

**Ministry of Education**

**SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL  
(SSRC)  
GRADUATE RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP  
(GRF)**

Administrative Guidelines and Policies  
for Universities and Awardees

05 July 2024

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Social Science Research Council (SSRC) Graduate Research Fellowship (GRF) is a national scheme that aims to facilitate the engagement of outstanding early-career Singaporean social science and humanities researchers who have been accepted for their doctoral or postdoctoral training at leading overseas research or academic institutions.
- 1.2. The SSRC GRF aims to forge strong professional networks with promising early-career Singaporean social science and humanities researchers. This broadened network of Singaporean researchers based locally and abroad facilitates a rich exchange of ideas between local and international scholars that strengthens Singapore's research capabilities.
- 1.3. The SSRC GRF also aims to assist in the development of promising overseas-based early-career researchers with the provision of a small research grant and an opportunity to be mentored by an experienced researcher from one of the local Autonomous Universities (AUs). This will broaden the potential pipeline of Singaporean researchers who may eventually take up appointments within the local research ecosystem.
- 1.4. There are two categories of award:
  - (a) Up to SGD 10,000 per award for doctoral students; and
  - (b) Up to SGD 20,000 per award for postdoctoral fellows.

## 2. Terms

### Eligibility Criteria

- 2.1. Applicants must fulfil the following eligibility criteria:
  - (a) Singapore citizens;
  - (b) Outstanding undergraduate academic records (at least a bachelor's degree with second upper honours or equivalent); and
  - (c) Applied or accepted for doctoral studies or postdoctoral training (or equivalent<sup>1</sup>) at a leading overseas academic or research institution.

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<sup>1</sup> Applicants must provide supporting documents to show that their home university does not offer postdoctoral fellow positions, and their current position could be considered equivalent to that of a postdoctoral fellow.

- (d) Applicants should not be recipients of other scholarships from the Singapore Government e.g. Singapore Teaching and Academic Research Talent Scheme (START) PhD Scholarships and Postdoctoral Fellowship Awards<sup>2</sup>.

### Award Outcomes and Unsuccessful Applications

- 2.2. SSRC GRF applicants in the last year of their PhD programme may be offered conditional awards should they have an offer for a suitable postdoctoral position which they would assume upon graduation. Holders of conditional awards will inform MOE and the AU should there be any changes to the pre-agreed postdoctoral training plans, for review.
- 2.3. SSRC GRF applicants who have applied but yet to secure a PhD programme or postdoctoral position may be offered in-principle awards by the AUs. The fellowship will only be confirmed when applicants have secured a place in the pre-agreed PhD programme or postdoctoral position. Applicants should update the AUs on their application status and provide supporting documentation by the acceptance deadline.
- 2.4. Prospective SSRC GRF awardees may only accept one (1) GRF offer from one (1) host AU at any point in time.
- 2.5. SSRC GRF awardees may apply for a second award after the end of the Term<sup>3</sup> of their first award. However, an individual will be limited to a maximum of two (2) awards in total throughout their career (regardless of category). All applications for the award will compete on an equal basis.
- 2.6. Appeals for unsuccessful applications will not be considered.

### Terms of the SSRC GRF

- 2.7. The terms of the SSRC GRF are as follows:

- (a) Tenable for a period of two (2) years;

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<sup>2</sup> START PhD Scholarships include: NUS-Overseas Graduate Scholarship, NTU-Overseas Graduate Scholarship, SMU-Overseas Postgraduate Scholarship and SUTD-Graduate Merit Scholarship. START Postdoctoral Fellowship Awards include: NUS-Overseas Postdoctoral Fellowship, NTU International Postdoctoral Fellowship, SMU-Overseas Postdoctoral Fellowship and SUTD-Presidential Postdoctoral Fellowship.

<sup>3</sup> "Term" means the term of this Contract, beginning with the project start date for the duration of the Funding as specified in the Letter of Award/Acceptance Form. If project extension requests were approved, the end of the Term will align with the date approved by the host AU.

- (b) Tenable for research in any social science and humanities discipline, although research on issues relevant to the local context is encouraged;
  - (c) The award may be used for travel or other research-related expenses;
  - (d) Awardees will be assigned a mentor who is an experienced researcher at one of the local AUs based on their proposed area of research, who can provide access to valuable academic and career guidance;
  - (e) Awardees will be required to return to Singapore at least once during the tenure of award to participate in engagement activities (e.g. research seminars) within the AU and with SSRC members; and
  - (f) Awardees must comply with reporting requirements stipulated by the host AU.
- 2.8. The SSRC GRF is bond-free, and host AUs are not obliged to hire GRF awardees as faculty members beyond the GRF tenure.
- 2.9. SSRC GRF awardees should hold a position either as a doctoral student or postdoctoral fellow (or equivalent) throughout tenure of the award. SSRC GRF awardees are required to inform MOE through the host AU once this eligibility criterion is no longer met, and awards will be closed.
- 2.10. SSRC GRF awardees will inform MOE through the host AU should they receive other scholarships from the Singapore Government post-award. In such instances, the awards will be closed with effect from scholarship start date.
- 2.11. SSRC GRF awardees will inform MOE through the host AU immediately in the event that the ethics and other research-related approvals are withdrawn or suspended. MOE reserves the right to withhold funding if these approvals are not obtained, withdrawn or suspended.

### **3. Grant Management**

#### Funding

- 3.1. SSRC GRF will be administered by the AUs, with the SSRC as the final approving authority.

- 3.2. Upon conveyance of the approved awardees, MOE will disburse the approved award amount to the AUs upfront in one lump sum.
- 3.3. In the case of in-principle awards, if candidates are not offered a place in the pre-agreed choice of institute by the acceptance deadline, the final amount awarded to the AU will exclude the conditional offer, and AUs may not change the awardee. AUs should inform MOE on the status of in-principle awardees with supporting documentation in a timely manner.
- 3.4. Actual expenditure for SSRC GRF awards should be administered on the basis of each individual awardee. Once the list of awardees who have accepted the GRF has been finalised, AUs should provide to MOE the confirmed list of awards and approved funding quantum for each awardee. Should AUs be co-funding the award, the co-funding split between MOE and the AU should be clearly specified. The award amount and co-funding amount is fixed and cannot be changed after this.
- 3.5. In the case of co-funded awards, MOE funds may be depleted first to support actual expenditure incurred by individual SSRC GRF awardees. However, AUs should not aggregate the expenditure across individual awards and use the total savings across all awards to reduce institution's co-funding quantum below the original amounts set out for each individual.

#### Administration of the Funding

- 3.6. The host AUs are required to ensure that there are adequate internal financial controls and processes as well as adequate cost control measures to ensure that resources are utilised prudently. For cost items not specified in the list of non-fundable items, OREs should assess the reasonableness of the request, and ensure that the proposed costs are necessary and relevant for the research.
- 3.7. Host AUs and SSRC GRF awardees should **not** commit to any expenditure before or after the end of the Term.
- 3.8. Host AUs and SSRC GRF awardees are to follow AUs' procurement procedures and guidelines to ensure that all purchases made using SSRC GRF funds are value-for-money and processes are transparent.
- 3.9. Ownership of all assets purchased under the grant will be vested with the host AU, which will have the flexibility to repurpose or dispose of the asset in accordance with its internal asset management policy after the end of the Term. In the event that the awardee is unable to return the assets to the host AU when they visit Singapore, the AU may charge shipping costs to the

grant. Prudence should be exercised in making such transactions. Should shipping costs be too high, and exceed the original price of the asset, AUs are advised to explore acquiring the asset by other means or disposing of the asset.

- 3.10. In the event of an early termination of a GRF award, AUs should inform MOE earliest possible, and the following conditions will apply:
- (a) Change of awardee is not applicable for the SSRC GRF awards.
  - (b) Upon termination of the award, the AUs shall take all necessary actions to minimise further expenditure on the research up to termination date.
  - (c) AUs will have to return to MOE all monies that have not been expended under the award.
  - (d) MOE may require the AUs to return all or some of the funding that has already been expended in the event of termination due to misconduct, subject to the circumstances of each case.

#### **4. Reporting Requirements**

##### Audit Report

- 4.1. The host AU shall account for the utilisation of the funds through an annual audited expenditure statement to be submitted to MOE within two months from the end of the Financial Year (by 31 May). Upon the end of the Term, AUs shall return to MOE any unutilised funds after the submission of the audited expenditure statement. MOE may appoint an external auditor to audit the AUs for compliance in the use of MOE funds provided under the SSRC GRF. Roll over of unused funds to support new awards is not allowed.

##### Final Statement of Account

- 4.2. All qualifying GRF expenditures can be included in the annual expenditure statement as long as they are incurred by the end of the Term / termination date (if applicable) and paid within one month from the end of the Term / termination date (if applicable).
- 4.3. For projects with approved post-project conferences, these expenses should be reported in the annual expenditure statement of the Financial Year (FY) that these expenses were incurred.

Unutilised funds for these projects will be returned after MOE reviews the statement. All post-project conferences shall be paid within four (4) months from the end of the Term.

#### Performance Management

- 4.4. AUs are to submit on a Financial Year (FY) basis, an annual progress report and a final report to MOE for each batch of awardees within two (2) months from the end of the FY (by 31 May). The report should be submitted through the Offices of Research (ORE) or its equivalent and endorsed by the Director of Research (DOR), covering details on the research expenditure and output on an aggregated level. Individual reports from the awardees should be included in the Annex of the report to MOE.
- 4.5. AUs are to maintain a record of GRF alumni and their current employment, significant publications, and recent engagements in locally-relevant research activities and provide these to MOE by 31 May each year.

### **5. Grant Variation**

- 5.1. Variation requests should be assessed by the host AUs.

#### Budget Variation

- 5.2. The host AUs should establish a mechanism for the management of SSRC GRF funded projects which includes requests for project budget variation.

#### Project Extension

- 5.3. AUs are allowed to approve GRF project extension requests capped at one year with the following conditions:
  - (a) Extension requests of up to six (6) months should be approved by the Head of Department or equivalent, and
  - (b) Extension requests of up to one (1) year should be approved by the Deputy/Vice President of Research or equivalent.
- 5.4. The following reporting requirements will apply to approved project extensions:
  - (a) Changes in project end-date should be indicated in Annex I and submitted in the Financial Year they were approved. AUs should also provide supporting documentation for approved requests.

- (b) Final reports of extended research projects should be submitted to MOE within two (2) months from the end of the Term through the Offices of Research (ORE) and endorsed by the Director of Research (DOR).
- (c) The submission of annual progress reports will be waived for projects which received an extension of not more than three (3) months (i.e. ends by 30 June).

#### Post-Project Conference Charges

- 5.5. Post-project conferences may be charged to the SSRC GRF if approved, but this would not constitute an extension of award duration. The research project should be completed by the end of the Term, and research output for post-project conferences should be included in the final report submitted on 31 May.
- 5.6. Requests to attend post-project conferences shall be assessed by the host AU subject to the listed conditions and endorsed by the Head of Schools. A reference form to assess requests are provided in Annex IV. AUs may revise the template to include additional information, as long as information required by MOE remain included.
  - (a) The conference should be no later than three (3) months from the end of the Term and included in the PI's final report.
  - (b) The conference paper must be accepted for presentation before the end of the Term.
  - (c) Request should be sent to AU's approving authority via email at least one month before the end of the Term.
  - (d) No retrospective requests will be considered.
  - (e) Expenditures incurred after the end of the Term should solely be for the SSRC GRF awardee to attend post-project conferences, and funding should not be used for other purposes (e.g. to conduct additional fieldwork, to visit collaborators).
  - (f) In the event that a budget variation is required to attend post-project conferences, AUs should also assess this based on the established mechanism for the management of SSRC GRF funded projects before the project ends, which includes requests for project budget variation (see Para 5.2).



- (g) In the event of any non-compliance, MOE reserves the right to reject the expenditures to be charged to SSRC GRF.

## **6. Acknowledgement Guidelines**

- 6.1. All institutions should attribute their awards/grants to the Social Science Research Council (Singapore) and the Ministry of Education, Singapore.

- 6.2. Where possible, the acknowledgement statement should follow:

“This research / project is supported by the Social Science Research Council (Singapore) and administered by the Ministry of Education, Singapore, under its <name of funding programme> (XX Award <ref no>, if applicable).

If there is more than one (1) funding source, the names of each source of funding are to be placed in order of the funding value.

- 6.3. Where applicable, the following disclaimer must be included in all published materials arising from the Research:

“Any opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not reflect the views of the Social Science Research Council (Singapore) and the Ministry of Education, Singapore.”

## **7. Training & Education Programmes**

- 7.1. Wherever necessary, the SSRC or MOE may request the awardees and/or the research team to participate in education-related programmes such as:

- (a) Presenting their research work in MOE schools and institutions of higher learning or public outreach activities; and

- (b) Supporting MOE’s and the SSRC’s efforts in developing the social science and humanities research ecosystem in Singapore.

## **8. Compliance with Administrative Guidelines**

- 8.1. In the event of non-compliance with the administrative guidelines, MOE reserves the right to:

- (a) withhold or withdraw the funding;
- (b) carry out any action as MOE deems appropriate; and
- (c) disqualify the awardee from subsequent SSRC GRF awards.

**9. Miscellaneous**

- 9.1. MOE reserves the right to change, including without limitation, modify, delete or replace the information and materials set out in this document unilaterally. MOE shall notify the Host Institutions in writing, enclosing the revised terms and conditions, accordingly.
- 9.2. As and when directed by MOE, the Institutions will allow an auditor appointed by MOE to carry out an audit of its financial and related processes/procedures pertaining to the utilisation of SSRC GRF grants.