



**National
Research
Foundation**

**DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Application and Funding
Framework for Funding in 2024 Academic Year**

NRF Partners for Postgraduate Student Funding



science & innovation

Department:
Science and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



**higher education
& training**

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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



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1. Introduction

The National Research Foundation (NRF) is mandated by an Act of Parliament, the NRF Act (Act No. 23 of 1998, amended) to: “*contribute to national development by promoting and supporting research through funding, human resource development and the provision of the necessary research facilities, in order to facilitate the creation of knowledge, innovation and development in all fields of research, including indigenous knowledge and thereby contributing to the improvement of the quality of life of all the people of the Republic.*” In giving effect to its mandate, the NRF is guided by a Transformation Framework that identifies the specific need to focus on transformation of the equity profiles of the South African research workforce; of the knowledge enterprise; of the relationship between science and society; and the building of a diverse and fully inclusive learning organisation. Additionally, the NRF through the projects that it supports will promote societal and knowledge impact of research. 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 impact refers to the value that research adds to society across various spheres, whether social, economic, or environmental. Societal impact reflects the direct or indirect relationship between research, or the research process, and improvement in the quality of people’s lives, inclusive of innovation, technological advancements, and policy developments.

Transformation of the equity profiles of the South African research workforce is reliant on the ability to attract, nurture and retain high academic achievers in the system to pursue postgraduate studies up to the doctoral level. The NRF is prioritising postgraduate students with research inclination as part of a national drive to grow the next generation of researchers and scholars to sustain South Africa’s knowledge enterprise. Another objective is to fast-track the development of postgraduate students in high-impact, priority, and vulnerable disciplines critical for national socio-economic development.

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. In order to develop a future cohort of researchers and scholars, it is vital that postgraduate students complete their studies without delay and that they continue through to completion of their doctoral studies. To advance these priorities, the NRF will prioritise funding for such students for full-time studies from honours through to the doctoral degree level, **subject to satisfactory performance at each consecutive postgraduate level and pending the availability of the budget.**

The purpose of this framework document is to outline the funding principles and implementation guidelines. The context within which the NRF functions is informed by various strategic frameworks, legislation, policies and plans of government. This framework document should be read together with the Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Decadal Plan (2022); Strategic Policy Framework on Disability for the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) System (2018); The Strategy for Human Capacity Development for Research, Innovation and Scholarships (2016); National Development Plan 2030; and The Ministerial Guidelines for Improving Equity and the Distribution of DST/NRF Bursaries and Fellowships (2013).

2. Short-term research mobility opportunities

For research mobility opportunities offered by the NRF, please refer to the Global Knowledge Partnership implementation framework at <https://www.nrf.ac.za/global-knowledge-partnerships-programme-implementation-framework-for-the-2024-academic-year/>.

3. Areas of Support

DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Funding is intended to support honours, master's, and doctoral candidates to pursue full-time studies at South African public universities, in all areas of Science, Engineering, Technology, Social Sciences and Humanities, including Indigenous Knowledge Systems, focusing on research aligned with one of the National Priority Research Areas. Additionally, the research that is conducted by postgraduate students must align with the thematic focus areas as outlined in the Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Decadal Plan 2022, which serves as an implementation guide of the 2019 White Paper on STI.

The **broad disciplines supported for postgraduate studies are:** Accounting, Actuarial Science, Agricultural Sciences, Astronomy, Astrophysics, Auditing, Bioinformatics, Biotechnology, Cellular and Molecular Biology, Chemistry, Climate Change, Computer Science, Cosmology, Demography, Drug Discovery and Development, Earth Sciences, Earth

Observation, Ecology, Economic Sciences, Education, Engineering, Environmental Sciences, Financial Management, Functional Genomics, Geology, Global Change, Society and Sustainability, Health Sciences, Information Science, Information Systems, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Law, Mathematical Sciences, Marine Sciences, Medicinal Plant, Medical Sciences, Nanotechnology, Nuclear Technologies in Medicine and Biosciences, Palaeosciences, Polar Science, Physics, Renewable Energy, Construction management, Dermatological sciences, Architecture, Nuclear science, Data Science, Economic and Management Science, Biochemistry, Microbiology, Geosciences, Materials Research, Bibliometrics and Scientometrics Science, Technology and Innovation (Policy) Studies, Higher Education (Policy) Studies, Sociology of Science and Technology, History and Philosophy of Science, Research Evaluation and Research Impact studies, Science Communication, the Public Understanding of Science and Technology, Social Science and Humanities, Space Science, Statistics, Transportation Studies and Tourism.

The overall percentage of supported students by the NRF will be 80% from the Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) disciplines and 20% from the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH).

4. Eligibility Criteria

4.1 Eligibility for first-time applicants for honours, master's and doctoral funding

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 year of undergraduate 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. If the master's degree was upgraded to a doctoral study, 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 should be used.

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;
- International applicants applying for master's and doctoral scholarships. These applicants should enter a 'Pass' in the application form; and
- South African citizens with international qualifications applying for master's and doctoral scholarships. These applicants should also 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 1** applies to all first-time applicants for honours, master's, and doctoral funding.

Table 1. Eligibility criteria for first time applicants for the DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Funding for FCS and PCS for the 2024 academic year

Study Level	FCS		PCS
	Exceptional Achievers	Financially Needy and Applicants with a Disability	Other
Honours	Average of $\geq 75\%$ mark for major subjects in the final year of undergraduate study	Average of $\geq 65\%$ mark for major subjects in the final year of undergraduate study	Average of $\geq 65\%$ 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 2023. Only South African citizens and permanent residents are eligible for honours scholarships.		
Master's	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum average of 75% for all subjects at the honours level; OR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum average of 75% for all subjects for a Postgraduate diploma level; OR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum average of 75% for final year subjects of a four-year degree 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum average of 65% for all subjects at the honours level; OR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum average of 65% for all subjects for a Postgraduate diploma; OR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum average of 65% for final year subjects of a four-year degree 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum average of 65% for all subjects at the honours level; OR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum average of 65% for all subjects for a Postgraduate diploma; OR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum average of 65% for final year

Study Level	FCS		PCS
	Exceptional Achievers	Financially Needy and Applicants with a Disability	Other
			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 2023.		
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 2023.		

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 may 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.** Refer to section 13 for further information on considerations for funding. 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, master's and doctoral studies respectively, in the year of application, regardless of first year of registration.

4.2 Additional eligibility criteria for first-time applicants for master's and doctoral funding

In addition to the eligibility criteria stated in section 4.1:

- i. Applicants who commenced their master's and doctoral studies **on a part-time basis and wish to be considered for funding for completion of their studies on a full-time basis**, may apply and will be considered on a case-by-case basis. However, only students who will be registered on a full-time basis for their second or third year of master's studies in 2024 may apply. Students who will be registered on a full-time basis for their second, third, or fourth year of doctoral studies in 2024 may apply, and the initial date for registration of the degree will be taken into consideration to determine the support period if the student's application is successful; and
- ii. Eligibility period for individuals who took **gap year(s)** due to exceptional circumstances will be calculated from date of initial registration which will exclude any gap year(s) taken. A valid proof must accompany the motivation.

4.3 Additional eligibility criteria for NRF-SARAO applicants

SARAO, a national facility of the NRF, manages and coordinates all radio astronomy initiatives in South Africa, including the MeerKAT and KAT-7 telescopes in the Karoo, the Hartebeesthoek Radio Astronomy Observatory (HartRAO) in Gauteng, and the African Square Kilometre Array (SKA) Programme in the eight SKA partner countries in Africa. NRF-SARAO also manages South Africa's engagements with the International SKA Organisation.

In addition to the eligibility criteria stated in section 4.1, applicants who wish to pursue postgraduate-level research relevant to the scientific and technical goals of the SKA and MeerKAT radio telescopes, are eligible to apply for the NRF-SARAO scholarships. Only applicants who are South African citizens or permanent residents or citizens of Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, and Zambia are eligible for NRF-SARAO postgraduate scholarships.

4.4 Additional eligibility criteria for NRF-DAAD applicants

In addition to the eligibility criteria stated in section 4.1, applicants for the NRF-DAAD master's and doctoral funding must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- i. Only South African citizens and permanent residents are eligible for master's and doctoral scholarships;
- ii. Only applicants that are eligible for FCS funding will be awarded NRF-DAAD funding; and
- iii. Applicants should have a general interest in an educational and cultural exchange with Germany.

4.5 Additional eligibility criteria for NRF-SASOL FOUNDATION applicants

In addition to the eligibility criteria stated in section 4.1, applicants for the NRF-SASOL honours, master's and doctoral funding must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- i. Only South African citizens are eligible for honours, master's and doctoral scholarships;
- ii. Only applicants that are eligible for FCS funding will be awarded NRF-SASOL FOUNDATION funding; and
- iii. Only applicants registered in chemistry and related disciplines with specific focus on the green economy will be considered. In addition, students must intend registering at one of the following South African public universities *viz.* University of Fort Hare, University of Limpopo, University of Venda, University of Free State (Qwaqwa Campus), and North-West University (Mahikeng Campus), to be awarded NRF-SASOL FOUNDATION funding.

4.6 Additional eligibility criteria for NRF-MINDS applicants

In addition to the eligibility criteria stated in section 4.1, applicants for the NRF-MINDS doctoral funding must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- i. Applicants must be a national of an African country other than South Africa and residing in any African country;
- ii. The NRF-MINDS programme is targeted at specialised postgraduate study in fields that are in short supply on the African continent. The priority research fields are: Water-Energy-Food Nexus; Smart Economy; African Heritage (People, Spaces and Settlements); Information and Communication Technologies; Artificial Intelligence and Robotics; and Health and Well-being; and
- iii. Applicants must produce evidence of demonstrated leadership abilities or potential.

4.7 Eligibility for NRF Uninterrupted Study Support

Uninterrupted study support is funding of postgraduate students from the honours up to the doctoral level, however, students will have to submit a new scholarship application for each study level. In addition to the eligibility criteria stated in section 4.1, NRF-funded students will be eligible for uninterrupted study support provided that they meet the following requirements:

- i. The NRF-funded degree is completed within the NRF funding periods which are one (1) year for a full-time honours degree and two (2) years for a full-time master's degree;
- ii. Register for a master's degree immediately after completing the honours degree;
- iii. Register for a doctoral degree immediately after completing the master's degree;
- iv. Meet all the university and NRF requirements for postgraduate funding;
- v. Submit a new scholarship application for each level of study; and
- vi. Submit the required progress reports for the relevant levels of support.

4.8 Eligibility for Extension Support applicants for full-time master's and doctoral studies

The eligibility criteria for applicants for Extension Support for full-time master's and doctoral studies in 2024 are as follows:

- i. Applicants must be NRF scholarship-holders in 2023. Extensions will only be granted under exceptional circumstances and will be for either six (6) or twelve (12) months as the NRF expects all postgraduate students to complete their qualifications within the NRF funding period;
- ii. Applicants applying for extension support at the master's level must have registered for their master's degree in 2022 or July 2021;

- iii. Applicants applying for extension support at the doctoral level must have registered for their doctoral degree in 2021 or July 2020;
- iv. Only students pursuing full-time master's or doctoral studies in South Africa are eligible to apply;
- v. Applicants for extension support will be eligible for postgraduate funding at the same value as their 2023 funding; and
- vi. Applicants must have the support from their supervisor in order for the Extension application to be considered.

5. Individuals not Eligible for DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Funding

The following categories of individuals are not eligible to apply for DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Funding:

- i. Students who hold NRF funding for first-year master's studies in 2023, or first- or second-year doctoral studies in 2023, are not eligible to apply for funding as new students or first-time applicants. Students in these categories are continuing students and must submit all required Progress Reports (PR) on the NRF Connect system by the stipulated cut-off date to receive continued funding for the 2024 academic year, as per the Conditions of Grant and NRF approved funding level;
- ii. Individuals who registered for their masters' studies before July 2022;
- iii. Individuals who registered for their doctoral studies before July 2021;
- iv. Individuals who registered for their honours study before July 2023
- v. South African and permanent residents who graduated from South African institutions from the 2021 academic year onwards, without numerical marks are not allowed to apply;
- vi. Individuals that already hold a degree for the same level at which they intend studying, are not eligible to apply, e.g., individuals that hold a postgraduate diploma qualification may not apply for DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Funding for honours studies;
- vii. Individuals who de-registered from a degree and are applying for funding for the same level may apply, however the first date of registration for the original degree will be taken into account when determining the eligible period for NRF funding;
- viii. Individuals who will be in their pre-proposal year in 2024 should not apply for DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Funding for the pre-proposal year. In the case where a master's or doctoral programme includes a pre-proposal registration year prior to the first year of the programme, the NRF will not fund the pre-proposal year. The pre-proposal year will not be counted as a first year of registration for the degree;

- ix. Individuals who intend to register for, or who are studying for a 100% master's by coursework, professional master's or professional doctoral degree, may not apply for DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Funding. Further clarification of the professional degrees may be obtained from the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) approved by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET);
- x. Individuals who will be in contractual or permanent employment, whether salaried or unpaid, that exceeds 12 hours of work per week, while pursuing honours, master's or doctoral studies may not hold DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Funding for full-time studies. The above-mentioned 12 hours of work per week only applies to the institutional students' academic services such as teaching, tutorials and assistance or demonstration duties during the year of study;
- xi. Individuals that are on sabbatical leave from their current employment may not apply for DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Funding;
- xii. Individuals, including BTech qualification holders, who intend to study towards a Postgraduate Diploma or Postgraduate Certificate in Education and any postgraduate qualification that does not entail research as a core component;
- xiii. Students pursuing an undergraduate degree irrespective of the degree that they are enrolled for;
- xiv. Students who are currently nominated under a grantholder's NRF research grant with a zero value, are not eligible to apply for extension support; and
- xv. Students who will be registered for two or more degrees simultaneously regardless of NQF exit levels per degree.

6. Financial Means Test

The **DHET** currently defines **financially needy students** as individuals who come from households with a **combined gross family income of no more than R350 000** (three hundred and fifty thousand rand) per annum.

