

Operation Guide for the RGC Postdoctoral Fellowship Scheme (PDFS)

Introduction

As announced in the 2018 Policy Address, the Government would reserve recurrent funding in support of the Research Grants Council (RGC) to introduce three new regular fellowship schemes in 2019/20 academic year for open nominations, namely RGC Postdoctoral Fellowship Scheme (PDFS), RGC Research Fellow Scheme (RFS) and RGC Senior Research Fellow Scheme (SRFS), which will benefit post-doctoral fellows as well as researchers at associate professor and professor ranks respectively. This Operation Guide sets out the implementation principles and detailed guidelines of the PDFS.

Objectives

2. The PDFS aims at providing promising local and non-local postdoctoral researchers at UGC-funded universities with support at a pivotal time in their very early career, so as to incentivise young research talent to build up a career in the field of research and development (R&D) in Hong Kong.

3. To build up a pool of local research talent to sustain Hong Kong's competitiveness and propel the development of our higher education sector, it is desirable that local doctoral graduates are well covered and can benefit from the PDFS. While the PDFS will remain competitive in nature, it is proposed that a quota of half of the awardees will be reserved for local candidates in each exercise, i.e. for candidates who are, at the time of nomination, Hong Kong permanent residents enjoying the right of abode in Hong Kong as defined under the Immigration Ordinance¹. Under the principle of merit-based selection, should the quota for local candidates not being fully utilised in a particular exercise after exhausting every effort in selecting local candidates, consideration will be given to release the quota for suitable non-local candidates in the exercise concerned. This arrangement will be subject to review as and when required.

4. PDFS will provide support to 50 awardees (encompassing all academic disciplines grouped into two broad academic streams in each round of the yearly exercise, following the arrangement of Hong Kong PhD Fellowship

¹ For definition of Hong Kong permanent residents under the Immigration Ordinance, please refer to <https://www.immd.gov.hk/eng/services/roa/eligible.html>

Scheme) for a period of 36 months in terms of full-time appointment as postdoctoral fellow (PdF) at a University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded university. The two broad academic streams are as follows:

- (i) Science, Medicine, Engineering and Technology; and
- (ii) Humanities, Social Sciences and Business Studies

Coverage and Eligibility

Applicant/Supporting University

5. All eight UGC-funded universities are eligible to apply for the fellowship in support of full-time employment of PdF for research projects/activities. Each university may nominate up to 12 PdF candidates and is required to specify in the nomination the research project(s)/activities to be assigned to the PdF during the fellowship period.

PdF Candidate

6. To qualify for the fellowship, the PdF candidate must:
- (a) obtain a legal right to work and reside in Hong Kong during the fellowship period;
 - (b) have obtained/been conferred a PhD degree or an equivalent qualification not more than three (calendar) years before the (calendar) year of nomination, or will complete the requirement of a PhD degree or an equivalent qualification within six months from the closing date of nomination; and
 - (c) be supported by a UGC-funded university at which he/she wishes to hold the fellowship.

The PdF should be a graduate in the relevant field of the research project(s)/activities to which he/she is to be assigned.

Fellowship Award

7. For each PdF awardee, the supporting university will receive an annual stipend of \$396,600 per year, for the awardee's basic salary as well as a

conference and research-related travel allowance (of \$12,600 per year inclusively) throughout the 36-month fellowship period. Universities should supplement the fellowship with other fringe benefits on par with ordinary employment of a PdF, on top of the stipend to attract outstanding candidates. The amount of the fellowship stipend will be adjusted after every 12 months during the fellowship period with reference to the annual rate of Composite Consumer Price Index (CCPI) and related factors, and may be subject to review in future exercises.

8. Each awardee will be allowed to accept a full-time appointment as PdF at the supporting university. For awardees applying for/currently receiving other employment subsidy via the same research project(s) supported by other local public funding under the UGC, RGC, Innovation and Technology Fund (ITF), etc., they shall decide to receive either the fellowship for full-time employment under the PDFS or other employment subsidy to avoid "double funding".

9. Nevertheless, awardees are allowed, during the fellowship period, to hold concurrent grant(s) (except grant(s) in the form of fellowship) awarded by the UGC/RGC or other funding agencies on research project(s) other than that under the PDFS. Awardees accepting the fellowship shall not compete again in future exercises. Universities may make repeated nominations for non-selected candidates.

Selection Criteria

10. Selection is based on:
- (a) the candidate's academic record of excellence;
 - (b) the candidate's research ability and track record to date;
 - (c) the candidate's leadership potential in the field;
 - (d) the merit of the proposed research project(s)/activities;
 - (e) potential impact of the proposed research project(s); and
 - (f) university support.

Selection Panel

11. The two selection panels formed under the Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme, i.e. Humanities, Social Sciences and Business Studies Selection Panel (H-Panel) and Science, Medicine, Engineering and Technology Selection Panel (S-Panel), will be enlisted for assessment of nominations and selection of awardees under the PDFS with respect to the two broad academic streams respectively.

