Funding Instrument: South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI)

Domains: Research Chairs and Centres of Excellence & Grants Management & Systems Administration

Document: Framework & Funding Guide
SA-GER Bilateral Research Chair

10 December 2015 (revised)
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1. **Strategic background**

1.1. **Context**

The *White Paper on Science and Technology* (1996) and *the National Research and Development Strategy* (2002) put emphasis on the need for South Africa to transform its Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) workforce. Other policy and strategies of government, including the *Human Resource Development Strategy* (2009) and the *Medium Term Strategic Framework* (2009) note the shortage of high-level skills as a significant constraint in the development of the economy and society. In this regard, South Africa must produce a greater number of highly skilled individuals; particularly in SET, to achieve the goal of "an equitable, sustainable, and inclusive growth path that brings decent work and sustainable livelihoods, education, health, safe and secure communities, and rural development.

The South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) was established in 2006 by the Department of Science and Technology (DST). This Funding Instrument is managed by the National Research Foundation (NRF) through a contractual agreement with DST. It is a strategic intervention of the South African government designed to attract and retain excellence in research and innovation at South African universities. In particular, the instrument is aimed at increasing scientific research capacity through the development of human capacity and stimulating the generation of new knowledge. It is also intended to support the realisation of South Africa's transformation into a knowledge economy in which the generation of knowledge translates into socio-economic benefits.

SARChI is designed to significantly expand the scientific research base of South Africa in a way that supports implementation of the national Research and Development policies. Since inception, 198 Research Chairs have been awarded in various disciplines and research fields and the funding instrument has been successful in retaining leading South African scientists in the university system.
and attracting leading foreign researchers and expatriate researchers to South Africa.

In the framework of the German-South African Year of Science 2012/13, Prof Johanna Wanka, German Federal Minister of Education and Research, and the former South African Minister of Science and Technology, Derek Hanekom, have entered into an agreement for the establishment of a joint research chair. Based on this bilateral initiative, the South African–German Bilateral Research Chair will be launched in *Sustainable Natural Resource Management* with the aim to foster advanced research in this field, to consolidate the scientific cooperation between the two countries and to increase the number of internationally ranking researchers at South Africa’s public universities.

1.2. SARChI objectives

The main goal of the initiative is to strengthen and improve research and innovation capacity of public universities for producing high quality postgraduate students, research, and innovation outputs. The objectives of SARChI are to:

- Expand the scientific research and innovation capacity of South Africa;
- Improve South Africa’s international research and innovation competitiveness while responding to social and economic challenges of the country;
- Attract and retain excellent researchers and scientists;
- Increase the production of Masters and Doctoral graduates; and
- Create research career pathways for young and mid-career researchers, with a strong research, innovation and human capital development output trajectory.
1.3. Guiding principles for SARChI

The following principles will inform the awarding of the Research Chairs to the successful university:

- SARChI is a strategic instrument aimed at strengthening research and innovation capacity in public universities in South Africa, enhancing the training of a new generation of researchers and the further development of established researchers in all knowledge areas while responding to national priorities and strategies;
- SARChI is a funding instrument for universities but Research Chairs may be held by a university in partnership with a public research institution such as: another university, a science council, a national research facility or a public research institution;
- Public universities in South Africa will bid for the Research Chair in an open and competitive process;
- Each university may submit one (1) application for the Research Chair in this call, nominating a maximum of two (2) candidates;
- The university must demonstrate a commitment to closely cooperate with a German partner, namely another university or research institution;
- The Research Chair must be in alignment with the university Programme and Qualification Mix (PQM) approved by the Department of Higher Education and Training;
- The Chair will be expected to dedicate at least 80% of their time conducting research, supervising an average of 10 Masters and Doctoral students per annum and mentoring emerging researchers. The remainder of the time may be dedicated to administration or undergraduate teaching as well as to meetings with the German project partner;
- Research Chairs are tenable for Tier 1. The Chair is therefore expected to be an established researcher with international recognition as a leader in his/her field and/or have received substantial international recognition for his/her research contributions.
1.4. University accountability for SARChI Chairs

A Chair may be appointed by the university, at the level of a full Professor, benchmarked nationally. The Chair will fit into the normal management structures of the host institution. However, accountability for the Research Chair will reside with the Vice-Chancellor or Deputy Vice-Chancellor responsible for research at the South African host university.

