



Sino-Malta Fund 2020

National Rules for Participation – State Aid

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1. Introduction

Funding Party: Malta Council for Science and Technology for and on behalf of the Foundation for Science and Technology,
Villa Bighi, Kalkara, KKR 1320
Malta

1.1 Scope and Focus

The Call for Proposals for the Science and Technology Cooperation – Sino-Malta Fund for 2020 is to be carried out in accordance with the framework of the Agreement on Science and Technological Cooperation between the Government of Malta and the Government of the People's Republic of China and subsequent agreements by Joint Commission on Science and Technology between the Malta Council for Science and Technology (hereinafter referred to as 'MCST') and the Ministry of Science and Technology of the People's Republic of China (hereinafter referred to as 'MOST').

The aim of this Science and Technology Cooperation – Sino-Malta Fund, is to intensify scientific collaboration between the two countries to strengthen R&D activities, technology transfer and to carry out comprehensive, steady and long-term cooperation through support of researchers' mobility and the networking of industries, universities and research institutions to generate mutual-beneficial and win-win research.

1.1.1 Research Areas

The selection of topics for funding has been made on the basis of bilateral negotiations between MCST and MOST with respect to joint-priority areas. For this call, the selected areas are:

- a) Maritime Services and/or Maritime Technology and/or Aquaculture
- b) Transport
- c) Digital Technologies

1.1.2 Type of Research

Projects under the Sino-Malta Fund 2020 can undertake either Fundamental Research, Industrial Research or Experimental Development in line with the definitions outlined in Section 1.3, under Regulations A or B of this scheme. MCST will be funding all three research work categories.

1.1.3 Project Proposals

Project Proposal submissions will be undertaken in two stages. In stage 1 of the Call the submission of a pre-proposal is required and in stage 2 of the Call the submission of the full proposal.

Each project proposal must be in accordance with the following:

- The proposed research project must be consistent with the scope of this call determined in both the MCST and MOST published details.
- The proposed project must relate to one (1) predominant theme, a), b) or c) detailed above.
- The proposal should be novel and not correspond with on-going or completed projects funded by other instruments, programmes or projects.
- Only pre-proposals that have an approved cooperation agreement signed by all partners and an approved IP agreement signed by all partners will be considered. Furthermore, pre-/full proposals on either side must bear matching thematic areas and the applications on either side are to be complementary.

- Project consortia consisting of **at least one eligible legal entity operating from Malta** and one eligible entity from China can apply for funding. The eligibility of Maltese participants is highlighted within this document, whereas the eligibility of Chinese participants is published within the MOST call.
- The proposal should strive to be balanced between the countries involved in the project as far as the volume of work is concerned and preferably be balanced in terms of the requests for funding.
- There is no upper limit on eligible consortium size. Consortia may involve as many partners as necessary to achieve the project goals. However, applicants should be aware that a higher number of entities will not automatically result in a positive evaluation of the proposal. There is also no upper limit of partners from the same country, unless stated otherwise in the MOST call. Each side of the collaboration must however have, one (1) Principal Investigator (PI).
- MCST does not preclude the participation of entities from other countries, however these are to provide written proof that their part of the project will be covered independently from this call (i.e. in kind). They cannot act as a PI and their contribution to the project should not be vital. The MOST call must also be consulted with regards to any exemption of contradiction to this allowance by MCST which could nullify the statement.
- In every proposal, the PI from the Malta side and the PI from the Chinese side, bear the responsibility for submitting the application on behalf of the Consortium, to each of their respective managing authorities (i.e. MCST and MOST), whilst considering the national rules of either side.
- Applicants are to submit an application for assistance under this scheme before the start of works.
- Successful proposals will see entities operating from Malta entering into a Grant Agreement with MCST, whereas the Chinese entities will enter into a Grant Agreement with MOST. MCST shall decide whether successful applicants operating from Malta are to sign a Grant Agreement with MCST on a per partner basis, or in a collective manner.
- Each side (Maltese partners and Chinese partners) must adhere to their respective National Rules, to ensure joint-eligibility. Ineligibility of one side of the consortium, will result in an ineligible proposal overall.
- Applicants can submit more than one pre- / full- proposal under this Call.
- The proposal submitted by the PI operating from Malta to MCST must be written in **English**. The proposal submitted by the Chinese PI to MOST must be written in Chinese.

1.2 National Contact Point

Correspondence from Maltese entities should be directed to:

International.mcst@gov.mt / 23602240

Correspondence from Chinese entities should be directed to:

Tel: +86168598010

E-mail: zj@cstec.org.cn

1.3 Definitions

Applicant means anyone eligible for participation in a Project in terms of these Rules for Participation and who consequently applies for funding under this joint initiative.

Arm's length means that the conditions of the transaction between the contracting parties do not differ from those which would be stipulated between independent enterprises and contain no element of collusion. Any transaction that results from an open, transparent and non-discriminatory procedure is considered as meeting the arm's length principle.

Effective collaboration means collaboration between at least two independent parties to exchange knowledge or technology, or to achieve a common objective based on the division of labour where the parties jointly define the scope of the collaborative project, contribute to its implementation and share its risks, as well as its results. One or several parties may bear the full costs of the project and thus relieve other parties of its financial risks. Contract research and provision of research services are not considered forms of collaboration.

Eligible direct costs are those costs incurred directly by the national beneficiaries during the duration of the project and used primarily for the purpose of achieving the objectives of the project. All eligible expenses must be incurred between the Start Date and the End Date of the Project and must be limited to the budgeted value as indicated in the Grant Agreement.

End Date means the date when the Project Period, having commenced on the Start Date, expires. The Project Period is the time required to execute the Project as indicated in the grant agreement.

Industrial Entity is defined as a Legal Entity having more than 50% private shareholding, including but not limited to, a privately-owned company or commercial enterprise, the objects and activities of which include the output of a specified product and service, and have the financial means to execute the project and a potential to use the results. In addition to research and innovation contributions and knowledge transfer, the entity may contribute to the consortium by developing, testing, commercializing or using such a product or service. Provided that a registered NGO, or a Professional Body as defined in this Section is considered as forming part of this definition.

Innovation is defined as the internationally novel scientific/technological development of a technological process, product or service. Also, the definition of innovation within the same context can also be applied to non-novel, yet step-change/ground-breaking enhancement of existing technological processes, products or services, or even the application of existing knowledge to new novel applications of these solutions to deliver step-change competitiveness through such an application.

Large undertaking is an undertaking not fulfilling the criteria laid down in Annex I of the COMMISSION REGULATION (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty.

Linked enterprises are enterprises which have any of the relationships with each other outlined in Annex I of the COMMISSION REGULATION (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty.

Maltese Legal Entity means any entity created under the law of Malta which has legal personality and which may, acting under its own name, exercise rights and be subject to obligations. For the definition of Chinese entity eligibility, the call published by MOST is to be consulted.

NGO means any Voluntary or Non-Governmental Organisation set up in accordance with The Voluntary Organisations Act (Cap. 492 of the Laws of Malta).

