



**POLICY: POST-GRADUATE RESEARCH TRAINING
INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME**

Last Revision: May 2006

1. BACKGROUND

The MRC post-graduate research training internship programme was initiated in 1996 when the MRC received a special grant from the then Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST) for human resource development. The objective of the internship has always primarily been to transform the composition of the country's research human capital to be more representative of the face of the nation. Each of the eight Science Councils made a written submission and an oral presentation to DACST, outlining their strategy to develop human resources through the organisation's research activities. The MRC was awarded a fifth of the total grant to the eight Science Councils. This way the Department placed emphasis on the importance of the place of health research in the science platform.

This special grant was used to drive the MRC's Focussed Career Development Programme. However, since it was a one off grant, it was not possible to make any commitments for renewal of contracts beyond one year, a phenomenon acknowledged as a weakness in the programme. Nevertheless, it did provide an opportunity for MRC mentors and trainees to assess the value of such a programme to a Science Council. Subsequently, a decision was made to allocate baseline funds to make the programme more sustainable and to enable the interns to undertake degree studies through the programme.

The internship within the context of the MRC is a post-graduate research training programme specifically designed to open up an opportunity to develop Black scientists through Masters' and PhD studies as a way of correcting the balances of the past. It is envisaged that apart from the original MRC internship, others will emerge depending on funders in the collaboration, and these internships will always bear the funder's name jointly with that of the MRC, e.g the DST/MRC internship.

2. WHY A RESEARCH TRAINEE PROGRAMME FOR BLACK GRADUATES?

- Historically, South Africa has trained from five- to ten-fold more white postgraduates than black postgraduates in the scientific fields. Figure 1 below reflects the situation as it stood in 1993. This pattern has not changed significantly in more than a decade in the country, necessitating accelerated

efforts towards a culture change. The internship training programme is therefore one of the MRC's responses to address this imbalances.

- Research, as a career is not an obvious choice for black school leavers and graduates. Therefore this programme creates an opportunity for promising young graduates to train, experience and explore opportunities for pursuing a career as a researcher in the health sciences.
- Mentoring of young graduates has been identified as one way of developing unleashed potential. This also provides a nurturing environment for those who have been unable to fully develop their skills as a result of inequalities in the educational system.
- Inadequate financial resources have been identified as one of the barriers for entry into postgraduate training programmes for young black graduates. The post-graduate research training internship provides a financially more attractive alternative to a postgraduate bursary.

Figure 1: Number of Masters and Doctoral Degrees Awarded in 1993

CATEGORY	DISCIPLINE		
	Natural Science And Engineering	Medical Sciences	Social Science And Humanities
White	979	397	2 286
Coloured	21	10	83
Indian	41	27	112
African	47	28	233
Ratio White:Black	10.7 : 1	6.1 : 1	5.3 : 1

Blankley (1996) SA Science and Technology Indicators, FRD, Pretoria

3. POST-GRADUATE RESEARCH TRAINING INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME

What it is not.....

A post-graduate research training Internship should not be confused with that of a position or appointment (or creating an expectation to be appointed) as a researcher as the focus is on training and mentoring. If the individual has all the necessary skills and training to conduct research in the specified research area then it would be inappropriate to appoint the individual as a research trainee.

It is not a means of accessing “soft” money to appoint junior researchers.

It is not a means of accessing funds to employ field workers.

What it is.....

The purpose of the Post-graduate research training Internship is to identify, train and mentor young black researchers through Master's and PhD studies, to prepare them up to a level of suitability to be appointed as researchers and to increase the human resource base of health researchers in the country.

The programme provides an opportunity to train researchers who are registered for a Masters or PhD degree:

- in areas where there are no or minimal researchers
- in those disciplines that are not included in postgraduate training programmes in tertiary institutions, as long as there are academics to co-mentor the students to obtain their degrees.

As well as

- to do capacity development in the process of conducting research.

Since the programme aims to train researchers in fields in which there is limited capacity, interns who excel during their training will have a competitive advantage when applying for research positions that become available at the MRC.

4. REMUNERATION

Conditions of remuneration for MRC Post-graduate research training Interns signing new contracts will be as follows:

- The contract will be for a period of twelve months, starting from February of each year.

Research trainees will receive a total cost-to-company remuneration per annum, which includes provision for a single membership medical aid. Exclusions will only be allowed if the trainee can submit proof of membership of another medical aid, either as principal or dependant member, prior to accepting the internship. The levels will be determined for Masters and PhD internship by the MRC from time to time. Trainees may add dependants to their medical aid at own cost, and will qualify for tax relief on medical aid contributions.

- Host units may top up interns' salaries in line with the duties performed by the latter within each unit's programme.
- The total salary, inclusive of the top up amount from the programme, may not exceed 80% of the starting total package salary for a junior scientist and scientist respectively at the equivalent level. This will have to be negotiated upfront with the programme to assess the person's skills and qualifications relative to the job expectations. The top-up amount must be finalised between the RCD Sub-directorate and the Programme before a trainee receives his/her offer of traineeship.
- As this is a training position, staff performance bonuses will not be applicable. However, programmes that have the resources may reward the trainee in a manner which enhances her/his development, for example by covering expenses for conference attendance or a short course.

Remuneration for other internships will depend on the conditions agreed upon with the funder and contained in the applicable Memorandum of Agreement.

5. FINANCIAL RESOURCES FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION

The Post-graduate research training Programme will make available a maximum amount of R5 000.00 (five thousand rand) per trainee per annum to enable the trainees under the MRC internship to acquire appropriate skills.

These funds may be accessed by the mentor and trainee, by submitting a motivation to the research trainee programme and may be used to cover the costs of local conference attendance, short courses and masters and doctoral class and registration fees.

For other forms of internship, all resources accessible to interns will be catered for in the MoA with the funder.

6. EXTENSION OF THE MRC INTERNSHIP BEYOND ONE YEAR

Notwithstanding any stipulation in the agreement between employee and institution constituting the contract, no expectations, prospects, rights or claims for extension of the internship or appointment in a position at the MRC are created in terms of the agreement, and the contractual relationship between the parties expires in its entirety upon termination thereof. Renewal of this contract will be at the sole discretion of the institution. Those research trainees that excel during the first year in the training programme and are committed to developing their research skills may apply to continue with their post-graduate research training at the MRC. Applications for renewal of contracts must be motivated for by the relevant mentors and submitted to the Research Capacity Development sub-directorate before the end of November of the preceding year.

Research trainees will only be awarded a post-graduate research training internship for a second year if they have demonstrated that they have mastered the basic skills to function in a research environment and subject to a formal evaluation according to agreed criteria. These criteria will be developed in consultation with the Strategic Research Committee and appended to this policy. They will ideally, but not exclusively, include:

- the ability to undertake and write a comprehensive literature review,
- oral presentations,
- the ability to write a research proposal,
- ability to conduct fieldwork or experiments,
- relevant computer skills,
- project planning and management/evaluation
- and administrative skills

where applicable.

Skills development will be tailor-made for the individual and the research environment by the host unit in consultation with the trainee.

Research trainees who fail to develop adequate skills by the end of the first year may be advised to further their formal academic training through full time study

and fall off the internship programme. For this purpose, they may apply for assistance under the local post-graduate bursary scheme via the normal route.

If an individual enters the PhD post-graduate research training programme with an outstanding thesis for a Master's degree, the thesis should be completed within the first 2 months for them to register for the PhD as required by this policy.

Under exceptional circumstances, a post-graduate research training internship may be extended for up to half of the third year for Masters and fourth year for Doctoral internships. Preference will be given to individuals who are in the process of completing a masters or doctoral degree.

The decision to renew a contract will be governed by the availability of funds and progress and performance of the research trainee. The internship committee will consider all applications for renewal and the quarterly reports and mentor's motivation will form the basis for evaluation of the application. Where necessary, the intern and/or mentor may be contacted during the evaluation process.

Extension of joint internships will depend on proposals from Unit Directors which should be finally approved and funded by the sponsor. These are submitted annually in response to a call for proposals by the potential sponsor. In the event that external funding for joint internships ceases, these will be converted to MRC internships and funded at the normal MRC internship level.

7. MONITORING PROGRESS

This is an evolving programme and mentors, interns and management have much to discover and learn from participation in workshops. Progress will be monitored through the following mechanisms:

- ✚ An annual internship workshop in March every year to facilitate discussions on issues regarding the programme.
- ✚ An intern/mentor workshop will be coordinated annually if possible to help identify opportunities for improving the mentor/mentee relationship and the programme as a whole.
- ✚ Research trainees and mentors will have the opportunity to put forward constructive comments and suggestions on the other party and the post-

graduate research training programme, through a quarterly evaluation form to be returned directly to the RCD sub-directorate. The mentor's form will contain feedback from the research and academic mentors. Where these two differ, separate forms can be filled in and sent directly to the RCD Sub- directorate.

