



**SOUTH AFRICAN RESEARCH CHAIRS INITIATIVE
(SARChI) Consolidated Generic Framework**

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1. Contextual background

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), flagged the shortage of high-level skills as a significant constraint in the development of the economy and society. Accordingly, South Africa must produce a preponderance 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*”.

In order to achieve the above-mentioned goal, 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 research excellence and innovation at South African public universities, Research Councils and National Research Facilities. In particular, the SARChI funding instrument is aimed at increasing scientific research capacity through the development of human capacity and stimulating the generation of new knowledge. SARChI is also intended to support and advance transformation of South African society in terms of demographics and the knowledge economy, so that there is equitable and inclusive participation in the generation of knowledge and the generation of such knowledge translates into socio-economic benefits.

For the purpose mentioned above and to date, a cumulative total of 233 Research Chairs under the auspices of the SARChI funding instrument have been awarded and are operational in various disciplines and research fields at mostly South African public universities. Thus, the SARChI funding instrument has been successful in retaining leading South African researchers and attracting leading foreign researchers and expatriate researchers to South Africa. However, the SARChI has not been as successful in ensuring racial and gender equity. For instance, females comprise 40% of the Chair-holders while Blacks; in particular Africans and Coloureds are grossly underrepresented, collectively accounting for only 14% of all Chair-holders.

1.1. Types of Research Chairs

The funding instrument comprises of four types or categories of Research Chairs

- i. **DSI-NRF SARChI Chairs:** Basic Research Chairs fully funded by the DST and NRF with a primary focus on knowledge advancement and human capacity development. These Chairs are awarded following an open and competitive process to all qualifying universities and their respective nominated candidates who meet the minimum requirements of a SARChI Chair. Currently, 205 out of the 233 (87%) of awarded Chairs fall in this category.
- ii. **DSI-NRF- Third Party Co-funded SARChI Chairs:** These Chairs are funded by the DST-NRF in partnership with the private sector, other government departments, Science Councils and Universities, respectively. Nominations and applications for this Chairs are invited almost exclusively from black South Africans and females from other demographic groups, provided they meet the minimum requirements of a SARChI Chair. Accordingly, these Chairs are preferentially awarded to almost exclusively black South Africans followed by females from other demographic groups provided they meet the minimum requirements of a SARChI Chair. Thus, these Chair are also awarded following a competitive and rigorous process that upheld the SARChI standard. However, applications are generally only opened to specific demographic groups mentioned above, with a view to redress inequalities, address and accelerate transformation in partnerships with likeminded co-funding entities, such as those mentioned below, and to also ensure equitable and representative participation in the knowledge enterprise project. These Chairs also focus on advancement of knowledge and human capacity development. Currently there are 28 such Chairs respectively held in partnerships with Nedbank; the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET); the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC); the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR); the Sugar Milling Research Institute (SMRI) and University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN); the Lund Mission Society (LMS) and the University of Western Cape (UWC).
- iii. **Research and Development Research Chairs:** These Chairs are funded by the DST and NRF in partnership with industry partner(s). The research focus of these Chairs have a strong leaning towards evidenced based interventions and include the Maths

Education Numeracy Chairs co-funded by the First Rand Foundation and the Anglo American Chairman's Fund. Currently only 4 Chairs fall in this category.

- iv. **Bilateral or Trilateral Research Chairs:** These Research Chairs are held in partnership with 1 other country or 2 other countries, respectively, and have a research focus on international or global priority issues of interest to collaborating countries. These Chairs are only tenable at Tier 1 and there are currently 6 research Chairs in this category, which include the SA-Swiss Bilateral Chair in Global Environmental Health; SA-UK Bilateral Chair in Ocean Science and Food Security; SA-UK Bilateral Chair in Social Protection for Food Security; SA-UK Bilateral Chair in Political Theory, SA-Namibia Bilateral Chair in Astronomy and Astrophysics and SA-Kenya-UK Trilateral Chair in Transformative Innovation, the 4th Industrial Revolution and Industrial Development.

Research Chairs are recruited and nominated through these types of Calls;

- i. **Open Call:** This call allows candidates from any research field to apply.
- ii. **Directed Call:** The DSI-NRF and/or funding partner(s) stipulate specific research areas for the call.
- iii. **Closed Call:** This is a call made to a particular demographic group (e.g. females or Black South Africans) or to a specific university that would have entered into a partnership with the NRF through a Memorandum of Agreement (MTA) to co-fund a Chair.