Applicants who provide the required consent, will be subjected to a financial means test to determine their financial need status. Applicants for DSI-NRF postgraduate student funding who were previously supported by National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) or the Ikusasa Student Financial Aid Programme (ISFAP) will not be subjected to a financial means test, however, they **must attach proof** in the form of an official university stamped financial statement or signed agreement with NSFAS or ISFAP. **If proof is not attached at time of application, the applicant will be eligible and considered for PCS.** A financial means test is conducted annually by 1 September. Continuing NRF-funded students requesting financial

means test should liaise with the institutions and complete the relevant documents to be submitted by the institutions to the NRF **by 15 August**. The outcomes will be made available by 15 December.

The NRF acknowledges that there are financially needy applicants that may not have undergone a financial means test prior to applying to the NRF for postgraduate funding, and therefore, a financial means test for those applicants will be facilitated in partnership with ISFAP. Applicants that need to undertake a financial means test must provide the following:

- i. Completed NRF-ISFAP consent form certified by a Commissioner of Oaths uploaded to the Financial Need section of the online application;
- ii. Consent form must be co-signed by the household contributor(s) whom the financial means test will be conducted against, and their ID numbers must be included on the online application form; and
- iii. Consent to the NRF-ISFAP, and/or such other person or entity that the NRF-ISFAP may designate, the absolute right and permission to conduct creditworthy checks, affordability assessments and to verify his/her combined household income in order to ascertain whether they qualify for NRF-ISFAP funding.

The above checks and assessments by NRF-ISFAP will be conducted strictly in accordance and/or in compliance with the provisions of the National Credit Act No 34 of 2005.

Applicants who were previously funded by Funza Lushaka, Department of Military Veterans, or Department of Social Development (DSD) bursaries for their undergraduate studies must undergo a financial means test upon application for DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Funding. Typically, students funded by Funza Lushaka, Department of Military Veterans or DSD are nominated by the funder and financial need is not a criterion in the award of the undergraduate bursaries (although the bursaries are administered *via* NSFAS), hence they will be subjected to a financial means test at the postgraduate level.

7. Applicable Allowances

Successful applicants will be funded either at FCS or PCS, refer to **Table 2**.

Table 2: Annual NRF allowances applicable for FCS and PCS for honours, master's and doctoral studies.

Category	Funding per level of Postgraduate Study ¹					
	Honours		Master's		Doctoral	
	FCS	PCS	FCS	PCS	FCS	PCS
Value of the Scholarship (Rand)	R157 125 pa	R118 125 pa	R175 795 pa	R118 795 pa	R182 318 pa	R107 318 pa
Electronic study device allowance (Rand)²	10 000	n/a	10 000	n/a	10 000	n/a
Maximum Assistive Technology Device (Rand)³	20 000	n/a	20 000	n/a	20 000	n/a

¹ The scholarship amounts will be reviewed on an annual basis subject to the agreed CPI-linked sector-wide increases and alignment with the *Guidelines for the Department of Higher Education and Training Bursary Scheme for Students at Public Universities*.

² The electronic study device allowance will be provided as a once-off allowance for the duration of the postgraduate studies.

³ The Assistive Technology Device allowance will only be for students living with a disability.

Students living with a disability may apply for **additional funding** for an **assistive technology device** of up to **R20 000**. This is the **maximum amount allowed** during the tenure of the scholarship. **An assistive device** is defined as any device, product, equipment or tool that is designed or adapted to enable persons with disabilities to participate in activities, tasks or actions including: (i) **mobility aids** such as wheelchairs, prostheses and crutches as well as service animals (ii) **communication aids** such as hearing aids, Frequency Modulation (FM) systems; (iii) **sensory aids** such as white canes; noise reducing headphones and coloured lenses (iv) **technology aids** such as computers for alternate and augmentative communication, screen readers, magnifiers, texts in audio format (Strategic Policy Framework on Disability for the PSET, 2018). The assistive devices are aligned to requirements related to research studies rather than social services, as a result, the NRF will not pay costs for caregivers or other social related services.

7.1 The maximum period of support for each postgraduate level of study

The DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Funding is aimed at supporting individuals intending to register at a South African public university for full-time honours, master's or doctoral studies. Extension support for master's and doctoral students will be approved only under exceptional circumstances. The maximum period of support for each postgraduate level of study is indicated in **Table 3**.

Table 3: Maximum period of NRF funding for each postgraduate level of study.

Level of study	Maximum period of support
Honours	One (1) year
Master's	Two (2) years
Doctoral	Three (3) years
Master's upgrade to doctoral	Four (4) years
Extension Support for master's and doctoral	Six (6) or twelve (12) months

The period of support is calculated from the first year of registration for the study or research regardless of NRF funding and excludes the pre-proposal year.

8. Application Process

Applicants must first identify the university where they will be registered for their postgraduate degree before submitting an application to the NRF. When an applicant submits an application on the NRF Connect system, the application is routed to the university where the applicant intends to register. The NRF Connect system can be accessed on: <https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za>. Further instructions on the application process will be made available in the **DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Application and Funding Guide for 2024**. **Table 4** shows the cut-off dates for students to apply for scholarships at each postgraduate level of study. Additionally, applicants must please familiarise themselves with the **NRF Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)** and **NRF Statement of expectations for Postgraduate Training document**.

Table 4: Students' scholarships applications closing dates for each level of study.

Level of study	Closing dates
SARAO Honours	31 July 2023
First-time Honours <i>(For students who must undergo a Financial Means Test – to determine financial need status)</i>	15 August 2023

First-time Honours	24 November 2023
First-time Master's (including SARAO)	30 June 2023
First-time Doctoral (including SARAO)	30 June 2023
Level of study	Closing dates
Master's and Doctoral Extension Support	18 August 2023

8.1 Grantholder-linked (GHL) associated applicants

Applicants who have been recruited by an NRF-funded supervisor to be part of a research project/group, under any of the NRF Funding Instruments listed below, should apply *via* the **Scholarship linked to NRF-funded research category** and **should provide the supervisor's NRF Grant UID Number (unique identification number), OR provide the NRF Application Reference Number if the supervisor's research project application has been submitted to the NRF for review:**

- Research Chairs (SARChI);
- Centres of Excellence (CoE);
- Thuthuka (TTK);
- Global Knowledge Research Programmes such as
 - Earth Systems Science Research Programme (ESSRP);
 - Global Change Social Sciences Research Programme (GCSSRP); and
 - Risk and Vulnerability Science Centres (RVSCs);
- African Earth Observation Network (AEON);
- Foundational Biodiversity Information Programme (FBIP);
- South African Earth Observation Network (SAEON); and
- SARAO-Funded Research Groups
- National Astrophysics and Space Science Programme (NASSP)

8.2 Non NRF Grantholder-linked applicants

Applicants who have **not** been recruited by an NRF-funded supervisor will **not** need to provide a UID or application reference number on the online application template. These are applicants applying for General Scholarships, PDP, NRF-NASSP, NRF-SASOL, NRF-DAAD, NRF-SASAC¹, NRF-MINDS and NRF-SARAO.

¹ In 2022, seventeen (17) African countries participating in the Science Granting Councils Initiative (<https://sgciafrica.org/councils/>) collectively became the first regional member of IIASA under the new Sub-Saharan African Regional Member Organisation (SSARMO). SSARMO will be implemented through the Sub-Saharan African Systems Analysis Centre (SASAC), which among others will support joint research, scholarships and exchange programmes for candidates based in SGCI member countries. Implementation of programmes for SGCI members will be phased in the next three years, starting with support for student exchange programmes, joint research, and training opportunities.

8.3 Continuing NRF funded master's and doctoral students

All **current (2023 academic year) NRF funded** students who are eligible for a second or third year of funding must submit a Progress Report and not a new application. Refer to section 14. A new application should only be submitted for consideration to be funded for the next level of postgraduate study.

9. Documents to be attached to applications

Applicants must refer to the **DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Application and Funding Guide for 2024**, for a list of required attachments as these may differ for each scholarship category.

10. Review of Applications

10.1 Review of applications by university review committees

Honours, master's and doctoral funding applications will be reviewed at the institution where the student intends studying for the postgraduate degree. Reviews will be undertaken using standardised scorecards provided by the NRF as shown in **Tables 5, 6, 7 and 8**. As a result of the signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between DAAD and the NRF, DAAD alumni will participate in the institutional review process provided that there are applicants that have selected NRF-DAAD funding in their application.

Only applications that are recommended by the university for NRF funding, based on the review outcome, may be submitted to the NRF, by the university Designated Authority (DA). Review scores and recommendations must be uploaded onto the NRF Connect system by the university DA when recommending applications on the system. Applications which are not recommended for funding after the institutional review process should be rejected on the NRF Connect system and formal review feedback should be sent to applicants by the university. Appeals that relate to the review of applications by the universities must be responded to by the respective institutional DA. Refer to section 11 on the role of the NRF and the universities regarding the feedback that must be provided to applicants.

The university DA must submit a report on the review process, including comments from the reviewers, and signed by either the Deans of Faculties or the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Research.

