



**2027 NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY POSTDOCTORAL
AND RESEARCH FELLOWSHIPS**

CALL FRAMEWORK

RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT

15 September 2026

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1. INTRODUCTION

Support for high-level skills development is central to strengthening South Africa's research and innovation system and advancing an inclusive, knowledge-based economy. The period immediately following completion of a doctoral qualification represents an important stage in the development of an independent research career. It provides an opportunity for emerging researchers to deepen their expertise, extend their scholarly networks, develop research independence and strengthen the professional capabilities required for careers within and beyond academia. Postdoctoral support should therefore provide an enabling environment in which emerging researchers can consolidate their doctoral training while developing their scholarly identity, research profile and longer-term career trajectory.

In line with this approach, Nelson Mandela University seeks to strengthen its community of postdoctoral and research fellows as part of its strategic commitment to developing research capacity and nurturing the next generation of researchers. The University recognises fellows both as emerging scholars requiring purposeful career development and as important contributors to its research community. Its fellowship programme therefore seeks to combine opportunities for advanced research, mentorship, scholarly collaboration and professional development with meaningful participation in the University's research environment, thereby enabling fellows to progress towards research independence and sustainable research careers.

Within this framework, postdoctoral fellows are doctoral graduates who use the fellowship period to deepen their research expertise, strengthen their scholarly profile and develop greater research independence. Research fellows, by contrast, are early-career researchers who have either completed a postdoctoral fellowship or acquired formal research experience aligned with the University's [institutional research themes](#). Applications for either category of fellowship must be initiated by a host researcher who is a permanent staff member, Emeritus Professor or Research Associate of Nelson Mandela University and who demonstrates a proven research track record in the relevant field. The host researcher is responsible for identifying and recruiting a prospective fellow and agreeing with the fellow on the proposed research project. The prospective fellow is responsible for completing and submitting the online application, supported by the required host and Faculty endorsements.

This framework outlines the eligibility criteria, funding principles, application process and governance of the Nelson Mandela University Council Postdoctoral Fellowships, Vice-Chancellor's Postdoctoral Fellowships and Research Fellowships. It should be read in conjunction with the Postdoctoral and Research Fellowships Policy (IRC 402.09).

2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the postdoctoral and research fellowships are to:

- Increase the number and quality of postdoctoral and research fellows at Nelson Mandela University;
- Enable young scientists to attain post-PhD research training and strengthen their research profile;
- Support young scientists and professionals in strategic, basic, and applied research with the intention to promote innovation; and
- Transform the demographic profile of researchers at Nelson Mandela University by prioritising support for appropriately qualified prospective fellows from designated groups viz. Black persons, women, and persons with disabilities.

3. ELIGIBILITY

3.1. Eligibility Criteria for Host Researchers

To be eligible to host a postdoctoral or research fellow, the host researcher must:

- Be a permanent member of staff, Emeritus Professor or Research Associate of the University with a proven research track record in the specific area of the prospective fellow.
- Be based in a department within a faculty. While research entities may co-host fellowships in collaboration with faculties, the primary host must reside within a faculty, as fellows are formally registered at faculty level.
- Identify and recruit an appropriately qualified prospective fellow and agree with the prospective fellow on the proposed research project.
- Support the fellow's research and development by providing *inter alia* **research running costs, access to the library, a computer or access to computing facilities, publication costs and the support for conference participation.**
- Provide a letter of support confirming that the necessary research infrastructure, resources and funding to undertake the proposed research and support the fellow are available within the faculty/school/department.
- Commit to initiating or supporting efforts to secure alternative sources of funding to sustain the fellowship beyond the initial funding cycle.

