

**The Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology (CREST) and the DSI-NRF Centre of Excellence in Scientometrics and Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (SciSTIP) (hosted by CREST), has been awarded three major grants from the NRF and DHET.**

**1. Benchmarking the science engagement of NRF grant holders (amount of ca. R 5 million over three years). Principal investigators: Johann Mouton and Marina Joubert**

This grant was awarded by the NRF which requires CREST to conduct a benchmarking study over the next ten years to establish the types, nature and scope of the science engagement and social impact activities of all NRF grant holders. This study, which must analyse how all NRF grant holders across all their categories (Rated scientists, SARCHI Chairs, CoE's) report annually to the NRF about how they optimize the dissemination, uptake, engagement with stakeholders and maximising social impact about their research. In scope, this is a big project as the target 'population' is estimated to be around 4 000+ grant holders and our data sources – which we need to evaluate and benchmark over time – are their Annual Progress Reports.

If we succeed in this project, it will have major implications and potential value for all university academics especially in terms of learning from their colleagues on how to improve their science and public engagement activities for the benefit of all stakeholders including the general public. It is obvious that our work could and should also impact the work that SA universities' divisions for research, social impact assessment and science engagement/communication approach their work

**2. Publications quality framework (amount of R40 million) over next three years (of which about half will come to CREST. PI: Johann Mouton together with representatives from all SA university research offices, USAF, ASSAf, NRF and CPUT.**

About a year ago Johann Mouton drafted a proposal, at the request of Mr Chief Mabizela at the DHET, to develop and implement a framework to monitor, ensure and evaluate the quality of university publications that qualify for subsidy. The DHET annually awards more than R3 billion to public universities for publication subsidies. However, although there has been a significant increase in the numbers of articles, books and conference proceedings over the past 10 years, CREST has indicated in three major reports to the DHET and ASSAf over the past 6 years, that this increase in quantity has not necessarily also translated into an improvement in the quality of university publications.

On the contrary, CREST have found evidence of a whole range of questionable publication practices (including suspect editorial practices, predatory publishing, and the like) and in our most recent report to the DHET recommended that the department fund a project that would quality assure and build the required capacity and expertise in the sector, to avoid the continued prevalence of such practices.

This is not merely because of the imperative of research integrity, but – in the bigger scheme of things – we need to remind ourselves that any evidence that university academics are using public funds to engage in fraudulent practices simply to get paid for their publications, will have a major negative impact on the public's trust in scientific institutions.

In this project, CREST will work in partnership with the universities and other stakeholders to put in place the necessary mechanisms and quality assurance procedures to ensure that the integrity of the research publications of our universities are protected and enhanced.

**3. Monitoring and Evaluation Support Programme to the UCDP (University Capacity Development Programme): PI's: Johann Mouton and Lauren Wildschut. Amount of R21 million over the next four years**

The UCDP, with an annual budget of around R1.3 billion is one of the flagship programmes of the DHET as it aims to build and strengthen capacity in teaching and learning, research and programme renewal at all 26 public universities. CREST was awarded a first grant in 2018 to provide technical support to the DHET project management team to monitor and evaluate the implementation, outcomes, impact and cost-efficiency of the UCDP. This is again a major project as the current cycle of the UCDP consists of 270 individual projects at the universities as well as an additional 15+ national collaborative programme including NGAP, USDP, Future Professors, etc. We are a team of 5 people at CREST who conduct the M&E of these projects.

In addition, we were also awarded a supplementary grant 3 years ago to develop a Management Information System (MIS) that would be used as the IT platform by the DHET, CREST and all the participating universities in managing their grants. The academic and strategic value of this project for CREST and SU is that we engage on a regular basis with more than 400 users on the MIS-platform and is gaining unique insight into the interventions that SA universities are implementing to improve student performance, staff development and curricular and programme renewal.