



15 May 2006

Dear Colleagues

Re.: Changes to the Assessment of SARChI Proposals

Having received nine outstanding full proposals for the first four Chairs to be supported by the South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) and having applied the previously described assessment procedures, it is clear that it will be extremely difficult to make wise decisions that will benefit all relevant stakeholders. Therefore certain changes have had to be introduced to the selection process. The purpose of this letter is to inform you of these changes and explain their likely impact on the existing and future applications.

Let me begin by saying that the envisaged changes will not disadvantage any pre-proposal or full proposal already submitted nor will they require significantly more work from the applicants. You may well then ask the question why bother to change the process. The answer lies in the consistent desire of the NRF to ensure success of the programmes it operates. This success is desirable not only for the grant-holders and their institutions, but also for the future success and growth of the initiative.

The process will be amended by eliminating the assessment of the full proposal. Experience has shown that the full proposals received are all of exceptional scientific merit. Furthermore, as the current assessment procedure does not have a specific focus area¹ or applied strategy², it is extremely difficult to prioritise the proposals which come from a wide array of disciplines.

In place of the assessment of the full proposals, applicants will be asked to submit an extensive and complete CV plus an annotated budget of income and expenditure covering a five year period, a brief summary of why they should be awarded the Chair and, in the case of mature white male, a detailed succession plan including identified potential successors, the planned development trajectory and post handover mentoring plans. In the case of foreign nominees a brief motivation should be given why a suitable South African³ could not be found for the Chair. These submissions will be assessed, firstly by a panel of NRF staff members experienced in a wide range of granting programmes and secondly by an external panel of peers solicited from a range of eminent scientists from different disciplines. After consideration and assessment by NRF and DST officials, the final decision will be made jointly by the Director General of S&T and the CEO of the NRF.

It is also worth noting that the expenditure side of the budget will now make allowance for overhead expenditure so that the Chair will not translate into a cost for the host institution.

¹ As used in the NRF Focus Area Programme

² For example, natural science to take preference over social science

³ Permanent resident or citizen

In light of these changes and the delays in the announcement, it has also been decided that Call 1 (for four Chairs) and Call 2 (for 16 chairs) will be merged and assessed together. This means that the nine applicants who have already submitted full proposals will be given the opportunity to resubmit their budgets using the above directions.

The pre-proposal phase of the selection process will remain unaltered⁴. Its focus will remain on the alignment of national strategy, with intuitional research strategy and the skill set of the nominee.

The 52 applicants who have submitted pre-proposals in Call 2 (in March) will be informed shortly (by the end of May) who will progress to the second stage of assessment. The closing date for the amended full proposals remains the end of June 2006.

I apologize for the inconvenience cause and the delays in the role out of this initiative. I am sure you will forgive the inconvenience caused when I reconfirm that the reasons for the delays stem from our intention to make wise decisions for the benefit of all concerned.

I hope my letter is clear and uncomplicated, however if you do have questions or indeed comments please feel free to contact me. To facilitate this process, I have set aside the time from 12h00 to 14h00 on 17 May 2006 during which I will be in my office should any one wish to visit; and from 16h30 to 17h30 on 16 May 2006 and 14h00 to 16h00 on 17 May 2006 should any one want to call (012 481 4104).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Drennan', with a horizontal line underneath.

Electronic Signature

Dr Rob Drennan
Assistant Director: GMSA
National Research Foundation

⁴ The last closing date for pre-proposals remains the 31 August 2006