



**SOUTH AFRICAN RESEARCH CHAIRS INITIATIVE
(SARChI)**

**Process for Phase-out or Discontinuation of SARChI
Research Chairs**

Version1

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1. CONTEXT

The South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) was established in 2006 by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and the National Research Foundation (NRF), as a national knowledge and human resource development intervention. The programme is aimed at strengthening and improving research and innovation capacity of public universities for producing high quality postgraduate students, research and innovation outputs. The programme attracts world class local and international researchers to South African public universities and provides them with an environment that is conducive to the realisation of programme objectives.

Research Chairs are tenable at two Tiers. Tier 1 is for established researchers that are recognised internationally as leaders in their field and/or have received substantial international recognition for their research contributions. Tier 2 is for established researchers, generally under the age of 40 (forty) years with a strong research, innovation and human capital development output trajectory, and the potential to achieve substantial international recognition for their research contributions in the next five to ten years.

The term of appointment of a SARChI Chair is 5 (five) years, renewable for up to a second and third five-year funding term in the case of Tier 2 Chairs and Tier 1 Chairs, respectively. The decision to continue funding for a second or third five-year funding cycle is informed by an in-depth review of the Chair activities, that is undertaken in year 5 (five) of the funding cycle. During the first five-year term review, Tier 2 Chairs are also given the opportunity to be considered for an upgrade to a Tier 1 level if they meet the requirements for appointment at the Tier 1 level.

The five-year term review involves postal peer evaluation of self-evaluation reports submitted by the Chair holder and supporting documentation submitted by the host institution, followed by review panel assessment of the postal peer evaluation reports and submitted documentation. This process enables informed decision making, through a fair and transparent process, where there is a clear recommendation to continue funding the Research Chair for a further five-year funding cycle. However, where the SARChI review Panel makes a recommendation to discontinue funding for a further five-year term based on the written submission and the written postal peer evaluation reports, it may be necessary to gain further information; to seek clarity from the Chair holder and/or the host institution; and to give the Chair holder and host institution an opportunity to respond to concerns and questions raised by the Review Panel before a final decision may be made regarding continuation or discontinuation of funding for a further five-year term.

Furthermore, in the event that a decision is made by the NRF, as the implementing agency, not to continue funding the Chair activities for a further five-year cycle, a process of phasing out of the Chair activities is necessitated including ensuring that postgraduate students receive bursary support to enable them to complete their degrees.

This document outlines the process followed for the five-year term review of individual Chair activities and provides guidelines for the processes to be followed in the event that a SARChI Chair is not recommended for continued funding for a further five-year term.

2. POSTAL AND PANEL BASED FIVE YEAR REVIEW OF CHAIRS

2.1. Written submissions for five-year term reviews

During the fifth year of each five-year funding cycle, an in-depth review of the Chair will be undertaken to assess performance of the Chair over the funding cycle. The Chair holder will be required to submit, *via* the host university research management office, the following written documentation:

2.1.1. Self-evaluation report

A self-evaluation report taking a summative format and reporting on research progress over the five year funding cycle and addressing the following:

Research Achievements

- Describing milestones and progress made against set objectives in the proposal, including on-going research activities

Research Outputs

- A consolidated list of research outputs that arose directly from the funding provided. Outputs include publications (patents, journals, books and chapters in books) and artifacts (any research output not classified as a publication). Measurements of research outputs will be discipline specific as informed by peers in respective disciplines and listed in the NRF Knowledge Management and Evaluation KRAB document: http://www.nrf.ac.za/files/file/krab_2010.doc

- Journal impact factors, citation indices and any other quality indicator applicable to the research discipline.

Research Collaborations

- Information on the nature and extent of established collaborations nationally and internationally.

Profile of the research team

- Number and profile (study level, race, gender and nationality) of postgraduate students and post-doctoral fellows trained and mentored, respectively;
- Student throughput;
- Number and profile (professional status) of the research team;
- Human capital development and retention; and
- Mentoring of potential succession candidates.