Non-profit Organisation is an entity where (a) the statute of the entity contains an express exclusion of the purpose to make profits; and (b) there is express provision in the statute defining the purposes of the entity which do not include the promotion of private interests, other than a private interest which is a social purpose; and (c) no part of the income, capital or property is available directly or indirectly to any promoter, founder, member, administrator, donor or any other private interest. Provided that if a promoter, founder, member, administrator or donor is another enrolled non-profit making organisation, the limitation in paragraph (c) shall not apply provided the availability of such income, capital or property is subject to conditions which are consistent with the general purposes of the grantor entity:

Provided further that an organisation shall continue to be deemed as non-profit making notwithstanding that: (i) it obtains a pecuniary gain from its activities when such gain is not received or credited to its members but is exclusively utilised for its established purposes; (ii) it buys or sells or otherwise deals in goods or services where such activities are exclusively related to its principal purposes; (iii) it is established for the general entertainment, pastime, education or other similar benefit only of its members; or (iv) it is established for the promotion of the social role, ethics, education and values of a trade or profession provided it does not promote the private interests of its members.

Operating base in Malta means if the legal entity:

- owns, leases, or has been given the right of use by a third party, an adequate premises from where to conduct an eligible economic activity in the region of Malta;
and
- employs at least one (1) person that is based in Malta and is liable to pay income tax in Malta.

Partner is defined as a partner in a consortium of a funded transnational project

Personnel costs means the costs of researchers, technicians and other supporting staff to the extent employed on the relevant project or activity

Principal Investigator is one of the local beneficiaries of a project consortium that is appointed as that entity responsible for all communications with MCST and the consortium partners from proposal submission to project end, regardless of the number of local partners and the number of Grant Agreements. The Project Contact from the Principal Investigator will have the responsibility of ensuring that all the partners involved in the consortium are eligible and supervises the project workflow with the help of WP leaders. Additionally, he/she will be required to submit the project application on behalf of the consortium and must also compile and submit reports / deliverables to the funding bodies which in turn will relay these documents to MCST.

Professional Body may be an organisation, an association, a chamber, society, institute or a group of professional persons not being enrolled or registered in terms of The Voluntary Organisations Act (Cap. 492 of the Laws of Malta) or not being otherwise recognised in terms of Law, and which is generally recognised and acknowledged by the professional persons it seeks to represent as their representative Body. For the purposes of this Definition, a professional person is one who has undergone a period of

study at a university or a recognised institution of higher learning and has obtained the formal qualification entitling the person to practise the respective profession; and who provides a specialised service to the public, based primarily on a fiduciary relationship between herself/himself and the party to whom s/he provides such service on his own personal credibility and responsibility.

Project Contact is the individual, appointed to communicate on behalf of the partner with MCST and other partners. There must be one (1) Project Contact per partner.

Project Grant means the granted funding provided.

Project Value means the entire project budget including any co-financing.

Public Entity means any Maltese Public Service Department or Maltese Public Sector Entity, or any Maltese Legal Entity which has more than 50% government shareholding. Public Service refers to all Ministries and Departments; and Public Sector Entities refers to authorities, corporations, agencies and commercial public-sector entities in which the Government has a majority shareholding and that are not listed on the stock exchange. Public Entities also include foundations, local councils and public academic entities. In the case of public academic entities, this includes but is not limited to a higher education entity or a research institute, whether as a whole body or as a component unit or department within such body, provided that the entity's ongoing education and research is scientifically in line with the subject of the application being submitted during this call provided that the higher education entity must be in possession of a license for Higher Education according to the Further and Higher Education (Licensing, Accreditation and Quality Assurance) Regulations – Subsidiary Legislation 327.433. This does not include the license for a tuition centre.

Research and Development is defined as the systematic investigation, work or research carried out in any field of science or technology through experiment, theoretical work or analysis undertaken in order to acquire new knowledge, primarily directed towards a specific practical aim or objective, and includes:

- a) **Fundamental Research** means experimental or theoretical work undertaken primarily to acquire new knowledge of the underlying foundations of phenomena and observable facts, without any direct commercial application or use in view
- b) **Industrial Research** means the planned research or critical investigation aimed at the acquisition of new knowledge and skills for developing new products, processes or services or for bringing about a significant improvement in existing products, processes or services. It comprises the creation of components parts of complex systems, and may include the construction of prototypes in a laboratory environment or in an environment with simulated interfaces to existing systems as well as of pilot lines, when necessary for the industrial research and notably for generic technology validation
- c) **Experimental Development** means acquiring, combining, shaping and using existing scientific, technological, business and other relevant knowledge and skills with the aim of developing new or improved products, processes or services. This may also include, for example, activities aiming at the conceptual definition, planning and documentation of new products, processes or services

Experimental development may comprise prototyping, demonstrating, piloting, testing and validation of new or improved products, processes or services in environments representative of real life operating conditions where the primary objective is to make further technical improvements on products, processes or services that are not substantially set. This may include the development of a commercially usable prototype or pilot which is necessarily the final commercial product and which is too expensive to produce for it to be used only for demonstration and validation purposes.

Experimental development does not include routine or periodic changes made to existing products, production lines, manufacturing processes, services and other operations in progress, even if those changes may represent improvements;

Research and knowledge-dissemination organisation means an entity (such as universities or research institutes, technology transfer agencies, innovation intermediaries, research-oriented physical or virtual collaborative entities), irrespective of its legal status (organised under public or private law) or way of financing, whose primary goal is to independently conduct fundamental research, industrial research or experimental development or to widely disseminate the results of such activities by way of teaching, publication or knowledge transfer. Where such entity also pursues economic activities the financing, the costs and the revenues of those economic activities must be accounted for separately. Undertakings that can exert a decisive influence upon such an entity, in the quality of, for example, shareholders or members, may not enjoy preferential access to the results generated by it;

'Self-employed' as registered with Jobsplus.

Start of Works means the earlier of either the start of construction works relating to the investment, or the first legally binding commitment to order equipment or any other commitment that makes the investment irreversible. Buying land and preparatory works such as obtaining permits and conducting feasibility studies are not considered start of works. For take-overs, 'start of works' means the moment of acquiring the assets directly linked to the acquired establishment; also known as *Start Date* being the date which is stated in the grant agreement for the official start of the project.

Start-up Undertaking shall be defined as an enterprise that has been established for less than five (5) years following its registration. For eligible undertakings that are not subject to registration, the five year eligibility period may be considered to start from the moment when the enterprise either starts its economic activity or is liable to tax for its economic activity.

Single Undertaking includes all enterprises having at least one of the following relationships with each other:

- i. One enterprise has a majority of the shareholders' or members' voting rights in another enterprise;
- ii. One enterprise has the right to appoint or remove a majority of the members of the administrative, management or supervisory body of another enterprise;
- iii. One enterprise has the right to exercise a dominant influence on another enterprise pursuant to a contract entered into with that enterprise or to a provision in its memorandum or articles of association;
- iv. One enterprise, which is a shareholder in or member of another enterprise, controls alone, pursuant to an agreement with other shareholders in or members of that enterprise, a majority of shareholders' or members' voting rights in that enterprise.

