



**NRF POSTGRADUATE STUDENT FUNDING POLICY:
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)**

Acronyms

NRF	National Research Foundation
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
ISFAP	Ikusasa Student Financial Aid Programme
FCS	Full Cost of Study
PCS	Partial Cost of Study
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DSI	Department of Science and Innovation
STEM	Science Technology Engineering Mathematics
SADC	Southern African Development Community
NQF	National Qualification Framework

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National Research Foundation (NRF) Postgraduate Student Funding Policy Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The National Research Foundation (NRF) has developed a new Postgraduate Student Funding Policy that will use postgraduate student funding as a lever to address the challenges of inequity of access, success and throughput. The purpose is to retain high academic achievers in the system to pursue postgraduate studies up to the doctoral level, as part of a national drive to grow the next generation of researchers and academics to sustain South Africa's knowledge enterprise.

This document answers frequently asked questions (FAQs) related to the new policy and the 2021 Call for applications. These FAQs will be updated from time to time and the updated FAQs will be posted on the NRF website (www.nrf.ac.za). Should you have further questions that are not addressed here please send an email to busisiwe.sibiya@nrf.ac.za.

Application Process

1. How do I apply for NRF Postgraduate funding?

Application for funding must be made through the NRF Online submission system on <https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za/>. The call for applications opens every year in April. All applications will be reviewed at the university and only applications that meet all the requirements will be submitted by the university to the NRF. Please consult the university at which you are intending to register for your degree for their internal closing date before you apply.

Financial Means Assessment

2. How will the NRF establish financial need?

The NRF will identify students that have previously been assessed as financially needy by National Students Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) or the Ikusasa Students Financial Aid Programme (ISFAP). In addition, students who have not undergone a financial need assessment will be subjected to a Household Financial Means Assessment by the NRF in partnership with ISFAP. Only students that complete the consent form and provide the requested information will be subjected to a Household Financial Means Assessment by the NRF.

3. Who is regarded as a financially needy student?

A student with a combined net family income of R350 000.00 (three hundred and fifty thousand rand) per annum or less will be regarded as financially needy by the NRF. The combined net family income of the student's parents/spouses and/or legal guardians will be used to undertake the Household Financial Means Assessment. This will apply to all applicants intending to apply for full-time studies irrespective of their age or level of postgraduate study.

4. What does combined nett family income mean?

Combined net family income is defined as a measure of the combined income of parents/spouses and/or legal guardians who earn income both from the formal and informal sector (e.g., salaries and wages, grants, pension and other sources of income including business and/or rental income). This applies to all students applying to the NRF for postgraduate funding.

5. If I was previously funded by NSFAS or ISFAP, will I still need to undergo a financial means test to be eligible for NRF postgraduate funding?

No, applicants who were previously identified as falling into the category with a combined family income of R350 000.00 (three hundred and fifty thousand rand) per annum or less, by either NSFAS or ISFAP, will not need to undergo a financial means test. Such applicants must attach proof that they are financially needy on the NRF Online Application template. The attachment must be an official university stamped financial statement or acceptance of an award from NSFAS or ISFAP.

6. If I was previously funded by the University Financial Aid, will I be required to undergo a financial means test?

Yes, you will be required to undergo a financial means test for postgraduate funding in order to establish your financial need status i.e. whether you fall into the category with a combined net family income of R350 000.00 (three hundred and fifty thousand rand) per annum or less.

7. What if my combined net family income is just above R350 000, for example R355 000, will the NRF exclude me from obtaining funding?

No, you would be eligible for Partial Cost of Study (PCS) funding on condition that you meet the university and NRF eligibility criteria and academic requirements.

8. How will students older than 18 years of age who are no longer minors or living with their parents or guardian be accommodated?

The NRF offers funding support to students studying/intending to study on a full-time basis and who will not be in a full-time salaried, contractual or permanent employment that exceeds 12 hours per week while pursuing postgraduate studies. The financial means test will be based on the combined nett family income which is defined as a measure of the combined income of parents/spouses and/or legal guardians who earn income both from the formal and informal sector (e.g., salaries and wages, grants, pension and other sources of income including business and/or rental income). This will apply to all applicants for NRF funding irrespective of the age of the student.

Funding Period

9. What will be the maximum period of support for full-time study at the various postgraduate levels of study?

Level of study	Maximum period of support
Honours'	One (1) year
Masters	Two (2) years
Doctoral	Three (3) years
Masters upgrade to doctoral	Four (4) years, of which 1 or 2 years may be for masters studies

10. Some students may need more than three years to complete a doctoral degree. Will the stipulated three years for completion be sufficient?

