



# higher education & training

Department:  
Higher Education and Training  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA




## UNIVERSITY CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

### COLLABORATIVE PROJECT FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLICATIONS (PQF)

UNIVERSITY INFORMATION		
Name of lead university	Stellenbosch University	
Name of Project	Publications Quality Framework Programme(PQF)	
Responsible Senior Manager at the University (at least at DVC level)	<u>Title, initials, surname:</u> Prof S. Moyo	<u>Tel no:</u> 021 808 4370 <u>E-mail:</u> smoyo@sun.ac.za
Project coordinator and organization	<u>Institution name:</u> CREST, Stellenbosch University <u>Title, initials, surname:</u> Prof J Mouton	<u>Tel no:</u> 021 808 3708 <u>E-mail:</u> jm6@sun.ac.za

**SECTION 1  
DECLARATIONS**

DECLARATION	
I declare that my institution is the lead institution for this collaborative project plan and hereby authorize the submission of this project plan to the Department of Higher Education and Training.	
Title, initials and surname	Designation
Prof. S. Moyo	Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Studies
Signature	Date
	27 January 2023

DECLARATION BY THE DIRECTOR – GENERAL	
I hereby approve this Collaborative Project Plan.	
Dr Nkosinathi Sishi Director-General: Higher Education and Training	
Signature	Date

[Please note that once this plan is signed by both parties, it become a public document]

## SECTION 2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (max 1 page)

*2.1 Provide a brief summary of the project, highlighting its alignment to the goals of the University Capacity Development Programme.*

Given the huge investment of public funds and the key role that the *Policy on Research Outputs* plays in the University sector, it is essential that the quality, integrity, transparency of the implementation of the policy is ensured. It is equally important to continuously monitor the process whereby research outputs (books and conference proceedings) are evaluated by field-specific peer review sub-panels using pre-determined evaluation criteria in line with the Research Outputs Policy.

Recent studies of the publication behaviour by SA academics have revealed that some academics have increasingly begun to engage in questionable practices. Such practices need to be addressed as a matter of urgency so as to ensure public trust in the scientific enterprise in the country. Against this background, a national collaborative project is proposed (the Research Publications Quality Framework for SA), that will consist of four main activities:

- 1 The establishment of a more timely alert and support system to assist universities to identify cases of questionable publishing behaviour before submitting for publication subsidy.
- 2 Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the quality and integrity of all submissions to the DHET.
- 3 The development and implementation of educational and capacity-building interventions around good practice in scholarly publishing
- 4 Support for ongoing research and analysis of SA scholarly publishing practices in order to maintain the requisite levels of vigilance and ensure that the public investment in the subsidy systems meets the highest standards of research quality and integrity.

This programme aligns directly with the 2021-2023 Ministerial Statement on the UCDP where it states:

The UCDP views research development and teaching development as equally important in the development of well-rounded academics. Both are vital for the success of the higher education system, and the development of both areas must be promoted. Research development is as much about enhancing the quality as it is about increasing the quantity of research produced in the university system and is essential in positioning universities to contribute to the development of society and the economy. The UCDP therefore must enable a strong focus on research development and on teaching development (p. 16).

### **SECTION 3 MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE TO SUPPORT EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT**

*3.1 Describe the management structure that will be in place to support implementation of the Project.*

The project will be led and managed by a team consisting of Prof. Johann Mouton (Project leader: CREST, Stellenbosch University) in partnership with Prof. Elisha Chiware (Director Librarian and Associate Professor in Library and Information Science, Cape Peninsula University of Technology), together with a representatives from each of the following:

- the Department of Higher Education and Training,
- the **Academy of Science of South Africa,**
- the South African Research and Innovation Management Association,
- the National Research Foundation and
- the Research and Innovation Strategy Group of USAf.

In addition to this formal management structure, a consultative stakeholder group will also be established that will consist of one representative from each SA public university (preferably the Director of Research or his/her representative) as well as a **representative from the National Editors' Forum of the ASSAf** and the Publishers Association of South Africa.

