



FRAMEWORK

Study Support for Completing Part-time Doctoral Students

Directorate	Human and Infrastructure Capacity Development
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1. Introduction

The purpose of this framework document is to outline the funding principles and implementation of the part-time Doctoral study support funding instrument. The funding instrument is supported by the Department of Science and Technology (DST), through a contractual agreement (DST/CON 0118/2012) with the National Research Foundation (NRF) for the management of funding for human capital development in South Africa.

2. Background

Studies on the state of postgraduate studies in South Africa have shown that more and more Doctoral students are remaining or 'piling up' in the system, and fewer graduates are produced, relative to the number of new enrolments. Consequently, supervisors of Master's and Doctoral students at South African universities face an increasing burden as the average number of students to supervise continues to increase. In 2005, it was estimated that the "average" supervisor would have to supervise seven (7) Master's and Doctoral students. The situation is worse in the social sciences, in which a single supervisor was estimated to have nearly 12 students (CHE, 2007). This has direct implications for the completion rates of Doctoral degrees in South Africa. On average, Doctoral students take 4.5 years to complete their studies. However, the mature students between the age groups of 40 to 49; and 50 to 59 years of age, take up to six years to complete their Doctoral studies. These students are faced with work pressures, financial obligations and have limited access to scholarship/sabbatical opportunities. The completion rates may be improved by affording the opportunity, to the large number of part-time students, for dedicated time away from work pressures to complete their dissertations.

The funding instrument aims to provide funding to part-time registered Doctoral students enabling completion of the Doctoral studies and thereby increase graduation and throughput rates. Currently, the NRF provides funding predominantly for full-time postgraduate studies. This is the third call for applications for this funding instrument. In line with the Ministerial Guidelines for support for part-time postgraduate studies, this funding instrument will be expanded in future to provide comprehensive support for Honours, Masters and Doctoral part-time students in selected disciplines.

3. Objectives

The objectives of the part-time study support funding instrument are to:

- Provide an opportunity for completing ¹ Doctoral students to submit their dissertations for examination;
- Ease the burden of supervision by facilitating the completion of Doctoral degrees;
- Effect transformation in the knowledge workforce in South Africa, with respect to race, gender and persons with disabilities; and
- Develop a cohort of potential candidates for effective industry-academia partnerships that will be composed of mentors and role models for the next generation of researchers.

4. Application Process

4.1 Areas of support

Support will be provided to students currently pursuing research based Doctoral degrees, at public universities, in all areas of Science, Engineering, Technology and Mathematical Sciences (STEM) as well as the Social Science and Humanities (SSH).

4.2 Eligibility

Priority will be given to applicants that are in the process of finalising their thesis for examination and/or preparing a submission of a manuscript to an accredited journal. Students who are academically deserving but financially needy will be given priority.

In selecting applicants for consideration for funding, the following criteria will apply:

- Applicants must either be South African citizens or in possession of South African permanent residency;
- An applicant may not concurrently hold this support with another NRF scholarship or scholarship from any other South African government source; and

¹ Completing refers to students who need not more than one year to submission of their theses for examination.

- An applicant must currently be registered for a Doctoral degree and be in the final year of the research activities.

4.3 Value of part-time bursary support

Support for completion of studies will be made on a *pro rata* basis not exceeding twelve months. For the 2016 academic year, the value of the bursaries will be a maximum of R10 000 per month for twelve months or R120 000 per annum. Candidates will be expected to submit a budget indicating how the funds will be utilised.

4.4 Institutional Accountability

Applications must include a letter of support from the supervisor of the Doctoral research as well as the Human Resources (HR) Manager of the employing organisation. The letter from the employing organisation must:

- confirm the employment status of the candidate; and
- commit to allow the candidate time away from work, for the indicated period, in order to finalise and submit the Doctoral dissertation.

5. Equity and redress

In line with the national imperative of equity and redress, the bursary scheme prioritises support for appropriately qualified applicants from designated groups *viz.* black, female and persons with disabilities, while ensuring that only applications that meet the NRF merit review and selection criteria are supported. The set equity targets are 80% blacks, 50% women and 4% students with disabilities.

6. Selection criteria

The following will be considered in evaluating all applications in a competitive merit review process:

- The student's current and potential research performance.

Selection criteria will include previous research outputs; manuscripts submitted to an accredited journal for publication; and research awards/prizes/honours;

- The feasibility and merit of the applicant's research project proposal and plan for completion and submission of the Doctoral dissertation;
- Written support from the Doctoral supervisor for the proposed plan for completion of the Doctoral studies; and
- Written confirmation from the applicant's employer to grant the specified period of leave for the purpose of completing the Doctoral dissertation.

7. Reporting

At the end of the funding period, a final report must be submitted, in a format provided by the NRF, indicating the outputs. In addition, each student will be required to provide proof of submission of the Doctoral dissertation and, where applicable, proof of submission of a manuscript to an accredited journal.