



RHODES UNIVERSITY

## HUMAN RESOURCES DIVISION POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR MERIT AWARDS FOR SUPPORT STAFF

**Policy Number: H5**

**Policy approved by the Administrative Sub-Committee of Council on behalf of Council on 11 July 2001**

**Last Updated: May 2003**

### NATURE AND INTENT OF POLICY

Through this merit award policy, the University is committed to recognising and rewarding support staff for outstanding achievement and excellence in their work. It is important to note that merit awards are intended to reward outstanding performance in a staff member's particular job function, over and above expected work efficiency. Merit awards are made at the current grade of post and should not be confused with the upgrading of a post due to the changing nature of job responsibilities. The upgrading of a post should be referred to the Job Evaluation Committee. The merit bonus should also not replace the formal allocation of a responsibility allowance where an individual has been allocated the duties of another member of staff in his/her absence or has taken on additional responsibilities for a limited duration.

This policy is applicable to all members of the support staff, i.e. permanent, contract and those still on probation.

### DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this document, the term *Department* is used to imply Department/ Division/Institute and the term *Manager* is used to imply Head of Department/Division/ Institute or Manager of a Section/Unit. However, in cases where a distinction needs to be made between the Head of Department and the Manager, both terms are used.

awards procedures:

#### *Recognition of excellence*

The purpose of merit awards is to recognise *outstanding* performance over and above work done to the required standard. Merit awards are not made on the grounds of scarcity of staff, seniority or length of service.

#### *Equitable access*

Every member of the support staff is eligible to apply for a merit award. Staff will be given assistance in making an application through, for example, the running of workshops which explain the procedures and requirements to staff.

#### *Management of performance*

The merit award system is an integral part of a performance management system where Managers are able to motivate staff by rewarding them for excellence. Where appropriate, discussions between the Manager and staff

### PRINCIPLES

In demonstrating its commitment to the rewarding of staff, the University will ensure that the following principles are applied in the merit

member on performance and performance objectives may assist the individual in preparing an application for a merit award. In the long-term, this process could assist in preparing the staff member for promotion to a new post.

### ***Responsibility***

The success of this policy in motivating staff to achieve excellence will only be possible, if various parties execute their responsibilities in an appropriate manner.

### **Responsibility of the Manager**

The Manager is responsible for:

- ensuring that s/he understands the policy requirements and the purpose of merit awards in managing the performance of staff;
- communicating relevant information regarding the merit award process to all staff;
- identifying and recommending worthy individuals for merit awards. (It is preferable that the Head of Department or, in some cases, a Manager within the Department, identifies and recommends individuals for merit awards without the staff member having to initiate such an application);
- discussing with interested or identified staff their suitability to apply. If the Manager is of the opinion that the individual does not meet the criteria for a merit award, s/he must communicate his/her concerns and reasons to the staff member and discuss what is required to make a future application viable;
- completing and submitting an application where s/he supports the application, irrespective of whether the staff member initiated the application or not. (The Manager can request the assistance of the staff member in the gathering of information for the application but the application must be written in the third person by the Manager if s/he supports the application.)
- offering assistance to the staff member in completing the application (including the typing of the document) even where s/he does not support the application. The Manager is required to submit to the Committee his/her reasons for not supporting the application;
- ensuring that applications are complete and submitted timeously to the HRD Office;
- providing timeous feedback to the staff member on the outcome of the application, within the time frames specified within this policy. (All correspondence from the HRD Office regarding the application will be sent to the Manager who is required to communicate the details thereof with the staff member);
- discussing with the staff member the feasibility of requesting a review of the preliminary recommendation of the Support Staff Merit Awards Committee where the application has not been supported by the Committee.

### **Responsibility of Individual Staff Members**

It is expected that any staff member wishing to make an application will conduct him/herself in a professional manner as follows:

- that s/he will be aware of the policy and procedures having either read the relevant documentation, discussed the policy with his/her manager or staff of the HRD Office, and/or attended a merit award workshop;
- that s/he will give careful consideration to making an application, engaging in a realistic assessment of his/her performance with the Manager;
- that s/he will, well in advance of the deadline for applications, discuss with the manager his/her intention to apply; and
- that s/he will provide accurate information to the Committee.

### **Responsibility of the HR Division**

The Human Resources (HR) Division is responsible for:

- administering of the procedure;
- informing staff members and Managers of the policy and procedures;
- providing guidance to Managers and staff members regarding a potential application;
- providing training for Managers on appraisal and related skills;
- initial screening of applications to ensure adherence to policy requirements;
- maintaining the integrity of the process; and
- evaluating the effectiveness of this policy and associated procedures.

### ***Communication***

Documentation on the merit awards process must be communicated timeously to all members of staff ensuring optimal use of various communication channels.

