



**Global Knowledge Partnerships Programme
Implementation Framework for the 2025 Academic Year**

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NRF Partners for the Global Knowledge Partnerships Programme



science & innovation

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1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose

This Global Knowledge Partnerships (GKP) Implementation Framework document presents the guiding principles and key approaches required to integrate and incorporate a period of three (3) to eighteen (18) months of international experience opportunities into the research and education programme of exceptional doctoral students, Postdoctoral Research Fellows (PDRFs), and Early Career Researchers (ECRs)¹ who are funded² by the National Research Foundation (NRF). The exceptional doctoral students, PDRFs and ECRs will either be based at a local university or pursue a joint degree³ or undertake short-term research visits at an international institution to advance their research projects aligned to specific thematic areas.

The objectives of the GKP programme are to:

- Accelerate the career pathways of exceptional PDRFs and ECRs to become leading international researchers with strengthened academic rigour and competitiveness through increased international exposure, collaboration and mentorship opportunities;
- Strengthen the NRF's capacity to identify and sustain partnerships that enhance international opportunities for exceptional doctoral students, PDRFs, and ECRs, working in close collaboration with higher education and research institutions;
- Create platforms that increase international networking opportunities for a globally engaged cohort of exceptional doctoral students, PDRFs and ECRs; and
- Contribute to the NRF's transformation imperatives, as guided by the approved Transformation Framework.

1.2. Background

International exposure for doctoral students, PDRFs and ECRs is an integral component of the NRF's strategic goal to create an internationally competitive, transformed, and representative researcher cohort. The NRF will continue to monitor, offer, source and exploit new, and realign existing programmes to facilitate opportunities for outstanding doctoral

¹ Early Career Researchers are young researchers in knowledge institutions (normally younger than 35 years of age), with a doctorate completed within the previous five years, who, on the basis of potential, are considered likely to become future established researchers in their field. These researchers are employed full-time at their institutions.

² Some mobility opportunities are open to both NRF and non-NRF funded scholars, however, priority will be given to NRF funded scholars.

³ A joint degree is a single doctoral degree awarded by joint decision of a South African University and its international partner university at the successful completion of a jointly defined and entirely shared doctoral study programme. A joint degree requires that all participating institutions are responsible for the entire programme and not just their own separate parts.

students, PDRFs, and ECRs in South Africa to spend between three (3) to eighteen (18) months abroad, i.e., in Africa and beyond.

The programme is premised on the need to accelerate the development of a diverse young researcher cohort into world-renowned experts and a globally competitive workforce through the provision of platforms and pathways that offer opportunities for outstanding young researchers to access international networks, mentorship, global research funding streams, industry, and infrastructure. The programme will be realised through the guiding framework of the GKP programme, a DSI-NRF initiative which was implemented in 2020.

Through this initiative, the NRF, working in close collaboration with local and international partners, in addition to the higher education sector in South Africa, intends to guide and monitor opportunities for outstanding NRF-funded doctoral students, PDRFs and ECRs to spend a significant period abroad at universities, research performing entities, science councils and in industry. It is envisaged that this significant period spent abroad will accelerate the NRF's promotion of societal and knowledge impact of research, both in South Africa and international partner countries. Knowledge impact refers to scientific advances in understanding, interpretation, methods, theory, application, and related advances that bring about positive change within and/or across disciplines and fields. Societal impact⁴ refers to the value that research adds to society across various spheres, whether social, economic, or environmental.

2. Components of the GKP programme

The design of the GKP programme is premised on a sustainable partnership model comprising interdependent and interrelated components being:

- South African researchers: Leverage and consolidate international exposure outputs for NRF-funded programmes, i.e., Research Chairs, that are aligned with the GKP. A holistic measuring approach across NRF programmes will be developed to streamline and quantify international exposure opportunities for doctoral students, PDRFs and ECRs;
- South African universities: Leverage international networks of universities in partner countries to create international placement opportunities; and
- Funders and Partners: Local public funding entities (including NRF, DHET, TIA, etc.), science councils, industry and international funders and networks. The programme will also engage local partners for potential re-alignment of funding opportunities (e.g., the nGAP programme).

