Framework

NRF Freestanding, Innovation and Scarce Skills Development Fund Honours' and final year B Tech Block Grant Bursaries

Directorate: **Human and Infrastructure Capacity Development**

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1. Background and Rationale

Purpose of this framework document

The purpose of this framework document is to outline the funding principles and implementation of the Honours' and final year Bachelor of Technology (B Tech) block grant for NRF Freestanding, Innovation Bursary (which includes Department of Science and Technology (DST) priority research areas), the Scarce Skills Development Fund (SSDF) as funded by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), as well as Bursaries for students with disability. These funding instruments are funded by (i) the NRF core grant allocation from National Treasury, (ii) the DST (DST/CON 0118/2012) and (iii) the DHET managed SSDF, for Human Capital Development (HCD).

The NRF awards scholarships and bursaries through three modalities *viz.* (i) competitive scholarships awarded as freestanding awards following an NRF merit review process; (ii) block grants to universities, that nominate students for the bursaries following an institutional selection process; and (iii) grant-holder-linked bursaries in which the grant-holder nominates students linked to his/her research project.

Background

The NRF is mandated by an Act of Parliament, the National Research Foundation Act (Act No. 23 of 1998) to: "*Support and promote research through funding, human capacity 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*".

In addition, the DST and the DHET provide support for students with disabilities at all levels of study. The **definition of a person with disabilities** is defined according to The Code of Good Practice on Employment of People with Disabilities and the Employment Equity Act, (Act No 55 of 1998). The act states that: only people who satisfy all the criteria in the definition: (i) long-term or recurring; (ii) having a physical or mental impairment; (iii) which substantially limits, are considered as persons with disabilities.

In support of this mandate, the NRF makes funds available to support NRF Freestanding, SSDF and Innovation (including DST priority research areas) Honours' and B Tech students for the 2017 academic year. These bursaries are released as block grants to South African public universities **(Table 1)**. In addition, the block grant awards

for qualifying students are made to universities in line with the ministerial guidelines to the NRF, on equity and redress (Ministerial Guidelines on Bursaries and Fellowships, 2013). Applications for these bursaries must be made by students on the NRF Online Submission system https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za/. These funding instruments make funds available to support students pursuing full-time, Honours and final year B Tech studies at South African public universities. This is as a result of a monitored Key Performance Indicator (KPI) pipeline in increasing Masters and Doctoral students. Students may undertake the research component of their degree at other public research institutions including the science councils and national research facilities.

Historically, the NRF allocated Block Grants to universities that would implement NRF application and selection processes for awarding of the Honours' and final year B Tech bursaries allocated to each institution. In order to comply with good corporate governance, the NRF is now migrating the application process to the NRF Online Submission application system by implementing a standardised application form and process for all Honours' and final year B Tech students. Institutions will use a standard score card provided by the NRF to evaluate each application, before selecting and nominating students to take up the allocated bursaries. The advantage of this standardised process is that it will be auditable, fair and transparent. It will also enable institutions and the NRF to assess the pool of eligible applicants and to respond more effectively should there be a need for reallocation of bursaries or to make additional bursary awards.

Table 1:   Bursaries for Honours' and final year B Tech studies funded by DHET and DST

Bursaries	Honours and B Tech
DST Priority Research Areas	Institutional nomination
Current DST-NRF Interns	NRF nomination
Innovation Bursary Scheme	Institutional nomination
NRF Freestanding	Institutional nomination
Students with disability	Institutional nomination
Sasol-Inzalo	NRF nomination
Scarce Skills Development Fund	Institutional nomination

The DHET supports the training of postgraduate students through the SSDF Bursaries while the DST supports training of postgraduate students through the Innovation bursary Scheme which includes priority research areas. Funding for the SSDF Bursaries is made available from NSF residing within the DHET, and managed by the NRF. In addition, the DST and the DHET provide support for students with disabilities at all levels of study.

These bursaries advance the objectives of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 to increase the number of academic staff members at South African universities with doctoral qualifications to 75% and, the number of PhD graduations to 6 000 per annum by the year 2030. Furthermore, these funding instruments advance the joint deliverables of the DST and the DHET for developing high-end skills in South Africa. These high-end skills are critical for South Africa to establish a knowledge-based economy and for producing new knowledge for socio-economic development.

