

Academic grants body to blacklist plagiarists

By Renato Reyes

THE Research Grants Council (RGC) has taken a tough stand against researchers plagiarising other academic's work by denying them grants.

"If we are aware this is happening, we would almost certainly debar such person from grant applications," Nigel French, secretary-general of the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee (UPGC), said.

Concerns over plagiarism among academics were raised after Lam Tai-hing, a reader in Hong Kong University's Department of Community Medicine, was found guilty in 1992 in Hong Kong's highest court of plagiarising the work of two colleagues.

The university began an internal inquiry in May to see whether there were grounds to dismiss him.

The RGC, which funds research projects by academics, yesterday steered away from questions on misconduct, saying that researchers committing infringement of copyright belonged to a small minority.

RGC chairman Professor Ko Ping-keung said: "We have 10,000 faculty members in Hong Kong. I don't think we should let one or two isolated cases to dilute the image and reputation of the whole research community."

He said the RGC followed a strict process to monitor the work of a principal investigator or researcher and the money spent on the project.

The council requires researchers to submit progress and completion reports which are evaluated by international experts to determine if there is merit in the research.

If a researcher fails to deliver, Prof Ko said the RGC would request the return of the grant's unspent portion.

But he said there were only two cases when the RGC had to get the money back because the researcher had to emigrate. He said these cases involved no misconduct.

Yesterday, the RGC announced it had allocated \$260 million in grants to seven UPGC-funded institutions to finance 371 research projects in various academic fields like engineering, physical sciences, biology, medicine, humanities and social sciences.