1.5. SA-German Bilateral Research Chair in Sustainable Natural Resource Management

The Research Chair will be awarded to a public university in South Africa that can host such a Research Chair in its own right, or in partnership with a public research institution in South Africa; such as another university, a science council or a national research facility. Only institutions that adequately demonstrate research strength and competencies in the thematic area of the Research Chair and have the required research infrastructure will be considered for awarding of the Research Chair.

This Chair will be funded in partnership with the BMBF, Germany's Federal Ministry of Education and Research, through the DLR-PT. The broad objective of the SA-German Research Chair is to strengthen research and innovation capacities at the highest scientific level in the selected research domain and to promote international exchange and cooperation with scientists in Germany. There are no restrictions on the gender and citizenship status of the candidates. The research chair holder will however be expected to live and work in South Africa.
1.6. Cooperation with German partners
Willingness of the nominated candidates to engage in scientific cooperation with Germany is a prerequisite. The submitted application should already include plans regarding collaboration with a partner based in Germany. Candidates are expected to explain convincingly how future cooperation between the host university in South Africa and researchers at one or more universities/research institutions in Germany can be developed and how junior researchers will be integrated. The chair holder is expected to spend about 20% of his/her time at the German cooperation institution(s).

1.7. Working Conditions
The NRF will require the approved candidate for the Chair to enter into a five (5)-year performance agreement in the form of ‘Conditions of Grant’ and will evaluate the performance of the Chair against the research plan, stated objectives and targets. The track record of the nominated candidate is therefore very important to the selection process and success of the Research Chair.

Each university must submit one (1) application to host a Research Chair and can nominate up to two (2) candidates for the Chair position. A separate proposal must be provided by each candidate. For a university, where a Chair is taken up by a current academic staff member the university must immediately initiate a process to fill the vacated position with a suitably qualified candidate\(^1\). The replacement candidate must be employed on a full-time basis for at least the duration of the tenure of the Research Chair. Where such replacement candidates are not young or female, the university must develop a succession plan designed to develop a range of possible candidates with competitive capacity within two cycles of a Research Chair award.

\(^1\) In short, this Initiative must add to the number of university research and academic staff.
All candidates who are requested by the Deputy Vice Chancellors (DVCs) responsible for research to apply for a Research Chair must be established researchers that hold a doctoral degree or an equivalent research qualification and must submit a proposed research programme that is innovative, original and of high quality. Following the peer review of the full proposal and the *curriculum vitae* of the candidate, Chairs may be approved at the Tier 1 level based on their past research and innovation outputs, track record in supervising and mentoring postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows and national and international recognition for their research contributions. The criteria that must be met by nominated candidates for approval at the Tier 1 level are detailed below:

- Should be appointed at the level of a full Professor benchmarked nationally according to the German and RSA Higher Education landscape;
- Should be an outstanding and innovative researcher whose accomplishments have made a major impact in their field;
- Should be recognised internationally as an undisputed leader in their field and/or have received substantial international recognition for their research contributions;
- Should have a superior record in attracting and supervising post graduate students and postdoctoral fellows, taking into account the practices of the field;
- Should reside full time in South Africa for the duration of the Research Chair award; and
- Should spend about 20% of their time at German cooperation institution(s).

2. *Proposal submission and assessment process*

This section of the Framework and Funding Guide provides details of the research focus areas of the proposed awarding of the SA-German Research Chair in Sustainable Natural Resource Management. It also describes the
process for proposal submission and assessment and provides details on the call timelines.

2.1. Research Focus and thematic areas

The proposed thematic area for the awarding of a new Research Chair is intended to support scientific research and innovation generally, but also to respond to the five priorities of the South African government, namely:

- Creation of decent work and sustainable livelihood;
- Water, energy and the environment;
- Education;
- Health;
- Rural development, food security and land reform; and
- The fight against crime and corruption.

These have been expanded into priorities of the Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) and its 12 Outcomes. The following outcomes have been prioritised in formulating the theme for the awarding of the Chair:

- A long and healthy life for all South Africans;
- Vibrant, equitable, sustainable rural communities and food security for all;
- Protection and enhancement of environmental assets and natural resources;
- An efficient, competitive and responsive economic infrastructure;
- Sustainable human settlements and improved quality of households;
- Skilled and capable workforce to support inclusive growth;
- Quality education; and
- All people in South Africa are, and feel, safe.
2.2. Scope of the SA-German Bilateral Research Chair in Sustainable Natural Resource Management – Safe Mining