1.2. Aims and Objectives of the SARChI Chairs

The main goal of the SARChI funding instrument 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. The SARChI objectives are:

- a) Expand the scientific research and innovation capacity of South Africa;
- b) Improve South Africa's international research and innovation competitiveness, while responding to social, economic and transformation imperatives of the country;
- c) Attract and retain excellent researchers and scientists;
- d) Increase the production of Masters and Doctoral graduates; and
- e) 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

The following principles will inform the awarding of a SARChI Research Chair:

- a) Application for the Research Chair is administered through an open call only accessible to a South African public university/institution. Each institution may nominate up to three (3) candidates, unless stated otherwise, for the SARChI call who must submit separate applications. While all demographic groups may apply, preference will be given to females and Blacks; in particular African South Africans and Coloured candidates because they are grossly underrepresented in the SARChI Funding Instrument.
- b) To ensure equitable distribution of Chairs, while all South African public universities are encouraged to apply, preference will also be given to historically disadvantaged universities and those universities that currently host less than 15 Chairs; provided they meet the minimum requirements for this call.
- c) The university/institution may also nominate and submit applications from eligible candidates from abroad, specifically females of any race or Africans and Black South Africans of any gender in the diaspora. Applicants from abroad will only be considered for Tier 1 Research Chairs and must be willing to spend 50% of their time at the South African university.
- d) Each application for the Research Chair must be in alignment with the university's Programme and Qualification Mix (PQM) approved by the Department of Higher Education and Training;
- e) The Chair-holder will be expected to dedicate at least 80% of their time conducting research and in the process supervising an average of 10 Masters and Doctoral students per annum as well as mentoring Emerging Researchers or postdoctoral fellows. Demographics of postgraduate students supervised by the Chair at all levels (i.e. Honours¹, Masters and Doctoral) must adhere to the Ministerial guidelines on improving equity. Thus, at least 80% of each level of students supervised by the Chair should be Black (including African, Coloured and Indian/Asian South Africans), 55% women and 4% people with disabilities. In terms of nationality, at least 87% of students across all bursaries and scholarships provided by the NRF to the Chair must be South Africans (including permanent residents), 5% should be students from Southern Africa Developmental

¹ Only South African citizens will be funded at an Honours level.

Community (SADC), 4% should be students from the rest of Africa and 4% should be students from non-African countries.

- f) Research Chairs are tenable at two Tiers. Tier 1 is for Chairs who are established researchers and are recognised internationally as leaders in their respective fields 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 have the potential to achieve substantial international recognition for their research contributions in the next five to ten years;
- g) Candidates appointed without an NRF rating are encouraged and required to get rated within the first funding cycle.
- h) If the Research Chair is taken up by a candidate who is a current academic staff member, consistent with the SARChI principle of additionally, the university must immediately initiate a process to fill the vacated position with a suitably qualified candidate.

1.4. Accountability for Chairs

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor responsible for research at the South African host university will be directly accountable for the Research Chair. The chair will fit into the normal management structures of the host institution.

1.5. Profile and minimum requirements of the SARChI candidate

1. The candidate must have a doctoral qualification in a relevant field
2. The candidate must be an Associate or a full professor² at the time of application
3. Must be an established researcher, recognised nationally in their respective research field
4. Must have an extensive research profile, including peer reviewed journal articles
5. Must have an extensive student supervision record and the ability to attract, recruit and train postgraduate student in the field of study that they are applying for.

² Candidates that are still applying for professorship at their respective institutions should not apply until these have been approved.

2. Review process for the South African Research Chairs Initiative

Proposals submitted by universities to host Research Chairs will be reviewed via a two-tier process, namely; postal peer reviews by subject specific experts with relevant expertise in the respective applications' research area and panel reviews comprising of individuals from broad disciplines covering the directed and thematic areas identified for this call for SARChI applications. The review panels comprising of individuals from broad disciplines will draw on the expert reviewers' written feedback and make recommendations to the NRF for the approval of research programmes and plans and on the suitability of the candidate for appointment as a SARChI Chair. Such review panels will be comprised of respected individuals with knowledge and insights of the Higher Education System and the NSI and will consider the recommendations of the review panels and select the Research Chairs to be awarded taking into account the strategic objectives of SARChI and the transformation needs of the sector.

2.1. Review principles of the SARChI Funding Instrument

2.1.1. Confidentiality

In line with the NRF's principles on confidentiality, openness and fairness in the peer review process, SARChI treats information contained in all submitted documents as confidential. All individuals involved with the review and awarding process will be bound to confidentiality. Where a reviewer identifies a need to consult with another expert on a specific aspect of a proposal, the NRF must first be consulted and the confidentiality of the proposal and anonymity of the applicant and the proposal must both be maintained.

2.1.2. Access to Information

The NRF complies with the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA). The NRF will keep a signed written record of all reviewers' reports and a written record and voice recordings of Review Panel meetings.

Reviewers' comments submitted to the NRF may be provided to an applicant, on a confidential and anonymous basis to allow successful applicants to respond to issues raised as part of the peer review process in an attempt to benefit the research programme and to improve future applications for unsuccessful applicants.

2.1.3. Conflict of Interest

In facilitating a fair and unbiased review process, in line with NRF procedures, the SARChI funding instrument requires all individuals involved in the review processes to declare any personal and/or professional interests in applications under review. This will enable the NRF and Review Panel Chairs to identify and manage any conflicts of interest.

Conflicts of interest may arise from close links with, or interest in, an institution from which a funding proposal is being considered, for example, employment or academic collaborations; commercial or financial interests; non-financial interest where a member has other interests that may be thought to influence them, either intentionally or unintentionally; and personal or family interests. A potential conflict of interest may arise where the reviewer is located at the same department or institution as the applicant(s). An absolute conflict of interest is considered to arise where, the reviewer is a close friend or is closely related to the applicant(s), is directly involved in the work the applicant proposes to carry out, or where the co-applicant(s) or project partner(s) is working closely with the reviewer, for example as, a co-author or as a co-supervisor for a postgraduate degree, or has done so in recent years.

In a case of declared conflict of interest with a proposal(s), the individual is released from assessing the specific proposal(s) and requested to recuse him/herself from the discussion of the specific proposal(s).

2.1.4. Ethical Consideration

The review process relies on the integrity and accountability of reviewers. Reviewers will be selected based on their expertise relating to one or more aspects of the proposal(s) under review. However, reviewers must also be aware of subtle biases that can influence their judgment and recommendations and ensure impartiality at all times.

During the review of a proposal, a reviewer may discover ethical issues that must be considered and addressed by the Chair. It remains the responsibility of the host university to ensure that all research undertaken by SARChI Chairs have the necessary ethical approvals.

2.1.5. Commitment to Excellence

SARChI drives and maintains quality and excellence in research and innovation through its rigorous review process and careful selection of suitable reviewers based on their academic and research expertise and, understanding of the South African Higher Education System and National System of Innovation (NSI).

Quality reviewer reports add value to the peer review process by providing balanced reports with clear comments and recommendations, a justification for overall rankings and constructive criticism and feedback to applicants.

2.1.6. Alignment

SARChI is a national strategic intervention of government; therefore applications shall clearly indicate alignment between the proposed research area and national research and social development priorities. To ensure sustained university commitment and prioritisation of research areas in which Research Chairs are applied for, the proposed research area shall be aligned with the host university research strategy.

The funding instrument is aimed at increasing research and scientific innovation at South African universities through the development of human capacity and stimulating the generation of new knowledge. The Research Chairs based at the Universities, Comprehensive Universities and Universities of Technology will therefore align with the mission of the respective institution.

2.2. Proposal Submission and Assessment Process

Applicants will be awarded in an open and competitive process. Each university is eligible to nominate three (3) candidates for a Call, unless otherwise stated. However, each candidate must submit a separate full proposal. The application(s) must be authored by the candidate(s) in consultation with the university's Deputy Vice-Chancellor responsible for research. Each application should give details on:

- a) The readiness and commitment of the university to provide an enabling environment³ to ensure the success of the Research Chair;

³ By providing office /laboratory space, infrastructure and academic support. The institution must also provide leadership indicating the reporting lines and commit to providing financial (directly or indirectly) support.

- b) Strengths, capabilities, strategic environment and competencies of the university;
- c) The alignment of the proposed Research Chair with the required scope, as well as the university research strategy;
- d) The potential of the proposed Research Chair to enhance the international research and/or innovation competitiveness within the discipline;
- e) The potential of the research to impact on the social and/or economic development of the country;
- f) The potential of the research to inform national policy and strategy in the selected discipline.
- g) The research focus of the Research Chair;
- h) A proposed plan on how the Research Chair will fulfil SARChI objectives, including the strategic considerations mentioned in the university proposal; and how it will deliver on the university research strategy; and
- i) Specific objectives, outputs and outcomes for the five-year period.

The nominated candidate(s)⁴ must use the NRF Connect System (<https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za/>) to register and/or update his/her *curriculum vitae* and complete the application.

The application must be endorsed by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor responsible for research and the Designated Authority (DA) at the university. Each university nominating a candidate for the SARChI Research Chair must submit the following documents through the online application:

1. University's Research Strategy;
2. The university's Programme and Qualification Mix (PQM) approved by the Department of Higher Education and Training;
3. Details of current academic and research staff of the university in the specific discipline; and
4. Statistics on university research outputs and postgraduate students trained and graduated for the period 2014 to 2018, in the specific discipline.

2.3. Criteria for the selection

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 his/her qualifications

⁴ 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.

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.

The full proposal must also give specific details on:

1. Proposed teaching ⁵to research time ratio;
2. Research objectives for the five year period;
3. Expected knowledge outputs ⁶in the first five year period;
4. Expected human capital ⁷outputs in the first five year period; and
5. Existing and planned collaborations in the first five-year period.

Successful candidates will be awarded based on the following criteria:

Table 1: Criteria for SARChI Tier 1 and Tier 2 Research Chairs

Tier 1 Research Chairs	Tier 2 Research Chairs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should be appointable at the level of a full Professor benchmarked nationally; • 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 successfully supervising post-graduate students and postdoctoral fellows, taking into account the practices of the field; and • Should reside full time in South Africa for the duration of the Research Chair award. Candidates from abroad, specifically African 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should be appointable at the level of an Associate Professor or full Professor benchmarked nationally; • Should be an established researcher, with a strong research, innovation and human capital development output trajectory; • Should have the potential to achieve substantial international recognition for their research contributions in the next five to ten years; • Should have demonstrated the ability to attract and successfully supervise postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows; and • Should reside full-time in South Africa for the duration of the Research Chair award.

⁵ 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.

⁶ Peer-reviewed journal articles, peer-reviewed research reports, policy briefs, peer-reviewed conference proceedings, scholarly books and book chapters, patents, invited keynote presentations, conference presentations etc.

⁷ Numbers of Masters and Doctoral graduates and completed postdoctoral fellowships.

<p>scholars and Black South Africans in the diaspora that are willing to spend at least 50% of their time within South Africa are eligible for consideration.</p>	<p>Candidates from abroad, specifically African scholars and Black South Africans in the diaspora willing to reside full-time in South Africa for the duration of the Chair are eligible for consideration.</p>
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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 university.

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 period 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. A tier upgrade will be informed by the recommendations of a five-year term review panel and approved by the NRF executive.

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 proposal⁸. At the end of each financial year the incumbent will be required to submit to the NRF an Annual Progress Report (APR)

⁸ Should the Research Chair want to change the scope of the research, then a new proposal will have to be written and submitted to the NRF for another panel review. Research Chairs cannot change the title of the Chair without formal request and approval by the NRF.

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*.

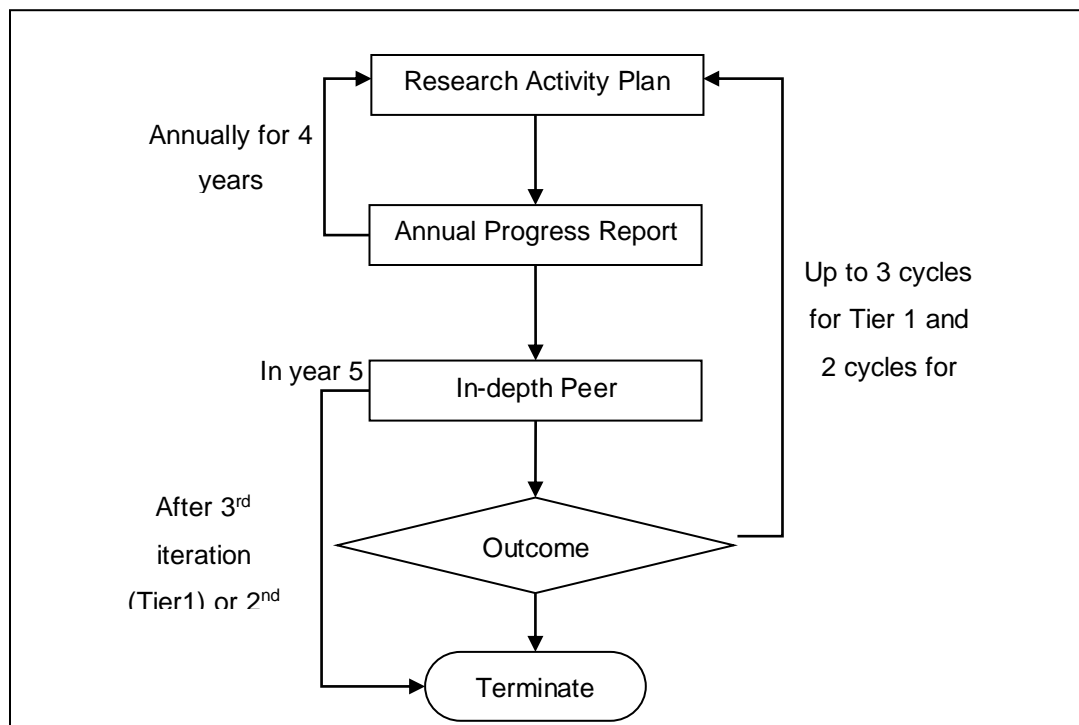


Figure 1: Management of Research Chairs over the tenure of the Research Chair

3.3. Funding Levels

SARChI funding instrument provides initial awards of up to R2, 180,000 for Tier 1 Chairs and R1, 180,000 for Tier 2 Chairs. The award covers salaries⁹; postdoctoral fellowships; 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 2.

⁹ Salaries of the incumbent and limited administrative support

Table 2: Guidelines for SARChI Annual Budget Breakdown

Budget category	Sub-item	Cost per annum (ZAR)	Minimum number of people	Maximum number of people
Salaries	Chair	550 000 (Tier 2) to 700 000 (Tier 1)	1	1
	Admin support	30 000	0	1
	Research Assistants (per person)	30 000	0	3
Fellowships	Postdoctoral Fellows (per person awarded pro rata)	200 000	1	Variable
Research equipment or infrastructure	Variable	≤400 000	Not applicable	Not applicable
Running	Variable	Up to 30% of total budget	Not applicable	Not applicable
University Overheads	Variable	Up to 10% of total budget	Not applicable	Not applicable

It is important to note that Table 2 provides a budget guide that states 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) and GMSA Directorate of the NRF.

Tier 1 Research Chairs will not be eligible for additional NRF parliamentary core grant funding. 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>). All incumbents can apply for grants for large equipment through the NRF Infrastructure Funding Instrument.

