Background material about research for the School of Design's retreat, 2015

- IK 12 August 2015

1 What is expected from a good academic researcher?

1.1 Standard expectation: a rule of thumb

A kind of old university heuristic has been that a good academic publishes about two good articles a year, and something bigger like a book every 3-5 years. This keeps him busy, enhances quality, and puts short-term interests into a longer planning frame.

In this rule, two things are important. First, there are publications:
- journal articles
- book chapters
- conference papers
    o conferences where submissions are done with full papers are more valuable than conferences where submission happens with abstracts (see Section 2.3)
    o presentations in conferences without a written paper can be reported, but they count only if they are keynotes
    o also report things like panel and workshop organization, being a session chair, curating a part of the conference
    o memberships in the board may also count
- report also reviews of books and exhibitions, newspaper columns etc. NOT blogs, unless they are curated by someone with a good reputation

Second, in the case of the School of Design, you can replace "articles" with "exceptional items" like
- exhibitions
- films
- citations of your (art) work in journals, magazines, newspapers
- funding in the case of arts
- residencies
- creative writing outputs
- other creative items

To see how these outputs are assessed, see Appendix 1. It describes practices at CityU and the Baptist University's Academy of Visual Arts, but it consistent with SD's former practice.

In terms of points, the accounting system uses the same weights for journals and exceptional items. In the academic world, however, your work has to be submitted through a fairly rigorous peer review or other form of jury. Hence, in Hong Kong's promotion criteria, this means things like participation in international exhibitions in major museums and galleries, and publishing in international journals.

For guidelines, you can check how CityU's Creative Media and HKBU's AVA evaluate their creative outputs. Their systems are commonsensical to any artist, and though they do not tell how to evaluate design, you can get a good idea of the evaluation framework.

You can get a copy of these evaluation schemes from Ilpo Koskinen.

1.2 Why is this relevant at the School of Design?

Earlier, we have had "Departmental Thresholds" that set standards for what was expected from the faculty.

Their problem was that they were *very* undemanding. An expectation for an assistant professor for a 4-year period was about 5 points.

In contrast, the standard university expectation outlined in Section 2.1.1. produces about 5 points *annually*, or about 20 points in a four-year period. This means that in 4-5 years, you have a significant portfolio.

The gap between the thresholds and standard, then, is massive. Don't satisfy the School and its old requirements. Think the long term.

1.3 Some School of Design examples

A good case of a level to strive for is Kenny Chow, whose production in 2014-2015 was three chapters in books by international publishers. In four years, this would lead to about 30 points. He also published a book earlier in 2014.

This makes an academic employable.

Note that you do not have to be a researcher to be promoted. Prof. Laurent Gutierrez was promoted this year on his artistic and professional merits. No university in the world would find it difficult to give Zaha Hadid professorships. Contribution to a difficult field is important, not how you do it.

1.4 Quality vs. quantity

Research is creative work. The trick is that ultimately only quality matters, but you can hardly produce quality without quantity.

If we take prof. Koskinen as an example, he has published about 140 papers in his life. His citation count is around 2300. Out of these books and papers, about 20 produce almost 1800 citations, while the rest 100 papers get only a couple of citations each. The good old 20/80 rule works pretty well in his case.

Now, the problem is that like in any creative work, it is practically impossible to predict what picks up. No one can produce only masterpieces. For this reason, it is good to produce a lot.

1.5 How about the PolyU hit list of journals?

1.5.1 The PolyU hit list

PolyU used to have a "hit list" of journals that ranked them in terms of their importance.

Do *not* blindly follow this. It is indicative, however.

It is not official anymore, and if you follow it, you only submit to 3-4 journals if you stick to design. The problem is that they are highly competitive; they accept less than 10% of submissions. Your failure rate will be high.

You can also game the system by searching those journals that have high rating in the PolyU system but low impact factor and high acceptance rate. This is like betting on sports, where you try to find miscalculated odds. Do you want to build your career on gambling?

