



higher education
& training

Department:
Higher Education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



“Revitalising and Transforming the Academic Profession”

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES (SOP) FOR THE NURTURING EMERGING SCHOLARS PROGRAMME (NESP)

Introduction

1. This document should be read in conjunction with the approved Ministerial Statement on the implementation of the University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP) as well as the Staffing South Africa’s Universities’ Framework (SSAUF) document.
2. The Nurturing Emerging Scholars Programme (NESP) will be implemented in **2 components** as follows:
 - 2.1 Honours/NQF Level 8 qualification component: A 4-year initiative implemented in 3 Stages. The countdown for the timeframe will begin from the date when the candidate signs the scholarship contract. Stage 1 comprises of one-year Honours/NQF Level 8 qualification scholarship, Stage 2 comprises of a maximum of 2-years Master’s scholarship and Stage 3 is a 1-year academic internship at a South African university.
 - 2.2 Master’s component: A 3-year initiative implemented in 2 Stages. The countdown for the timeframe will begin from the date when the candidate signs the scholarship contract. Stage 1 comprises of a maximum of 2-years Master’s scholarship and Stage 2 comprises a 1-year academic internship at a South African university.

The minimum requirement for eligibility for the scholarship is NQF Level 7 for Honours scholarship and NQF Level 8 qualification for a Master’s scholarship, graduates who demonstrate academic ability, who express an early interest in the possibility of an academic career and who might be lost to the system if structured, attractive prospects and opportunities for recruitment into academic positions do not exist. NESP Master’s graduates then become a resource pool from which new academics can be recruited.

- 3 The implementation of the NESP Honours/NQF Level 8 qualification component involves the recruitment of graduates with an appropriate NQF Level 7 qualification with a minimum average of 65% in the final year Major Subject in the discipline that the Honours/NQF Level 8 qualification scholarship is in.
- 4 The implementation of the NESP for the Master's component involves recruitment of graduates with an appropriate NQF Level 8 qualification with a minimum average of 65%.
- 5 This document is intended to provide a standard set of policies and processes to guide the implementation of the NESP.

The nature of the Nurturing Emerging Scholars Programme (NESP)

- 6 Eighty percent (80%) of the NESP scholars must be Black (African, Coloured and Indian) men and women, including people with disabilities, of which at least 55% of the positions should be taken up by Black women. Permanent residents can be considered through the remainder of the 20% based on substantial motivation. Priority must be accorded to persons who are 35 years or younger in age.
- 7 The NESP provides an opportunity for postgraduate studies and development opportunities as a first step into an academic career that:
 - a. enables scholars to register and study for a full-time Honours/NQF Level 8 qualification and Master's degree at a university of their choice;
 - b. ensures scholars are fully supported through a scholarship for up to a period of two / three years;
 - c. enables scholars to take up a one-year academic internship position at the host university after completion of the Master's degree;
 - d. ensures that the candidate is fully supported by a mentor for the duration of their participation in the development programme;
 - e. provides an opportunity for exposure through support for a possible international mobility experience in the internship year; and
 - f. enables the candidate to develop teaching and research capabilities.

The NESP Scholarship (Honours/NQF Level 8 qualification and Master's component)

- 8 Stage 1 is a scholarship programme which provides study support through a scholarship for Honours/NQF Level 8 qualification and / or Master's studies at a university of choice.

- 9 The scholar must be allocated a mentor by the host university at the outset of the scholarship. The mentor provides general support and guidance in terms of building an academic career.
- 10 The full cost of study scholarship will be awarded by the Department of Higher Education and Training (the Department) with a possibility of a funding partner.
- 11 Funding opportunities from other sources to augment the allocated NESP funds can be considered, but only if the contractual obligation/s are not in contravention of the programme.
- 12 The Honours/NQF Level 8 qualification and Master's studies must be undertaken full-time and be completed in a maximum time of: Honours/NQF Level 8 qualification, one year; and Master's degree, two years.
- 13 The Honours/NQF Level 8 qualification studies must be undertaken at a local university and with a supervisor who is a recognized leader in the field of study. The Master's studies must be undertaken at a local university or an international university (in the case of international scholarship, partnerships are set up by the Department) and with a supervisor who is a recognized leader in the field of study. Studies do not necessarily have to take place through the host university, especially in instances where the university seeks to use the NESP to grow capacity in an area where it currently lacks capacity in.
- 14 In the case of the scholar undertaking studies at the host university, the scholar will be supported in much the same way as any other scholarship student at the university, including providing reports to the funder, in this case the Department and/or the implementation support partner university. If the scholar registers for the post-graduate studies at another university, the host university will be responsible for fund disbursement to the university where the student is registered (e.g. tuition fees) and funds that have to be paid directly to the scholar (e.g. allowances and equipment including a laptop – receipts for purchases of equipment and laptops must be provided to the host university), as well as providing the progress reports.
- 15 The scholars should be encouraged to become involved in some academic activities such as tutoring, mentoring etc. where this does not compromise the quality of their studies and the time taken to complete.
- 16 The Honours/NQF Level 8 qualification degree is required to be completed in a period of 1 year and the Master's degree within a timeframe of 2 years. However, if the scholar is unable to meet this deadline due to any valid reason, they are still obligated to undertake the academic internship for a duration of 12 months. In such cases, if the scholar requires

