Funding Instrument:
South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI)

Domains:
Research Chairs & Centres of Excellence (RCCE) and Grants Management & Systems Administration (GMSA)

Document:

Date:
15th May 2018
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. **Strategic Background** ................................................................. 2  
   1.1. Context ...................................................................................... 2  
   1.2. SARChI Aim and Objectives ......................................................... 3  
   1.3. SARChI Guiding Principles .......................................................... 3  
   1.4. Accountability for SARChI Chairs ............................................... 5  
   1.5. Profile of Candidates ............................................................... 5  
      1.5.1. Minimum requirements and key competencies ....................... 5  
2. **Proposal Submission and Assessment Process** ................................ 7  
   2.1. Research Focus and Scope ......................................................... 8  
      2.1.1. Internationally recognized graduate and postgraduate training programme in upstream oil & gas exploration – content will include but not limited to exploration geosciences and geophysics, reservoir engineering; ................................................................. 11  
      2.1.2. Development of collaborative links with the Oil & Gas Industry; Error! Bookmark not defined.  
      2.1.3. Internationally connected research in petroleum geoscience and/or engineering targeting the South African offshore environment; Error! Bookmark not defined.  
      2.1.4. Strong collaboration with the national R&D community in related fields such as seismic data processing, engineering, geochemistry. Error! Bookmark not defined.  
   2.2. Application, Review and Selection Process .................................... 11  
   2.3. Selection Criteria ...................................................................... 13  
      2.3.1. Application to Host the Research Chair by University .......... 13  
3. **Management of the Research Chairs** ............................................ 14  
   3.1. Duration of the Research Chair .................................................... 15  
   3.2. Management of Research Chairs ................................................ 15  
   3.3. Funding Levels .......................................................................... 16  
   3.4. Payment of Grants .................................................................... 18  
   3.5. Evaluation and Impact of Research Chairs .................................... 19  
4. **References** ................................................................................. 19  
5. **NRF Contact Persons** .................................................................. 20
1. Strategic Background

1.1. Context

The White Paper on Science and Technology (1996) and the National Research and Development Strategy (2002) emphasised 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, 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 the DST. SARChI is a strategic intervention of the South African government designed to attract and retain excellence in research and innovation at South African universities, Research Councils and National Research Facilities. In particular, the Funding 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, 199 Research Chairs have been awarded in various disciplines and research fields. 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.

1.2. SArChI Aim and Objectives

Aim
The main goal of SArChI is to strengthen and improve research and innovation capacity of public universities, research councils and national research facilities in order to produce high quality postgraduate students and research outputs.

Objectives
- Expand the scientific research and innovation capacity of South Africa;
- Improve South Africa’s international research and innovation competitiveness, while responding to social, economic and transformation imperatives 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. SArChI Guiding Principles

The SArChI funding instrument is for public research institutions which are defined as being; a Public University, a Research Council or a National Facility of the National Research Foundation. The awarding of the Research Chairs to the successful institution will be informed by the following principles:

- SArChI is a strategic instrument aimed at strengthening research and innovation capacity in public research institutions 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 public research institutions. Partnerships with and between other public research institutions are encouraged;

• Each institution may submit a maximum of three (3) applications for the Research Chair position in this particular call;

• Each Research Chair applied for, must be in alignment with the university’s Programme and Qualification Mix (PQM) as approved by the Department of Higher Education and Training, as well as the research expertise of the Science Council and/or National facility;

• The Chair-holder 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;

• Research Chairs are tenable at two Tiers. Tier 1 is for Chairs who are Established Researchers that are recognised internationally as leaders in their field and have received substantial international recognition for their research contributions. Tier 2 is for Chairs who are Established Researchers, 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;

• Candidates from abroad that are willing to spend at least 50% of their time within South Africa are eligible for consideration only at the Tier 1 level. The intention is to attract candidates, including African scholars and South Africans in the diaspora, who have distinguished themselves in their research fields. Only South African citizens and permanent residents will be considered at the Tier 2 level and will be required to reside full-time in South Africa for the duration of the award of the Research Chair.

• While all demographic groups may apply, preference will be given to Female, Black and Coloured candidates in the spirit of redress and equity. The
preferred candidates must first meet the minimum requirements stipulated in the selection criteria on Table 1 below.

- To ensure equitable distribution of Chairs, while all South African public universities may apply, preference will also be given to historically disadvantaged institutions and institutions that currently host less than 15 Chairs in the case of universities; provided they meet the minimum requirements for the call.

### 1.4. Accountability for SARChI Chairs

A Chair may be appointed by the university/science council/national facility, at the level of a full Professor or Associate 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 or the relevant research manager at the science council and national facility.