1.5.2 How professors evaluate your work

There is one rational use for the list, however. When School Research Committee (typically one of its senior professors) gets your annual output, they have to rank each item somehow.

People like Profs. Tang or Koskinen know a lot about design research, but not everything. When faced with a new journal, conference, or exhibition, they have to put a mark to it somehow. In this work, they have two sources: either the Web (in practice, so called "impact factors") or the former hit list.

So, if you publish in *Design Issues* or *International Journal of Design*, you'll get high marks automatically. If you publish in a biomedical journal in Brazil, your work may be every bit as good, but the only way to evaluate it without knowledge of that journal is to go to the Web or to the hit list.

Note. In research output exercises (RAE 2014), these "reputation measures" played no role. They played no role in REF 2014 in the UK either. This is a conscious policy by very senior academics: they trust their own judgment, not numeric formulas in forming their opinion. This is the case in art, design and the humanities, but also in engineering at least in the UK.

1.6 What role does a PhD play in your career?

Next, a clarification about the magic of the PhD degree. Researchers in design schools often think that as soon as they get a PhD, they are honored members of the academia.

This is not the case. A PhD is a student piece supervised by someone. Often, it tells as much about the supervisor as about the student.

More relevant is work you have done after your PhD. Another rule of thumb is this:

- If you produce another piece that is as weighty as a PhD, academics know you are a capable researcher. This makes a good (sometimes salaried) adjunct professor.
- Produce two pieces as weighty as a PhD, and you're at associate professor level.
- Full professor requires 3-4 pieces after a PhD.[1]

A "piece" here usually means a book, a major exhibition, a major production, etc., or a series of smaller pieces that are of similar weight. Thus, 5-6 papers around a topic counts as a book.

This logic guarantees that getting tenure is not a mishap, but a reward for those people who are productive and creative. It also guarantees that people at senior positions have multiple skills and both depth and breadth.

The best way to think about a PhD degree is to see it as a driver's license. You can drive, but you are still taken cautiously by more experienced drivers, and you are put into the most difficult situations only after you show you're worth the trust.

1.7 Competition never stops

Obviously, the higher you climb in the university world, the more competition there is for positions, and the higher these requirements go.

You will face competition in many ways at all levels of your university career.

First, disciplines vary; in European HCI programs, becoming an assistant professor requires a PhD and about 20-25 good conference papers/journal articles. Then, most of these are co-authored, and there are lots of conferences in that area.

Competition never stops. Becoming a full professor of general history in any decent university usually requires 5-8 published research monographs.

1.8 Does teaching and service count?

They do, but form only a small part of the evaluation when you're passing from a tenured position. "Small" means maybe 10-20% and in practice not even that.

Usually, this means that when reviewers go through your portfolio for promotion, they will first look at what your research (but remember exceptional items!) tells about you. Then they adjust this picture a notch up or down, depending on your teaching and admin portfolio. The process goes the other way around very, very seldom.

Now, the logic is this. If you choose to teach rather than do research, it is your choice, and will lead to a teaching track. Your choice will be treated as an indication that you

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[1] An additional quirkiness of universities is that full professorships are for the best experts and do not usually require even a high school diploma. Associate professorships in science universities usually require a PhD. In design schools, the line if not as clear.

want to be a teacher who is not interested in generating new knowledge, which, ultimately, is the business of universities.

The bad news is that teaching does not buy you out of research. The good news is that this gives you a reason for searching funding and other means for buying yourself out from teaching.

So, analyze your motives. Teaching is much more fun than research, which is usually boring and full of waste, rejected papers and bad days.

Just keep in mind that this is why it is called research. It is about wrong paths and misunderstood arguments, and no one is a master in research unless they realize that failure is an inalienable part of it. It is a boring and frustrating path that requires self-sacrifice and a long-term perspective.

2. Tips for GRF applications

The School of Design organizes an internal commenting process in 2015. It is organized under the wings of SRC, and is headed by Tina Luximon, with Ilpo Koskinen's mentoring.

2.1 Background

Think about the decision-making process of the GRC. It consists of screening, expert reviews, and final decision.

The last one is the most important thing when you carve your message. It will be a panel of senior academics in a meeting in which they go through 200-400 applications.

The meeting will be long, but it is heavy. If the meeting goes through 180 applications in 3 hours, it means that each application gets less than 60 seconds. In this time, the panel browses through the reviewer comments and grades. Someone possibly explains in one sentence what the application is about. Then there is a decision.

Yes: very few people enjoy this. Most in fact turn cranky when blood sugar drops. The process is ruthless, especially in the social sciences and the humanities, where senior academic may clash not only on the merits of the proposals, but also on their theory basis and worldview. An inconsistency in reviews will kill a proposal.

The message is this: if your proposal gets to this phase, it has to be obviously important, novel, and easy to describe. Also, the plan has to be solid, and you have to be a credible applicant. Design the proposal with this audience in mind.

2.2 Ask this: is the question for GRF?

Research for a solid research proposal easily takes a few months. It is a major investment of time and its most likely outcome is rejection.

How to decide whether to submit, then? A few rules of thumb are clear. The following distinctions between clinical, applied, and basic research are from Richard Buchanan.

- ***Direct basic research to GRF***. Basic research generates new knowledge rather than solves practical problems. Such knowledge tends to have few direct applications and lots of implications, but its relationship to these implications is ambiguous. This is also high-risk funding, and failure almost expected.

Other types of research should go elsewhere.

- "Applied research" should go to ITF or to foundations. Applied here means applying existing knowledge to several cases. Risk level is usually low to middle.

- Exploratory research should usually go for DFRG. This funding is typically for studying whether a possible topic is worth more attention. A plan that leads to a bigger proposal should be the aim, and a failure may be a good result.
- "Clinical research," in which you apply existing knowledge to a specific case is for consultancy, which fits to the university with difficulties. Think about your doctor, who examines you, gives you a diagnosis, and then a pill. This activity no doubt has a research component, but does not merit research funding, which is reserved for thornier tasks.

Ask what kind of question you are having. Is it basic research, applied, or clinical, to use Richard Buchanan's old distinctions? If your question is clinical, do not submit to GRF. If it is applied, it may be funded, but highly likely it won't, as academic research funding at the highest level is usually reserved for basic research, as there are few others willing to support it.

The best way to assess your question is to talk to professors. They may not be experts in your topic, but they know a lot, and will know when they see a good proposal. In particular, ask profs. Siu, Tang, Koskinen, and de Bont, who have a research background.

2.3 Scoping the question

Another thing you want to do is to evaluate your research question. When thinking through it, it is good to check its promise. Some questions help.

2.3.1 Some diagnostic questions

Is it significant? Make sure the question is not too small, solvable with just technology or government action; too abstract or big to be studyable; or already well-studied. You can build on Hong Kong, but please use HK as an example of a much more general phenomenon. Avoid single concepts: they are impossible to define, especially if your theoretical basis is weak.

Is it novel? Don't build on ideas that are from 1995. Build on discussions happening right now. Unfortunately, the only way to show this is literature review. It has to be good.

Is it clear? Can you expect outsiders to understand it? This sounds simple, but it not. How do you define words like "father" and "mother" these days?

Are you a credible applicant? For example, if your topic is psychological, are you a psychologist? Is your topic too ambitious for a young academic, or too small for a more senior professor?

Remember that being a designer is a drawback in academia: it is a new, applied discipline that is not well known. Therefore, make sure you tell why you can do your proposed study.

2.3.2 Specification

The question is malleable. It can be shaped with concepts. Usually, you find suitable topics in the intersection of 3-4 concepts. Less than that, your question remains so abstract that you cannot answer it; more than that, it gets so specific that it loses its relevance.

For example, studying "poverty" is impossibly large. Are you an expert in EU statistics and the history of Mesopotamia? Paris 16th between 1860-1980? It is very easy to shoot down claims that are too big.

