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Framework & Funding Guide for co-funded DSI-NRF SARChI Chairs

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1. Strategic Background

1.1. Context

The *White Paper on Science and Technology* (1996) and the *National Research and Development Strategy* (2002) 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 abovementioned goal, the South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) was established in 2006 by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) (which, on the 26 June 2019, was rebranded the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI)). This funding instrument is managed by the National Research Foundation (NRF) through a contractual agreement with the DSI. 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, SARChI 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, 258 Research Chairs have been awarded to 22 Universities and the National Research Facilities in various disciplines of scientific research, including the Natural Sciences, Engineering, Humanities and the Social Sciences. Of the 258 Research Chairs awarded since, 216 have been filled by institutions, and are operational. Forty two (42) Chairs exited the system, 5 Chairs have been rescinded and 37 have been phased out and/or ended their funding cycle of 15 years. Of the operational Chairs 87% were recruited from South African public universities. Thus, the SARChI has been successful in retaining leading South African researchers and attracting leading foreign researchers and expatriate researchers to South Africa. The SARChI funding instrument in 2021 for the first time since inception has been successful in ensuring gender equity. For instance, females comprise 52% of the Chair-holders, however racial equity has not been achieved as Blacks; in particular Africans and Coloureds are grossly underrepresented, collectively accounting for only 32% of all Chair-holders.

It is in this context that the NRF has to constantly explore innovative approaches to grow and strengthen the SARChI, especially in the face of budgetary constraints. Consequently, the NRF has initiated the establishment of international bilateral chairs with European countries (e.g. United Kingdom and Switzerland) and has also established co-funded chairs in partnership with other government departments (e.g. Department of Higher Education and Training), other Science Councils (e.g. South African Medical Research Council) as well as the private sector (e.g. SASOL and Nedbank). To further strengthen this quadruple helix of collaboration between (i) the South African government departments and their respective implementing agencies or science councils, (ii) universities, (iii) private sector partners, and (iv) international partners; the NRF has explored establishment of co-funded chairs with respective universities **to accelerate transformation** at like-minded universities and within the National System of Innovation (NSI) through the SARChI.

1.2. **Aims and Objectives of co-funded SARCHI Chairs**

The core focus of co-funded Chairs is to assist willing universities and other public research entities to accelerate transformation and maintain research excellence consistent with requirements of the SARCHI in research areas aligned to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and National Priorities such as South Africa's Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) priority outcomes and the DSI-driven Grand Challenges (Table 1). For this reason, the main aim of co-funded SARCHI Chairs is also to strengthen and improve research and innovation capacity of public universities in order to produce high quality postgraduate students and research outputs. The objectives remains as follows:

- 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.

Table 1: International, National and NRF Priority Areas to which the Chairs must be aligned[#]

SDGs	MTSF Priority Outcomes	DSI's Grand Challenges	NRF Research Agenda
Goal 1: No Poverty	none	none	Health and Wellbeing
Goal 2: Zero Hunger	Consolidating the social wage through reliable and quality basic services (P3)	Bio-economy: Agriculture	
Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being	Education, skills and health (P2)	Bio-economy: Health Innovation	
Goal 4: Quality Education	Education, skills and health (P2)	none	Smart Connected Economy and Society
Goal 5: Gender Equality	Social cohesion and safe communities (P5)	none	The Environment and Us
Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation	none	none	Resource Security (Resilience and Sustainability)
Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy	none	Energy Security	Particles and Forces: minute to massive
Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth	Economic transformation and job creation (P1)	none	The World of Work (WoW)
Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	none	Bio-economy: Industry and Environment	Smart Connected Economy and Society
Goal 10: Reduced Inequality	Social cohesion and safe communities (P5)	none	People, Places and Settlements
Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities	Spatial integration, human settlements and local Government (P4)	none	
Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production	Consolidating the social wage through reliable and quality basic services (P3)	none	The Environment and Us
Goal 13: Climate Action	none	Global Climate Change	
Goal 14: Life Below Water	none	none	Origins and Futures
Goal 15: Life on Land	none	none	

Goal 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions	A capable, ethical and developmental state (P6)	Human and Social Dynamics	Nation Building
Goal 17: Partnerships to achieve the Goal	A better Africa and world (P7)	none	none

#The Research Chair must be aligned to at least one SDG and at least one MTSF priority outcome and/or one DSI Grand Challenge listed above.

