



Innovation and Technology Fund (ITF) -
Research Talent Hub
for
Technology Companies Conducting
Research and Development Activities in Hong Kong

(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-TC** applicable to technology companies conducting R&D activities in Hong Kong. For the **RTH-ITF** and the **RTH-SPC**, please refer to their respective guides.

I. Eligibility

Applicant Company

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.

4. A technology company which is conducting or plans to conduct R&D activities (see below for definition of R&D activities) in Hong Kong is eligible to apply for funding under the RTH-TC to engage research talent to conduct R&D work if it is –

- (a) registered in Hong Kong under the Business Registration Ordinance (Cap.310) or incorporated in Hong Kong under the Companies Ordinance (Cap.622); and
- (b) not a government subvented organisation or a subsidiary of any government subvented organisation².

5. The applicant company must have substantive business operations in Hong Kong. A shell company or a company having most of its main business operations outside Hong Kong will not be regarded as having substantive business operations in Hong Kong. The applicant must provide documentary evidence proving its substantive business operations in Hong Kong at the time of application.

6. Incubatees and I&T tenants of the HKSTPC and the Cyberport should apply under the RTH-SPC.

7. The applicant company should state in the application the R&D activities it is engaged in or plans to conduct in Hong Kong and also describe the R&D activities to be assigned to the research talent.

8. The ITC reserves at all times the right to determine whether an entity is eligible to apply for funding under the RTH-TC.

Research Talent

9. To qualify for the RTH-TC, the research talent must be a graduate³ in the relevant field of the research activities 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 STEM⁴-related discipline** awarded by a local university, or jointly awarded by a local university together with a non-local university.

10. For research talent with a doctoral degree obtained from a non-local institution, he/she is eligible to participate in the RTH-TC 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:

² A government subvented organisation means an organisation that receives grant from the government on a recurrent basis. The grant contributes towards the organisation's operational expenses, in exchange of its service to the public. The recurrent grant may account for the bulk of the organisation's income or may just be a token contribution/sponsorship forming a small percentage of the organisation's total income.

³ The research talent must have already obtained a bachelor/master/doctoral degree qualification.

⁴ STEM (i.e. Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).

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

11. 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.

12. 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-TC. 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. The research talent should conduct R&D work of the applicant company other than the R&D projects funded and/or to be funded by the ITF during the engagement period. The research talent should not be a salaried staff under other R&D projects funded and/or to be funded by the ITF during the engagement period.

R&D Activities

13. For the purpose of the RTH-TC, an R&D activity is –

- (a) an activity in the fields of natural or applied science to extend knowledge;
- (b) an original and planned investigation carried on with the prospect of gaining new scientific or technical knowledge and understanding; or
- (c) the application of research findings or other knowledge to a plan or design for producing or introducing new or substantially improved materials, devices, products, processes, systems or services before they are commercially produced or used.

14. In general, an R&D activity takes place when a project seeks to achieve an advance in science or technology. Any activity which does not directly contribute to achieving this advance

in science or technology through the resolution of scientific or technological uncertainty is not an R&D activity. The following activities are **NOT** considered to be R&D activities for the purpose of RTH-TC –

- (a) any efficiency survey, feasibility study, management study, market research or sales promotion;
- (b) the application of any publicly available research findings or other knowledge to a plan or design, with an anticipated outcome and without any scientific or technological uncertainty;
- (c) an activity that does not seek to directly contribute to achieving an advance in science or technology by resolving scientific or technological uncertainty;
- (d) any work to develop the non-scientific or non-technological aspect of a new or substantially improved material, device, product, process, system or service;
- (e) quality control;
- (f) routine testing of materials, devices, products, processes, systems or services;
- (g) routine data collection;
- (h) routine, cosmetic or stylistic modifications or changes to materials, devices, products, processes, systems or services;
- (i) market survey for the purpose of ascertaining the needs of customers where no systematic, investigative or experimental activity is involved; and
- (j) production and distribution of goods and services.

15. The above list is by no means exhaustive.

16. To be eligible for funding under the RTH-TC, the applicant company must be conducting or plans to conduct R&D activities in Hong Kong and the duties assigned by the applicant company to the research talent must primarily consist of R&D activities in Hong Kong.

II. Engagement Period of Each Research Talent

17. In order for the research talent to contribute meaningfully to the R&D activities of the applicant company, 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.

18. Upon completion of the engagement in a company, 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.

19. 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 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-TC 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

20. **A maximum of four research talents** can be engaged by an applicant company at any one time to conduct R&D activities. **The total engagement period for an applicant company under the RTH-SPC and the RTH-TC should be no more than 144 months.** In case a research talent engaged resigns/leaves, the applicant company can engage another talent as replacement.

IV. Application Procedures

21. The RTH-TC is open for application throughout the year.

22. The applicant company should select/identify a suitable research talent by an open and fair process, without prejudice to any candidates, before submission of a RTH-TC application.