Then, studying poverty in Kam Tin among boys born 2000-2002 living in public housing and involved in petty crime is too small. This kind of studies are a matter of city statistics or criminology, and of no interest to the world outside social work in Hong Kong.

Studying how poverty and design interact among teens born between 1995-2000 in Hong Kong works better. Here, the topic is an intersection of four concepts: design, poverty, age, and the city.

When doing this "specification," as it is known in standard methodology, start from the thing you want to understand. Statisticians call it dependent variable; it is the most important thing in your study. After defining your dependent variable, describe the main "independent" variables. (Dependent variables depend from independent variables, hence the name; alternative vocabulary is explaining variables and explained variables, and even causes and effects, though these words take you to difficult philosophical waters).

There is no escape from this work. Even in qualitative research you need to define the thing you explain, even though you do not think it as a variable, nor try you to explain it.

The result of the specification is usually a relationship you can focus on in your study. How you frame this relationship depends on your thinking; you may use the statistical language, but equally well just say that this is the relationship you try to explicate.

When doing the specification, the normal tactic is from theories to details, but you can also work the other way around, though it is usually much more difficult.

2.4 Do you have an answer?

If you have, do not submit. A grant proposal should have a question, but no answer. You sell a journey into something unknown. The drama in publications always starts from a question and ends up with an answer of some sort, but grant proposals are about questions.

What you should have are possible answers, or hypotheses, i.e. answers building on theory. Keep in mind their form: they tell how the thing you're interested in would look like if some theory were true. Normally, grant proposals have several hypotheses, and you should tell why you doubt them, but not give an answer. In the actual study, you then rule some of them out, and that way arrive at an answer. *An* answer, not *the* answer. Usually you can only say that some answer is more plausible than other answers.

Having said this, it is also good to keep in mind that this is not a standard formula. There are also questions that open up exploration; that aim at creating a better explanation than existing theories; that aim at showing that prevailing wisdom is wrong of neglects something crucial; or just define an area for exploration.

These formats are very typical in the humanities and also in the social sciences. Knowing your audience is the only way to reduce this risk; framing a question wrong to some readers may kill the proposal before it gets serious attention.

2.5 The importance of Page 1

People who make a decision may read only the first (half) page. It has to sell. Put at least these things:

Clear title
Clear topic
Aims, clearly
Description of relevance
Rule out competing approaches to your problem and tell why
Realism: what is the background on which you build.

2.6 Sell the institution

Add a paragraph telling research is being done at SD, and describe how your work contributes to its ongoing research agendas.

2.7 Treat GRF proposal as a platform

It is good to remember that GRF proposals are only one part of research.

When you write a GRF proposal, use it as a template for other applications. GRF proposals are good breeding grounds for other applications: you have to do them pretty carefully. Going from a consultancy project to GRF won't work as well.

Thus, a good plans ideally leads to several proposals. Build a path from academic proposals to applied and clinical. Chunk out pieces for DRGF, ITF, and foundations: use it as a platform.

You can always try next year, unless your topic is very timely. Use feedback in rewriting and recycling applications.

Finally, keep in mind: in the long run output matters much more than where you got funds from, especially if you are looking for life outside PolyU. Any funding is good as long as you keep publishing or pushing your work into the public domain by writing about it or by any other means.

2.8 GRF process at the School of Design in 2015

By the time this was written, we did not know yet the GRF deadline of the 2015 process. SD organizes a support process for the applicants, which takes 7 weeks.

The process starts on 9 Sept. This year, the process is hosted by Tina Luximon. When this memo was written, the deadlines was not yet known. Emily Leung will inform you when Research Office gets the information from HK's research council.

2.9 The School's process, 2016

SRC will start the coaching process for GRF 2016 early Spring in 2016. The process and its support is defined in 2015.

3 Upcoming conferences

Below are a few conferences of interest to SD folks.

