RESEARCH GRANTS COUNCIL
Competitive Research Funding Schemes for the Local Self-financing Degree Sector

Framework of the three Competitive Research Funding Schemes for the Local Self-financing Degree Sector

Ambit of the Resources

1. To develop research capacity of institutions and faculty members.

2. The funding is competitive in nature.

3. The funding schemes should serve to:
    - promote research that informs teaching including pedagogical development and curriculum design;
    - enhance professional development of faculty members;
    - engage students in research activities; and
    - discover new knowledge.

Operation Framework

(i) Faculty Development Scheme (FDS)

Objective:	To develop the research capability of individual academic staff in the local self-financing degree-awarding institutions so that they can transfer their research experiences and new knowledge into teaching and learning.
Eligibility:	● Principal Investigators (PIs) – Full-time academic staff being engaged by one of the local self-financing degree-awarding institutions with at least a one-year renewable contract with the institution at the time of funding award being made; and spending at least 80% of time in locally-accredited local degree or higher degree work[1] in the institution.

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[1] A PI / Project Coordinator (PC) / Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PI) / Team Leader who is / will be seconded to conduct research in a university or a research institute / body / agency in the Mainland / overseas jurisdiction while retaining his / her full-time appointment and position with his / her parent institution and is still on the payroll of the parent institution is eligible to apply for Research Grants Council (RGC) project grant.

- Institutions are responsible for interpreting and confirming whether an applicant has fulfilled the eligibility requirements announced in the Call for Proposals.

- Co-Investigators (Co-Is) – no eligibility requirements. The Co-Is can be any personnel working in the same or different local self-financing degree-awarding institutions, the UGC-funded universities, or other local / overseas institutions or organizations.

- All eligible academic staff, including junior academics, are encouraged to apply.

Operation Mode:	• Application should be submitted on an individual basis. Subject to institutional approval, the funding support should be used to conduct individual research project that informs teaching and learning or discover new knowledge. • The maximum project duration is three years. • Each applicant is allowed to submit one application under the FDS in the capacity of PI in each exercise. There is no limit in the number of applications submitted in the capacity of Co-I. • Expenditure items that support the conduct of a research project such as teaching relief, equipment, research support staff, travel expenses, conference or workshop registration, subsistence, expenses for dissemination of research results and other direct project costs will be considered. Provision of monthly allowance to an undergraduate student helper for each project will also be considered. • Change of PI will normally not be approved before the start of a project or within the first six months of an approved project. • If the PI accepts a non-academic appointment or any appointment outside the local self-financing degree sector, the sponsoring institution may nominate a suitable Co-I to become the new PI, and the funded project can be

continued in the institution until it completes.

- If the PI accepts another academic appointment within the local self-financing degree sector, he / she may carry the funded project to the new institution subject to the mutual agreement of the outgoing and receiving institutions.

- The above arrangements will be subject to the institutions to decide, but the change of PI and / or the transfer of funding from one institution to another requires the approval of the RGC.

Expected Deliverables:
- Research outputs leading to advances in knowledge that could be transferred into teaching and learning, insights of interest or value to the research community, including publications, patents, etc. PIs should elaborate the impact of research outputs in their applications.

Funding Level:
- Direct costs involved in conducting the research projects.

- On-costs of 15% of the approved project costs.

- No upper limit of the approved amount but the level should be comparable with the average approved amount of a General Research Fund project in the UGC sector. Given the considerable competition for the limited funds available, individual research projects costing over $1.2 million should be well justified.

- The threshold limits for applications are $150,000 (inclusive of 15% on-costs) for projects in the fields of Biology & Medicine, Engineering and Physical Sciences, and $100,000 (inclusive of 15% on-costs) for projects in the fields of Business Studies and Humanities & Social Sciences.

Assessment:
- Merit-based assessment criteria:
  - Academic quality of proposals is the primary evaluation criterion.

- Peer-review mechanism:
  - Proposals to be assessed by the Assessment Panel and local / overseas external reviewers.

- PIs are required to submit progress and completion reports for monitoring purposes.

- Site visits will be conducted by the Monitoring and Assessment Panel to assess the progress of the projects.

(ii) Inter-Institutional Development Scheme (IIDS)

Objective:
To enhance academics' research capability in the local self-financing degree-awarding institutions and keep them abreast of new developments and challenging research topics in relevant fields.

Eligibility:
- PIs / Co-Principal Investigators (Co-PIs) – Full-time academic staff being engaged by one of the local self-financing degree-awarding institutions with at least a one-year renewable contract with the institution at the time of funding award being made; and spending at least 80% of time in locally-accredited local degree or higher degree work[1] in the institution.

- Institutions are responsible for interpreting and confirming whether an applicant has fulfilled the eligibility requirements announced in the Call for Proposals.

- Co-Is – no eligibility requirements. The Co-Is can be any personnel working in the same or different local self-financing degree-awarding institutions, the UGC-funded universities, or other local / overseas institutions or organizations.

- All eligible academic staff are encouraged to apply under

this scheme.