3.2. General Eligibility Criteria for Postdoctoral Fellowships

To be eligible for consideration, a prospective postdoctoral fellow must:

- Have obtained a doctoral degree within the past five (5) years. Doctoral candidates who have submitted their thesis for examination or who intend to submit by December 2026 are also eligible to apply. Candidates who have already submitted their thesis must provide proof of submission for examination. Candidates who intend to submit by December 2026 must provide a copy of the Intention to Submit form, signed by the student and supervisor and submitted to the Assessment and Graduation Office. In all cases, the doctoral degree must be successfully completed before the fellowship can be taken up.
- Preferably have obtained their doctoral degree from an institution other than Nelson Mandela University. The recruitment of prospective fellows who completed their doctoral degree within the past five (5) years at institutions other than Nelson Mandela University is strongly encouraged..
- Preferably be under the age of 45 at the time of application.
- Demonstrate the potential to contribute to one or more of Nelson Mandela University's [Institutional Research Themes](#), aligned with the host's area of research.
- Not hold full-time salaried employment during the tenure of the fellowship.
- Undertake a postdoctoral research project that is distinct from their doctoral research, thereby broadening their research experience and developing expertise in a new area of research.

3.3.Additional Eligibility Criteria for the Nelson Mandela University Council Postdoctoral Fellowships and the Vice-Chancellor's Postdoctoral Fellowships

The following additional eligibility criteria apply to the Nelson Mandela University Council Postdoctoral Fellowships and the Vice-Chancellor's Postdoctoral Fellowships:

- Postdoctoral fellows seeking a second cycle of funding from Nelson Mandela University are eligible if they intend to undertake research on a new project.
- Postdoctoral fellows seeking a second cycle of funding from Nelson Mandela University to continue research on the same project are **not** eligible.

3.4.Eligibility Criteria for Research Fellowships

To be eligible for consideration, a prospective research fellow must:

- Have obtained the doctoral degree more than five (5) years, but not more than ten (10) years, before the closing date of the call.
- Have a minimum of two years post-PhD research experience related to one or more of Nelson Mandela University's institutional research themes.
- Demonstrate a research track record through outputs arising from doctoral and post-

PhD research activities. These may include articles published in accredited peer-reviewed journals, mentoring of senior postgraduate students and co-supervision of postgraduate students.

- Demonstrate the potential to secure external funding for research projects.
- Not hold full-time salaried employment during the tenure of the fellowship.
- Provide a SAQA equivalence certificate for the highest qualification if it was obtained outside South Africa.
- If an international prospective research fellow, provide evidence of eligibility to apply for a valid South African Scarce Skills work permit. The final award of the fellowship will be conditional upon approval of the relevant work permit.

3.5.Exclusions

The following categories of researchers are not eligible for consideration as postdoctoral or research fellows:

- Fellows funded by Nelson Mandela University whose current awards remain active in 2027. These continuing fellows must submit a progress report at the end of the 2026 academic year for their funding to continue in 2027.
- Doctoral candidates in their final year who have **not** submitted their thesis for examination or submitted an Intention to Submit form indicating that the thesis will be submitted by December 2026.
- Researchers who currently hold, or have previously held, an NRF A, B or C rating..
- Postdoctoral fellows seeking a second cycle of funding from Nelson Mandela University to continue research on the same project.
- Postdoctoral fellows seeking a third cycle of funding from Nelson Mandela University.

4. APPLICATION AND REVIEW PROCESS

Applications for the Nelson Mandela University Council Postdoctoral Fellowships and Research Fellowships must be submitted by the prospective fellow via the online application form available [here](#). **The closing date for applications is Friday, 9 October 2026.** Before applying, the prospective fellow must have been identified and recruited by an eligible host researcher, and the host researcher and prospective fellow must have agreed on the proposed research project. The application must be supported by the required documentation, including the host researcher's letter of support and the completed Faculty Endorsement Form (Appendix A), signed by the Executive Dean or designate.

The prospective fellow is responsible for completing the online application form and uploading all required supporting documentation by the closing date.

Eligible applications for the Council Postdoctoral Fellowship will also be considered by the review panel for the Vice-Chancellor's Postdoctoral Fellowship, which will be awarded to a limited number of exceptional prospective fellows who demonstrate a strong research track record, including research outputs and experience in postgraduate supervision. **Late or incomplete applications will not be considered.**

The following supporting documents must be uploaded with the application:

- The host researcher's CV.
- A detailed CV of the prospective fellow.
- A letter of support from the Host researcher confirming that the necessary research infrastructure, resources, and funding are available within their faculty, school, or department. This should include, but is not limited to, research running costs, library and computing facilities, publication costs and support for conference participation.
- The completed Faculty Endorsement Form (Appendix A), signed by the Executive Dean or designate.
- Two letters of reference for the prospective fellow.
- A certified copy of the prospective fellow's identity document/passport,
- A certified copy of the prospective fellow's doctoral qualification. Where the doctoral qualification has not yet been formally awarded, the following documentation must be provided, as applicable:
 - Prospective fellows awaiting graduation must provide an institutional letter confirming that all requirements for the doctoral qualification have been fulfilled.
 - Doctoral candidates awaiting the outcome of their thesis examination must provide a letter from their current institution confirming that the doctoral thesis is under examination.
 - Doctoral candidates who have not yet submitted their thesis for examination must provide a copy of the prescribed Intention to Submit form, signed by the student and supervisor, confirming their intention to submit the thesis by December 2026.
- For Research Fellowship applications, a SAQA equivalence certificate where the prospective fellow's highest qualification was obtained outside South Africa.
- International prospective Research Fellows must provide evidence of eligibility to apply for the relevant South African work permit.

All applications will first be screened by Research Development against the eligibility criteria and submission requirements. Applications that do not meet these requirements, or that are incomplete, will be rejected without further review.

Eligible and complete applications will be evaluated by an external expert appointed by Research

Development. The host researcher and prospective fellow must recommend three suitably qualified external experts for consideration. The external expert's assessment will inform the subsequent review by an internal panel convened by Research Development. The panel will assess applications against the predetermined criteria and weightings set out in Table 1. The scoring system provides a consistent basis for evaluating the relative merit of applications and identifying those recommended for funding within the available budget.

Table 1: Scorecard for the Assessment of Fellowship Applications

Criteria	Sub-Criteria	Weighting (Total = 100%)
Track Record of Host Researcher and Prospective Fellow	Relevant experience of the host researcher in mentoring emerging researchers over the past five years.	10%
	The prospective fellow's research track record, which may include peer-reviewed publications, conference proceedings, research prizes and awards.	10%
Scientific and Technical Quality of Proposed Research	Quality of the research rationale with citations; significance of the research problem; clarity of the aims and objectives; and the potential scientific contribution, originality and new knowledge to be generated.	20%
	Appropriateness of the research design and methodology in addressing the aims and objectives, and the feasibility of the work plan, timelines and milestones.	20%
	Alignment with relevant national research priorities and one or more of Nelson Mandela University's Institutional Research Themes.	5%
Host and Faculty Support	Adequacy of the mentorship and support provided by the host researcher and Faculty, including the research infrastructure, resources and facilities available to provide an enabling research environment for the prospective fellow.	5%
Potential Research Outputs and Impact	Quality and feasibility of the envisaged research outputs, taking disciplinary norms into account. Outputs may include peer-reviewed publications, books and book chapters, conference outputs, patents, technical or policy reports, products, artefacts, prototypes and other recognised research outputs.	10%
	Potential contribution of the fellowship to the prospective fellow's research development, independence and career progression.	10%
	Potential for the research to generate impact in South Africa through: • Knowledge impact - advances in understanding, methods, theory or application; and/or • Societal impact - potential social, economic or environmental benefit.	10%
		100%

Following the external expert review, the internal review panel convened by Research Development will consider the external assessment and the application against the criteria and

weightings set out in Table 1. Based on the outcome of the review process, applications will either be recommended or not recommended for funding. Final awards are subject to the availability of funds.

IMPORTANT: Personal information provided as part of the application process will be processed in accordance with the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013 (POPIA) and the Nelson Mandela University Privacy Policy. Information submitted by host researchers and prospective fellows will be used only for purposes related to the administration, assessment and management of the fellowship application and award.

5. FUNDING PRINCIPLES

This funding programme aims to develop and strengthen the research competence, productivity and stature of postdoctoral and research fellows in pursuit of research excellence. In allocating funding, the University will seek to achieve a cohort comprising at least 70% South African citizens and permanent residents, 70% Black researchers and 50% women, in line with its institutional transformation objectives.

5.1. Duration and Value of the Fellowships

Postdoctoral Fellowships are awarded for a maximum period of two years, while Research Fellowships are awarded for a maximum period of three years. Fellows who are women may take maternity leave during the tenure of the fellowship and will be eligible for an additional four (4) months of support beyond the fellowship period. The fellowship values for the 2027 academic year are presented in the Table 2 below.