### ***Procedural fairness***

Objectivity in decision-making is critical to staff perceptions of a fair merit award system. Every attempt will be made to ensure fairness through, for example

- making the criteria for evaluation explicit to staff;
- requiring submission of evidence that the applicant meets the criteria for evaluation;
- having a committee rather than individuals make the decision;
- ensuring that the applicant has sight of his/her Manager's comments, whether positive or negative;
- providing applicants with feedback when their applications are not supported by the Committee and allowing them the opportunity of submitting further evidence to support their application.



## **TYPES OF MERIT AWARDS**

There are two types of merit awards:

- the bonus and
- the increment.

The **BONUS** is awarded for a once-off *outstanding* achievement and/or *significant* additional responsibility assumed *in the last twelve months*. There are two types of bonus awards namely, a bonus award for individuals and a bonus award for teams.

A team may be a normal work unit in terms of the structure of the department/unit/section or a group specifically formed to complete the particular project/task or take on the particular significant responsibility. There are separate application forms for each award.

An **INCREMENT** is awarded on proof of *sustained excellence* in terms of work performance *over a period of at least two years*. There are three separate application forms for staff on grades 6 and above, for staff on grades 3 to 5 and for staff on grades 1 or 2.

Only in unusual circumstances will an applicant be awarded both a bonus and an increment in the same review period. In such instances, there must be clear differences in the applications for the two awards where the application for the increment does NOT include any content found in the application for the bonus.

## **PERIOD UNDER REVIEW**

The period under review for merit awards is very important. The Support Staff Merit Awards Committee will not consider any application which does not meet the requirements as regards the review period.

For the bonus, the period under review is the last 12 months from 1 September of the previous year to 31 August of the current year.

In the case of the merit increment, the period under review is at a minimum the past 24 months as at 31 August of the current year e.g., 1 September 2001 to 31 August 2003.

## **IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS IN MAKING AN APPLICATION**

A number of considerations impact the eligibility of individual staff members to apply for a merit award (both bonus and increment). Managers and staff must ensure that they meet these requirements before making an application. These considerations include:

- the disciplinary record of the individual;
- the length of service in current position; and
- the length of time since the individual last received a merit award.

### **Disciplinary Considerations**

Individuals who have a documented disciplinary offence (e.g., a formal verbal, written or final written warning) during the period under review for the merit award do not have the right to apply for a merit award. Under these circumstances, Managers are not obliged to assist staff who insist on making an application.

Where a team bonus application is being made and one member of the team has a documented disciplinary offence, s/he will not be eligible to apply for a merit bonus. The rest of the team is still eligible to apply.

A documented disciplinary offence must be differentiated from the process of counselling an individual because of a performance problem e.g. late coming. Where an individual has had such a problem but after counselling the problem has not persisted, such an individual would be eligible to apply. Where the problem has persisted and has resulted in a formal documented verbal or written warning, the staff member would not be eligible to apply for a merit award.

In the event that an applicant is found guilty of a disciplinary offence between the time of his/her application and January of the next year when the award comes into effect, the University has the right to review whether the staff member should still receive the merit award.

### **Length of Service**

In the case of applying for an increment, the staff member must have been in his/her current post for at least two years at the time of application i.e., from 1 September two years prior.

In the case of the bonus, the length of service is not important. It is important however, that the achievement took place and/or the significant additional responsibility was assumed in the last 12 months i.e., since the last merit award process.

### **Length of Time Since Last Award**

A staff member may only apply for an increment every second year i.e., in year 1 should s/he be successful in his/her application, s/he would only be eligible to apply again for an increment in year 3. This staff member could however, apply

for a bonus should s/he meet the criteria for that award.

There are no limitations on how frequently an individual may apply for a merit bonus.

## **BONUS AWARD**

### **Criteria for the Award**

In assessing the merit of each application, the decision to award the bonus will be based on the impact on the Department/ University of the achievement and/or responsibilities assumed as well as the significance of the achievement or the additional responsibility.

#### *Examples of outstanding achievements:*

- the successful completion of a major project or event which contributed to the effectiveness of the Department/ University;
- recognition by an external organisation of a work-related contribution where such a contribution has had a positive impact on the Department/University.

#### *Examples of additional responsibility*

- involvement in activities outside the usual scope of the job/Department, e.g. conferences;
- taking on additional tasks due to the prolonged absence of a colleague, e.g. for maternity or sick leave.

### **Conditions in Making the Award**

*The award of a merit bonus for an individual is conditional upon:*

- The applicant fully meeting the performance requirements of his/her normal job function i.e., even if a staff member has taken on significant additional responsibility, if s/he is not meeting the normal requirements of the job, s/he will not be eligible for the bonus award;
- The applicant having received no extra remuneration for any significant additional responsibility assumed; and
- The achievement or responsibility falling outside of the applicant's normal work

responsibilities.