Much of the mineral resources of South Africa are hosted by narrow, geologically complex and deep-seated deposits. These have been exploited for more than a century by labour intensive methods. Mining depths now exceed 4 km in some mines in South Africa – deeper than any other mines worldwide. Mine workers are exposed to extreme environmental conditions and the risk to human life is substantial. Increasing depth also increases the cost of extraction. Both may ultimately render mining in South Africa unsustainable. To assure that the mining industry in South Africa remains a source of economic growth and social transformation it has become an imperative task to develop mechanised and automated mining methods that are able to reduce the risk for the human work force underground and to increase resource and energy efficiency. The timeliness and relevance of this research field is aptly demonstrated by concurrent initiatives by leading mining houses (incl. “Mine of the Future” initiative of Rio Tinto, or the “FutureSmart” initiative of Anglo American).

Germany, on the other hand, is a leading supplier of industrial solutions for modern industries. The “Industrie 4.0” concept embraces technologies geared to enable contemporary automation, data exchange and manufacturing within the context of the so-called “Internet of Things”. The goals of “Industrie 4.0” can easily be extended to the South African mining context, where technologies for autonomous or remote-controlled extraction will be an important contribution towards sustainability of the mining industry.

The chair holder will provide a bridge between Germany and South Africa. A leading mining engineering research centre in South Africa will host the chair and provide close links into the mining innovation ecosystem, comprising of academic and industry partners. On the other hand, the chair will establish a close link to a leading German research institution/university department that may act as a co-host. This co-host serves to provide access to leading German competency in automation and data exchange concepts applicable to the mining industry.
The research field to be covered by the research chair could aptly be described as "Safe Mining".

**Targets**

- Development of new technologies for automation within deep underground mining environments;
- Automation technologies will focus to increase safety and health of the underground work force;
- Contribution to resource and energy efficiency by underground mining operations;
- Contribution towards the development of technologies suitable for underground deployment between South African and German partners;
- Training of a new generation of highly qualified scientists and engineers for South African industry and the higher education sector.

The proposed topic is also informed by the need to strategically grow specific research areas in mining as well as the absorptive capacity of individual universities and the university system in general.

### 2.3. Application, Review and Selection Process

A Research Chair will be awarded in an open and competitive process. The application and selection process will be conducted in a one-phase process, which will include, (i) *the motivation by the South African public university to host the Research Chair*; (ii) *the nomination of a candidate for appointment to the Chair position*; (iii) *a research and activity plan drafted by the nominated candidate(s)*; (iv) *the concept for cooperation with German partners*.

An open call will be advertised to all South African public universities to host the Research Chair. At the same time a communication will be sent out by DLR-PT to the German research community to alert them to the call and inform them of the mechanism by which international as well as German researchers can put
themselves forward to be potential candidates for institutional bids to host a Research Chair.

Beside the nomination of a candidate for appointment to the Chair position and a research and activity plan, the application should give details on:

(i) the readiness and commitment of the institution to provide an enabling environment to ensure the success of the Research Chair;

(ii) strengths, capabilities, strategic environment and competencies of the university;

(iii) the alignment of the proposed Research Chair with the proposed thematic areas and the university research strategy;

(iv) the potential of the proposed candidate(s) to enhance the international research and/or innovation competitiveness within the discipline;

(v) the potential of the research to impact on social and/or economic development of the country;

(vi) the research focus of the candidate(s);

(vii) a proposed plan on how the Research Chair will fulfill SARChI objectives, including the strategic considerations mentioned in the university proposal; how it will deliver on the university research strategy;

(viii) specific objectives, outputs and outcomes for the five (5)-year period;

(ix) how future cooperation between the host university in South Africa and researchers at one or more universities/research institutions in Germany can be developed and how junior researchers will be integrated. The chair holder is expected to spend about 20% of his/her time at the German cooperation institution(s); and

(x) proof of the cooperation agreement with partner(s) in Germany, e.g. in the form of a Letter of Intent or Memorandum of Understanding.

Applications will be assessed in a two-tier peer review process, namely postal review and panel review.
Main pillars of the selection process are:

The NRF will set up a selection committee consisting of an equal number of independent experts nominated by the NRF and the DLR-PT respectively. The NRF and DLR-PT will each nominate up to three (3) experts.

A decision for awarding of the research Chair will be made by the selection committee, based on independent peer review statements. DLR-PT and NRF will identify therefore two reviewers each per nomination. The selection committee will make a ranked list of up to three (3) outstanding scientists to whom the Chair will be offered. If one (1) of the candidates of one university is selected as Research Chair holder but will not be able to take up this position, the selection committee will instead appoint the next person in line in their overall ranking of all applications.

