



Innovation and Technology Fund (ITF) –

Research Talent Hub

for ITF-funded R&D projects

(formerly known as the Researcher Programme and Postdoctoral Hub)

Application Guide

To nurture technology talent and encourage them to pursue a career in innovation and scientific research, the Innovation and Technology Commission (ITC) launched the Researcher Programme and Postdoctoral Hub in 2004 and 2018 respectively. In order to provide more flexibility, effective from 1 July 2020, the two programmes have been merged to become the **Research Talent Hub** (“RTH”) whereby each eligible organization/company or research and development (R&D) project can engage up to **four research talents** at bachelor/master/doctoral degree level to conduct R&D work.

2. The RTH provides funding support for organisations/companies undertaking R&D projects funded by the Innovation and Technology Fund (ITF)¹(“RTH-ITF”), incubatees and innovation and technology (I&T) tenants of the Hong Kong Science & Technology Parks Corporation (HKSTPC) and the Hong Kong Cyberport Management Company Limited (Cyberport) (“RTH-SPC”), as well as technology companies conducting R&D activities in Hong Kong (“RTH-TC”) to engage research talent to conduct R&D work.

3. This guide sets out details of the **RTH-ITF** applicable to ITF-funded R&D projects. For the **RTH-SPC** and the **RTH-TC**, please refer to their respective guides.

I. Eligibility

Applicant Organisation / Company

4. All organisations/companies undertaking R&D projects funded by the ITF,

¹ R&D projects funded by the ITF include projects funded under the Innovation and Technology Support Programme (ITSP), the Guangdong-Hong Kong Technology Cooperation Funding Scheme (TCFS), the Mainland-Hong Kong Joint Funding Scheme (MHKJFS), the Partnership Research Programme (PRP), the Matching Grant for Joint Research Scheme (UIM) of the University-Industry Collaboration Programme (UICP), the Enterprise Support Scheme (ESS), the Midstream Research Programme for Universities (MRP), as well as R&D projects undertaken by research centres and laboratories in the research clusters of the InnoHK.

including R&D Centres², designated local public research institutes³ and research centres and laboratories in the research clusters of the InnoHK, may apply for funding support to engage research talent under the RTH-ITF to assist in the ITF-funded R&D project. In general, the RTH-ITF is only applicable to on-going and new R&D projects funded by the ITF.

Research talent

5. To qualify for the RTH-ITF, the research talent must be a graduate⁴ in the relevant field of the research project in which he/she is to be engaged. He/she must be legally permitted to work in Hong Kong; and in possession of **a bachelor degree (including top-up bachelor degree), a master degree, or a doctoral degree of a STEM⁵-related discipline** awarded by a local university, or jointly awarded by a local university together with a non-local university.

6. For research talent with a doctoral degree obtained from a non-local institution, he/she is eligible to participate in the RTH-ITF if the qualification awarding institution is among the top 100 institutions for STEM-related subjects in the *latest publication* of any of the following world university ranking tables:

| Ranking tables | STEM-related subjects |
|--|--|
| Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engineering and Technology - Life Science and Medicine - Natural Sciences |
| Shanghai Jiao Tong University (Academic Ranking of World Universities) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Life and Agriculture Sciences (LIFE) - Natural Sciences and Mathematics (SCI) - Engineering/Technology and Computer Sciences (ENG) - Clinical Medicine and Pharmacy (MED) |
| Times Higher Education World University Rankings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engineering and Technology - Computer Science - Life Sciences - Physical Sciences - Clinical, Pre-clinical and Health |

² R&D Centres refer to –

(a) Automotive Platforms and Application Systems R&D Centre (www.apas.hk);

(b) Hong Kong Research Institute of Textiles and Apparel (www.hkrita.com);

(c) Hong Kong Applied Science and Technology Research Institute, designated as the R&D Centre for Information and Communications Technologies (www.astri.org);

(d) Logistics and Supply Chain MultiTech R&D Centre (www.lscm.hk); and

(e) Nano and Advanced Materials Institute (www.nami.org.hk).

³ Designated local public research institutes refer to local universities (including all University Grants Committee-funded institutions), self-financing degree-awarding institutions registered under the Post-Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap. 320), the Hong Kong Productivity Council, the Vocational Training Council, the Clothing Industry Training Authority and the Hong Kong Institute of Biotechnology.

⁴ The research talent must have already obtained a bachelor/master/doctoral degree qualification.

⁵ STEM (i.e. Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).

7. For doctoral degrees obtained from other non-local institutions, the research talent should provide relevant document(s) (such as the qualifications assessment report issued by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications) supporting that the specific skills possessed by him/her or the equivalence of the qualification being assessed is on the doctoral level for consideration.

8. ***For private company applicants***, the proprietor, partner, shareholder or management of the applicant company or their relatives are not eligible to be engaged as a research talent under the RTH-ITF. The engagement of the research talent should go through an open process (e.g. to advertise the position via mass media, online platform, etc.) to ensure fairness. The applicant company and the research talent shall not be receiving other employment subsidies provided by any other local public funding for the subject engagement under application.

II. Engagement Period of Each Research Talent

9. In order for the research talent to contribute meaningfully to the R&D project, the engagement period for the candidate should be **no less than 6 months**; and should not overlap with any other engagement period under the RTH.