10.2 Review of applications for strategic initiatives

Applications that fall under specific strategic initiatives may be reviewed by separate review panels using standardised scorecards provided by the NRF as shown in **Tables 5, 6, 7 and 8**. The strategic initiatives include, amongst others, the NRF-SARAO postgraduate funding, the DSI-NRF Centres of Excellence (CoE's) and the South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI). Only applications that are recommended for NRF funding based on the review, may be submitted to the NRF by the DA. Review scores and recommendations will be uploaded onto the NRF Connect system by the DA when recommending applications on the system. Applications which are not recommended for funding after the institutional review process should be rejected on the NRF Connect system and formal review feedback should be sent to applicants by the university. Appeals that relate to the review of applications by the universities must be responded to by the respective institutional DA. Refer to section 11 on the role of the NRF and the universities regarding the feedback that must be provided to applicants.

The DA must submit a report on the review process and comments from the reviewers signed by either the respective Director, Deans of Faculties, or the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Research.

10.3 Transparency and accountability

To be compliant with the Promotion of Administrative Justice Act (Act 3 of 2000) and in order to respond to appeals from applicants, the reports on the review process undertaken must include proof of the following:

- i. The names of committee or panel members of subject experts that participated in the review of applications for DSI-NRF postgraduate student funding;
- ii. Minutes of the review meeting and sign-off by the Chairperson of the review committee;
- iii. Recommendations made by the panel on whether applications are recommended or not recommended for funding, with clearly stated reasons; and
- iv. Correctly allocated scores against each criterion as per weighting provided in the relevant scorecard

10.4 Standardised review scorecards for reviewing applications

Four standardised scorecards as shown in **Tables 5, 6, 7 and 8** must be used to review applications for honours, master's, doctoral and extension support funding respectively.

Table 5. Review Scorecard for First-Time Applications for Honours Level Funding

Review Criteria and Weighting	Description
1. Academic merit (40%)	Average percentage mark for major subjects in the final-year undergraduate courses.
2. Completion time for undergraduate degree (40%)	Time taken to complete the undergraduate degree.
3. Priority Research Area (20%)	Research aligned with one of the national research priority areas.

Table 6. Review Scorecard for New Applications for Master’s Level Funding

Review Criteria and Weighting	Description
1. Academic merit (35%)	Average percentage mark for the honours degree if completed; or Average percentage mark for major subjects in the final-year undergraduate courses for applicants currently registered for honours degree; or Average percentage mark for major subjects in the third-year undergraduate courses for applicants in the final year of a four-year undergraduate degree.
2. Completion time for previous degree (15%)	Time taken to complete the honours degree if completed; or Time taken to complete the undergraduate degree if the honours degree is in progress; or Time taken to complete third-year undergraduate courses for applicants in the final year of a four-year undergraduate degree.
3. Priority Research Area (20%)	Research aligned with one of the national research priority areas.
4. Project Outline (30%)	Provide an overview of your research concept and your proposed aim.

Table 7. Review Scorecard for New Applications for Doctoral Level Funding

Review Criteria and Weighting	Description
1. Academic merit (30%)	Percentage mark for the master's degree if completed; or If the master's degree is in progress, average percentage mark for the honours degree; or Average percentage mark for major subjects in the final year of a four-year undergraduate degree.
2. Completion time for previous degree (15%)	Time taken for completion of the master's degree if completed; or If the master's degree is in progress, time taken to complete the honours degree or four-year undergraduate degree.
3. Track record or Research Outputs (15%)	Evidence of research outputs in accredited peer-reviewed publications and, presentations at conferences/symposiums.
4. Priority Research Area (10%)	Research aligned with one of the national research priority areas.
5. Originality of the Doctoral study (20%)	Problem statement, Identified knowledge gaps relating to the problem statement, Aim and Objectives of the study.
6. Potential Impact (Societal and/ or Knowledge) of the research (10%)	Potential to contribute to national research strategies and the strategic goals of the knowledge economy.

Table 8. Review Scorecard for Master's and Doctoral Level Extension Support

Review Criteria and Weighting	Description
1. Progress to date (25%)	Report on research work completed in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree.
2. Reasons why the study could not be completed in the NRF maximum funding period (25%)	Explanation of why the study could not be completed within the NRF funding period.
3. Work plan to complete the degree within the indicated timeframes (50%)	1. Work plan for six (6) or twelve (12) months, indicating activities for completion of master's or doctoral degree, indicating the start and completion date of each activity; 2. Proposed date for submission of the dissertation for examination; 3. Timelines for corrections to dissertation from reviewers; 4. Details of manuscripts to be drafted and submission timelines; and 5. Proposed graduation date.

11. Feedback to Applicants

Applicants must refer to the **DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Application and Funding Guide for 2024**, regarding the role of the NRF and the universities on feedback for applications submitted.

12. Appeals

Appeals relating to the review process will be undertaken by the university that reviewed the application. Appeals are **only** based on an unsuccessful outcome during the review process by the university i.e., unfair comment from the review panel or scientific merit. It is the responsibility of the applicant to request formal review feedback from the institution. Appeals may not be lodged against the funding decision taken such as PCS funding or not being awarded funding due to budget constraints.

