Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Graduate Internship Programme: Call for Graduate Interns for 2021-2022

Application Process

1. How do I apply to be a Graduate Intern?
   All applicants must first identify the university where they will be registered for their honours degree before submitting an application to the NRF. All applications for the Graduate Internship Programme must be submitted on the NRF Online Submission System by accessing the link: https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za.

2. What happens after I submit my application to be a Graduate Intern on the NRF Online Submission System?
   A designated authority based at the university you have selected for honours studies will screen the application for eligibility. The application will then be reviewed by the university using a standard scorecard provided by the NRF. If your application is recommended for funding, it will form part of the pool of applications from which mentors at host institutions will interview and select Graduate Interns. Selected interns will sign a two-year appointment contract with the host institution and will be expected to commence duty on either 01 February or 01 March 2021, depending on when the process is finalised.

Eligibility Criteria

3. Will permanent residents with a valid South African Identity Document be eligible to apply?
   No. Permanent residents would not have been funded by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) or the Ikusasa Student Financial Aid Programme (ISFAP) for their bachelor's degree and therefore are not eligible to apply for the Graduate Internship Programme. However, permanent residents are eligible and should apply for full-time postgraduate funding for the 2021 academic year.

4. What avenue of funding is available to honours and masters graduates who are not eligible for the Graduate Internship Programme?
   Honours and masters graduates are eligible and should apply for full-time postgraduate funding to pursue masters and doctoral studies respectively in the 2021 academic year. Applicants should apply on the NRF Online Submission System by accessing the link: https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za/.
5. Are bachelors graduates who intend to register for a postgraduate diploma eligible to apply?

No. the NRF has taken a strategic decision not to fund students pursuing studies leading to postgraduate certificates or diplomas, regardless of National Qualifications Framework (NQF) exit level.

6. Are bachelors graduates who intend to register for full-time honours studies eligible to apply?

Yes. Students intending to pursue full-time honours programmes will only be eligible if all lectures and practical sessions are held late afternoon and/or on weekends, enabling them to obtain work experience while undertaking honours studies. Applicants must provide a timetable and letter of support from Faculty Deans confirming that the structure of the honours programme is conducive to being undertaken simultaneously with the internship programme.

7. What is the minimum academic requirement for students to qualify for funding as Graduate Interns?

A minimum average of 65% for major subjects in the final undergraduate year of study is required.

8. What is the age limit for applicants?

Applicants have to be 27 years of age or younger on 31 December of the year of application.

9. How was the age limit determined?

The average completion age for an undergraduate degree as published by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) was 21 years. In addition, the NRF analysed a cohort of 60 000 postgraduate students funded by the NRF over a six-year period and looked at the average age at completion for honours, masters and doctoral students. The prescribed age for commencing honours studies was obtained as an outcome of this analysis.

10. Will a financially needy student who has not undergone a means test be eligible to apply?

No. Only students who were funded by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) or the Ikusasa Student Financial Aid Programme (ISFAP) for their bachelor’s degree are eligible to apply. Students who have not undergone a financial need assessment should apply for full-time postgraduate funding for the 2021 academic year and provide consent for the NRF to make a Household Financial Means Assessment.
Funding Period

11. **What is the funding period for the Graduate Internship Programme?**
   
The Graduate Internship Programme is a two-year work experience programme for bachelor’s graduates who will be pursuing honours studies simultaneously during the internship period.

Students Living with a Disability

12. **How does the NRF define a person living with a disability?**
   
The Strategic Policy Framework on Disability for the PSET (2018), defines Disability as “the loss or elimination of opportunities to take part in the life of the community, equitably with others, encountered by persons having physical, sensory, psychological, developmental, learning, neurological or other impairments, which may be permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, thereby causing activity limitations and participation restriction within mainstream society. These barriers may be due to economic, physical/structural, social, attitudinal and/or cultural factors.”

Recruitment, Selection and Contracting

13. **When and how will I be informed of my acceptance onto the Graduate Internship?**
   
Nominees approved by the NRF for placement in the Graduate Internship Programme will be notified by email and SMS before 29 January 2021 (for interns commencing on 01 February) and before 26 February 2021 (for interns commencing on 01 March).

14. **What process do I follow to accept the Graduate Internship?**
   
Successful applicants who are offered a Graduate Internship by the NRF will be required to complete and sign a Conditions of Grant (CoG). The signed CoG must be submitted together with the signed Intern-Host Institution appointment contract and proof of registration for the honours degree to confirm acceptance of the Graduate Internship.

15. **Can interns be registered for honours studies at a university different from the host institution where they are appointed as Graduate Interns?**
   
Yes. The Graduate Internship Programme does not make it mandatory for interns to be registered for honours studies at the same institution hosting them as interns. However, logistically it will be impractical for an intern to be registered to study at an institution that is located at a considerable distance from the host, especially if contact sessions are required for the honours degree.
16. When will successful interns commence the programme? 
   Interns are expected to report to work on 01 February or 01 March 2021.

