

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”) merged the Researcher Programme and Postdoctoral Hub to become the **Research Talent Hub** (“RTH”) on 1 July 2020 to provide funding support for eligible organization/company to engage research talents for research and development (“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”), technology companies conducting R&D activities in Hong Kong (“RTH-TC”), as well as companies subsidised under the New Industrialisation Acceleration Scheme (“RTH-NIAS”) 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**, the **RTH-TC** and the **RTH-NIAS**, please refer to their respective guides.

I. Eligibility

Applicant Organisation / 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. All organisations/companies undertaking R&D projects funded by the ITF, 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 a Hong Kong permanent resident or person legally permitted to work in Hong Kong during the RTH-ITF engagement period; and in possession of **a bachelor degree (including top-up bachelor degree), a master degree, or a doctoral degree of a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (“STEM”)-related discipline** awarded by either a local university or a well-recognised non-local institution (see Paragraph 6), or jointly awarded by a local university together with a non-local university.

6. For research talent with a 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
Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Natural Sciences- Engineering- Life Sciences- Medical Sciences

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.

Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engineering and Technology - Computer Science - Life Sciences - Physical Sciences - Clinical, Pre-clinical and Health 	
Ranking tables	STEM-related subjects	
U.S. News & World Report (USNWR) Best Global Universities Rankings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agricultural Sciences - Artificial Intelligence - Biology & Biochemistry - Biotechnology & Applied Microbiology - Cardiac & Cardiovascular Systems - Cell Biology - Chemical Engineering - Chemistry - Civil Engineering - Clinical Medicine - Computer Science - Condensed Matter Physics - Electrical & Electronic Engineering - Endocrinology & Metabolism - Energy & Fuels - Engineering - Environment/Ecology - Food Science & Technology - Gastroenterology & Hepatology - Geosciences - Immunology - Infectious Diseases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Material Science - Mathematics - Mechanical Engineering - Meteorology & Atmospheric Sciences - Microbiology - Molecular Biology & Genetics - Nanoscience & Nanotechnology - Neuroscience & Behavior - Oncology - Optics - Pharmacology & Toxicology - Physical Chemistry - Physics - Plant & Animal Science - Polymer Science - Psychiatry/Psychology - Public, Environmental & Occupational Health - Radiology, Nuclear Medicine & Medical Imaging - Space Science - Surgery - Water Resources

7. For 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 the equivalence of the qualification being assessed is on the bachelor/master/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 shall 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 have sufficient time to contribute 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 Research Talent Hub. 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, the RTH-TC, and the RTH-NIAS 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 salary allowance applicable to a doctoral degree holder. The applicant organisation/company can also notify the ITC to apply for a higher level of salary allowance and/or additional living allowance (applicable to doctoral degree holder) for the research talent who has obtained a higher degree during the RTH-ITF engagement period (see Part V Remuneration for Research Talents and VI Additional Monthly Living Allowance) 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 RTH-ITF invites applications for funding all year round.

14. 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 shall 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>). 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. The applicant organisation/company should also provide copies of the following supporting documents with the application:

- (a) Graduation certificate of the research talent;
- (b) Relevant document(s) (such as the qualifications assessment report issued by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications) supporting the equivalence of the qualification being assessed is on the bachelor/master/doctoral level for degrees obtained from non-local institutions outside the top 100 institutions for STEM-related subjects in the latest publication of world university ranking tables named in paragraph 6;
- (c) Recruitment advertisement (where applicable);
- (d) Employment contract of the research talent (where applicable).

15. 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.

16. 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 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

17. The RTH-ITF will provide the following maximum monthly salary 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 salary allowance	Maximum MPF contribution
Bachelor degree	HK\$20,000	HK\$1,000
Master degree	HK\$23,000	HK\$1,150
Doctoral degree	HK\$35,000	HK\$1,500

18. To commensurate RTH-ITF support with the scale of ITF projects and for better allocation of resources, the maximum total amount of RTH-ITF salary allowance (plus MPF contribution) for R&D projects with ITF as the main funding source⁵ will be cap at the final

⁵ i.e. including Innovation and Technology Support Programme (ITSP) (Platform & Seed) projects, ITSP (Mid-stream, theme-based) projects, Guangdong-Hong Kong Technology Cooperation Funding Scheme (TCFS) (Platform) projects,

approved total project cost of such projects as confirmed by the final audited account. ITF funded R&D projects approved before the effective date of this Application Guide (i.e. 1 April 2023) will not be affected.