The Chairs are therefore expected 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. Postgraduate Student Funding Policy

In 2021, the NRF implemented the *DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Funding Policy* wherein postgraduate funding allocations are underpinned by the principles of equity of opportunity; representivity; prioritisation; and enhanced access, success and throughput. The *DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Funding Policy* gives effect to the Ministerial guidelines for improving equity in the distribution of DSI-NRF Bursaries and Fellowships (2013). Citizenship, age, gender and disability are considered in the allocation of funding, with transformation of the postgraduate cohort as the core objective. Financial need is included as a criterion for determining the level of funding. To attract and retain a diverse range of students, funding levels cover the full cost of study for students who meet the required criteria.

The NRF's minimum academic requirements for postgraduate funding are as follows:

- **For first-time honours funding** - A minimum average of 65% for major subjects in the final undergraduate year of study;
- **For first-time master's funding** - A minimum average of 65% for all subjects at the honours level OR a minimum average of 65% for all subjects of a postgraduate diploma OR a minimum average of 65% for all final year subjects of a four-year degree; and
- **For first-time doctoral funding** - A minimum of 65% at the master's level.

South African citizens or permanent resident applicants who have **graduated from 2021 academic year with a classification of Pass will not be allowed to apply in the current call**, only applicants with a numerical pass mark may apply for NRF funding. However the following individuals will be allowed to apply without a numerical mark:

- South African citizens or permanent residents who graduated prior to 2021 academic year with a 'Pass' and 'Pass with a distinction'. Applicants with a

'Pass' should enter the 'Pass' under the academic achievement section of the application form, and those with 'Pass with a distinction' should enter 75%;

- South African citizens or permanent residents with a 'Pass with distinction'. These applicants should enter 75% mark in the application form; and
- International applicants applying for masters and doctoral scholarships. These applicants should enter a 'Pass' in the application form.

The eligibility criteria for funding at Full Cost of Study (FCS) and Partial Cost of Study (PCS) listed in Table 3 apply to all first-time applicants for honours, master's and doctoral funding.

Table 3: Eligibility criteria for first time applicants for the DSI/NRF Student Funding for FCS and PCS

Study level	Full Cost of Study		Partial Cost of Study
	Exceptional Achievers	Financially Needy and Applicants with a Disability	Other
Honours	Average of $\geq 75\%$ mark for major subjects in the final year of undergraduate study	Average of $\geq 65\%$ mark for major subjects in the final year of undergraduate study	Average of $\geq 65\%$ mark for major subjects in the final year of undergraduate study
	Applicants for honours funding must be 28 years of age or younger in the year of application i.e. applicants must not be over 28 years by 31 December 2022. Only South African citizens and permanent residents are eligible for honours scholarships.		
Master's	Minimum average of 75% for all subjects at the honours level; OR Minimum average of 75% for all subjects for a Postgraduate diploma level; OR Minimum average of 75% for final year subjects of a four-year degree	Minimum average of 65% for all subjects at the honours level; OR Minimum average of 65% for all subjects for a Postgraduate diploma; OR Minimum average of 65% for final year subjects of a four-year degree	Minimum average of 65% for all subjects at the honours level; OR Minimum average of 65% for all subjects for a Postgraduate diploma; OR Minimum average of 65% for final year subjects of a four-year degree
	Applicants for master's funding must be 30 years of age or younger in the year of application i.e. applicants must not be over 30 years by 31 December 2022.		
Doctoral	Minimum average of 75% for Master's degree	Minimum average of 65% for Master's degree	Minimum average of 65% for Master's degree

Applicants for doctoral funding must be 32 years of age or younger in the year of application i.e. applicants must not be over 32 years by 31 December 2022.

Only South African citizens and permanent residents who are either financially needy, living with a disability or exceptional academic achievers are eligible for FCS. Applicants that are eligible for FCS can be awarded at PCS due to budget constraints. The NRF reserves the right not to make an award or adjust a grant under any circumstances from PCS to FCS. The PCS funding will be awarded to South African citizens, permanent residents and 5% of international students.

The entry age requirement is 28, 30 and 32 years for honours, masters and doctoral studies respectively, in the year of application, regardless of first year of registration.

For more information on the DSI/NRF postgraduate student policy, please go onto the NRF online (<https://www.nrf.ac.za/nrf-for-post-graduate-students/bursaries-scholarships/>).

3.5. 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 NRF '*Conditions of Grant*' by the incumbent and paid upon the claim of expenses by the university. Student funding will be made available to successful nominated postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows. 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 (APR).

4. Performance monitoring and evaluation of Research Chairs

In addition to the rigorous review process in selecting a host university and suitable candidates, on-going performance monitoring and evaluation strategies have been developed to mitigate the risk of not attaining programme objectives.

The following are the main inputs to be used in monitoring and evaluating performance:

- i. Annual Progress Reports (APRs) submitted by the Chair holder by 28 February of each year

- ii. DVC institutional level impact report
- iii. Five-year review of each Research Chair
- iv. Site visits to the Research Chairs at host universities by the NRF funding instrument management team

4.1. On- going performance monitoring

On-going monitoring of the functioning and performance of Research Chairs is achieved through APRs. The report should address: (i) milestones and expected outputs as presented in the incumbent's original grant proposal, (ii) postgraduate student and postdoctoral fellow support, (iii) research outputs, (iv) support from host institution and the NRF, (v) funds leveraged from other sources and (vi) challenges and constraints on performance and progress. For years one to four, reports must be submitted through the NRF on-line system no later than the **28 February** of the subsequent year annually.