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) minimum prescribed period for full-time masters and doctoral studies are one (1) and two (2) years respectively. NRF funded students are eligible for two (2) years of funding for masters studies and three (3) years of funding for doctoral studies. Under exceptional circumstances, students may apply for extension support of six (6) or twelve (12) months for completion of the masters or doctoral degree.

11. What does 'uninterrupted study support' mean?

Uninterrupted study support is funding of postgraduate students from the honours up to the doctoral level, however, they will have to make a new scholarship application for each study level. NRF-funded students will be eligible for uninterrupted study support provided they meet the following requirements:

- The NRF-funded degree is completed within the NRF funding periods which are one (1) year for a full-time honours degree and two (2) years for a full-time masters degree;
- Register for a masters degree immediately after completing the honours or undergraduate degree that qualifies for admittance onto a masters programme e.g. engineering and allied health science degrees;
- Register for a doctoral degree immediately after completing the masters degree; and
- Meet all the university and NRF requirements for postgraduate funding.

12. How will the NRF cater for female students that have taken time off from their studies in-between degrees to raise a family?

The maximum age limits for applying for NRF funding makes provision for an interruption period of up to six (6) years during postgraduate studies, which enables female students who wish to take a break during their postgraduate studies to raise a family. Female students that take a break during their postgraduate studies to raise a family will be eligible for uninterrupted postgraduate funding provided that they meet all other eligibility criteria.

13. Is it possible for students who commence masters or doctoral studies without NRF funding to apply for NRF funding from their second year onwards?

Yes, full-time students that have commenced their masters or doctoral studies without NRF funding may apply for funding for completion of their masters or doctoral degree provided that all other eligibility criteria have been met. Masters students will not be funded beyond their second year of registration and doctoral students will not be funded beyond their third year of registration.

14. Can students enter at any level of study for funding?

Yes, students may enter at any level of their postgraduate studies provided that they meet the NRF eligibility criteria and university requirements. For example, a student that did not meet the 65% requirement in their honours/four year undergraduate degree will not be funded for masters studies and a student that did not meet the 65% requirement in the masters degree will not be funded for doctoral studies.

15. How many years will students who upgrade from a masters to doctoral registration have to complete their studies?

The student who is upgrading from a masters to doctoral studies will receive funding for a total of four (4) years. A student who upgrades after receiving one (1) year of funding will receive funding

for a further three (3) years and a student who upgrades after receiving two (2) years of funding will receive a further two (2) years of funding to complete the doctoral degree.

16. Will the NRF still be considering applications for extension support and at what level of study?

Yes, the NRF will maintain its mechanism for providing extension of funding support at the masters and doctoral level only. Recipients of both Full Cost of Study (FCS) and PCS bursaries may apply for extension support funding, however such extension will only be provided under exceptional circumstances and will not exceed twelve (12) months.

17. How will students who started the first year of their masters or doctoral studies in 2020 with NRF funding be funded when the new NRF Postgraduate Funding Policy is implemented?

Masters students who start their first year of studies in 2020 will continue on the old funding model until completion of their degrees. The phasing out process of the old funding model will reach its end in 2023. From 2024 onwards all students will be on the new postgraduate funding model.

Eligibility Criteria

18. Which postgraduate degrees will be funded?

Postgraduate student funding will be made for full-time honours, masters, and doctoral degrees only. It must be noted that the NRF will not fund the following:

- a. Undergraduate qualifications, regardless of National Qualifications Framework (NQF) exit level;
- b. Postgraduate certificates or diplomas, regardless of NQF exit level and
- c. Professional masters and doctoral degrees, regardless of NQF exit level.

19. What is the academic minimum requirements for NRF postgraduate funding?

A student must obtain:

- A minimum average of 65% for major subjects in the final undergraduate year of study for honours funding;

- A minimum average of 65% at the honours level or final year of a four year degree for masters funding; and
- A minimum of 65% at the masters level for doctoral funding.

20. If a student does not have a numerical mark indicated for the masters degree, will the NRF fund such students?

Where universities classify masters' students' results in the categories of "Pass" or "Pass with distinction", the university must disclose to the NRF the numerical mark for making such classification. A student with a classification of "Pass" or "Pass with distinction" will be allowed to apply for the current call. For the call that will be open in April 2021, student without a numerical pass mark will not be eligible for NRF funding. However such applications might be considered for funding by the NRF on a case-by-case basis.

