



## **Framework Document**

### **Study Support for Completing Part-time Doctoral Students**

**Directorate:** Human and Infrastructure Capacity Development  
**Date:** April 2016

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## **1. Introduction**

The purpose of this framework document is to outline the funding principles and implementation of the funding instrument for Study Support for Completing Part-time Doctoral Students. 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 (HCD) in South Africa.

## **2. Background**

The study by (CHE, 2007) on the state of postgraduate studies in South Africa have shown that more and more doctoral students are 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 was found to be worse in the social sciences, in which a single supervisor was estimated to have nearly 12 students. 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 take up to six (6) years to complete their doctoral studies. These students are faced with work pressures, financial obligations and have limited access to scholarship/sabbatical opportunities.

In 2015, Cloete and co-workers ascribed the low progression and retention rates for the postgraduate pipeline to the part-time nature of studies. This DST commissioned "*Study of the Postgraduate Pipeline*," indicates that Doctoral students who study full-time complete their studies on average in half of the time it takes part-time students. Among the top three reasons given for considering discontinuing with their studies, across all three study levels, are challenges with finding adequate time to dedicate to the postgraduate studies. 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 (Cloete et al. 2015).

In line with the Ministerial Guidelines on improving on equity in the distribution of Bursaries and Fellowships made through the NRF and funded by the DST, ten percent of DST-NRF funding for postgraduate student support may be for part-time postgraduate studies (Ministerial guidelines on Bursaries and Fellowships, 2013). The funding instrument aims to provide funding to part-time registered Doctoral students enabling completion of their Doctoral studies and thereby increase graduation and throughput rates.

### **3. Objectives**

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

- Provide an opportunity for completing <sup>1</sup> 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. Eligibility**

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 must be registered on part-time basis at a South African public university;
- An applicant may not concurrently hold this support with another NRF scholarship or scholarship from any other South African government source; and
- An applicant must currently be registered for a Doctoral degree and be in the final year of the research activities (applicants must have completed all fieldwork, experiments, research methodology and analysis and should be in the write up stages of their doctoral dissertation).
- An applicant must be employed at the time of the application.

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

## **5. 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).

## **6. Application Process**

Applications for funding in 2017 must be submitted through the NRF Online Submission to the NRF by accessing the link: <https://nrfs submission.nrf.ac.za/>. The call for applications will be open from 04 May 2016 to 29 June 2016. Further instructions on the application process will be made available in the *DST-NRF – Study Support for Completing Part-time Doctoral Studies Funding Guide for 2017*.

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 provide the following:

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

## **7. Value of Scholarship**

Support for completion of doctoral studies will be made on a *pro rata* basis not exceeding twelve months. For the 2017 academic year, the value of the bursaries will be a maximum of R10 000 per month for twelve months or R120 000 per annum.

## **8. 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, 55% women and 4% students with disabilities.

## **9. 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;
- 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.

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

## **10. 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.

## **11. Financial Control**

These 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 Grants Management and Systems Administration (GMSA) Directorate to the relevant institutions' cost centres. The institution will in turn administer the funds on behalf of the successful grant holder to the value of the full sum awarded by the NRF.

Scholarships not taken up within six (6) months of the grant award will be cancelled for reallocation unless otherwise approved by the NRF.

## **12. NRF Contact Persons**

When making an enquiry, please use “NRF- Study Support for Completing Part-time Doctoral Studies Call” as the email subject line

### **For funding instrument related enquiries, please contact:**

Mr Mduduzi Tshabangu

Professional Officer: Human and Infrastructure Capacity Development (HICD)

Telephone: 012 481 4148. E-mail: [mduduzi.tshabangu@nrf.ac.za](mailto:mduduzi.tshabangu@nrf.ac.za)

### **For grants management related enquiries, please contact:**

Ms Nozine Ngeketo

Professional Officer: Grants Management and Systems Administration (GMSA)

Telephone: 012 481 4184. E-mail: [nozine.ngeketo@nrf.ac.za](mailto:nozine.ngeketo@nrf.ac.za)

Mr Lehlogonolo Phaahla

Liaison Officer: Grants Management and Systems Administration (GMSA)

Telephone: 012 481 4102. E-mail: [lehlogonolo.phaahla@nrf.ac.za](mailto:lehlogonolo.phaahla@nrf.ac.za)

## NRF Scorecard for the Assessment of Study Support for Part-Time Doctoral Scholarship Funding

Criterion	Description	% Weighting
<b>Progress to date</b>	This section refers to a detailed and comprehensive account of progress achieved to date. It also looks at the originality and contribution to new knowledge, interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary aspects; and utilisation of existing knowledge and methodologies.	15
<b>Work plan to complete the degree</b>	<p>Research objectives to match aims of study – reviewers will assess whether the research objectives are clearly stated and whether they are appropriate to meet the aims of the study; are sound but have inconsistencies and can be refined; are appropriate but only partially address the aims of the study; or are not appropriate to meet the aims of the study.</p> <p>Research methodology to match research objectives – Reviewers will comment on whether the research methodology is appropriate to meet objectives of study; is sound but has inconsistencies and can be refined; is appropriate but only partially addresses study objectives; or not appropriate to meet objectives of study.</p> <p>Students to provide a thorough work plan towards completion of study. They should also give feasible timelines and methodical project activities.</p>	55
<b>Supervisor's support</b>	<p>Supervisor's recommendation for part-time doctoral bursary is important to provide an academic account of the student's progress in relation the project as well as the proposed project plan. The supervisor is required to endorse the proposed plan for completion as well as submission of the dissertation and manuscripts for publication.</p> <p>The reviewers will look for consistencies in the supervisor's report versus the student's motivation, as well as support for the applicant and the submission of the dissertation or manuscripts for publication.</p>	10
<b>Research outputs and publication plan</b>	Particular attention is paid to proposals with the potential to contribute to the strategic goals of the knowledge economy.	20