3.1 Process

3.1.1 Clarifying motivation

Discuss the conference with your supervisor. The aim is learning and sharing, not traveling.

As a rule, going to a conference should enrich your research by giving you new ideas, a benchmark to ongoing work in your research area, and contacts that may be useful later.

Sometimes, especially when you are researching a new topic, it may make sense to go to a conference even without a paper. This is a matter of discussion with not only your supervisor, but also associate dean for research.

3.1.2 Admin

The acceptance procedure is normal; contact Emily Leung for details.

3.1.3 Reporting

After the conference, report your experiences to SD blog. (See below)

3.1.4 Full paper conferences count

As a rule, papers in conferences where you apply with a full paper count as merit.

Conferences what accept contributions based on abstracts have much less weight; they are typical to the humanities, where conference papers prepare journal papers.

As always, there are exceptions to this rule.

3.1.5 Academic cultures vary

There are fields of learning in which conference papers matter more than journal articles.

This is the case in computer science in particular – and by implication, interaction design – but is also true of any fast-moving technical field that does not have time for a two-year wait typical to journals.

3.1.6 Planning ahead

It is difficult to get through to the best conferences. Their acceptance rates are typically around 20-30%, and peer reviewing can be harsh, detailed, and full of frustration.

In reviews, three things are usually important: contribution, literature, and method.

Start preparing early, and make sure you contribute to the conference a bit (not too much: this adds risk); read and understand literature; and your method works.

3.1.7 Failures

Failure in being accepted may be a good opportunity for learning. In better conferences, the reviews tend to detailed and thoughtful. You can learn a lot from failures.

Writing with someone who knows the community is the best way to learn how to frame a piece of work and avoid obvious pitfalls.

3.1.8 Cost-efficiency

Traveling is expensive, and conference fees are not cheap either. For this reason, make sure you have co-authors who can travel. This is not away from you; it enriches you and adds to your CV.

3.1.9 Listening and listening between the lines

In conferences, especially big ones, it makes sense to listen to the conference in at least two ways.

Obviously, there are papers you want to listen. When in the conference and back on campus, compare what you've heard and try to observe regularities and trends.

It is equally important to listen to people: what they are interested in; where the community is going; what kinds of schisms are there; and what young participants see as especially interesting openings.

3.1.10 Reporting

Starting from Fall 2015, SD will ask you to report your experiences in the School of Design blog at blog.sd.polyu.edu.hk/. This is a way to make your experience available to others in SD. A conference trip is an investment from the School; give something back to the community.

A good and compact format describes briefly the conference, theme, and its organizers, the most interesting papers, and also your impression about what other participants saw as particularly interesting things.

3.2 Upcoming research conferences

3.2.1 ACM conferences for interaction and industrial designers

CHI 2016, May 7-12
San Jose, USA
http://chi2016.acm.org/wp/
Deadlines
- Papers: 25 September, 2015
- Other: 9 Oct
Acceptance rate about 25%, but a very harsh review process.
Ilpo: the leading conference in HCI and probably interaction design. It also has two design-oriented panels, one increasingly focusing on sustainability, another on critical design. Several submission categories, including papers, short papers, alt.chi, exhibition, posters, and so on.

DIS '16: Designing Interactive Systems Conference
June 8-12, Brisbane, Australia
http://www.dis2016.org/
Submission deadline not known yet.
The acceptance rate about 25%.
This is the most design-oriented computer science conference.

IDC '16: Interaction Design and Children
June 21-24, Manchester, U.K.
http://idc2016.org/
Submission deadline not known yet.
Acceptance rate around 30%.
Ilpo: I don't know much about this, but it looks interesting if you're in the area.

MobileHCI '16: 18th International Conference on Human-Computer Interaction with Mobile Devices and Services
September 6-9, Florence, Italy
Web site and submission schedule still open.
Acceptance rate about 25%.
This is in the 30-40% acceptance rate category. It balances industry and academia.