21. What are the minimum academic requirements for students that are financially needy or living with a disability to be eligible for Full Cost of Study (FCS) funding by NRF?

A student must obtain:

- A minimum average of 65% for major subjects in the final undergraduate year of study for honours funding;
- A minimum average of 65% at the honours level or final year of a four year degree for masters funding; and
- A minimum of 65% at the masters level for doctoral funding.

22. What are the minimum academic requirements for students to be considered as exceptional academic achievers for FCS funding by the NRF?

A student who obtains:

- A minimum average of 75% for major subjects in the final undergraduate year of study for honours funding;
- A minimum average of 75% at the honours level or final year of a four year degree for masters funding; and
- A minimum of 75% (or cum laude) at the masters level for doctoral funding.

23. Will international students that are exceptional academic achievers or living with a disability be eligible for FCS funding?

No, students from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the rest of the world will only qualify for PCS funding.

24. Does the age limit for NRF postgraduate students funding apply across all NRF funding programmes?

Yes, the age limit applies to all students receiving NRF postgraduate funding across all NRF Programmes.

25. Under the NRF age limit for postgraduate student funding, how will the NRF cater for female students that have taken time off from their studies to raise a family?

The maximum age limits for applying for NRF funding have already made provision for an interruption period of up to 6 years during postgraduate studies, which enables female students who wish to take a break during their postgraduate studies to raise a family. For example a student who completes her undergraduate degree at the age of 21 has a period of 11 years in which to complete a masters degree and apply for funding for doctoral studies by the age of 32 years.

26. Is the introduction of age limits for NRF postgraduate funding not restrictive in the South African context? That is, will this not exclude students from previously excluded communities from accessing postgraduate training?

The proposed age limits for accessing NRF postgraduate funding are intended to significantly decrease the average age at completion of doctoral degrees to around 35 years. Early completion will allow adequate time for research productivity that leads to becoming an established and internationally recognised researchers. In addition, a high proportion of NRF-funded students pursuing full-time postgraduate studies complete their postgraduate degrees within these age limits.

27. How did the NRF come up with the prescribed age restrictions?

The average completion age for an undergraduate degree as published by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) was 21 years. In addition, the NRF analysed a cohort of 60 000 postgraduate students funded by the NRF over a six-year period and looked at the

average age at completion for honours, masters and doctoral students. The prescribed ages for qualifications were obtained as an outcome of this analysis.

28. Will international students at all levels of postgraduate studies be eligible for NRF postgraduate funding?

No, international students will not be eligible for NRF honours postgraduate funding. International students will be only be eligible for funding at the masters and doctoral level at PCS.

29. Will the NRF fund part-time studies?

Under the new Postgraduate Student Funding Policy, only full-time studies will be funded. Consideration will be made in future to fund part-time studies under exceptional circumstances for students who are involved in the knowledge enterprise.

The NRF is also launching the Graduate Internship Programme in 2020 that will align with the NRF Postgraduate Student Funding Policy. The redesigned two-year Graduate Internship Programme will provide a platform for bachelors graduates to receive work experience while simultaneously pursuing an honours degree part-time. All students must apply through the NRF Online submission system on <https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za/> to be considered for the Graduate Internship Programme.

Postgraduate Students living with disability

30. How does the NRF define a person living with a disability?

The Strategic Policy Framework on Disability for the PSET (2018), defines Disability as “*the loss or elimination of opportunities to take part in the life of the community, equitably with others, encountered by persons having physical, sensory, psychological, developmental, learning, neurological or other impairments, which may be permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, thereby causing activity limitations and participation restriction within mainstream society. These barriers may be due to economic, physical/structural, social, attitudinal and/or cultural factors.*”

31. What are the minimum academic requirements for students that are living with a disability to be eligible for FC funding?

A student must obtain:

- A minimum average of 65% for major subjects in the final undergraduate year of study for honours funding;
- A minimum average of 65% at the honours level or final year of a four year degree for masters funding; and
- A minimum of 65% at the masters level for doctoral funding.

32. Will students with a disability be funded strictly for 1, 2 or 3 years for honours, masters or doctoral studies respectively?

No, students living with a disability may be supported for an additional 12 months should the disability impact on the time for completion of the requirements for fulfilment of the degree.

33. Will students with a disability be eligible for an upgrade from masters to doctoral studies?

Postgraduate students with a disability that upgrade from a masters to a doctoral degree may be funded for maximum of five (5) years should the disability impact on the time for completion of the requirements for fulfilment of the degree. The NRF will only upgrade masters bursaries to doctoral level upon receipt of official university upgrade documents.