### 1.5. Profile of Candidates

The NRF will require the approved candidate for the SARChI Chair to enter into a five 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 plan will be reviewed every five years. Subject to satisfactory performance by the Chair, following the 5 year in-depth review, the grant may be renewed for a further 5 years for Tier 2 Chairs and up to 2 more 5 year cycles for Tier 1 Chairs. Therefore, the track record of the nominated candidate is therefore very important to the selection process and success of the Research Chair.

#### 1.5.1. Minimum requirements and key competencies

- A PhD degree in petroleum geoscience and engineering, or related field;
- Outstanding research track-record supported by relevant research outputs;
• Experience in the development and application of high quality research in specific focus areas of petroleum geoscience and engineering, with a view to informing national, regional and institutional policies and practices at both a national and international level;
• Advanced knowledge and expertise on petroleum geoscience and engineering education and training;
• Experience in capacity building to strengthen petroleum geoscience and engineering;
• International recognition as an expert in the field.

In addition to the above requirements, all candidates who are requested by the DVC of Research or their equivalent at South African public research institutions to apply for a Research Chair, must be established researchers. Applicants are expected to submit a relevant 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 allocated at a Tier 1 or Tier 2 level. The allocation will be based on their past research and innovation outputs, track record in supervising and mentoring postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows, as well as national and international recognition for their research contributions. The criteria that must be met by nominated candidates for approval at the Tier 1 or Tier 2 level are detailed in Table 1 below:
### Table 1: Criteria for SARChI Tier 1 and Tier 2 Research Chairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier 1 Research Chairs</th>
<th>Tier 2 Research Chairs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Should be appointable at the level of a full Professor benchmarked nationally;</td>
<td>• Should be appointable at the level of an Associate Professor or full Professor benchmarked nationally;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Should be an outstanding and innovative researcher whose accomplishments have made a major impact in their field;</td>
<td>• Should be an established researcher, with a strong research, innovation and human capital development output trajectory;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Should be recognised internationally as an undisputed leader in their field and/or have received substantial international recognition for their research contributions;</td>
<td>• Should have the potential to achieve substantial international recognition for their research contributions in the next five to ten years;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Should have a superior record in attracting and successfully supervising postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows, taking into account the practices of the field; and</td>
<td>• Should have demonstrated the ability to attract and successfully supervise postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Should reside full-time in South Africa for the duration of the Research Chair award. Candidates from abroad, including African scholars and South Africans in the diaspora, that are willing to spend at least spend 50% of their time within South Africa are eligible for consideration.</td>
<td>• Should reside full-time in South Africa for the duration of the Research Chair award. Candidates from abroad, including African scholars and South Africans in the diaspora, willing to reside in South Africa full-time for the duration of the Chair, are eligible for consideration.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2. Proposal Submission and Assessment Process

The NRF has entered into an agreement with the South African International Maritime Institute (SAIMI) to establish one (1) research chair in Petroleum Geoscience and
Engineering. The Research Chair called “Operation Phakisa Research Chair in Petroleum Geoscience and Engineering” will be funded in partnership with SAIMI and the DST. The broad objectives of the Research Chair are to strengthen research and innovation capacity in the areas of Petroleum Geoscience and Engineering.

2.1. Research Focus and Scope

This section of the framework and funding guide provides details of the research focus and scope of the DST-NRF/SAIMI - Operation Phakisa Research Chair in Petroleum Geoscience and Engineering.

Operation Phakisa was launched by government in June 2014 to fast track the implementation of specific large-scale programmes that have significant potential for economic growth and employment in South Africa. One such programme involves the unlocking of the potential of South Africa’s oceans, which has led to the launch of the Ocean Economy leg of Operation Phakisa in July 2014. Operation Phakisa: Oceans Economy focuses on four key areas: Aquaculture; Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration; Marine Transport and Manufacturing; as well as Marine Protection and Governance.

The Department of Higher Education and Training in collaboration with the South African International Maritime Institute (SAIMI) has, for that purpose, established five multi-stakeholder Skills Initiative Working Groups to ensure an effective response to skills development needed to grow the ocean economy. These Working Groups are aligned to the key focus areas of Operation Phakisa Oceans Economy. The mandate of the Skills Initiative Working Groups is to co-ordinate the implementation of the maritime and marine skills development initiatives in the 3-foot plans of each Operation Phakisa Oceans Economy delivery units.
The mandate of the Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration Skills Initiative Working Group is to develop the skills strategy roadmap for the industry and governance based on the activities related to the offshore oil and gas project life cycle. This skills strategy roadmap, which was finalised in December 2015, includes a mechanism for knowledge generation and human capacity building, which can be achieved through the establishment of university research chairs, amongst other things. One of the deliverables of this Working Group, therefore, is that of facilitating the establishment of Research Chairs within selected universities to drive knowledge generation, human capacity building and transformation within the Oil and Gas industry.

