

Incentive Funding for Rated Researchers (IFRR)

FAQs

12 October 2017

On 3rd October 2017 the National Research Foundation (NRF) announced through a *Communique* to the stakeholder community, the revised format of the Incentive Funding for Rated Researchers (IFRR). The following questions, in no particular order of priority, have been some of the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) concerning the changes:

1. The NRF's Annual Report, which was tabled in parliament at the end of September, paints a picture of an entity under considerable financial pressure, with a steadily declining parliamentary grant over the past 5 years (in real terms). How has this affected the decision to reduce funding to researchers next year?

As indicated in the table and graphic below, the real growth of the Science Vote to the Department of Science and Technology (DST), which is the line department of the National Research Foundation (NRF), has been in the negative except for the financial year 2015/16. Consequently, the real growth of the core parliamentary and DST contract funds allocated and transferred to the NRF have generally followed the same trend. In some areas there have been small increases, but in real terms it has been reduced. This to a large extent has influenced the decision on the prioritisation, the choices and values of investments by the NRF with the object of ensuring sustainability.

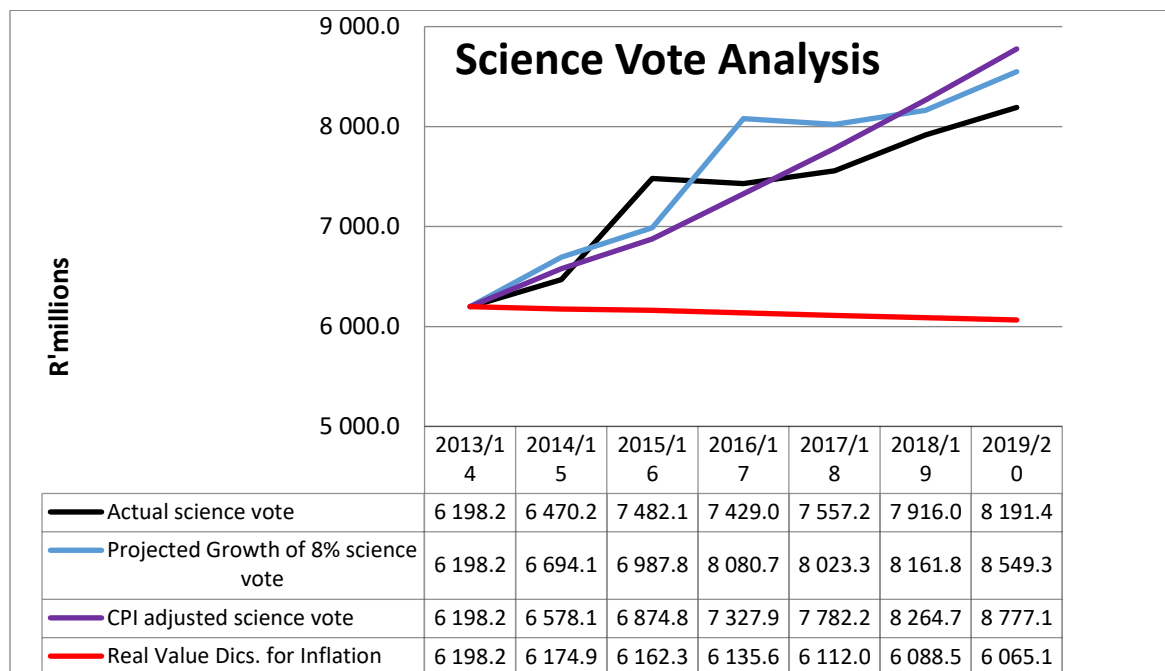
SCIENCE VOTE: DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

R' millions

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Actual Science Vote	6 198.2	6 470.2	7 482.1	7 429.0	7 557.2	7 916.0	8 191.4
CPI adjusted Science Vote	6 198.2	6 578.1	6 874.8	7 327.9	7 782.2	8 264.7	8 777.1
Projected growth of 8% Science Vote	6 198.2	6 694.1	6 987.8	8 080.7	8 023.3	8 161.8	8 549.3
Actual Science Vote Movement		4%	16%	-1%	2%	5%	3%
Average CPI		6.1%	4.5%	6.6%	6.2%	6.2%	6.2%
Projected NSI CPI estimated at 8%		8.0%	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%
Annual CPI Shortfall % (Real Terms)		-1.7%	11.1%	-7.3%	-4.5%	-1.5%	-2.7%
Annual CPI Shortfall % (Real Terms)		-3.6%	7.6%	-8.7%	-6.3%	-3.3%	-4.5%

* Negative real growth except for 2015/16

Annual CPI Shortfall (R'million)		-107.9	607.3	101.1	-225.0	-348.7	-585.7
Annual Shortfall on a 8% growth (R'million)		-223.9	494.3	-651.7	-466.1	-245.8	-357.9