1.3. Guiding Principles

The following principles will inform the awarding of the co-funded Chair:

- The host institution should have secured or be willing to contribute **50%** of funding towards the Chair for **its duration** should it be awarded. This must be preceded by a signed Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) between the host institution and the NRF, clearly stating the amount that will be contributed by each party to the Chair and a detailed concept note with gap analysis of the proposed research area/field. The **minimum duration** of such a contribution by each party should be **5 years**.
- Application for the Chair is administered through a closed call only accessible to a South African public university/institution, which would have signed the abovementioned MoA with the NRF. **Applicant university/institution may only nominate female and Black candidates, especially Africans and Coloureds. Nominated candidates must meet the minimum requirements for a SARCHI Chair (Table 2)**. All applications will be subjected to the same robust peer-review and adjudication processes for the SARCHI.
- The research proposal must be aligned to at least one SDG and at least one MTSF priority outcome and/or one DSI Grand Challenge (see Table 1 above).
- The applicant university/institution may nominate up to three candidates for the Chair position, who must submit separate full proposals, which

must either be from eligible females of any race or Blacks, in particular Africans and Coloureds of any gender.

- The applicant 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.
- Each application for the research Chair must be in alignment with the university's Research Strategy, and its Programme and Qualification Mix (PQM) approved by the Department of Higher Education and Training;
- 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. Honours, Masters and Doctoral) must adhere to the Ministerial guidelines on improving equity. Thus, at least 90% of each level of students supervised by the Chair should be Black (including African, Coloured and Indian/Asian South Africans), 55% women and 1% people with disabilities. In terms of nationality, at least 95% 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 Community (SADC), and the rest of world including Africa. For the 5% students from SADC countries and the rest of the world – focus will be on the alignment with the African continental agenda and countries with which South Africa has bi- and multilateral agreements.
- Research Chairs are **tenable at only Tier 1 level (Table 2)** but panel may recommend Tier 2 for excellent and exceptional candidates. 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;

- Candidates appointed without an NRF rating are encouraged and required to get rated within the first funding cycle.
- If the 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.
- Where such replacement candidates are not young, Black or female, the university must develop a succession plan designed to develop a range of possible candidates with competitive capacity within two cycles of a Research Chair award.

1.4. Accountability for Chairs

A Chair may be appointed by the university, 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.

1.5. Profile and Minimum Requirements of Candidates

The NRF will require the approved candidate for the Research Chair, for each cycle of 5 year funding, to enter into a 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. Therefore, the track record of the nominated candidate is very important to the selection process and success of the Research Chair.

1.5.1. 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 Professor¹ 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 and other recognised knowledge outputs
5. Must have an extensive student supervision record and the ability to attract, recruit and train postgraduate students in the field of study that they are applying for.

1.6. Criteria for the selection

The broad objectives of these Research Chairs are to accelerate transformation at interested universities/institutions committed to co-fund the Chair, and to also strengthen research and innovation capacity in areas aligned to SDGs and national priorities. Following the peer-review of the full proposal and the *curriculum vitae* of the candidate, Chairs may be approved **only** at the Tier 1 level. This will be determined by the candidate's past research, knowledge 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 level is detailed in Table 2 below. An added advantage for a candidate to be nominated/recommended at a Tier 1 level, would be that the candidate must be typically an A or B rated researcher. Chairs who meet the Tier level criteria but are not rated at the time of application, must be rated within the first five (5) year funding cycle.

¹ Candidates that are still applying for professorship at their respective institutions should not apply until these have been approved.

Table 2: Criteria for SARChI Tier 1 Research Chairs

Tier 1 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 a 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 postgraduate 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 scholars and Black South Africans in the diaspora that are willing to spend at least 50% of their time in South Africa are eligible for consideration.

