



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

**Process for Phase-out and Discontinuation of Research
Chairs**

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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, national research facilities and science councils by producing high quality postgraduate students, research and innovation outputs. The SARChI funding instrument attracts world-class established researchers to South African public universities and provides them with an environment that is conducive to conduct research and meet the objectives of SARChI.

Research Chairs are tenable at two Tiers. Tier 1 is for established researchers, preferably an NRF A or B-rated researchers who are full professors recognised internationally as outstanding leaders in their respective fields. Tier 2 is for established researchers who are either full or associate professors preferably with an NRF C- or P-rating. Tier 2 researcher should be under the age of 40 years for C rated researchers or 35 years for P rated researchers benchmarked nationally with a strong research, innovation and human capital development output trajectory. Tier 2 Chairs must have the potential to achieve substantial international recognition for their research contributions in the next five to ten years following the award of the Chair.

The funding cycle and term of appointment of a Research Chair is 5 (five) years, renewable for up to a second and third five-year funding term in the case of Tier 2 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 evaluation of the Research Chair activities, that is undertaken in year 4 (four) of the funding cycle. During the five-year term evaluation, Tier 2 Research 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 a Tier 1 level.

The five-year term evaluation consists of a self-evaluation report submitted by the Chair holder and supporting documentation submitted by the host institution. The peer evaluation process comprises two-stages and this entails evaluation by (i) remote reviewers and (ii) by a panel.

- (i) Remote reviewers are peers reviewers who are generally subject/area expert with relevant knowledge, experience and ability to exercise objective and fair judgement of the submission for the Research Chair, and to provide an

appropriate assessment of the Chair-holder's submission for further funding. Remote reviewers are generally sourced locally and abroad.

- (ii) A panel comprising experts and generalists convenes to evaluate submissions for further funding and Tier level upgrade. The panel bases their evaluation on remote reviewer reports and recommendations from the panellists; and makes a recommendation to NRF on whether or not to continue funding the Research Chair. This process enables informed decision making, through a fair and transparent process.

The Chair is renewed when there is a clear recommendation to continue funding the Research Chair for a further five-year funding cycle. However, when the SARChI Evaluation Panel makes a recommendation to discontinue funding for a Chair, an institutional visit by SARChI Funding Instrument management and panel 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 Evaluation Panel before a final decision may be made regarding termination or continued funding for a further five-year term.

A site visit is deemed unnecessary based on the recommendations of the panel, if a Chair has not graduated any doctoral/postgraduate students, the research output of the Chair is considered inadequate for an established researcher, and there is no qualified successor for sustainability of the Chair, a decision to discontinue funding may be finalised without a site visit. A site visit may be undertaken where the Chair has performed well in some aspects of the original proposal or where there is potential for the Chair to produce ground-breaking work or work that is of national or international benefit. A site visit should be undertaken only when deemed beneficial to make an informed funding decision.

In the event that after an institutional visit the NRF upholds the recommendation of the evaluation panel not to continue funding the Chair activities for a further five-year cycle, a process of phasing out of the Chair activities is implemented to ensure that postgraduate students receive the necessary bursary support to enable them to complete their respective degrees.

The process of phasing out of the Chair activities becomes effective when a Tier 2 Research Chair has completed the second five-year funding term and not recommended for upgrade to Tier 1 or a Tier 1 Chair has completed the third five-year funding term or a Tier 1 Chair is downgraded to Tier 2 at the end of the second five year funding term.

This document outlines the process followed for the five-year term evaluation of individual Chair holders' activities and provides guidelines for the phasing out processes to be followed in the event that a Research Chair is not recommended for continued funding for a further five-year term or a Research Chair has completed the respective funding cycles.

The Phasing out process will therefore be initiated when the following occurs:

- Tier 2 Research Chair has completed the second five-year funding term and not upgradable to Tier 1.
- Tier 1 or Tier 2 Research Chairs have completed the third and second five-year funding term respectively; and
- Tier 1 Research Chair has been downgraded to Tier 2 in the second five-year funding term.

