

9 November 2015

Division Merit Salary Review Committee (DMSRC)

Guidelines for evaluating Social Science faculty in merit salary reviews

1. Applicability

The DMSRC is of the opinion that these guidelines should *not* apply to any annual adjustment to faculty salaries equal to or less than the annual percentage change in the salary of civil servants. These guidelines should only apply to an annual adjustment to faculty salaries *exceeding* the annual percentage change in the salary of civil servants.

Rationale: every year, the Hong Kong government adjusts HKUST's budget in accordance with the salary increases for civil servants. The civil servant salary increases are based on salary increases in comparable positions in the private sector. The civil servant salary increases are applied *uniformly* to all civil servants within a particular pay category for which such data were collected for the private sector (high / medium / low).

These across-the-board uniform civil servant salary increases do *not* incorporate the additional civil servant annual automatic salary increment in case of "satisfactory" performance, nor do they incorporate salary increases due to promotions. In the civil service, those constitute performance-based salary increases that happen over and above the across-the-board same-position salary changes.

(1) Since the government treats professors as civil servants when adjusting its annual transfers to HKUST, the DMSRC expects HKUST management to be consistent and to pass on the civil servant pay changes in unadulterated fashion to faculty, supplemented by a merit review with salary increases over and above the across-the-board same-position salary changes. (HKUST's management itself steadfastly applies civil servant rules to faculty across numerous instances, such as leave-taking, an alien concept to academia.)

(2) Some members of the DMSRC conclude that if the civil servant pay changes are not passed on to faculty one-for-one, those faculty who receive pay changes below the civil servant pay raises (and this could be 99% of the faculty, or even 100% given the absence of transparency) will continuously lose out in comparison to the civil service *and* in comparison to the private sector, i.e., are continuously expropriated vis-à-vis their *economy-wide* peers. These members of the DMSRC does not condone HKUST management's use of a "merit review" as a tool of expropriation relative to the economy-wide peers.

(3) Some members of the DMSRC conclude that HKUST management's practice of by default passing on *half* of the civil servant / economy-wide pay increases in practice implies a real salary cut. The DMSRC does not condone HKUST management's systematic impoverization of faculty members.

The DMSRC therefore views these guidelines as applicable only to a performance-based review for salary adjustments over and above the economy-wide same-position uniform salary increases.

2. HKUST Guidelines for Faculty Performance Assessment

The HKUST “Guidelines for Faculty Performance Assessment” (SN118/40/2013) contain the following passage relevant to the DMSRC in performing its duties:

The assessment of a faculty member’s performance in each of the three areas of primary duties and activities, namely, teaching and education (“teaching” for short), research and scholarship (“research” for short), and service should be holistic, depending on a number of key performance attributes, and should not be mechanical. It would be inappropriate to simply count the number of publications or to focus exclusively on the students’ teaching evaluation summary statistics. In any academic review, including annual merit review, a faculty’s overall performance should be summarized in words, not only with numbers.

The DMSRC acknowledges these formal HKUST guidelines as binding for the division merit salary review. (HKUST management’s annual evaluation form violates the formal HKUST guidelines in that it is de facto, with its five-grade scale, purely number-based.)

3. Evaluation of Research

3.1 The HKUST “Guidelines for Faculty Performance Assessment” (SN118/40/2013) state regarding research that:

Faculty research performance in any given year of assessment should be based on some reasonable moving averages, say over a few years, rather than exclusively on the new publications and other forms of recognition in that particular year alone. The review should also take into account the faculty member’s career accomplishments and professorial rank.

Consequently, the DMSRC considers research performance over the past three years in one “package,” not giving special weight to any one year. The choice of three years arises from the availability of three years’ data in the Annual Activity Report Form.

3.2 The HKUST “Guidelines for Faculty Performance Assessment” (SN118/40/2013) define “excellent performance in research” as:

Only faculty whose research publications are, judged by their colleagues and by distinguished international peers in their discipline, to be first rank, and who show promise (for assistant professors) or evidence (for associate professors or higher) of continued academic achievement at the same level or higher, will be regarded as achieving Excellent performance in research.

This (above) paragraph has two implications. First, the DMSRC is particularly interested in excellent performance as that could justify salary adjustments above the same-position across-the-economy (civil servants, private sector) uniform pay adjustments.

