



FAO: NEWS EDITORS AND NEWS WIRES

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THE NRF CELEBRATES RESEARCH EXCELLENCE THROUGH THE RECOGNITION OF LEADING RESEARCHERS

Bloemfontein, 14 September 2017 - Minister of Science and Technology, Mrs Naledi Pandor; the CEO of the NRF, Dr Molapo Qhobela; and over 250 guests celebrated research excellence at the 2017 National Research Foundation Awards.

Seen as the benchmark for research excellence, the 2017 NRF Awards held under the theme '***Sustainable Development through Knowledge Creation***' purposely put a spotlight on the role of knowledge creation in supporting and enabling South Africa's sustainable development as envisaged in the National Development Plan (NDP).

In her keynote speech, Minister Pandor spoke of the value of the knowledge enterprise in meeting South Africa's developmental challenges and sustainable growth. She emphasised the importance of the transformation agenda to the ongoing sustainability of the National System of Innovation, and the important role that a representative cohort of senior researchers has to play in transforming South Africa into a knowledge intensive economy.

Reiterating the importance of connecting knowledge creation to sustainable development, CEO of the NRF, Dr Molapo Qhobela, said: "The creation of new knowledge and its application are critical in South Africa's pursuit of sustainable and inclusive development. The recipients of the NRF Awards are leading researchers who, through their work, are helping shape a South Africa that derives enduring benefit from science and technology".

"The NRF has played a critical role in enabling South Africa's research environment, driving not only excellent scientific research, but also continuing the transformation of the cohort of

researchers. The publication of over 6 800 research articles in peer-reviewed journals; the development of an antibody that neutralises HIV-1; the development of a point-of-care rapid diagnostic test for tuberculosis (TB); support for 14 173 postgraduate students through bursaries and scholarships; the increase in the number of both male and female black NRF-funded researchers from 866 to 970 and female researchers from 1054 to 1176 - these are only a few of the successes that have been made possible by the work of the NRF. Through these NRF awards we are celebrating leading researchers whose work has played critical roles in some of these successes and those who are helping us make strides in building a fully inclusive scientific community.” Said Dr Qhobela

Currently, there are 3 392 NRF rated researchers, with the number of black researchers increasing by 70% over the five-year period from 2013-2017 and female researchers by 51% over the same period.

Presented at the awards were nine Special Awards, two P-ratings and sixteen A-ratings.

The three special awards of the evening were presented as follows:

- **The Lifetime Achievement Award** which went to retired Rector of the University of the Western Cape and Extraordinary Professor in Education, **Professor Brian O’Connell**.
- **The Champion of Research Capacity Development and Transformation at South African Higher Education Institutions Award** which was presented to **Professor Diane Hildebrandt** from the Material and Process Synthesis Research Unit at the University of South Africa.
- **The Hamilton Naki Award** which was awarded to University of Cape Town’s **Professor Lungisile Ntsebeza** of the university’s Centre for African Studies.

The **Science Team Award**, which recognise the contributions, creativity and achievements of a science team towards extending the boundaries of scientific research in Africa, and for the role they played in raising South Africa’s international stature as a world-class research destination, was awarded to the **Cardiovascular Genetics Laboratory, University of Cape Town** and **Groote Schuur Hospital**, for its discovery of the the gene responsible for Arrhythmogenic Right Ventricle Cardiomyopathy (ARVC), a major cause of sudden death in people younger than 35,

particularly during athletic activity. This discovery has been heralded as the most significant for South African medical science since the first human-to-human heart transplant in 1967. It identifies a new biological pathway to sudden cardiac death which is a new target for the development of novel drugs.

Other special awards were presented as follows:

- **The Research Excellence Awards for Next Generation Researchers**, presented to final year doctorate students showing outstanding performance, went to **Ms Shakira Choonara**, School of Public Health at the University of the Witwatersrand, and **Dr Lukhanyo Mekuto**, Department of Chemical Engineering at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, respectively.
- **Professor Nicole Falkof** of University of the Witwatersrand's School of Literature, Language and Media Studies; and **Dr Musa Manzi** from the School of Geosciences at the University of the Witwatersrand walked away with the **Research Excellence Award for Early Career/Emerging Researchers** which recognises the exceptional research performance by NRF Thuthuka grant holders.
- The **Excellence in Science Engagement Award** went to **Dr Tiisetso Lephoto** from the School of Molecular and Cell Biology at the **University of the Witwatersrand**.
- The NRF **Excelleration Award**, which recognises the most improved research performance over recent years, went to the **University of KwaZulu-Natal**.

