

**Health and Medical Research Fund –  
Research Fellowship Awards**  
**Guidelines for Accounting, Reporting, Project Monitoring and Change Requests**

These guidelines serve to remind the Fellowship Applicants (FAs) and the Administering Institutions (AIs) about the key issues relating to accounting, reporting and monitoring requirements of research fellowship awards funded by the Health and Medical Research Fund (HMRF).

FAs and AIs shall comply with these guidelines in conjunction with the signed Agreements. FAs are advised to contact the research offices of their respective AIs for accounting and research administrative support. For further queries, please contact the Research Fund Secretariat (the Secretariat) (Email: [rfs@healthbureau.gov.hk](mailto:rfs@healthbureau.gov.hk)).

Starting from the 2022 application round, the reports, change requests and claims for reimbursement shall be submitted via the electronic Grant Management System (eGMS) (<https://rfs.healthbureau.gov.hk/eGMS/>). Failure to comply with the guidelines may be subject to penalty actions. The *Management of Track Records of Applicants* is available on the [Secretariat's website](#).

**1. Accounting arrangements**

- (a) Expenditures incurred in the claims for reimbursement shall only cover the fellowship period between the commencement date and end date (both dates inclusive) as set out in the Agreement. The training cost should not exceed \$200,000/\$400,000.<sup>1,2</sup>
- (b) Cost of work (e.g. the purchase of equipment or the first working day of a project staff) incurred before the commencement date of the fellowship which includes the period before and after application submission is **not** allowed.
- (c) Funding can be used to meet the costs of the following items –
  - i. fees of the training course/attachment to acquire the specialised knowledge and enhance the skill set for conducting research;

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<sup>1</sup> For awards granted in the 2019 Open Call and thereafter, the ceiling of training cost is increased from \$200,000 to \$400,000. The funding ceiling for an award remains as \$1,200,000.

<sup>2</sup> For awards granted in the 2020 Open Call and thereafter, the training cost shall be used for overseas training programme only. Up to two round-trips economy class air passage are supported.

- ii. air passage (up to two round trips economy class), accommodation and subsistence allowance for overseas training according to the established procurement policy and standard of the relevant AI;
  - iii. procurement of equipment or consumables or recruitment of research staff for conducting the research project; and
  - iv. salary of the reliever at the rank of the FA or below to take over the **teaching duties** of the FA according to the salary rates set by the AI.
- (d) Prior approval from the Secretariat is required for budget virement between any two categories (e.g. “Staff” and “Other Expenses”), or addition of new budget items, or change of staff composition.
- (e) Revised monthly salary for budgeted staff due to cost-of-living adjustment under AI’s policy is automatically approved **provided** that the total of the staff budget remains unchanged. No change request is needed to be submitted to the Secretariat.
- (f) Overspending of any individual item within any category is automatically approved **provided** that the accumulated overspending of any individual item does not exceed 10% of the item’s budget **and** does not exceed the ceiling for that item as set out in the grant policy (e.g. a maximum of HK\$20,000 for publication costs) **and** the budget total of the category concerned is unchanged.
- (g) Bi-monthly claims for reimbursement should be duly submitted to the Secretariat when expenditures are incurred. Claims shall be made no more frequently than bimonthly.
- (h) Payment will be made within **six weeks** to AI after confirming satisfactory progress of the project, verification and acceptance by the Government of each reimbursement claim form submitted by the AI. The Secretariat will put the claim on hold under the following circumstances –
- i. When the project account is frozen due to unsatisfactory progress and overdue deliverables such as report and financial statement.
  - ii. The accumulated claim amount has been over 80% of the total approved budget or the ceiling for payment as specified in the Agreement.
- (i) Research offices and finance offices of AIs should make proper arrangements **in advance** with related department(s) and audited firm(s) and submit the certified financial statement (FS) and Audited Account (AA) on time. Interim Report

(IR)/Final Report (FR) **cannot be accepted** without submission of certified FS/AA, which will affect the payment to the AI.