Second, the standard for junior faculty (assistant professors) is different than that of senior faculty. The paragraph sets a standard of “promise” for assistant professors. Given the information available in the Annual Activities Report Form, though, the DMSRC is hard pressed to evaluate “promise.”

As a rule, since the publication process takes time, for any given level of performance evaluation (say, excellent) junior faculty in their first three years after their PhD are not expected to have the same publication record for this period as faculty members who have been employed for more than three years since receiving their PhD. For any given level of performance evaluation, junior faculty within six years of their PhD are also not expected to publish at the same level of quality as faculty members who have been employed for more than six years since receiving their PhD.

3.3 The DMSRC considers the following (non-exhaustive list of) indicators relevant for evaluation of research:

- Journal articles
- Books (solo-authored, co-authored)
- Books (edited)
- Book chapters
- Short articles addressing a general audience
- Working papers
- Conference and workshop presentations
- Research awards and prizes
- Research fellowships
- Impact factor of journals in which one has published
- Google scholar citations. Ideally, this information would be provided by the faculty as part of the submission of one's annual report. Faculty are invited to enable their google scholar profile. (One member of the DMSRC is not sure this is needed, given that the size of such numbers varies according to disciplines.)
- Harzing's Publish or Perish statistics (which include a variety of indicators that, for example, correct for the number of authors or for the date of publication). Ideally, this information is provided by the faculty as part of the submission of one's annual report; it is near-impossible for another person to effectively run Harzing's Publish or Perish on one's behalf. (One member of the DMSRC is not sure this is needed, given that the size of such numbers varies according to disciplines.)

3.4 The DMSRC notes the following particular difficulty in evaluating performance in research for the purpose of salary adjustments:

- Take two articles published in the same journal, one by a solo author, and one by the same author together with three co-authors. Does the first article (solo-authored) carry four times more weight than the second, or do they carry equal weight? In the latter case, the DMSRC would likely be remunerating strategizing rather than research. (Get four people together, put your names on each other's papers.) If four co-authors were to imply four times the work of a solo author, then the result can be expected to be of exceptional quality, which will be reflected in journal quality, impact factor, and citations, one-quarter of which each author is responsible for.
- Some members of the DMSRC feel that not every faculty member has the same opportunities at HKUST. Some faculty members have been singled out by HKUST management for special treatment. In evaluating the performance of faculty members, the DMSRC has difficulty distinguishing to what extent performance is due to special

treatment by HKUST management. In this case, HKUST management has stacked the odds of salary adjustments in favor of selected faculty members, and the DMSRC would simply be rubber-stamping HKUST management's prior decisions on who is more likely to receive salary adjustments.

3.5 Some members of the DMSRC do not consider submission of a grant proposal, or receiving a grant, as a research achievement as these obviously do not represent research *performance*.

3.6 The DMSRC invites faculty members who consider their research to be excellent are invited to in their Annual Activities Report Form make a special argument for their case.

4. Evaluation of Teaching

4.1 The HKUST "Guidelines for Faculty Performance Assessment" (SN118/40/2013) define "excellent performance in teaching" as:

The university has an on-going initiative redrawing the process and criteria by which performance is judged in teaching, including Excellent performance in teaching. See *Task Force Report on the Evaluation of Regular Faculty in Their Role in Student Education*." [Not available to the DMSRC]

4.2 In evaluating teaching, the DMSRC evaluates the aggregate performance over the past three years (without giving any one year special weight), in order to match the evaluation period of research, and in order not to allow strategizing that may lead to peak teaching performance in any one year and significantly lower teaching performance in other years.

4.3 The DMSRC does not take into consideration the number of courses taught because that number reflects numerous factors of which the DMSRC is not cognizant (such as leave, buy-out thanks to grants, etc.).

4.4 Some members of the DMSRC feel that students' teaching evaluations are of questionable use in evaluating faculty teaching. (i) While there is a rationale for a company (financial bottomline) to pay attention to if their customers like their products, this does not apply in same measure to the education sector; a student could well dislike a class at the time of evaluation and only realize years later how useful and important that class was. (ii) A student may give easier classes a higher rating than more difficult classes (in which case using student evaluations as criterion for good teaching simply causes a race for the bottom among faculty members, surely not what a top research university wants to be famous for). (iii) Students are likely to have systematic preferences across disciplines. (iv) Some faculty members are prohibited from teaching courses in the discipline in which they have been trained to teach and may therefore have a teaching disadvantage.

