**China – Maurice Wilkins Centre**

**Collaborative Research Programme (****C-MWC)**

**Invitation to apply for Project Funding**

Due 12pm, Monday 15th March 2021

**The Maurice Wilkins Centre (MWC) hosted by the University of Auckland invites proposals for NZ-based research** from biomedical investigators based in NZ who have existing research collaborations with China. The research proposed should aim to deepen partnerships with researchers and institutions in China and accelerate research into therapeutic agents with potential health benefits for both countries. NZ-based biomedical researchers who are not affiliated with the MWC are welcome to apply for funding, as well as MWC investigators.

This document includes a Guide for Applicants that describes the intention of the C-MWC programme, and the process for selection of the projects that will make up the programme. The Application Form follows the Guide for Applicants and applicants should only submit the pages that make up the Application form, not the introduction nor the Appendices.

Guide for Applicants

**1. C-MWC Programme Objectives**

The C-MWC programme was funded by MBIE for 5 years from June 2020 and aims to enhance the reputation in China of the Maurice Wilkins Centre and the wider NZ research community as world-class partners in biomedical research and the development of novel therapeutics. By extension the programme also aims to increase NZ's international standing as a high-quality research partner, capable of producing excellent results and willing to engage in large-scale international collaborative research programmes. Specific objectives of the programme include:

* Generating scientific knowledge that advances the understanding and treatment of human disease, especially those of particular concern to New Zealanders such as cancer, infectious disease, and metabolic disease.
* Delivering a large-scale collaborative research programme with leading Chinese research institutions, especially those affiliated with the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS).
* Deepening existing relationships between NZ and Chinese research institutions into enduring research partnerships that attract funding from both NZ and China.
* Enabling NZ biomedical researchers to increase their international networks, and gain experience and skills through access to advanced research facilities not available in NZ.
* Helping to build a diverse health research workforce within NZ by creating new opportunities for biomedical researchers that improve our ability to attract and retain high-calibre researchers, and support the development of emerging research leaders.

A fuller description of the C-MWC programme’s mission can be found in **Appendix 1**.

**2. C-MWC Projects**

The C-MWC aims to fund 12 research projects of up to two years duration between 2021 and May 2025. Projects of duration less than two years can also be funded provided they still meet the goals of the programme, potentially allowing more than 12 projects to be funded.

The initial tranche of Project funding (“Round 1” under this funding call) is targeted at deepening existing collaborations with leading biomedical researchers and their institutions in China. The second tranche of Project funding in 2022 (“Round 2”) will support a broader range of projects, including new collaborations that will be fostered over the next two years through additional funding for joint symposia (virtual in 2021, in-person in 2022) and travel exchanges (from late 2021/early 2022), depending on progress against COVID-19.

This funding call is for new proposals with budgets fully-costed, exclusive of GST over periods of up to **two years**. The maximum available funding pool in this round is **$3,000,000** (exclusive of GST). Projects will be assessed by the C-MWC Project Assessment Committee, through a competitive process described later in this call document.

It is anticipated that projects will start no later than the 30th June 2021 to ensure all research is completed and outputs such as publications and patents are filed before the end of 2023.

**3. Timeline for Project Funding, Round 1**

* Call for applications – 18th January 2021
* **Closing date for applications – 12pm, 15th March 2021**
* Questions/feedback provided to applicants for final preparation of presentation – by 29th March 2021
* C-MWC Project Assessment Committee convened to review applications and presentations by project leaders – week of 5th April 2021
* MWC Board approval of Project Assessment Committee recommendations – week of 12th April 2021
* Announcement of provisional results – 19th April 2021
* Negotiation of changes to research plan and/or budget – week of 19th April 2021
* Earliest start date of projects funded – 1st May 2021
* Latest start date of projects funded – 30th June 2021