Nomination Process

12. Nominations of PdF candidates should be made by universities via their Research Office using the PDFS nomination form, on which universities should indicate the institutional support with detailed comments, and PdF candidates should include their research plan, if applicable, detailing the research project(s)/activities to be undertaken within the fellowship period. Prior to submitting a PDFS nomination to the UGC Secretariat, the supporting university is advised to conduct interview assessment with the potential nominee on his/her academic strength, research ability and potential, degree of fitness, leadership, etc., and provide the assessment results and related information in the nomination form for the selection panel's information/reference. Further details and explanatory notes of the nomination process are provided on the RGC website. Call letter will be issued to Heads of Universities by August and nominations should reach the UGC Secretariat by the end of October. Candidates submitting application direct to the UGC Secretariat will not be considered.

Assessment Process by RGC

13. The UGC Secretariat will vet the nominations received and seek clarifications from universities as necessary by December. After that, the panel chair concerned will assign the first reviewer and second reviewer for each nomination among the panel members, taking into account their expertise. To ensure all nominations are competing on a level playing field, a blind review process is adopted for local reviewers to avoid possible conflicts of interest. The first reviewer and second reviewer are required to complete the preliminary assessment of nominations independently by the following January.

14. The UGC Secretariat will then consolidate all the assessments

received and prepare relevant information to facilitate panel discussion on each nomination in detail. The panel discussion will be steered by the panel chair at the selection panel meetings to be held in Hong Kong in the following February. Announcement of results will be made to the universities and on the RGC website in the ensuing month.

Implementation Schedule/Processing Cycle

Timeline	Milestone
August (Year <i>n</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announcement of the launch of PDFS with call for nomination
end-October (Year <i>n</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close of nominations from universities
mid-December (Year <i>n</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formation of selection panels (following the arrangement of Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme) • Assignment of nominations to panel members by panel chair
January (Year <i>n+1</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preliminary assessment of nominations by panel members
February (Year <i>n+1</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final assessment of nominations at selection panel meetings
March (Year <i>n+1</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announcement and notification of PDFS results • PDFS awardees to start a 36-month appointment as PdF at the supporting university within the same (calendar) year <i>n+1</i>

Disbursement Arrangements

15. By accepting the fellowship, the awardee will start a 36-month appointment as PdF at the supporting university within the same (calendar) year after the result is announced, and the annual stipend will be allocated to the supporting university annually via a designated bank account. The supporting

university is responsible to offer basic salary with the conference and research-related travel allowance (no less than the stipend levels as stipulated in paragraph 7 above), as well as other fringe benefits, to the awardee throughout the 36-month fellowship period. The awardee and the supporting university will sign grant undertakings and agree to abide by all the relevant UGC/RGC guidelines.

16. Any unspent balance including interest income generated of the fellowship stipend (such as in the case as per paragraph 19 below) should be returned to the UGC Secretariat within three months from the date of completion of the fellowship.

Monitoring/Reporting Requirements

17. Awardees will be required to submit annual progress reports on all on-going research project(s)/activities through the supporting university to the UGC Secretariat for monitoring. The reporting period should end at the immediate 30 June on or after the completion of every 12 months of the fellowship. Annual progress reports should reach the UGC Secretariat within three months from the end of the reporting period.

18. Upon completion of the 36-month fellowship period, awardees should submit a completion report through the supporting university to the UGC Secretariat not later than three months from the end of the fellowship.

19. In case an awardee resigns or his/her PdF appointment is terminated by the supporting university before the end of the fellowship period, the fellowship shall terminate as it is only designated for PdF appointment and cannot be transferred between persons. The supporting university shall return the unspent balance (including interest income generated) of the fellowship stipend to the UGC Secretariat within three months from the termination of fellowship. The awardee shall submit a concluding report through the supporting university to the UGC Secretariat not later than three months from the termination of fellowship.

20. Request for extension of the fellowship period will be considered exceptionally, on a case-by-case basis, if an awardee is accorded overseas scholarship or offer as visiting scholar/researcher in overseas during the fellowship period. The supporting university should submit the request for extension with supporting documents to the UGC Secretariat for consideration

and approval. Following the approval for extension, the disbursement of fellowship stipend will be suspended until the awardee resumes the fellowship after the overseas tour. Cases seeking covering approval for extension will not be considered.

21. If an awardee changes his/her PdF appointment from the supporting university to a PdF appointment at another UGC-funded university, normally the fellowship cannot be transferred. Nevertheless, provided that the current university has reached a mutual consensus with the receiving university, and an undertaking has been made by the receiving university to confirm that it will manage the fellowship based on the same research project(s)/activities, the current university should report the change in appointment status of the awardee and submit the request for transfer to the UGC Secretariat for prior approval. Subject to approval, the fellowship will then be allowed to transfer with the awardee to the receiving university. However, the fellowship cannot be transferred if an awardee changes his/her PdF appointment from the supporting UGC-funded university to a self-financing local degree-awarding institution.