

UK, Thailand agencies join hands to fund research

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Singapore: Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), a UK government research funding body, Thailand Research Fund (TRF) and National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA) have signed a memorandum of agreement (MoU) to support research collaboration and human resource development in the field of biotechnology and biological sciences.

This MoU represents another milestone on progress with the UK-Thailand Partners in Science program. Present at the signing ceremony were Dr Kanyawim Kirtikara, executive director of the National Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (BIOTEC), one of the NSTDA research centers which will execute the MoU on behalf of NSTDA, Prof. Dr. Sawasd Tantararatana, TRF Director and Asif Ahmad, British Ambassador to Thailand, who represented the BBSRC.

British Ambassador Asif Ahmad said, "The MoU signing today is a demonstration of the deep links between Thailand and the UK. As part of the UK-Thailand Partners in Science program, this MoU provides for new collaboration between the UK and Thailand in biosciences. The BBSRC is investing £675,000 to complement the Royal Golden Jubilee PhD Program that has been successfully running in Thailand. This will enable 40 of Thailand's most promising student scientists to study in the UK for one year of their PhD degrees over the next five years. This will help in the exchange of knowledge between our two countries and the development of skills for a new generation of scientists. In the long term, BBSRC hopes that these students will forge new international collaborations with the people they meet during their stay."

Prof Dr Sawasd Tantararatana said, "It has been well documented that successful research programs usually have to be multidisciplinary in nature and require extensive collaboration among researchers. The multidisciplinary and collaborative research programs can be achieved through effective operation of research networks. The Royal Golden Jubilee PhD program has involved more than 1,400 Thai advisors and more than 2,500 international co-advisors in 40 different countries. The program is known for its high standard achievements due mainly through the selections of high quality students and supervisors."

Dr Kanyawim Kirtikara said, "To forge the collaboration, a series of workshops and meetings were organized throughout the first half of 2011, bringing in UK scientists to meet with Thai counterparts on each specific theme." These meetings resulted in the formation of two UK-Thailand networks, one on food borne pathogens and the other on natural products. The UK-Thailand network on food-borne pathogens currently has one research project on microbial risk assessment of *Campylobacter* in broiler chicken production chain in Thailand with participation from Chulalongkorn University, Khon Kaen University, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT), BIOTEC and the University of Liverpool. The network on natural products has currently reached an agreement on one joint project on a type of insect pathogenic fungi, *Ophiocordyceps unilateralis*, consisting of partners including BIOTEC, the Genome Analysis Centre (TGAC) and the University of Bristol. "Both research projects have been approved for funding from NSTDA and BIOTEC, respectively," added Dr Kanyawim Kirtikara.

In addition to research, both networks of natural products and food borne pathogens also include a capacity building component, through the provision of PhD scholarships for Thai researchers to be jointly funded by the Thailand Research Fund and the UK's Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC).