



Policy Title	Research Funding Policy				
Scope of Application <i>(All persons to whom the policy applies)</i>	All Internal and External Stakeholders				
Parties Consulted (Development) <i>(State the stakeholder group/s consulted during policy formulation/revision)</i>	Senate Research and Innovation Committee, Executive Deans, Academic staff, Human Resources and Finance				
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A Policy Owner	Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research, Innovation, Commercialisation and Internationalisation (RICI)				
Policy Implementer <i>(A person doing the implementation and monitoring)</i>	Research Directorate				
<p>POLICY HISTORY <i>(To be Completed by Policy Owner)</i></p> <p>This policy is an updated version of the old research funding policy. New categories of funding have been introduced in this policy. In addition, the method of distribution of the DHET research output subsidy has been formalised and introduced in the policy.</p>					
Policy Number	Resolution Number	Status	Implementation Date	Approving Authority	Next Review Date
<i>(Unique number assigned to each policy)</i>	To be added	(New/revised/No Status)	(compulsory if "New" or "Revised")		<i>(Date of which the committee approves revision proposal)</i>

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1. POLICY STATEMENT

The Vaal University of Technology (VUT) strives towards becoming a university of technology with international recognition, firmly rooted in knowledge production, technology, and innovation. To achieve international stature, the impetus is on generating greater investments to increase research and innovation levels. This can be implemented by making funding for research and innovation a focal point at the university's executive management level.

Research funding should be directed towards research capacity building including improvement of research collaboration, provision of infrastructure, appointment of post-doctoral fellows, training of postgraduate students and other research related expenses. Research funding policy aims to promote staff development, research excellence and performance, to develop inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary research focus areas at VUT. These research focus areas should be developed on a continual basis and must be conceptualized around themes that address local, national, and international strategic research priorities and needs.

This policy aims to guide resource allocation for research development and research initiatives related to the core mandate of the university in terms of teaching, research, innovation, and community engagement.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all VUT internal and external funds allocated for research and innovation.

3. LAWS AND REGULATIONS

The Research Funding Policy should be aligned and contribute directly to the VUT Strategic Plan, taking into consideration the following approved policies: Adjunct Appointee and Visiting Scholar Policy, Sabbatical Leave Policy, Staff Development Policy, Intellectual Property Policy, Research Ethics Policy, Grants and Contracts Policy and the Academic Promotions Policy.

This policy is also aligned to the Intellectual Property Policy of the Republic of South Africa (2018), The National Environmental Management Act (10 of 2004), the White Paper on Science, Technology and Innovation (2019) and the National Research and Development Strategy (2002).

4. DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
NRF Focus area	means any of the National Research Foundation (NRF) focus areas that collectively provide a broad framework for researchers in South Africa across the spectrum of disciplines (the natural; social and human sciences; engineering; and technology) to pursue their research interests taking into consideration the macro-environment as well as relevant national developments. Within this context, VUTs preferred focus (based on its own priorities) will be agreed in keeping with the vision of VUT.