In addition, the NRF Programme management team together with the host university research management team will undertake annual on-site monitoring visits during years one to four of the cycle, visiting Tier 2 Chairs to assess operational conditions and performance of the Chairs as well as to identify and address problems that may hamper productivity and performance of the Chair. In particular, institutional support with regard to provision of infrastructure, administrative and financial support as committed in university application proposals to host Chairs. Furthermore, to discuss areas of concern with regard to performance as identified from submitted APRs as well as under expenditure of awarded grant. Similar visits will be undertaken for Tier 1 Chairs during the third year of existence of the Chairs.

4.2. Performance Evaluation

4.2.1. Five year review of Research Chairs

During the fifth year of the funding cycle, an in-depth review of the Chair will be undertaken to assess the performance of the Chair over the five-year period. The process will be managed by the Reviews and Evaluation Funding Instrument management team. Incumbents due for

review will be notified through the university Research Office ¹⁰as early as **November**¹¹ of the fourth year of the cycle. The Chair holder will be required to submit via the host university research management office a self-assessment report taking a summative format and reporting on research progress over the five year cycle and addressing the following:

1. Research Achievements

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

2. Research Outputs

- A consolidated list of research outputs that arose directly from the funding provided. Outputs include publications (patents, journals, books and chapters in books), artefacts (any research output not classified as a publication). The measurements and weighting of the research outputs will be discipline specific as informed by peers in respective disciplines and listed in the NRF Knowledge Management and Evaluation KRAB document.
- Research Chairs under review must also provide the journal impact factors, citation indices and any other quality applicable in their context.

3. Research Collaborations

- Information on the nature and extent ¹²of established collaborations nationally and internationally.

4. Profile of Research Team

- Number and profile (study level, race, gender and nationality) of postgraduate students and post-doctoral fellows trained and mentored, respectively;
- Student throughput;
- Number and profile (professional status) of the research team;
- Initiatives for the development and support of young and mid-career researchers.

¹⁰ It is the responsibility of the institution's research office to know which of its Research Chairs are going for the five year review, and to notify the incumbent and to notify the NRF.

¹¹ Those that will be reviewed in the first semester of the fifth year. Those that will be reviewed in the second semester of the fifth year should be notified by the Research Office by March of the fifth year.

¹² It is in the interest of the incumbents to state clearly what the role of the collaborations was, and what outputs came as a result of the collaboration.

5. Benefit analysis

- Details on the incumbent's NRF rating status during the period of the Chair;
- A brief benefit analysis. This analysis should present evidence for the effect the incumbent's work has had on the following:
 - The research team;
 - The faculty; and
 - The host institution

Examples of such evidence include student fate reports (letter from students describing the kind of support received from the Chair holder and benefits of being part of that research team), testimonials written by university research management and credible researchers commenting on impact of the Chair.

6. Leveraged funds

- A summary of additional funds leveraged which are related to Chair activities.

7. Research plan

- Most importantly, the five year report must have a proposed research plan and budget for the next funding cycle. Should there be a radical change from the initial proposal of the Chair, then the incumbent must clearly give reasons for this.

The evaluation will be conducted by a panel of subject experts using submitted documents. Chair holders must update their *Curriculum Vitae* and submit all documents on the NRF online system. Additional inputs into the evaluation process will include APRs submitted for the period under review. During the evaluation, incumbents are required to be available to be contacted telephonically for questioning if necessary. Assessment will take into consideration discipline-specific conditions and criteria with regard to research outputs. Different areas of performance will be weighted according to their importance as measured against the programme objectives.

In addition to performance, evaluation will be based on the institutional support of the Chair over the five year period. Satisfactory outcomes of the evaluation will render the Chair eligible for continued funding into the next five-year cycle while unsatisfactory results will result in an onsite review that will determine the continuation or termination of the SARChI grant at the end of year five. Outcomes of the review will be communicated in writing by the NRF to the host university Research Office.

4.2.1.1. Review Panel recommendations

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

- Highly recommended / continue funding
- Recommended / continue funding
- Recommended / continue 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 Review Panel may make one of the following recommendations provided Chair holder meet the minimum requirements:

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

Satisfactory outcomes of the five-year review of the Chair will render the Chair eligible for continued funding into the next five-year funding cycle.

4.2.2. Upgrading of Tier 2 Chairs to Tier 1 Chairs

A Tier 2 Chair holder may apply for an upgrade to Tier 1 ¹³during their five year review after the first or second funding cycle. The two processes *viz.* the five year review of the Chair and a Tier 2 upgrade will be conducted simultaneously by the same Review Panel. However, decisions for the two processes will remain independent of each other. For example, a positive outcome of a five-year review of a Tier 2 Chair will not automatically qualify a Research Chair for an upgrade to a Tier 1 Chair.