Additional funding leveraged

- A summary of additional funds leveraged that have contributed to the achievement of Chair activities.

NRF Rating status

- Details on the incumbent's NRF rating status during the period of the Chair.

Institutional support for the Chair

- Details of the support provided by the host institutional in ensuring success of the Chair.

2.1.2. Benefit analysis

- Reports from two or more researchers from outside the institution commenting on the effect of the Chair in the discipline;
- A report from the Head of Department in which the Chair resides detailing the impact of the Chair on the research team; the faculty; and the host institution; and
- A report from the university Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) responsible for management of the Research Chair detailing the benefit to the institution of hosting this Research Chair.

2.1.3. Research plan and budget for the next five year cycle

The report must also include a proposed research plan for the next cycle of five years together with a supporting budget plan. This research plan forms the basis against which the Chair activities will be monitored and evaluated over the next five-year funding period.

2.1.4. Upgrading of Tier 2 Chairs to Tier 1 level

Tier 2 Chair holders are required to indicate in their five year review self-evaluation report whether they would like to be considered for an upgrade. The two processes *viz.* the five year review of the Chair and a Tier 2 upgrade will be conducted simultaneously by the same Review Panel. However, decisions for the two processes will remain independent of each other. For example, a positive outcome of a five-year review of a Tier 2 Chair will not automatically qualify a Chair for an upgrade to a Tier 1 Chair.

2.2. Postal peer evaluation

Evaluation of the Chair's self-evaluation report and supporting documentation is guided by the milestones and expected outputs as presented in the incumbent's approved proposal for the period under review. At least two substantive peer reviewer reports are obtained from peer researchers that are subject experts, drawn from the local and international research community. Peer reviewers evaluate the following:

- **Student support (postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows)**
Based on the information contained in the self-evaluation report.
- **Research outputs**

Based on the reported progress against set objectives and milestones in the original grant proposal focusing on progress in research activities and outputs including journal articles, patents, books, book chapters and artefacts.

- **Support from the host institution**
Based on the benefit reports by the institution and other researchers in the field working in South Africa.
- **Funds leveraged from other sources**
Based on the information contained in the self-evaluation report.
- **Research collaborations**
The nature and the extent of established research collaborations in expanding Chair activities based on the information contained in the self-evaluation report.
- **Upgrading of Tier 2 Chairs to Tier 1 level**
Assessment for an upgrade will be based on the set Tier 1 and Tier 2 criteria and will follow the evaluation criteria stipulated in Phase 2 proposal scorecard.

2.3. Review Panel assessment

Review Panel members will be individuals from broad disciplines covering the research focus of the Chairs under review. Furthermore, they will be individuals with no direct association with any of the Chairs for which he/she is serving as a reviewer. The assessment of the Chair's performance will take into consideration discipline-specific conditions and criteria with regard to research outputs.

The role of reviewers will be as follows:

- Review the substantive postal written assessments from the subject specific experts together with the Chair's self-evaluation report and supporting documentation;
- Provide qualitative assessment of the Chair's performance and proposed research plan and budget for the next five-year term and, where applicable, the suitability for upgrade from a Tier 2 to a Tier 1 Chair;
- Provide panel consensus scores using the scorecard provided by the NRF; and

- Make overall consensus recommendations regarding continued funding for the next five-year term and where applicable the suitability for upgrade from a Tier 2 to a Tier 1 Chair.

All proposals will be presented by two assigned reviewers, referred to as discussion leaders, before being discussed by the Review Panel and unanimously agreed upon scores being allocated to each application. The two discussion leaders will submit their written assessments to the NRF to assist with providing accurate and detailed feedback to Chair holders and to the host institution.

Chair holders undergoing a five-year review are required to be available to be contacted telephonically to respond to questions from the Review Panel or to clarify any matters that may assist in the review process.