13. Equity and Redress

The NRF applies measures for enhancing equity, fairness, and justice in accordance with the South African Constitution. The NRF adheres to the Immigration Act of 2002 which states that the holder of a permanent resident permit *"has all the rights, privileges, duties and obligations of a citizen, save for those rights, privileges, duties and obligations which a law or the Constitution explicitly ascribes to citizenship"*. Additionally, the NRF adheres and supports the SADC protocol on education and training requiring member states to reserve at least 5% of admissions for students from South African Development Community (SADC) nations other than their own, treating these as home students for purposes of tuition and accommodation.

In line with the national imperative of enhancing equity of postgraduate student access, success and throughput using funding, all postgraduate funding must prioritise support for appropriately qualified applicants from designated groups viz. Black, female and persons living with disabilities, while ensuring that only applications that meet the merit review and selection criteria are supported. Additionally, the NRF will prioritise applicants who are financially needy, yet academically capable and previously funded by the NSFAS, NRF and/or ISFAP.

All DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Funding will be allocated as follows:

- **95%** to South African citizens and permanent residents;
- **5%** to students from the SADC countries and the rest of the world; and

- **55%** to women.

The **South African Citizens and permanent residents' targets** are further disaggregated in terms of **race and disability** as follows:

- **90%** Black (African, Coloured and Indian);
- **10%** White; and
- **1%** Students living with a disability.

When funding decisions are made by the NRF, consideration will be given to ensuring the need to strengthen research capacity in scarce skills, priority skills and knowledge fields as well as to accelerate the demographic transformation. Allocation of funding will be determined by the following criteria: Recommendation by the institutional merit - review panel; NRF Annual Performance Plan (APP) targets; Institutional rate of scholarship awards uptake; Postgraduate enrolments at each university; Institutional spread; Knowledge domains as specified by the funder; Financially need as determined by ISFAP facilitated household means test; Previously NRF, NSFAS and/or ISFAP funded students; and Availability of budget.

14. Progress Reporting

All **continuing students** that are eligible for continuation of scholarship funding for the next year of study must **submit a Progress Report (PR) and not a new application**. Final year students must submit final year reports.

All students who have received the DSI-NRF postgraduate student funding at either FCS or PCS as well those students funded under the old NRF policy, are required to submit Progress Reports on the NRF Connect system on the dates indicated in the NRF Conditions of Grant (CoG).

Students will be expected to submit the reports to the NRF as follows:

- i. The honours students are expected to submit certificate of completion to the postgraduate and/or research office at their respective institutions after graduation.
- ii. Master's and doctoral students must submit the progress report by mid-February 2024.

Failure to submit a progress report on time will result in the cancellation of a grant for the subsequent year(s) and the grantholder will not be eligible for further funding at the postgraduate level at which they were in breach of the CoG. Students will not be considered for

funding for the next level of study if they have failed to comply with the progress reporting requirements as per the CoG.

Note: Reporting requirements for NRF-SARAO-funded postgraduate students are provided in the Terms and Conditions / Conditions of Grant, provided by NRF-SARAO.

15. Financial Control

The DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Funding awards will be managed in terms of standard NRF financial policies and procedures. The payment of the grant by the NRF to successful applicants will be administered by the NRF Grants Management and Systems Administration (GMSA) Directorate to the relevant institutions. The institutions will in turn administer the funds on behalf of the NRF to the successful applicant to the value of the full sum awarded by the NRF.

16. Monitoring and Evaluation by the NRF

The NRF will continuously monitor and review the progress of the students at an individual and institutional level. On an ongoing basis, the NRF will undertake institutional visits and focus group discussions which will be conducted at the host universities.

16.1 NRF-DAAD Funded students

The DAAD and NRF would like to strengthen and maintain contacts with former in-country scholarship-holders, therefore the NRF-DAAD funded final year students will receive a questionnaire that they must complete truthfully and forward to the NRF. The scholarship-holder gives consent for the questionnaire to be forwarded to the DAAD for their records. The universities should ensure that this information is transmitted to the NRF as soon as the scholarship ends. The scholarship-holder is expected to uphold contact with the DAAD and join its extensive Alumni family. Please contact the DAAD Information Centre, Johannesburg for further information (daad@wits.ac.za).