**4. Eligibility Criteria**

**Project Criteria**

* Each project must build on an existing relationship with Chinese researcher/s based at one or more prestigious Chinese research institutions, such as those affiliated with CAS.
* Projects must have strong potential to deepen engagement between NZ and China in together achieving excellent research outcomes, improvements in health, and successful commercialisation of innovative science.
* Projects must showcase NZ science excellence[[1]](#footnote-1).
* Each project must have a clear pathway to impact, with potential for health gains in diverse populations including Māori, as well as potential for economic benefit to NZ.
* Projects must include risk mitigation strategies for potential technical challenges.
* Each project should contribute to the wider aims of the programme, including developing resources and relationships likely to benefit other teams within the programme.
* Project teams need to demonstrate their ability to carry out the research proposed in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic, including describing how prolonged travel restrictions will influence the project.
* As far as possible, project teams should encompass researcher diversity that reflects NZ society, and preferably includes both Māori scientists and emerging researchers.

**Project Leader(s)**

* Project Leaders must be NZ-based biomedical investigators, currently employed by research organisations that are Universities, Crown Research Institutes or Independent Research Organisations recognised by MBIE.

**Budget**

* Projects are limited to a budget of up to **$1,000,000 over 2 years.**
	+ Projects for shorter time periods are encouraged, with maximum budgets of $250,000 for every 6 months.
	+ In building the budgets, applicants should note that the intention is to fund up to 6 projects in this round. Budgets at or near the maximum level will need to be strongly justified, and should also provide options for partial funding, identifying any sections of the project that can be achieved independently of other sections.
* Research costs can be used to cover fully-costed research staff salaries, PhD student stipends and tuition fees, working expenses and any travel necessary beyond the exchange programme funded separately by the C-MWC programme (details to be announced in February 2021).
	+ Project leader/s should have a minimum of 5% of their FTE included in the budget.
	+ Other project participants can have any percentage of their FTE from 1% included in the budget. For team members who will make unfunded “time only” contributions, please list them in the budget spreadsheet signed off by the host institution under the section where FTE is specified at <1%.
	+ Please note that if PhD student costs are included in the budget, applicants will need to provide evidence from their institution that the student will be fully supported beyond the 2-year maximum timeframe of the C-MWC project. Masters and Honours students can also be included in the project description, but their associated working expenses should be included in the consumable supply and service budget line.
* The funding is targeted at **supporting research within NZ**, so any costs of materials or services from collaborators in China will need to be met from other sources, with the exception of shipping charges.

**5. Application Process**

To apply for a C-MWC Project in this call (Round 1), please use the form provided on **pages 9-15** of this document. Notes on the information required are to be found on the form, including suggested page lengths.

In addition, please provide the following documents:

* **A letter** from the collaborating researchers and their host institution in China confirming the feasibility of the project and its potential to strengthen scientific co-operation between NZ and China. If materials or services from China are required for the project, the commitment to supply these should also be covered within the letter.
* **A budget** set out in the template spreadsheet that accompanies this funding call document. This budget must be signed off by the host institution prior to submission of the application, so that the C-MWC executive team is assured that the project has been fully costed prior to consideration by the Project Assessment Committee. Please note that individual budget items are justified within the application form rather than the spreadsheet.
* **CV/s** of NZ project leader/s. The CVs must be completed on the NZ Standard CV template provided.

These documents need to be received by Wendy Li (wendy.li@auckland.ac.nz) by **12pm on the 15th March 2021**. In fairness to all applicants, no time extensions will be considered.

**6. Administrative Assistance**

The C-MWC executive team acknowledges that there will be a significant effort involved in preparing a C-MWC application. The C-MWC will provide advice to help teams of investigators prepare their applications, and administrative support to enable virtual meetings, involving Chinese counterparts by audio or video-conferencing as required. Please contact Wendy Li (wendy.li@auckland.ac.nz) if you would like to take up the support, or have any questions about the application process.

