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## REVIEW CRITERIA FOR HONOURS, MASTER'S, DOCTORAL AND EXTENSION SUPPORT SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS FOR FUNDING IN 2024

The NRF's Vision 2030 positions the organization to enable, facilitate and perform excellent research which seeks to extend knowledge frontiers, advance innovation, and address national challenges. To realize this vision the NRF is advancing a research impact agenda. The NRF aims to promote, support, identify and communicate the impact of research within the research enterprise (Knowledge Impact) and in society (Societal Impact). 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, improved sustainability, and policy developments.

The emphasis on the impact of research is aligned with the NRF's mandate and the 2019 White Paper on Science, Technology and Innovation (WP STI), both of which emphasize the contribution that research can make to national development. Impact is not limited by geographic location, but the NRF's emphasis will be on impact within the South African or African context. The NRF aims to advance the positive contribution of research, while recognizing that types of impact and value can change over time. The NRF is advising reviewers to be mindful of this when reviewing Postgraduate application. NRF Impact framework is accessible on: <https://www.nrf.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/NRF-Framework-to-Advance-the-Societal-and-Knowledge-Impact-of-Research.pdf>.

The review criteria is designed to detail the review process for honours, master's, doctoral and extension support applications for funding consideration in 2024 academic year. The Application and Funding Framework must be consulted in conjunction with the review process.

## 1. Review Score Cards

**Table 1. NRF honours applications review scorecard for 2024 Funding.**

Review Criteria / Weight	Description	Four Point Rating Scale, Weight and Descriptor			
		3 = Excellent	2 = Good	1 = Average	0= Below average
<b>1. Academic Merit (40 %)</b>	Average percentage mark for major subjects in the final year of undergraduate courses.	75% and above	70 - 74%	65 - 69%	64% and below <b>Not eligible for funding</b>
<b>2. Completion Time for Previous Degree (40%)</b>	Time taken to complete the undergraduate degree.	Minimum prescribed period*	Minimum prescribed period + 6 months	Minimum prescribed period + 12 months	Minimum prescribed period + 2 years
<b>3. Priority Research Area (20%)</b>	Research aligned with one of the national research priority areas.	Yes	-	-	Not a national research priority area

\* According to SAQA, minimum prescribed period means the minimum academic years prescribed for the completion of a Designated Qualification or Undergraduate Studies.

**Table 2. NRF master’s applications review scorecard for 2024 Funding.**

Review Criteria / Weight	Description	Four Point Rating Scale, Weight and Descriptor			
		3 = Excellent	2 = Good	1 = Average	0= Below average
1. Academic Merit* (35 %)	Average percentage mark for the honours degree if completed; <b>OR</b>			65 - 69%	64% and below <b>Not eligible for funding</b>
	Average percentage mark for major subjects in the final-year undergraduate courses for students currently registered for a honours degree; <b>OR</b>	75% and above	70 - 74%	The applicant (only International and those who graduated before 2021) stated only a “Pass”	64% and below <b>Do not reject</b>
	Average percentage mark for major subjects in the third-year undergraduate courses for students in the final year of a four-year undergraduate degree.				64% and below <b>Do not reject</b>
2. Completion Time for Previous Degree (15%)	Time taken to complete the honours degree if completed; <b>OR</b> Time taken to complete the undergraduate degree if the honours degree is in progress; <b>OR</b> Time taken to complete third-year undergraduate courses for students in the final year of a 4-year undergraduate degree.	Minimum prescribed period**	Minimum prescribed period + 6 months	Minimum prescribed period + 12 months	Minimum prescribed period + 2 years
3. Priority Research Area (20%)	Research aligned with one of the national research priority areas.	Yes	-	-	Not a national research priority area
4. Project Outline (30%)	Overview of the research concept and proposed aim.	<b>Comprehensively described</b> The project outline is comprehensive and summarises the major aspects of the entire project which includes the overall purpose, aim and	<b>Adequately described</b> The project outline adequately summarises the major aspects of the entire project which includes the overall purpose, aim and	<b>Partially described</b> The project outline partially summarises the major aspects of the entire project and could benefit from further refinement.	<b>Poorly described</b> The project outline poorly states the aspects of the entire project.  <b>Not eligible for funding</b>

Review Criteria / Weight	Description	Four Point Rating Scale, Weight and Descriptor			
		3 = Excellent	2 = Good	1 = Average	0= Below average
		significance of the research.	significance of the research.		

\*International applicants, and SA & Permanent residents who graduated prior to 2021 academic year, who received a “Pass” and have not entered a percentage pass mark must be allocated a default score of 1.

\*\*According to SAQA, minimum prescribed period means the minimum academic years prescribed for the completion of a Designated Qualification.