10. Upon completion of his/her engagement with an applicant organisation/company for a particular ITF-funded R&D project, a research talent may be engaged again under the RTH-ITF, the RTH-SPC, and the RTH-TC. Unless otherwise approved by the ITC, **the total engagement period for a research talent under the Research Talent Hub viz. the RTH-ITF, the RTH-SPC, and the RTH-TC should generally be no more than 36 months in total.**

11. To encourage a research talent to progress further in his/her academic achievement, a research talent who has been engaged under the RTH and has subsequently obtained a first doctoral degree is allowed **a fresh 36-month engagement period under the RTH**, counting from the date the research talent first draws the allowance applicable to a doctoral degree holder. The applicant organisation/company can also notify the ITC to apply for a higher level of allowance for the research talent who has obtained a higher degree during the RTH-ITF engagement period (see Part V Remuneration for Research Talents) by submitting a change request; no new application is required.

III. Number of Research Talents to be Engaged

12. **A maximum of four research talents** can be engaged at any one time to assist in an ITF-funded R&D project. In case a research talent engaged for a project resigns/leaves, the applicant organisation/company can engage another one as replacement during the ITF project period.

IV. Application Procedures

13. The applicant organisation/company should have its ITF-funded R&D project approved and a research talent selected/identified before submission of the application to the ITF Secretariat. Applicant organisations/companies should submit separate application for each research talent through the Innovation and Technology Commission Funding Administrative System (ITCFAS) at the ITF website (<http://itcfas.itf.gov.hk>). Relevant supporting document(s), including copies of academic qualification certificates of the research talent, should also be attached to the application. A fresh application should be submitted for engagement of an additional or replacement research talent; or transferring an approved research talent to another ITF-funded R&D project.

14. Once approved by the ITC, the conditions of funding as set out in this Guide would form part of the project agreement of the respective ITF-funded R&D project. Expenses of and payment to the research talent would be additional to the approved budget of the ITF-funded R&D project and should be included in the project accounts for accounting and auditing purposes. No budget virement into or out of the approved funding for the engagement of research talents is allowed.

15. For any subsequent change to the details of the engagement (e.g. change in engagement duration, salary adjustment, etc.), the applicant organisation/company should submit a **change request** electronically through the ITCFAS at the ITF website <http://itcfas.itf.gov.hk> to the ITC for prior approval. Request to change the engagement duration should be submitted **before** the engagement completion date.

V. Remuneration for Research Talents

16. The RTH-ITF will provide the following maximum monthly allowance plus the employer's contribution to the Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) as specified below for each research talent:

| Qualification of the research talent | Maximum monthly allowance | MPF contribution |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| Bachelor degree | HK\$18,000 | HK\$900 |
| Master degree | HK\$21,000 | HK\$1,050 |
| Doctoral degree | HK\$32,000 | HK\$1,500 |

17. The monthly allowance should be paid in full towards the actual lump sum monthly remuneration for the research talent who participates in the ITF-funded R&D project and shall not, in whole or in part, be retained by the applicant organisation/company for whatever reasons. No other allowances, overhead or fringe benefits, etc. will be payable from the RTH-ITF.

VI. Role of the Applicant Organisation/Company

18. The applicant organisation/company should:

- ensure that the research talent selection process is open, fair and without prejudice to any candidates. To avoid conflict of interest, in selecting a research talent, the applicant organisation/company must not engage a research talent who is the proprietor, partner, shareholder or management of the applicant organisation/company or their relatives. The applicant organisation/company or any person/staff authorised by the applicant organisation/company to handle or in any way to be involved in the selection process should declare that they have no actual or potential conflict of interest; or otherwise should not participate in the selection process;
- ensure that the research talent is suitably supervised (preferably by the project coordinator/ deputy project coordinator of the ITF-funded R&D project), to whom he/she can report or consult on a regular basis;
- assign to the research talent relevant R&D duties related to the ITF project and with an appropriate level of workload which warrants a full-time engagement;
- comply with the relevant legislative requirements concerning the employment of the research talent, including the relevant entry/visa requirements for non-local research talents; and
- provide a safe working environment and arrange a proper workspace for the research talent.

VII. Role of the Research Talent

19. The research talent being engaged should assist in the R&D work of the ITF-funded project on a full-time basis.

VIII. Reporting Requirements

20. Both the applicant organisation/company and the research talent should submit evaluation reports to the ITC **within one month from the completion or termination of the engagement** in each ITF-funded R&D project for which he/she is engaged. In case of resignation of the research talent during the approved engagement period or if the applicant organisation/company intends to terminate the engagement, the applicant organisation/company should report such to the ITC immediately. The applicant organisation/company is also required to keep the relevant financial documents (e.g. copies of cheques issued to the research talent, payroll sheets, or certified receipts signed by the research talent, etc.) for seven years after completion/termination of the engagement, and

submit such to the ITC on request at any time during this period.

IX. Return of Funds

21. The applicant organisation/company should return all unused funds and accrued interest to the Government **within one month** upon completion or termination of the engagement.

X. Handling of Information

22. Information provided by the applicant organisation/company in its application and evaluation reports will be kept in confidence. It may however be disclosed to relevant parties to process the application, to conduct research and survey, and if the application is successful, to monitor the engagement, to exercise the Government's rights, and for other related purposes.

XI. Important Notes

23. Inaccurate and incomplete information may affect the consideration and processing of the application and may result in deferral or rejection. Applicant organisations/companies should note that any misrepresentation or omission of information in the application or evaluation reports may lead to rejection of the application and/or full recovery of the monthly allowances already granted by the ITC, and possible court proceedings.

24. The ITC reserves at all times the absolute right to review all applications and adjust the amount of allowances approved as necessary. In the event that there is an overpayment due to error in calculation or assessment, applicant organisations/companies are required to refund the amount overpaid **within one month** upon notification.

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