additional funds to complete the Master's degree, the stipend allocated for the academic internship can be used accordingly, and the university should adjust the remuneration for the internship year accordingly. For the Honours/NQF Level 8 qualification component, if the scholar is unable to meet this deadline and needs an extension this will be at a **no-cost** extension.

The NESP Internship

- 17 Following the successful completion (confirmation of the completion of the degree) of the scholarship of the Master's degree, the NESP scholar must immediately embark on a year-long structured academic internship at the host university.
- 18 The associated internship costs will be covered by the NESP budget allocated to the host university.
- 19 The following outcomes of the internship year must be achieved:
 - a. participate in teaching development and research development opportunities offered by the university;
 - b. prepare at least one paper for publication based on the Master's study and present the paper at a conference; and to
 - c. develop a PhD study proposal/embark on doctoral studies.
- 20 The mentorship relationship that initiates during the scholarship phase will continue into the internship stage. Mentors in this program are expected to be experienced, successful academics who are recognized as disciplinary experts in their respective fields. Ideally, mentors should also be known for their proficiency in teaching and research, as they are well-suited for the role of mentorship.
- 21 The role of the mentor includes:
 - a. quarterly engagements during the scholarship component that then continues into the internship component where the engagement increases to monthly;
 - b. identifying and supporting the intern to participate in appropriate teaching and research development opportunities;
 - c. supporting the intern to develop an identity as a member of the host university through participation in academic community activities;
 - d. supporting the intern to develop a PhD study proposal;
 - e. supporting the intern to apply for relevant academic positions at the host university or any other university;

- f. keeping close track of agreed developmental milestones and plans;
 - g. creating opportunities for reflective discussions on teaching and research experiences, opportunities and challenges;
 - h. assisting with such matters as personal problems, time management and financial management.
- 22 After the successful completion of the internship year, the intern is released from all contractual obligations relating to the NESP. Interns who have not been offered an academic position at the host university are free to take up any other scholarship opportunity/job opportunity that becomes available.

Financial management of NESP funds allocated by the Department to universities

- 23 The university is required to create a separate cost centre for each cohort in a phase of the NESP (e.g. a cost centre for Phase 2, Cohort 2.1 and subsequent cohorts and new phases) in its financial system; and within this, to manage the fund allocation for each NESP position.
- 24 The management of the scholarship and the internship year funds will be the responsibility of the host institution.
- 25 The funds allocated to support the participation of the candidate on the NESP can only be used for the following activities over the period of the programme as outlined in Tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1: Honours/NQF Level 8 Scholarship/Internship component

Category	Honours/NQF Level 8 qualification degree amount	Master's degree amount year 1*	Master's degree amount year 2 (if applicable)*	Internship year
Living and Meal allowance	R60 000	R60 000	R60 000	-
Maximum Accommodation Allowance	R60 000	R60 000	R60 000	-
Maximum Tuition Fees	R45 000	R40 000	R40 000	-
Electronic Study device	R15 000	-	-	-
Maximum Assistive Technology Device (where applicable)	R20 000 ¹	-	-	-
Total for 3-year scholarship	R180 000	R160 000	R160 000	
Overall total	<u>R500 000</u>			
Academic Internship stipend		-	-	R230 000
Teaching and research development opportunities, mentorship and proposal development for doctoral studies		-	-	R20 000
International conference/short mobility		-	-	R75 000
Total for the internship year	<u>R325 000</u>			
Grand Total	<u>R825 000</u>			

*Some Master's programmes are structured for one year of studies. In such cases Master's Year 2 funds falls off.

**If the candidate is awarded an international Master's scholarship, the amounts for the Master's component will be adjusted accordingly.

¹ Assistive devices can be covered from the interest accumulated from NESP funds upon request (scholars with special needs)

Table 2: Master’s scholarship/Internship Component

Category	Master’s degree amount year 1*	Master’s degree amount year 2 (if applicable)**	Internship year
Living and Meal allowance	R60 000	R60 000	-
Maximum Accommodation Allowance	R60 000	R60 000	-
Maximum Tuition Fees	R40 000	R40 000	-
Electronic Study device	R15 000	-	-
Maximum Assistive Technology Device (where applicable)	R20 000 ²	-	-
Total for 2-year scholarship	R195 000	R160 000	-
Overall total	<u>R355 000</u>		
Academic Internship stipend	-	-	R230 000
Teaching and research development opportunities, mentorship and proposal development for doctoral studies	-	-	R20 000
International conference/short mobility	-	-	R75 000
Total for the internship year	<u>R325 000</u>		
<u>Grand Total</u>	<u>R660 000</u>		

*Some Master’s programmes are structured for one year of studies. In such cases Master’s Year 2 funds falls off.

