



higher education & training

Department:
Higher Education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

CRITERIA FOR THE USE AND MANAGEMENT OF THE RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT GRANT TO UNIVERSITIES (2014/15 – 2016/17)

November 2013

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to outline the criteria governing the application for, approval and utilisation of Research development Grants (RDG) at public higher education institutions.

2. BACKGROUND

South African higher education needs to improve its research capacity and capability, particularly in low research intensive universities. Staff qualifications have been identified as a factor which impacts on the quantity and quality of research output. This analysis can also be extrapolated to include teaching productivity and quality. Developing staff capacity is, therefore, an important aspect of the RDG. The percentage of research staff with doctoral qualifications in the university sector currently stands at 38,6% of the total research staff of 17 451 in 2012 . This falls short of the target of 75% of the National Development Plan (NDP). In response to this need, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) revised the Research Development Grant (RDG) in 2011, to improve the development of research capacity within the university sector. In the past, only universities whose actual weighted totals of research outputs were less than their normative weighted research output totals would receive research development funding.

Substantial funds have been allocated over the past few years for research development and these have been used to support a number of research related initiatives. Specifically, research development funds have been used to support activities such as: infrastructure

development; incentives for academics and researchers; journal publication page fees; research equipment; awards for top researchers or postgraduate bursaries and developing centres of excellence etc. Although these activities all support research, they tend to support established researchers rather than emerging academics that still require research development. It is therefore not intended that they should be supported through the RDG. Universities should use other sources of funding or appropriate earmarked funds allocated by DHET, for these purposes.

The main purpose of the RDG is to encourage universities to enhance their research capacity and improve their research productivity through a focus on developing the research capabilities of academic staff. The aim is to channel these funds towards the development of junior/emerging academic staff to enable them to become qualified and competent researchers through Masters, Doctoral, post-doctoral programmes, as well as other training programmes meant to enhance research capability. The ultimate goal of the RDG is to ensure that the qualifications of all academic staff at universities are improved. It is hoped that through this fund, academic staff will improve their research capabilities, become more competent academics, and begin to improve their research productivity thereby contributing to improved quality of research and research productivity of their institutions.

In order to ensure that the RDG have the desired impact within the university sector, the DHET has decided on a three year allocation. Each university will be required to develop a RDG proposal for the utilisation of their RDG over the three year period (2014/15 – 2016/17). This document provides the criteria for the use and management of RDG funds by universities.

3. RDG ALLOCATIONS

All public Higher Education Institutions are eligible for Research Development Grants. The allocations for each university are contained in the *Ministerial Statement on University Funding for 2014/15 to 2016/17*. These are the approved allocations against which universities must develop their Research Development Grant proposals.

The Ministerial Statement reflects the funding allocations per university for 2014/15 and 2015/16, based on the shares of development funds indicated in Table 1. The method of distributing research development funds amongst universities has already become less sensitive to institutional manipulation. The previous system in which a university received more state funding when it performs less, will no longer apply in future years.

Universities have been clustered into three categories to enable the Department to set differential targets and norms. The clustering, takes into account individual institutional missions together with the persistent effects of the legacy of inequality among South African higher education institutions. It is based on analysis of HEMIS data, actual weighted research output¹ of individual institutions from previous year, and teaching output data.

The three clusters are as follows:

- **Cluster A:** are institutions that have consistently produced per capita output of 1.4 units or above.
- **Cluster B:** are institutions that have consistently produced per capita output between 0.51 and 1.39 per capita.
- **Cluster C:** are institutions that have consistently produced per capita output of 0.5 units or below per capita.

The allocation of research development funds across and within the clusters varies depending on the level of capacity building required. Kindly see annexure A for details regarding appropriate development programs to be prioritised for each cluster.

4. FUNDED RDG PROGRAMMES

As part of its integrated institutional planning, each university should develop a holistic **Research Development Plan/ Strategy**. Within this overall plan/ strategy, specific activities or programmes aimed at improving the research capabilities of its staff should be identified in 3 year cycles. Universities are encouraged to be innovative when developing proposals and designing collaborative programmes. Specific activities may be funded through the RDG.

¹ Weighted research output is calculated on the basis of permanently employed academic staff members versus the set norms for research outputs, which include research Masters and Doctoral graduates, resulting in units.

The following activities/ programmes will be considered for funding through the RDG for the 2014/15 – 2016/17 cycle:

- **Mentoring/ Supervisor training programmes** (*These are training programmes that specifically involve the training of mentors/ supervisors through, for example a range of workshops and seminars. Up to 15% of total budget can be utilised for this purpose*)
- **Research Capacity development programmes for recent recipients of a PhD qualification** (*These are programmes geared towards research staff capacity development, for example proposal writing skills workshops, professional development workshops. Up to 15% of total budget can be utilised for this purpose*)
- **Postgraduate study support programmes for developmental staff** (*These are study programmes that specifically support academic staff to obtain formal postgraduate degrees, mainly at Masters and Doctoral levels. At least 40% of total budget can be utilised for this purpose*)
- **Postdoctoral research fellowship programmes** (*These programmes are aimed at providing opportunities for recent doctoral degree recipients to enhance their research skills, with a long term objective of increasing new generation of researchers/ academics. This is targeted at both new and existing staff members who have just obtained their PhDs and would like to take a post doc at an institution of their choice, bringing in new post docs at a senior level with the intention to absorb them into the system. Up to 30% of total budget can be utilised for this purpose*)
- **The employment of contract staff** (*This could be used to support teaching and learning activities while the permanent staff member has taken time off to study. However, RDG funds cannot be used to provide incentives to students or staff.*)
- **Academic exchange and mobility programmes** (*This could involve a two way mobility (local or international) exchange programmes to undertake research related activities, improve international competitiveness, collaboration, strengthening supervisory capacity and networking. Up to 20% of total budget can be utilised for this purpose*)
- **Topping up of NRF and other development grants** (*This is a customised institutional intervention/ co-contribution to incentive funding for Y-C rated researchers, supplementary funding for emerging researchers. This could also be used as additional funds to supplement these grants with the aim of allowing*

recipients to conduct research that goes above and beyond the scope of the funded/ actual project. Up to 15% of total budget can be utilised for this purpose)

Institutions can utilise up to 5% of the total allocation to put systems in place that will assist with effective and efficient management/administration of the research development grant (e.g. *the RDG funds can be used for the appointment of interns in the research office to provide overall support with the administration of the grant*).

5. THE SUBMISSION OF RDG PROPOSALS AND TIMEFRAMES

Each institution is expected to submit a proposal for the use of their allocated RDG over the three year period from 2014/15 to 2016/17. The proposal should be submitted together with the institution's long-term research development plan/ strategy, which should take into account the current institutional capacity (staff and infrastructure), focus on academic staff development needs at the institution and be aligned with the DHET's strategic plan. Institutions are encouraged to focus their proposals in those areas where there is demonstrable research capacity or potential.

Institutions must prepare their RGD proposal to cover a range of activities/ programmes from the list described in section 4 above, falling within the parameters indicated in terms of the division of funds across categories. The overall combination of activities must be justified in terms of the specific institutional needs and aligned to the long term research development plan/strategy. Institutions must use the proposed programmes within different institutions clusters (**Annexure A**) as a guide to focus their proposals. Proposals must include clear targets, with baseline descriptions or data and key performance indicators that will be applicable for the duration of the grant.

- Only one RDG proposal will be considered for funding per institution.
- All proposals must be submitted on the attached template/ form.
- The closing date for submission of the RDG proposal is **28 February 2014**.

6. THE EVALUATION AND APPROVAL OF RDG PROPOSALS

RDG proposals submitted will be evaluated by a review panel of experts appointed by the DHET. All proposals will be assessed against the following criteria:

- The proposal must be coherent and clearly linked to the University's overarching Research Development Plan/ Strategy.
- Programmes, projects and activities must be set out to achieve clear targets over the three year period (2014/15 to 2016/17).
- Targets must be linked to the qualitative and/or quantitative improvement of the research capability of academic staff.
- proposal must be cost-effective, efficient and must be supported by a detailed and itemised budget.
- The proposals must indicate what structures (staff, physical resources, systems, and processes) have been put in place within the university to enable successful implementation of the proposal.

The department will provide feedback on proposals and work iteratively with institutions to ensure approval.

Institutions will be informed of approval after due processes have been followed. It is envisaged that final approval and disbursement of funds will be processed by the end of April each year, provided that all reports and information are satisfactorily and timeously submitted.

7. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

- Universities are expected to submit annual progress reports against the approved RDG proposal, accompanied by externally audited expenditure reports in line with the budget approved by the Department. Failure to submit such audited reports may result in funds being withheld. Failure to utilise funds in accordance with the approved RDG proposal and budget may result in funds being withdrawn.

- The DHET will annually distribute reporting templates on which the reports must be submitted.
- All annual progress reports must be submitted on or before **30 April**.
- The DHET will develop a monitoring tool with performance indicators (short and long-term) to assess the impact of the RDG within the sector as a whole.
- Where necessary, the Department may request a meeting with individual universities for purposes of monitoring.
- The proposal will be funded for the three year period; however, the release of the grant will be dependent on submission of a satisfactory annual progress report from the previous year.

Payments for 2014/15 will be processed after the assessment of the 2013/14 progress reports.

CONTACT PERSONS

For more information and clarification relating to this guideline and the development of proposals, institutions may engage with **Ms Angie Magabane** of the Directorate: University Policy & Development at the following contact details:

Ms Angie Magabane
Deputy Director: University Policy and Development Support
Department of Higher Education and Training
Email: Magabane.a@dhet.gov.za
Tel: 012 312 5082

Signed hard copy as well as an electronic copy of the Research Development Grant proposal must be submitted to **Mr Temwa Moyo** at the following contact details:

Mr Temwa Moyo
Deputy Director: University Financial and Physical Planning
Department of Higher Education and Training
Email: Moyo.M@dhet.gov.za
Tel: 012 312 5894

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Please refer to the following documentation when developing of proposals:

- Proposal template/ form (**key requirement**)
- Annexure A: Proposed programmes within different institutional cluster