Enterprises having any of the relationships referred to in points (i) to (iv) above through one or more other enterprises shall be considered to be a single undertaking,

Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) is an undertaking which fulfils the criteria laid down in Annex I of Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty.

Subcontracted Activity means any activity related to the project, (including but not limited to consultancy), which is not carried out directly by a Partner or its employees but is carried out by any third party (local or foreign) individual, company, partnership or entity, under whatsoever terms and conditions.

Undertaking in Difficulty means an undertaking in respect of which at least one of the following circumstances occurs:

(a) In the case of a limited liability company (other than an SME that has been in existence for less than three years or, for the purposes of eligibility for risk finance aid, an SME within 7 years from its first commercial sale that qualifies for risk finance investments following due diligence by the selected financial intermediary), where more than half of its subscribed share capital has disappeared as a result of accumulated losses. This is the case when deduction of accumulated losses from reserves (and all other elements generally considered as part of the own funds of the company) leads to a negative cumulative amount that exceeds half of the subscribed share capital. For the purposes of this provision, 'limited liability company' refers in particular to the types of company mentioned in Annex I of Directive 2013/34/EU and 'share capital' includes, where relevant, any share premium.

(b) In the case of a company where at least some members have unlimited liability for the debt of the company (other than an SME that has been in existence for less than three years or, for the purposes of eligibility for risk finance aid, an SME within 7 years from its first commercial sale that qualifies for risk finance investments following due diligence by the selected financial intermediary), where more than half of its capital as shown in the company accounts has disappeared as a result of accumulated losses. For the purposes of this provision, 'a company where at least some members have unlimited liability for the debt of the company' refers in particular to the types of company mentioned in Annex II of Directive 2013/34/EU.

(c) Where the undertaking is subject to collective insolvency proceedings or fulfils the criteria under its domestic law for being placed in collective insolvency proceedings at the request of its creditors.

(d) Where the undertaking has received rescue aid and has not yet reimbursed the loan or terminated the guarantee, or has received restructuring aid and is still subject to a restructuring plan.

(e) In the case of an undertaking that is not an SME, where, for the past two years:

1. the undertaking's book debt to equity ratio has been greater than 7.5 and
2. the undertaking's EBITDA interest coverage ratio has been below 1.0.

2. Eligibility for Participation

2.1 Partner Eligibility

With regards to the State aid scheme, intended beneficiaries must be undertakings that carry out an economic activity within the meaning of Article 107 TFEU and are registered as one (1) of the following:

- i. A limited liability company established within the European Union and with an operating base in Malta.
- ii. Public entity
- iii. Research and knowledge dissemination organisations (such as academia or research institutes, technology transfer agencies, innovation intermediaries, research-oriented physical or virtual collaborative entities)
- iv. NGO

- v. Non-Profit Organisation
- vi. Self-employed
- vii. Professional Body
- viii. Cooperatives

Such beneficiaries will be eligible for funding subject to the terms and conditions laid out in this document and in particular the conditions for eligibility in Regulations A and B.

For assistance provided under **Regulation B** of the National Rules for Participation, no aid may be granted to a beneficiary which is subject to an outstanding recovery order following a previous Commission Decision declaring an aid granted by Malta illegal and incompatible with the common market.

Applicants, who fall within the definition of Industrial Entity, will be required to provide the following documents which will be considered during the national eligibility check stage (to be included as an annex to the National application form or else provide authorisation to the MCST to obtain directly from the Malta Business Registry):

- Memorandum & Articles of Association or other constitutive document;
- Audited financial statements for last 3 fiscal years (2 sets).

In the event that the Applicant is a start-up and the above documents are not available, the Applicant shall provide the financial projections for three (3) years signed by an auditor, including:

- an income statement,
- a cash flow statement, and
- a statement of financial position

In the event that the review of these documents may result in too high an exposure risk to MCST, the Applicant will no longer be entitled to participate in the project.

Applicants who have other funded projects with MCST and are in default, and/or have gone beyond the timelines of the project, are not eligible to participate.

Any application submitted by or including the participation of any legal person or legal entity having, in totality or in majority ownership, the same shareholders, partners or persons holding and / or exercising a controlling power in any other legal entity which will have been at any time prior to such application declared as non-compliant or defaulting on any other contract or agreement entered into with MCST, shall be automatically declared as inadmissible.

Under Regulation B, aid will not be granted to undertakings in difficulty (within the meaning of the General Block Exemption Regulation).

Funding under this scheme is made available on the basis that the Applicant has not benefited and will not benefit from any other grant or financial incentive of whatever nature, applied for and/or utilised for the same costs and scope as that subject of the funding requested under this scheme.

3. Funding Criteria

The funds for the national beneficiaries participating in the project consortium will be made available in accordance with these rules and regulations.

3.1 Project Duration

Project duration should be a maximum of two (2) years. Successful projects are envisaged to start in January 2021. Any envisaged delays beyond 31 January 2021 need to be communicated to MCST in writing and it will be up to the Councils discretion whether the project start date can be extended further.

3.2 Application Process

The Application Process is a two-stage process:

Stage 1 – Pre-Proposal Application Form

A concise application will be submitted in Stage 1 of the call, where applicants is invited to provide an abstract of the project together with a brief overview of the objectives, targets, research, innovation and technical aspects of the project. Information on the foreseen timeline as well as the strength of the partnership will also need to be included. Collaboration and Implementation Agreements need to be submitted as part of this application phase.

Stage 2 – Full-Proposal Application Form

A full proposal submission is required in Stage 2 of the call, in which a detailed explanation of the project will be required at this stage, including further elaboration on the content that was provided in the Stage 1 Application Process as well as providing a more detailed overview of the Implementation methodology including the deliverables broken down into tasks, a detailed overview of the budget.

Applications from applicants operating from Malta are required to be submitted via email to international.mcst@gov.mt

Only complete Application Forms shall be considered.

3.3 Submission Deadline

The submission deadline for Stage 1 is **15 June 2020**. Stage 2 submission deadline will be communicated to the applicants that are invited to submit a Stage 2 Full Proposal Application Form.

3.4 Grant Value

One (1) project will be selected for funding from each of the thematic areas, with a maximum national allocation for Maltese partners in a consortium of €200,000 per sector per project

Funding for successful project submissions will be based on a periodic cash advance and will be regulated through a Grant Agreement establishing the terms and conditions governing the financing of the project.

Funding under this joint initiative is made available on the basis that an Applicant does not benefit from any other grant or financial incentive in respect of the expenses related to execution of the project.

3.5 Project Contact Point

Each national partner shall appoint a Project Contact Point. The Project contact point shall have the following responsibilities:

- To act as the main contact person between the partner executing the project and MCST
- To ensure compliance with their obligations in terms of the Grant Agreement.
- To provide input to the Project Contact point of the PI for the compilation of Periodic Reports and Final Reports including their timely submissions and effective execution of the project.
- To ensure submission of all required financial reporting as per the contractual obligations for the partner to MCST.
- To monitor the execution of the project activities according to set timeframes and deliverables.