*The award of a merit bonus for a team is conditional upon:*

- Each team member meeting the performance requirements of his/her normal job function;
- Each team member having received no extra remuneration for any significant additional responsibilities assumed;
- The achievement or responsibility falling outside of the team's normal work responsibilities;
- The application demonstrating why the achievement or additional responsibility assumed could only be done by the team.

### **Rating of Applications**

All applications for a merit bonus will be evaluated on a three point scale:

- 0 – does not meet the requirements for the bonus;
- 1 – meets the requirements for the bonus; and
- 2 - more than meets the requirements for the bonus.

### **Monetary Value of Award**

Monetary awards for a bonus will be a one-off non-pensionable payment. The following guidelines will be used to determine the value of the award:

- The award will usually be calculated in multiples of the annual notch increment (approximately 4% of annual salary) for the post (to which the individual is appointed) where this multiple may be influenced by the rating given e.g. for a rating of 2, the applicant would get a bigger bonus than for a rating of 1;
- There will usually be a minimum value for the award as recommended by the Support Staff Merit Awards Committee and approved by Council. For example, if the minimum value is determined as the value of an annual notch increment for grade 6 posts, all successful applicants in posts lower than grade 6 will still receive this minimum value and not the annual notch increment associated with their current post (as this will

be lower than the minimum value).

- In the case of team awards, the calculation will usually be done as follows: the annual notch increment (or multiples thereof depending of the rating received) for each team member (corresponding to their level of post) will be calculated and the total value thereof for the team will be divided equally amongst the members of the team.

## **INCREMENT AWARD**

### **Criteria for the Award**

For the increment award, applicants need to provide evidence of sustained excellence against the following criteria (please note that these criteria are detailed in the application forms):

- Standards of performance achieved
- Other important criteria of particular relevance to this job
- Customer Service Orientation
- Level of co-operation
- Communication
- Investment in personal development and its application in the workplace
- Initiative
- Standard of supervision/management (if relevant)
- Involvement in University or outside-related activities or both
- Any other relevant information.

Where overtime may be a consideration in an application, it must be made very clear as to whether the individual has or has not been compensated for working such overtime, either

in pay or with time off.

To ensure that the members of the Support Staff Merit Awards Committee are familiar with the job requirements, the applicant/Manager must indicate these requirements as well as how the applicant exceeds them.

An applicant need not necessarily excel in all of the assessment criteria, some of which may be of greater importance in some jobs than in others.

The applicant/manager will need to provide an argument if some of the criteria are not valid and may include further criteria of relevance to the job.

Where a second or further applications are made in subsequent years, it must be remembered that new incidents of performance will have to be evidenced as the individual has already been compensated for previous incidents of performance e.g., initiative shown, improvements in customer orientation etc.

Documentation (i.e. letter of thanks or commendation received in the course of doing one's job) may support the application. However, such documentation must contain evidence of the quality of the service or work (and not simply be a letter of thanks). It is not necessary to attach detailed CVs, manuals or portfolios.

### **Rating of Applications**

All applications for an increment are evaluated on a 2 point scale:

- 0 - does not meet the requirements for an increment; and
- 1 – meets the requirements for an increment.

Where an application is made and the applicant is currently on a higher grade than that of the actual job (due to the past practice of personal promotion), his/her performance will be evaluated relative to his/her personal grade and not the job grade (i.e., on a higher level). Similarly, where a job has been regraded to a lower grade but the individual remains at the historical (and therefore, personal) grade, his/her performance will be evaluated relative to his/her personal grade and not the job grade (i.e., on a higher level).

### **Monetary Value of Award**

The monetary value for an increment award will be a permanent increase in the successful applicant's salary by one notch, not limited to the ceiling of the candidate's current salary scale.



## **MERIT AWARD PROCEDURES**

**1** In early June of every year the Human Resources Development (HRD) Office will call for applications for merit awards.

**2** In July of each year, the HRD Office will run workshops for prospective applicants and Managers who are considering making an application and who need guidance in doing so.

**3** A prospective applicant or his/her Manager may obtain the relevant documentation from:

- the HR website ([www.ru.ac.za/administrative/hr/human\\_resources\\_development/meritawards\\_policy\\_and\\_procedures](http://www.ru.ac.za/administrative/hr/human_resources_development/meritawards_policy_and_procedures))
- the HRD Office – please send an empty computer disk and the relevant documentation can be copied onto this disk. Paper copies of the documentation will also be available.

**4** Upon receipt of the circular calling for applications from the HRD Office, the Manager shall:

- ensure that all staff are aware that the process has commenced;
- invite interested staff to discuss their desire and suitability to apply for a merit award;
- identify suitable candidates;
- hold discussions with prospective applicants (either identified by the Manager or who have come forward of their own accord), during which reasons for support or non-support by the Manager are indicated and the nature of the award, bonus or increment is determined;
- if necessary and where appropriate, discuss with the applicant the collection of relevant

information and the compilation of the application;

- in the case of an application that s/he supports, complete the application (it may be appropriate for the staff member to write an outline of the application providing examples/evidence for the various criteria.