17. Additional Information

- i. Successful applicants that receive a provisional award for postgraduate funding from the NRF are required to accept the NRF CoG online via NRF Connect, which will be

- uploaded to the application at the time of the award. The required documents must be uploaded to the system when accepting the award on NRF Connect.
- ii. Successful applicants that receive the NRF-SASOL FOUNDATION scholarship who are not registered in one of the five mentioned institutions on section 4.5, or who want to change institutions after being awarded the scholarship, will forfeit the scholarship.
 - iii. Successful applicants who are awarded scholarships linked to NRF-funded research are not permitted to change institution, supervisor or project.
 - iv. 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 submitted with the mid-year reports due by the end of August. Honours students should submit the signed MoU between student and HoD/Supervisor at take up of award or with the mid-year reports. Master's students registered for coursework in the first year of study, should submit the agreed and signed MoU with their year-end reports due by mid-February of the following year.
 - v. Postgraduate funding awarded for the 2024 academic year, that is not taken up by 30 April 2024 will be automatically cancelled for reallocation unless otherwise approved by the NRF.
 - vi. All DSI-NRF postgraduate student funding shall be held as the primary funding towards the research study.
 - vii. Grantholders 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 students' Progress Reports. Please refer further to the *Statement of Expectations for DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Funding* available under call documents on the NRF website.
 - viii. The grantholder must obtain the degree, for which the postgraduate funding was awarded, by the contractual date, which is within one (1) year after NRF funding has ceased, and must notify the NRF *via* the university DA of the completion of the degree.
 - ix. Grantholders may not hold bursaries, awards, assistantships and/ or receive emoluments from public or private institutions in conjunction with the DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Funding. The grant may not be held concurrently with any other DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Funding or fully funded government scholarship/ bursary from organisations, such as Council for Scientific and Industrial Research or the South African Medical Research Council.

- x. Grantholders on "FCS" or "PCS" funding **may receive supplementary⁴ or top-up⁴ funding** from another private-sector source, another South African government source, the NRF supervisor's running expenses (SARChI, CoEs, etc.) or any other source (E.g. merit award), provided that the total funding received from the NRF, and the other source(s) does not exceed institutional maximum limit.
- xi. By submitting an application, the applicant consents to the NRF for processing of personal information in compliance with the "POPI Act" as required from time to time for funding and statistical purposes.

⁴*Supplementation or top-up is additional funding on an existing scholarship, however, it cannot be another fully funded scholarship.*

It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that:

- They have read and understood the requirements as laid out in the DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Application and Funding Framework as well as the DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Application and Funding Guide for 2024;
- They have applied for the correct category/scholarship;
- All attachments are translated into English as a medium of communication;
- A suitable supervisor and co-supervisor (if applicable) have been identified;
- For first-time honours applicants, the final examination results are captured in the scorecard of the application as soon as they are made available by the institution.
- For first-time master's applicants, the identified master's supervisor submits the required report *via* the NRF Connect system;
- For first-time doctoral applicants, master's supervisor, the identified doctoral supervisor submits the required report *via* the NRF Connect system;
- The application is completed in full and the information furnished is correct;
- The university has received the application submitted on the NRF Connect system.
- To ensure that proof of NSFAS/ISFAP funding is attached at time of application if applicant was previously funded NSFAS/ISFAP.

18. NRF Contact Persons

For enquiries, applicants are encouraged to contact the Research or Postgraduate offices at their universities. Should there still be a need to contact the NRF, below are the contact persons and details:

For General honours related enquiries, please contact:

Mr Lehlogonolo Phaahla: Professional Officer – HICD. Telephone: 012 481 4315.

Email Address: LA.Phaahla@risa.nrf.ac.za

For General First-time master's and doctoral, and NRF-DAAD related enquiries, please contact:

Ms Kgaugelo Molepo: Professional Officer – HICD. Telephone: 012 481 4148.

Email Address: KJ.Molepo@risa.nrf.ac.za

For master's and doctoral Extension Support, NRF-SASAC, PDP and NRF-SASOL related enquiries, please contact:

Ms Nontokozo Kunene: Professional Officer – HICD. Telephone: 012 481 4105

Email Address: NS.Kunene@risa.nrf.ac.za

For National Skills Fund and NRF-MINDS related enquiries, please contact:

Ms Busisiwe Sibiyi: Professional Officer – HICD. Telephone: 012 481 4166

Email Address: BG.Sibiyi@risa.nrf.ac.za

For Global Knowledge Partnerships related enquiries, please contact:

Mr Nelson Komane: Professional Officer - HICD. Telephone: 012 481 4219.

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

For First-time SARChI honours, master's and doctoral related enquiries, please contact:

Ms Andisiwe Jukuda: Professional Officer – RCCE. Telephone: 012 481 4113.

Email Address: AH.Jukuda@risa.nrf.ac.za

For First-time CoEs honours, master's and doctoral related enquiries, please contact:

Ms Malekgotla Finger: Professional Officer – RCCE. Telephone: 012 481 4003.

Email Address: MD.Finger@risa.nrf.ac.za

For NRF-SARAO postgraduate scholarships related enquiries, please contact:

Annah Mashemola: Professional Officer, HCD, NRF-SARAO. Telephone: 012 442 2434.

Email Address: asmashemola@sarao.ac.za or amashemola@ska.ac.za.