The P-Ratings, which are awarded to researchers considered likely to become future international leaders in their respective fields, on the basis of exceptional potential demonstrated in research performance and output during doctoral and/or early post-doctoral careers, were awarded to the following recipients:

- **Dr William Bennett** of the Department of English Language and Linguistics at **Rhodes University**
- **Dr Daniel Spence** from the **University of the Free State's** International Studies Group.

The A-Ratings were awarded to researchers who are unequivocally acknowledged by their peers as leading international scholars in their respective fields for the high quality and impact of

their recent research outputs. The assessment of the quality and impact of researchers is done through the NRF rating system which is based on peer review. Acquiring an NRF rating generates considerable acknowledgement and respect for the individual researchers as well as their institutions.

The A-rated awardees were as follows:

| Awardee | Department and Institution |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Professor Frank Brombacher | Department of Pathology University of Cape Town |
| Professor Derk Brouwer | School of Public Health University of the Witwatersrand |
| Professor Anusuya Chinsamy-Turan | Department of Biological Sciences University of Cape Town |
| Professor David Glasser | Material and Process Synthesis Research Unit University of South Africa |
| Professor George Janelidze | Department of Mathematics and Applied Mathematics University of Cape Town |
| Professor Jonathan Jansen | Faculty of Education University of the Free State |
| Professor Rachel Jewkes | Gender and Health Research Unit South African Medical Research Council |
| Professor Cedric Linder | Department of Physics University of the Western Cape |
| Professor Shabir Madhi | National Institute for Communicable Diseases National Health Laboratory Service/ University of the Witwatersrand |
| Professor Christopher Mathew | School of Pathology University of the Witwatersrand |

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| Professor Guy Midgley | Department of Botany and Zoology Stellenbosch University |
| Professor Stella Nkomo | Department of Human Resource Management University of Pretoria |
| Professor Peter Ryan | Department of Biological Sciences University of Cape Town |
| Professor Lynette Wadley | Evolutionary Studies Institute University of the Witwatersrand |
| Professor Qing-Guo Wang | Institute for Intelligent Systems University of Johannesburg |
| Professor Yevhen Zelenyuk | School of Mathematics University of the Witwatersrand |

END OF STATEMENT

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For biographies of the awardees, pictures and media related queries please contact:

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About NRF Awards: The annual NRF Awards recognise and celebrate South African research excellence. The awards presented to researchers are in two categories, the ratings linked awards and special recognition awards. The rating linked awards are given to those who have qualified for an A or P rating, as evaluated through the peer review based NRF rating system. The special recognition awards provide a platform to honour researchers for career achievements and contributions to knowledge creation and dissemination, as well as capacity development and transformation.

About the NRF Ratings: The NRF rating system is a key driver in the NRF's aim to build a globally competitive science system in South Africa. It is a valuable tool for benchmarking the quality of our researchers against the best in the world. NRF ratings are allocated based on a researcher's recent research outputs and impact as perceived by international peer reviewers. The rating system encourages researchers to publish high-quality outputs in high impact journals/outlets. Rated researchers as supervisors will impart cutting-edge skills to the next generation of researchers.

The rating of individuals is based primarily on the quality and impact of their research outputs over the past eight years, taking into consideration the evaluation made by local and international peers. It identifies researchers who count among the leaders in their fields of expertise and gives recognition to those who constantly produce high-quality research outputs. Several South African universities use the outcomes of the NRF evaluation and rating process to position themselves as research-intensive institutions, while others provide incentives for their staff members to acquire and maintain a rating and give special recognition to top-rated researchers.

The rating process is coordinated by members of academia who are represented on the following committees:

- 25 Specialist Committees coordinated by a Convener
- The Executive Evaluation Committee
- The Appeals Committee

The ratings that are awarded fall within the following categories:

- A – Leading international researchers
- B – Internationally acclaimed researchers
- C – Established researchers
- P – Prestigious Awards
- Y – Promising young researchers

About NRF: The National Research Foundation (NRF) is an independent statutory body set up in accordance with the National Research Foundation Act. Its mandate is to support and promote research through funding, human resource development and the provision of the

necessary research facilities in order to facilitate the creation of knowledge, innovation and development in all fields of science and technology, including indigenous knowledge, and thereby contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of all South Africans.