



MTR RESEARCH FUNDING SCHEME

Overview and Guidance Notes for MRF2024

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1. INTRODUCTION

In its new strategy to prepare the corporation for the future, MTR has identified three founding pillars, namely Hong Kong Core, Mainland China and International Business, and New Growth Engine. The transformation journey to turn the strategy into reality is now well underway. Technology and Innovation is deemed to have an instrumental role as both enabler and new growth engine in this transformation drive.

The MTR Academy (**the Academy**) was established in 2016 as the global education and research hub for railway technology, management, and operations. Drawing on MTR's world-class experience in the railway industry, the Academy has developed its tailor-made education and training programmes to cultivate future railway professionals and leaders of the industry in Hong Kong and around the world.

'Research And Thought Leadership' has been one of the Academy's strategic pillars, which closely aligns with MTR's latest strategy. It endows the Academy with the mission of engaging the local and international academic community to develop forward-looking research, in order to address the current, and more importantly future, pain points of railway operations and services in the midst of the soaring challenges and needs of modern railway transport.

The MTR Research Funding (MRF) scheme is an important enabler to realise the Academy's research drive. It provides financial support for research projects whose outcomes will attribute significant long-term benefits and impacts on technology advances, service provision quality and system performance of the railway transport in general.

This document outlines the management and operation framework of the MRF Scheme and provides guidance for interested Applicants. All Applicants and their Universities should read this document carefully before completing and submitting applications for this research funding scheme.

2. MTR RESEARCH FUND

2.1 Objectives

The MTR Research Funding Scheme is administrated by the MTR Academy, and it aims to

- a) facilitate exploratory and up-stream research whose outcomes enable attainment of excellence on railway transport services and operations of tomorrow;
- b) encourage forward-looking railway-oriented research in the academic communities and nurture research talents for the future;
- c) establish MTR as a leading research driver and innovation advocator in the domains of railway transport technologies, operations, and management;
- d) support Hong Kong to become an International Innovation and Technology Hub.

2.2 Funding Scheme

The MRF is a competitive bidding research funding scheme. Invitation of research proposals will be extended to all eligible full-time academic staff members in the UGC-funded Universities of Hong Kong every year.

This funding scheme is to specifically support exploratory and up-stream research projects and develop forward-looking innovative ideas and insightful conjectures. The Applicants are strongly encouraged to **look beyond the problems and boundaries of today and shape up the future railway transport** with their ingenuity and aspiration.

The scope is intended to be broad and inclusive. It may reach out to any aspect relevant to system performance and service quality of railway transport or public transport in general; and their attributing factors, such as the interfaces and interactions with the community, economy, environment, individuals, and other public transport modes, against the backdrop of future urban mobility. Proposals from all disciplines to explore, envisage and build our future transport are welcome. However, Applicants should note that MTR Academy does not have access to the system and operation data of MTR. Proposals should not assume any provision of data from MTR even if they are funded.

The outcomes of the projects may not generate immediate impacts or practical applications, but they are expected to contribute to further applied research and development, realisation of solutions, or informed decisions and policies for the problems and issues in the transport of tomorrow.

While the research projects should be geared toward, but encouragingly not limited to, the innovations on the technologies, operations and management of railway transport, each round of call for research proposals may be accompanied by a number of selected themes. Preference will be given to the proposals with substantial relevance to those themes.

The MTR Academy assumes the full responsibility of the promotion, administration, and facilitation of the funding scheme, as well as the management of the funded projects in close coordination with the Universities.

Research proposals are reviewed according to the selection criteria and funding is allocated on merits. The number of projects to be awarded and the level of support to individual projects are entirely at the discretion of the Academy.

2.3 Management and Administration

The MRF Scheme Committee (**the Committee**) of the MTR Academy oversees the overall promotion, management and operation of the funding scheme. It ensures the undertaking of the stringent processes on application, proposal evaluation, funding allocation, monitoring and reporting progress of the research projects, and fosters further investigation or development of the outcomes from the funded projects.

The Scheme Committee is supported by the Academic Panel (**the Panel**) which facilitates evaluation on the academic rigor and innovation value of the proposals and assessment on progress and outcomes of the funded projects. The proposals will be peer-reviewed anonymously by academic or professional experts of relevant areas who are nominated by the Panel.