1.7. **Application, Review and Selection Process**

The co-funded DSI-NRF SARChI Chairs will be awarded in a closed process. The application must include, (i) the motivation by the South African public university/institution to host the Research Chair (ii) the suitability of a candidate for appointment to the Chair position; (iii) a research and activity plan with concomitant budget drafted by the nominated candidate. The host university/institution may nominate up to three candidates for the Chair position who must submit separate full proposals. 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:

- The readiness and commitment of the university/institution to provide an enabling environment to ensure the success of the Research Chair:
 - 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 university structure.
- Strengths, capabilities, strategic environment and competencies of the university/institution;
- The alignment of the proposed Research Chair with the scope and priority areas described in Table 1, as well as the research strategy of the university/institution;
- The potential of the proposed Research Chair to enhance the international research and/or innovation competitiveness within the discipline;
- The potential of the research to impact on the social and/or economic development of the country;
- The research focus of the Research Chair;
- A proposed plan on how the Research Chair will fulfill SARChI objectives, including the strategic considerations mentioned in the university proposal; and how it will deliver on the university research strategy; and
- Specific objectives, outputs and outcomes for the first five-year period of funding.

The nominated candidate(s)² must use the NRF Online Submission System (<https://nrfs submission.nrf.ac.za>) to register and/or update her/his *curriculum vitae* and complete the application.

Since the Chair is awarded to the host university/institution, the application(s) by the approved candidate(s) must be supported through the electronic application process by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor responsible for research and Designated Authority (DA) of the university/institution. Each university/institution nominating a

² No commitment should be given to the candidate(s) by the university before the NRF has officially informed the University of the Award by means of a review panel outcomes letter.

candidate for SARChI must submit the following documents through the online application:

- University Research Strategy;
- 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 university in the specific discipline; and
- Statistics on university research outputs and postgraduate students trained and graduated in the specific discipline over the past five years (e.g. 2015-2019).

The selection of candidates will be based on the merit of each candidate's full research proposal. This will include the strength of the candidate's profile, including her/his qualifications and experience, knowledge outputs in the discipline of the Research Chair and postgraduate student supervision track record. This will also include an assessment of the candidate's research and activity plan in respect of their ability to deliver on SARChI objectives, as well as the proposed budget (see Section 3.3. of this document for Funding Levels).

The full proposal must also give specific details on:

- Proposed teaching³ to research time ratio;
- Research objectives for the first five year period;
- Expected knowledge⁴ outputs in the first five year period;
- Expected human capital⁵ outputs in the first five year period; and
- Existing and planned collaborations in the first five-year period.

³ Teaching of postgraduate students only. Note: Chair-holders may not spend more than 20% of their time on undergraduate teaching and/or management responsibilities not related to activities of the Research Chair.

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

⁵ Numbers of Masters and Doctoral graduates and completed postdoctoral fellowships.

2. 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.

2.1. Duration of the Research Chair

Tier 1 Research Chairs will be tenable for five years, renewable for two further five-year cycles giving a total lifespan of 15 years, subject to satisfactory performance by the Chair following each five year in-depth review. Eligibility for renewal will be entirely performance-linked.

2.2. 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 four, 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*.

