



Media Release
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2021 NRF Awards Honour and Celebrate South Africa's Top Researchers and Scientists

On the 2nd of November 2021, the National Research Foundation (NRF) hosted the prestigious celebration of South African research excellence; the NRF Awards.

The annual NRF Awards recognise recent outstanding achievements made by individuals and teams whose excellence has significantly advanced science for the benefit of society. Their internationally competitive work is assessed for, among other things, the contribution to the field of study focusing on quality and impact. One of the objectives of the awards is to encourage the continued culture of advancing South Africa's scientific knowledge and technological innovation by rewarding those that make use of research for the advancement and betterment of humanity.

In her welcome address, Dr Nompumelelo Obokoh, Chairperson of the NRF Board said, "Amidst the despair and grief brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic are also many stories of selflessness, kindness and courage that continue to restore our faith in humanity and inspire us to dream of a better tomorrow. Even during this turbulent time, our researchers have continued to nurture the country's knowledge economy in many other scientific fields as well."

This year the NRF hosted a hybrid event with limited inperson guests in Pretoria and live-streamed to more than 500 virtual attendees. The ceremony celebrated 68 awardees across 10 categories.

Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Dr Blade Nzimande graced the ceremony virtually to congratulate the awardees. "To illustrate our continued commitment to science, technology and innovation, the Department of Science and Innovation has developed a new policy framework on Science and Technology. The Decadal Plan on Science, Technology and Innovation will serve as an initial 10-year implementation plan from 2020-2030. To practically demonstrate our capacity as a government working together with the National System of Innovation, we have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in line with the vision of the Decadal Plan. Our researchers committed their expertise and resources to developing solutions to the pandemic and monitoring its impact locally, but also contributing to the global body of knowledge".

In his closing remarks, NRF Chief Executive Officer Dr Fulufhelo Nelwamondo also reflected on the progress made by scientists over the past few months: "The increasing challenges faced due to the COVID-19 outbreak as well as other societal challenges have not only underscored the importance of research in society, but also shone a very bright light on the ability of our scientists, both established

and those just starting out on their research paths, to rise to the occasion. We have seen sterling work in a broad spectrum of areas including vaccine research, the development of diagnostics, monitoring and modelling of the spread of the pandemic, health policy research and science advocacy as well as improved opportunities for public engagement with science. In closing, a reminder to ourselves that Science remains the key to a reimagined, innovative future. Let us continue to do worthwhile work by advancing knowledge, transforming lives and inspiring a nation!”

The awards were presented as follows:

- **Research Excellence Award for Next Generation Researchers**

2020

Dr Nkositatile Raphael Biata, Department of Chemical Sciences at the University of Johannesburg

Dr Alexandré Delport, School of Life Sciences at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

2021

Dr Takudzwa Madzivanzira, Ichthyology and Fisheries Sciences at the NRF-South African Institute for Aquatic Biodiversity

Dr Neelakshi Mungra, Department of Integrative Biomedical Sciences at the University of Cape Town

Mr Emmanuel Tetteh, Department of Chemical Engineering at the Durban University of Technology

- **Research Excellence Award for Early Career/Emerging Researchers**

2020

Dr Moses Basitere, Department of Chemical Engineering at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology

Dr Phiwayinkosi Vusi Dlodla from the South African Medical Research Council

Professor Pragashnie Govender, School of Health Sciences at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

Dr Tebogo Pilgrene Mashifana, Department of Chemical Engineering at the University of Johannesburg

Professor Christopher Ouma, Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Cape Town

2021

Professor Oluwafemi Adebo, Department of Biotechnology and Food Technology at the University of Johannesburg

Professor Shanade Barnabas, Department of Communication and Media at the University of Johannesburg

Dr Isobel Brink, Department of Civil Engineering at the Stellenbosch University

Professor Ntanganedzeni Mapholi, Department of Agriculture and Animal Health at the University of South Africa

Professor Nnamdi Nwulu, Department of Electrical & Electronic Engineering Science at the University of Johannesburg

Professor Moses Phooko, Department of Private Law at the University of Johannesburg

- **P-Rated Researchers:**

2020

Dr Steven Hussey, Department of Biochemistry, Genetics and Microbiology, University of Pretoria

Dr Michelle Lochner, Department of Cosmology, African Institute for Mathematical Sciences, University of the Western Cape

2021

Dr Matteo Grilli, International Studies Group, University of the Free State

Dr Ryan Nefdt, Department of Philosophy, University of Cape Town

Dr Robert Skelton, Fynbos Node, NRF-South African Environmental Observation Network

Dr Nicholas Spaul, Department of Economics, Stellenbosch University

Dr Rosalie Tostevin, Department of Geological Sciences, University of Cape Town

Dr Christopher Trisos, African Climate and Development Initiative, University of Cape Town

- **Public Engagement with Research Award 2020/21**

Professor Liesl Zühlke (2020), Department of Paediatrics and Child Health at the University of Cape Town

Professor Rachel Wynberg (2021), Department of Environmental and Geographical Science at the University of Cape Town

- **Champion of Research Capacity Development and Transformation at South African Higher Education Institutions Award 2020/21**

Professor Emmanuel Iwuoha (2020), Department of Chemistry at the University of the Western Cape