Institutional research funds	refers to all institutional funds that the VUT annually budgets for and allocates to VUT staff members to promote research. Institutional research funds are annually ring-fenced by the Senate Research and Innovation Committee based on annually projected faculty research output plans. The allocation of such funding is output driven and considers accredited output units, including peer-reviewed artefacts and creative outputs for the previous three years as an indicator for funding applications in the next calendar year.
VUT focus areas	refers to a clear research niche, which is part of the VUTs institutional plan and aligned with an NRF focus area. Such research focus areas must have clear scholarly merit and societal relevance.
Research	means careful or diligent search or studious inquiry/study or examination of facts, phenomena, social, cultural or historical issues. These include the investigation or experimentation aimed at the discovery and interpretation of facts; revision of accepted theories or laws in the light of new facts, or practical application of such new or revised theories or laws; and the collecting of information about a particular subject, across fields of study or a problem.
Researcher	means a person who inquires, investigates, probes and devotes her/himself to undertaking research in any given field, within any social/ historical/ legal environment or another field of interest. This includes field and laboratory engagements to advance knowledge in one or more academic spheres.
Research Expenses	are expenditures that can be logically linked and attributed to a research project. These include, amongst others, but is not limited to: research running costs, research equipment costs, multi-user equipment costs, repair of research equipment, travel costs, supplement costs of postgraduate bursaries of students working, salaries of research assistants, salaries of research technicians, purchasing of database licenses, computers to be used in the research projects and seminar/conference costs.
Staff	is defined as full-time, contractual (three-year), adjunct or post-doctoral fellows. (Special consideration is made for staff who may be on annual contracts, but who have published under the banner of VUT in the past year or publish regularly as employees of VUT and who are supported by the Executive Dean of the relevant faculty to qualify for research funding).
Research output	is a product of research and a process of investigation leading to new insights. It is effectively disseminated academically by way of journal articles; conference contributions; books and book chapters; physical artefacts; exhibitions and performances; digital artefacts (including web content).
Research output units (ROU)	will include: A research article published in a Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) approved journal and is allocated a single unit (1 unit). A conference proceeding that meets the DHET guidelines is allocated a 0.50 unit.

	<p>A book/ chapter in a book that meets the DHET guidelines ranges from 1 unit to 10 units, depending on the number of pages. For all research outputs where there is more than one author, the unit is shared between authors.</p> <p>The DHET research output subsidy is linked to the total number of research outputs produced by an institution.</p>
Substantial progress in a dissertation or thesis	means demonstration that all data for masters/doctoral research are collected.
Advanced stage of dissertation in an article format	refers to an advanced stage of an article including the abstract, introduction, methods, results, discussion, references and acknowledgments that is ready for final language editing.
Full research cost	means the total costs of undertaking research including the direct research costs and indirect research costs, as well as space, personnel, IT and management, as defined in the Grants and Contracts Policy.
Seed funding	means funds that are distributed to an individual who has completed his/her doctoral studies as a once off allocation (new member of staff or an emerging researcher) to initiate a research niche area as defined by VUT.
Block funding	means funds from the university intended as the minimum top-up necessary to enable researchers to carry out a realistic and feasible research plan.
Hosting a conference grant	means funds other than seed funds to assist departments in arranging research conferences and symposia.
Publication grants	means grants which are intended to contribute towards page costs of articles in journals accredited by the DHET, or to provide a contribution to the publishing of a book that may earn a DHET subsidy

5. POLICY MANDATE

The aim of the Research Funding Policy is to:

- create an enabling research environment that supports research staff and postgraduate students.
- provide guidelines for the fair and equitable distribution and use of research funds and improve accountability within the VUT research system, including research development and research initiatives related to the core mandate of the university in terms of teaching, research and community engagement.
- ensure transparency and accountability and streamlining of all funds intended for research purposes.

To achieve this aim, the following objectives are identified:

- To ensure research capacity development for staff and students.

- To allocate funds responsibly and ensure effective monitoring of research expenditure to the Faculty Research and Innovation Committee (FRIC) under the guidance of Senate Research and Innovation Committee (SRIC).
- To monitor research outputs and post-graduate supervision.
- To promote inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary research using internal research grants.

6. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Department/Designation	Role/Responsibilities

7. DEVIATION FROM THIS POLICY

Deviations from this policy must be approved by the Senate.

8. OBJECTIVES

- To ensure research capacity development for staff and students.
- To allocate funds responsibly and ensure effective monitoring of research expenditure to the Faculty Research and Innovation Committee (FRIC) under the guidance of Senate Research and Innovation Committee (SRIC).
- To monitor research outputs and post-graduate supervision.
- To promote inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary research using internal research grants.

9. PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES

The Research Funding Policy is guided by the following rules and regulations in terms of two categories for funding: inter alia funding from Institutional Research Funds and Special Categories of funding.