⁴ Access the 'NRF Framework to Advance the Societal and Knowledge Impact of Research' document on the NRF website

Various modalities are used to provide a significant number of international placement opportunities for exposure for exceptional NRF-funded doctoral students, PDRFs, and ECRs. A number of existing and new opportunities are being adapted and identified to expand the intent, advance current and revised NRF offerings, and to solicit support and own initiatives from the universities where the doctoral students are registered or PDRFs and ECRs are based. This includes fostering, upscaling and leveraging partnerships in support of robust, scholarly international exposure.

3. International training opportunities under the GKP programme

3.1. Pre-doctoral programmes

3.1.1. Fulbright Foreign Student Programme (FFSP)*

The FFSP in partnership with the NRF supports the Visiting Student Researchers (VSR) to undertake non-degree doctoral research training for a maximum period of twelve (12) months at a university in the United States of America (USA). Applicable research fields supported include Science, Engineering and Technology (SET), and Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH). For more information, please visit the FFSP website at <https://za.usembassy.gov/fulbright-foreign-student-program/>

3.1.2. NRF- Mandela Institute for Development Studies (MINDS) mobility programme

The NRF in partnership with the MINDS is enabling a joint postgraduate scholarship and Exchange programme for Africa. Through the Exchange programme, NRF-funded students under the NRF-MINDS Scholarship programme may apply for short-term research visits of one (1) to three (3) weeks or three (3) to twelve (12) months at an African-based academic institution. For more information, please visit the MINDS website at <https://minds-africa.org/>.

3.1.3. NRF- Mathematics of Information Technology and Complex Systems (Mitacs) mobility programme*

The NRF-Mitacs mobility programme is a co-funding partnership that makes provision for funding, training and networking opportunities for NRF funded doctoral students. The objective of this partnership is to strengthen international research collaboration between South African and Canadian companies and universities. NRF-funded doctoral students may undertake short-term research visits of between twelve (12) to twenty-four (24) weeks at a Canadian-based academic institution. This opportunity is offered through the Mitacs Accelerate

⁵ * This mobility opportunity is open to both NRF and non-NRF funded scholars.

International and Mitacs Globalink Research Award programme. Doctoral students must be pursuing their research in a field of study linked to one of the Mitacs broad thematic research areas. The broad thematic research areas are:

- Advanced Computing;
- Achieving Net Zero;
- Global Health; and
- Open theme: Social and Scientific Innovation

For more information, please visit the Mitacs website at <https://www.mitacs.ca/en>.

3.1.4. NRF- Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) mobility programme

- i. Students receiving NRF-DAAD in-country master's and doctoral funding may apply for a **short-term research fellowship** for research training spanning three (3) to six (6) months in Germany. Further information and the application details of these short-term research fellowships can be obtained from daad@wits.ac.za.
- ii. Students receiving NRF-DAAD in-country funding may also apply to participate in one (1) of six (6) **interdisciplinary summer schools** in Germany. Further information and the application details can be obtained from daad@wits.ac.za.

3.1.5. DAAD Research Mobility Grants programme

The primary aim of this programme is to promote research projects within the context of doctoral programmes through the provision of mobility grants. Excellently qualified doctoral candidates under specified disciplines may apply for funding to advance their research projects at a state or state-recognised institution of higher education in Germany or a non-university research institute, which is carried out in coordination with an academic adviser in Germany. The mobility grant may span up to twelve (12) months, but the actual duration will be decided upon by the selection committee and is dependent on the research project and applicant's work schedule. For more information, please visit the DAAD website at https://www.daad.org.za/en/find-funding/scholarship-database/?type=a&origin=1&subjectgroup=0&q=one-year&status=0&page=0&onlydaad=1&language=en&id=0&pg=1&detail_to_show=57140602

3.1.6. Young Scientists Summer Programme (YSSP)*

The International Institute of Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) offers diverse opportunities to students from the member organisation countries such as the annual YSSP. Through the YSSP, doctoral students undertaking their research using systems analysis methodology will

advance on their research projects under the supervision of an IIASA-linked researcher for the duration of three (3) months (July – August) at IIASA in Vienna, Austria.