## 2. Submission and assessment of reports

- (a) Training Report (TR), Progress Report (PR), IR, FR and Dissemination Report (DR), certified FS and AA shall be submitted according to the required [format](#) and by the specific due dates in the Agreement or as required by the Secretariat.
- (b) Reminders will be issued to FA and AI before the due date of submission and deliverables will be assessed by the respective parties set out below –

Deliverables	Reminder issued before due date of submission		Reviewing parties* for PR, TR, IR, FR and DR
	To FA	To AI	
PR	Two weeks	–	Secretariat**
TR, IR, FR, DR, FS and AA	One month	One month	<u>TR, IR, FR and DR</u> Research Fellowship Assessment Panel (RFAP) members  <u>FS and AA</u> Secretariat

\* *The progress of each fellowship award is monitored by three RFAP members (Assessor 1, 2 and 3) with the most relevant expertise assigned by the Secretariat. If the report is rejected by Assessor 1, the FA will be required to revise the report for further review by Assessor 1. If the revised report remains unsatisfactory as determined by Assessor 1, it will be reviewed by Assessor 2. The report will be rejected if both Assessor 1 and Assessor 2 find it unsatisfactory. If Assessor 1 and Assessor 2 have different views, the revised report will be reviewed by Assessor 3. The final decision will be come up by majority vote of the three Assessors.*

\*\* *The Secretariat may seek views from Assessors assigned to monitor the progress of the award where appropriate.*

- (c) Warning will be issued to FA and AI if overdue deliverable(s) is not submitted after issuance of two overdue reminders with extended deadline. The following actions will be carried out if FA fails to submit the deliverable(s) by the final deadline given in the warning: termination of award, recovery of the grant, marking of track record and debarment from applying and receiving HMRF grants.

- (d) In the TR, PR and IR, FA should report the progress according to the expected target(s) during the reporting period set out in the Timetable of the approved proposal/special condition(s) stipulated in the Agreement or specified by the Secretariat. In particular, if the study involves subject recruitment, please state the number of subjects recruited up to a date and the difference from the expected target(s) during the report period and the total target(s) of the study.
- (e) Under “Achievements/Major Findings of the Project so far” of IR, the FA should describe any changes resulting from the research project so far, if any, in terms of, for example: impact on policy, changes in clinical practice or health services management, as well as changes to therapy or treatment and in patient/healthcare professional behaviour, others).
- (f) FA should adhere to the format of FR and DR, in particular a maximum of 2,000 words for DR (including main text, references, key messages) with not more than 3 tables and/or figures and 5 references. FA should provide valid justifications for the Government's consideration if deferral for dissemination of FR or DR is required.
- (g) In the FR, a list of publications (including in press), patents and other Intellectual Property Rights that have resulted directly from the research/project shall be provided. FA/AI should seek written consent from the Government before filing a patent application. Please provide information on the patent to be filed or obtained where applicable. If there is no patent related items, please state “None”.
- (h) For submission of FR, please provide an equipment list, if any, containing (i) serial number or unique stock code; (ii) date of purchase; (iii) location; and (iv) actual value of each item of equipment purchased under the grant.
- (i) Subject to Assessor 1’s advice, FA will be invited to revise FR **ONCE** if it is not accepted. If the revised FR is still not accepted after taking the majority vote of the three Assessors, the project will be closed according to the Agreement (may hold the final payment or require a full/partial recovery of grant) and, track record of FA will be marked.

### **3. Project monitoring**

- (a) FA should adhere to the approved training programme and study design of the project. If the progress is behind schedule, FA should submit practical and feasible

contingency plan to address the possible pitfall(s) or include these information in the PR or IR, whichever is earlier, to the Secretariat for consideration.

- (b) FA and/or AI shall notify the Secretariat as early as possible of any event which is likely to prejudice the project outcome, whether in a qualitative, quantitative or financial aspect, or the timely completion of the fellowship.
- (c) According to the Agreement, FA and AI shall render their advice or recommendation on an impartial basis without giving favour to any particular product or service in the project. FA and AI shall seek the Government's permission to all or any facts which **may reasonably be considered to give rise** to a situation where the financial, professional, commercial, personal or other interests of the FA or AI or any of their respective associates and associated persons, or any member of the Project Team (i.e. Co-applicant(s) (Co-A(s)), conflict or compete, or may conflict or compete, with the FA's or the AI's duties under the approved project.
- (d) If the FA/AI fails to comply with any terms and conditions stipulated in the Agreement, the project will be subject to termination of award and recovery of grants. The track record of the FA will be marked and may be debarred from applying and receiving HMRF grants.