3.6 Deliverables

Mandatory deliverables

The project plan must give details of certain activities which are required by MCST. These should be included as deliverables in the project proposal and include:

1. Under Regulation A, a showcase of the project to the general public by the national project partner/s through:
 - The publication of at least two (2) articles per year in local newspapers, magazines or online portals. These should not contain intellectual property but should raise awareness about the project and its benefits.
 - The organisation of at least one (1) half-day event to be held at MCST's premises or as otherwise directed by MCST.

Further to the above dissemination deliverables, MCST invites applications to also include deliverables as recommended below, subject to the nature of the research project:

1. Monograph/s and/or peer-reviewed paper/s for accepted publication in international journal/s of repute based on the work carried out through the Project. The subscription levels or Impact Factor of journals are important considerations. Similar papers published on open source media would also be considered favourably.
 2. Oral presentation/s at international conference/s on the work carried out through the Project.
 3. The attainment of undergraduate degrees and/or postgraduate degrees and/or post-doctoral research. In cases where the project duration is insufficient for the purpose of submitting a degree, there has to be a commitment to complete the degree outside the duration of the project utilising other sources of funding.
 4. Registration of a patent or other Intellectual Property Rights stemming from the Project, in Malta as well as in any other country.
 5. Commercial commitments such as technology innovations to be included in a partner's existing product or service.
 6. Commercial commitments such as technology transfer licences.
-
2. Under Regulation A and B, reporting on project progress as per the list hereunder in line with the templates provided by the MCST;
 - End of Stage Technical and Scientific Reports;

- End of Stage Financial Report;
- End of Project Technical and Scientific Report;
- End of Project Audited Financial Report.

The reports are to include sufficient evidence on the achievement of the project objectives as well as the parameters indicated in the application.

Changes to the project objectives, deliverables, work-packages and all the parameters committed in the applications are to be detailed, justified and approved by MCST.

4. List of Eligible and Ineligible Costs

4.1 Eligible Costs

Eligible direct costs are those costs incurred directly by the national beneficiaries during the duration of the project and used primarily for the purpose of achieving the objectives of the project.

All eligible expenses must be incurred between the Start Date and the End Date of the project and must be limited to the budgeted value as indicated in the Grant Agreement.

Applicants may opt for **one** (1) of the following two regulations. In the Pre-Proposal Application Form, applicants are requested to provide which funding route they are going to choose.

Eligible costs are those costs incurred directly by the project partner during the duration of the project and used primarily for the purpose of achieving the objectives of the project.

All expenses must be incurred between the Start Date and the End Date of the project and must be limited to the budgeted value.

Please contact MCST for more information on the implications of these State Aid Rules.

4.1.1. Eligible Costs under Regulation A: [Commission Regulation \(EU\) No. 1407/2013 of 18 December 2013 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid \(the de minimis Regulation\)](#)

a) Personnel Costs

Permissible number of hours funded under this programme to work on project related tasks – Maximum of 10 hours / week / **existing employee** (as part of their normal working hours and allocated research quota in their contract).

Existing employees that have exhausted their research quota, can apply for pro-rata payment – Maximum of 10 hours extra per week (for management, supervisory or research tasks only). This needs to be permissible within their contract of employment.

Total funded hours for **existing employees** will not exceed 20% of the project value.

Personnel costs related to **Project Management** are limited to 10% of the project value and form part of the 20% limit imposed on existing personnel cost threshold. Any project management which is not carried out by any of the partners shall be deemed to be subcontracting and, apart from being subject to the 10% maximum threshold detailed herein, will also be calculated as part of the 10% maximum referred to in Section 4.1.1(g) for subcontracting costs

The salary of senior researchers, researchers, technicians, operators and research support assistance, that are **specifically employed** on the project, will not form part of the personnel cost limit of 20% of the

project value. This provision is not applicable to existing personnel that are provided with separate part time contracts to extend their working hours with the entity, for the purpose of the project.

The hourly rate (z) is calculated using the formula:

$€ z = (\text{basic salary} + \text{allowances}) / \text{yearly weekday hours}$. Eligible salaries are pinned to the following hourly rates (including National Insurance and Inland Revenue and allowances) and personnel limits per project:

Role in Project	Hourly rates	Limits per project
Management or equivalent	Up to € 39.51/hour	Max 2 per project
Senior Researcher* or equivalent	€ 22.83/hour to €32.09/hour	Max 2 per project
Researcher* or equivalent	€ 12.66 to € 22.81/hour	Max 2 per project
Operational, technician, research support assistant or equivalent	Up to € 12.65/hour	

The rates stated in the table above are for the year 2020 and are to be applied in accordance with employment contracts, including allowances and benefits, and including employer contributions. For subsequent years a 5% increase per year is allowed.

*The term 'senior researcher' is to be used for a postdoctoral researcher with a specialist and high level of local and international experience in the field. Individuals possessing a high level of experience in industry can still be considered.

*The term 'researcher' is to be used for a Bachelor's, Master's or a Ph.D degree holder and hence the hourly rate should be equivalent to the degree held by the relevant individual.

Personnel in salary brackets that are higher than those noted above will still only be reimbursed at the rates of the eligible brackets above depending on their role in the project. The hourly rates will have to be noted in the application along with the number of hours on the project per individual.

Students can be engaged on the project and paid an **annual stipend** of €6,000 when reading for a Master's degree or an **annual stipend** of €8,000 when reading for a Doctoral degree. Note that for every engaged student, a full-time researcher must be employed by the applicant. The eligible costs for stipends is limited to a maximum of two years.

Filled time sheets are to be retained for all personnel, including students, as proof of number of hours spent on the project. Documentation of the utilisation of the employees' internally funded research quota for other research activities is to be retained as this evidence may be required by the auditors.

b) Specialised equipment and research consumables

Purchase of specialised equipment including software, limited to 20% of project value. Overall value of consumables typically cannot exceed 20% of project value.

c) Travel and Subsistence

Applicants which are not regulated by the Public Contracts Regulations (Chapter 174.04 of the Laws of Malta) are required to obtain three quotations for purchases related to travel.

For the attendance of consortium meetings, only one (1) person will be eligible to attend the meeting.

For the attendance of international conferences, only one (1) person will be eligible to attend per six (6) months.

Eligible costs under this section include the cost of economy flights, public transport and other expenses that have been incurred for the purpose of the project after selection of the most economic solutions. Per diems are payable for travel up to a maximum of 14 days in a row.

Travel expenses are limited to 20% of project value.

d) Other Operating Expenses

Other operating expenses may be incurred directly as a result of the project, however these must be approved beforehand by MCST and must not fall under ineligible costs.

e) Costs of IP and knowledge transfer activities

Costs of knowledge transfer activities and patents bought or licensed from outside sources at arm's length conditions.

f) Overheads

Overheads will be covered at 20% of direct eligible costs.

Overheads for all equipment will be covered at 10% of the direct eligible costs and will be capped at a maximum of €500 per piece.

Overheads for all consumables will be covered at 10% of the direct eligible costs and will be capped at a maximum of €500.