**7. Project Assessment Process**

To consider applications for funding following each call for potential projects, the C-MWC will use the MWC’s well-refined procedures to convene a Project Assessment Committee (PAC) with at least 10 members. The PAC will comprise:

•  The Scientific Director of the C-MWC (Chair).

• The Administrative Director of the C-MWC.

•  A member of the MWC Directorate or their delegate.

•  At least five other biomedical researchers drawn from both the MWC and the wider biomedical research community in NZ, all of whom have knowledge and experience of collaborating with scientists in China. The breadth of scientific expertise of each PAC convened will be matched as closely as possible to the breadth of the applications, so that scientific feasibility and novelty within the fields of interest can be accurately assessed by qualified experts.

• Two representatives from the national commercialisation partner networks currently funded by MBIE: KiwiNet and Return On Science.

The C-MWC aims to ensure the members of the PAC represents the diversity of NZ society, within the constraints of the pool of qualified investigators.

Additional experts may also be invited to attend the PAC meetings to provide additional advice, especially on matters relating to China’s biomedical research, research commercialisation, and healthcare provision systems. An observer from MBIE will also attend where possible to monitor and provide feedback on the process.

The PAC will be responsible for:

• Review and evaluation of proposals for new projects to be included in the programme.

• Recommendations to the MWC Board for proposals that meet the criteria for funding.

• Recommendations for changes to the project scientific plan and/or budget to be negotiated between the project team and the programme’s executive team before funded can be released.

Applications will be assigned a Lead Reviewer from the PAC, based on who is best qualified to assess it. After an initial assessment, the Lead Reviewer will consult with the C-MWC executive team to determine whether additional technical advice is necessary to inform assessment. If so, additional technical advice will be obtained from within the NZ biomedical community where feasible, or from international experts, including members of the MWC’s Scientific Advisory Board. One week before the PAC meeting, the Lead Reviewer will provide the applicants with any requests for clarification that have arisen during their review or that of the technical advisors.

Before the PAC meeting, all projects will be scored by all (non-conflicted) PAC members as below, and these scores shared amongst the PAC in order to highlight projects likely to need additional discussion (e.g. due to highly divergent scores).

At the PAC meeting, applicants will be invited to present their project including any clarifications requested (10 minutes) and answer any questions from the PAC (up to 10 minutes). The Lead Reviewer will then lead discussion of the project by the PAC *in camera*, before the PAC members are invited to revise their scores.

The PACwill score each application under the following rubric:

* + **Science excellence**1, including responses to questions and technical review (**40%** weighting – scored by the scientific members of the committee only, i.e. excluding the Administrative Director, and the representatives of KiwiNet and Return-on-Science
	+ **Potential** **impact**1, encompassing potential for health gains, economic gains and workforce development (**40%** weighting)
	+ **Collaborative reach into China**, and potential to deepen engagement between NZ and China in together achieving excellent research outcomes, improvements in health, and successful commercialisation of innovative science (**10%** weighting)
	+ **Risk mitigation** strategies for potential challenges (**5%** weighting)
	+ Overall **contribution to the wider aims of the programme**, including resources and relationships likely to benefit other teams within the programme (**5%** weighting)

Based on how the blinded scores of the projects cluster, the PAC will determine a minimum score for funding, then review the projects in descending score order to determine whether the project can be fully or partially funded. As each project is discussed, the executive team will record any revisions to the project plan or budget deemed necessary by the PAC.

Funding recommendations will then be sent to the MWC Board for review and ratification. As soon as Board approval for funding is obtained, the executive team will negotiate final project plans and budgets with each project team, according to the recommendations of the PAC.

**8. Conflicts of Interest**

Whenever there is a need to manage conflicts of interest or perceived conflicts of interest, the principles followed will be those established by the host institution, the University of Auckland. A summary of these guidelines can be found in **Appendix 2**. These principles will be circulated to committee members ahead of time, and their participation in the PAC will be taken as an agreement to follow these policies.