The Working Group had identified four critical areas in the Oil and Gas industry where capacity in South Africa is scanty and requires Research Chairs. These include:

- Petroleum Geosciences and Engineering;
- Drilling Engineering and Platform Technology;
- Marine and Ocean Geosciences; and
- Petroleum and Energy Resource Economics.

Petroleum Geosciences and Engineering has been identified a key area in which a Research Chair is urgently required. The other 3 Research Chairs are equally important but it has been recommended that the establishment of a Petroleum Geosciences and Engineering Research Chair should be considered first due to the need to increase capacity building and knowledge generation in this upstream area. The general scope of the Research Chair is thus to:

- **Advance growth in energy related research and capacity building in Petroleum Geoscience and Engineering.** The Research Chair should offer opportunities for postgraduate studies in one of the rapidly developing research area involving
petroleum geoscience and engineering in the discovery and management of oil and gas resources in South Africa.

- Promote significant research and Innovation of the host Institution regionally, internationally and connections to the public sphere. One of the strategies for achieving this goal is “to identify, establish and align its distinctive research niche areas and structures”.

Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration in South is still in its infancy in comparison to the potential hydrocarbon resources in and around South Africa. Existing skills development programmes in offshore Oil & Gas are not adequately staffed and have yielded limited capacity in student output.

A key driver to the need for increased skills development to support the production of energy and the maintaining of energy infrastructure, of which offshore exploration is a part. By the middle of this century the global demand for energy will have doubled compared to the beginning of the century. Increasing population growth, urbanisation, increase in motorised vehicles and higher living standards are likely to increase the total energy demand from 200 million barrels of oil equivalent per day in 2000 to approx. 400 million barrels of oil equivalent per day in 2050 (Shell Scenarios, International Energy Agency). Despite the increasing supply in renewable energy, the demand for fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas) is likely to grow by 70% until 2050 and oil and gas will still form the base of 50% of the world’s energy.

There are 30 offshore ventures registered in South Africa, according to the most recent petroleum exploration and production overview from PASA, and a 2013 base scenario from the global energy company Shell and the South African Oil & Gas Alliance, suggest that 31 of these venture companies will commence exploration offshore South Africa and 5 of them will enter into full development for oil and gas in at least the next 10 years. The
need for graduates/postgraduates with recognized skills, which is a global trend, is evident.

This rational for an increased capacity development in offshore Oil & Gas Exploration calls for the establishment of the Chair in Petroleum Geoscience with specific focus on:

2.1.1. Internationally recognized graduate and postgraduate training programme in upstream oil & gas exploration – content will include, but not limited to exploration geosciences and geophysics, reservoir engineering;

2.1.2. Development of collaborative links with the Oil & Gas Industry;

2.1.3. Internationally connected research in petroleum geoscience and/or engineering targeting the South African offshore environment;

2.1.4. Strong collaboration with the national R&D community in related fields such as seismic data processing, engineering, geochemistry.

2.2. Application, Review and Selection Process

The DST-NRF/SAIMI-Operation Phakisa Research Chair in Petroleum Geoscience and Engineering will be awarded in an open and competitive process. The application must include, (i) a motivation by the South African public research institution to host the Research Chair (ii) an eligible and suitable candidate for appointment to the Chair position; (iii) a research and activity plan with concomitant budget drafted by the approved candidate.

Each institution may nominate up to three candidates for the Chair position, who must submit a separate full proposal. The application(s) must be authored by the candidate(s) in consultation with the Institutions Deputy Vice-Chancellor or equivalent designation responsible for research.

Each 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 institution;

(iii) The alignment of the proposed Research Chair with the scope and priority areas described in Table 2 above, as well as the institution research strategy;

(iv) The potential of the proposed Research Chair to enhance the international research and/or innovation competitiveness within the discipline;

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

(vi) The research focus of the Research Chair;

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

(viii) Specific objectives, outputs and outcomes for the five-year period.

The approved candidate(s)\(^1\) must use the NRF Online Submission System (https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za/) to register and/or update her/his curriculum vitae and complete the application.

Since the SARChI Research Chair awards are made to the host institution, the application by the approved candidate must be supported through the electronic application process by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor responsible for research and Designated Authority (DA) at the university. Each university nominating a candidate for the SARChI Chair must submit the following documents through the online application:

- Institution’s Research Strategy;

\(^1\) 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.
- The university’s Programme and Qualification Mix (PQM) approved by the Department of Higher Education and Training;
- Details of current academic and research staff of the institution in the specific discipline; and
- Statistics on the institution’s research outputs and postgraduate students trained and graduated for the period 2012 to 2016, in the specific discipline.