2. REMOTE AND PANEL BASED FIVE YEAR EVALUATION OF RESEARCH CHAIRS

2.1. Written submissions for five-year term evaluation

During the fourth year¹ of each five-year funding cycle, an in-depth evaluation of the Chair will be undertaken to assess performance of the Research Chair over the funding cycle². The Chair holder will be required to submit, through the host university research management office, the following written documentations:

¹ If the incumbent started occupying the Chair in the first semester they will be reviewed in the second semester of the fourth year of the funding cycle. If the incumbent started occupying a Chair in the second semester, they will be reviewed in the first semester of the fifth year of the funding cycle. This is to ensure that Research Chairs know timeously if there will be continuous funding, or if there will be a further evaluation in the form of an on-site visit.

² It is the university's responsibility to know when their respective Chair holders' five year funding cycle ends and to confirm with the NRF when the Chairs will be reviewed.

2.1.1. Self-evaluation report

A self-evaluation report is a summative report on the research progress over the five year funding cycle and should address 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 patents, peer-reviewed research articles in accredited journals, books, chapters in books and artefacts (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 document <http://www.nrf.ac.za/about-nrf/corporate-divisions/kmc/information-sources>
- 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.
- Role of collaborators and value added by the collaboration.

Profile of the research team:

- Number and profile of South African postgraduate students (study level, race, gender and nationality) and post-doctoral fellows trained and mentored respectively.
- Number and profile (professional status) of the research team; and
- Number and profile of potential succession candidates mentored.

Additional funding leveraged:

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

NRF Rating status:

- Details on the incumbent's current NRF rating status and whether a higher rating status was attained during the tenure 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 Research Chair resides detailing the impact of the Research 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/strategy and budget for the next five year cycle

The report must include a proposed research plan/strategy for the next funding cycle of five years with a supporting budget. This research plan/strategy forms the basis against which the Research 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 self-evaluation review 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 Evaluation 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 Research Chair for an upgrade to a Tier 1 Chair.**

Please note: incomplete submissions will not be evaluated. It remains the responsibility of the institution/Designated Authorities to check the submissions for completeness and quality before submitting to the NRF.

2.2. Remote 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 four substantive evaluation reports from remote reviewers are obtained from peer researchers that are subject/area experts, drawn from the local and international research community. Peer reviewers evaluate the following:

- **Student support (postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows)**
Reports on the number and profile (study level, race, gender and nationality) of postgraduate students³ graduated and Post-doctoral fellows trained and mentored respectively.
- **Research outputs**
Evaluates reported progress against set objectives and milestones stipulated in the original grant proposal/application, specifically focusing on the progress in research activities and produced outputs including journal articles, patents, books, book chapters and artefacts.
- **Support from the host institution**
Evaluation informed by the benefit analysis reports by the institution (DVC Research) and other researchers in the field working in South Africa.
- **Funds leveraged from other sources**
Evaluate the extent to which the Chair holder was able to use the brand and prestige of SARChI to leverage funding in order to benefit research and support human capital development.
- **Research collaborations**
The nature and the extent to which established research collaborations expand and enhance the Chair activities.

³ To be aligned with DST Human Capacity Development plan and Ministerial Guidelines.

- **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 of Reviews and Evaluation (RE).
- **Downgrade of Tier 1 Chairs to Tier 2 level**
Assess whether a Chair is operating at a Tier 1 level and if not a downgrade will follow the evaluation criteria of Reviews and Evaluation.

2.3. Evaluation Panel assessment

Evaluation Panel members should comprise generalists who are knowledgeable in one or more aspects of the discipline of the Chair, and experts in the discipline of the Chair. The evaluation process will be guided by the remote reviewers' reports, covering the research focus of the Chairs under evaluation. Furthermore, panellists will be individuals with no direct association with any of the Research Chairs for which he/she is serving as a panellist. The assessment of the Chair's performance will take into consideration discipline-specific conditions and criteria with regard to research outputs.

The role of panel will be as follows:

- Review remote reviewer reports from the subject specific experts together with the Chair-holder's self-evaluation report and supporting documentation;
- Provide qualitative assessment of the Research Chair's performance and proposed research plan and activities, succession 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 whether or not to continue funding for the next five-year term, and where applicable the suitability for upgrade or downgrade.

At the panel meeting, each submissions will be evaluated by two or three assigned reviewers, referred to as discussion leaders, before being discussed by the Evaluation Panel. The 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 on the date of the evaluation of their submissions** to enable panel to be able to contact them telephonically to respond to questions from the Evaluation Panel or to clarify any matters that may assist in the evaluation process.

