



Innovation and Technology Fund (ITF) -

Research Talent Hub

for Companies Subsidised under the New Industrialisation Acceleration Scheme

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 organisation/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 the details of the **RTH-NIAS**. For the **RTH-ITF**, **RTH-SPC** and the **RTH-TC**, please refer to their respective guides.

I. Eligibility

Applicant Company

4. Companies with projects approved under the New Industrialisation Acceleration Scheme (NIAS) are eligible to apply for funding to engage research talents to conduct R&D activities of the companies. The applicant company shall 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 duties to be assigned to the research talent.

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 set up in the research clusters of the InnoHK.

Research Talent

5. To qualify for the RTH-NIAS, the research talent must be a graduate² in the relevant field of the research activities 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-NIAS 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-NIAS 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 	
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 	
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 	<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

² The research talent must have already obtained a bachelor/master/doctoral degree qualification.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Energy & Fuels - Engineering - Environment/Ecology - Food Science & Technology - Gastroenterology & Hepatology - Geosciences - Immunology - Infectious Diseases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Psychiatry/Psychology - Public, Environmental & Occupational Health - Radiology, Nuclear Medicine & Medical Imaging - Space Science - Surgery - Water Resources
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7. For degrees obtained from other non-local institutions, the research talent shall 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. The proprietor, partner, shareholder or management of the applicant company or their relatives are not eligible to be engaged as a research talent under RTH-NIAS. The engagement of the research talent shall go through an open process (e.g. to advertise the position via mass media, online platform) 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 shall 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 shall 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

9. For the purpose of the RTH-NIAS, 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.

10. 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 the RTH-NIAS –

- (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.

11. The above list is by no means exhaustive.

12. To be eligible for funding under the RTH-NIAS, 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

13. In order for the research talent to have sufficient time to contribute to the R&D activities being engaged, the engagement period for the candidate shall be **no less than 6 months**; and shall not overlap with any other engagement period under the RTH.

14. Upon completion of his/her engagement in an applicant company, 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 shall generally be no more than 36 months in total.**

15. 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 company may also notify the ITC to apply for a higher level of salary allowance and additional living allowance for the research talent who has obtained a higher degree during the RTH-NIAS engagement period (see Part III Number of and Remuneration for Research Talents) by submitting a change request; no new application is required.

III. Number of and Remuneration for Research Talents

For four research talents

16. The RTH-NIAS 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 (a maximum of **four**) to be engaged by an applicant company at any one time:

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

17. In addition to the above monthly salary allowance plus the employer's contribution to the MPF, the RTH-NIAS will also provide an additional monthly living allowance of HK\$10,000 (plus the employer's contribution to the MPF, if and when applicable) to each of these four research talents participating in the RTH-NIAS **with doctoral degrees**. Applicant companies **MUST** provide monthly living allowance of HK\$10,000 to research talents participating in the RTH-NIAS **with doctoral degrees IN FULL**. Approved applications will be revoked if applicant companies cannot provide documentary proof that the monthly living allowance of HK\$10,000 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 companies.

18. **The total engagement period for an applicant company under the RTH-SPC, the RTH-TC and the RTH-NIAS entitled to the aforementioned maximum allowance shall be no more than 144 months.**

For additional 36 research talents on matching basis

19. In addition, an applicant company under the RTH-NIAS may engage up to an additional 36 research talents for a total engagement period of 3 years on a **1 (Government): 1 (company) matching basis**, with the Government covering a maximum of **half** of the monthly salary (plus the employer's contribution to the MPF) or **half** of the prevailing maximum salary allowance (plus the employer's contribution to the MPF) as set out in paragraph 16, whichever is lower.

20. In addition to the above monthly salary allowance plus the employer's contribution to the MPF, the RTH-NIAS will also provide an additional monthly living allowance of HK\$5,000 (plus the employer's contribution to the MPF, if and when applicable) to each of these 36 research talents participating in the RTH-NIAS **with doctoral degrees**. Applicant companies **MUST** provide monthly living allowance of HK\$10,000 (which includes HK\$5,000 from the RTH-NIAS as set out above) to research talents participating in the RTH-NIAS **with doctoral degrees IN FULL**. Approved applications will be revoked if applicant companies cannot provide documentary proof that the monthly living allowance of HK\$10,000 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 companies.