For all these reasons, at least one member of the DMSRC concludes that the teaching evaluations cannot signal more than particularly bad and excellent teaching. This member of the DMSRC therefore considers everyone's teaching performance to be equally "good" by default.

4.5 A faculty member whose teaching evaluation in any one course is approximately two standard deviations below the mean of comparable courses (or of the same course over time) is invited to explain the divergence in their Annual Activities Report Form.

4.6 The DMSRC is particularly understanding should junior faculty incur low teaching evaluations (more than two standard deviations below the mean of comparable courses). Some junior faculty may also have been assigned by the division head to teach courses outside the areas they have been trained to teach in.

4.7 Beyond the summary student evaluation of teaching, the “Annual Activities Report Form” (of 2015) includes information on three further items:

- Actions taken to enhance courses and innovate to improve students' learning, including learning materials, in-class delivery, teaching-laboratory experiences, and assessment activities.
- Contributions to development of courses and programs, including curriculum development, implementation of elearning, and development of an orientation to outcomes-based teaching, learning and assessment.
- Other activities in your educational role not covered above.

The first two of these items appear to include assumptions by HKUST management about what is valuable in teaching. None of these assumptions has been made explicit, let alone approved by the faculty; nor is any formal HKUST document available. Some of the sub-items listed by management, such as elearning, are known to come with arm-twisting, horse-trading, sugar-coating or provision of large favors. Thus, even if one were to assume and accept that such performance is a “positive,” or a “significant positive,” such performance may (or may not) already have been compensated by HKUST management. In order to take such items into consideration, the DMSRC requests information from management on all ‘deals’ struck by management with individual faculty members.

At least one member of the DMSRC feels that documentation of such deals needs to be available to all faculty, and as a matter of fairness all faculty need to have been offered equal access to such deals.

4.8 The DMSRC invites faculty members who consider their teaching to be excellent to in their Annual Activities Report Form make a special argument for their case.

5. Evaluation of Service

5.1 The HKUST “Guidelines for Faculty Performance Assessment” (SN118/40/2013) define “excellent performance in service” as:

All faculty are routinely expected to serve on departmental, school, and university committees, and in addition, if asked, in such administrative roles as Department Head, Associate Dean, and Dean for which they are also routinely compensated. Only cases *which exceed the routine expectations* [emphasis added] of such service contributions can be considered for Excellent performance in service.

In accordance with these HKUST guidelines, one member of the DMSRC, in the evaluation of internal service, assigns a default value of “good” unless there is evidence of service that exceeds routine expectations and has not been compensated.

5.2 The DMSRC requests information from HKUST management regarding the arrangements management has made for specific faculty in exchange for particular service (for example, extra remuneration, courses off, or participation in an exchange program). One member of the DMSRC requests written confirmation from management that such arrangements have been offered equally to all faculty.

5.3 At least one member of the DMSRC feels that the quantity of routine services is determined by management—the Division head, Dean, or other HKUST management members decide who is on which committee—and thus cannot be used to evaluate service performance of the faculty member. (It could be used to evaluate the fairness and performance of Division head, Dean, and other HKUST management members.)

5.4 External service includes, but is not limited to:

Journal editorship

Member of editorial board of journal

Member of advisory board of journal

Editor of book series (editor of a book is to be included in research)

Public service (including public speeches on academia- or research-related topics)

Conference/workshop organization

Media instances: newspaper articles and significant blog entries, appearance on TV and radio, online presence

5.5 At least one member of the DMSRC does not consider graduate student supervision as service because in the special case of this division access to graduate students is determined by HKUST management’s choice of the character of the PG program, discriminating against specific disciplines. In addition, individual faculty members have no say in the admission of PG students.

5.6 The DMSRC does not consider professional memberships to be services because these are typically bought. Professional membership by invitation in acknowledgement of achievements constitutes service and faculty members are invited to make that argument.

5.7 At least one member of the DMSRC does not consider the reviewing of grants for the RGC to be a service as it is similar to the internal service labeled by the HKUST “Guidelines for Faculty Performance Assessment” to be “routine.”