#### **4. Dissemination of results**

- (a) FR and DR with rating of "Accepted" will be uploaded to the Secretariat's website within **one month** after closure of the fellowship. Some DRs may be selected for external publication by the Secretariat, e.g. in the Hong Kong Medical Journal Supplement, even if the project team has published an original article based on the project data themselves. According to the guidelines of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors, these subsequent publications of DR are considered as "acceptable secondary publications" with proper citation of the primary reference and are not a duplicate publication. This fact will be indicated in the title of all published DR with the phrase "abridged secondary publication". Please note according to the Agreement, the Government or FA/AI shall have the right to use the Materials for non-commercial academic purpose without the consent from each party.
- (b) The impact of projects conducted during the fellowship period are evaluated on a

regular basis using the internationally validated Buxton-Hanney research payback framework<sup>3</sup> **two years and four years** after the end date of the fellowship. It is also a **contractual requirement** that FA and AI shall provide information relating to projects under the HMRF for the purpose of evaluation after project completion. Approval for new funding will not be granted if the FA has not submitted outstanding/overdue outcome evaluation questionnaire(s) for his/her grants supported by the HMRF.

- (c) FAs are required to share their experience and research findings after completion of the fellowship at the Journal Club/Health Research Symposium/other appropriate occasions at the request of the Government.
- (d) The Government's contribution shall be properly acknowledged in all research outputs, academic conference presentations and press conference materials, specifically "**Health and Medical Research Fund, the Health Bureau, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region**". Please include the project reference number for easy reference.

## 5. Change requests

- (a) **Prior approval from the Secretariat** is required for all change requests in writing with justifications. Each request will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- (b) **To change a Co-A:** The FA shall (i) replace a Co-A by nominating a suitably qualified and experienced candidate by submitting the nominee's CV and endorsement from the newly nominated Co-A; or (ii) remove a Co-A without replacement by submitting the consent of the Co-A concerned to be removed from the Project Team.
- (c) **To change the Mentor:** The FA shall replace a mentor by nominating a suitably qualified faculty with supporting letters from the new mentor and AI.
- (d) **To extend the end date of fellowship:** Each fellowship lasts for a maximum of two consecutive years (inclusive of both training and research components). For awards granted in the 2019 Open Call and thereafter, project extension up to cumulative period of 12 months with valid justifications and revised work plan will be considered on a discretionary basis. The FA and AI shall make internal

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<sup>3</sup> M. Buxton, S. Hanney. How can payback from health services research be assessed? Journal of Health Services Research 1996;1(1):35-43.

arrangements to absorb the expenditure incurred during the extended project period.

- (e) To change the study protocol (e.g. the number of subjects and inclusion/exclusion criteria): Change of objectives of the research/training plan is not allowed. The FA is required to provide a discussion of the anticipated impact on the study objectives and timeline. He/she has to indicate the amount of reduced budget in the request for reduction of study scope. The amount of approved budget shall be reduced proportionally to the reduction of the scope of study. The Government shall not be liable to make any payment to the FA, AI or any other persons as a result of termination or reduction in scope of the study or extension of study period. Updated/additional regulatory/ethics approval(s)/evidence for accessing third-party data, if any, should be submitted with the change request.
- (f) To change the training plan (e.g. format/nature of the training course and training period): The FA is required to provide a discussion of the anticipated impact on the objective and timeline.
- (g) To terminate before end date of fellowship (i.e. early termination): FA shall contact and discuss with the Secretariat all possible ways to salvage the project as early as practical before submitting the request with full justification, the up-to-date financial statement, supporting letters from the Department Head and Research Office, and consent from all Co-As.
- (h) Change request will first be reviewed by the Secretariat. Longer processing time is needed if approval from RFAP member(s) is required. The approving authorities for change requests are set out below –

<b>Change requests</b>	<b>Approving authorities*</b>
Change of Co-A i. Without replacement ii. With replacement	RFAP member(s) Secretariat
Change of Mentor	RFAP member(s)
Protocol change	
Change of Training	
Project extension i. Extended fellowship to be completed within 2 consecutive years <sup>4</sup> ii. Extended fellowship to be completed <u>over</u> 2 consecutive years <sup>4</sup>	Secretariat  RFAP member(s)
Budget virement	Secretariat
Early termination	RFAP member(s)

\* *Each fellowship award is monitored by three RFAP members (Assessor 1, 2 and 3) with the most relevant expertise assigned by the Secretariat. If the request is rejected by Assessor 1, the FA may be required to respond to Assessor 1's comments for further review by Assessor 1. If the request is still rejected by Assessor 1, it will be reviewed by Assessor 2. The request will be rejected if both Assessor 1 and Assessor 2 reject the request. If Assessor 1 and Assessor 2 have different views, the request will be reviewed by Assessor 3. The final decision will be come up by majority vote of the three Assessors.*