UIST'16: The 29th Annual ACM Symposium on User Interface Software and Technology
October 16-19, Tokyo, Japan
http://uist.acm.org/
Acceptance rate about 20%.
A good, though quite technical

3.2.2 Design research conferences

Design Research Society Conference
The DRS 50th Anniversary Conference, Brighton, UK
June 27-30, 2016

http://www.drs2016.org
Deadline: 9 Nov, 2015
Acceptance rate
Themes:
(1) Future-Focused Thinking:
(2) Conference questions: design research and societal problems; design research as a creative and active force shaping design; how design research makes our life responsible, meaningful, and more open
(3) 50 Years of Design Research: key contributors and contributions over the past 50 years of Design Research
Papers up to 5000 words.
Check also their special interest groups on craft, health, pedagogy, networks?, universal, sustainable, management, embedded, and behavior change
Comments:
This is a terribly British conference, but it is still the main design conference in 2016 (IASDR will be taking place in 2017). The quality of papers has varied tremendously over the years, and power is in the hands of UK-based researchers, so this is not a place for wild ideas.

Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture
University of Washington, Seattle, WA, March 17-19, 2016
DL Sept 23, 2015
http://www.acsa-arch.org/programs-events/conferences/annual-meeting/104th-annual-meeting/call-for-papers

This site has landscape architecture conferences: http://www.thecela.org/calendar.php

4 A tip about applied research

4.1 There is nothing wrong being practical...

If you have contacts interested in funding applied research in business or in government, go for it. Applied research can be fun, it is a good way to get real-life contacts, and when you do it, you may be able to see something happening quite rapidly.

4.2 ...as long as you produce knowledge

However, applied research won't win you friends in universities unless you put your learning back to the public domain.

Keep publishing in mind, and write about your work. If you don't, your work disappears with you, and it won't benefit anyone outside the project. That is seldom valued in universities.

Finding outlets should not be particularly difficult. Most design and interaction design conferences and journals, in fact, crave for real-life pieces.

4.3 Build up from applied to basic

Applied research is also a good place to develop ideas that later build up to better GRF research proposals.

Think about as a way to build up a convincing portfolio. Start with small projects – and report them in small conferences. (Remember to include conference fees and travels to the project budget). Get slightly bigger projects, and report them in bigger conferences. After a few papers, tell the story of your research in journals, or write a small book.

When you have a portfolio like this, you can use it as an argument in GRF. This is how many famous design researchers have built up their academic credibility.

4.4 How the School helps you

The School has an organization in the making, so this is preliminary in August 2015. Still, it is good to know a few things.

We have been doing background work on things like pricing our work, intellectual property rights, negotiation strategy, and ways to build teams.

Throughout, the guiding idea has been to minimize transaction costs from those SD folks who are interested in applied research. That is, by the end of 2015, SD has pooled expertise that unloads a lot of workload from you. For instance, there is no need to know about IP because SD has pooled internal competence and processes for thinking through it.

4.5 IP – intellectual property

The biggest hurdle will always be IP. PolyU owns all IP in its projects, which scares companies off. This is a negotiation issue that has to be dealt with seriously and strategically.

4.6 Who to talk to at the School

Contact Jorn Buhring after you have negotiated with a company and you are entering a briefing stage. This is where there is enough clarity in the plan for foreseeing its possible risks, legal complications, and price points.

Other people to talk to are Tim Jachna and, if you think School Research Committee has to be somehow involved, Ilpo Koskinen.

5. About RAE 2014 (and a word from REF 2014 in the UK)

5.1 Background

Finally, Hong Kong went through a research evaluation exercise (RAE) last year. The results of the cost center, which included the School of Design, were generally speaking fine, but slightly under PolyU average.

The next exercise will be done in about 7 years, but there are a few things we need to over 2016-18 do to show improvement in year 2020. The most important thing the School has done is the nomination of an Associate Dean for Research, Prof. Tim Jachna, which means that it has a key strategic resource looking to the future.