Overheads in relation to subcontracting activities are not eligible.

g) Subcontracted activities

Subcontracted activities shall be allowed up to a limit of 10% of the project value, provided that prior approval is attained from MCST before subcontracting to ensure fair procurement procedures.

Additional Provisions

Eligible Costs are to conform to the following and are subject to the final audit scrutiny:

- Any expenses incurred during the course of the project must be consistent with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- In the event of purchases of any value, private entity partners are required to demonstrate adequate marketing testing, obtaining three (3) quotations from three (3) different, independent and relevant sources.
- Public Entity partners are to follow Public Procurement Regulations in their entity.
- Any calls for the recruitment of staff on a project is to be conducted in a strictly transparent manner and is to include a public call in the form of an advert published in a Sunday newspaper (minimum size of advert: 2 columns by 8cm) and interview process.
- Commercial transactions between any applicants or consortium partners, or between any applicants or a consortium partner and a company with similar shareholding to a consortium partner, is not allowed. All transactions need to be carried out in line with the arm's length principle outlined in Section 1.3.

Aid Intensity

The financial contribution to a project partner applying under Regulation A shall be 75% of the eligible costs incurred on the project by that project partner. The partner must finance the remaining 25% of the eligible costs. It is not possible for a Partner to cover the contribution of 25% 'in-kind'.

Applicable State Aid Regulations and Obligations

Assistance provided under Regulation A of these National Rules for Participation is in line with the [Commission Regulation \(EU\) No. 1407/2013 of 18 December 2013 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid \(the de minimis Regulation\)](#).

The total amount of *de minimis* aid granted to a single undertaking shall not exceed the amount of €200,000 over any period of three consecutive fiscal years. The total amount of *de minimis* aid granted to a single undertaking performing road freight transport for hire or reward shall not exceed €100 000 over any period of three fiscal years.

This aggregate maximum threshold applies in principle to all economic sectors with the exception of the agriculture and fisheries sectors for which different thresholds and criteria apply. The term 'undertaking' includes also all companies in a group (which fall under the direct or indirect ownership or control of the same ultimate parent company) and relevant partner and linked enterprises as defined in Annex I of Commission Regulation (EU No 651/2014). This period covers the fiscal year concerned as well as the previous two fiscal years. 'Fiscal year' means the fiscal year as used for tax purposes by the undertaking concerned.

This maximum threshold would include all State aid granted under this aid scheme and any other State aid measure granted under the *de minimis* rule including that received from any entity other than the Malta Council for Science and Technology. Any *de minimis* aid received in excess of the established threshold will have to be recovered, with interest, from the undertaking receiving the aid.

The de minimis declaration form must be filled in and submitted together with the application form.

Assistance approved under this aid scheme is NOT:

- i. Aid granted to undertakings active in the fishery and aquaculture sector, as covered by Council Regulation (EC) No. 104/2000;
- ii. Aid granted to undertakings active in the primary production of agricultural products;
- iii. Aid granted to undertakings active in the sector of processing and marketing of agricultural products, in the following cases:
 - a. Where the amount of the aid is fixed on the basis of the price or quantity of such products purchased from primary producers or put on the market by the undertakings concerned;
 - b. Where the aid is conditional on being partly or entirely passed on to primary producers;
- iv. Aid to export-related activities towards third countries or Member States, namely aid directly linked to the quantities exported, to the establishment and operation of a distribution network or to other current expenditure linked to the export activity;
- v. Aid contingent upon the use of domestic over imported goods;
- vi. Aid for the acquisition of road freight transport vehicles granted to undertakings performing road freight transport for hire or reward.

Where an undertaking is active in the sectors referred to in points (i), (ii) and (iii) above as well as in other sectors falling within the scope of the *de minimis Regulation*, the Council will ensure a separation of the activities or distinction of costs. Only those sectors eligible for assistance under the *de minimis Regulation* will be assisted. Activities in the sectors excluded from the scope of the *de minimis Regulation* will not benefit from assistance under this aid scheme.

In terms of Article 5 of the *de minimis Regulation*, *de minimis* aid granted under this initiative may be cumulated with *de minimis* aid granted in accordance with Commission Regulation (EU) No 360/2012 up

to the ceiling laid down in that Regulation. It may be cumulated with *de minimis* aid granted in accordance with other *de minimis regulations* up to the relevant ceiling fixed in terms of these National Rules for Participation.

De minimis aid approved under this initiative shall not be cumulated with State aid in relation to the same eligible costs or with State aid for the same risk finance measure, if such cumulation would exceed the highest relevant aid intensity or aid amount fixed in the specific circumstances of each case by a block exemption regulation or a decision adopted by the European Commission. *de minimis aid* which is not granted for or attributable to specific eligible costs may be cumulated with other State aid granted under a block exemption regulation or a decision adopted by the Commission.

4.1.2. Eligible Costs under Regulation B: [Commission Regulation \(EU\) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty.](#)

a) Personnel Costs

Permissible number of hours funded under this programme to work on project related tasks – Maximum of 10 hours / week / **existing employee** (as part of their normal working hours and allocated research quota in their contract).

Existing employees that have exhausted their research quota, can apply for pro-rata payment – Maximum of 10 hours extra per week (for management, supervisory or research tasks only). This needs to be permissible within their contract of employment.

Total funded hours for **existing employees** will not exceed 20% of the project value.

Personnel costs related to **Project Management** are limited to 10% of the project value and form part of the 20% limit imposed on existing personnel cost threshold. Any project management which is not carried out by any of the partners shall be deemed to be subcontracting and, apart from being subject to the 10% maximum threshold detailed herein, will also be calculated as part of the 10% maximum referred to in Section 4.1.1(g) for subcontracting costs

The salary of senior researchers, researchers, technicians, operators and research support assistance, that are **specifically employed** on the project, will not form part of the personnel cost limit of 20% of the project value. This provision is not applicable to existing personnel that are provided with separate part time contracts to extend their working hours with the entity, for the purpose of the project.

The hourly rate (z) is calculated using the formula:

$€ z = (\text{basic salary} + \text{allowances}) / \text{yearly weekday hours}$. Eligible salaries are pinned to the following hourly rates (including National Insurance and Inland Revenue and allowances) and personnel limits per project:

Role in Project	Hourly rates	Limits per project
Management or equivalent	Up to € 39.51/hour	Max 2 per project
Senior Researcher* or equivalent	€ 22.83/hour to €32.09/hour	Max 2 per project
Researcher* or equivalent	€ 12.66 to € 22.81/hour	Max 2 per project
Operational, technician, research support assistant or equivalent	Up to € 12.65/hour	

The rates stated in the table above are for the year 2020 and are to be applied in accordance with employment contracts, including allowances and benefits, and including employer contributions. For subsequent years a 5% increase per year is allowed.

*The term 'senior researcher' is to be used for a postdoctoral researcher with a specialist and high level of local and international experience in the field. Individuals possessing a high level of experience in industry can still be considered.

*The term 'researcher' is to be used for a Bachelor's, Master's or a Ph.D degree holder and hence the hourly rate should be equivalent to the degree held by the relevant individual.