2. Objectives

- Support the development of a critical mass of globally competitive human resources in prioritised areas;
- Promote and advancing science, research and innovation;
- Contribute towards the increase in the number and quality of South African postgraduate students (Honours and Final year B Tech) in all areas of (i) Science, (ii) Engineering and (iii) Technology and in the (iv) Social Sciences and (v) Humanities;
- Build a pipeline of the next generation of skilled scientists and researchers in South Africa;
- Effect transformation in the percentage representation of postgraduate students from designated groups *viz.* black, female and persons with disabilities ; and
- Support the development of postgraduate training to meet the specific needs of the country in conjunction with the higher education sector and industry.

3. Areas of Support

3.1. NRF Freestanding

The bursary is intended to support full-time Honours' and final year B Tech candidates to pursue research studies in all areas of (i) Science, (ii) Engineering and (iii) Technology and in the (iv) Social Sciences and (v) Humanities, at public

universities and research institutions in South Africa. The percentage of supported students will be 80% from the Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) disciplines and 20 % from the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH).

3.2. Innovation (including DST Priority Research Areas)

The Innovation Bursary Scheme which also includes priority research areas* supports students who wish to pursue their Honours and final year B Tech studies in the fields listed below *viz.*:

- Astronomy;
- Bioinformatics*;
- Biotechnology;
- Cellular and Molecular Biology;
- Chemistry;
- Climate Change*;
- Computer science;
- Drug Discovery and Development*;
- Earth Sciences;
- Earth Observation*;
- Ecology;
- Engineering;
- Functional Genomics*;
- Global Change, Society and Sustainability*;
- Indigenous Knowledge Systems*;
- Mathematical Sciences;
- Marine Sciences*;
- Medicinal Plant Research*;
- Medical sciences;
- Nanotechnology*;
- Nuclear Technologies in Medicine and Biosciences*;
- Palaeosciences*;
- Physics;
- Renewable Energy*;
- Social Science and Humanities; and
- Space Science*.

The percentage of supported students will be 80% from SET and 20% from the SSH disciplines.

3.3. Scarce Skills Development Fund

The SSDF supports students who wish to pursue their Honours and final year B Tech studies in the fields listed below *viz.*:

- *Biological sciences:*
  Biotechnology;
- *Engineering:*
  All fields of engineering;
- *Financial sector:*
  Accounting, Actuarial Science, Auditing, Statistics;
- *Management:*
  Financial Management;
- *Physical sciences:*
  Computer Sciences, Chemistry, Geology, Information Systems, Mathematical Sciences, Physical Sciences; and
- *Sector specific:*
  Agricultural Sciences, Demography, Transportation Studies, Tourism.

3.4. Students with Disability

The bursary is intended to support Honours and final year B Tech students, with a physical or mental impairment, to pursue research degrees in all areas of (i) Science, (ii) Engineering and (iii) Technology and in the (iv) Social Sciences and (v) Humanities, at public universities and research institutions in South Africa.

4. Eligibility

The eligibility criteria listed below (Table 2) applies to applicants for Honours' and final year B Tech who are intending to register full-time at a South African public University.

Table 2: Eligibility Criteria for Honours and Final year B Tech students

Programme	Eligibility
Priority Research Areas	South African citizens, South African permanent residents as well as a limited percentage of foreign nationals.
Current-DST-NRF Interns	South African citizens and South African permanent residents who are current DST-NRF interns.
Innovation Bursary Scheme	South African citizens, South African permanent residents as well as a limited percentage of foreign nationals.
NRF Freestanding	South African citizens and South African permanent residents as well as a limited percentage of foreign nationals.
Students with disability	South African citizens and South African permanent residents.
Sasol-Inzalo	South African citizens and South African permanent residents.
Scarce Skills	South African citizens and South African permanent residents.

5. Non-eligibility

- Applicants that already hold an Honours' or Final year B Tech degree at the level for which they are applying for.
- Students pursuing an undergraduate degree are not eligible irrespective of the degree they are enrolled for.

6. Application Process

Students must first identify the university where they will be registered for the Honours' or final year B Tech degree. Applications for funding in 2017 must then be submitted, to the university where they intend to register, through the NRF Online Submission System by accessing the link: https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za/. The call for applications will be

open from September 2016 to October 2016. Further instructions on the application process will be made available in the NRF Freestanding, Innovation and Scarce Skills Development Fund Honours Block Grant Application and Funding Guide for 2017.