2.4. Evaluation Panel recommendations

The Evaluation Panel will make consensus recommendations taking into consideration the postal peer evaluation and the panel assessment. The Evaluation 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 funding with reservations, no further review required
- Recommended for continuation of funding 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 Evaluation Panel may make one of the following recommendations provided Chair holders meet the minimum requirements:

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

Satisfactory outcomes of the five-year evaluation of the Chair will render the Chair eligible for continued funding into the next five-year funding cycle. Where the Evaluation Panel does not recommend continued funding for a further five-year cycle an on-site review of the Research Chair will be undertaken for 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 Evaluation Panel recommendations do not support continued funding for the next five-year cycle. The on-site review will be undertaken following the completion of panel evaluation process. The purpose of the on-site review is to afford an opportunity for the SARChI Funding Instrument management and panel 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 Chair, 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, through the outcomes/feedback report, that emerged during the panel evaluation 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 or institutional Visit delegation

The site visit delegation will be constituted as follows:

- An external Chairperson;
- The two or three lead discussants that served on the Evaluation Panel;
- One or two subject specific experts drawn from the national or international research community if necessary;
- RCCE Directors responsible for SARChI management; and
- DST representative

The NRF 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;
- The DVC responsible for management of the Research Chair;
- The Dean of the faculty; and
- Head/s of the School/ Department.

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 Directors for Reviews and Evaluation (RE) and SARChI funding instrument management will brief the panel on the objectives of the review, 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 and decide on aspects and issues that will 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 Evaluation Panel will engage with the Chair holder and the host institution representatives 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 Evaluation 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 Evaluation Panel to engage with any other relevant key player, e.g., the students supported by the Chair-holder 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 Chair activities under review within 3 (three) weeks of the on-site review.

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 the Chair holder for a further five-year cycle, the NRF may in consultation with the DST, implement the following:

- Terminate Chair activities and the university loses the Research Chair. Based on strategic priorities, a call for a new Research Chair in the same field as the terminated Chair may be approved by the NRF Executive Director responsible for SARCHI.

Guiding principles:

- 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, 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 or have completed their full funding cycle, the following phase-out process will apply.

- The Chair will be funded for one further year for rounding off critical activities and/or for the university to take over funding of the Chair. In this final year of funding:
 - no new postdoctoral fellows, doctoral, masters and honours students will be supported;
 - only the current students of the Chair will be supported for the remainder of the duration of their respective studies and they will only be funded by the NRF for the minimum duration of their respective studies; and
 - running costs will be adjusted down.
- The host institution will be required to submit a revised budget proposal to the NRF within two months of having received the outcome from Reviews and Evaluation (RE) using the NRF template. The proposal will cover 50 per cent of the total budget to ease the transition. This will afford the host institution and Research Chair an opportunity to manage the transition. The proposal must outline the following:
 - A list of continuing postgraduate students and their respective years of study including details of interim measures that would be put in place by the host university to ensure continued supervision and mentorship until the students complete their studies (See table 1). Also detailed projections indicating breakdown of the amounts required for students to complete their studies.

Table 1: Student support for Phasing-out period of a Chair

Year 1 of phasing out a Chair	Year 2 of phasing out a Chair	Year 3 of phasing out a Chair
First and Second year Masters students	Second year Masters students only	No Masters students supported
First, Second and Third year Doctoral students	Second and Third year Doctoral students only	Third year Doctoral students only.

NRF contact persons

- Dr Makobetsa Khati, Executive Director: Research Chairs and Centres of Excellence (phone: 012-481 4022; email: Makobetsa.khati@nrf.ac.za)
- Mrs Anthipi Pouris, Acting Executive Director: Grants Management and Systems Administration (phone: 012-481 4240; email: Anthipi@nrf.ac.za).
- Dr Nana Boaduo, Director: Research Chairs (phone: 012-481 4326; email: nana.boaduo@nrf.ac.za)
- Ms Andisiwe Jukuda, Professional Officer: Research Chairs (phone: 012-481 4113; email: Andisiwe.jukuda@nrf.ac.za)
- Mr Simon Lotz, Director: Grants Management and Systems Administration (phone: 012 481 4124; email: simon.lotz@nrf.ac.za)
- Ms Judith Mahlanya, Professional Officer: Grants Management and Systems Administration (phone: 012 481 4063; email: judith.mahlanya@nrf.ac.za)