



Carsten Holz <carstenholz@gmail.com>

Not interested in continuing to serve as RGC reviewer Re: Assessment of research proposal (xxx) [Prof Carsten Holz]

Carsten Holz <carstenholz@gmail.com>

Tue, Feb 15, 2022 at 4:22 PM

To: rgc1@ugc.edu.hk

Bcc: Faculty members, School of Humanities and Social Science

Dear RGC administrator,

I am not interested in continuing to review RGC grant proposals.

(1) I am not being paid to take on this extra work

As far as I understand, the RGC's rationale for not paying local reviewers is that local reviewers are (potential) beneficiaries of RGC grants.

Based on my experience over four rounds of grant applications, I conclude that I will with near-certainty never again obtain a RGC grant. As you must be aware, one negative review is sufficient to sink an application. I have experienced some extremely low-quality reviews as well as reviews where I wonder if they are not politically motivated. When reviews are written along 'Party lines,' my name alone (<https://carstenholz.people.ust.hk/>), shared with reviewers, will suffice to lead to a low score by one or more reviewers.

Over four (unsuccessful) RGC grant applications, written in order to avoid HKUST sanctions for not applying, I have easily wasted a full year of full-time research, and have been painfully diverted (in order to write grant applications) from whatever research I was doing at the time. My life is too short to throw any more of my professional career to the dogs by wasting my time applying for an RGC grant.

If I will never again be the beneficiary of an RGC grant, the rationale for reviewing grant proposals for the RGC for free disappears.

Aside: If a RGC panel thinks that my grant proposals are consistently unqualified, surely the panel must not think that I am qualified to review other people's grant proposals.

(2) The UGC's decision to base university funding on RGC grants awarded leads to absurd outcomes

(a) In my past experience as reviewer of RGC projects, the vast majority of projects did not need any funding. They can (and should) be done by the Principal Investigator on their own and do not require extra wo/manpower or any other funding. The UGC's arrangements for university funding are wasting enormous amounts of faculty (and thereby research) resources in the annual, time-consuming composition of pointless grant applications.

(b) Following rules set by the UGC, faculty without RGC project funding are now actively prevented by HKUST administrators from doing their research. They are also deprived of research postgraduate students. – Starting this year, if I don't *obtain* a RGC grant, I have

to teach an extra course, i.e., I am explicitly penalized by HKUST administrators in that I am being restricted from doing my research (and won't have research students). I am further penalized a second time by HKUST administrators because less research has obvious implications for salary and promotion.

On the one hand, thus, I am consistently being denied RGC grants in a review process that, to me, appears severely flawed. On the other hand, I am being sanctioned and prevented from doing research and denied research students and experience real salary cuts year after year, while I am being asked to show a good face to the very bad game and write reviews of other people's RGC grant proposals. I hope you see the utter absurdity of this system failure and understand that I will no longer serve as a convenient toy in such horrifically, academically destructive games.

Sincerely,
Carsten Holz

PS: You may freely share this email. (I am sharing it, using the bcc function, with faculty members in my school.)

On Mon, Feb 7, 2022 at 12:05 PM <rgc1@ugc.edu.hk> wrote:
Dear Prof Holz,

Greetings from the Research Grants Council (RGC) of Hong Kong. We would like to invite you, in the capacity of external reviewer, to evaluate a research proposal titled