## 6. Improprieties of Applicants

- (a) Improprieties may arise at any point in the funding cycle (e.g. grant application submission, peer review, ongoing project or post-completion evaluation) including:
- i. Scientific misconduct such as plagiarism;
  - ii. Non-disclosure of important information (e.g. conflict of interest (COI), double dipping and research work done before project commencement); and
  - iii. Non-compliance to funding regulations without valid justifications (e.g. failure to submit final report, early termination, incomplete project, etc.).
- (b) AIs should have in place adequate systems to ensure the quality of research conducted by FAs and their compliance to the terms and conditions under the HMRF, in particular effective mechanisms for identifying and handling allegations of scientific misconduct.

<sup>4</sup> For awards granted in the 2019 Open Call and thereafter, the normal duration for each fellowship is two years. Project extension up to cumulative period of 12 months with valid justifications will be considered.



- (c) **Double dipping, plagiarism, including self-plagiarism, are not tolerated** and are considered as a type of serious misconduct. The definitions of plagiarism and self-plagiarism as well as examples are detailed at [Annex](#).
  
- (d) Training attended and/or research work (e.g. subject recruitment) conducted before the commencement of the fellowship which includes the period before and after application submission is not allowed. **Work done before commencement of fellowship without declaration**, if substantiated, **will lead to severe consequences**.
  
- (e) In the event of improprieties, FA will be requested to provide clarification. Where violation of research ethics is suspected (including plagiarism, fraudulence, non-disclosure of important information), the respective AI will be requested to conduct investigation and report the findings to the Secretariat within 30 calendar days. The RFAP will examine the case and advise the next course of actions according to the *Management of Track Records of Applicants* available on the [Secretariat's website](#). Penalty actions include but not limited to disqualification from the current application round, debarment from applying and receiving grants from the HMRF in the capacity of Principal Applicant/FA, marking of the track record of the FA, and recovery of grants. The track record of the affected applicant shall be taken into account when considering future applications to any funds administered by the Secretariat. RC's decision on penalty actions is final.
  
- (f) Normally, FA and AI concerned will be informed of the decision and consequence of improprieties within 6 months. Longer processing time is needed where complex issues or multiple parties are involved.

Research Fund Secretariat  
Research and Data Analytics Office  
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## Plagiarism and Self-plagiarism

1. Plagiarism is the appropriation or use of the work of others for example, copying sentences, paragraphs, sections or whole articles from other publications without acknowledgement or credit. Apart from words, figures, tables, images and software, etc., can also be considered plagiarism if the source is not acknowledged.
2. Self-plagiarism occurs when researchers reuse their own data or previously published work without appropriate acknowledgement that the material had previously been published.
3. Common examples of plagiarism and self-plagiarism found in the preparation of grant applications are illustrated below –
  - (a) **Example 1 (plagiarism):** The applicant copies verbatim the sentence(s) from another source in the proposal without citing the reference or giving any indication that it had been previously published by others. This is unacceptable – the source of the original text must be acknowledged; the passage should be enclosed by quotation marks to indicate that it has been cited in its entirety.
  - (b) **Example 2 (plagiarism):** The applicant copies a sentence or text from another source and makes minor editorial adjustments such as adding or removing abbreviations, changing tenses, etc. but acknowledges the original source. This is unacceptable – the acknowledgement of the original source merely indicates the text was consulted; it does not indicate that a portion has been quoted almost verbatim with only minor editorial changes. For the avoidance of doubt, the edited passage should have been enclosed in quotation marks.
  - (c) **Example 3 (plagiarism):** The applicant replicates the plan of investigation, research aims, objectives and hypotheses of another research group without acknowledgement. This is unacceptable – the research study should be original and studies conducted by others should be acknowledged clearly.
  - (d) **Example 4 (plagiarism):** One or more of the figures used in the grant application was found to have been used in a previous publication or public presentation such as a symposium or conference without acknowledgement. This is unacceptable – plagiarism can involve non-textual items such as figures, images, tables, software, etc. and prior usage should be acknowledged clearly.
  - (e) **Example 5 (self-plagiarism):** The applicant reproduces text and/or figures from his/her own previously published work in the proposal without acknowledgement. This is unacceptable – all previously published work by the applicants should be acknowledged.