9.1 Incentivisation of research activities

The primary source of institutional research funds will come from the DHET Research Output Subsidy allocated annually to the university.

9.1.1 DHET Research Output Subsidy and method for distribution

The guidelines stipulated below will be piloted for the next three years from 2022 to 2025, after this period the method of distribution will be reviewed.

The Finance Department at VUT will earmark, ring-fence, and invest **100%** of the DHET research output subsidy exclusively for research expenses and research infrastructure.

The DHET research output subsidy will be distributed as follows:

- **50%** for research capacity development to be administered by the Research Directorate on behalf of the Senate Research and Innovation Committee (SRIC). Funds under this category will be used to support institutional research capacity development initiatives such as research rewards for excellence, attendance or hosting of conferences, strategic training of staff and postgraduate students, supplementation of post-doctoral stipends and purchase of research equipment amongst others agreed on by SRIC.
- **30%** to be allocated to the author(s) research accounts to be used exclusively for research purposes. No funds will be paid to researchers as cash for personal use.
- **20%** for the use and benefit of the faculty to be managed by the Executive Dean and allocated by FRIC. The allocated amount to the faculty must be used to improve research at the respective faculty including the training of doctoral students. The Executive Dean shall be accountable for the expenditure according to the SRIC approved guidelines. Expenditure reports should be tabled for discussions at every SRIC meeting. Annual unspent funds may be kept by the faculty for future research activities.

9.1.2 Rewards for research excellence

With the coming into effect of this policy, VUT will introduce the research reward system aimed at retaining and rewarding productive established researchers and emerging researchers. These incentives are expected to enhance research productivity, support faculty staff development and strengthen prospects of external funding. The 50% DHET research output subsidy funds allocated to the Research Directorate will be utilized for these rewards.

This incentive scheme is intended to provide awards in two main categories namely:

9.1.2.1 Category A: Research Excellence

This award is directed at researchers who have a distinguished track record of having published more than **30** research outputs (number of journal articles, books/book chapters and conference proceedings) with a minimum of **10** research output units (number of research outputs divided by the number of authors) in DHET accredited publications over a period of three years. It must be noted that this excellence awards excludes successful supervision of supervision of Masters and Doctoral students. Incentivisation of postgraduate supervision is done separately.

An amount of **R300 000** will be paid in full as cash into the researcher personal bank account for the researcher's personal use.

9.1.2.2 Category B: Research Excellence

This award is directed at researchers who have a distinguished track record of having published more than **15** research outputs (number of journal articles, books/book chapters and conference proceedings) with a minimum of **5** research output units (number of research outputs divided equally amongst the number of authors generating the research output) in DHET accredited publications over a period of three years. It must be noted that this excellence awards excludes successful supervision of supervision of Masters and Doctoral students. Incentivisation of postgraduate supervision is done separately.

An amount of **R150 000** will be paid in full as cash into the researcher personal bank account for the researcher's personal use.

Process

1. With the coming into effect of this policy, the Research Directorate will establish reward guidelines for this incentive scheme. The Guidelines will be submitted and approved by SRIC.
2. Research rewards committee with a three (3) year mandate and its ToR's will be established.
3. A faculty via the Executive Dean submits nominations to this committee for evaluation.
4. A faculty may nominate an unlimited number of candidates, but no candidate may be nominated for more than one award category. Self-nominations are not allowed.
5. Outcome of the evaluation will be submitted to and approved by SRIC.

9.2 Categories for funding from institutional research funds

Academic and professional VUT staff members can apply for institutional research funds for research initiatives, research collaboration, as well as for research equipment and conferences attendance and presentations. In all instances, researchers applying for funding must provide evidence of their efforts to source external funding to reduce over reliance on internal research funds.