Table 2: Fellowship values

Fellowship Type				Value per annum (Rand)
Nelson	Mandela	University	Council	270 000
Postdoctoral Fellowship				
Vice-Chancellor's Postdoctoral Fellowship				320 000
Research Fellowship				400 000

Postdoctoral fellowships are awarded as non-taxable stipends. Postdoctoral fellows may receive top-up funding from host researchers or other funding sources, and there is no institutional limit on the value of such top-up funding. Approved top-up funding must be reflected in the relevant award and post-award documentation and processed in accordance with the University's approved procedures. Research Fellowships are fixed-term contract appointments and the fellowship value is therefore subject to applicable income tax and statutory deductions. All fellows are encouraged to actively pursue appropriate external funding to support their research activities, strengthen their

career development and contribute to the longer-term sustainability of their research.

5.2.Assistive Devices for Fellows with Disabilities

Fellows with disabilities may apply for once-off funding of up to R20 000 towards an assistive technology device or human support.

6. CONDITIONS OF AWARD

- Fellowships **must be taken up in 2027** by submitting the signed Conditions of Grant. Awards that are not taken up within five (5) months will be cancelled and the funds reprioritised.
- Fellows must be registered at Nelson Mandela University and physically based at the University during the tenure of the fellowship. They must submit a declaration confirming their agreement to this requirement and to abide by Nelson Mandela University's Code of Conduct for Researchers and Research Ethics Policy.
- The postdoctoral fellowship must be the fellow's primary source of funding and may not be held concurrently with another fellowship. Postdoctoral fellows may receive top-up funding from host researchers or other funding sources. There is no institutional limit on the value of such top-up funding.
- Postdoctoral fellows are required to declare any salaried employment or other paid work undertaken during the fellowship and to notify Research Development promptly of any change in their employment status. A postdoctoral fellow who accepts salaried employment during the tenure of the fellowship is required to resign from the fellowship. Failure to make the required disclosure constitutes a breach of the conditions of the fellowship.
- Postdoctoral fellows who are South African citizens or permanent residents may undertake limited teaching responsibilities, not exceeding 12 hours per week, and may be remunerated for these duties.
- International postdoctoral fellows must apply for a Section 11(1)(b)(iv) visitor's visa for the duration of the fellowship and comply with its conditions. They may undertake appropriate academic and research-related activities as part of their fellowship but may not engage in remunerated work. They may, however, receive non-taxable top-up funding through the bursary system, in accordance with the University's approved processes.
- Research fellows may mentor and co-supervise senior postgraduate students. They may also undertake limited teaching responsibilities; however, such responsibilities should preferably not exceed 10% of their weekly workload and must be clearly agreed upon in the applicable Memorandum of Agreement or Understanding.

7. REPORTING

Fellows are required to submit an annual progress report at the end of each academic year to enable Research Development to monitor progress. The report must be submitted in the prescribed format and must demonstrate progress against the deliverables set out in the approved application and signed Memorandum of Agreement or Understanding.

8. CONTACT DETAILS

All queries may be directed to Ms Welma van Heerden (Welma.VanHeerden@mandela.ac.za).

APPENDIX A: FACULTY ENDORSEMENT FORM

To:

Office of Research Development, Nelson Mandela University

The Faculty supports the application of the prospective fellow identified below for consideration under the Nelson Mandela University Postdoctoral and Research Fellowships Programme.

Prospective Fellow Details

Name and Surname:

Fellowship Category:

☐ Council Postdoctoral Fellowship

☐ Research Fellowship

Proposed Research Project Title:

Host Researcher:

Department/School:

Faculty:

Faculty Endorsement

I confirm that the Faculty supports the proposed hosting of the prospective fellow and, should the application be successful, acknowledges that the fellowship will be administered in accordance with the requirements and conditions of the Postdoctoral and Research Fellowships Call Framework. I understand that Faculty endorsement does not constitute an award and that the application remains subject to eligibility screening and review by Research Development.

Executive Dean/Designate:

Designation (if designate):

Signature:

Date:
