



## **DSTI-NRF Postgraduate Funding Policy**

### ***Statement of Expectations for Postgraduate Training***

**Updated: May 2025**

## INTRODUCTION

The National Research Foundation (NRF) allocates postgraduate funding as a lever to address the challenges of inequity of access, success, and throughput at university, with transformation as the core objective.

The NRF maximises return on funding investment through funding of excellent research with impact that contributes to national development and delivering of sustainable solutions to global challenges, as well as linking students to NRF funded researchers as part of the NRF's strategy of exposing next generation researchers to established researchers for guidance and inspiration that will facilitate their growth in becoming established researchers. The NRF further strives to achieve a fully representative and transformed South African research workforce and reduces the age of completion of doctoral degrees, whilst improving success rates, and facilitating high retention of exceptional postgraduate talent in the academic and research fields. The NRF supports postgraduate training through a number of interventions and the expectations as set out below for the Universities, Students and the NRF. This is to ensure that the NRF delivers on its mandate of advancing knowledge and equity redress.

## EXPECTATION OF UNIVERSITIES

1. For postgraduate student training and development, universities are expected to demonstrate that they:
  - a. Underpin all of their work with common values of rigour and integrity;
  - b. Conform to all ethical, legal and professional obligations incumbent on their work;
  - c. Nurture a research environment that supports research of the highest standards of rigour and integrity;
  - d. Use transparent, robust and fair processes to handle allegations of misconduct;
  - e. Continue to monitor, and where necessary improve, the suitability and appropriateness of the mechanisms in place to provide assurances over the integrity of research;
  - f. Ensure that all the designated **postgraduate supervisors** have the necessary training, capabilities and capacity to train and supervise postgraduate students; and
  - g. The University must assign a mark for the major subjects in the final year of all undergraduate degrees, major subject(s) for an honours degree and an overall numerical mark for all master's degrees as students must meet the academic pass mark requirement to be eligible for the DSTI-NRF postgraduate scholarships.

## Administrative support for postgraduate students

2. The NRF further expects universities to create equality of opportunity for students with disabilities and the removal of all barriers to enable their inclusion and integration into postgraduate programmes.
3. Universities are expected to have inclusive policies aligned to the Strategic Policy Framework on Disability for the Post-School Education and Training System (2018). Additionally, institutional policy on disability must cover three critical areas of access: the enabling environment, coordination, and cooperation.
4. Universities are expected to advertise the NRF postgraduate funding opportunities internally, especially to those eligible for extension support.
5. Universities are expected to screen postgraduate scholarships for eligibility as per the standardised screening checklist which will be provided by the NRF. Applications which are not eligible following the eligibility screening process should be rejected on the NRF Connect System and formal feedback should be sent to applicants by the universities.
6. Universities are expected to review each postgraduate application using a standard scorecard provided by the NRF before forwarding nominated applications to the NRF. Applications which are not eligible following a review process should be rejected on the NRF Connect System and formal review feedback should be sent to applicants by the Designated Authorities (DAs). Applications which are eligible and are recommended to the NRF should all have scores.
7. Institutional review committees are expected to review the first-time master's and doctoral applications including those for extension support, applying all the scorecard review criteria provided by the NRF.
8. The reviewers are expected to note the NRF's emphasis on scientific merit and originality of the study for master's and doctoral applications, respectively, as well as potential impact of the outputs at both levels of study when reviewing applications.
9. The Research Office or Postgraduate Office must submit confirmation of the review process for the first-time master's and doctoral applications including extension support, signed by the Deans of Faculties or Deputy Vice-chancellor of Research. Only applications recommended for funding, based on the merit review of applications by the university, must be submitted to the NRF for funding consideration.