VI. Additional Monthly Living Allowance to Doctoral Research Talent

19. In addition to the above monthly salary allowance plus the employer's contribution to the MPF, the RTH-ITF will also provide an additional monthly living allowance of \$10,000 (plus the employer's contribution to the MPF, if and when applicable) to the research talent with doctoral degree qualification for a maximum of 36 months. Applicant organisations/companies **MUST** provide monthly allowance of \$10,000 to research talents participating in the RTH-ITF with **doctoral degrees IN FULL**. Approved applications will be revoked if applicant organisations/companies cannot provide documentary proof that the living allowance has been disbursed. Under such circumstances, both the monthly salary allowance (plus MPF contribution) and living allowance (plus MPF contribution) will not be reimbursed to the applicant organisations/companies.

20. The monthly salary allowance (plus MPF contribution) and the above additional living allowance (plus MPF contribution) 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 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. The monthly salary allowance (plus MPF contribution) and additional living allowance (plus MPF contribution) will be provided to applicant organisation/company on a reimbursement basis upon the submission and acceptance of documentary proof for the talents' remuneration expense throughout the approved engagement period.

VII. Role of the Applicant Organisation/Company

21. The applicant organisation/company shall:

- 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;

Mainland-Hong Kong Joint Funding Scheme (MHKJFS) (Platform) projects, but excluding Partnership Research Programme (PRP), TCFS (Collaborative) projects, MHKJFS (Collaborative) projects and Enterprise Support Scheme (ESS) projects, as well as R&D projects of research laboratories admitted to the InnoHK Research Clusters.

- ensure that the research talent has consented to the provision of his/her personal data to the Government and the disclosure of such data to relevant parties for processing the RTH-ITF application, monitoring the engagement and other related purposes (please also see Part IX Handling of Information);
- 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;
- provide a safe working environment and arrange a proper workspace for the research talent;
- (*For R&D projects with ITF as the main funding source⁵,*) ensure that the maximum total amount of RTH-ITF salary allowance (plus MPF contribution) to claim (excluding the monthly living allowance for doctoral degree holder) shall not exceed the final total project cost of the respective project as confirmed by the final audited account.

VIIIX. Role of the Research Talent

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

IX. Reporting Requirements

23. 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.

X. Return of Funds

24. 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.

XI. Handling of Information

25. 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.

XII. Important Notes

26. 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 salary allowance (plus MPF contribution) and additional living allowance (plus MPF contribution) already granted by the ITC, and possible court proceedings.

27. Applicant organisations/companies and the research talent being engaged shall conform in all respects with all applicable laws and regulations (including without limitation the Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance). The Government may at any time revoke an approved application with immediate effect and require refund of disbursed funding to ITC on the occurrence of any of the following events:

- (i). the applicant organisation/company and/or the research talent has engaged or is engaging in acts or activities that are likely to constitute or cause the occurrence of offences endangering national security or which would otherwise be contrary to the interest of national security;
- (ii). the continued engagement of the applicant organisation/company and/or the research talent is contrary to the interest of national security; or
- (iii). the Government reasonably believes that any of the events mentioned in (i) or (ii) above is about to occur.

28. Approved applications will be revoked and the Government may require refund of disbursed funding if applicant organisations/companies and/or research talents fail to comply with any of the requirements stipulated in this Guide. Applicant organisations/companies **MUST** provide monthly allowance of \$10,000 to research talents

participating in the RTH-ITF **with doctoral degrees IN FULL**. Approved applications will be revoked if applicant organisations/companies cannot provide documentary proof that the living allowance has been disbursed. Under such circumstances, both the monthly salary allowance (plus MPF contribution) and the living allowance (plus MPF contribution) will not be reimbursed to the applicant organisations/companies.

29. 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.

XIII. Enquiries

30. For enquiries on this Guide and the RTH-ITF application, please contact –

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