

Thursday, May 17, 2018, 22:13
HONG KONG



National funds bonanza ‘drawcard for research talent’

By He Shusi in Hong Kong



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Chung Kwok-fai, director of the CNERC for Steel Construction (Hong Kong Branch), believes more exchanges between Hong Kong and mainland scientists are very necessary. (EDMOND TANG / CHINA DAILY)

The central government’s green light for Hong Kong institutions to bid for national research funds could help draw more talents to conduct long-term scientific research projects in the special administrative region, a renowned Hong Kong academic said.

Chung Kwok-fai, director of the Chinese National Engineering Research Center for Steel Construction (Hong Kong Branch), on Wednesday said he was grateful for the country’s latest move to support Hong Kong’s innovation and technology development.

President Xi Jinping this week published an instruction to allow national science and technology funds to be used within Hong Kong.

This support will solve short-term difficulties in Chung's research and help improve the overall sci-tech development in Hong Kong in the long term, including training for talents, he said.

Talents are always the most important element to scientific research

*Chung Kwok-fai, Director,
Chinese National Engineering
Research Center for Steel
Construction (Hong Kong
Branch)*

“When we (Hong Kong scientists and researchers) gathered to discuss the difficulties we faced, we didn't expect they would be solved with such a high-level and comprehensive response,” Chung said.

Chung, also professor and associate head of the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, noted that in the past it was very time-consuming for Hong Kong researchers to apply for funding for new projects.

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Some projects were even suspended for several times due to financial shortages, Chung said.

During the halts, many sci-tech talents have left projects because of uncertainties, he said.

The new arrangement opens the door for Hong Kong researchers to bid for national funds independently – for use within the SAR – and provides new access to funds and the chance to move forward with research, rather than just waiting, Chung said.

Previously Hong Kong researchers could only apply for national sci-tech funds by partnering with mainland counterparts, and had to use funds within the mainland.

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“After the change, they (the talents) will know that it is a nation-funded project with continuity, so that they are willing to join and stay on the project for five to 10 years,” Chung said.

“Talents are always the most important element to scientific research,” Chung stressed.

More exchanges

Except for funding, President Xi Jinping's latest instruction on Hong Kong's sci-tech development also encouraged more exchanges between Hong Kong and the mainland on innovation and technology.

Chung believes more exchange with the mainland is very necessary, as the country has nurtured many technological talents and accumulated a great amount of experience in the whole steel industry in China over decades, including manufacturing, processing and design.

The experience was not something Hong Kong scientists could obtain by themselves, it must be learnt through more exchange with the mainland, Chung said.

Money is important, but it cannot solve everything, Chung said.

Noting that his research center has received the first direct funding from the central government, worth 1 million yuan (\$157,000), Chung said the center would soon cooperate with Guangdong province and contribute to integrating the steel industry in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

The center would use the SAR's advantages in international ties and familiarity with international standards, fashioning the Bay Area's quality raw steels to meet European Union standards and promoting them to foreign markets, Chung said.

According to the World Steel Association, China is the world's biggest steel producer; its annual crude steel production accounted for almost half the world's total output last year.

Chung believes that as Hong Kong-mainland cooperation goes further, China's quality steel could win more recognition in global markets and be more frequently applied to overseas projects.

This will no doubt benefit the country in the Belt and Road Initiative and Bay Area development, as both national strategies are based on infrastructure, Chung said.

There are six CNERC branches in Hong Kong. Establishment of the centre for steel construction at the PolyU was approved by the Ministry of Science and Technology in 2015, aiming to promote exports of the mainland's steel products and Hong Kong's professional services.

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