

**Health and Medical Research Fund –  
Research Fellowship Awards**  
**Guidelines for Accounting, Reporting, Project Monitoring and Change Requests**  
**(Major changes are highlighted in yellow.)**

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 Office 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 \$400,000<sup>1</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;
  - 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;

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<sup>1</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.

- 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) For request of budget virement received **on or after 1 November 2024, automatic approval** is granted for the following situations –
- i. Addition of a new individual staff item with monthly salary not more than \$25,000 per month (including Mandatory Provident Fund) <sup>\*</sup>; or
  - ii. Update including addition of an existing individual staff item with monthly salary not more than \$25,000 (including Mandatory Provident Fund); or
  - iii. Update including addition of an existing individual staff item with monthly salary more than \$25,000 if the accumulated increase in that individual staff item is not more than 30% of its original budget; or
  - iv. Accumulated increase of budget of an existing individual Equipment/Other Expenses item not more than 30% of the item's original budget and \$60,000 and the budget ceiling of the item (e.g. publication costs<sup>2</sup>, conference and reference materials).
  - v. Change of budget total for a category (Staff costs/Other expenses/Equipment/Training) as long as the requirements in the above paragraphs (i) – (iv) are met, and the budget for research and training should not exceed \$800,000 and \$400,000 respectively.
- <sup>\*</sup> Request for budget virement is required for eligible item under criterion i above but justification is not needed (put “Nil” under “Justifications” in the budget virement request).*
- (e) Prior approval from the Secretariat for budget virement is required for situations that do not fall under automatic approval as listed in bullet (d) above.
- (f) 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.
- (g) Payment will be made within **six weeks** to AI after confirming satisfactory progress of the project (if any), 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 –

<sup>2</sup> Starting from the 2024 application round, the cost of publishing the results of research grant up to a maximum of HK\$30,000 is allowed.

- 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.
- (h) 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 Accounts (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.
- (i) Whenever recovery of grant from a project/study is required, AI is required to provide an AA/FS reflects the actual expenditure of the project. Such refund amount will be offset by the payment of other project(s) to be paid by the HMRF to the AI concerned. In this connection, only the net amount will be paid to the AI and the breakdown of such amount will be provided. Demand Note will be issued if the payment of other project(s) to be settled by HMRF is not enough to cover the refund amount.

## 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	14 calendar days	–	Secretariat**

Deliverables	Reminder issued before due date of submission		Reviewing parties* for PR, TR, IR, FR and DR
	To FA	To AI	
TR, IR FR, DR and AA	30 calendar days	–	TR, IR, FR and DR Research Fellowship Assessment Panel (RFAP) members
IR and FS FR, DR and AA	–	On the 1 <sup>st</sup> day of preceding month	FS and AA 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 may 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, or debarment from applying and receiving grants in all capacities in all funding schemes administered by the Secretariat. Approval for new funding will not be granted if the FA has not submitted overdue deliverable(s) / outcome evaluation questionnaire(s) for his/her other grant(s) supported by the funding schemes administered by the Secretariat. **Starting from the 2024 Open Call**, approval for new award may also be withdrawn if the overdue deliverable(s) / outcome evaluation questionnaire(s) is not submitted within six months from the grant approval date.
- (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 accordance with templates and guidelines available on the [Secretariat’s website](#). The new Guidance Notes for DR must be adopted for projects with end date on or after 21 January 2025. The new Guidance Notes advocating for an end-user oriented design, serves to facilitate dissemination of research findings and enhance the translational impact of studies supported by the HMRF. They set out the rationale, principles, and detailed operational requirements of the new DR, with a hypothetical sample report. 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**. Failure by the FA to satisfactorily address the comments raised by the Assessor may lead to FR being downgraded. FR rated “1 - Unredeemable” or “2 - Unacceptable” is subject to penalty according to the *Management of Track Records of Applicants* available on the [Secretariat’s website](#).

### **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 FA may be subject to penalty according to the *Management of Track Records of Applicants* available on the [Secretariat's website](#).

#### 4. Dissemination of results

- (a) FR and DR with rating of "Accepted" or "3 – Accepted" or above 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. **The information provided in the outcome evaluation questionnaires will form the basis for relevant parties to assess the outcomes / achievements of individual projects for**

<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.

reporting to the Research Council, selecting impactful projects for presentation and receiving awards at the Health Research Symposium, further disseminating the findings by the Secretariat, etc.

- (c) 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 funding schemes administered by the Secretariat. **Starting from the 2024 Open Call**, approval for new award may also be withdrawn if the outstanding/overdue outcome evaluation questionnaire(s) is not submitted within six months from the **grant approval date**.
- (d) 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.
- (e) 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 submit the consent of the Co-A concerned to be removed from the Project Team. **Where available, a suitably qualified and experienced replacement should be nominated. The nomination of a new or replaced Co-A must include the nominee's CV and his/her consent.**
- (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, **and submitting the consent from outgoing mentor.**
- (d) **To extend the end date of fellowship**: Each fellowship lasts for a maximum of two years (inclusive of both training and research components). Project extension up to **a** 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 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. **For other changes in the study protocol**, 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	RFAP member(s) Secretariat
i. Without replacement	
ii. With replacement	
Change of Mentor	RFAP member(s)
Protocol change	
Change of Training	
Budget virement	Secretariat
Early termination	RFAP member(s)



Change requests	Approving authorities*
Project extension	
i. Extended fellowship to be completed within 2 years <sup>4</sup>	Secretariat
ii. Extended fellowship to be completed <u>over</u> 2 years <sup>4</sup>	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 will 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) Scientific misconduct and non-compliance with HMRF's requirements, if substantiated, will lead to serious consequences including but not limited to disqualification in the concerned funding exercise, debarment in all capacities in all funding schemes administered by the Secretariat, recovery of grants and downgrade of rating of new funding application(s) being reviewed. Definitions of plagiarism and self-plagiarism as well as examples are detailed at **Annex**. Please refer to the *Management of Track Records of Applicants* available on the [Secretariat's website](#).
- (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.
- (c) **Starting from the 2024 Open Call**, FA shall declare whether there is any similar/related research work done or training conducted before the proposed commencement date of fellowship stated in the application when he/she receives the decision email that his/her application is recommended for support. Any changes in the proposal will be sent to RFAP for endorsement. Any non-disclosure of similar/related research work done or training conducted before the proposed commencement date of fellowship stated in the application will be subject to penalty.

<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 a cumulative period of 12 months with valid justifications will be considered.

**Before the 2024 Open Call**, research work done before the commencement date of the fellowship stated in the Agreement is not allowed. Any such non-disclosure, if substantiated, will be subject to penalty.

- (d) In the event of improprieties, FA may be requested to provide clarification. Where scientific misconduct is suspected, the respective AI will be requested to conduct investigation and report the findings to the Secretariat within 30 calendar days. The GRBE 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](#). Research Council's decision on penalty actions is final.
- (e) 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  
Health Bureau  
30 May 2025

### **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.