Personnel in salary brackets that are higher than those noted above will still only be reimbursed at the rates of the eligible brackets above depending on their role in the project. The hourly rates will have to be noted in the application along with the number of hours on the project per individual.

Students can be engaged on the project and paid an **annual stipend** of €6,000 when reading for a Master's degree or an **annual stipend** of €8,000 when reading for a Doctoral degree. Note that for every engaged student, a full-time researcher must be employed by the applicant. The eligible costs for stipends is limited to a maximum of two years.

Filled time sheets are to be retained for all personnel, including students, as proof of number of hours spent on the project. Documentation of the utilisation of the employees' internally funded research quota for other research activities is to be retained as this evidence may be required by the auditors.

b) Instruments and Equipment

Purchase of specialised equipment including software, limited to 20% of project value. Overall value of consumables typically cannot exceed 20% of project value.

Costs of instruments and equipment are eligible to the extent and for the period used for the project. Where such instruments and equipment are not used for their full life for the project, only the depreciation costs corresponding to the life of the project, as calculated on the basis of generally accepted accounting principles are considered as eligible.

The depreciation costs must be verified by a Certified Public Accountant.

c) Costs of IP and knowledge transfer activities

Costs of knowledge transfer activities and patents bought or licensed from outside sources at arm's length conditions.

d) Other Operating Expenses

Other operating expenses may be incurred directly as a result of the project, however these must be approved beforehand by MCST and must not fall under ineligible costs.

e) Overheads

Overheads incurred directly as a result of the project will be covered at 20% of direct eligible costs..

Overheads for all equipment will be covered at 10% of the direct eligible costs and will be capped at a maximum of €500 per piece

Overheads for all consumables will be covered at 10% of the direct eligible costs and will be capped at a maximum of €500.

Overheads in relation to subcontracting activities are not eligible.

f) Subcontracted Activities

Subcontracted activities shall be allowed up to a limit of 10% of the project value, provided that prior approval is attained from MCST before subcontracting to ensure fair procurement procedures.

Aid Intensity

The aided part of the research and development project shall completely fall within one or more of the following categories:

Type of Research	Small Undertaking	Medium Undertaking	Large Undertaking
Fundamental Research	100%	100%	100%
Industrial Research	70%	60%	50%
Industrial Research with an effective Collaboration and/or results are widely disseminated	80%	75%	65%
Experimental Development	45%	35%	25%
Experimental Development with an effective collaboration and/or results are widely disseminated	60%	50%	40%

The project involves effective collaboration:

- Between undertakings among which at least one is an SME, and no single undertaking bears more than 70% of the eligible costs, or
- Between an undertaking and one or more research and knowledge-dissemination organisations, where the latter bear at least 10% of the eligible costs and have the right to publish their own research results;

The results of the project are widely disseminated by showcasing the project to the general public through:

- The publication of at least two (2) articles per year in local newspapers, magazines or online portals. These should not contain intellectual property but should raise awareness about the project and its benefits.
- The organisation of at least one (1) half-day event to be held at MCST's premises or as otherwise directed by MCST.

Further to the above dissemination deliverables, MCST invites applications to also include deliverables as recommended below, subject to the nature of the research project:

7. Monograph/s and/or peer-reviewed paper/s for accepted publication in international journal/s of repute based on the work carried out through the Project. The subscription levels or Impact Factor of journals are important considerations. Similar papers published on open source media would also be considered favourably.
8. Oral presentation/s at international conference/s on the work carried out through the Project.

9. The attainment of undergraduate degrees and/or postgraduate degrees and/or post-doctoral research. In cases where the project duration is insufficient for the purpose of submitting a degree, there has to be a commitment to complete the degree outside the duration of the project utilising other sources of funding.
10. Registration of a patent or other Intellectual Property Rights stemming from the Project, in Malta as well as in any other country.
11. Commercial commitments such as technology innovations to be included in a partner's existing product or service.
12. Commercial commitments such as technology transfer licences.

The amount of assistance granted to participants will not exceed the thresholds laid down in Article 4(1) (i) of Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014.

Additional Provisions

Eligible Costs are to conform to the following and are subject to the final audit scrutiny:

- Any expenses incurred during the course of the project must be consistent with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- In the event of purchases of any value, private entity partners are required to demonstrate adequate marketing testing, obtaining three (3) quotations from three (3) different, independent and relevant sources.
- Public entity partners are to follow Public Procurement Regulations in their entity.
- Any calls for the recruitment of staff on a project is to be conducted in a strictly transparent manner and is to include a public call in the form of an advert published in a Sunday newspaper (minimum size of advert: 2 columns by 8cm) and interview process.
- Commercial transactions between any Applicants or consortium partners, or between any Applicants or a consortium partner and a company with similar shareholding to a consortium partner, is not allowed. All transactions need to be carried out in line with the arm's length principle outlined in Section 1.3.

Applicable State Aid Regulations and Obligations

The terms and conditions set out in Regulation B of these National Rules for Participation are in line with the [Commission Regulation \(EU\) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty](#), as amended by *Commission Regulation (EU) No 2017/1084 of 14 June 2017 amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 as regards aid for port and airport infrastructure, notification thresholds for aid for culture and heritage conservation and for aid for sport and multifunctional recreational infrastructures, and regional operating aid schemes for outermost regions and amending Regulation (EU) No 702/2014 as regards the calculation of eligible costs*.

Assistance will not be granted if the aid is:

- i. related to export activities towards third countries or Member States, namely aid directly linked to quantities exported, to the establishment and operation of a distribution network or to the other current expenditure linked to export activity.
- ii. contingent upon the use of domestic in preference to imported goods.
- iii. granted in the sector of processing and marketing of agricultural products, in the following cases:

- i. where the amount of the aid is fixed on the basis of the price or quantity of such products purchased from primary producers or put on the market by the undertakings concerned;
 - ii. where the aid is conditional on being partly or entirely passed on to primary producers;
- iv. granted in favour of a beneficiary which is subject to an outstanding recovery order following a previous Commission decision declaring an aid granted by Malta illegal and incompatible with the internal market.
 - v. granted in favour of an undertaking in difficulty defined in terms of the Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014.

Aid approved by the Corporation in terms of these National Rules for Participation will be suspended until the undertaking has reimbursed old, unlawful and incompatible aid that is subject to a recovery.

Rules on *cumulation of aid* shall be in line with Article 8 of the Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17th June 2014.

In determining whether the notification thresholds and the maximum aid intensities are respected, the total amount of State aid for the aided activity or project or undertaking shall be taken into account.

Where Union funding centrally managed by the institutions, agencies, joint undertakings or other bodies of the Union that is not directly or indirectly under the control of the Member State is combined with State aid, only the latter shall be considered for determining whether notification thresholds and maximum aid intensities or maximum aid amounts are respected, provided that the total amount of public funding granted in relation to the same eligible costs does not exceed the most favourable funding rate laid down in the applicable rules of Union law.