10. Pre-allocation award letters for honours students are sent to the institutions. All eligible and recommended applications, with final year results in accordance with the pre-allocation letters must be screened and submitted to the NRF.
11. Universities must provide eligibility feedback to applicants who were screened at the universities for eligibility and deemed not eligible for funding.
12. Universities are expected to review appeals (i.e., re-review original applications by appointing a different panel) using a standard review spreadsheet template provided by the NRF before forwarding recommended appellants to the NRF. Appellants who are not eligible following a review process should be rejected and formal feedback should be sent to the appellants by the universities.
13. The Research or Postgraduate Office must submit reviewed appeals using the appeal review spreadsheet template signed by the Deans of Faculties or Deputy Vice-chancellor: Research. Only appellants recommended for funding, based on the review of the appeal by the university, must be submitted to the NRF for funding consideration.
14. All universities are expected to endorse the students' Conditions of the Grant (CoG) by accepting them on the NRF Connect system at the commencement of funding at each level of study.
15. In order for the students not to lose their continued funding, higher education institutions must ensure that the academic results are available before the institutional deadlines for registration of the next higher degree.
16. The universities should undertake open, merit-based and transparent recruitment of postgraduate students.
17. Considering that the NRF does not cover historic debts, universities should permit NRF-funded students with outstanding debts to register for their postgraduate degrees and make arrangements with those students on payment plans for the historical debts.

### **Enabling environment for postgraduate training**

18. The universities are expected to provide an environment where postgraduate students have the opportunity to widen their horizons as part of their training. Experiences outside their own university, for example with other academic collaborators, in non-academic environments or overseas are encouraged where it fits with the individual and scope of

the project. These should be well planned to ensure that the postgraduate student gains maximum benefit.

19. Universities are required to offer wrap around support, that is, access to managed social support ensuring availability of healthcare, access to psychologists and counsellors on campus.
20. The Student-Supervisor Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), clarifying expectations and preferences in managing the research project, must be signed by both the student and supervisor and retained by the respective university office and/or department. This MoU should be available when the NRF requests such a document when dealing with the student's unsatisfactory progress.
21. In the case of master's and doctoral students, the MoU will be agreed upon and signed between the supervisor(s) and the postgraduate student, clarifying expectations and preferences in managing the Research project.

### **Training of postgraduate students**

22. The universities should implement a training strategy which is in line with the approved research project.
23. The emphasis should be on enhancing the research excellence and quality of postgraduate training by developing the students' thinking and research capabilities, academic capabilities, and life skills.

### **Quality assurance**

24. The universities should provide career advice (both prior to embarking on a postgraduate study and ongoing) to enable students to choose the most appropriate type of postgraduate study and have the confidence and skills to explore the impact they may have in a wide range of career options.

### **Code of Ethics for Research**

25. It is the responsibility of the supervisor, in conjunction with the university, to ensure that all research activities carried out in or outside South Africa comply with the laws or regulations of South Africa and/or of the foreign country in which the research activities

are conducted. These include appropriate human subject, animal welfare, copyright and intellectual property protection, and other regulations or laws, as appropriate.

26. Universities are expected to offer all postgraduate students supported by NRF training to conduct research as well as appropriate training on code of ethics for research.

## **Supervision of students**

27. The universities are expected to provide excellent standards of supervision, management and mentoring. Supervisors should receive the support and training that they individually need to provide the highest-quality supervisory support to their postgraduate students and be aware of their responsibilities to treat all postgraduate students in a fair, open and non-discriminatory manner.
28. Supervisors should provide institutional commitment to the necessary running expenses for the research project as well as the appropriate research infrastructure during the postgraduate studies.
29. Supervisors should provide postgraduate students with training in the principles of good research conduct in their discipline, and understanding how to comply with relevant ethical, legal, and professional frameworks as part of their training.
30. Supervisors should provide postgraduate students with in-depth advanced training, as well as developing a broad understanding of their subject area. They should also provide an understanding of how their research fits into the broader “research and innovation system”.
31. Supervisors should provide postgraduate students with training in experimental design and statistics appropriate to their disciplines and in the importance of ensuring research results are robust and reproducible.
32. Supervisors are expected to have regular project review meetings with postgraduate students to monitor progress and to identify and address potential challenges during the tenure of the project/qualification.
33. Supervisors should recognise postgraduate studies as wider training opportunities, encourage and support students in developing their careers. Supervisors are therefore expected to have personal development review meetings with students at regular

intervals. Supervisors are expected to ensure that students receive managed academic support, life skills training and wrap-around support for holistic personal development.

34. Supervisors must ensure that they recommend and support the students annual progress report timeously to ensure continued funding for their postgraduate studies.
35. Supervisors must encourage their students to undertake at least 80 hours of Academic Service Work per annum in the form of structured, university determined academic support activities. Such activities should not hamper the research progress in any way.

