



Funding Instrument: ***Competitive Support for Unrated Researchers***

Functional Domain: **KNOWLEDGE FIELDS DEVELOPMENT**

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

APR	Annual Progress Report
CV	Curriculum Vitae
GMSA	Grant Management and Systems Administration
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ICSU	International Council for Science
KFD	Knowledge Fields Development
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
NRF	National Research Foundation
R&D	Research and Development
RISA	Research and Innovation Support and Advancement
SA	South Africa
SKFG	Strategic Knowledge Fields Grants

1 FUNDING INSTRUMENT AND DESCRIPTION

1.1 Name

Competitive Support for Unrated Researchers

1.2 Description of Funding Instrument

The Competitive Support for Unrated Researchers (CSUR) is a discipline-based funding instrument that supports principally basic research as the foundation of knowledge production, in the disciplines of the Humanities, Social and Natural sciences.

As a competitive funding instrument, the CSUR provides support to **established researchers** who do not hold a valid NRF rating at the time of submission.

Although the funding instrument ostensibly has a broad and non-directed theme and/or structure, proposals which are closely linked to and/or address similar problems through other National Research Foundation (NRF) funding instruments will not be prioritised as part of **this** funding instrument. Rather, the emphasis will be on basic and as appropriate, applied research in disciplinary fields, and will allow some scope for multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary enquiry along the basic-applied research continuum.

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The NRF recognises that in order for South Africa to be internationally competitive and to meaningfully contribute to the global economy, the country must have the capability to understand the knowledge produced by others. This understanding can best be developed through performing research. Publicly funded basic and applied research is viewed as a source of new ideas, opportunities, methods, and most importantly, the means through which problem solvers can be trained.

The NRF views support for basic disciplinary research as an investment in the country's learning and knowledge production capabilities and capacities. The CSUR is a discipline-based and demand-driven funding instrument. It is open to persons who **do not currently hold an NRF rating. The cohort of unrated researchers is heterogeneous in its make-up and researchers are not rated for a variety of reasons, inter alia, they -**

- **are established researchers but unwilling to subject themselves to the rating experience;**
- **have allowed their rating to lapse by not applying for re-rating due to a variety of reasons); or**
- **have not succeeded in receiving a rating upon re-evaluation by peer review.**

The researchers in the categories above are thus beyond the development phase of their research careers. In a country that is striving to raise the bar for its research outputs including the supervision of postgraduate students, it is important to provide support for their efforts.

3 STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The mandate of the NRF is to support and promote research through funding, human resource development and the provision of the necessary research infrastructure in order to facilitate the creation of knowledge, and innovation and development in all fields of science and technology, including indigenous knowledge and thereby to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of all the people of the Republic (NRF Act, 1998). In support of its purpose, the NRF launched *Vision 2015* that aims to promote world-class research, and create a transformed society and sustainable environment.

3.1 Environmental scan

The CSUR resonates with the NRF mandate by being cognisant of the role that basic research and applied research¹ play in the innovation and commercialisation value chain, and hence the socio-economic development of the country.

While it is recognised that the innovation value chain requires basic, strategic and applied research, the emphasis in **this** programme will be on funding basic and discipline-based research. The rationale for this is based on the understanding that, “*basic research is the foundation of all other knowledge – and the ultimate base of an innovative society*” (Hoffman, 2006, cited in Knowledge@WPCarey). In order to participate in the international system of innovation, a nation needs the capability to understand the knowledge produced by others. Support for basic disciplinary research should be seen as an investment in a society’s learning capabilities (Salter and Martin, 2001).

At the same time, this funding instrument acknowledges that basic and applied research are a continuum and inter-dependent (ICSU, 2004) and that increasingly, the notion of “frontier research” is gaining purchase internationally, as it transcends the distinction of basic and applied research and refers to leading edge research which is risky and often multidisciplinary [and transdisciplinary] (Schneider, 2007).

3.2 Objectives

The objectives of the funding instrument are:

- To contribute to the development of a sound fundamental basis to science and scholarly endeavour in South Africa, in the Humanities, Natural, Engineering and Social Science disciplines;
- To contribute to knowledge production across the research spectrum and innovation value chain;
- To achieve world-class research and the development of the associated human capacity;

¹ The *Frascati Manual* (OECD, 2002) defines **Basic research** as experimental or theoretical work undertaken primarily to acquire new knowledge of the underlying foundation of phenomena and observable facts, without any particular application or use in view. It further defines **Applied research** as also original investigation undertaken in order to acquire new knowledge. It is, however directed primarily towards a specific practical aim or objective.