Aid granted under this incentive may only be cumulated with:

- a) any other State aid, as long as those measure concern different identifiable eligible costs,
- b) any other State aid, in relation to the same eligible costs, partly or fully overlapping, only if such cumulation does not exceed the highest aid intensity or aid amount applicable to the aid under Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014.

Aid awarded under Regulation B of these National Rules, shall not be cumulated with any *de minimis* aid in respect of the same eligible costs if such cumulation would result in an aid intensity exceeding those laid down in these Incentive Guidelines.

4.2 Ineligible Costs

The following expenditure shall be considered as ineligible costs:

- Expenses related to loans, interest, etc
- Recoverable value added tax.
- Expenses which are recoverable through other funding mechanisms.
- Re-purchase of equipment originally procured through other funding mechanisms.
- Purchase of equipment from partners or their subsidiaries.
- Opportunity costs related to foregone production and production downtime arising from the allocation of resources to the Project.
- Any activity related to the reproduction of a commercial product or process by a physical examination of an existing system or from plans, blueprints, detailed specifications or publicly available information.
- Standard office equipment.
- Personnel hours for travelling.

- Travel and Subsistence is an ineligible cost in relation to applications submitted under Regulation B
- Any other costs not listed down in Section 4.1.1 and 4.1.2.

5. Evaluation

Submission of applications from the Maltese and Chinese applicants will be checked for eligibility by MCST and MOST respectively. Any discrepancies on either side or the failure to fulfill all requirements of the call will result in the overall proposal being ineligible.

MCST may undertake a due diligence exercise through its contractors for the purpose of administrative compliance. Further assurances, such as bank guarantees, may be required at the discretion of MCST.

Pre-proposals submitted under Stage 1 of the Call, that pass the eligibility check will then proceed to a scientific evaluation phase of the pre-proposal.

Pre-proposals will be evaluated at national level according to the following criteria:

- Innovation of the project & alignment to the priority area/s
- Competence and expertise of the research team/s
- Described benefits for both the Maltese and Chinese participants
- Quality of the Cooperation and Intellectual Property Agreements

Preference will be given to:

- Pre-proposals involving more than one Maltese partner, and/or
- Pre-proposals that offer collaborative opportunities for scientific breakthrough research and/or,
- Proposals having a potential for strong commercial synergies and industrial impact

Once the pre-proposals are evaluated, MOST and MCST will agree on a common shortlist. The shortlisted applicants shall be informed through the PIs by MCST and MOST respectively and will be invited to submit a full proposal in accordance with the Stage 2 application process.

In the Stage 2 Application process, applicants will have the chance to further elaborate on the content that they provided in the Stage 1 Application process, as well as provide a more detailed overview of the Implementation methodology to be used. The full proposals will again be evaluated independently by the Maltese and Chinese sides.

Full proposals will be evaluated at national level according to the following criteria:

- Further information on the Scientific Excellence
- Research Methodology – including work package details, risk management, distribution of work between partners as well envisaged timelines
- Appropriateness of requested budget with respect to methods and expected results
- Impact – including post-project plans and industrial benefits
- Further information on the competence and expertise of the research team/s (including CV's)
- Strength of the partnership and benefits of proposed scientific collaboration

MCST and MOST will then convene to once again agree on a common ranking list and move forward to inform all applicants with the outcome of the Call.

For applications submitted under Regulation B of these National Rules for Participation, a Technical Evaluation Committee will be set up by MCST in order to assess:

- i. that the proposed research falls under one of the R&D definitions outlined in Section 1.3;

and

- ii. the type of eligible costs defined in Section 4.

The aid intensities will be awarded according to the outcomes of the Technical Evaluation Committee.

6. Post Selection Process

6.1 The Grant Agreement

For each project approved for funding, individual Grant Agreements will be signed between the successful PI operating from Malta and MCST. If necessary, a separate yet complementary Grant Agreement is also signed between MCST and other partners operating from Malta in the same successful consortium. This Agreement will act as the basis for project funding and will regulate the transfer of funds to national beneficiaries based on these regulations.

The PI's from the Maltese and Chinese sides are to ensure that a common start date is applied to all partners following guidance from the funding bodies. This will ensure that project timelines are synchronised.

MCST reserves the right not to proceed with signing any National Grant Agreement in the event that it results that doing so would be too high an exposure risk to MCST.

6.2 Start Date and End Date

The project will start on a pre-determined date as agreed by all the respective parties and determined in the Grant Agreement.

In view of the particular nature of the Grant Agreement, the said agreement may not be signed simultaneously by all parties but will be signed by all the parties separately. Each party will signify the date of signing and the Grant Agreement will come into force on the date on which the final signature is made thereon (hereinafter the "Agreement Date").

Between the Agreement Date and the Start Date, the Project Contact should ensure that all activities required for a smooth project start are completed.

To be eligible for funding, all expenses must be incurred between the Start Date and the End Date of the Project.

6.3 Double Funding

Funding under this joint initiative is made available on the basis that the Applicant has not benefited and will not benefit from any other grant or financial incentive of whatever nature, applied for and/or utilised for the same scope as that subject of the funding requested under this joint initiative. Provided that, in the case where the application covers work that is part of a larger project, the Applicant must submit a table as an appendix to the application form that shows a comprehensive list of the items of work and the source of funding for each item.

The Applicant will be required to sign a declaration to this effect and authorising MCST to exchange essential information related to the project with other funding agencies, both local and overseas, for any necessary checks.

6.4 Project Extensions

Time extension requests are unlikely to be accepted unless these are due to extenuating circumstances that are deemed by MCST as having been unavoidable by the partners following all efforts and best practice project management. In exceptional cases, even though MCST may deem a request for extension as valid, this would need to be endorsed by MOST, and vice versa. If a common agreement is not reached between the funding bodies, the request will automatically be declined.

7. Funding, Management and Progress Monitoring

7.1 Allocation and Disbursement of Funding

Following the termination of the project or expiry of the Grant Agreement, the Project Contact will be required to submit a Final Technical Project Report for the whole project, thus covering the work undertaken.

For the purpose of funding and reporting, a project submission shall be divided into a maximum of two (2) Stages. Each Stage shall be of a maximum twelve (12) month duration. No more than two (2) Stages are permissible. Funding for any one (1) Stage shall not exceed 80% of the total project financial contribution due. Total financial contribution over the lifetime of the project shall not exceed the funding limit as established in the Grant Agreement, irrespective of actual expenditure.

The periodic funding will be allocated according to the following schedule:

1. For the first Stage, MCST will make an initial advance payment of 100% of the due financial contribution in relation to that particular Stage. This will be calculated on the Applicant's component of projected expenditure for that Stage and include both direct and indirect costs.

In the case of a single-Stage project (one 12 month period), MCST will make an advance payment to the applicant equivalent to 80% of the due financial contribution calculated on the projected costs. This will include both direct and indirect eligible costs.