The application and selection processes will be carried out jointly by the NRF and DLR-PT and all review committee meetings will be convened by the NRF.

More information on selection criteria is given in Section 2.4 below. The full application must also include the biography of the candidate(s), who will have, in principle, accepted the nomination for the Research Chair by the university. The recommended candidate(s) must use the NRF Online Submission System (https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za/nrfmkii/) to register and/or update her/his curriculum vitae and complete the application.

As awards of SARChI Research Chairs are to be made to the host university the application by the proposed candidate has to be supported through the electronic application process. The support must be made by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor responsible for research at the university. Each university must submit the

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2 No commitment should be given to the candidate(s) by the university before the NRF has officially informed the University of the Award by means of an award letter.
following documentation to be considered as a host university for Research Chairs, through the online application:

- University Research Strategy;
- University Programme and Qualification Mix (PQM) approved by the Department of Higher Education and Training;
- Details of current academic and research staff of the university in the specific discipline; and
- Statistics on university research outputs and postgraduate students trained and graduated for the period 2011 to 2015, in the specific discipline.

Applications should be submitted not later than 22 April 2016, on the NRF Online Submission System (https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za/nrfmkii/), by the DVC responsible for Research and validated by the relevant Designated Authority (DA) by the 29 April 2016. Only submissions that provide all the requested information will be eligible and considered for review. Following a competitive review process, led by experts in the selected discipline, the Research Chair will be awarded to the successful university for appointment of the candidate.

2.4. Selection Criteria

Application to host the Research Chair by university

The selection of the applications will be based on (i) the readiness and suitability of the university to host the proposed Research Chair, (ii) the strategic alignment of the proposed Research Chair, (iii) the motivation by the South African public university to host the Research Chair; (iv) the nomination of a candidate for appointment to the Chair position; (v) a research and activity plan drafted by the nominated candidate; (vi) the concept of cooperation with German partners.
The application must therefore address the following:

- The alignment of the proposed Research Chair with the university’s research strategy and PQM;
- Alignment of the proposed Research Chair’s focus with that of existing research activities or capacity;
- University commitment for creating an enabling environment with regard to:
  - Office and/or laboratory space.
  - Infrastructure (equipment, IT facilities, etc.);
  - Academic support (information, resource facilities and related research groups);
  - Management and leadership; and
  - Financial support (direct and indirect);
- The reporting lines and location of the Research Chair within the university structure.

The selection of candidates will be based on the merits of each candidate’s full research proposal. This will include the strength of the candidate’s profile, including her/his qualifications and experience, publishing in the discipline of the Research Chair and postgraduate student training track records. This will also include an assessment of the candidate’s research and activity plan in respect of its ability to deliver on SARChI objectives, as well as a proposed budget (see Section 3.3. Funding Levels).

The full proposal must also give specific details on:

- The proposed teaching\(^3\) to research time ratio;
- Research objectives for the five year period;
- Expected knowledge\(^4\) outputs in the first five year period;

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\(^3\) Teaching of postgraduate students only. Note: Chair holders may not spend more than 20% of their time on undergraduate teaching and/or management responsibilities not related to activities of the Research Chair.
• Expected human capital\(^5\) outputs in the first five year period;
• Existing and planned collaborations in the first five-year period
• Concept of cooperation with German partners.

2.5. **Call timelines**

The key activities and timelines, to ensure effective implementation by the NRF and the universities, are outlined in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Research Chair Call activities and timelines**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Timelines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Application to host the Research Chair by university and Awarding of the Research Chair and approval of nominated candidate and full proposal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Call opens for applications</td>
<td>February 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Call closes for applications</td>
<td>22 April 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Postal reviews</td>
<td>May 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Meeting of selection committee</td>
<td>July 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Review outcome letter sent to Deputy Vice-Chancellors</td>
<td>End of July 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Feedback letter sent to Deputy Vice-Chancellors</td>
<td>End of July 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Proposed start of research chair</td>
<td>August/September 2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **Management of the Research Chair**

This section of the Framework and Funding Guide for Applications describes what follows after the Research Chair has been awarded to the university.

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\(^4\) Peer-reviewed journal articles, peer-reviewed conference proceedings, scholarly books and book chapters, patents, invited keynote presentations, conference presentations etc.

\(^5\) Numbers of Masters and Doctoral graduates and completed postdoctoral fellowships.
3.2. Duration of the Research Chair

Tier 1 Research Chairs will be tenable for five (5) years, renewable for one further five (5)-year period giving a total life lifespan of 10 years. Eligibility for renewal will be entirely performance-linked.