All investigators under consideration for PAC membership will be asked to declare any direct or perceived conflicts of interest as soon as applications close. The programme executive team will assess these conflicts of interest and determine whether they are manageable using the PAC’s processes; if not, the conflicted investigator will not be appointed to the PAC. PAC members will be asked to update potential conflicts of interest both immediately before and during the PAC meeting, and any newly arising conflicts will be managed by the PAC Chair after discussion with the PAC.

No member of the PAC will be present in the room during the discussion or scoring of any application on which they are named as an investigator or if they have declared any other conflict of interest. Final compiled scores will be blinded before the committee decides the score threshold where it recommends funding, so that there is no possibility of committee members influencing the final status of projects on which they are conflicted.

At the conclusion of each PAC meeting, the PAC will be invited to comment on the processes, especially how well conflicts of interest were managed during the meeting, and any workable suggestions for improvements to the processes used for future funding rounds.

**9. Administration of Funded Projects**

Distribution of research funds will be initiated by the C-MWC executive team once projects have been ratified by the MWC Board, the programme executive team, and the Host institution, the University of Auckland. Sub-contracting of project funds will be arranged and managed through the Host institution, using protocols already established in the MWC’s administration of its national research funding portfolio.

* For each project approved for funding, the C-MWC executive team will first negotiate with the applicants any changes to the scientific plan or the budget noted as necessary by the PAC.
* The C-MWC executive team will then develop with the applicants a statement of work and funding agreement for the research. This will include description of the requirements on reporting, and participation in meetings and other activities to support the programme, including public communication.

The C-MWC executive team, supported by members of the PAC with appropriate scientific expertise, will monitor progress against milestones **every 6 months** and institute a formal project review should any milestone fail to be achieved. The project review will lead to revision of the project plan in order to ensure successful outcomes within the timeframe of the project. Failure to initiate any project within 6 months of funding allocation will result in cancellation of the project and reallocation of the funds.

The C-MWC executive team will also continuously monitor the quality of the relationship between the NZ research team and their collaborators in China, by maintaining regular contact with, and (post-pandemic) visits to, the Chinese researchers and their institutions.

**C-MWC Project Application Form**

**Round 1 – 2021**

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| ***Project Title:***  |

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| ***NZ-based investigators:****Lead investigator/s:**Lead investigator/s will take contractual responsibility for management of the project and fulfilment of all project obligations including reporting requirements.* |
| *Title/Name* | *Affiliation/s* | *Time commitment (minimum 5% FTE)*  |
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| *Other investigators:* |
| *Title/Name* | *Affiliation/s* | *Time commitment* *(minimum 1% FTE if budgeted; if not budgeted, enter “<1% FTE”)* | *Role* |
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| *Students:* |
| *Name* | *Affiliation/s* | *Time commitment*  | *Role* |
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| ***China-based investigators:****Please ensure commitments match those offered in supporting letter/s from institution/s).* |
| *Title/Name* | *Affiliation/s* | *Role and/or resources to be contributed* |
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| ***Estimated start and end dates of project:****Start date must be between 1/5/21 and 30/6/21; maximum project length is 2 years.* |

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| ***Scientific background:****Up to two pages describing the problem being addressed, summarising the relevant literature and/or commercial landscape, and describing any preliminary data or team track record in the field.* |

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| ***Scientific plan:****Up to five pages describing:**(1) intended outcomes of the project**(2) science plan to achieve those outcomes**(3) timelines to achieve outcomes, including 6-monthly milestones to enable monitoring of progress**(4) resources requested from the C-MWC budget and how they will contribute to the outcomes intended* *(5) other resources available to the group within NZ (e.g. externally funded grants) that will contribute to project outcomes**(6) support and/or resources to be contributed by collaborating investigators in China, and how they will contribute to project outcomes* |

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| ***Potential impact:****Up to one page describing the potential for health, economic, and workforce development impacts both in the near term (by mid-2023) and longer term. Include detail of the proposed pathway to achieve these impact/s and incorporate commentary on alignment with Vision Mātauranga for each intended impact.* |