¹³ A Research Chair can only be upgraded, and no downgrades will be permitted. That is, if a Tier 1 cannot perform, their Chair will be terminated, not downgraded to Tier 2.

Whilst the panel recommendation will inform the NRF management on whether the Research Chair can be upgraded, the Research Chair and the institution should meet the minimum requirements for a Tier upgrade¹⁴:

- Students graduated and trained must be more than what is expected (both in Chair holder and the team). Research Chairs are expected to support a minimum of 10 postgraduate students annually. However, the Chair holder will be judged on the number of students that they have successfully graduated over the five year period.
- The Research Chair must have published in high impact journals by themselves and with students. Human capacity development is an integral part of the SARChI funding instrument, and Research Chairs will be favourably assessed if they are able to groom students.
- International leadership: invitation to be a guest contributor in a high impact journal, Keynote speaking at a reputable conference etc. or any other quality that shows leadership in the research field. It is the responsibility of the Chair holder to include all achievements and recognition in the self-assessment report because assessment is based on what is in the report.
- A clear research activity plan for the next five years showing research gap that will be filled, milestones, expected outcomes and methodological thrust. More importantly, the research plan must outline how the proposed research plan is pushing the frontiers of knowledge.
- Rating: Although voluntary, we encourage Research Chairs to be rated by the end of the funding cycle.
 - The self-assessment must show all leveraged funding. This shows the review panel that the Research Chair can be sustained beyond the life span of a Chair.

4.2.3. Onsite review

However, when the SARChI review panel makes a recommendation to discontinue funding for a further five-year term based on the written submission and the written postal peer evaluation reports, it may be necessary to gain further information through the onsite review. The purpose of an onsite review is to seek clarity from the Chair holder and the host institution; and to give them an opportunity to respond to concerns and questions raised by the Review Panel before

¹⁴ Tier upgrade will be relative to the research field of the Chair, and so will be the measurement and weighting of the research outputs.

a final decision may be made regarding continuation or discontinuation of funding for a further five-year term.

4.2.3.1. Composition of on-site Review Panel

The Review Panel will be constituted as follows:

- An external Chairperson;
- The two or three lead discussants that served on the Review Panel;
- One or two additional subject specific experts drawn from the national or international research community if necessary;
- NRF Directors responsible for SARChI and Reviews and Evaluation funding instruments; 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 Chairs;
- The Dean of the faculty; and
- Head/s of the School/ Department.

4.2.3.2. Format for on-site review

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

1) Panel briefing meeting

The NRF Directors for the Reviews and Evaluation (RE) and the 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.

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) 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.

4) Question and answer session 1

The Review 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.

5) Viewing of research infrastructure where applicable

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

6) Question and answer session 2

If necessary, a second question and answer session will enable the Review Panel to engage with any other relevant key player, e.g., the students supported by the Chair-holder to address any additional areas of concerns and/or matters requiring clarity.

4.2.4. Phase-out of Chair activities

In the event that after an onsite review, the NRF upholds the recommendation of the review panel not to continue funding the activities of a Chair for a further five-year cycle, a process of phasing out of the Chair will be implemented. The process of phasing out of the Chair activities also becomes effective when a Tier 2 Research Chair has completed the second five-year funding term and not upgradable to Tier 1 or a Tier 1 Chair has completed the third five-year funding term. The phase-out of Chair activities will be managed in consultation with the

university DVC responsible for management of the Research Chairs to ensure compliance with the universities' conditions of employment.

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:

- a) No new postdoctoral fellows, doctoral, masters and honours students will be supported;
- b) 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.
- c) The host institution will be required to submit a new adjusted 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:
- d) 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 must be provided. Also a detailed projections indicating breakdown of the amounts required for students to complete their studies.

Table 4: 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.

4.3. Replacement of Research Chairs

Upon receiving notification of the Chair holder's intention to vacate the Chair, the university must immediately notify the NRF in writing, accompanied by the university's proposed interim plan for supporting the Chair. Within six months of the Chair being vacated, universities must submit to the NRF detailed a *Curriculum Vitae* and Research Plans of no more than three candidates identified to fill the position to ensure that the position is filled within that year. Universities are expected to pre-screen candidates against set criteria of Tier levels before submitting their applications to the NRF for peer review. Assessment of the candidate's credentials and research plan will be conducted by at least three independent subject experts and outcomes of the review will be communicated in writing by the NRF to the host university. The original proposal of the previous incumbent will also be looked at to ensure that the new candidate is within the scope of the Research Chair.

In its fifteen (15) year funding cycle, a Tier 1 Chair can be replaced 2 times. Each time there is a replacement review, the institution will be expected to submit 3 candidates who could possibly replace the Chair. In its ten (10) year funding cycle, a Tier 2 Chair can be replaced once. The institution will be expected to submit 3 candidates who could possibly replace the Chair.

5. Appeals

The NRF recognizes the right to an appeal of any of its stakeholders who has a vested interest in the manner in which the SARChI review panel conducts its business, and hereby institutes operational procedures to that effect. The Appeals Policy is applicable to any disputes resulting out of:

- i. Approval of the nominated candidate for the Research Chair position; or
- ii. Approval of the nominated candidate at a Tier 1 or Tier 2 level; or
- iii. Approval of the proposed research plan and activities.