The MRF Scheme Secretariat (**the Secretariat**), reporting to the Committee, undertakes the general administration of the funding scheme. The Secretariat also serves as the contact point for the Applicants, Principal Investigators of the funded projects and the Research Offices (or the

corresponding offices or divisions handling external research funding) in their affiliated Universities, as well as the potential end-users of the research outcomes of the funded projects within MTR.

2.4 Research Outcomes

2.4.1 Dissemination

The Research Teams, i.e. the Principal Investigators (**PIs**) and Co-Investigators (**Co-Is**), of the funded projects are required to present and disseminate the findings and outcomes of the projects to the relevant Business Units and Subsidiaries of MTR through written reports, presentations, workshops or other reasonable means, in order to raise awareness of the outcomes, arouse interests in translating outcomes to practical solutions or applications, or attract support for further development within MTR.

In order to encourage the Research Teams to take a proactive role in project outcome dissemination and further development of the innovative merits of the outcomes, they may be invited to further exploit the practical values of the outcomes and given the first right to participate in implementation and commercialisation ventures with the relevant parties in MTR.

2.4.2 Intellectual Property Rights

Ownership of the Intellectual Property Right (IPR) derived from the research outcomes of the funded project will be negotiated between the University and the Academy, according to the nature of the expected outcomes. In general, regardless of the ownership, MTR and its subsidiaries should have the unrestricted right to utilise and exploit the project outcomes for further development. On the other hand, the University and the Research Team are allowed to use the project outcomes for teaching and research purposes.

If background IP from the previous work of the Applicant and others is to be involved in the research project, it should be clearly stated in the application and the ownership of the resulting IP of the project will be negotiated and agreed between the Applicant (and/or a third party) and the MTR Academy as a pre-condition of funding approval. However, it should be noted that background IP is not generally expected in most exploratory and up-stream research projects under this funding scheme.

When IP of a third party is involved in the project, the Applicant should indicate if consent or licence for use of the IP has been attained and include the related cost or fee in the project budget. It is the

Applicant's responsibility to indemnify and keep indemnified MTR and its affiliates against any and all claims, actions, investigations, demands and liabilities arising from the use of such IP throughout the project.

2.4.3 Publications

The research teams of funded projects are encouraged to publish the outcomes of the research projects in internationally reputed academic journals and conferences of relevant areas. When MTR data are explicitly involved or represented in the contents of the publications, prior written approval should be sought from MTR.

The publications should include an acknowledgement statement to recognise the source of funding for the work leading to the publications; and a disclaimer statement to declare the authors' sole responsibility of the contents of the publications.

3. APPLICATION

3.1 Eligibility

The Applicant must be full-time academic staff member(s) of one of the UGC-funded Universities in Hong Kong¹, with the remuneration wholly funded by the University.

The Applicant can be a team or an individual. In case of the former, one of the members must be designated the role of Principal Investigator (**PI**). PI is the lead of the Research Team and fully responsible for the application, undertaking and management of the project, and serves as the primary contact point.

Other members of the Research Team, the Co-Investigators (**Co-Is**), should be full-time academic staff members at Universities or researchers at Research Institutes and Centres. Collaborations among local and overseas Universities within the Research Team are possible.

The PI has to obtain from the University the endorsement on his/her eligibility; and commitment to provide support for the PI and research student (if any) on academic resources, facilities, equipment and project fund administration. If applicable, approval on research ethics and/or safety should also be sought from the University.

3.2 Application Submission

The MTR Academy will invite applications from the Universities toward the end of each calendar year. The invitation will be accompanied by the selected themes (if any) and the timeline of the application process. For enquiries on the Scheme and application procedures, Applicants may contact the Secretariat via email for further clarifications. Applicants should note that the Secretariat will not arrange meeting(s) between MTR/MTR Academy and the Applicant for presentation of research ideas during the call-for-proposals period.

¹ Post-doctoral fellows or teaching staff without research responsibility (e.g., instructors, teaching assistants) are not eligible to be the PI of MRF applications.

The full application form can be downloaded from a given hyperlink through the MTR Academy website. The completed application form duly signed by the PI and all team members, and endorsed by the University, together with the required supporting documents, should be submitted to the Secretariat on or before the application deadline via the email: mrf@mtr.com.hk

Incomplete application form or missing documents will lead to unnecessary delays on proposal assessment process or outright rejection of application.

3.3 Assessment

3.3.1 Overview

Upon deadline of the application period, the Secretariat will conduct general screening on the submitted research proposals and seek clarification or supplementary information from the Applicants if necessary.

The Panel, with the administrative support from the Secretariat, will invite external reviewers from relevant areas to evaluate the proposals according to the criteria given below (in Section 3.3.2). Reviewers are academic and/or industrial experts who are experienced in academic research and innovation development. Views from multiple reviewers may be obtained to establish objective and extensive evaluation on the proposals.

The Applicants may be invited to present the proposals at online meetings and provide clarifications for and answer queries from the Panel prior to completing the assessment.

Informed by the assessment report from the Panel, the Committee will decide and finalise the approved proposals. The successful projects may be funded in full or reduced amount. In case of the latter, the Applicants will be required to revise the scope and duration of the proposals accordingly.

The disclosable sections of the reviewer comments will be released to the Applicants soon after the announcement of funding results. The feedback will be anonymised to protect the identities of the reviewers. The Applicants of the unsuccessful proposals may consider resubmission in the following round after encompassing the reviewer comments and enhancing the proposals accordingly.

The MTR Academy will enter into Research Project Agreements with the Universities (on behalf of the PIs of the funded projects) on the undertaking of the funded projects and the associated obligations and arrangements prior to the commencement of the projects. A standard Agreement will be adopted for the funded projects. The standard terms should be adhered to as far as possible to avoid unnecessary delay to the commencement of the projects. Any deviation from the standard terms has to be negotiated, agreed upon and set out individually.

3.3.2 Assessment Criteria

The key assessment criteria are listed as follows.

Quality of Proposed Research Work – This criterion gauges scientific and scholarly merits, originality, innovative values, relevance to the given themes and possible academic and professional development (e.g., research studentship is particularly encouraged). They should be clearly evidenced through the Project Objectives, Research Questions, Methodologies and Deliverables in the proposal.

Implementation Plan – It focuses on the feasibility of the overall research plan and project management. Realistic targets on milestones and timeline, effective activities to attain the milestones, reasonable budgets on manpower, facilities and equipment should be well justified in the proposal. The qualifications, research achievement and project management track records of the research team members, as well as the division of work and coordination among them, also attribute to this criterion.

Outcomes and Values – This criterion comprises of demonstrable contributions towards the advances of railway transport technologies, operation and management and hence possible enhancement of railway system performance and service quality. Potentials for publications, further research, IP generation, practical application development or product realisation and commercialisation also add to the significance of the outcomes. They should be highlighted in the Pathway to Impact Statement of the proposal.

3.4 Budget and Duration

3.4.1 Project Budget

The Project Budget may include cost on supporting research staff, research student stipend, equipment, conference expenses and other items. Full or partial salaries of the PIs, Co-Is or Relief

Teachers are strictly excluded. With the exception of the research student stipend, the overall budget operates as a one-line vote so that the PIs are given some extent of flexibility in deploying the fund amongst a number of budgeted items.

Each funded project shall submit an audited report on the project account upon completion. The audit fee can be included under 'Other Expenses' in the Project Budget.

The University of the PI may include the administrative overheads of up to an additional 15% of the requested fund in the Project Budget. The administrative overheads should be stated and presented clearly in the proposal.

The overall Project Budget should fall within the range of HK\$300,000 and HK\$1,500,000. Exceptional consideration will only be given to budget outside this range when substantial and compelling justification is provided. All unspent fund at the end of the projects will be returned to the MTR Academy.

3.4.2 Project Duration

All MRF funded projects should normally last for no more than 3 years. Project with duration less than 12 months will not be considered. Project duration extension on on-going projects is only allowed on reasonable grounds and advanced requests. Each project is normally entitled to one duration extension.

The Committee may, prior to funding approval, adjust the project budget and duration. The Applicants will be requested to revise the research plan accordingly before accepting the grant. On the other hand, the Applicants may decline the revision if they consider it operationally or financially infeasible to undertake the project work with the amended budget and duration.

When the progress of an on-going project is deemed to be unsatisfactory or a serious and apparent problem is identified in the project, the Committee has the absolute discretion to terminate the project and request return of any unspent fund.

Prior to acceptance of the grant, the PIs of the successful projects should confirm the intended starting date of the project. The first day of employment of the first research staff (or the first day of enrolment

of the first research student) of the project is regarded as the actual starting date of the project. If the actual starting date is more than 6 months later than the intended one, an application for project duration extension is required. All projects will be given duration extension only once.