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| ***Engagement with China:****Provide up to half a page of supporting details regarding the collaborating Chinese investigators. Detail how the combined team will manage issues such as transfer of critical research materials, and access to research services and specialised equipment in China. Detail how the collaboration will be maintained, especially in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, including frequency of teleconferences / phone calls and meetings, and how the team will use available travel funding. Describe the potential for follow-on work in China, especially potential routes to funding from Chinese funding agencies to support collaborative work within China.* |

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| ***Other international linkages:****Up to half a page on any other international linkages, either existing or new, that will be leveraged to progress this project, including both academic and commercial institutions.* |

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| ***Budget:****Summarise the project budget detailed in the budget spreadsheet, as signed off by your lead investigator’s institution. Provide justification for each line of expenditure in the budget. If students are involved in the project, outline additional sources of financial support beyond what is budgeted in this project (e.g., if student support costs are budgeted, confirm that other support is available beyond the 2-year timeframe of the project.)* |

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| ***Partial funding:****Should C-MWC be unable to fully fund your budget, please state whether partial funding would be acceptable, and which sections of the work plan would be prioritised if partial funding was offered.* |

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| ***Intellectual Property:****State whether any NZ-China joint intellectual property (IP) is likely to be generated as part of this project and if so which institution/s will own the IP. If any IP generated is owned by more than one institution, please indicate which technology transfer office will take the lead in developing the IP.* |

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| ***Publication plan:****State whether any joint NZ-China publication is likely to be generated as part of this project, and how the writing, submission and publication of each manuscript intended will be managed.* |

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| ***Technical risk assessment:****Please list the major technical risks associated with the project, their likelihood (high/moderate/low) and their potential impact on the project (high/moderate/low), and how each of those risks will be mitigated.*  |
| *Technical risk* | *Likelihood* | *Potential Impact* | *Mitigation strategy* |
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C-MWC Programme Executive Team

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Appendix 1

C-MWC Programme 2020-2025

**Mission**

The Maurice Wilkins Centre (MWC) is a national biomedical network that discovers and develops new human therapies and diagnostics. Since 2012, the MWC has engaged successfully with scientific partners at prestigious Chinese institutions, especially the Chinese Academy of Sciences. These partnerships have produced exciting scientific findings and new therapies that are poised to enter clinical trials.

The new C-MWC programme will allow the MWC to generate new scientific knowledge that can be translated into new treatments for cancer and metabolic, infectious, neurologic and degenerative disease. These treatments will not only benefit the health of the people of both countries, but are likely to also provide strong economic benefits. The programme will also deepen the relationship between NZ and China in a crucial high technology field, thereby increasing NZ's international reputation for world-class research. NZ scientists will benefit, especially at an early career stage, through access to expertise, technology, and equipment / facilities not available within NZ, and through lifting their vision of what they can achieve through active engagement of leading scientists and institutions outside NZ.

The C-MWC will discover and develop new human therapeutics, aiming to alleviate human suffering through the development of highly innovative, world-leading approaches to treating human disease, using both drugs and cellular therapy. Integration across the programme will be achieved by exploiting a shared set of fundamental capabilities in therapeutics discovery, with team members working across multiple projects where appropriate, and accessing common pathways for research translation through to the clinic.

This programme will benefit patients in both NZ and China, by enabling clinical trials of new therapies, leading to their adoption in clinical medicine in both countries, and around the world. Commercialisation of these therapies is intrinsic to this vision, so the programme will also seek to develop shared intellectual property (IP) between NZ and Chinese investigators. Throughout this "bench-to-bedside" process of discovery and translation to clinical use, C-MWC will offer new opportunities for our diverse researchers to acquire new skills, lift their vision of their international potential, and develop as leaders of translational research. The programme will also create new opportunities for NZ scientists, entrepreneurs and companies to drive economic development through technological innovation, acting as a conduit to such opportunities in China.