21. **The monthly salary allowance (plus MPF contribution) and the additional living allowance (plus MPF contribution) set out in paragraphs 16-17 and 19-20 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-NIAS. The monthly salary allowance (plus MPF contribution) and additional living allowance (plus MPF contribution) will be provided to the applicant company on a reimbursement basis after ITC's acceptance of the progress report (i.e. on a half-yearly basis in general) as detailed in Part VII Reporting Requirements below.

22. In case a research talent engaged resigns/leaves, the applicant company may engage another research talent as replacement.

IV. Application Procedures

23. The RTH-NIAS is open for application throughout the year.

24. The applicant company shall have its NIAS project approved and a research talent selected/identified before submission of an RTH-NIAS application.

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

26. The applicant company shall 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 shall 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 shall 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.

27. The applicant company shall also provide copies of the following supporting documents:

- (a) Business registration certificate of the applicant company;
- (b) Graduation certificate of the research talent;
- (c) Recruitment advertisement for the research talent; and

(d) Employment contract of the research talent (where applicable).

28. The ITC reserves the right to request additional information and supporting documents when necessary. If an 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.

29. Once the application is approved by the ITC, the applicant company shall 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 VII Reporting Requirements 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(s) to monitor the approved application where necessary.

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

V. Role of the Applicant Company

31. The applicant 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 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 shall declare that they have no actual or potential conflict of interest; or otherwise shall not participate in the selection process;
- 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-NIAS application, monitoring the engagement and other related purposes (please also see Part IX Handling of Information);
- ensure that the research talent is suitably guided by a supervisor, to whom the research talent can report or consult on a regular basis;
- assign to the research talent relevant R&D duties (not secretarial or administrative 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.

VI. Role of the Research Talent

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

VII. Reporting Requirements

33. The applicant company is required to submit progress report(s), signed by both the project coordinator and the research talent, along with copies of relevant supporting documents (such as latest employment contract, salary pay slips (including the additional living allowance (if applicable)) signed by the research talent, MPF records, bank statement or other documentary proof showing the applicant company's name and its bank account number), **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 companies and research talents from time to time during the engagement period for monitoring purposes.

34. Both the applicant company and the research talent are required to 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 engagement period or if the applicant company intends to terminate the engagement, the applicant company shall report such to the ITC immediately. The applicant company is also required to keep the relevant financial documents (e.g. copies of cheques issued to the research talents, payroll sheets, or receipts signed by the research talents) for **seven years** after completion/termination of the engagement, and submit such to the ITC on request at any time during this period.

VIII. Return of Funds

35. In the event that the project under the NIAS is terminated and/or the investment from the applicant company does not meet the minimum requirement of HK\$200 million under the NIAS, the approved application for the RTH-NIAS will be revoked and funding will not be disbursed to the applicant company. The Government will also reserve the right to recoup the disbursed funding.

IX. Handling of Information

36. Information provided by the applicant company in its 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

37. Inaccurate and incomplete information may affect the consideration and processing of the applications and may result in deferral or rejection. Applicant companies shall note that any misrepresentation or omission of information in the applications or progress/evaluation reports may lead to rejection of the applications 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.

38. Applicant 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 the ITC on the occurrence of any of the following events:

- (i) the applicant 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 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.

39. Approved applications will be revoked and the Government may require refund of disbursed funding if applicant companies and/or research talents fail to comply with any of the requirements stipulated in this Guide. Applicant companies **MUST** provide monthly living allowance of HK\$10,000 to research talents participating in the RTH-NIAS **with doctoral degrees IN FULL**. Approved applications will be revoked if applicant companies cannot provide documentary proof that the monthly living allowance of HK\$10,000 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 companies.

40. 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

41. For enquiries on this Guide and the RTH-NIAS application, please contact –

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