34. What will FCS cover for students living with a disability?

Full Cost of Study will cover tuition, accommodation, living allowance, meal allowance and a once-off allowance for study resource material such as an electronic device

35. Will students with a disability be eligible for any other allowances?

Students with a disability may apply for additional funding for an assistive technology device of up to R20 000 pa. This is the maximum amount allowed during the tenure of the scholarship.

Funding Exclusions

36. Will students who are intending to register for part-time studies be considered for NRF Postgraduate Funding?

No, students must be intending to register for full-time studies at a public university in South Africa.

37. Which qualifications will not be funded by the NRF?

- a. Undergraduate qualifications, regardless of National Qualification Framework (NQF) exit level;
- b. Postgraduate certificates or diplomas, regardless of NQF exit level; and
- c. Professional masters and doctoral degrees, regardless of NQF exit level.

38. Will the NRF still support grantholder-linked scholarships?

No, the NRF Postgraduate Funding Policy is adopting a one call approach, scholarships will no longer be included in research grant awards as was previously the case. All students must apply through the NRF Online submission system on <https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za/> to be considered for postgraduate funding.

Areas of Support

39. Will the fields of study to be supported be aligned to the NRF Research Strategy?

Yes, the fields of study will be aligned to the NRF strategy, in that the majority of student bursaries will be allocated in a directed manner so as to respond to national priorities, vulnerable disciplines and fields important for socio-economic development, as may be identified by the NRF from time to time.

40. Does the NRF gender target of 55% not restrict access to female applicants entering the system?

No, the proposed gender target of 55% female is aimed at encouraging women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) not only to remain in the system, but to progress from honours up to doctoral studies.

41. Why are professional degrees not considered for funding?

The NRF mandate states that the objective of the foundation is to contribute to national development by supporting, promoting and advancing research and human capacity

development, through funding and the provision of the necessary research infrastructure, in order to facilitate the creation of knowledge, innovation and development. It is for this reason that the NRF has taken a strategic decision based on its mandate not to fund: postgraduate certificates or diplomas (e.g. PGCE), professional masters (e.g. MBA) and doctoral degrees, regardless of the NQF exit level.

Academic Support Activities for Students

42. Will students be paid for the 80 hours per annum of academic service work that they will be rendering?

No, students will not be paid for academic service work rendered, either by the NRF or the university, as the academic service work will be done in the spirit of making a contribution to society.

Review of applications

43. If I do not have results for my current in-progress degree e.g. masters results when applying for doctoral funding, will my application be considered for funding?

Yes, you may apply with the results of your previous degree e.g. by using honours results or final year result if you have completed a four-year undergraduate degree. However, if you are awarded a scholarship, it will be provisional depending on whether you pass your masters degree with the minimum NRF academic requirement of 65%.

Awarding Criteria

44. How many students received funding for postgraduate studies annually from the NRF?

Approximately 12 000 students were awarded funding depending on the availability of the budget, and this is divided into approximately 5 000 (42%) at the honours level, 4 000 (33%) at the masters level and 3 000 (25%) at the doctoral level.

45. Will combining the SADC students with students from the rest of the world in the funding allocations targets, not undermine the SADC protocol on education and training which states that “member states shall reserve at least 5% of admissions for students from SADC nations other than their own” and also states that, “member states are required to

treat students from SADC countries as home students for purposes of tuition and accommodation”.?

No, while this proposal states that postgraduate funding should be allocated to 95% South Africans (including permanent residents) and 5% students from the rest of the world including students from SADC countries. The 5% allocation is expected to advance South Africa’s global partnerships, which would include commitments to SADC.

Full Cost of Study (FCS) and Partial Cost of Study (PCS) funding

46. Who will be eligible for FCS?

FCS will be available to South African citizens and permanent resident students, who (i) are either financially needy (ii) living with a disability; or (iii) are exceptional academic achievers.

47. What costs will FCS cover?

The FCS funding will cover tuition fee, accommodation allowance, personal care/living allowance, meal/food allowance and electronic study devices as indicated in the annual Call for Applications.

48. Who will be eligible for PCS?

PCS be available to (i) South African citizens and permanent resident students who are not eligible to be funded under FCS; (ii) students from SADC countries; and (iii) students from the rest of the world.