9.2.1 Conference travel grant (To be paid from the 50% Research Directorate Allocation)

Purpose

The purpose of the conference travel grant is to allow and enable researchers to present the results of their recent research to a suitable audience at a conference or a meeting of appropriate high academic standing. An associated secondary aim is to develop collaborative networks nationally and internationally within or across areas of specialisation. Applications may be made for a national or international conference attendance. For the purposes of this funding, an international conference held within the South African borders will be treated as a national conference. Conferences outside the South African borders are regarded as international, as per SARS directive.

Eligibility

- VUT academic staff, permanent and on three-year contract employment.
- Administrative and Professional Support Services staff affiliated with academic departments.
- Adjunct Appointees, Research Associates, Visiting Scholars and Honorary Professors.
- Post-Doctoral Research Fellows who are associated with academic departments or research units.
- A staff member, registered for a Masters or Doctorate at a recognised institution of higher education, who has made reasonable progress (i.e. staff member must have adequate data to present, as documented by the supervisor) will be funded for a first-time national conference. Such a staff member must provide proof that they have presented the research in the department or faculty before approval.

Assessment criteria

The conference award is granted on a competitive basis and will take the following into account:

- The paper must be presented in the area of benefit to the VUT.
- In the event of co-authorship, only one staff member will be funded to present a paper for chosen national or international presentations.
- The status of the conference and its previous accreditation by DHET.
- The quality of the exposure and interaction of the applicant.
- Envisaged research outputs and collaboration networks emanating from the conference.
- Proof of having applied to other funding agencies such as NRF to supplement VUT internal institutional funding.

Assessment of application will be based on the information provided by the applicant as well as the recommendation and support from the applicant's head of department.

Budget

Budget items that Researchers will qualify for funding as follows:

- a. Subsistence funding for international or national conferences is allocated for one day before the conference to one day after the conference, including the number of days spent at the conference.
- b. Subsistence funding is granted for one specific conference and will not be transferred to another conference, even in the event of conference cancellation.
- c. All applicants must attach quotes to the application as per the prevailing procurement policy. Preferably, the applicant should stay in the accommodation provided by the conference organisers.
- d. Requests for funds for travel should include a travel itinerary.
- e. Applicants will qualify for an average amount on accommodation at the cost of the 3-star hotels by South African standards, except where the conference is hosted, and accommodation is available at the venue.
- f. The daily allowance will be in accordance with the SARS rate.
- g. Funds can be applied to cover insurance when travelling. Travel insurance cover will be guided by the university insurance policy.

- h. Funds awarded for international travel will be calculated according to the daily rate of exchange and budgets will be changed accordingly to accommodate fluctuations in the rate of exchange between the time of application and approval of funding.
- i. Funds awarded for transport will not include funds for transport to and from OR Tambo International Airport. Such funds may be claimed from departmental operational funds.
- j. Costs relating to the conferences such as conference dinners, social events and transport between the airport and hotel are included in the subsistence and travel costs.
- k. Should any funds not be utilised, the funds will revert to the university.
- l. If a conference is fully funded by a sponsor or the organising institution/ committee, the university shall not contribute any funds.

Conditions

- If funds were received for a previous conference attendance from any VUT institutional research funds, proof of a DHET accredited publication is needed before another conference application can be considered.
- Approval of the application for conference attendance does not require proof of an accepted abstract, provisional award will be made pending acceptance of the abstract or paper.
- Applicants should submit their applications at least two months prior to the conference.
- Researchers may attend as many national conferences as they wish. However, only ONE national conference will be funded by VUT per annum per applicant and thereafter only 50% will be allocated for additional conference attendance, dependent on availability of funds. Funding will only be allocated when a paper or poster will be presented.

The staff member must submit a written report within one month of their return through FRIC to the Research Directorate.

9.2.2 Hosting a conference grant (From the 30% Faculty Allocation)

Purpose of the award

The primary aim of this grant is to assist faculties in organising research conferences, research meetings and symposia. Funding to initiate conference arrangements will be made available. The focus is on providing support for smaller research conferences that otherwise would not take place without this funding. This grant is not intended for research development workshops or for large regular international conferences or national society annual conferences.