Operation Mode:	● Application should be submitted by a PI from an institution or with Co-PIs jointly from collaborating institutions to organize workshops or short courses, etc. for a duration of several days to several weeks. The proposed activity should serve the purpose of enabling participants to conduct focused study and intensive scholarly exchange under the guidance of visiting scholars and experts. Participation must be open to other local self-financing degree-awarding institutions, and preferably to all institutions in Hong Kong.

● The maximum project duration is one year.

● Each applicant is allowed to submit one application under the IIDS in the capacity of PI in each exercise. There is no limit in the number of applications submitted in the capacity of Co-PI or Co-I.

● Each application should be a single integrated proposal indicating clearly the division of work amongst the PI and Co-PIs or the participating institutions, with a single budget indicating clearly allocation of funding, among each of the participating institutions.

● Expenditure items that support the conduct of workshops or short courses such as air passage and hotel accommodation for speakers, venue cost, etc. will be considered.

● Change of PI will normally not be approved before the start of a project or within the first six months of an approved project.

● If the PI accepts a non-academic appointment or any appointment outside the local self-financing degree sector, the sponsoring institution may nominate a suitable Co-PI or Co-I to become the new PI.

● The above arrangements will be subject to the institutions to decide, but the change of PI and / or the transfer of

	funding from one institution to another requires the approval of the RGC.
Expected Deliverables:	● Workshops / Short courses / Scholarly exchange activities that can enhance academics' research capability.
Funding Level:	● Direct costs involved in organizing the workshops or short courses. RGC's prior approval is required for virement among items under direct costs.
	● On-costs of 15% of the approved costs.
	● There is no funding threshold or ceiling for the approved IIDS projects. The approved funding will be subject to the justification of the proposal.
Assessment:	● Assessment criteria: – Intellectual merit, relevance to research / education programmes ongoing or under active development, size of interested participants, institutional support, etc.
	● Peer-review mechanism: – Proposals to be assessed by Assessment Panel and local / overseas external reviewers.
	● PIs are required to submit completion report for monitoring purposes.
	● Site visits will be conducted by the Monitoring and Assessment Panel to inspect the achievements made.

(iii) Institutional Development Scheme (IDS)

There are two grants under the IDS, namely "Research Infrastructure Grant" and "Collaborative Research Grant".

(a) Research Infrastructure Grant

Objective:	To build up the research capacity of local self-financing degree-awarding institutions in their strategic areas.
Eligibility:	● Local self-financing degree-awarding institutions offering locally-accredited local degree programmes.
	● Project holder – Application should be submitted on an institutional basis by the Head of Institution (HoI).
	● Team leader – Full-time academic staff being engaged by the same local self-financing degree-awarding institution with at least a one-year renewable contract with the institution at the time of funding award being made; and spending at least 80% of time in locally-accredited local degree or higher degree work[1] in the institution.
	● Institutions are responsible for interpreting and confirming whether an applicant has fulfilled the eligibility requirements announced in the Call for Proposals.
	● Team member – no eligibility requirements. The Team members can be any personnel working in the same or different local self-financing degree-awarding institutions, the UGC-funded universities, or other local / overseas institutions or organizations.
Operation Mode:	● Application should be submitted on an institutional basis to develop a programme of research that informs teaching. The proposed programme should fall in the strategic areas of the institution's development plan. Elaborations should be made in the application on the research topics that the institution is going to pursue and how the proposed programme can assist the institution in developing capacity in those research areas.

- The maximum project duration is three years.

- Each HoI is allowed to submit one application under IDS Research Infrastructure Grant in the capacity of Project holder in each exercise. The project team should comprise the Project holder, Team leader and a reasonable number of Team members.

- Funding will be provided to support the direct costs of a series of activities that support research, such as purchase of communal equipment and research materials, organization of seminars, workshops, conferences, and exchange programmes, etc.

- For institutions which were granted funding for infrastructure support under the IDS in previous exercise(s), the Project holder needs to provide full justifications for further funding under the IDS Research Infrastructure Grant in the application. The Project holder is also required to demonstrate how the proposal can create synergy with previously funded project.

- Change of Project holder / Team leader will normally not be approved before the start of a project or within the first six months of an approved project.

- Change in the Project holder / Team leader requires the approval of the RGC.

Expected Deliverables:	Physical research facilities and / or infrastructure, databases and computing equipment for research, and workshop, conference or exchange programmes that can develop a programme of research and enhance the research capacity of the institution.

Funding Level[2]:   ● Direct costs involved in building up of research infrastructure and conducting a series of activities to support research.

● Virement between the approved budget areas is not allowed.

Assessment: ● Assessment criteria:
– Merit-based, relevance to the strategic areas of institution and number of academic staff to benefit.

● Self-financing institutions of UGC-funded universities are required to justify the needs for establishment of new infrastructure instead of paying for such services provided by their respective UGC-funded universities.

● Selection interview will be conducted with the project team of each shortlisted application.

