

The University of Manchester and The Chinese University of Hong Kong Joint Research Seed Fund - 2026 Call for Proposals

Guidelines for Applicants

Deadline: Monday 16 March 2026, 5pm GMT / Tuesday 17 March 2026, 1am HKT

Overview

The University of Manchester (UoM) and The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) are pleased to announce the eighth round of their joint research fund to support collaborative research projects between the two institutions.

The purpose of the fund is to initiate or develop **new research partnerships**. Funds will be awarded to projects which encourage the building of networks of researchers and have clearly defined plans for future funding.

The proposed collaborative projects should present a balance between partnership-building activities and direct research, as appropriate, considering the key objectives of the funding opportunity. Projects can include:

- Joint research activities: scoping, feasibility, or proof of concept studies
- Travel and networking
- Exchange visits
- Skills training

Projects that primarily focus on teaching or training will not be eligible.

The fund is open to applications from all research areas, and we welcome researchers from any discipline to submit proposals. If you are looking for collaborators, please get in touch with your institutional coordinator (contact details at the end of the document) and she will help identify researchers with similar interests.

We encourage the involvement of research staff who are Early Career Researchers (ECRs)¹ either as the principal investigators (PIs) or as members of the project team. Please check the eligibility listed in the “Project Scope and Eligibility” section for other criteria. Please note that PhD students are not eligible as PIs/institutional leads.

Proposals will be assessed and recommended for selection by a panel composed of staff from both universities.

Timeline

Call for proposals opens	Wednesday 28 January 2026 (9am GMT / 5pm HKT)
Deadline for submission	Monday 16 March 2026 (5pm GMT) / Tuesday 17 March 2026 (1am HKT)
Applicants notified	Late April—early May 2026
Project start date	June 2026

¹ **Manchester:** an individual who is within six years of their first academic appointment. This duration excludes any period of career break. **CUHK:** Academic staff members who are Assistant Professors or below.

Funding and Project Length

Projects will be funded for a period of 18 months starting from June 2026 onwards. There is flexibility on start dates, but all projects must be underway by August 2026 at the latest.

Project Scope and Eligibility

Applicants and Collaborators

- The proposal must be a new collaboration, i.e. the PIs/institutional leads have not jointly published or received joint funding before.
- The proposal must be led by a research staff member from each institution (see additional eligibility criteria below).
- A proposal MUST include a lead/PI from UoM and a lead/PI from CUHK, and at least one other researcher on each team, i.e. **at least two researchers** from each partner institution. At UoM, researchers can include PhD students and post-doctoral fellows. At CUHK, there should be at least one other research staff member, i.e. not a PhD student.
- Eligible applicants (see additional eligibility criteria below) may only lead one application but can be listed in the project team on other applications.
- We encourage ECRs to apply. PhD students or academic staff on non-research contracts may be included in the project team but cannot lead a project.
- Mutual external collaborators (including researchers from other universities internationally, or those working in non-academic contexts such as industry or government) cannot lead an application but can be involved in the proposed activities at their own expense, where the benefit of their involvement to the collaboration is justified in the proposal.
- The funding envelope comprises up to £40,000 from UoM and HK\$400,000 from CUHK. We expect to support up to five projects in this round for a funding period of 18 months. Recipients will be awarded up to:
 - £8,000 GBP from UoM to support Manchester applicants.
and
 - HK\$80,000 from CUHK to support CUHK applicants.

Additional Eligibility Criteria

- **Manchester:** We encourage ECRs to apply. The PI/institutional lead does not need to have a permanent post, but they must have an existing contract at the time of application, and that contract must cover the full period of the grant. The PI/institutional lead should also be eligible to apply for external research funding. Emeritus and honorary staff are not eligible to apply as a PI/institutional lead but may be members of the project team.
- **CUHK:** Academic staff members ranked at Research Assistant Professors or above holding full-time employment from all disciplines are welcome to apply. Award holders are required to remain in university service for not less than a year upon completion of the activities in the proposal.

Project Proposals

- The fund is open to proposals across all research areas.
- Proposals may include workshops (face-to-face and virtual), symposia, staff exchanges, research seminars/presentations and formation, development of a collaborative network and/or practical pilot or feasibility research activities (such as experiments, surveys, etc.).

- Proposals demonstrating strong relevance to strategic priorities² at the participating institutions and with the potential for sustainability beyond the initial funding period are encouraged.

Costs and Budget

- The funding provided is intended to support expenses, including but not limited to costs of travel between the institutions, and necessary related consumables. Details of eligible and ineligible costs are detailed in the table below.
- Each partner should pay its own costs and there can be no transfer of funds between institutions. For example, travel costs for Manchester staff should be in the Manchester budget, and costs for a workshop taking place in CUHK should be allocated in the CUHK budget.
- Each institution will pay funds directly to its researchers. Approval of expenditure will be governed by each university for the portion of funding provided.
- UoM collaborators – A fEC costing is not required. Please note that only directly incurred costs are allowed and not directly allocated.