**Table 3. NRF doctoral applications review scorecard for 2024 Funding**

Review Criteria/ Weight	Description	Four Point Rating Scale, Weight and Descriptor			
		3 = Excellent	2 = Good	1 = Average	0 = Below average
1. Academic Merit* (30 %)	Percentage mark for the master's degree if completed; <b>OR</b>	75% and above	70 - 74%	65 - 69%	64% and below <b>Not eligible for funding</b>
	If the master's degree is in progress, average percentage mark for the honours degree; <b>OR</b>				64% and below <b>Do not reject</b>
	Average percentage mark for major subjects in the final year of a 4-year undergraduate degree.				64% and below <b>Do not reject</b>
2. Completion Time for Previous Degree (15%)	Time taken for completion of the master's degree if completed; <b>OR</b> If the master's degree is in progress, time taken to complete the honours degree or 4-year undergraduate degree.	Minimum prescribed period**	Minimum prescribed period + 6 months	Minimum prescribed period +1 year	Minimum prescribed period +2 years
3. Track Record of Research Outputs (15%)	Evidence of research outputs in accredited peer-reviewed publications and presentations at conferences/symposiums.	1 Journal article and conference / Symposium presentation	2 conferences/ symposium presentations/ 1 Journal article	1 conference/ symposium presentation	No outputs
4. Priority Research Area (10%)	Research aligned with one of the national research priority areas.	Yes	-	-	Not a national research priority area
5. Originality of the Doctoral study (20%)	Problem statement, Identified knowledge gaps relating to the problem statement, Aim and Objectives of the study.	<b>Comprehensively described</b> The problem statement and knowledge gap/s are comprehensively described.	<b>Adequately described</b> The problem statement and knowledge gap/s are adequately described.	<b>Described with minor gaps</b> The problem statement and knowledge gap/s are partially described.	<b>Poorly described</b> The problem statement is poorly described and lacking a description on knowledge gaps

		<p>The research aim comprehensively indicates the overarching goal of the project and is well aligned with the problem statement and the knowledge gap.</p> <p>The objectives comprehensively indicate the key issues that the research will focus on and are well aligned with the problem statement and research aim.</p>	<p>The research aim adequately indicates the overarching goal of the project and is aligned with the problem statement and the knowledge gap.</p> <p>The objectives adequately indicate the key issues that the research will focus on and are aligned with the problem statement and research aim.</p>	<p>The research aim is partially described and could benefit from further refinement to appropriately align with the problem statement and the knowledge gap.</p> <p>The objectives partially indicate the key issues that the research will focus on and could benefit from further refinement to appropriately align with the problem statement and research aim.</p>	<p>The research aim is poorly described and does not provide sufficient information about the project.</p> <p><b>Not eligible for funding</b></p>
<p><b>6. Potential Impact (Societal and Knowledge) of the research (10%)</b></p>	<p>Potential to contribute to national research strategies and the strategic goals of the knowledge economy.</p>	<p><b>Comprehensively demonstrated.</b></p> <p>The stated impact (Societal and /or Knowledge) is highly feasible and could immensely contribute to national research strategies and the strategic goals of the knowledge economy.</p>	<p><b>Adequately demonstrated.</b></p> <p>The stated impact (Societal and /or Knowledge) is feasible and could substantially contribute to national research strategies and the strategic goals of the knowledge economy.</p>	<p><b>Partially demonstrated with minor gaps.</b></p> <p>The stated impact (Societal and /or Knowledge) is fairly feasible and with further refinement, could potentially contribute to national research strategies and strategic goals of the knowledge economy.</p>	<p><b>Potential impact (Societal and /or Knowledge) has not been demonstrated.</b></p> <p>The impact (Societal and /or Knowledge) has not been sufficiently demonstrated and does not provide information on the potential to contribute to national research strategies and strategic goals of the knowledge economy</p>

\*International applicants, and SA & Permanent residents who graduated prior to 2021 academic year, who received a “Pass” and have not entered a percentage pass mark must be allocated a default score of 1.

\*\*According to SAQA, minimum prescribed period means the minimum academic years prescribed for the completion of a Designated Qualification.