2. At the end of the first Stage, the Project Contact will be required to submit a Technical Stage Report and a Financial Stage Report to MCST with details of actual expenditure over the past stage, together with an updated forecast of projected expenditure for the following stage. The stage report has to be approved by MCST before moving to the next stage. This should be in line with the templates for stage and final reports as provided by MCST within the Grant Agreement.
3. For the final Stage, MCST will calculate the due financial contribution in relation to that particular Stage based on the Financial Stage Report submitted. This contribution will be calculated as forecast eligible expenditure, adjusted for any overspend or underspend of the preceding Stage.
4. Except for the final Stage (or for single Stage projects) of the project, MCST will make an advance payment equivalent to 100% of the due financial contribution in relation to that particular Stage, calculated as in bullet (3) above.
5. For the final Stage of the project (or in the case of single Stage projects), MCST will make an advance payment of up to 80% of the due financial contribution calculated as in bullet (3) above. However, MCST shall retain 20% of the total project grant to be transferred only upon successful completion of the project. MCST reserves the right to deduct dues in the absence of the delivery

of activities, work packages, deliverables, in part or in full, and where the appropriate standards of reporting have not been achieved.

6. Following the termination of the project or expiry of the Grant Agreement, the Project Contact Point will be required to submit a Final Technical Project Report together with a Final Financial Report for the whole project, thus covering the work and expenditure undertaken. The Final Financial Report needs to be audited by a certified auditor appointed by the Applicant and approved by MCST once submitted. The audit should determine the total eligible costs and compare these to the funds forwarded. MCST reserves the right to appoint an auditor to audit the Project Financial Audit as submitted. Failure to submit a timely audited Final Financial Report may result in MCST recovering all funds disbursed across the project.
7. As soon as the verifications and audits are finalised and cleared, MCST will release the retention money due. In the case of overpayment, the Applicant will be required to refund the under-spend amount to MCST within a specific timeframe, or as agreed to with MCST.

MCST reserves the right to alter the funding parameters as deemed appropriate.

7.2 Dissemination & Externalisation

Any articles and text material related to the project should include the words:

'Project <Project Name> funded by the Malta Council for Science and Technology through the Sino-Malta Fund 2020 (Science and Technology Cooperation).'

Any websites or printed material related to the project should also include MCST and its line Ministry's logo.

During the term of Agreement the Applicant shall include and prominently feature the MCST in any publicity related to the project.

All publicity material shall be vetted and approved by MCST before publication and should make mention of the initiative and the MCST. In the case where printed material is published without a mention of the initiative and MCST, the Applicant shall be obliged to publish a correction at its own expense in the subsequent issue of the publication.

By the end date of the project, the Applicant shall be required to provide a proof of submission of an article to an open access peer-reviewed journal.

7.3 Reporting

On the last day of a stage, an End of Stage Technical Report is to be presented to MCST. An End of Stage Financial Report is then to be submitted within one month from the end of the stage.

On the last day of the project, the Project Contact is required to submit a Final Technical Project Report. Audited accounts are to be presented within one month from the end of the project.

MCST reserves the right to request additional project-related information.

Approval of the stage reports allows the beneficiary to proceed with the next stage of the project. Approval of the final reports permits the release of the retention.

In the event that a project is found to be in breach of the Grant Agreement or to materially depart from the submitted application, MCST reserves the right to discontinue the award and the applicant may be required to refund the Grant in part or in full. In any such event, MCST may also exclude an applicant from participating in future calls.

The PI shall set a schedule for quarterly progress meetings with MCST to take place as part of the reporting work package.

The templates provided by MCST should be used to develop the End of Stage Technical and Financial Reports as well as the Final Technical and Financial Reports.

The End of Stage Technical and Financial Reports shall contain the following details:

- (i) An account of project activity and achievements over the past stage compared with the originally submitted application;
- (ii) An account of actual expenditure over the past stage compared with the originally submitted budgeted expenditure. All financial reports must be signed by the person responsible for the financial management, and assembled as per the instructions in the Grant Agreement;
- (iii) An updated forecast of project activity and projected achievements for the following stage;
- (iv) An updated forecast of projected expenditure for the following stage;

The beneficiary shall appoint an auditor to conduct a detailed financial audit, following the completion of the project. The audit will consist of, at least, the following checks and based on the template provided by MCST::

- Accounts
- Physical inventory
- Time-sheets and payslips / employee contracts
- Receipts for all equipment and consumables
- Bank statements for the Project Account

7.4 Accountability

The beneficiaries shall keep a separate project bank account and records, clearly distinguishable from their other accounting records. All relevant expenses must be recorded in these accounts. All funding payments by MCST must be received in the project bank account.

Eligible expenses must have been determined in accordance with the usual accounting and management principles and practices of the applicant. Direct eligible costs must be backed up with the relevant documentation as specified in the Grant Agreement.

7.5 Supervening Circumstances

The Project Contact is obliged to immediately advise in writing MCST of any internal or extraneous significant event which might affect the validity or implementation of the project. This obligation applies to the entire period between the submission of the Project Application and the completion of the project.

MCST, at its own discretion, shall either give such directives as it deems necessary for the furtherance of the project or re-assess the project in its entirety accordingly.

Failure on the part of the Project Contact to respect this obligation may lead MCST to suspend or terminate funding for the project and request a refund of funds already paid out.

If during the course of a project a partner withdraws from the Project Consortium, the Applicant will immediately advise MCST in writing. In this event, the relevant articles of the Project Consortium Agreement and the National Grant Agreement shall apply.

7.6 Default

If the implementation of a project becomes impossible or if the Applicant fails to implement it, MCST shall be entitled to collect refunds of money already paid out.

7.7 Interpretation of Rules

This document endeavours to establish comprehensive and unambiguous rules governing participation in this initiative. However, should circumstances arise where the rules are inadequate, unclear, ambiguous or conflicting, MCST shall exercise its discretion in the interpretation of the rules through the setting up of an *ad hoc* committee.

8. Confidentiality of Submissions

Unless otherwise indicated, all project application submissions except for the abstract shall be treated in strict confidence.

The data collected by MCST via the application for the aid and its subsequent processing by MCST to evaluate data subject's request for aid under the Scheme is in line with:

- i. The National Rules for Participation.
- ii. Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17th June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty as amended by Commission Regulation (EU) No 2017/1084 of 14 June 2017 amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 as regards aid for port and airport infrastructure, notification thresholds for aid for culture and heritage conservation and for aid for sport and multifunctional recreational infrastructures, and regional operating aid schemes for outermost regions and amending Regulation (EU) No 702/2014 as regards the calculation of eligible costs (hereinafter referred to as the 'General Block Exemption Regulations' (for Schemes notified under the General Block Exemption Regulations) (where applicable).
- iii. COMMISSION REGULATION (EU) No 1407/2013 of 18 December 2013 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to *de minimis* aid (*de minimis* Regulation) (where applicable).
- iv. Data Protection Act, Chapter 586 of the Laws of Malta and Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation).
- v. The legitimate basis to process personal data submitted by the data subject by virtue of his/her written application for aid is Regulation 6 (1)(b) of the General Data Protection Regulation ("GDPR"), as 'processing is necessary in order to take steps at the request of the data subject prior to entering into a contract'.

Further information may be found within the National Application Form.