In 2022, seventeen (17) African countries participating in the Science Granting Councils Initiative (<https://sgciafrica.org/councils/>) became the new Sub-Saharan African Regional Member Organisation (SSARMO), which is a first regional member of IIASA. Candidates based in SGCI countries are encouraged to apply for the YSSP.

For more information, please visit IIASA website at <https://iiasa.ac.at/train-with-us/yssp-young-scientists-summer-program>

3.1.7. Global Young Scientists Summit (GYSS)*

The NRF in Singapore hosts the annual GYSS with the aim of providing doctoral students an opportunity to interact with and learn from Nobel Laureates and world-renowned scientists as they discuss global issues relating to how science and technology can pave the way towards a brighter future. Up to twenty (20) speakers are scheduled to speak over a five (5) day period, with candidates being able to engage in thought-provoking plenary lectures and panel discussions.

Candidates may either choose to be a participant or a viewer in the programme which is held over a period of five (5) days. All attendees (i.e., viewers and participants) would have access to the live plenary lectures, panel discussions, Q&A sessions, expo exhibition, and networking platforms. In addition, participants will also participate in informal sessions with their pre-selected speaker and showcase highlights of their research through a short video and stand a chance to win attractive prizes. For more information, please visit the GYSS website at <https://gyss.nrf.gov.sg/>

3.1.8. Sub-Saharan African Systems Analysis Centre (SASAC) mobility programme

The NRF in partnership with the British Council makes provision for three (3) year scholarships through the SASAC doctoral programme for students, as part of the International Science Partnerships Fund (ISPF). This programme seeks to harness and strengthen the intellectual capacity of students and supervisors from universities based in Science Granting Councils Initiative (SGCI) participating countries, and in partnership with UK institutions and IIASA. Students funded under the SASAC doctoral programme will have an opportunity to undertake a short-term research training of up to 3 months under the supervision of a UK and IIASA supervisors, to advance their NRF funded research projects. These students may also apply to participate in the 3 months YSSP programme hosted annually by IIASA in Austria.

For more information, please consult the NRF Postgraduate Scholarship Framework document which is accessible on the NRF website at <https://www.nrf.ac.za/>

3.2. Postdoctoral Research Fellows and Early Career Researchers Programmes

3.2.1. Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS)

The JSPS hosts annual HOPE meetings wherein young scholars from selected countries within the Asia-Pacific and African regions are afforded an opportunity to engage in interdisciplinary discussions with Nobel laureates and other distinguished scientists pioneering the frontiers of knowledge. Held over a period of one (1) week (annually around March) in Japan, the HOPE meetings also present a great platform for creation of collegial networks with peers from the participating countries. For more information, please visit the JSPS website at <https://www.jsp.go.jp/english/e-hope/index.html>

3.2.2. Global Young Scientists Summit (GYSS)*

The NRF in Singapore hosts the annual GYSS with the aim of providing PDRFs an opportunity to interact and learn from Nobel Laureates and world-renowned scientists as they discuss global issues relating to how science and technology can pave the way towards a brighter future. Up to twenty (20) speakers are scheduled to speak over a five (5) day period, with candidates being able to engage in thought-provoking plenary lectures and panel discussions. Candidates may either choose to be a participant or a viewer in the programme which is held over a period of five (5) days. All attendees (i.e., viewers and participants) would have access to the live plenary lectures, panel discussions, Q&A sessions, expo exhibition, and networking platforms. In addition, participants will also participate in informal sessions with their pre-selected speaker and showcase highlights of their research through a short video and stand a chance to win attractive prizes. For more information, please visit the GYSS website at <https://gyss.nrf.gov.sg/>

3.2.3. NRF-Mitacs mobility programme*

In addition to the doctoral related mobility opportunities stated in section 3.1.3, NRF-funded PDRFs may undertake short-term research visits of between twelve (12) to twenty-four (24) weeks at a Canadian-based academic institution. This opportunity is offered through the Mitacs Accelerate International and Mitacs Globalink Research Award programme. PDRFs must be pursuing their research in a field of study linked to one of the Mitacs broad thematic research areas. The broad thematic research areas are:

- Advanced Computing;
- Achieving Net Zero;
- Global Health; and
- Open theme: Social and Scientific Innovation

For more information, please visit the Mitacs website at <https://www.mitacs.ca/en>

3.2.4. South African Women in Biotechnology Programme - International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (SAWBP-ICGEB)

South African women postdoctoral fellows undertaking research in Biotechnology and attached to the ICGEB in Cape Town will have an opportunity to spend between three (3) to six (6) months abroad at the ICGEB laboratories in Trieste, Italy or New Delhi, India. Applicants interested in the SAWBP-ICGEB programme should apply under the NRF Freestanding, Innovation and Scarce Skills Postdoctoral Fellowships (indicating ICGEB as the institution of choice). Further information on this short-term research fellowship may be accessed at: <https://www.icgeb.org/activities/fellowship/>

4. Eligibility criteria

4.1. Eligibility criteria for doctoral students, PDRFs and ECRs

To be eligible, individuals must:

- Be a South African citizen or permanent resident⁶, (however, this requirement is not applicable to students funded under the NRF-MINDS scholarship programme⁷, SASAC scholarship programme, applicants of the DAAD Research Mobility Grants programme⁸, and YSSP);
- Be a doctoral student or PDRF and ECR. Please note that while some mobility opportunities are open to both NRF and non-NRF funded scholars (*marked with a red asterix*), however, priority will be given to NRF funded scholars;
- Be regarded as an exceptional scholar with excellent potential, supported by evidence of academic achievement;
- Ensure that any visit undertaken in the final year of the grant must be completed at least six (6) months prior to the end of NRF funding;
- Provide a letter of support from the supervisor or invitation from the international host researcher; and
- Have a research plan developed for the time abroad which is signed by the South African supervisor and international host supervisor.

⁶ At the time of application, only persons with a valid South African ID number will be considered as a South African Permanent Resident, and not those in the process of applying for permanent residency. The latter will be considered as international candidates.

⁷ Doctoral students applying for the NRF-MINDS mobility programme will need to demonstrate leadership ability as an additional requirement.

⁸ It should be noted that the DAAD Research Mobility Grants programme is for mobility purposes for conducting research up to one-year and is different from the NRF-DAAD mobility programme.

4.2. Eligibility criteria for supervisors

To be eligible to participate in the GKP programmes, supervisors must:

- Be in a full-time faculty position at a university/research institution with recognised international reputation in teaching and research, or in a formal association with an industry partner or research facility associated with the discipline of exposure of the incumbent; and
- Be eligible to supervise graduate students and/or provide mentorship of PDRFs.

5. Role of the NRF

The NRF's responsibility will be informed by the bilateral and multilateral agreements established with local and international partners. In most cases the NRF will bear primary responsibility for broadcasting of calls for applications which are managed by international partners, monitoring of the GKP programme in close collaboration with universities/research institutions, as well as providing a platform for GKP opportunities, through inter alia, joint review and selection processes. In addition, the NRF will use its current funding opportunities to support components of the GKP programme.

The NRF, in consultation with the funding partner, may adjust grant awards of the NRF-funded students or PDRFs or ECRs accordingly in case of successful application for some of the mobility programmes listed above.

6. Role of international partners

The role of international partners will be informed by the bilateral and multilateral agreements established, but may include, inter alia:

- The co-funding of programmes under the GKP programme;
- Opening and management of calls for applications, including the screening, reviewing and selection processes;
- Sending feedback to applicants on the outcomes of their applications; and
- Work jointly with the NRF to improve on the aspects of the GKP programme based on the monitoring and evaluation exercise.

7. Role of the International Host Supervisor/Host Institution

The host supervisor/host institution will be required to meet the following requirements:

- Provide or contribute to research running costs, i.e., costs that can reasonably be expected to accrue during the course of the research period, in order for the doctoral students, PDRFs or ECRs to access research infrastructure, library facilities, connectivity and office space;

- Assist in making housing arrangements for the visiting research scholar. These arrangements must be finalised prior to the scholar's arrival;
- Assist with reasonable travel arrangements;
- Provide a report to the funding partners on the accomplishment or impact of the visit within three (3) months following the completion of the visit;
- Advise on immigration requirements as appropriate; and
- In the case of a joint doctoral degree, the research parties will be required to develop a Memorandum of Agreement, i.e., between the international higher education institution (HEI) and the partner university in South Africa, in respect of awarding joint degrees.