2.4. Review Panel recommendations

The Review Panel will make consensus recommendations taking into consideration the postal peer evaluation and the panel assessment. The Review Panel may make one of the following overall recommendations on whether or not funding for the Chair should be awarded for a further five-year term:

- Highly recommended / continue funding
- Recommended / continue funding
- Recommended / continue with reservations, no further review required
- Recommended for continuation with minor revisions to be approved by the NRF
- Revise and resubmit, review outcome is pending
- Not recommended for a further five-year cycle of funding

In addition the Review Panel may make one of the following recommendations on the upgrade of the Chair to the Tier 1 level:

- Upgrade from Tier 2 to Tier 1 recommended
- Upgrade from Tier 2 to Tier 1 not recommended
- Upgrade pending

Satisfactory outcomes of the five-year review of the Chair will render the Chair eligible for continued funding into the next five-year cycle. Where the Review Panel does not recommend continued funding for a further five-year cycle an on-site review of the Chair will be undertaken as additional inputs to inform the final decision to be taken by the NRF.

3. FOLLOW-UP ON-SITE FIVE YEAR REVIEW OF CHAIRS

An on-site five-year review of a Research Chair will be undertaken when the Review Panel recommendations do not support continued funding for the next five-year cycle. The on-site review will be undertaken following the completion of the postal and panel review process. The purpose of the on-site review is to afford an opportunity for the reviewers to engage with the Chair holder and the senior management of the host institution, to better understand the prevailing circumstances and to either confirm or revise the panel recommendation.

The host institution, through the DVC responsible for management of the Research Chairs, will be informed in writing by the NRF that the outcome of the five-year review is pending and that an on-site review of the Research Chair will be undertaken. The NRF will communicate the specific issues that emerged during the panel review process that the Chair holder and the host institution are requested to respond to during the on-site review.

3.1. Composition of on-site Review Panel

The Review Panel will be constituted as follows:

- An external Chairperson;
- The two lead discussants that served on the Review Panel;
- One or two additional subject specific experts drawn from the national or international research community if necessary;
- NRF Executive Directors responsible for SARChI management;
- DST representative; and
- Grants Management and Systems Administration (GMSA) personnel serving as secretariat.

The NRF Executive Directors and DST representative will not serve as reviewers but may pose questions that would serve to inform final decision making by the DST and NRF.

The host institution representatives in attendance will include:

- The Chair holder; and
- The DVC responsible for management of the Research Chairs.

3.2. Format for on-site review

The on-site review will be held as a closed meeting and will be managed with sensitivity and confidentiality.

3.2.1. Panel briefing meeting

The NRF Executive Directors for GMSA and SARChI Programme management will brief the panel on the review objectives, meeting proceedings, procedures and documents to be used during the review process. Panel members will also have an opportunity to clarify and discuss issues that they regard as particularly important for the review process.

3.2.2. Panel preparatory discussion

The panel members will have a discussion on the review findings and recommendations to date and to decide on aspects and issues that require further clarity and probing.

3.2.3. Presentation by the Chair holder

The Chair holder will be afforded the opportunity to give a **concise**, maximum 40 (forty) minutes, presentation outlining the following:

- Objectives in the proposal for the period under review;
- Highlights of objectives that have been achieved;
- Objectives that were not met citing reasons why the objectives were not met;
- Research infrastructure emanating from the Research Chair;
- Impact of the Research Chair at the institutional and national level;
- Impact of the Chair in advancing knowledge in the discipline; and
- Planned research activities for the next five-year term.

3.2.4. Question and answer session 1

The Review Panel will engage with the Chair holder and the DVC responsible for the management of the Research Chairs on matters for clarification, areas of concerns and any

other issues that will enable the panel to gain further insights to inform the final recommendation.

3.2.5. Viewing of research infrastructure where applicable

Where applicable a visit to the research facilities may be included to enable the Review Panel to gain a better understanding of the institutional environment under which the Chair is operating and/or the impact of the Research Chair at the institutional level.

3.2.6. Question and answer session 2

If necessary a second question and answer session will enable the Review Panel to engage with any other relevant key player, e.g., the Dean of the Department in which the Research Chair resides, to address any additional areas of concerns and/or matters requiring clarity.