● Project holder is required to submit progress and completion reports for monitoring purpose. Project holder should also report the condition / utilization of all major facilities / equipment supported by the IDS to ensure that those items are well managed and utilized during and beyond the project period.

● Site visits will be conducted by the Monitoring and Assessment Panel to examine the delivery of all funded projects.

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2   The funding ceilings for each project funded under the IDS Research Infrastructure Grant are set with reference to the number of full-time academic staff and full-time students as follows:

No. of Full-time Academic Staff	Funding Ceiling ($m)
≤ 40	3 (student no. ≤ 50)
	6 (student no. ≥ 51)
41 - 130	8
≥ 131	14

(b) Collaborative Research Grant

Objective: To encourage and support collaborative research involving two or more self-financing institutions[3], and / or group research activities that operate across disciplines[4] within an institution with a view to enhancing the research output of self-financing institutions in terms of the level of attainment, quality, dimensions and / or speed.

Eligibility:
- Project Coordinators (PCs) / Co-PIs – Full-time academic staff being engaged by one of the local self-financing degree-awarding institutions with at least a one-year renewable contract with the institution at the time of funding award being made[5]; and spending at least 80% of time in locally-accredited local degree or higher degree work[1] in the institution.

- Institutions are responsible for interpreting and confirming whether an applicant has fulfilled the eligibility requirements announced in the Call for Proposals.

- Co-Is – no eligibility requirements. The Co-Is can be any personnel working in the same or different local self-financing degree-awarding institutions, the UGC-funded universities, or other local / overseas institutions or organizations.

Operation Mode:
- Application should be submitted by one applicant nominated as the PC. Other joint applicants will be regarded as Co-PI. Each Co-PI should have a clear, distinct and material role.

- The normal project duration is three years.

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[3] For cross-institutional research proposals, the project team should have at least one eligible Co-PI from a local self-financing degree-awarding institution other than that of the Project Coordinator (PC).

[4] For cross-disciplinary research proposals, the research proposal should cover at least two research fields from different subject disciplines.

[5] Academics from UGC-funded universities may take up the role of Co-PI in Collaborative Research Grant project. Since the research funding is ring-fenced for the self-financing sector, the project grant cannot be transferred to the UGC sector.

- There is no limit in the number of applications submitted by an institution under IDS Collaborative Research Grant. Institutions are strongly encouraged to screen the proposals to ensure that only proposals having a high academic standard are submitted to the RGC.

- Each applicant is allowed to submit one application under the IDS Collaborative Research Grant in the capacity of PC in each exercise. There is no limit in the number of applications submitted in the capacity of Co-PI (but the Co-PI needs to declare all his / her research proposals / projects in the application and to justify that he / she could deploy sufficient attention to each of the funded projects) or Co-I.

- To encourage collaboration among self-financing institutions and / or collaboration across disciplines within an institution, a proposal without Co-PI will not be accepted.

- Expenditure items that support the conduct of a research project such as teaching relief, equipment, research support staff, travel expenses, conference or workshop registration, subsistence, expenses for dissemination of research results and other direct project costs will be considered.

- Change of PC will normally not be approved before start of a project or within the first six months of an approved project.

- If the PC accepts a non-academic appointment or any appointment outside the local self-financing degree sector, the project team and the participating institutions may nominate a suitable Co-PI from the self-financing degree sector to become the new PC to continue the project. Subject to RGC's approval, the funded project will be transferred to the affiliated institution of the new PC.

- If the PC accepts another academic appointment within the local self-financing degree sector, he / she can carry the funded project to the new institution subject to the mutual

agreement of the outgoing and receiving institutions and the approval of the RGC.

Expected Deliverables:	● Research outputs leading to advances in knowledge that could be transferred into teaching and learning, insights of interest or value to the research community, including publications, patents, etc. PCs should articulate the impact of research outputs in their applications.
Funding Level:	● Direct costs involved in conducting the research projects.
	● On-costs of 15% of the approved project costs.
	● The total funding for each project will be in the range of $2 million to $10 million (inclusive of the 15% on-costs).
	● Funding will be released to the coordinating institution (i.e. the affiliated institution of the PC) in two stages.
Assessment:	● Merit-based assessment criteria which include:

(i)   academic merit;

(ii)   long term goal of the proposal and its potential to develop into an area of strength;

(iii)   opportunities for effective synergy among the participating researchers, research groups and institutions;

(iv)   viability of the proposal, particularly in terms of its project management. The project team's ability to put in place an effective governance structure to monitor collaborating work and to ensure prudent deployment of resources would be important considerations; and

(v)   the potential research impact of the proposal, which is defined as the demonstrable contributions, beneficial effects, valuable changes or advantages that research qualitatively brings to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the

environment or quality of life; and that are beyond the academia.   It may include social and economic impact and research that translates into products and services, as well as research that aligns with important policy, community and social objectives.

- Selection interview will be conducted with the project team of each shortlisted application.

- The project team is required to submit progress and completion reports for monitoring purpose.

- Site visits will be conducted by the Monitoring and Assessment Panel to assess the progress of the projects.

UGC Secretariat
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