Professor Sabiha Essack (2021), Anti-Microbial Research Unit at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

- **Hamilton Naki Award 2020/21**

Professor Sharon Prince, Department of Human Biology at the University of Cape Town

- **NRF Excelleration Award for South African Research Institutions 2020/21**

Mangosuthu University of Technology

- **Science Team Award 2020**

The Institute for the Development of Energy for African Sustainability (IDEAS) Team at the University of South Africa

- **Lifetime Achievement Award**

Professor Linda Richter, University of the Witwatersrand

- **A-Rated Researchers:**

Name	Designation	Institution
2020		
Professor Willem Boshoff 1ST A-RATING	Department of Fine Arts	University of the Free State
Professor Colin Chapman 1ST A-RATING	School of Life Sciences	University of KwaZulu-Natal
Professor Dieter Heiss 1ST A-RATING	Department of Physics	Stellenbosch University
Professor Elmi Muller 1ST A-RATING	Dean: Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences	Stellenbosch University
Professor James Ogude 1ST A-RATING	Centre for the Advancement of Scholarship	University of Pretoria
Professor Mario Santos 1ST A-RATING	Department of Physics and Astronomy	University of the Western Cape
Professor Quarraisha Abdool Karim 2ND A-RATING	Centre for the AIDS Programme of Research in South Africa	University of KwaZulu-Natal
Professor Fernando Albericio 2ND A-RATING	School of Chemistry and Physics	University of KwaZulu-Natal
Professor Tebello Nyokong 2ND A-RATING	Department of Chemistry	Rhodes University
Professor Brenda Wingfield 2ND A-RATING	Department of Biochemistry, Genetics and Microbiology	University of Pretoria
Professor Cornelius van der Merwe 3RD A-RATING	Department of Private Law	Stellenbosch University
2021		
Professor Oonsie Biggs 1ST A-RATING	Centre for Complex Systems in Transition	Stellenbosch University
Professor Michael Bruford 1ST A-RATING	Department of Biochemistry, Genetics and Microbiology	University of Pretoria
Professor Michael Claeys 1ST A-RATING	Department of Chemical Engineering	University of Cape Town

Professor Kevin Durrheim 1ST A-RATING	School of Applied Human Sciences	University of KwaZulu-Natal
Professor Crain Soudien 1ST A-RATING	Former Chief Executive Officer	Human Sciences Research Council
Professor Giona Tuccini 1ST A-RATING	School of Languages and Literature	University of Cape Town
Professor Romeel Davé 2ND A-RATING	Department of Physics and Astrophysics	University of the Western Cape
Professor Andries Engelbrecht 2ND A-RATING	Department of Industrial Engineering / Department of Computer Science	Stellenbosch University
Professor Maxim Finkelstein 2ND A-RATING	Department of Mathematical Statistics and Actuarial Science	University of the Free State
Professor Christopher Henshilwood 2ND A-RATING	Evolutionary Studies Institute	University of the Witwatersrand
Professor Donald Kurtz 2ND A-RATING	Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences	North-West University
Professor Bruce Rubidge 2ND A-RATING	Centre of Excellence in Palaeosciences	University of the Witwatersrand
Professor Roger Smith 2ND A-RATING	Department of Geological Sciences	Iziko Museums of South Africa
Professor Yves van de Peer 2ND A-RATING	Department of Biochemistry, Genetics and Microbiology	University of Pretoria
Professor Melanie Walker 2ND A-RATING	SARChI Chair in Higher Education and Human Development Research	University of the Free State
Professor Robert Wilkinson 2ND A-RATING	Institute of Infectious Disease and Molecular Medicine	University of Cape Town
Professor Jill Farrant 3RD A-RATING	Department of Molecular and Cell Biology	University of Cape Town
Professor Michael Henning 3RD A-RATING	Department of Mathematics and Applied Mathematics	University of Johannesburg
Professor Steven Johnson	School of Life Sciences	University of KwaZulu-Natal

3RD A-RATING		
Professor Rajend Mesthrie 3RD A-RATING	School of African and Gender Studies, Anthropology and Linguistics	University of Cape Town
Professor Bob Scholes 3RD A-RATING	Global Change and Sustainability Research Institute	University of the Witwatersrand
Professor Mark Solms 3RD A-RATING	Department of Psychology	University of Cape Town
Professor Johannes van Oort 3RD A-RATING	Department of Systematic and Historical Theology	University of Pretoria
Professor Charles van Onselen 4TH A-RATING	Institute for the Advancement of Scholarship	University of Pretoria
Professor Richard Cowling 5TH A-RATING	School of Environmental Sciences	Nelson Mandela University
Professor Jean Cleymans 8TH A-RATING	Department of Physics	University of Cape Town

Note: For further details on the 2021 NRF Awards, please [click here](#).

About the NRF:

The National Research Foundation (NRF) is an independent statutory body established in accordance with the National Research Foundation Act. Its mandate is to support and promote research through funding, human resource development and the provision of the necessary research facilities in order to facilitate the creation of knowledge, innovation and development in all fields of science and technology, including indigenous knowledge; supporting and promoting public awareness of, and engagement with, science; and promoting the development and maintenance of the national science system and support of Government priorities, thereby contributing to the improvement of the quality of life of all South Africans.

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