2.3. Selection Criteria

2.3.1. Application to Host the Research Chair by Public Research Institutions

The selection of the applications will be based on (i) the readiness and suitability of the institution to host the proposed Research Chair, (ii) the strategic alignment of the proposed Research Chair, (iii) the motivation by the South African public research institution 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.

The application must therefore demonstrate the following:

- Alignment of the proposed Research Chair with the institution’s research strategy and PQM;
- Alignment of the proposed Research Chair’s focus with that of existing research activities or capacity;
- Institution’s 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);
• Reporting lines and location of the Research Chair within the institution’s 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, publications in the discipline of the Research Chair and postgraduate student supervision 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. of this document for Funding Levels).

The full proposal must also give specific details on:

• Proposed teaching\(^2\) to research time ratio;
• Research objectives for the five year period;
• Expected knowledge\(^3\) outputs in the first five year period;
• Expected human capital\(^4\) outputs in the first five year period; and
• Existing and planned collaborations in the first five-year period.

### 3. Management of the Research Chairs

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

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\(^2\) 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.

\(^3\) Peer-reviewed journal articles, peer-reviewed conference proceedings, scholarly books and book chapters, patents, invited keynote presentations, conference presentations etc.

\(^4\) Numbers of Masters and Doctoral graduates and completed postdoctoral fellowships.
3.1. Duration of the Research Chair

Tier 1 Research Chairs will be tenable for five years, renewable for two further five-year periods giving a total lifespan of 15 years, subject to satisfactory performance by the Chair following each five year in-depth review. Tier 2 Research Chairs will be tenable for five years, renewable for a further five-year cycle, giving a total lifespan of 10 years, also subject to satisfactory performance by the Chair following each five year in-depth review. Eligibility for renewal will be entirely performance-linked and Tier 2 Chairs may be upgraded to a Tier 1 after the first or second five-year funding period based on the recommendations of a five-year term review.

3.2. Management of Research Chairs

The management of SARChI grants is described below and illustrated (Figure 1). On accepting the award and signing the Conditions of Grant (CoG), 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 a Progress Report (PR) addressing the milestones and expected outcomes as presented in the research activity plan in the application.

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

3.3. Funding Levels

SARChI funding instrument provides initial awards of up to R2,680,000 and R1,680,000 per annum for Tier 1 and Tier 2 Chairs, respectively. Each award covers salaries\(^5\); postdoctoral fellowships and bursaries for postgraduate students; research operating costs; research equipment & infrastructure, and overheads for host institution. The guidelines for apportioning of the grant across these categories and the values of fellowships and scholarships are shown in Table 3.

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\(^5\) Salaries of the incumbent and limited administrative support
### Table 3: Guidelines for SARChI annual budget breakdown for Tier 1 and Tier 2 Research Chairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budget category</th>
<th>Sub-item</th>
<th>Cost pa (ZAR)</th>
<th>Minimum number of people</th>
<th>Maximum number of people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salaries</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>550 000 (Tier 2) to 700 000 (Tier 1)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Admin support</td>
<td>30 000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Assistants (per person)</td>
<td>30 000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fellowships</td>
<td>Postdoctoral Fellows (per person awarded pro rata)</td>
<td>200 000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bursaries</td>
<td>Doctoral (full time)</td>
<td>100 000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Masters (full time)</td>
<td>70 000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>40 000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research equipment or infrastructure</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>≤400 000</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Up to 30% of total budget</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Overheads</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Up to 10% of total budget</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 Research Chairs and Centres of Excellence (RCCE) Directorate of the NRF.

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

However, Tier 2 Chairs may apply for NRF grants as outlined in the Multiple Grants Eligibility Overview (http://www.nrf.ac.za/document/multiple-grants-eligibility-overview-july-2015)

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.

3.4. Payment of Grants
The operational value of the grant for year 1 of 5 for the awarded Research Chair will be released to the host institution upon receipt of the signed copy of the NRF ‘Conditions of Grant’ by the incumbent and paid upon the claim of expenses by the institution. Student funding will be made available to successful nominated postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows. Grants will thereafter be disbursed to the institutions on an annual basis, for the approved funding period, subject to the appointed Chair meeting the ‘Conditions of Grant’ and submitting a Progress Report.
3.5. Evaluation and Impact of Research Chairs

A baseline study of Research Chairs, their institutional and intellectual environments will be conducted with each round of new awards. These studies, together with the universities’ Strategic Research Plans and the Research Chair’s activity plan, will serve as the baseline to evaluate impact on the discipline and at the institutional level.

4. References


5. NRF Contact Persons

- Dr Nana Boaduo, Director: Research Chairs and Centres of Excellence, Tel: 012 481 4326; E-mail: nana.boaduo@nrf.ac.za
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