4. PROJECT PROPOSAL

The Applicants must complete the application form “A1” (in MS Word) which is available from the Secretariat or can be downloaded from the Academy’s website. The application form must be signed at relevant sections in PDF format. All submission documents, including the **Application Form and Supplementary Attachments**, must be submitted in a single PDF file through the University’s Research Office (or equivalent office/unit) and conform to the following requirements.

Paper Size:	A4
Font:	Times New Roman
Font Size:	12 point
Margin:	2.5 cm all round
Spacing:	Single-line spacing
Language:	English
Document Format:	PDF

The above requirements, and specific page or word limits for individual sections, must be fully observed, the application may be deemed void otherwise.

The application submission, including the application form and supporting documents, should not contain any information other than required in the corresponding sections, or irrelevant to the proposal, or unsolicited communication intended to the Panel or reviewers. The application will be disqualified if such contents are detected.

4.1 Proposal Contents

4.1.1 Project Particulars

The name of the PI and the University by whom the PI is employed in full-time capacity, full title of the project, project duration and the total amount of funding requested are the key project particulars of the application.

The PI should indicate if the proposal is a new application or a re-submission. In case of the latter, a statement of no more than **500 words** should be included to explain how the reviewer comments from the previous application have been addressed and highlight the major revisions in the new proposal.

Re-submission will be reviewed as a new application and the Panel will also consider the PI's responses to the previous comments in the assessment of the current application.

A Project Abstract of a maximum of **400 words** is a compulsory section. It should serve as a layman summary of the key research questions, the innovation in the solution approach and the expected new knowledge and impacts of the project.

4.1.2 Research Team

The names and details of all members of the Research Team are to be stated clearly in the given table of the application form. The names should be the same as on their legal identity documents, for the purpose eligibility confirmation. One of the team members must be nominated as the Principal Investigator (PI). Any change of PI during the application processing period will not be entertained. Addition to the Research Team of an approved project will only be considered under very exceptional circumstances.

All team members must submit their CVs, limited to a maximum of **2 pages per person**, as supporting documents. The CV should include the member's academic qualifications, past and current academic or research positions held at Universities or research institutes, and other employments or professional affiliations, previous relevant research works, a list of no more than 10 successfully completed externally-funded research projects as PI, and no more than 10 most representative publications.

On the CV, each member should also provide a list of all on-going research projects in which he/she acts a PI or Co-I. The list should include the project titles, funding sources and the starting and expected completion dates of the projects. Other information such as prizes and awards on research achievements, relevant industrial experiences or consultancy works, editorships of academic journals, membership or affiliation with learned societies or professional organisations, or public appointment may be included. Please do NOT include sensitive personal information such as HKID or passport number in the CV.

A Plan of Collaboration of a maximum of **2 pages** is compulsory to clearly state the roles, responsibilities, and contributions of individual members of the team. Each member is expected to have a concrete, distinct and necessary role in the delivery of the project work. Inter-institutional

collaborations are welcome and a letter of collaboration outlining the commitment and division of work should be attached to the application. In the cases of single research team member, the Plan of Collaboration is not required.

By signing on the signing page of the Application Form, all team members, PI and Co-Is, acknowledge their participation in the project and confirm their commitment to the project work as proposed in the application.

4.1.3 Main Body

Project Objectives

This section should, with a maximum of **800** words, outline the background and motivation of undertaking the project; the key problems to be addressed; the merits of solution approaches; and the possible outcomes of the projects, in terms of new knowledge, innovation and/or practical applications and their significance. The key objectives can be summarised in bullet-point form to conclude this section.

Research Questions

It should set out the details of the relevant previous and existing research work in the research field(s) of the proposal; and how they lead to the key problems or questions to be addressed in the proposal. The importance, exigency, and impact of addressing those questions and how the new pool of knowledge and insight will be generated by this project should be discussed.

Methodologies

This section should present the proposed approach of tackling or solving the research questions. The relevant research principles and techniques of the proposed methodologies should be stated clearly. The analysis of their merits and limitations is to be included in order to reinforce the appropriateness and effectiveness of the methodologies and underline the innovation of the approach. It should also specify the research activities or tasks associated with the proposed methodologies and their justifications.

Deliverables

The key expected outcomes of the project, echoing the project objectives, should be summarised here in bullet-point form.