3.3. Management of Research Chairs

The management of SARChI grants is illustrated in Figure 1 and described below.

On accepting the award and signing the Conditions of Grant, the newly appointed incumbent of the Research Chair will be required to deliver on the research activity plan that formed part of the accepted full proposal. At the end of each financial year the incumbent will be required to submit to the NRF an annual progress report addressing milestones and expected outcomes presented in the research activity plan. This report will be shared with DLR-PT.

During year five of the five-year funding cycle, the Research Chair will be subjected to an in depth evaluation undertaken by peers following the framework set out in the SARChI Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.
Figure 1: Management of Research Chairs over the tenure of the Research Chair

3.4. Funding Levels

SARChI proposes to make an award of up to €300,000\textsuperscript{6} per annum. This award will cover salaries\textsuperscript{7}, postdoctoral fellowships and postgraduate student bursaries, research operating costs and research equipment and infrastructure. The guidelines for apportioning of the grant across these categories and the values of fellowships and scholarships are shown in Table 2.

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\textsuperscript{6}Grant will be paid out in the equivalent ZAR, calculated by the exchange rates at the time of transfer.

\textsuperscript{7}Salaries of the incumbent and limited administrative support
Table 2: Guidelines for SARChI grant annual budget breakdown for Tier 1 Research Chairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budget category</th>
<th>Sub-item</th>
<th>Cost pa in €</th>
<th>Min. number of people</th>
<th>Max. number of people</th>
<th>€</th>
<th>ZAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Salaries</strong></td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>75.000-85.000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Travel costs to Germany</td>
<td>15.000</td>
<td></td>
<td>15.000</td>
<td>226 800</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Travel costs to invite Germans to SA</td>
<td>15.000</td>
<td></td>
<td>15.000</td>
<td>226 800</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Admin support</td>
<td>2.000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.000</td>
<td>30 240</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research assistants</td>
<td>2.000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.000</td>
<td>30 240</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fellowships</strong></td>
<td>Postdoctoral fellows</td>
<td>14.000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.000</td>
<td>211 680</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bursaries</strong></td>
<td>Doctoral (full time)</td>
<td>7.000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Masters (full time)</td>
<td>4.700</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Honours</td>
<td>2.700</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research equipment or infrastructure</strong></td>
<td>Up to</td>
<td>27.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Running</strong></td>
<td>Up to 30% of total budget</td>
<td>90.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>University Overheads</strong></td>
<td>Up to 10% of total budget</td>
<td>30.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total budget</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>300 000</td>
<td>4 536 000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

€ 300 000 = R 4 536 000 (@ R15.12 to the Euro as at 6 November 2015)

It is important to note that this budget template provides a guide that stipulates the minimum and maximum amounts per budget category and has the flexibility for the Chair to allocate the SARChI grant based on the research activity plan.
The proposed budget will be approved at the commencement of each five-year funding cycle. The incumbent will be given an opportunity, at the end of each calendar year, to make budget adjustments for the subsequent year, in consultation with the Directors of Research Chairs & Centres of Excellence and Grants Management and Systems Administration directorates.

Tier 1 Research Chairs will not be eligible for additional NRF parliamentary core grant funding, except in respect of Rated Researchers Incentive Funding. Incumbents must apply for grants for large equipment through the NRF Infrastructure Funding Instrument.

Chairs are expected to dedicate at least 80% of their time conducting research and supervising an average of 10 Masters and Doctoral students per annum. The Chairs are therefore strongly encouraged to attract additional funding for research and human capital development from other national and international funders and donors to supplement the SARChI grant.

3.5. Payment of Grants
The grant for year 1 of 5 for the awarded Research Chair will be fully disbursed to the university upon receiving the signed copy of the NRF ‘Conditions of Grant’ by the incumbent. Grants will thereafter be disbursed to the universities on an annual basis, for the approved funding period, subject to the appointed Chair meeting the ‘Conditions of Grant’ and submitting an Annual Progress report.

3.6. Evaluation and Impact of the Research Chair
The university’s Strategic Research Plans and the Research Chair’s Research and Activity Plan, will serve as the baseline to evaluate impact of the South African – German cooperation in general, the discipline and at the institutional level. Seeing the ground-braking, innovative potential of the research topic of the
Chair, its impact on the scientific advancement in this particular field will furthermore form part of the assessment.

4. References


5. NRF contact persons

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