Application conditions

- Given that this grant is intended to provide base funding to initiate conference arrangements, applications for conferences to be held in the following year will be prioritised.

- The department or faculty must:
 - be able to attract international researchers who will interact with academic staff *and* postgraduate students.
 - have a strong and productive research team around the proposed conference; and
 - have a strong nucleus of productive research students of high calibre who will benefit from participation in the conference.
- The proposed conference, which may be open or closed, must further research development at VUT.
- The application must indicate expected research outputs. Please note that peer reviewed output that generates subsidy carries a higher weighting.
- The department or faculty must demonstrate that an application for external funding for such a conference has been made.

Budget

The budget for such a conference will include the following:

- Travel and subsistence costs for invited conference speakers.
- Publication costs of any conference proceedings/other research outputs.
- Catering and space rental costs where applicable.
- Incidental expenses for which there must be appropriate motivation.
- Expected Miscellaneous from conference pre and post conference planning
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9.2.3 Staff capacity development grant (From the combination of the UCDP funds and 50% Research Directorate Allocation)

Purpose

The purpose of this funding category is:

- To support eligible staff to register for higher qualifications and conduct research towards fulfilment of a masters or doctoral degree.
- To secure specific funding for a research related intervention to benefit the academic staff.

Eligibility

- To qualify for funding in this category, the staff member must provide proof of an attempt at obtaining external funding.
- VUT staff member, based in the academic departments, who have demonstrated a commitment to study will be supported.

- In the case of non-academic staff, a clear motivation in terms of the direct benefit to VUT needs to be established.
- Conditionally appointed VUT staff where the condition is to complete masters or doctoral qualification for a permanent appointment will be prioritized.
- Staff members who are on a fixed term contract basis (three years and longer) should be dealt with in the same manner as permanent staff.

Conditions

- a. An applicant applying for funding for a research project for qualification purposes and who is registered at another university, must provide proof of registration. Further to this, a confirmation letter from the institution is required stating that the candidate has not received funding from the university where the staff member is studying.
- b. Ordinarily, all research expenses for a staff member registered at another institution should be covered by that institution.
- c. The staff member should sign an agreement to serve VUT for an equivalent number of years that support was provided. Should the staff member resign, all costs funded by this grant will be recouped with interest.
- d. Intellectual property for staff studying at another university ordinarily belongs to the university at which the staff member has studied, except if the staff member has received funding from VUT and has utilised the VUT infrastructure and resources to conduct the research. In the event of the latter, the nature of the Intellectual Property Agreement would need to provide for the sharing of ownership and benefits between the departments and/or faculties of the respective institutions.
- e. The staff member must submit quarterly reports to the head of department and to the Research Directorate, which will be tabled at the FRIC for their consideration. Should there be no demonstrable progress reported, VUT reserves the right to withdraw and recover monies spent on such funding, giving sufficient notice to the candidate.

Budget

A motivated and justified budget to cover the research project costs, travel and some equipment will be considered. Where research equipment is purchased as part of the grant, it will remain the property of VUT.

9.2.4 Seed funding

(From the 50% Research Directorate Allocation)

This will be a grant given to staff who have recently completed their PhD studies to undertake new research initiatives. It will apply to all staff meeting the requirements (including new staff who join the university). The grant will be administered by the Research Directorate according to procedure approved by the SRICs.

Budget

A properly motivated budget to include research costs, post-graduate student support as well as research equipment will be considered. The budget must be supported by the head of the department in which the staff member is based.

9.3 Special categories of funding

(Funds to be allocated by Council from the University central fund)

9.3.1 Faculty block grants

Purpose

Block grants enable researchers to pursue their research. This block grant is intended as the minimum top-up necessary to enable researchers to carry out a realistic and feasible research projects.