Research Plan

An easily comprehensible timeline indicating the timing, duration and chronological relationship of all research activities or tasks to be undertaken and the expected milestones is required in this section. It may be presented in an organised tabular form or provided through a Gantt chart. Remarks on the significant involvement of Research Team members or facility/equipment at certain activities or tasks can be attached onto the Research Plan. The Plan must be consistent with the proposed Project Duration.

Pathway to Impact Statement

This statement, of a maximum of **2 pages**, should discuss the impact of the outcomes of the project, in terms of demonstratable contributions, beneficial effects, significant changes or advantages to technology advances, service quality excellence, system performance, and management and governance for railway transport and beyond.

The Statement should also feature the impacts and potential beneficiaries in short (1-3 years), medium (3-10 years) and long (over 10 years) terms; the intended activities or development to realise such impacts and reach out to the beneficiaries during and after the project; any potential implementation or commercialisation of practical application/product/service/system and associated plans.

References

The references cited within the main body of the proposal to support the application are to be listed under this section. All references should be provided in full, with inclusion of the names of all authors. Generally accepted citation format should be adopted. This reference list should not go beyond **2 pages**.

Non-text contents such as diagrams, figures, photos, charts, and tables may be inserted in the relevant sections of the Main Body of the proposal to supplement the discussions, but they should not take up more than a total of **2 pages**.

The Main Body of the proposal should be limited to a maximum of **15 pages** as a whole.

4.2 Project Budget

Only the budget items set out below will be supported. The PIs' Universities are expected to provide the necessary infrastructure and overhead supports, such as office space and support, consumables, stationeries, personal IT equipment, library service, to the funded projects.

4.2.1 Research Staff Support

Research staff at the Research Assistant (RA) level will normally be supported. The intended duties and required expertise of each research staff must be stated clearly in the justification. The prevailing indicative rate adopted by the General Research Fund (GRF) of the University Grants Committee (UGC) for research support staff, which is currently at HK\$348,000 per annum for full-time RA and HK\$558,000 per annum for full-time Senior RA, should be used as the reference of the cost cap on each supporting staff. The proposed cost must be inclusive of Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF), contract gratuity, allowances and/or other human-resources overheads.

All the proposed research work should be undertaken by the research team and the research student(s) supported by the application. No outsourcing or subcontracting of work within or outside the University will be allowed.

4.2.2 Research Studentship

Full-time research studentship, either PhD or MPhil, are strongly encouraged in the applications. Student stipend of HK\$20,000 per month for 24 and 36 months will be provided for each MPhil and PhD student respectively.

The research student must be a recent graduate of relevant undergraduate disciplines (preferably with Upper Second-Class Honours or above, or equivalent) of one of the UGC-funded Universities, or a reputable Universities overseas or in Mainland China.

The studentship cost is an earmarked item and hence it is the only item in the project budget not falling into the one-line vote. The Universities should take note of the arrangement and manage the project account accordingly.

4.2.3 Equipment

Any request of funding on equipment purchase should be raised when the equipment is absolutely critical to the attainment of project outcomes. The justification should include detailed explanation on its uniqueness and functionalities and its indispensable role in the research plan and indicate if the same equipment can be otherwise available or shared in the University or other local institutions. The expected level of use of the equipment, such as the number of Research Team members and students using the equipment and the number of hours of utilisation every month during the course of the project, should be stated. For any equipment with a total estimated cost on purchase, installation, testing and maintenance over HK\$150,000, a valid quotation must be included in the proposal.

Personal electronic devices, such as mobile phones and digital cameras, and standard office equipment, such as desktop PC, laptops, and printers, will not be supported under any circumstances.

The equipment acquired by the project fund must be made exclusively available for the project works during the course of the project and it will become the property of the University upon completion of the project.

4.2.4 Conference Expenses

Exchanges and sharing with the academic and research communities and presenting works at international conferences of relevant fields is strongly encouraged. Each project is entitled to a provision of up to HK\$25,000 per year (i.e., every 12-months and pro rata), irrespective of the number of Research Team members and research students in the project, to support conference attendance.

4.2.5 Other Expenses

Requests for purchase or subscription of software licence (excluding the common office software) and computing or IT services, and acquisition of services such as dataset access or data collection, may fall under 'Other Expenses'. The requests must be well justified, evidenced not to be available or shared from the University, and backed by valid quotations if the estimated cost is over HK\$150,000.