Another piece of background is that the UK also evaluated its research in 2014, but switched from RAE to REF, Research Excellence Framework, which also evaluated research in a four-point scale. The UK is particularly relevant for us, as HK tends to look to it for model, and their evaluation framework is well-tried and pretty smart in many ways.

To make sense of these frameworks, IK made a few phone calls to the panelists in HK and the UK. They are mostly old friends and colleagues, so they provided a lot of background information that will be useful in the future.

The following few points focus on the UK, which will be a model for Hong Kong's next assessment.

5.2 About the RAE panel's recommendations

The main comments of the panel can be grouped into three main categories:

1. Research output in general is good and at high international level
2. We should pay more attention to communication design
3. Our research is currently text-based, and its formats ought to be diversified; SD needs more research through design
4. Finally, and building on the previous point, we should pay more attention to real-world relevance of our research

5.3 Backchannel news

Informally, the Hong Kong panelists in a few things (they were *very* accomplished and experienced designers):

- SD research puts a lot of effort on rigorous methodology at the cost of contribution
- Research focuses too much on Hong Kong: it should tell stories to the world
- Outputs and research questions were communicated unclearly

- Theories were tested minimally in relatively safe academic formats rather than in practice
- Submissions had lots of massive qualitative claims without a whole lot of evidence
- Our presentation of creative outputs was not at the level expected, coming from Europe
- Also, the School needs a orchestrate its presentation well, and it needs a business plan that tells where it is going

5.4 Things assessed in the UK

The work and its quality, about 70%: see below 3.4.
Impact, about 20%: assessed by "research users," including practicing designers.
Research environment, about 10%: funding, the number of PhD students, support from the institution (i.e. university).

5.5 How the panelists assess a piece of work?

Assessment is essentially a portfolio exercise. Both in Hong Kong and in the UK, the panelists were very accomplished senior academics, who trust their own judgment rather than look at matrics. In the UK, each panelist went through about 400 submissions, each cross-referenced to two panelists. In HK, the panelist got about 150 submissions from design.

When assessing the work, they looked at questions; visual examples; evidence of where the work came from and the history of idea development ("rigor" in REF's language); and evidence of creative thinking. They also wanted to see evidence of the context of work, especially in more arty pieces that are impossible to understand without contextualization.

The result was four stacks from irrelevant to world-class.

Reputation measures – impact factor, where a picture was hung – were the least important things, and in the UK, only taken into account in assessing the research environment.

5.6 Towards "impact"?

Hong Kong's RAE mentioned specifically the importance of paying attention to "impact." The UK's Research Excellence Framework in particular gave about 20% of weigh to impact instead of just publications.

This idea is understandable looking at many trends in universities, but it is not without criticism. The problem is that if impact is put ahead of science, the long-term benefits of basic research may be lost, and it is easy to game the system by buying high-impact researchers.

5.7 Assessing environment

Here the institutions were classified into large, medium, nearly medium, and small
Assessment was done for each category separately, as these are not directly
comparable.

6. Department's Academic Advisor's comments regarding research

Kei Sato from Illinois Institute of Technology visited us in June to review our latest developments. Here's a list of his observations and recommendations. Thanks to Tim Jachna for taking notes:

On research
- junior faculty needs mentoring
- research better connected to application; impact up
- social innovation: where is research?
- Define "non-traditional output": it is not understandable for outsiders
- Strategic allocation of faculty to events, committees, international
- Paper writing support is needed
- Clear focus is needed at the level of broad vision
- Goals for research collaboration

On PhD processes
- enhancement of PhD guidance
- students should present at various points
- support for paper development
- integration to research groups
- integration to funded research at the school, research projects
- students should build events on their own without faculty to build community
- more visibility and impact at the school
- build-up of supervisors

Appendix 1. On assessment of creative outputs in HKBU's AVA and CityU's School of Creative Media.

1. Background

We have a few places in town that can provide models for assessing our creative outputs. Their experience is relevant in research assessments and in promotions.