5.1. Criteria for appeals process

The following process must be followed by an appealing institution:

- 5.1.1. The DVC responsible for research at an institution may lodge a written appeal if it considers the result of a particular SARChI panel review outcome to be seriously out of line with the institution's own assessment of the nominated candidate and proposed research plan. Individual nominees have the right to appeal, but must do

so through the DVC of research. No appeal documents will be considered for a review if it does not come through the institution.

- 5.1.2. Written appeals must be lodged by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor responsible for the management of the Research Chairs or such other duly authorised official of the host institution **within two months** of the date on the feedback letter.
- 5.1.3. Appeals shall be administratively processed by SARChI staff in the Research Chairs and Centres of Excellence (RCCE) directorate of the NRF.
- 5.1.4. The letter of appeal will be considered only if it explains the reasons for the appeal; and is based on one or more of the following issues related to the process of the SARChI peer review:
 - i. The decision taken by the panel and NRF is not congruent with the information before it; or
 - ii. Evidence of bias on the part of one or more peer reviewers; or
 - iii. Conflict of interest on the part of one or more peer reviewers; or
 - iv. Lack of appropriate expertise within the review panel; or
 - v. Factual error(s) made by one or more reviewers that could have altered the outcome of review substantially; or
 - vi. Failure by the peer review panel to follow the prescribed procedures in reaching its decision.
- 5.1.5. A letter of appeal based solely on differences of scientific opinion will not be accepted

A letter of appeal that does not meet the above criteria and/or does not include the concurrence of the relevant authority of the host institution will not be considered.

5.2. Process of Appeal

Upon receiving an appeal request from the institution's DVC responsible for research, the RCCE management will assess the validity of the appeal. Should the appellant's appeal be approved, then it will be referred to the Chairperson of the Appeals Committee.

5.2.1. The Appeals Committee composition

Members of the Appeals Committee shall be:

- i. Individuals who are experts and generalists in the research fields under appeals.
These individuals will also have substantial research and/or research management

experience and have an understanding of the South African Higher Education System and the National System of Innovation (NSI);

- ii. The NRF Director of SARCHI
- iii. One member who has considerable experience with the SARCHI review processes and has not been involved in the case being appealed;
- iv. NRF staff members from RCCE and Reviews and Evaluations directorates shall be in attendance to provide administrative and logistical support to the Appeals Committee.
- v. A scribe that will be responsible for recording the appeals proceedings.

The appeal will be heard by the Appeals Committee, whose decision will be final.

5.2.2. Considerations of an Appeal

Valid appeals take the following into account when adjudicated by the Appeals Committee:

- a) The SARCHI proposal submitted by the host institution;
- b) Written reports by postal reviewers;
- c) Written reports by the lead discussants in the Review Panel;
- d) Meeting records as well as recommendations given by the Review Panel and decisions taken by the NRF executives;
- e) Written report of the assessor for the Review Panel;
- f) The letter of appeal submitted by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor responsible for management of Research Chairs or such other duly authorised official of the host institution; and any further documentation for clarification of issues.

5.2.3. Things that will not be considered

- a) Information coming to light subsequent to the submission of the original application will not be considered by the Appeals Committee. Accordingly, only those documents on which the original decision was based will be considered by the Appeals Committee.
- b) No new documentation on research outputs achieved subsequent to the submission of the SARCHI proposal for review may be submitted. Any scholarly achievements of the applicant postdating the submission will not be taken into account in an appeal.

- c) Other reports received from reviewers, e.g., those solicited by the nominated candidate and/or host university to support the appeal, will not be considered by the Appeals Committee.

5.3. Terms of Reference

The mandate of the Appeals Committee is:

- i. To consider appeals lodged against outcomes of the SARChI panel review;
- ii. To review the correctness and completeness of the process followed in specific applications against which an appeal has been lodged;
- iii. To review the and pronounce upon the fairness and objectivity in the interpretation of reviewers' reports;
- iv. To consider whether or not the criteria for SARChI panel review was interpreted correctly;
- v. To make a pronouncement on the fairness and correctness of the review outcome that is being appealed against;
- vi. To refer the case back to the Reviews and Evaluation and RCCE Executive Directors and to point out specific shortcomings in the process that warrant review in cases where the Appeals Committee is at variance with outcomes of the SARChI panel review; and
- vii. Based on the evidence presented and its analysis thereof against the principles set out in this policy, the Appeals Committee will make a final and binding decision.

5.3.1. Power and authority of the Appeals Committee

Furthermore, the Appeals Committee will have the power and authority

- i. to call upon any person (including NRF staff and review panellist) to attend in person at an appeal hearing and/or furnish it with any document or material that the Appeals Committee considers necessary;
- ii. To determine who should bear the costs associated with the attendance of any person at the appeal hearing.

NRF contact persons

- Dr Makobetsa Khati, Executive Director: Research Chairs and Centres of Excellence (phone: 012-481 4022; email: MA.Khati@risa.nrf.ac.za).
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