A final audited statement of the Project Accounts is required upon completion or termination of the project. The external audit fees are to be included here. The maximum provision allowed for each audited statement should not exceed HK\$8,000.

4.3 Research Ethics and Other Approvals

4.3.1 Research Ethics/Safety Approvals

The PI and the University has the full responsibility to ensure the proposal is thoroughly evaluated for its compliance with the applicable laws, health and safety guidelines and ethical standards. Ethics clearance must be sought for research on living animals and human subjects, including but not limited to, potential physical or psychological harm, discomfort and stress, or privacy infringement. The PI must state in detailed descriptions the approval/clearance required. The University should confirm the accuracy of information on ethics and safety in the application and any approval/clearance is being sought or has been given.

4.3.2 Access and Retention of Data and Records

Should access to data and record from the government, official or private entities be required in the pursuit of the proposal research work, timely approval from the relevant parties must be sought. The PI is fully responsible for securing the approval and the University has to confirm the information on data and record provided in the application is accurate and any approval is being sought or has been given.

The Applicant should indicate in the application form if the project would generate data or record of retention value and confirm the commitment of allowing access to such data and record at appropriate junctures.

4.4 University Endorsement

The University of the PI should confirm it has evaluated the proposal and agree to provide the necessary support to the application. The University bears the primary responsibility for prevention, detection, and investigation of research misconduct, including but not limited to misuse of funds, data falsification, plagiarism, and double-dipping. The University should vet the grant applications using anti-plagiarism software before submitting them to the MTR Academy.

4.4.1 Applicant Eligibility

The University is required to confirm that the PI's full fulfilment of the eligibility requirement and his/her workload commitment to the proposed work in the application will not be compromised by his/her existing teaching, research, and administrative duties. The University should inform the

Secretariat if the PI becomes ineligible during the application process or when the project is underway upon approval.

4.4.2 Support to Applicant and Studentship

The University should commit to the provision of support to the Research Team member(s) and research student(s). The support includes office space and facilities, laboratory and equipment utilisation, supervision and training, library services, office computing, software, and IT support, as well as project account management and financial reporting. The University should also confirm the information of the funding request items given in the research proposal and budget to be accurate.

4.4.3 Research Ethics and Data Access

The University must confirm that the approval on any research ethics and safety, access or retention of data and records has been given by or is being sought from the relevant authorities or parties. If the University is unable to confirm that the approval has been attained before the Panel convenes to finalise the approved projects in the current round, the application will be deemed to have been withdrawn.

5. PROJECT MANAGEMENT

5.1 Project Monitoring

The PI of a funded project is required to provide a number of reports during the course of the project in order to allow effective monitoring of the project progress and ensure proper utilisation of the allocated fund. The reports should follow the specific templates which are available from the Secretariat.

The reports will be reviewed, evaluated, and endorsed by the Panel, followed by confirmation and acceptance by the Committee. The project progress will be compared against the Deliverables and Research Plan stated in the proposal. The research findings and data in the reports may be shared among various relevant stakeholders within MTR to promote the outcomes and foster further development.

Initial Report: This Report should be submitted within 6 months upon the commencement of the project. It is to ensure the project starts on the right track, and any early difficulties can be detected timely and addressed accordingly.

Progress Report: It is a regular progress report every 12 months upon project commencement. It should present the on-going progress, itemised expenses, and research outcomes during the reporting period, as well as the intended work plan in the following reporting period.

Final Report: This report is required when a project is completed. It should include a layman summary highlighting the project aims, innovation values and achievements; a statement on the attainment of the deliverables and their impacts; and recommendations on further research work, outcomes development or implementation. When the project completion is expected within 3 months after a Progress Report is due, the PI may request to skip the Progress Report and submit the Final Report in lieu.

The PIs of the completed projects are required to present their research outcomes in seminars or workshops organised by the Secretariat. The PIs will also be invited to exclusive presentations for designated stakeholders within MTR, where opportunities of further collaboration on development and implementation may arise.

For a completed project, an audited statement of the Project Accounts should be submitted within 3 months of the confirmation of completion. The audited statement should be prepared by independent auditor.

5.2 Project Fund Account

5.2.1 Fund Allocation

Unless exception is given in the Project Agreement, the Committee will provide the full sum of approved fund of the successful project to the PI's University before project commencement if the project duration is 24 months or less.