**If the candidate is awarded an international Master’s scholarship, the amounts for the Master’s component will be adjusted accordingly.

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26 The funds make provision for an electronic device intended for study purposes. The same device will continue to be used in the internship year.

² Assistive devices can be covered from the interest accumulated from NESP funds upon request (scholars with special needs)

- 27 Funds are provided to enable ONE international conference during the internship year of the programme.
- 28 The university must maintain a budget which clearly illustrates how the NESP funds are utilised and a report on the budget for each candidate must be included in the annual report on the NESP submitted by the university. A university is expected to submit a report annually irrespective of whether or not a scholar/s have been recruited.
- 29 The university will credit the NESP account annually with interest as calculated by the university in accordance with its financial policy regarding trust fund accounts, which is subject to change from time to time. Details of this policy must be made available to the Department and amendments thereto must be communicated to the Department in advance. The accumulated interest earned on the funds may be used primarily to offset inflationary increases, secondly for administrative/management expenses and lastly, for NESP related *bonafide* purposes/costs approved by the NESP Manager. Use of accumulated interest must be approved by the Department (see clause 47 below).
- 30 At the end of the scholarship/internship, no funds can be further utilised by the scholar. Remaining funds can be used by the university to fund additional NESP positions.
- 31 All expenditure debited against the NESP fund will be subject to the provisions of the university's financial policies and normal institutional audit protocol.

Application and selection process of NESP scholars/interns

- 32 Universities are invited to submit applications to participate in the Programme through a call sent out by the Department. The applications will be submitted on a standard template that accompanies the call.
- 33 Universities are expected to submit their applications for positions by the deadline indicated in the call. Late applications will not be considered.
- 34 The application will contain the following information:
 - a. number of NESP scholarships/internships that can be hosted at the university in the phase.
 - b. university motivation for the NESP positions must include:
 - (i) alignment of the scholarship/internship requests with the university's medium to long-term staffing requirements;
 - (ii) alignment of the scholarship/internship requests with national/systemic priorities;

- (iii) alignment of the scholarship/internship requests with higher education transformation imperatives;
- (iv) demonstrated capacity of the university to nurture and support the development of young upcoming academics, including a description of the mentor support and the teaching and research development opportunities that will be made available to the NESP intern.

- 35 Applications will be signed by a Vice-Chancellor or designated Vice-Chancellor and approved by the Director-General of the Department.
- 36 The approved NESP positions will be advertised nationally by the Department. Universities are encouraged to raise further awareness of the NESP positions through disciplinary networks and direct potential applicants to the central online application platform.
- 37 Applications will be received by the Department and the implementation support partner university, screened for completeness, and channelled to the respective universities.
- 38 Applicants must meet the following requirements:
- a. a minimum average of 65% attained in an appropriate NQF Level 7 and/or 8 qualification in the NESP position applied for;
 - b. age 35 years or younger;
 - c. South African citizen or permanent residency status.
- 39 Each university will review the applications it has received from the Department. Eligible applicants will be shortlisted and interviewed, and the top three applicants will be ranked per position. Institutions will submit documentation indicating the selection process to the Department. The ranked applicants will be reviewed and ratified by a national ratification committee. The committee comprises of representatives from universities and the Department.
- 40 Successful applicants will be attached to the host university, but do not necessarily have to undertake their post-graduate studies at the host university.
- 41 Successful applicants will be required to sign two contracts: (i) a scholarship contract committing themselves to full participation and work towards successful completion of Honours/NQF Level 8 qualification/Master's degree as stipulated in clause 2 above, followed by (ii) an academic internship contract of one year at the host university.
- 42 Once the recommended scholars have been confirmed in writing by the Director-General or nominee -
- a. the university can make firm offers to the successful scholars;

- b. the university cannot make a firm offer to the scholars without the formal approval from the Department;
 - c. universities must ensure that the approved NESP scholar signs the scholarship contract within 10 days of receipt confirming acceptance of the scholarship;
 - d. the university must submit signed scholarship contracts to the Department within 30 days of confirmation of the award;
 - e. NESP positions are considered to be filled when the Department receives a copy of the signed scholarship contract.
- 43 NESP positions allocated to the university which are not filled by the start of the next phase allocation will be carried over to the next phase or cohort. This will affect the number of positions allocated to the university for the subsequent phase.
- 44 In cases where a university struggles to fill a position, the university can re-advertise unfilled Master's positions as Honours component themselves and inform the Department accordingly.