7. Evaluation Criteria

Each university will evaluate applications submitted by the students intending to study at the respective institution using the scorecard provided by the NRF. The following will be considered in evaluating all students' applications (Table 3):

1. Students previously funded by National Students Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) or the University Financial Aid Scheme for their undergraduate degree;
2. Priority research area of study to be supported;
3. Intention to continue with Master's degree upon completion of the Honours' or B Tech degree; and
4. Average percentage mark for previous degree.

Table 3: **Scorecard for the assessment of applications for Honours and final year B Tech Scholarships**

Criteria	Description	Weight
Academic Merit	Average percentage mark for previous degree.	45%
Career path	Intention to continue with Master's degree.	15%
Priority Research Area	Research aligned with one of the national research priority areas*.	25%
National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) or University Financial Aid Scheme	Previously funded by NSFAS or University Financial Aid Scheme (proof must be attached).	15%
		100%

8. Selection Criteria

1. Ministerial guidelines on demographic targets for equity and redress
2. Availability of budget

9. Student Nominations and NRF Approval

The NRF will allocate a block grant of a set number of bursaries to each university based on historical uptake, expressed need and the available budget. Institutions will use a standard score card provided by the NRF to evaluate each application, before selecting and nominating students to take up the allocated bursaries. The NRF will not approve nominations that do not comply with these criteria. Students who are unable to submit an academic transcript due to outstanding fees must not be screened out. However, they must attach proof of outstanding fees from the university with an institutional stamp and signature.

10. 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 assessment and selection criteria are supported. The set equity targets are 80% blacks, 55% women and 4% students with disabilities as directed by the DST Ministerial Guidelines on Equity and Redress (Ministerial Guidelines on Bursaries and Fellowships, 2013).

With respect to citizenship of successful applicants, the awards will be allocated in line with the following percentages:

- 87% to South African (including permanent residents);
- 5% to students from the South African Development Community (SADC) region
- 4% to students from the rest of Africa; and
- 4% to students from non-African countries

The DHET funded bursaries i.e. SSDF bursaries will be distributed according to the following set equity targets; 85% blacks, 55% women and 4% students with disabilities.

11. Value of Support

Bursary values for full-time Honours' and final year B Tech students are indicated in table 4. The bursary support is for one (1) year only and is not renewable.

Table 4: **Bursary values for full-time Honours and Final year B Tech students for 2017 academic year**

Type of Bursary	Bursary value (per annum)	Maximum Funding period
DST Priority Research Areas	R60 000	1 year
Current DST-NRF Interns	R60 000	1 year
Innovation Bursary Scheme	R60 000	1 year
NRF Freestanding	R30 000	1 year
Students with disability	R60 000	1 year
Sasol-Inzalo	R60 000	1 year
Scarce Skills	R60 000	1 year

Assistive devices for students with disabilities

Bursary-holders with a disability may apply for additional funding for an assistive technology device of up to R20 000. This is the maximum amount allowed during the tenure of the bursary. As defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (IDEA), an assistive technology device is "*any piece of equipment, or product system, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities*".

12. Funding Principle

The NRF Freestanding, Innovation and SSDF bursaries for Honours' and final year B Tech students are aimed at increasing the throughput rates of postgraduate students at public higher education institutions. Consideration will be given to ensuring the need to strengthen research capacity in scarce skills, priority skills and knowledge fields as well

as to accelerate the demographic transformation of the next generation of researchers. Allocation of funding will be governed by the annual budget availability.

13. 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 applicant to the value of the full sum awarded by the NRF.

Bursaries not taken up by May of the year of award will be cancelled for reallocation unless otherwise approved by the NRF.

*Relevant Strategies on National Priority Research Areas:

1. http://www.dst.gov.za/index.php/resource-center/strategies-and-reports/143-the-ten-year-plan-for-science-and-technology
2. http://www.dst.gov.za/index.php/resource-center/strategies-and-reports/174-national-research-a-development-strategy-2002
3. http://www.gov.za/sites/www.gov.za/files/Science_Technology_White_Paper.pdf
4. http://www.gov.za/sites/www.gov.za/files/Bioeconomy%20Strategy_a.pdf
5. http://www.gov.za/sites/www.gov.za/files/PALEO_STRATEGY_DST_Final_.pdf
6. http://www.gov.za/sites/www.gov.za/files/DST_Nanotech_18012006_0.pdf
7. http://www.gov.za/document?search_query=strategy&field_gcisdoc_doctype=All&field_gcisdoc_subjects=518&start_date=&end_date=&=Search
8. http://www.gov.za/about-sa/science-technology