

# UGC announces results of Research Assessment Exercise 2020

The following is issued on behalf of the University Grants Committee:

The University Grants Committee (UGC) announced today (May 24) the results of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2020. About 70 per cent of the research projects assessed were judged by international experts to be "internationally excellent" or above – 25 per cent being "world leading" and 45 per cent "internationally excellent".

The Chairman of the UGC, Mr Carlson Tong, said, "The UGC is extremely pleased with the results of the RAE 2020 and congratulates the eight UGC-funded universities and their researchers. The encouraging outcome will provide positive guidance for the universities in their pursuit for excellence, which has benefited from the increased research funding from the Government over the past few years. In particular, I am most thankful to all parties involved for their concerted effort and commitment over the past year, during which the exercise pressed on in a most rigorous and robust manner under the difficult circumstances imposed by the pandemic".

The RAE 2020 is part of the UGC's ongoing efforts to assess the performance of the UGC-funded universities in research. It is a criterion-referenced assessment exercise against agreed quality levels as defined by international standards, covering research outputs completed during October 2013 to September 2019. In addition to research outputs, the RAE 2020 included new assessment elements in research impact and research environment, so as to encourage research of broader social relevance with high economic and social benefits, and take into account universities' strategy, resources and infrastructure in respect of research support. About 16 000 research outputs involving some 4 200 eligible academic staff, 340 research impact case studies and 190 research environment submissions were assessed in this exercise.

Mr Tong added, "Universities performed well in research impact, which reveals that the universities did a good job in transferring their research to innovative solutions, bringing substantial benefits to society and significant and tangible changes to people's lives."

The RAE 2020 was implemented under the purview of the Research Assessment Exercise Group (RAEG) of the UGC, under which 13 assessment panels of broad disciplines were formed. The panels involved 361 members, all distinguished scholars or research end-users with extensive professional knowledge and expertise in their respective fields. Among them, 252 (or 70 per cent) were non-local scholars from different parts of the world, ensuring independent and fair assessment according to international standards and underpinned the credibility of the RAE results from an international perspective.

The UGC conducted five RAEs in the past, in 1993, 1996, 1999, 2006 and 2014 respectively. The RAE 2020 has produced quality profiles of the eight UGC-funded universities to delineate relative strengths and identify research areas and opportunities for development.

The Deputy Convenor of the RAEG, Professor Wong Yuk-shan, said, "The objective of the exercise is to encourage world-class research and drive excellence. All assessments were based on the merits of the submissions, and were not about individual staff." He added that whilst the 2020 results should not be directly compared with those of the RAE 2014 due to different methodologies and elements being assessed, clearly all the universities had built upon their earlier success.

Regarding the interpretation of the RAE 2020 results, Professor Wong emphasised that the data should not be read out of context and that the universities had different combinations of disciplines covered in the exercise. "The RAE 2020 is not a ranking exercise. Direct comparison of results across different panels and universities should be avoided. When interpreting the RAE 2020 results, attention should be paid on the quality profiles of the units of assessment. Due regard should also be given to the universities' different roles, missions, discipline focuses and history," he added.

The results of the individual universities of the 13 assessment panels will be uploaded to the UGC website ([www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/activity/research/rae/rae2020.html](http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/activity/research/rae/rae2020.html)). The results of the RAE 2020 will be used to determine the distribution of part of the Research Portion of the UGC Block Grant to universities, which have the autonomy to allocate the funds internally as they see fit.

Mr Tong said, "The RAE results provide robust benchmarking information and establish reputational yardsticks for use within the UGC sector and for public information. They also provide guidance for the universities' future development in respect of pursuing research excellence and creating yet more synergies between research, teaching and learning, and knowledge transfer activities. While direct comparison between the current RAE, with 70 per cent of research projects judged to be 4-star and 3-star, as against the RAE six years ago, with 46 per cent judged to be 4-star and 3-star, cannot strictly be made due to the difference in methodologies and elements being assessed, the RAE 2020 results show that the universities' research quality has grown from strength to strength. We hope that the RAE 2020 will enhance public understanding of the benefits research can contribute to the community and thereby bring the research community closer to members of the public."