

COLLOQUIUM ARTICLE

Article on the Colloquium hosted on 15 September 2026 under the theme: *Leveraging Post-Doctoral Research Fellows in Developing a Pipeline of Academics and Researchers in South African Higher Education Institutions*

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On 15 September 2026, the Council on Higher Education, through the Monitoring and Advice Programme, hosted an online colloquium on the theme Leveraging Post-Doctoral Research Fellows in Developing a Pipeline of Academics and Researchers in South African Higher Education Institutions. The colloquium sought to extend the conversation to the wider public on how post-doctoral research fellows (PDRFs) can be optimally leveraged in higher education institutions.

The CHE commissioned the study three years ago, driven by the recognition that even though post-doctoral research fellows contribute largely to the higher education sector, higher education institutions still do not adequately recognise their potential as a source of long-term academic and research capacity. Moreover, one of the goals of the National Development Plan 2030 is to increase the percentage of PhD qualified staff in the higher education sector to over 75 percent by 2030. So, developing post-doctoral research fellows as an intentional part of the staffing pipeline could contribute to the attainment of this goal.

The study aimed to use its findings to propose a framework on how South African higher education institutions can leverage PDRFs to develop a pipeline of academics and researchers. It identified a gap between PDRF capability and the conditions in higher education institutions through which that capability is used. The study zoomed into a number of factors, emanating as themes around:

- Official positions adopted by public universities regarding contracting and use of PDRFs
- Funding models and financial support mechanisms for PDRF programmes
- Institutional placement, roles, and contract management
- Support mechanisms and alignment with institutional and national transformation imperatives

The report was commended for its timeliness and relevance, the format of its report structure, its methodology and the quality of its literature review. By the same token, the respondents identified some areas for improvement, including the length of the report being extensive, the contradiction between the value placed by universities on PDRFs in comparison with the support, recognition and opportunities that they receive, and insufficient cross-institutional comparisons.

The research team proposed enhancements to strengthen the national PDRF framework. Some of these included, diversifying funding models to allow 'postdocs' to bridge between the 'postdoc' period and being academics, capacity building through mentorship and professional development as well as developing differentiated career pathways not only into academia, but also toward industry, entrepreneurship and research management, among others.

The Colloquium was a success overall, with 227 registrants in attendance.

If you missed the colloquium, the recording of the event can be found here:

[Recording: [CHE Colloquium - Theme Leveraging Post-Doctoral Research Fellows in Developing a Pipeline of Academics and Researchers in South African Higher Education Institutions-20260915_070153UTC-Meeting_Recording.mp4](#)]

The research report will be published during the first quarter of 2027.