3.2.7. Panel discussion and recommendations

The panel will have an in camera discussion and make its recommendations regarding the continuation of funding for the Chair for a further five-year term.

The evaluation panel will submit a report to the NRF with their findings and recommendations within 2 (two) weeks of the on-site review, and the NRF, in consultation with the DST, will make the final decision regarding the continuation of the said Chair activities.

4. DISCONTINUATION OF CHAIR ACTIVITIES

Where the outcome of the five-year review of the performance of a Chair holder is judged to be unsatisfactory and a decision is taken by the NRF not to continue funding for the Chair holder for a further five-year cycle, the NRF may in consultation with the DST, implement one of the following three actions:

4.1. Option 1

The university is requested to nominate a new candidate to replace the Chair holder and the university retains the Research Chair for strategic reasons.

4.1.1. Guiding principles for Option 1

- The unsatisfactory performance of the Chair holder is unrelated to the institutional circumstances;
- The university has met its institutional commitments for creating an enabling environment for Chair activities to be undertaken;
- Effective management and monitoring and evaluations processes for the Research Chair is in place;
- Significant research infrastructure that is crucial for the research area has been established at the host institution and cannot be readily replicated at another institution; and
- The Research Chair activities are in an area that is of strategic importance for South Africa and is best undertaken at this host university.

In this instance:

- SARChI processes for filling Research Chairs that are vacated will be followed; and
- The maximum period of funding for a SARChI Research Chair at an institution will apply, that is 15 (fifteen) years irrespective of the number of incumbents that occupy the Research Chair position over the 15 (fifteen) year period.

4.2. Option 2

University loses the Research Chair and a competitive process is implemented to award another Research Chair in the discipline for strategic reasons.

4.2.1. Guiding principles for Option 2

- The unsatisfactory performance of the Chair holder may be related to the institutional circumstances; and/or
- The university has failed to meet its institutional commitments for creating an enabling environment for the Chair activities to be undertaken; and/or
- Effective management and monitoring and evaluations processes for the Research Chair have not been implemented; and/or
- The Research Chair activities are in an area that is of strategic importance for South Africa but may be undertaken at other universities in South Africa.

4.3. Option 3

Terminate Chair activities and the university loses the SARChI Research Chair. Based on strategic priorities, a call for a new Research Chair to replace this Research Chair is not made.

4.3.1. Guiding principles for Option 3

- The unsatisfactory performance of the Chair holder may be related to the institutional circumstances; and/or
- The university has failed to meet its institutional commitments for creating an enabling environment for the Chair activities to be undertaken; and/or
- Effective management and monitoring and evaluations processes for the Research Chair have not been implemented; and/or
- The Research Chair activities are not in an area of strategic importance and have a low probability of advancing SARChI objectives of improving South Africa's international research and innovation competitiveness while responding to social and economic challenges of the country.

5. PHASE-OUT OF CHAIR ACTIVITIES

The phase-out of Chair activities will be managed in consultation with the university DVC responsible for management of the Research Chairs at the host institution to ensure compliance with the universities' conditions of employment.

In the event that the university loses the Research Chair, the following phase-out process will apply.

- The Chair will be funded for one further year for critical activities (year six in the cycle) to round off activities or for the university to take over funding for the Chair. In this final year of funding:
 - no new postdoctoral fellows and masters and doctoral students will be supported; and
 - running costs will be adjusted down based on the research activities.
- Carry-over of research funding post the end of the funding period will be subject to standard SARChI granting guidelines.
- Final year (year three) doctoral students may be supported for one year post the end of the granting period (see illustration below).

Year 5 Final year in first cycle of funding	Year 6 1 year of rounding off	Year 7 Final year for student support
First year Masters students	Second year Masters students	No Masters students supported
First year Doctoral students	Second year Doctoral students	Third year Doctoral students

6. ACRONYMS

DST	Department of Science and Technology
DVC	Deputy Vice Chancellor
GMSA	Grant Management and Systems Administration
NRF	National Research Foundation
SARChI	South African Research Chairs Initiative

NRF contact persons

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