Eligible Costs	Ineligible costs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel costs including flights, hotels and subsistence • Directly incurred staff, e.g. Research Assistant* (up to 20% of the budget, i.e. £1.6K; no restrictions at CUHK) • Research costs including consumables, lab equipment or data collection* (up to 20% of the budget, i.e. £1.6K; no restrictions at CUHK) • Costs associated with organising workshops and meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replacement research/teaching costs • Directly allocated costs including applicants' time** • Indirect costs/estates costs • Equipment • Scholarships • Conference attendance • Costs for external speakers or workshop participants from other universities • Tuition fees • Honoraria • Society and group membership costs

Directly incurred and directly allocated costs are terms used by UK funders:

** Directly Incurred costs are project-specific (i.e. they arise as a direct consequence of the project taking place).*

*** Directly allocated costs are not project-specific (i.e. they are incurred whether or not the project takes place), and are estimated at project level, e.g. Investigator time, Technician time (where not directly incurred).*

Manchester: We ask that Manchester applicants take into consideration the [University Travel Policy](#) and the [Before Travelling](#) guidance, including the associated [Travel Decision Tree](#). These documents and links are designed to assist colleagues in making informed decisions about travel and where possible, reduce the university's overall carbon footprint.

CUHK: The University has introduced the [Carbon Offsetting Encouragement Policy](#) to encourage all staff members to offset their air travel emissions voluntarily. For more information about the policy, please visit the [webpage](#).

How to Apply

This is a joint call, and a single application should be submitted online using [SmartSurvey](#). The form can be previewed [here](#). It can be completed collaboratively, and applicants should use the 'save and continue' feature to save the form and continue later (a link is sent to the applicant's email address). The link can be shared with collaborators to contribute to the application.

² At CUHK, it refers to four strategic research areas identified in the Strategic Plan, which are China: Tradition and Modernity; Innovative Biomedicine; Information and Automation Technology; and Environment and Sustainability.

The full proposal is comprised of the following elements:

- **Applicants' details – affiliations from each institution with contact details**
 - Principal Investigator Information
- **Research proposal – details of the project**
 - **Title** of the Research Project
 - **Key words** that relate to the main topic of your proposal
 - **What is your project idea** – a brief, plain English description of your project (project design and rationale)?
 - **Why is this impactful and important** (project design and rationale)?
 - **Proposed timeframe** (project design and rationale) – project dates, a project timeline and a description of the planned activities.
- **Collaborator complementarity** – a description of how the proposed activities combine mutual areas of interest and strength and the added value of these combined expertise. Also include any involvement of early-stage/early career researchers and/or graduate researchers/PhD students and any direct anticipated benefits to those researchers themselves.
- **Potential impact**
 - **Potential scholarly impact** – a description of the expected academic gains for the project as a result of the proposed collaboration and the identification of corresponding performance indicators, e.g. a publication, a blog, a meeting report etc.
 - **Potential broader impact** – a description of how your proposal aligns with the strategic priorities of the participating institutions and the anticipated benefits of the activities to local or international communities.
- **Capacity for future collaboration**
 - What plans do you have for future funding after the end of the project?
 - What other potential future collaborations and outcomes do you anticipate as a result of having undertaken the current collaboration? For example: joint publications, joint supervision of graduate researchers, joint teaching, growth of research team size at each partner, and collaborations with corporate partners. Provide an outline for potential follow-up steps after funding for the project has ended.
- **Proposed budget**
 - A breakdown of the cost of the activity, e.g. travel, subsistence, hotels, etc.
- **Project team**
 - Provide details of the other researchers involved in the project.
- **Supporting documents**
 - Abbreviated Curriculum Vitae (not more than 2 pages) from each institution's PI (Principal Investigator) with a selected list of publications.
 - **Manchester:** A letter of support from your Head of Department/Research Domain which includes an explanation of how the project aligns with the Faculty's research strategy.
 - **CUHK:** An endorsement form to be completed by the CUHK heads of departments/units to confirm their intention to renew the applicants' contract, if applicable. To download the form, please click [here](#).
- **Communication feedback**
 - Confirmation of how you heard about this fund, this will help us to promote future funds.
- **Declaration and approval**
 - Confirmation you understand the rules and regulations of the fund.

Evaluation Criteria

A joint review panel will assess each proposal according to the academic merit and the following criteria:

- **Project design and rationale (25 points):** How clearly presented and justified is the basis for, and design of the project? How do the proposed activities assist with establishing new and emerging research collaborations?
- **Collaborator complementarity (25 points):** What is the added value of the new or emerging collaboration? How do the proposed activities combine mutual areas of interest and strength? What are the anticipated benefits of involving early-stage/early career researchers and/or graduate researchers/PhD students?
- **Potential impact: (20 points):** What desired outcomes do the planned activities set out to achieve? What are the anticipated benefits of the activities to local or international communities? How does the proposal demonstrate strong relevance to strategic priorities of the partner institutions?
- **Capacity for future collaboration/funding (30 points):** What is the potential for this project to foster ongoing collaboration and through what mechanism(s)? How well does the proposed collaboration plan to access external funding? Provide an outline for potential follow-up steps following the project.

Reporting after Project Completion

All awardees must, as a condition of receiving an award under this call, complete a narrative report that describes the outcomes, nature of collaboration, project impact, trainee involvement, and opportunities for future collaboration that evolved from their projects.

Once the project has been completed, the grant holders will be sent a report form to complete. The report should be submitted within three months of the project end date.

CUHK: The awardees of CUHK will be invited to complete a survey annually for three to five consecutive years to facilitate tracking of the partnership development.

Contact Information About This Call

If you have additional questions that are not answered in the above document, please email the contact at your institution with your query:

The University of Manchester

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The Chinese University of Hong Kong

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