49. What are the minimum academic requirements for students to be considered for PCS funding by the NRF?

A student must obtain:

- A minimum average of 65% for major subjects in the final undergraduate year of study for honours funding;
- A minimum average of 65% at the honours level or final year of a four year degree for masters funding; and
- A minimum of 65% (or cum laude) at the masters level for doctoral funding.

50. What costs will PCS cover?

The PCS funding will cover tuition fee and accommodation allowance as indicated in the annual Call for Applications.

51. How will NRF allowances be paid out to students?

- **Tuition fee** will be capped and paid as per each university invoice. Tuition fee, inclusive of registration fees, is the agreed institutional fee for the actual programme of study. Qualifying NRF students not be required to pay registration fees upfront to the university.
- **Accommodation allowance** will be limited to the maximum cost of the equivalent university owned on-campus accommodation at a particular institution and paid per invoice. Students accommodated in Private accredited accommodation must provide proof of a lease agreement.
- **Meal/Food allowance** will be included with the accommodation allowance if a student resides in a catering residence. For students not staying in catering residences, this allowance will be paid monthly onto the student personal bank account by the university at which the student is registered.
- **Personal care/Living allowances** will be paid monthly onto the student's personal bank account by the university at which the student is registered.
- **Electronic study devices allowance** will be provided as a once off allowance for the duration of postgraduate studies.

52. Who decides which students receives FCS or PCS funding?

The NRF decides the support awarded to students based on an assessment of financial need, academic achievement, disability and citizenship.

53. Will students funded under PCS receive funding without interruption?

Yes, however, they must complete their degree within the NRF funding period and obtain the required minimum of 65% in their degree. Refer to section 11 under interrupted study.

54. If the NRF is held as a primary funder on all NRF Postgraduate Funding, what does this imply?

The NRF conditions of award supersedes other funder agreements and conditions of award, therefore the NRF will remain the primary funder irrespective of whether the student receives the FCS or PCS scholarship from the NRF.

55. If all NRF scholarships are proposed to cover at least tuition and accommodation, will an NRF funded student who is residing at home during postgraduate studies, also qualify for the same value of the scholarship?

All the NRF funded postgraduate students are expected to reside at the university or in private accommodation closer to the university so that they have easy access to research laboratories, libraries, supervisors etc.

56. Will all students who are awarded NRF FCS funding receive the same scholarship value? That is, will the cost of living in each city and region be taken into consideration?

Tuition and accommodation fee will be capped. Tuition will be paid as per invoice by the respective universities and accommodation will be capped at the university accredited accommodation rates.

57. Will a student who receives NRF FCS funding be allowed to hold other scholarships?

No, students receiving FCS funding may not receive another scholarship from any other source (Government or Private sector funder). Top-up funding may not cover any of the amounts already covered by the NRF funding.

58. Will a student who receives NRF PCS funding be allowed to hold other scholarships and/or top-up funding's?

Yes, students on PCS are eligible to hold other scholarships or top – ups, NRF funding awarded, will be reduced accordingly. The NRF may not pay for the amounts already covered by another funder.

59. How did the NRF determine the amounts for meal allowance?

The meal allowance was determined based on data made available from Statistics South Africa.

60. Will students whose masters degree have been upgraded to a doctoral programme be considered under FCS or PCS for the doctoral studies?

Students who upgrade from a masters to doctoral registration and that have demonstrated exceptional achievement to date may be considered for FCS. The NRF will consider motivations from the student and supervisor submitted through the university Designated Authority.

61. Will a student who receives a merit award from their institution be allowed to receive NRF postgraduate funding?

If the student receives a merit award from their institution, the NRF funding will also be reduced accordingly, so that the FCS is covered.

Financial Control

62. What will the recourse be should students receiving either FCS or PCS funding fail to complete the degree within the NRF stipulated time?

By accepting FCS or PCS funding from the NRF, the student agrees to complete the degree in the stipulated period. Failure to meet this commitment, especially if it is determined that it was due to negligence, would constitute a breach of contract and students must be return all the monies paid to the NRF together with interest at the prevailing prime rate charged by the NRF bankers, unless a de-registration is approved by the NRF due to exceptional and extenuating circumstances.

63. What will happen in instances where the university provides a certain percentage fee waiver or where tuition fee is not charged?

The funds allocated for the fees will not accrue to the student and will not be used as an additional subsistence allowance, but will be made available as a research grant to cover running expenses of the postgraduate research project. Running expenses are categorised as small equipment, materials and supplies, data collection, site visits and technical assistance for specialised skills.

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