The key thing in evaluating creative work is always contribution, teaching us something new, which can be an idea, technique, process, insight. However, there has to be evidence telling that a piece is a contribution: it is not evident from work, and no one believes a person telling his/her work is original without something that supports the claim.

Assessment always balances three things: content (usually research), teaching, and service. Content gets most attention; getting promoted on teaching or service merits is rare.

2. Assessment criteria: some notes

These two Schools assess its people with some general criteria:

- Teaching and Service are assessed more or less as in PolyU. Yes, you have to do these, but in the long term, they are not knowledge-creation activities, and get less weight than research or art

- Research:
    o Consistent activity of outstanding quality since last promotion.
    o For seniors, international recognition matters is crucial
    o Monographs by international publishers, well-known journals
    o Leadership roles in international research community
    o Successful knowledge transfer activities
    o AVA also gives a scheme for measuring journals, conference papers (starting from keynotes in international conferences to local meetings).

    Note: CityU also gives a hit list of journals and publishers that are good enough.

- Art
    o Consistent activity of outstanding quality since last promotion
    o For seniors, international recognition matters is crucial
    o Solo exhibitions
    o Group exhibitions in reputable museums, galleries, alternative spaces; festivals, awards, grants, residencies
    o Writings and reviews about the artist's work in well-known places.
    o Interdisciplinary work and research

- o AVA also gives a detailed scheme for measuring art works, the scale ranging from A+ to C:
  - Conferences:
    - from keynotes in major international conferences (A+ level)
    - to talks in local meetings (C)
  - Exhibitions:
    - from juried/curated international exhibitions as invited or award-winning artist (A+)
    - to curated and juried exhibitions of local relevance (and audience) (C)
  - Performances:
    - from commissioned presentations as solo or featured artist (A+)
    - to local presentations in a supporting role (C)
  - Festivals (film/non-film):
    - from participation in juried/curated festivals as award winner or featured artist (A+)
    - to local festivals
  - Citation as subject:
    - from being the subject of an monograph by a major international publisher (A+)
    - to being a character in book chapters in local publications (C)
  - Funding: getting funds from Arts Development Council or Leisure and Cultural Serviced Department:
    - >150.000$ (B+)
    - <150.000$ (B)
  - Residency:
    - participation in international juried/competitive residency (B+)
    - participation local juried/competitive juried/competitive residency (B)
  - Public art project
    - from a juried or curated art project associated with a historic site, structure or monument by prestigious body (like the Legislative Council or Rockefeller Center) (A+)
    - to participation in a juried or curated local project (B+)
  - Creative writing and other literary output
    - from being the sole author of an award-winning publication by an international publisher (or with justification, local significant publisher) (A+)
    - to co-authorship in local publications (B-)
  - "Path-finding activities" (i.e. experimentation that does not fit into the art world's usual categories)
    - path-finding with international visibility or high-level of originality (with justification!) (B+)

- path-finding with a high-level of originality (with justification!) (B)

3. How much is enough?

The higher you go, the higher are the requirements for long-term output. The exact measurements do not matter that much, but the levels are roughly this. These are usually counted as three-year moving averages:

1. "Excellent performance"

- assistant professors: about two B-level outputs per year
- associate professors: about 2.5 outputs, one at A level
- full professors 2.5, one in the A level and none under B

2. Good performance
- assistant professors: about two outputs per year
- associate professors: about two outputs, at least one at B level
- full professors 2.5, one in the A level

3. Threshold
- assistant professors: nil
- associate professors: about two outputs per year
- full professors: about 2 outputs, at least one at B level

Appendix 2. Scheme for describing creative work

Sheffield Hallam uses this scheme to orchestrate its research submissions regardless of its type. It is probably useful at SD too:

- Research question/debate/proposition/investigation
- Research context
- Research output (*inc primary dissemination- relevant images, films pdfs etc. etc.)*
- Research methods/materials
- Research funding
- Further Dissemination/critical reviews
- Other relevant information (esteem, impact)