**Table 4. NRF Extension master’s and doctoral applications review scorecard for 2024 Funding.**

Review Criteria/Weight	Four Point Rating Scale, Weight and Descriptor				
	Description	3 = Excellent	2 = Good	1= Average	0 = Below average
<b>1. Progress to date (25%)</b>	<b>Report on research work completed in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree.</b>	A comprehensive account of progress achieved to date is meticulously articulated and there is mention of milestones achieved.	An adequately described account of progress achieved to date is provided.	A partially described account of progress achieved to date is provided.	A poorly described account of progress achieved to date is provided.
<b>2. Reasons why the study could not be completed in the NRF Maximum funding period (25%)</b>	Explanation why the study could not be completed within the NRF funding period.	There is comprehensive description <b>and exceptional</b> justification of the reason/s and/or challenges which led to the delay in project completion.	There is adequate description <b>and</b> justification of the reason/s and/or challenges which led to the delay in project completion.	There is partial description missing either the justification or the reason/s and/or challenges which led to the delay in project completion.	There is a poor description and justification of the reason/s and/or challenges which led to the delay in project completion.
<b>3. Work plan to complete the degree within the indicated timeframes (50%)</b>	<p>1.1 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;</p> <p>1.2 Proposed date for submission of the dissertation for examination;</p> <p>1.3 Timelines for corrections to dissertation from reviewers;</p> <p>1.4. Details of manuscripts to be drafted and submission timelines; and</p> <p>1.5. Proposed graduation date.</p>	<p>A fully aligned and comprehensive work plan towards study completion is clearly presented, feasible and well aligned with the project activities and timelines for the extension period applied for (6 or 12 months).</p> <p>This should include all 4 of the activities (proposed dissertation submission date; timelines for corrections; details of</p>	<p>An aligned and motivated work plan towards study completion is presented, feasible and adequately aligned with project activities and the timelines for the extension period applied for (6 or 12 months).</p> <p>This should include at least 3 activities (proposed dissertation submission date; timelines for corrections; details of manuscript to be drafted</p>	<p>A partially described work plan with minor gaps towards study completion is included and the projected timelines appear feasible for the extension period applied for (6 or 12 months).</p> <p>This should include at least 2 activities (proposed dissertation submission date; timelines for corrections;</p>	<p>A poorly formulated work plan towards study completion is included (i.e., scant details on project activities and timelines). The projected timelines do not appear feasible for the extension period applied for (6 or 12 months).</p> <p>This includes less than or equivalent to 1 activity (proposed</p>

Review Criteria/Weight	Four Point Rating Scale, Weight and Descriptor				
	Description	3 = Excellent	2 = Good	1= Average	0 = Below average
		manuscript to be drafted and submitted; and proposed graduation date).	and submitted, and/or proposed graduation date).	details of manuscript to be drafted and submitted; and/or proposed graduation date).	dissertation submission date; timelines for corrections; details of manuscript to be drafted and submitted; and/or proposed graduation date).
					<b>Not Eligible</b>

## 2. Scoring on the NRF Connect System

The review criteria of some application sections will be automated as indicated in Table 5 below, however, designated authorities (DAs) are required to manually complete the application sections which are not automated (application sections reviewed by Review Panel) on the NRF Connect system.

**Table 5: Automated and Manual Scoring Matrix of the honours, master's, doctoral and extension support scholarship applications**

Levels of Study	Review Criteria Automatically Scored on NRF Connect System	Review Criteria Scores Manually entered on NRF Connect System by DAs	Review and Scoring of Applications by Review Panel
Honours (Refer to table 1)	1, 2 and 3	None	Not Required
Master's (Refer to table 2)	1, 2 and 3	4	Required
Doctoral (Refer to table 3)	1, 2 and 4	3, 5 and 6	Required
Extension Support (Refer to table 4)	None	1, 2 and 3	Required



### 3. Submission of Review Confirmation Documents

Only applications that are recommended for NRF funding based on the merit review, may be submitted to the NRF by the DA in the format provided by the NRF. Applications review scores and recommendations must be uploaded onto the NRF Connect System by the DA. 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 to Ms. Kgaugelo Molepo at [KJ.Molepo@risa.nrf.ac.za](mailto:KJ.Molepo@risa.nrf.ac.za).

**NB: A list/ names of DAAD alumni who participated in the NRF-DAAD application review process should be submitted along with the review documents.**

**The DA submission date for the review confirmation documents is 29 September 2023.**

### 4. Applications Feedback

The Promotion of Administrative Justice Act (Act 3 of 2000) give effect to the right to administrative action that is lawful, reasonable and procedurally fair and to the right to written reasons for administrative action as contemplated in section 33 of the constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. As a result, the NRF and universities are expected to provide feedback to all applicants on the status of their applications:

#### **Universities must provide feedback to applicants:**

1. who were screened at the universities for eligibility and deemed not eligible for funding; and
2. who were reviewed at the universities and not recommended for funding by the panel of reviewers. This is important for the appeals process, in case a student wants to launch an appeal.

#### **NRF must provide feedback to applicants:**

1. recommended for funding at the institutions but screened at NRF for eligibility and deemed not eligible for funding;
2. whose applications were recommended for funding but were not awarded due to budget constraints. In this instance, the NRF will send a regret letter directly to the affected applicants; and
3. whose application were recommended for funding and approved. In this instance, the NRF will publish a list of the successful applicants on the NRF website ([https://www.nrf.ac.za/Bursaries\\_Outcomes](https://www.nrf.ac.za/Bursaries_Outcomes)) and share the list with the Research/Postgraduate Offices at respective universities.

**END**