**Outcomes sought**

This collaborative programme will produce outstanding internationally-competitive research results that garner high quality publications and patent applications with shared authorship and inventorship between the two countries. Shared IP will then lead to co-development of each therapeutic, using resources and personnel at whichever site/s across the two countries provide the best opportunity for rapid translation into the clinic, so patients can benefit directly. Clinical trials and eventual clinical adoption of new therapies will lead to improved health outcomes for communities in both countries, including disadvantaged groups such as Māori that suffer disproportionately from the diseases being targeted. Successful commercialisation will deliver economic benefit to both countries through the founding of new spin-out companies and licensing to existing companies.

The programme will deepen cooperation between NZ and China in research, science and technology, and enhance NZ's reputation for cutting-edge research both within China and around the world. At the same time, the programme will enable access to complementary research ideas, technology and facilities for scientists from both countries. A major outcome of the programme will therefore be upskilling and mentoring of NZ's biomedical research workforce, not only by enabling this access but also by providing new leadership opportunities in large-scale internationally-focused translational research. A commitment to diversity in the biomedical workforce engaged in the programme will include facilitating exchange of knowledge about characterisation of natural products and their extracts between iwi-led groups and leading experts in Traditional Chinese Medicine.

Appendix 2

Conflict of Interest Guidelines / Best Practice

(based on University of Auckland Policy on Conflicts of Interest)

*The guiding principles for the identification and management of conflicts of interest within the C-MWC programme are:*

1.  All participants in the C-MWC programme must be seen at all times to behave in an impartial and transparent manner.

2.  It is important to understand that the existence of a conflict of interest does not necessarily imply wrong-doing on the part of any person.  However, any interests which could give rise to a conflict of interest must be disclosed.

3.  Participants need to be alert to situations in which they, or the people that they manage or supervise, may have a conflict of interest and ensure that the situation is recognised and handled appropriately.

4.  Conflicts of interest must be dealt with quickly and transparently, that is they must be: acknowledged, disclosed, put on record, where appropriate, and effectively managed or avoided.

5.  If a participant has any doubt as to whether a conflict of interest exists, they must disclose the matter to the Programme executive team.

6.  Participants must consider how an impartial observer might reasonably *perceive* a potential conflict of interest, whether or not they believe a conflict of interest exists.

7.  Conflicts of interest may raise complex issues and members and the Programme executive team must judge each situation that arises in a prudent manner.

8.  Disclosure of conflicts of interest may involve disclosing personal information. This information must be handled with due regard to the privacy of the individual concerned.

9.  If a participant has a conflict of interest in the matter being considered, they must not take part in any discussion or decision on the matter giving rise to the conflict unless the Programme executive team can justify their participation can be managed in a manner that is transparent to all other participants.

10. However, a person who has a direct or indirect financial interest in the matter being considered must not take part in any decision about the matter.

*Identification and effective management of conflicts of interest within the Project Assessment Committee process:*

11. Members must identify and disclose any actual or potential conflict of interest that may affect, or may be seen to affect, their impartiality when acting on the Project Assessment Committee.

12. Each conflict of interest situation must be dealt with as soon as reasonably practicable after it is identified.

13. Conflicts of interest must be disclosed to the appropriate person in the circumstances. The appropriate person in most circumstances will be the Programme executive team, or in the case of committees, the Chair.

14. The situation must then be reviewed, managed and recorded by the Programme executive team in a manner that is appropriate to the circumstances.

15. The Programme executive team must help to build awareness of conflict of interest situations, and support those who report to them to comply with their obligations under this policy.

*Register of interests:*

16. All conflicts of interest and relevant manager responses are to be submitted for inclusion in the relevant conflicts of interest register maintained for the Programme by the executive team.

1. For definitions of excellence and impact, please see the National Statement of Science Investment 2015–2025 at [www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/7252-national-statement-of-science-investment-2015-2025](http://www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/7252-national-statement-of-science-investment-2015-2025) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)