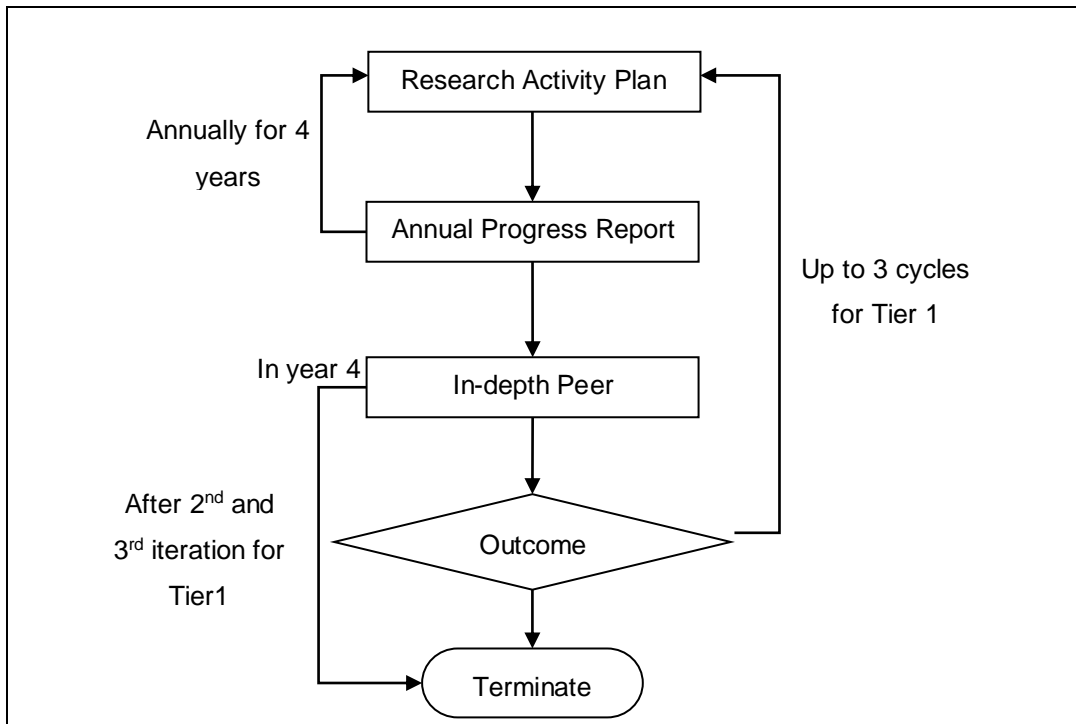


Figure 1: Management of Research Chairs over the tenure of the Research Chair.

2.3. Funding Levels

SARCHI funding instrument provides initial awards of up to R2, 680,000 for Tier 1 Chairs. The award covers salaries⁶; 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 3.

⁶ Salaries of the incumbent and limited administrative support

Table 3: Guidelines for SARChI annual budget breakdown for Tier 1 Research Chairs

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 3 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) Directorate of the NRF.

Tier 1 Chairs will not be eligible for additional NRF parliamentary core grant funding. Incumbents must apply for grants for large equipment (above R400k) 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-2018>)

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.

2.4. 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 4: 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 ≥ 75% mark for major subjects in the final year of undergraduate study	Average of ≥ 65% mark for major subjects in the final year of undergraduate study	Average of ≥ 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;	Minimum average of 65% for all subjects at the honours level;	Minimum average of 65% for all subjects at the honours level;
	OR Minimum average of 75% for all subjects for a Postgraduate diploma level;	OR Minimum average of 65% for all subjects for a Postgraduate diploma;	OR Minimum average of 65% for all subjects for a Postgraduate diploma;
	OR Minimum average of 75% for final year subjects of a four-year degree	OR Minimum average of 65% for final year subjects of a four-year degree	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/>).

2.5. 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. . 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 a Progress Report.

Postgraduate students will have to apply for funding under the NRF postgraduate funding policy

2.6. 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.

2.7. Ethical Clearance

It is the responsibility of the grantholder, in conjunction with the institution, to ensure that all research activities carried out in or outside South Africa comply with the laws and regulations of South Africa and/or the foreign country in which the research activities are conducted. These include all human and animal subjects, copyright and intellectual property protection, and other regulations or laws, as appropriate. A research ethics committee must review and approve the ethical and academic rigor of all research prior to the commencement of the research and acceptance of the grant.

The awarded amount will not be released for payment if a copy of the required ethical clearance certificate, as indicated in the application, is not attached to the Conditions of Grant.

Please also refer to the “Statement on Ethical Research and Scholarly Publishing Practices” on the NRF website at <https://www.nrf.ac.za/media-room/news/statement-ethical-research-and-scholarly-publishing-practices>.

3. 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).
- Dr Gugu Moche, Executive Director: Grants Management and Systems Administration (phone: 012-481 4182; email: IO.Moche@risa.nrf.ac.za).
- Dr Nana Boaduo, Director: South African Research Chairs Initiative (phone: 012- 481 4013; email: NKK.Boaduo@risa.nrf.ac.za).
- Mr Simon Lotz, Director: Grants Management and Systems Administration (phone: 012 481 4124; SM.Lotz@risa.nrf.ac.za).
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- Ms Judith Mahlanya, Professional Officer: Grants Management and Systems Administration (phone: 012 481 4063; email: JK.Mahlanya@risa.nrf.ac.za).