- To advance or develop paradigms, theories and methodological innovation across the research spectrum;
- To afford established researchers who may have lost their rating, and not been rated the opportunity to rebuild, reconsolidate and/or re-establish their research portfolios and apply/re-apply for rating; and
- To increase the number of rated researchers.

3.3 NRF Perspective

The CSUR is a discipline-based, demand-driven funding instrument that focuses on basic disciplinary research, while allowing (where appropriate) for the “continuum of knowledge” approach alluded to above. This is in line with the NRF’s view that support for basic disciplinary research is an investment in South Africa’s learning capabilities. The CSUR addresses the NRF *Vision 2015*, which envisages the following for South Africa:

- World-class research
- Transformed society; and
- Sustainable environment.

The CSUR directly addresses the following strategic goals of the NRF *Vision 2015*:

- The promotion of internationally competitive research as the basis for a knowledge economy;
- The growth of a representative science and technology workforce in South Africa; and
- The contribution to a vibrant national innovation system.

3.4 Institutional Structure

The funding instrument is hosted in the Knowledge Fields Development (KFD) Directorate. The Reviews and Evaluation (RE) Directorate is responsible for the review processes up to the award of grants. The grant management and administration, including the call process, payments of grant funds and ensuring adherence to the conditions of the grant, are the responsibility of the Grants Management and Systems Administration (GMSA) Directorate.

3.5 Financing support

The CSUR is made possible through the NRF’s Parliamentary Core Funding.

3.6 Key stakeholders

The key stakeholders involved in the CSUR are unrated persons based at public research institutions that are recognised by directive of the Minister of Science and Technology that include mainly, Universities, Museums and Science Councils.

4 MANAGEMENT OF FUNDING INSTRUMENT

The KFD Directorate of the NRF– Research and Innovation Support and Advancement (RISA) manages the CSUR and is primarily responsible for:

- Strategic oversight and management of the funding instrument;
- Conceptualizing and developing the funding instrument;
- Coordinating and facilitating activities of the funding instrument;
- Compiling funding instrument research and evaluation reports;
- Stakeholder engagement; and
- Ensuring that the funding instrument delivers on its intended goal(s).

The Reviews and Evaluation (RE) Directorate is responsible for managing the adjudication process including:

- sourcing of reviewers both for remote reviews and panels;
- managing peer review process;
- organizing and managing the review panels as and where appropriate;
- providing feed-back as appropriate and
- awarding of grants.

The GMSA Directorate is responsible for:

- Managing the Call process, that is,
 - Posting the Call; and
 - Receiving and assessing applications eligibility.
- Coordinating and facilitating the granting processes;
- Managing the granting including the administration of awards;
- Administering grant payments; and
- Ensuring adherence to conditions of grants.

4.1 Line of authority

The Director: KFD responsible for this funding instrument manages the CSUR with the assistance of a Professional Officer.

Where and when appropriate, a Call may be managed by a specially appointed Project Leader supported by a Project team of staff drawn from RE, GMSA; Knowledge Management and others. The Project Leader responsible for this instrument reports to the Executive Director of the KFD Directorate, who is the project sponsor

Directors from GMSA and RE will normally manage the granting and review processes, respectively with the assistance of Professional and Liaison Officers. The Directors in both the GMSA and RE report to their respective Executive Directors.

5 MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE FUNDING INSTRUMENT

The NRF is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the CSUR.

5.1 Reporting

The funding instrument Director is responsible for reporting quarterly on the contribution of the CSUR to the KFD Directorate's Key Performance Indicators. In addition, the funding instrument Director is responsible for reviewing and reporting on the progress of the funding instrument.

5.2 Timeframes for evaluation

The will be evaluated by an appropriate reviewer as appointed by the NRF. RISA will determine and set timeframes for the review, when deemed appropriate, or in line with existing guidelines.

5.3 Broad terms of reference for evaluation

The broad terms of reference for the programme review of the CPRR will be determined by RISA with preliminary input by the KFD Directorate, and in consultation with the Reviews and Evaluation Directorate.

5.4 Utilisation of the results of the evaluation

The results of the evaluation will be used in line with the purposes set in the Terms of Reference for the evaluation. Evaluation results will also be used for funding instrument improvement and development.

6 INFORMATION SOURCES

Basic research by Universities is critical to US Innovation 2006. *Knowledge@WPCarey*, accessed 10/12/2009

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< http://www.nrf.ac.za/doc/nrf_vision_2015.pdf>

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