- ✚ The mentors and mentee will send an agreed-upon quarterly report to the RCD sub-directorate on the progress of the internship. This should also include comments from the academic mentor.

It is not possible to remove all subjectivity in the assessments of the research intern's progress without emulating a formal academic programme. Since the MRC is a SETI and not a University, the assessment of the intern will be conducted in a more informal manner.

8. REQUIREMENTS FROM HEADS OF HOST UNITS

- The name of the individual(s) who will be mentoring the research intern.
- Written commitment from the mentor to participate in mentorship reportback/evaluation workshops.
- Forwarding of details of an academic mentor from the institution where the intern is registered for their post-graduate studies, who must have appropriate qualifications for mentorship at this level and conversant with the research to be undertaken by the intern.
- The project through which the intern will be trained. It is crucial that the intern's research project is directly linked to the unit's project for the latter to adequately play the mentoring role. If there is no direct link between these projects, then the intern should identify another host unit in line with their area of interest and start negotiations with the head thereof, while keeping the RCD sub-directorate informed of progress.
- A plan for the interns' development for the year i.e. goals, targets, expected outputs, skills development. This must be negotiated with the intern and co-signed by the mentor and mentee. It is critical that quarterly milestones are set to enable a fair assessment of the intern's progress. The quarterly reports should address the achievement of these milestones, or lack thereof. In case of the latter, remedial strategies should be suggested.
- A commitment from the mentor to provide a brief quarterly report on the research intern's progress. This will form the basis for determining whether an intern's contract should be renewed for a further year. It is therefore essential

for this report to be in line with the milestones that were set for the quarter in question.

This information will either be contained in the MRC internship application form or within the Unit proposal for joint internship.

9. CONTRACTUAL CONDITIONS FOR POST-GRADUATE RESEARCH TRAINEES

All research trainees will be expected to abide by the MRC Conditions of Service with the following exceptions:

- Registration for Master's or PhD studies
- There will be no probationary period, as evaluation will take place quarterly, subject to criteria mutually agreed upon.
- Relocation costs will not be covered by the MRC.
- Remuneration will be fixed for the contractual period of traineeship, unless the MRC implements a general increase of intern salaries.
- Trainees will be entitled to leave allocation at one day per seventeen days worked. Leave is non-accumulative and will have no cash value.
- Trainees will be entitled to sick leave allocation at 10 working days per annum or 1 day for every 26 days worked.
- No paid maternity/paternity leave will be granted.
- Working hours will be forty hours per week, and eight hours per day.
- No study support will be granted other than funds for continuing education as stipulated in section 5.

10. REQUIREMENTS OF RESEARCH TRAINEES

- Proof of registration for a Master's or PhD study, or undertaking to register within two (2) months of entering the programme, or understanding that the contract will be terminated if not registered at the end of the two months.
- A commitment from the intern to participate in mentorship reportback/evaluation reports, meetings and workshops.
- Research trainees must take active part in their own development. The mentor's role is to provide expert guidance, support and encouragement.

However, success will rely on commitment, initiative, effort and dedication from both parties.

- The research trainee programme creates an opportunity for hands-on training through the trainee participating and contributing to the research activities of the programme. Therefore, in the process of developing their skills, the research trainees' contribution to the research output of the programme must be identifiable and directly linked to their development. In return for opening up its resources to the research trainee, the programme benefits from the activities of the intern. Thus, if well managed, this should be a mutually beneficial relationship.

11. SOME OF THE CORE SKILLS NEEDED BY RESEARCH INTERNS (LIST NOT EXHAUSTIVE)

- Computer skills applicable to their research projects
- Scientific writing skills
- Presentation skills
- Research methodology applicable to their research projects
- Project Management

Units will have to make plans for how interns can obtain these. Some will be presented/coordinated by the RCD sub-directorate, but others not.

12. APPROVAL INFORMATION

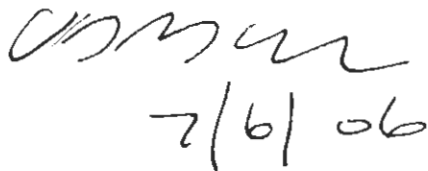
Policy Owner: Research Capacity Development Sub-Directorate

Approved By: EMC

Date Approved:

Revision Date: Three years from date of approval, or as required.

President's signature:



Handwritten signature and date: 7/6/06

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