All research-related activities for which Faculty researchers would like to receive support should be included in the block grant application.

Budget

The SRIC provides the budget for the block grant and the faculty allocation will depend on the specific needs of the relevant faculty. The faculty block grants will be an addition to the DHET allocated subsidy. The block grant is determined by specific needs, previous outputs generated by the faculty, number of active researchers and utilisation of previous year's grant.

Grant allocation and distribution

Each faculty receives an annual block grant calculated in direct relation to the research outputs reported in the previous year.

The distribution of the block grant is then managed at the faculty level. FRICs are responsible for the management and distribution of their block grant according to a faculty-specific model approved by the SRIC. This is to provide maximum flexibility for aligning the use of block grants with faculty-specific strategies.

The process of grant allocation and distribution is as follows:

- The FRIC prepares data based on the research report that informs the output-based allocation formula. The FRIC returns the required data to the Research Directorate.
- The Research Directorate finalises the faculty macro-allocations and informs the FRIC.
- The FRIC processes the applications (each faculty determines their own process).
- Block grant appeals to be submitted by the deadline date (which is set annually). A block grant appeals meeting is held to evaluate appeals submitted.

9.3.2 NRF matching grant

Additional funding will be allocated to a research project with the aim to match institutional funding to external funds from NRF in order to build partnerships and relevant, high-impact research in collaboration with industry and other external stakeholders. (Guidelines to be established by the Research Directorate).

9.3.3 NRF rating incentive grant

This grant will be eligible for staff members who obtain an NRF rating as an incentive for their achievement. Rated researchers will be provided with an additional incentive fund for this achievement. Funds will be allocated according to the level of the rating to be determined annually by the SRIC. The incentive is paid annually for the duration of the approved NRF rating period, while still employed at VUT. Funds will be paid into a cost-code allocated to the researcher and these funds can only be used for research related activities. Funds need to be utilised in the same year and cannot be carried over from one year to the next.

9.3.4 Miscellaneous expenses

All other unforeseen research funding not specified in this policy must be justified within the conditions set out in this document and approved by the both the Director of Research and the DVC: RIC.

10. POLICY

The Research Funding Policy should not be used in isolation, but with due consideration and application of the rules and regulations stipulated in other relevant VUT policies pertaining to teaching and learning; finance; human resources, VUTs business units and other relevant policies.

11. POLICY MANAGEMENT

Research funding Applications considered by the Senate Research and Innovation Committee should be submitted to the Faculty Research and Innovation Committee prior to being submitted to the Senate Research and Innovation Committee.

- a. Non-academic staff members must submit their funding application forms to the relevant Faculty Research and Innovation Committee before submitting them to the Senate Research and Innovation Committee. If such funding applications lie outside the areas of specialisation offered at the institution, such applications can be considered on an ad hoc basis by the Director: Research. In such cases, feedback will be provided on the outcome of the process by the Research Directorate to the applicant/s.
- b. For all the funds allocated to faculties will be reviewed annually by the Senate Research and Innovation Committee. Faculties are required to report quarterly and annually to the Senate Research and Innovation Committee on their utilisation of these funds.
- c. No research funding will be allocated without the research proposal and research ethics clearance in place.

- d. Supplementation of external research grants are to be budgeted in consultation with the Research Directorate to ensure that the full cost budgeting is included. Waiver to the full cost budgeting applies only to NRF, ERC and MRC grants.

12. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY AND REVISION PERIOD

- a. Once the policy is approved by the VUT Council for implementation, the policy will go into effect and guide all activities relating to all Research Funding at VUT.
- b. This policy should be evaluated at the end of the fifth (5th) year after its implementation and revisions should be made, if recommended.
- c. Key activities and their respective outcomes set out in this policy will be evaluated at the end of each year to gauge the progress made in implementing this policy.
- d. After approval of this policy by the University Council, a formal letter with a copy of this policy will be communicated to all staff of the university.