8. Reporting by doctoral students, PDRFs and ECRs

Upon return from the research trip, scholars are required to submit a trip report. The trip report may be submitted as⁹:

- For doctoral students – as part of the bi-annual progress report for postgraduate students; and
- For PDRFs and ECRs – as part of the annual progress report for PDRFs and ECRs.

9. Application and selection process

Applications must be submitted through the international partner's online portal for specific programmes (e.g., FFSP, YSSP, etc.). With specific programmes, the reviewing and selection of applications will be conducted jointly by the international partner and the NRF. All applications will be considered in the context of contributions by the home universities/research institutions, and the robustness of the applications.

10. Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation of the GKP programme will be fundamental to track its performance and ensure that the objectives of the programme are met. An annual tracking survey will be used to assess the short-term outcomes of the programme. However, the survey builds on the development of a monitoring and evaluation framework for the programme, adopting a theory of change approach and will allow the NRF to track the long-term impact of the programme for beneficiaries with respect to:

- Quality of research training and skills;
- Career movements;
- International mobility benefit throughout their career; and

⁹ Note that some partners may have additional reporting requirements or specific reporting Templates which must be adhered to

- Local and international institutional support throughout the training process.

11. Knowledge Interchange and Collaboration (KIC) Travel Grant

The purpose of the Knowledge Interchange and Collaboration (KIC) funding programme is to build and maintain excellence in South African research, bolstered by international collaboration. The promotion of international collaboration through the support of travel opportunities and participation in scientific events, enriched by national learning opportunities and engagements, are important mechanisms towards this goal.

Within the NRF funding context, the internationalisation of research is an intrinsic part of the current funding instruments, built into research grants awarded through programmes such as Competitive Funding for Rated Researchers, the South African Research Chairs Initiatives (SARChI), and the Centres of Excellence (CoE) Programme. **Therefore, funding for KIC support is prioritised for those researchers who have not already been allocated travel support through any other NRF grant.** This grant area supports the following:

1. PhD students (through their supervisors) registered at public South African institutions;
2. NRF-funded Postdoctoral Fellows;
3. Researchers who are full-time employees or on a fixed-term contract at any of the following institutions are eligible to apply:
 - South African universities/universities of technology.
 - Recognised research institutions such as national facilities.
 - Museums.
 - Science councils.

PhD students (through their supervisor) who cannot apply for a travel grant through their NRF Scholarships and who are registered at a South African public university can only apply for travel grants for individuals.

Students and researchers from private/commercial institutions are not eligible to apply.

As there are specific eligibility criteria for the KIC travel grant, it is important for applicants to thoroughly consult the **Knowledge, Interchange and Collaboration - Scientific Events/ Travel Grants Funding Framework** which is accessible on the NRF website at: <https://www.nrf.ac.za/funding/>

The timelines for the Call for applications are as follows:

- Applications under **KIC Review Period 1** will be considered for support for travel/events taking place between **1 July and 31 December 2024**. All applications for KIC Review Period 1 grants should be submitted by **12 April 2024**.
- Applications under **KIC Review Period 2** will be considered for support for travel/events taking place between **1 January and 31 June 2025**. All applications for KIC Review Period 2 grants should be submitted by **30 August 2024**.

12. Contact details

For pre-doctoral related enquiries, please contact:

Mr Nelson Komane: Professional Officer

Telephone: 012 481 4219

Email address: SN.Komane@risa.nrf.ac.za

For PDRF and ECR related enquiries, please contact:

Ms Edith Shikumo: Professional Officer

Telephone: 012 481 4201

Email: EA.Shikumo@risa.nrf.ac.za

For KIC Travel Grant related enquiries, please contact: Email: kicgrants@nrf.ac.za