The Manager can then edit this and add further information to it. The application must however, be written in the third person). The application must be typed;

- in the case of unsupported applications, offer his/her assistance to the staff member in the writing of the application. With such an application, the Manager is *obliged* to submit further documentation stating his/her reasons for not supporting the application;
- forward all documentation to the Head of Department, if s/he is not the Head of Department. Where the Head does not concur with the Manager's assessment, s/he is obliged to discuss his/her assessment with the Manager and to submit further documentation;
- show the staff member the final application including comments by him/herself and if relevant, the Head of Department. The application is then signed by the staff member in the presence of both parties. A copy of all documentation must be retained by the applicant;
- forward the application to the HRD Office by the closing date, usually in the first week of September of each year.

**5** Upon receipt of the application, the HRD Office will:

(i) Check to see that:

- the staff member is eligible to apply as per the considerations in this policy. If the staff member is not eligible, the application will be withdrawn and the applicant/manager informed;
- the application has been made for the correct award. Where an application has been made for the wrong award (e.g., an application has been made for a merit increment but the more appropriate award is the merit bonus), the application will be returned to the individual/manager and s/he will be requested to re-submit the application;

- the application is complete and typed and if incomplete or not typed, send the application back to the Manager concerned;
- if the Manager has supported the application, that it is written by the Manager in the third person. If not, the application will be returned to the Manager concerned;

(ii) Acknowledge receipt of applications by a letter sent to both the Manager and the applicant. This letter will outline the time-frames of the process.

(iii) Prepare all documentation for the Support Staff Merit Awards Committee.

**6** Within six weeks of the closing date for applications, the Support Staff Merit Awards (SSMA) Committee will meet to consider the relevant documentation.

**The committee** will be chaired by the Vice Principal and will consist of:

- Director of Human Resources or his/her representative
- the Registrar or Deputy Registrar
- the Director of Finance or his/her representative
- the Director of Estates or his/her representative
- the Director of Communications or his/her representative
- the Director of Development or his/her representative
- the Director of Information Technology or his/her representative
- the Dean or Assistant Dean of Students
- the University Librarian or his/her representative
- a member of the academic staff nominated by the Deans
- the HRD Manager
- one NTESU representative
- one NEHAWU representative

With the exception of the NTESU and NEHAWU representatives, all individuals serving on the Committee must be employed in a grade 13 or higher post.

Where an applicant's Head of Department serves on the Committee, s/he may be permitted to

answer any questions put to him/her by other members of the Committee.

However, s/he shall be required to recuse him/herself from any debate or vote.

Should the SSMA Committee view an application where it appears that a re-grading of the job is required, the Manager will be advised to ask for a review of the job grade (i.e. for a job evaluation). This recommendation by the SSMA Committee does not however, guarantee upgrading of the job as this is the decision of the Job Evaluation Committee. This recommendation would not impact in any way on the application for a merit award which would still be considered.

**7** Within five (5) working days of the Committee having considered the applications, the chief signatory on the document (i.e. the direct supervisor/ manager) will be informed of the preliminary recommendation in the form of a letter with feedback for passing on to the applicant. This preliminary recommendation must be communicated to the applicant within five (5) working days from the date of the letter.

**8** Applicants who have not gained the initial support of the Committee will be given an opportunity to request a review of the Committee's preliminary recommendation. Applicants/Managers, who wish to provide additional information and/or make representation to the Committee, must give notice of this intention and submit any additional documentation in the prescribed format to the HRD Office within twelve (12) working days from the date of the letter informing the Manager of the recommendation.

**9** At the second meeting of the Committee, to be convened within six (6) weeks of the first meeting for the purpose of reconsidering disputed applications, representation may be made by the applicant and his/her manager or a fellow employee. The composition of the Committee will remain unchanged.

**10** Within five (5) working days of this Committee having met, the chief signatory on the document (i.e. the direct supervisor/manager) will be informed of the final decision.

At his/her earliest convenience, but not later than seven (7) working days of being informed of the decision, s/he is required to meet with the applicant to relay the Committee's final recommendation. A letter, with feedback for the applicant will be sent for passing on to the applicant.

**11** Positive recommendations of the SSMA Committee will be forwarded to the Administrative Sub-Committee of Council for consideration and approval. As soon as this Council has approved the recommendations, letters will be written to the successful candidates, usually before the University closes for the shut-down period over Christmas and New Year. This letter will indicate that the recommendations have been approved and will confirm the value of the award and when it will be paid (the merit bonus is usually paid in December of the current year or January of the following year and the merit increment will be implemented as at 1 January of the following year).