2. Can you explain the rationale for the changes described by Bozzoli - namely the large cuts in the size of the grants awarded to rated researchers, effective from January 2018? *As evident in 1 above, the available resources makes the IFRR in its current financial model unsustainable into the future.*
3. To what extent are the changes a reflection of problems with the rating system used for scientists, and the criteria used to determine who is eligible for NRF funding? *There is no relationship between the funding provided and planned to be provided in the future and the criteria for rating.*
4. Will these changes to IFRR only affect newly rated researcher/persons who will obtain new ratings with effect from 2018? *The changes will affect ALL rated researchers - new and those with valid ratings.*
5. Why are the cuts so abrupt, and not phased in? *The revised financial revisions are not totally abrupt but partially phased in. Our financial modelling projections indicate that a complete phasing in approach was not sustainable.*
6. Can you confirm if the reductions, up to 90%, alleged by the DA is true? *Rated researchers were eligible for incentive funding at the rate prescribed in the framework document for the period of the rating, which is usually up to 5 years. Thus an A rated Researcher would receive R100 000 per year over six years, provided she/he submits an Annual Progress Report (APR) explaining how the funds were used, generally for research/academic related activities. With effect from 2018, all currently rated and newly rated Researchers will receive a once off-funding of R30 000 and*

R50 000, respectively for the period of their rating. The awardee can indicate when they would want these funds disbursed to them within the funding period.

7. Prof Bozzoli also argues that DVCs have known about the cuts for "some months". Is this accurate? *Discussions with the research leadership began some months ago, placing the financial challenge and the sustainability of the IFRR on the discussion agenda. The NRF worked out scenarios in terms of funding and shared this with them in June 2017. A very elaborate discussion on the matter followed. Following inputs from the Research and Innovation Strategy Group (RISG) of Universities South Africa (USAf), the scenarios were further revised and presented to a joint sitting of RISG and DVCs (Research) of universities. It should be further noted that on 23 January 2017 when the call for IFRR was posted for all Rated Researchers to respond, the following was stated: "As indicated above, the NRF is in the process of reviewing the nature, form and levels of funding for Incentive Funding for Rated Researchers grants. The changes will be announced in due course. However, the annual call and awards for 2017 will proceed within the context of the call framework document".*
8. If so, what is the NRF's motivation for the move? Will the money essentially be moved to other or more pressing areas? *This is partly explained in 1 above. The NRF mitigated the risk of the IFRR being terminated completely by revising the funding model. Any savings that may accrue will be invested in supporting a greater number of emerging and established researchers with multiple year grants.*
9. Will there be any measures taken to help researchers mitigate the funding decrease, especially researchers from the less well-resourced universities? *Any measures taken will be within the limits of the NRF granting system.*
10. Will there be any measures taken to assist students who received scholarships/bursaries from a rated researcher who used funds from the IFRR programme? *In instances where a registered student has been fully funded through the IFRR programme and previous funding can be confirmed by the institution, provided that it is within the NRF bursary funding guidelines, the NRF will provide continued funding for the duration of the degree.*
11. Is the NRF concerned that the move will have a negative impact on research in the country, or affect postgraduate training in any way? *The NRF is naturally concerned about diminishing financial resources for research in our country. However, other NRF funding instruments continue to be available to researchers on a competitive basis.*
12. I have double-checked the various scenarios in the attached communique, and need to know about the group of re-evaluants whose applications are currently being processed, with rating outcomes valid from 1 January 2018. In instances where their rating improves, will they qualify for the R 50 000 incentive grant in the same manner applicable to applicants from 2019 onwards? *Yes. They will receive R50 000. This and more details will be presented in the Framework Document and Call that is posted at the beginning of each year.*

13. Will I only receive R 30 000 or R50 000 over the period of 5 to 6 years of my valid rating? *Yes. If you are a first time rated researcher in the Y or C category, you will receive the R30 000 twice over the period. You will indicate up front when these funds should be disbursed to you.*
14. I am in the middle of my rating cycle, with a number of years to go before expiry of rating/re-evaluation, what happens to the funding that I was to receive for these outer years after 2018? *It will fall away, except if you were rated in 2016 and received your first tranche of funds in 2017. You will receive further funding of R 30 000 in 2018 and R 30 000 in 2019.*
15. What happens to researchers who improve their rating category in 2018? Will they get be getting the R 50 000? *Yes.*
16. How will the NRF deal with the legality of the letters of award? *The Master Funding Agreement between the NRF and research institutions indicate that all grants awarded are subject to the availability of funds.*
17. In what year will the allocation of R 30 000 commence? *With effect from 2018 depending on the rating category of the researcher.*

THE NATIONAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION (NRF) OF SOUTH AFRICA