23. Applicant companies should register for the purpose of the RTH-TC through the Innovation and Technology Commission Funding Administrative System (ITCFAS) at the ITF website (<http://itcfas.itf.gov.hk>). For each selected research talent, the applicant company should submit a separate application via the ITCFAS. New application should be submitted for engagement of an additional/replacement research talent, or for transferring an approved research talent to another company.

24. The applicant company should assign a person as the “project coordinator” of the application to act as the main contact point between the applicant company and the ITC. The project coordinator should be able to fully represent the applicant company. As such, the project coordinator must be a responsible personnel of the applicant company. The project coordinator should also be responsible for direct supervision of the research talent under application, overseeing the management and reporting of the engagement of the research talent generally, ensuring the proper usage of approved funds in accordance with ITC guidelines and instructions, liaising with and answering all enquiries/requests raised by the ITC for information and clarification on all aspects of the engagement of the research talent.

25. The applicant company should also provide copies of the following supporting

documents:

- (a) Business Registration Certificate;
- (b) Certificate of Incorporation (for companies incorporated in Hong Kong under the Companies Ordinance (Cap.622) only);
- (c) Form 1(a)/1(c) of the Business Registration Office or the latest Annual Return filed with the Registrar of Companies (Form NAR1);
- (d) Tenancy agreement/other documentary proof showing the premises for conducting R&D activities;
- (e) Employment contract, and payroll proof issued within one month prior to the date of application of at least one existing staff member. If he/she is an R&D staff member, please provide the CV as well;
- (f) Graduation certificate of the research talent;
- (g) Recruitment advertisement;
- (h) Identity proof of the research talent;
- (i) Rental agreement/receipts/instalment payment records of R&D facilities/equipment, if available;
- (j) Latest Supplementary Form S3 – Expenditure on research & development (Form BIRS3) and the latest Tax Assessment (I.R.C. 1931) of Inland Revenue Department, if available; and
- (k) Employment contract of the research talent (where applicable).

26. The ITC reserves the right to request additional information and supporting documents when necessary. If the applicant company fails to respond to the ITC's request for information/supporting documents within two months of such request, the application will be considered withdrawn. Ineligible or incomplete application will be returned to the applicant company.

27. Once the application is approved by the ITC, the applicant company should comply with the conditions of funding as set out in this Guide throughout the engagement period, and keep relevant records for the engagement as required in Part VIII below. The ITC reserves at all times the right to seek or collect additional information (e.g. research talent's attendance records) from the applicant company and the selected research talent to monitor the approved application where necessary.

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

V. Remuneration for Research Talents

29. The RTH-TC 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

30. **The monthly allowance shall only cover the engagement period stipulated in the approved application**, and shall be paid in full towards the actual lump sum monthly remuneration for the research talent and shall not, in whole or in part, be retained by the applicant company for whatever reasons. No other allowances, overhead or fringe benefits, etc. will be payable from the RTH-TC. The monthly allowance will be provided to the applicant company on a reimbursement basis after acceptance of the progress report by the ITC (on a half-yearly basis in general) as detailed in Part VIII Reporting Requirements below.

VI. Role of the Applicant Company

31. The applicant 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 company must not engage a research talent who is the proprietor, partner, shareholder or management of the applicant company or their relatives. The applicant company or any person/staff authorised by the applicant 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 guided by a supervisor, to whom he/she can report or consult on a regular basis;
- assign to the research talent R&D duties 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 workplace for the research talent, including allocating a fixed office room/space with dedicated workstation(s).

VII. Role of the Research Talent

32. The research talent being engaged should conduct R&D work of the applicant company on a full-time basis.

VIII. Reporting Requirements

33. The applicant company is required to submit progress report(s), signed by both the project coordinator and the research talent, **on a half-yearly basis in general** throughout the engagement period. The ITC will conduct vetting of the report and may visit and interview the applicant company and research talent from time to time during the engagement period for monitoring purposes.

34. Both the applicant company and the research talent should submit evaluation reports to the ITC **within one month from the completion or termination of the engagement**. In case of resignation of the research talent during the approved engagement period or if the applicant company intends to terminate the engagement, the applicant company should report such to the ITC immediately. The applicant company is also required to keep the relevant financial documents (e.g. copy of cheques issued to the research talent, payroll sheets or 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. Handling of Information

35. Information provided by the applicant company in the application and progress/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.

X. Important Notes

36. Inaccurate and incomplete information may affect the consideration and processing of the application and may result in deferral or rejection. Applicant companies should note that any misrepresentation or omission of information in the application or progress/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.

37. 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 companies are required to refund the amount overpaid within one month upon notification.

XI. Enquiries

38. For enquiries on this Guide and the RTH-TC application, please contact –

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