



# higher education & training

---

Department:  
Higher Education and Training  
**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

## *Research Outputs Communique 2 of 2023 – 26 September 2023*

### **To all DVC's for Research and Senior Directors of Research**

The Project Management Team (PMT) of the Publication Quality Framework Project (PQFP) has commenced its work in earnest. You will recall that a Communique from the Department of Higher Education and Training (the Department) was sent to you a few weeks ago announcing this project. Following two meetings of the PMT (Chaired by Professor Johann Mouton and attended by representatives from the Department, Academy Science of South Africa (ASSAf), the National Research Foundation (NRF), Universities South Africa (USAf) and Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology (CREST), a number of action steps have now been finalized. The Department is pleased to update you on these. The Department also depends on your full co-operation as it proceeds with the project.

The purpose of this Communique is to request that your Research Office submit **two documents** that are required as part of the preparatory work on the project, each of which is elaborated below. The PMT is planning for a **first virtual consultative meeting** with the representatives from the 26 universities (DVC's for Research/ and or Research Directors). The date for this meeting will be finalized soon but it is likely to be held during the **second half of November 2023**.

A second more comprehensive consultative meeting to be held in Stellenbosch in **February or March 2024** is also planned. This meeting, to be held over two days, will involve detailed discussions of possible changes to be made to the current Research Outputs Policy. The PMT will send a *save a date* for this meeting as soon as possible as we believe that senior representatives (preferably the DVC's for Research or their secondi) must be in attendance.

### **Request for Documents:**

**Document 1: Internal submission process for publication submissions.** The Department is requesting that all Universities submit a document that outlines the current process(es) followed within the university for the submission of all documents (articles, books, chapters and conference proceedings) for subsidy purpose. It has been decided that such a document is essential to

ensure universities conform with the rules of the 2015 Research Outputs Policy. Our annual verification of all submissions (including the 2023 submissions for 2022 publications), shows that universities continue to submit publications that violate some of the rules of the Policy (including submitting duplicate publications, publications published not on the accredited lists, publications published in predatory journals or with predatory publishers, publications where the authors are not officially appointed as being affiliated to the university where the research was conducted, and so on.). The universities should be alive to Rule 4.5 of the Policy which states the following:

*The Department may consider punitive measures (such as the docking of units) against an institution which persistently makes incorrect claims that compromise the integrity of scholarship or research.*

The current policy also states (Rule 4.6) that

*Institutions may consider establishing a Research Integrity Committee, which could be a Senate Committee that would primarily ensure institutional compliance with respect to such aspects as the conduct of researchers.*

To assist the Department to gain a deeper understanding of the different practices currently followed by SA universities in preparing and submitting their documents, you are requested to furnish the Department with a document that addresses the following questions:

- (1) Where in the institution are submissions for the Research Outputs Submission System (ROSS) system captured (is there a central point or do the submissions originate in a decentralized manner?) In either case, please indicate which office(s) are involved in the capturing of the submissions.
- (2) What platform or software system does the University use to capture the submissions? If no dedicated platform is used, please indicate in what format the submissions are captured (e.g. Excel spreadsheets). Do such platforms have inbuilt checks or validation rules to improve the accuracy of the submissions?
- (3) Indicate at what stages in the submission process quality controls are implemented, from capturing of submissions to the ultimate uploading on to the ROSS system. This section of your document must indicate whether the University has an internal Quality Control/Evaluation/Integrity committee that meets to discuss submissions before these are uploaded. In addition, this section must also outline in detail the Terms of References that are given to auditors who are required to conduct final checks on the correctness of claims submitted.
- (4) Any additional information that demonstrates how the University ensures the final accuracy and integrity of the annual claims for subsidy may be added.

**Document 2: University policies or guidelines regarding disbursement of publication subsidies.** Recent media articles have questioned the practice, seemingly followed by some universities, where staff (and students) receive direct payments for publications subsidized within the Department's Research Outputs Policy. The concerns raised in these articles are a necessary reminder that the disbursements made to universities within this policy (more than R5 billion in 2021), is public (taxpayers') monies. The Policy is unequivocal about its commitment to

promoting research integrity and warns explicitly against universities making direct payments to their staff. Rule 1 of the Policy states:

*This policy aims to support and encourage scholarship. Institutions and academics must remember the importance of research **integrity** when submitting their claims and are urged to focus on **quality** research and **not** maximal accrual of subsidy funds. And Rule 3.1 is even more direct: *The Department subsidises institutions and not individual authors or academics. Institutions should be cautious of **directly incentivizing individual** authors as this practice is promoting **perverse behaviour** in some cases.**

Regrettably, various recent studies and our own experience in reviewing the 2023 claims for 2022 publications have shown again that some universities continue to engage in practices that directly incentivize or reward (in some cases 'enrich') academics and students. Our second request should be read against this background. The request is as follows:

- (1) That you submit your University's policy (or relevant guidelines) regarding the disbursement of subsidies earned through the Department's Research Outputs Policy. If you do not have such a single policy, please submit all relevant documentation.
- (2) It is essential that this document specifies whether and to what extent the University rewards/incentivizes the production of publications, Masters' and doctoral graduates.
- (3) The document must indicate – where such incentives are paid out – under what conditions these are done and whether such payments are made only for research-related purposes and activities. Where disbursements are currently being made to staff as a contribution to their salary, this should be clearly indicated (and again under what conditions this is the case).
- (4) The document also needs to be specific on the disbursement amounts made to staff for different categories of output.
- (5) Any other information, that you deem relevant to this request, can be included in the documents.

**Both Documents 1 and 2** must be sent directly to Professor Johann Mouton (The Project Leader of the PQFP) and copied to Mr Walter Ntuli at [Ntuli.W@dhet.gov.za](mailto:Ntuli.W@dhet.gov.za) . The deadline for both documents is **Friday the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 2023**. No late submissions will be accepted. Any correspondence or questions of clarification regarding any of these two documents, can be sent to Professor Mouton at [jm6@sun.ac.za](mailto:jm6@sun.ac.za).

Respectfully,



**Dr Marcia Socikwa**  
**Deputy Director-Director: University Education Branch**  
**Date: 28.09.2023**