NRF opportunities for further postgraduate studies

17. What happens to interns at the end of the programme? 
   In order to develop a future cohort of Research and Development (R&D) workers, it is vital that postgraduate students complete their studies without delay and that they continue through to completion of their doctoral studies. To advance these priorities, the NRF will offer uninterrupted funding post the Graduate Internship, for full-time studies for masters and doctoral studies, subject to satisfactory performance at each consecutive postgraduate level.

18. What are the eligibility criteria for uninterrupted postgraduate funding? 
   In line with the NRF Postgraduate Funding Policy, interns who complete their honours studies within the two-year Graduate Internship and maintain their academic performance will be eligible for full-time master’s funding from the NRF.

19. What does uninterrupted funding mean? 
   It means funding of postgraduate students from honours up to doctoral level, however, students will have to submit a new scholarship application for each study level. NRF-funded students will be eligible for uninterrupted funding provided that they meet the following requirements:
   - The NRF-funded degree is completed within the NRF funding periods which are one (1) year for a full-time honours degree, two (2) years for a part-time honours degree and two (2) years for a full-time master’s degree;
   - Register for a master’s degree immediately after completing the honours or undergraduate degree that qualifies for admittance onto a master’s programme e.g. engineering and allied health science degrees; and
   - Register for a doctoral degree immediately after completing the master’s degree; and meet all the university and NRF requirements for postgraduate funding.

20. What is the minimum prescribed period for completion of an honours degree? 
   The minimum academic year(s) prescribed by the Department of Higher Education and Training for the completion of a full-time and part-time honours qualification are one (1) year and two (2) years respectively.
Payment of Monthly Stipend and Honours Funding

21. How much is the monthly stipend that interns will be paid and how will payment be made?
   Interns will receive a tax free monthly stipend of R6 070 (i.e. R72 840 per annum) paid directly into their bank account by the host institution from funding provided by the NRF.

22. Will there be any deductions made from the monthly stipend?
   A small percentage for the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) contribution will be deducted from intern’s monthly stipend, and the amount will reflect on the salary slip. UIF is a necessary deduction as it gives short-term relief to workers when they become unemployed or are unable to work because of illness or while on maternity leave.

23. What is the value of the honours funding and how will tuition be paid?
   Interns’ honours tuition fees will be funded by the NRF up to a maximum of R50 000 over the two-year internship and paid directly to the institution at which they are registered. In this context, tuition fee is the agreed institutional fee for the actual programme of study. The registration fee is to be included in the tuition fee and qualifying NRF-funded students are not required to pay the registration fee upfront.

24. What will happen if a university waives tuition or does not charge tuition fee?
   The funds allocated for the fees will not accrue to the student and will not be used as an additional subsistence allowance, but will be made available to the university to cover running expenses of the honours research project. Running expenses are categorised as small equipment, materials and supplies, data collection, site visits and technical assistance for specialised skills.

Conditions of Funding

25. How will interns be expected to split their time between their work at the host institution and their honours studies?
   Typically, Graduate Interns will be expected to report for duty during work hours and attend lectures outside of office hours and on weekends. How graduate interns split their time between undertaking work experience at the host institution and their honours studies must be negotiated directly with their mentors and captured in the work plan.
26. How will maternity leave be handled during the internship period?

Maternity leave will be granted for a maximum period of four (4) consecutive months without pay. Graduate Interns may claim maternity benefits from the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) during the maternity leave period. At the end of the two-year period, an intern’s contract may be extended in lieu of the period that she has been on maternity leave.

27. Will mentors be able to replace interns who resign?

No. New interns must be appointed in cohorts with each call for applications.

28. Will students in their second year of a part time honours degree studies in 2021 be eligible to apply?

No. Only students who will be registered for the first year of their honours studies in 2021 may apply.

Financial Control

29. Will interns who resign from the programme be required to pay back the stipend they have been paid?

No. Interns have worked for the stipend they received and so will not be required to pay any of that money back if they resign.

30. What happens to interns who resign from the programme but continue the honours degree?

The NRF expects interns who resign from the programme to continue and complete their honours degree within the stipulated time at their own cost.

31. What recourse will there be for interns who fail to complete the honours degree within the time stipulated by the NRF?

By accepting funding from the NRF, interns agree to complete the honours degree in the stipulated timeframe. Failure to meet this commitment, especially if it is determined that it was due to negligence, would constitute a breach of contract and interns will be required to pay back the full amount of the fees that the NRF has paid to the university with interest at the prevailing prime rate charged by the NRF’s bankers, unless de-registration was approved by the NRF due to exceptional and extenuating circumstances.

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