



Carsten Holz
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"SOSC Faculty Development Fund for 2018-19"

Carsten Holz <carstenholz@gmail.com>

Mon, Sep 3, 2018

To: [Division head; SOSC executive officer]

Cc: [SOSC faculty]

Dear [Division head],

re your/[SOSC executive officer]'s 9Jul2018 email titled "SOSC Faculty Development Fund for 2018-19:"

(1) "Research Travel/Duty Trip Fund of HK\$7,500: I wonder why the "SOSC Recurrent Budget account" can only be used for travel, and not for things such as a computer purchase, or for the purchase of statistics books (research material)? If there is a rule limiting the recurrent account to travel expenses, who is responsible for that rule (and why did the responsible person make this rule)?

(2) I wonder what the thinking is behind the amount, HK\$7,500? It's not enough for a conference trip (or anything else) overseas. Are we now supposed to pay half of such a trip ourselves (out of a shrinking salary)? Or are we de facto only supported to travel to the mainland, i.e., are we now being limited to the mainland system of research and conferences? I would agree that combining the two halves into HK\$15,000 is enough for an overseas trip, but then who pays for all the other expenditures during the year? And for the new computer every few years?

(3) I wonder what the rationale is for the choice of HK\$7,500 from the SOSC DDF account? (I don't even know what "DDF" is, nor do I have any clue what the division budget looks like.)

I note that previously this was HK\$32,500, and that your first act as acting division head was to reduce this to HK\$7,500, without any explanation.

(4) The email says "Those faculty members who will apply for a GRF [General Research Fund (grant)] in the upcoming cycle [...] will receive an additional HK\$20K in late November after GRF submissions have been confirmed." – I conclude from the phrasing that this includes the (revised) re-submission of an application that has been unsuccessful in the past. If not, can you please let me know?

Best,
Carsten

On Mon, Jul 9, 2018 at 3:41 PM, [SOSC executive officer] wrote:
Dear SOSC Faculty Members,

On behalf of [Division head], I am pleased to inform the “SOSC Faculty Development Fund” for 2018-19 for all regular faculty as follows:

(I) HK\$15K will be disbursed to all regular faculty in early July :
· *[Same as previous, this first allotment would include a “Research Travel/Duty Trip Fund of HK\$7,500” which comes from the “SOSC Recurrent Budget account” and thus it can only be used for Travel Expenses (i.e. airfare, lodging), and it will be forfeited by the end of the fiscal year if unspent. The rest of the said HK\$15K (i.e. HK\$7,500) which comes from the “SOSC DDF account” can be carried forwarded till June 2021 but subject to a 15% clawback by the end of every fiscal year if it is unspent.]*

(II) Those faculty members who will apply for a GRF in the upcoming cycle (or were successful in the last cycle), will receive an additional HK\$20K in late November after GRF submissions have been confirmed:
· *[This amount which comes from the “SOSC DDF account” can be carried forwarded till June 2021 but subject to a 15% clawback by the end of every fiscal year if it is unspent.]*

Similarly as previous years, note that although the academic fiscal year lasts until June 30th, the on-line system for BR requests now closes in early June and reopens in July for the following fiscal year. As such, *kindly please be sure to send in all your budget requests to us by 1 June, 2019 if you would like the expense to be settled within the current fiscal year.*

My colleague, [name omitted], will send each of you an updated report of your faculty development fund balance soon in mid-July .

Thanks for your kind attention.

Regards,
[SOSC executive officer]

Division head response

On Mon, Sep 3, 2018 at 8:51 AM, [Division head] wrote:

Dear Carsten,

There has been no change in policy except that instead of providing everyone with \$20K in July as we did in 2017, of which \$7500 is for travel, this year we could only offer \$15K, of which \$7500 is for travel. If you compare this year's email sent out on July 9 2018 with the one sent out on July 6 2017 for 2017-18, you will see that the policies are unchanged except that \$20K is now \$15K, reflecting increased pressure on our funds. Our policy regarding \$20K for GRF submission or success remains the same. I am not sure where your figure of \$32500 comes from, or why you think there was a change from \$32500 to \$7500.

I note that the provision of \$7500 to be used only for travel is a longstanding policy, I believe reflecting the source of the funds. I have an email from Dora dated 8/16/2013 about the faculty development fund for 2013/14, which specifies that everyone will receive \$7500 to be used for travel only, and additional funds for general use.

Re #4, yes, if you submit a revised proposal in November, you will receive \$20K.

Regards
[Division head]

From: Carsten Holz [mailto:carstenholz@gmail.com]
Sent: Monday, September 3, 2018 9:00 AM
To: [Division head]
Subject: Re: "SOSC Faculty Development Fund for 2018-19"

Dear [Division head],

Thanks.

The 32.5K I arrived at by deducting the 7500 from the annual total 40K that I have been receiving for several years.

I take it from your response that funding basic research expenses is a matter of availability of funds, rather than a matter of principle. This would then mean that when basic research expenses are not funded, faculty aren't expected to do research.

And when faculty need a lot of funding for research and get a GRF, then they receive extra money from the division (for God-knows-what, since the GRF covers their research expenses).

Best,
Carsten

Division head response

On Mon, Sep 3, 2018 at 9:16 AM, Division head wrote:

If you've been getting 40K/year recently, it's probably because you've been submitting GRF. If you resubmit again in November you'll have another \$20K which will bring you up to \$35K total.

I'm open to suggestions for adjusting the incentives for GRF submission. I tend to agree that there is less urgency in giving an additional reward to people who receive one, since it duplicates what the VPRGO now does. The main argument for extra funds who had a successful application was to help them with expenses related to their research that GRF will not cover. All that said, I have been talking to the ExComm about switching to something like a flat \$30K in November for everyone who applies, and then eliminating the extra funds for a successful application. I need to check with Dora about whether those numbers would work. I think we do need to tie the Faculty Development Fund to GRF submission because there is a natural question about why people need money from the Faculty Development Fund if they don't think they need GRF support.

From: Carsten Holz [mailto:carstenholz@gmail.com]
Sent: Tuesday, September 4, 2018 7:43 AM
To: [Division head]
Subject: Re: "SOSC Faculty Development Fund for 2018-19"

Hi [Division head],

Re the question of why people need money from the Faculty Development Fund if they don't think they need GRF support:

My best research has always been without GRF support.

I like to present it at conferences.

I need some things to conduct my research, such as a good computer / monitors, and statistics yearbooks.

The GRF does not allow me to apply for (only) funding for two conferences a year + one-third of a set of electronics a year + 12K for research materials a year.

Instead, the GRF forces me to spend a lot of time writing up an application and then, if successful, years later when I am on to different research, divert my attention to something that doesn't reflect the best use of my time. There are exceptions: some GRF applications make sense for me because I do need a lot of support, but those are the minority. More likely, my GRF applications are done in accordance with HKUST-internal incentive structures and in violation of the optimal pursuit of research that would occur if the Provost didn't want to make money of our backs.

Best,
Carsten

Division head response

On Sat, Sep 8, 2018 at 12:56 PM, [Division head] wrote:

I understand. When I have the opportunity I lobby against the reliance on GRF as a 'KPI' since it is an input, not an output. And as you point out, there are many colleagues who can do top quality work without outside funding, for whom writing GRF is a distraction, and who could use the extra time to advance their own research. I have also been pointing out at higher levels that encouraging people to apply for GRF when in fact they don't need them means extra competition for funds for the people who actually do need GRF because they have large projects that require research assistance, fieldwork, and so forth.

All that said, until the situation evolves, I do hope that you continue to apply on an occasional basis. I appreciate that you have been contributing to our efforts. While GRF won't cover equipment purchases, I think they will cover various kinds of data acquisition.