5.8 Refereeing for journals or book publishers is a borderline case; if a faculty member feels that s/he has performed extraordinarily in this respect, s/he is invited to make/his her case. Faculty members may always include refereeing information (such as journal name and number of reviews for the particular journal) in the “Additional Information and Comments” section of the Annual Activities Report Form.

5.9 In evaluating service, the DMSRC evaluates the aggregate performance over the past three years (without giving any one year special weight), in order to match the evaluation period of research and teaching.

5.10 The DMSRC invites faculty members who consider their service to be excellent to in their Annual Activities Report Form make a special argument for their case.

6. Miscellanea

6.1 Absence of transparency invalidates the current review process

There is no evidence linking the DMSRC's merit review of individual faculty members to HKUST management's decision on salary adjustments for these individual faculty members. This renders the division review process pointless.

In addition, it also provides no incentives for careful evaluation by the DMSRC of faculty performance ("it's a joke, anyway").

6.2 HKUST managements' arrangements for merit review invalidate these review guidelines

DMSRC members fill in the official evaluation forms *individually* and can do so however they wish, no matter what the guidelines say. There are no consequences to a discrepancy between their evaluation and these guidelines as there is zero transparency and zero responsibility.

At least one member of the DMSRC feels that these guidelines should constrain *management* in the conduct of the merit review; the DMSRC has always proceeded largely along the the guidelines detailed here. It is management that is operating without constraints, without transparency, and without any guarantee whatsoever of fairness and a professional review.

6.3 Requirements for the "merit review" to not be a farce

At least one member of the DMSRC feels that in order for HKUST's performance review to move beyond the farcical, the Annual Activities Report Forms submitted by faculty need to be available to all division faculty, the evaluations provided by each DMSRC member need to be available to all division faculty, and everyone's salary adjustments and the salaries themselves need to be made known to all division faculty. (Another member of the DMSRC agrees to this view only if individual faculty members agree.)

6.4 One social science vs. disciplines

One member of the DMSRC notes that we are officially a Division of Social Science, not a Division of Social Sciences. I.e., HKUST management has decided that there is only one social science, and there are no disciplines. (HKUST management has decided that the same applies to the UG and the PG program.) The DMSRC then faces the task of evaluating research and teaching across a wide variety of disciplines while supposedly treating everything as one discipline. This creates a difficulty in that, for example, each discipline likely has its own preference ordering for different types of research and

research outlets which cannot be reconciled with those of other disciplines. In terms of teaching, some disciplines have systematically lower teaching evaluations than others.

6.5 Guarantee that management abides by its funding claims

One member of the DMSRC would like to receive credible assurance from management that (i) the annual increase in salary budget passed on from government to HKUST in fact arrives proportionally in SOSC (and is not, for example, redirected to other schools), and (ii) is fully passed on to faculty (and not, for example, redirected into the creation of new positions). The DMSRC is aware of instances when annual salary adjustments have been / are *below* the percentage increase in salary budget, and there is conflicting recollection of statements made at the DMSRC meeting as to if anyone is aware of any instance when salary adjustments have actually been / are *above* the percentage increase in salary budget.

6.6 Matters of fairness across faculty

One member of the DMSRC finds it difficult to evaluate performance when faculty members are not treated equally (fairly) by HKUST management:

- Some faculty in the Division of Social Science are allowed to teach courses in the discipline for which they have been trained in their PhD studies, while others are explicitly prohibited from teaching in their field of expertise and are asked to teach courses outside their disciplines.
- The PG program is biased towards faculty in certain disciplines, and biased to varying degree against faculty with different expertise. The availability of research students is severely limited, and again biased against specific faculty.

As long as management does not create a level playing field, this member of the DMSRC finds it impossible to conduct a fair performance review. This member of the DMSRC therefore suggests to dissolve the DMSRC and let management directly hand out their favors rather than abuse faculty time to hide behind the pretense of a merit review.

6.7 DMSRC membership

The DMSRC favors systematic rotation of DMSRC membership among all senior faculty over the years. Alternatively, the DMSRC suggests to have all senior faculty be on the DMSRC every year.

6.8 Guiding principles

The DMSRC evaluates performance. It does not evaluate “effort” (we are not a socialist system).

The DMSRC does not count how many units of output a faculty member has produced and assign points accordingly (The DMSRC does not acknowledge sweatshop practices.) The guiding principle in all performance evaluation is what kind of performance makes for a great research university, with top research universities worldwide as the model.