Only 70% of the approved budget will be provided initially for projects of duration more than 24 months. The remaining 30% will be disbursed when satisfactory progress is confirmed from the Initial Report and the first Progress Report is received, i.e., about 15 months after the project commencement.

The Universities shall make the fund available to the PIs through their research project account management systems.

5.2.2 Accounting and Financial Records

In addition to the financial reporting in the project reports, the PIs, with support from their Universities, are required to maintain proper records of the project accounts throughout the course of the projects according to the prevailing accounting practices and standards.

For completed projects, the PIs and their Universities should make all financial documents, account statements and relevant information available and ready for auditing purpose upon completion of the projects. Any residual fund should be returned to the Academy after the final audited accounts are confirmed.

5.3 Suspension and Termination of Project Funding

The funding support to an approved project may be suspended or terminated if the project progress is deemed unsatisfactory repeatedly, successful completion of the project is considered unviable, or a breach of terms and conditions of the Agreement is substantiated.

In case of termination, an audited statement of the Project Accounts should be submitted within 3 months of serving the notice of termination. The PI and his/her University are then required to return the unspent fund of the project.

6. OTHER ADMINISTRATION

6.1 Research Project Agreement

Prior to the commencement of an approved project, the PI and the University shall enter into a binding agreement with the Academy for undertaking the research project. A standard Agreement will be used across the approved projects. With the exception of the terms on IPR which will be negotiated separately, deviation from the terms and conditions in the standard Agreement is expected to be minimal. It is strongly advisable that the request of such deviation should be raised with justifications in the project proposal.

6.2 Changes on Project Details

The project work should be carried out strictly according to the details stated in the approved proposal. Written approval on significant change of any item of the agreed project details must be sought from the Academy in advance by a formal request to the Secretariat or in the relevant sections in the Initial or Progress Report.

Amendment on project objectives, research plan and budget or replacement of PI or key research team member are regarded as major changes of project details. Change on affiliated University (for example, due to PI employment movement across Universities) is generally not encouraged and will only be considered on the merits of each case.

6.3 Personal Data Handling

All personal information and data in the research fund application are collected for the purposes below.

- Determination of applicant eligibility as full-time staff member(s) of UGC-funded Universities
- Assessment of research track record of the research team
- Assisting the Panel in identifying suitable external reviewers to evaluate the proposal
- Data sharing with public and private research fund agencies to avoid duplicate funding
- Confirming payment of personal expenses within the approved budget
- Project publicity and monitoring for approved projects
- Compilation of funding scheme management reports and statistical research

All personal data will be handled with extreme care by the Academy. Parties who may be involved in the processes above will be given access to the data on need-to-know basis and they will be reminded of their obligation of observing confidentiality.

It should be noted that all proposals have to undergo a rigorous peer-review process in which domain experts from local and international academic and professional communities are involved. Upon submitting a proposal, the Applicant accepts and agrees that the proposal, together with personal data, is to be presented to the external reviewers nominated by the Panel.

The Applicants may at any time request access to, and update or correct personal data held by the Academy under the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance. The Academy may charge a reasonable cost for the processing of such request. All requests on data access and amendment should be made in writing to the Secretariat.

6.4 Indemnity

For approved projects, in case of a breach of terms and conditions of the Agreement by the Applicant, the Applicant shall indemnify the Academy all loss, claims, demands, damage, costs, expenses and liabilities suffered or incurred by the Academy on which may be brought or established against the Academy arising out of such breach.

The Applicant, successfully securing funding support from the Academy or otherwise, or any employees, employers, agents, or associates of the Applicant shall not seek or claim any compensation, reimbursement, damages, indemnity, or waiver from the Academy in relation to the preparation, submission, or presentation of its research proposal.

6.5 Prevention of Bribery

The Academy is firmly devoted to high standard of integrity and impartiality in the administration and management of the funding scheme. All members of the Academy, the Committee and the Panel, the reviewers, and the Applicants are governed by Section 9 of the Prevention of Bribery Ordinance (Cap 201). Any offer or attempt to offer to the members of the Academy or reviewers, with a view to influencing the funding decision on an application, is an offence of the said Ordinance. The application

in question will be rendered disqualified whenever such offence is reported and evidenced. Any resulting approval on project will be rescinded immediately and the Applicant will be held liable for any loss and damages suffered by the Academy.