### **Research Collaborators**

36. The collaborating partners should maximise the quality of the training experience for the student by recognising the broader training and development opportunities which are available through working in academic and non-academic environments.
37. The NRF expects the university and collaborating organisation to have an agreement in place before the project begins, which recognises the student's contribution, to make sure that the Intellectual Property arising from the research/training is managed effectively.

### **EXPECTATION OF THE STUDENTS**

38. Students are expected to familiarise themselves with the NRF Application Funding Framework and Guide.
39. Students are expected to apply for the funding on time, submitting all the required documents.
40. Students are expected to follow up with their supervisors to ensure that applications and/or progress reports feedback have been provided within the relevant timelines.
41. Students are expected to inform the NRF about any other funding that they may be awarded. Failure to do so will be regarded as fraud and will result in the termination of funding and return of any funding fraudulently received.
42. Students are expected to take full responsibility of their own learning and development and the successful and timely completion of their qualification.

43. All NRF funded students must have a valid transactional bank account into which monthly stipends will be paid by the University.
44. All NRF funded students will be expected to accept a CoG online via the NRF Connect system, at the commencement of funding at each level of study. In addition, all NRF funded students are expected to read and understand the conditions associated with the awarded scholarship.
45. Master's and doctoral students should ensure that have a signed MoU between him/herself and supervisor(s) clarifying expectations and preferences in managing the research project. This signed MoU should be kept at the respective university and or department.
46. The Student-Supervisor MoU must include frequency for submitting written reports; managed academic support; life skills training and wrap-around support for holistic personal development. In addition, the MoU must include at least 80 hours of Academic Service Work per annum in the form of structured, University determined academic support activities.
47. Students should be actively involved in managing and directing their research project and training, taking advice from their supervisor.
48. Students are expected to have regular project review and personal development meetings with their supervisor(s) to monitor progress and to identify and address potential challenges during the tenure of the project.
49. Students are expected to submit annual Progress Reports endorsed by their supervisors at the end of each year.
50. Where students get the opportunity to work in a non-academic environment, they should maximise the opportunity by seeking to understand the role of research within the organisation and the wider context.
51. Students are expected to participate in training and networking opportunities provided by the university.
52. Students should complete all information/reporting requests from the NRF and ensure contact details are maintained on the NRF Connect system.



53. Students should be familiar with the funders (e.g. NRF) and their strategic objectives. DSTI-NRF support should be acknowledged on any publications or any other form of dissemination arising from their postgraduate studies.
54. Master's and doctoral students are expected to undertake at least 80 hours of Academic Service Work per annum in the form of structured, university determined academic support activities. University determined academic support activities may include tutoring/mentoring of other students; volunteering for orientation of new students and on career days; or science engagement activities. Academic support activities must be included in the student-supervisor MoU and reported on in the student progress reports.

## **EXPECTATION OF THE NRF**

55. Provide visible information on the scholarship application process on our website and other avenues and keep this information updated. This includes making explicit the criteria for eligible students.
56. The NRF will have an annual onboarding session (contact or virtual) with the new grantees.
57. The NRF will receive and process applications via the NRF Connect System.
58. Provide the necessary funding opportunities to qualifying postgraduate students.
59. Discuss and evaluate recruitment strategy and processes, and training of postgraduate approaches at universities on visits and through formal support mechanisms, as required.
60. The NRF must provide feedback to applicants whose applications were recommended for funding but were not awarded funding due to budget constraints. In this instance the NRF will send a regret letter directly to the affected applicants.
61. The NRF must provide feedback to applicants whose applications were recommended for funding and approved for funding. In this instance, the NRF will publish a list of the successful applicants on the NRF website (<https://www.nrf.ac.za/nrf-for-post-graduate-students/bursaries-scholarships/application-outcomes/>) and share the lists with the Research/Postgraduate Offices at respective universities.

62. The NRF reserves the right not to fund a student nominated by the university.
63. The NRF reserves the right to cancel or change an award under any circumstances, including system malfunctions and the associated unintended consequences thereof, and based on the initial date of registration for the degree (in accordance with the CoG).

**END**