate is 8%
- New per-project funding ceiling of \$60M
- Some projects are world leading and have significant societal impact

Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme Steering Committee

**Hong Kong PhD
Fellowship Scheme
Steering Committee**

Hong Kong PhD Fellowship
Scheme

Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme Steering Committee (Cont'd)

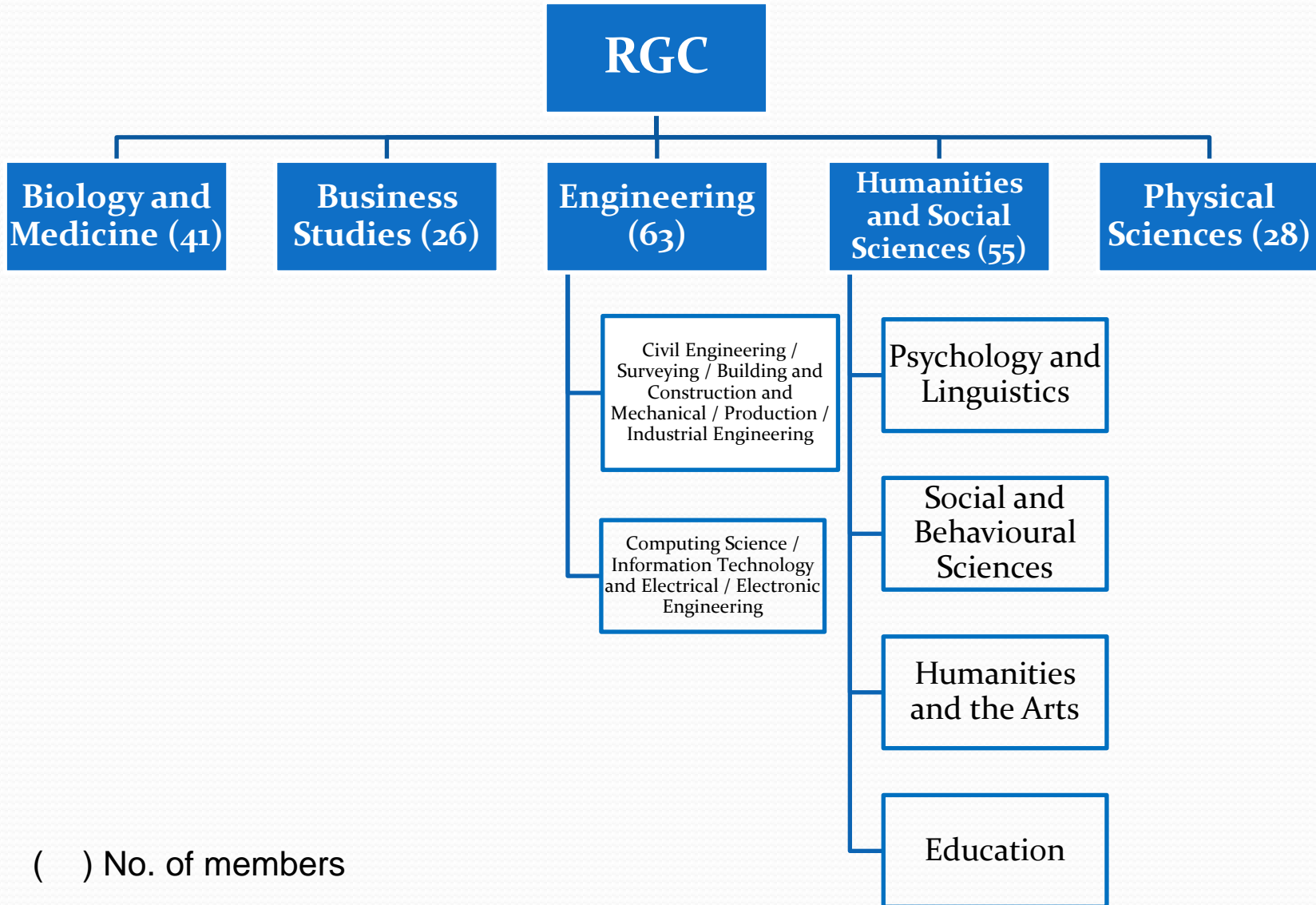
- **Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme**

- Funding provided by UGC Block Grant
- To attract the best and brightest students globally to pursue PhD studies in Hong Kong
- Stipend : Monthly stipend of \$20,000 and a conference and research-related travel allowance of \$10,000 per year up to 3 years



4. Assessment and Monitoring

GRF/ECS Subject Panels



() No. of members

GRF/ECS

4.1 Assessment via Peer Review Mechanism

- Subject Panel Members
 - 103 local member and 110 non-local members
- External Reviewers
 - Over 14 000 active reviewers in database
 - Over 13 000 reviews solicited in a year

4.2 Handling Conflict of Interests

Handling Conflict of Interests

Mechanism of avoiding conflict of interests

- A Code of Conduct is in place to set out the standard of behaviour expected of Members in handling Council's business.
- Assessment Panels/Committees are chaired by non-local Members.
- Chairman, RGC (being a local academic) is not involved in the assessment of grant proposals.

Handling Conflict of Interests (Cont'd)

Rules to manage conflict of interests

- A Council/Panel member shall :
 - report his conflict of interests by completing/updating “Register of Interests” and declare on a case by case basis
 - avoid putting himself in a position that may lead to an actual or perceived conflict of interest
 - not comment on proposals from applicants with affiliation without permission
 - not assess applications in which he is associated
 - not take part in the decision-making on applications from the same institution

4.3 Monitoring & Assessment of Funded Projects

Monitoring & Assessment of Funded Projects

- Project holders are required to submit (1) progress reports and/or (2) completion reports to the RGC
- **Progress Reports**
 - For group research projects, the RGC will conduct on-site inspection or hold a symposium to meet with the project teams.
 - The progress report will be rated and feedback will be given to the project holders for follow-up and improvement.

Monitoring & Assessment of Funded Projects (Cont'd)

- **Completion Report**

- The completion report will be rated. Reflect in the project holder's track record and may affect the grading of the project holder's next application.
- Summary of the completion reports are uploaded to the RGC's website for public information.
- On-site inspection or sharing sessions will be arranged for completed projects selected randomly.

4.4 Disciplinary Committee

Disciplinary Committee

- To oversee the policies on handling alleged improprieties
- To investigate the alleged cases
- PIs have the right to appeal against RGC's decision on penalty

Thank you