Provisions to be incorporated in the scholarship and internship contracts of the NESP scholars

- 45 The university must provide appropriate infrastructure support (except for the laptop provided at the beginning of the scholarship period) for the NESP scholars/interns to reasonably perform the tasks allocated to them as interns.
- 46 The scholarship contract will include the following conditions:
- a. If the NESP scholar willingly terminates his/her participation in the NESP programme before he/she has completed, or fails to take up an internship position, the scholar will be expected to refund:
 - 100% of the costs associated with the post-graduate studies of the programme;
 - 10% of the costs associated with allowance provision in the internship year;
 - In cases where a scholar requires additional time and funding beyond the provided period to complete their post-graduate studies (e.g., failing to complete the Honours/NQF Level 8 qualification within one year or the Master's within two years), the university should make adjustments to the internship stipend. This means that the stipend allocated for the internship year will be reduced in order to

provide the necessary funds to support the scholar in completing their Master's degree.

- b. If the NESP intern secures permanent employment and therefore terminates his/her participation in NESP before the contract is completed, no penalties will apply, provided that proof of employment is submitted to the Department for approval.
- c. The Deputy Director-General or his/her nominee may, in the interest of the intern and after consultation with the host university, and based on sound motivation, approve a deviation from these provisions.

47 The academic internship contract will include the following conditions:

- a. stipulate a one-year internship contract, indicating the start and end date;
- b. stipulate that the NESP internship is on a temporary appointment and that there is no obligation on the part of the university to appoint the NESP intern after the internship period is completed;
- c. specify that the workload responsibilities assigned to the intern align with a developmental plan formulated for the intern that ensures that the outcomes stated in clause 19 are achieved;
- d. include a developmental plan that stipulates the following:
 - emphasis on successful participation in a set number of development opportunities provided by the university;
 - outline terms regarding the production of a research paper and conference presentation(s);
 - outline the expectations in relation to the completion of a proposal for PhD studies;
 - emphasise the commitment of the NESP intern to work with a mentor (see clause 21).
- e. *Unless:*
 - the termination is a result of ill-health, and a registered medical doctor has certified that the scholarship recipient is no longer fit to continue with the studies for medical reasons; or
 - the Department has exercised its discretion to exempt the scholarship recipient from this condition.

Change Management

- 48 Universities are monitoring the implementation of the NESP and this necessitates changes as and when necessary based on the outcomes of the monitoring.
- 49 Therefore, universities are expected to make changes internally, however, with the approval of the respective Deputy Vice-Chancellor. The following changes, however, need to be approved by the Department:
- a. extensions of study/internship period;
 - b. changes to the discipline of the allocated position;
 - c. utilisation of interest accumulated.
- 50 Records of changes made must be provided as part of the annual report that is submitted to the Department.
- 51 Requests for changes that are directed to the Department can only be considered up to the end of October with full justification for such requests.
- 52 Changes must be recorded on the standard change request template provided by the Department.
- 53 Changes with regard to budget virements (managed internally by the university) must be illustrated in a table that clearly indicates the movement of funds from one project/activity to the other.

Reporting Requirements

- 54 The university must provide an annual narrative and financial report to the Department on the implementation of the NESP at the university, supported by a report from the external auditors, as per the reporting templates provided by the Department (inclusive of records stipulated in clause 52 above)
- 55 The annual reporting templates must be submitted to the Department no later than the date communicated by the Department.
- 56 The annual narrative reporting template will include a detailed account of the participation and progress made by the NESP scholar.
- 57 The annual financial reporting template provided by the Department must include the signature of the Director: Finance of the host university, the responsible Deputy Vice-

Chancellor and the external auditors, and should reflect the income and expenditure of the NESP fund.

- 58 The report from the external auditors must indicate that all expenditure was incurred and paid for following the university's formalized procedures and code of conduct. It must also indicate that all expenditure and commitments are consistent with the final version of the budget approved by the Department. An audit sampling methodology of not less than 60% of expenditure incurred must be used for this report. The university must adhere to the Standards on Auditing (SA 530: Audit Sampling) in this regard.

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES (SOP) FOR THE NURTURING EMERGING SCHOLARS PROGRAMME (NESP)

The Standard Operating Procedures (SoP) for the implementation of the Nurturing Scholars Programme (NESP) is **endorsed**



DR M SOCIKWA

DEPUTY DIRECTOR-GENERAL: UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

DATE: 10.09.2023

The Standard Operating Procedures (SoP) for the implementation of the Nurturing Emerging Scholars Programme (NESP) is **APPROVED**



DR NKOSINATHI SISHI

DIRECTOR-GENERAL

DATE: 14/09/2023