**SECTION 4  
MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS**

Activity 1	Sub-activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Sources of evidence
<p>1. The establishment of a more timely alert and support system to assist universities to identify cases of questionable publishing behaviour before submitting for publication subsidies.</p>	<p>1.1 Develop and establish an open access website that provides a comprehensive portal of information and documents in areas such as lists of predatory journals, questionable publishers, integrated accredited journal lists, FAQs about ethical publishing, etc. (CREST)</p>	<p>1.1 Integrated and publicly accessible website containing up-to-date, relevant and crucial information to all role-players in the system</p>	<p>1.1 All role-players in the academic publishing system have access to relevant and high-quality information on ethical publishing and translate this into good practice</p>	<p>Functional website, possibly to be hosted by the NRF</p>
	<p>1.2 Establish routines to improve the efficiency of the publication and creative outputs submissions process and procedures including the capturing of information by institutions to the capturing of evaluation process by the Department (NRF)</p>	<p>1.2 New routines developed and integrated into the ROSS system to optimize validation of distributed data capture by universities.</p>	<p>1.2 Increased efficiency of the ROSS system (less wastage of time in the workflow) 1.3 Reduction in the number of errors that arise during the workflow.</p>	<p>Improved ROSS system with additional features. Feedback by users (back-end and front-end) of the ROSS system</p>
	<p>1.3 Establish routines to ensure more efficiency of the research outputs evaluation process by the evaluation panels including the peer review process in book and conference proceedings publications as well as creative outputs (NRF)</p>	<p>1.3 New routines developed and integrated on an online platform to optimize the work of evaluation panels.</p>		

Activity 2	Sub-activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Sources of evidence
<p>2. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the quality and integrity of all submissions to the DHET through rigorous and regular monitoring of all SA journals, the development and monitoring of a list of accredited book publishers and the monitoring of a list of accredited conference proceedings.</p>	<p>2.1. Implementing and monitoring of a Journal Quality Monitoring Framework (JQMF) of all accredited SA journals annually, at least for the duration of the project, whilst setting up permanent systems (CREST, ASSAf and DHET)</p>	<p>2.1 JQMF implemented and tested for future application</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidenced-based assessment of compliance of SA journal outputs, published conference proceedings and book outputs meeting DHET criteria of quality and integrity</li> <li>• Evidence based assessment of the extent to which SA universities are in compliance of international standards on publication ethics and integrity</li> </ul>	<p>CREST reports based on analysis of SAKnowledge data.</p> <p>ASSAf reports on journal reviews</p>
	<p>2.2 Evaluation of new journal applications and appeals for listing in the DHET list of Approved Journals.</p>	<p>2.2 New additions to the DHET list of approved journals and removal from the list of non-qualifying journals</p>	<p>Expansion of a pool of quality journals, spanning across study fields. Easing on gate-keeping syndrome</p>	
	<p>2.3. Implementing a revised annual journal cluster review process conducted by ASSAf panels (ASSAf)</p>	<p>2.3 Annual reports by ASSAf on journal clusters reviewed</p>		
	<p>2.4 Development and ongoing monitoring of a list of accredited publishers (CREST and DHET)</p>	<p>2.4 Standardized list of accredited book publishers</p>		
	<p>2.5 Development and ongoing monitoring of a list of accredited conference proceeding titles. (CREST and DHET)</p>	<p>2.5 List of accredited book publishers and Conference Proceedings</p>		

	2.6 Monitoring of the quality assurance policies, systems and procedures of the individual universities (CREST and DHET)	2.6 Annual report on the compliance of each university (office) to minimal criteria of publication integrity		
	2.7 Production of an annual M&E report combining the results of activities 1 – 5 (CREST and ASSAf)	2.7 Annual M&E report		
	2.8 Study of international best practices to inform processes and decisions on quality academic publications, and for benchmarking.	2.8 A report on international practices on maintaining quality academic publications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International benchmarking.</li> <li>• Research Outputs management system that has credibility and integrity</li> <li>• Internationally competitive quality system</li> </ul>	Reduction in the number of publications declined on the basis of predatory publishing and other signs of poor quality publishing
<b>Activity 3</b>	<b>Sub-activities</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Sources of evidence</b>
3. The development and implementation of educational and capacity-building interventions around good practice in scholarly publishing.	3.1 Provision of funding support to staff at University research offices (and related institutions) to enrol for academic courses in the fields of research management and related fields (research integrity, bibliometrics, research evaluation).	3.1 Number of I research administration and management officials provided with funding support for skills training.	3.1 Strengthened capacity and expertise in research management at SA research offices. Increased knowledge and understanding of the key issues relation to publication ethics and integrity across the system	Number and lists of staff registered for courses.  Number and lists of individual beneficiaries of funding support. Number and lists of seminars and workshops offered by SARIMA
	3.2 Provision of funding for junior and middle-level research managers to attend short courses and conferences and training in areas such as publication ethics, predatory publishing, bibliometrics, etc.	3.2 Number of scholarships awarded to research administrators and research managers		

	3.3 Provision of funding to SARIMA to develop new seminars and workshops (in conjunction with universities) in these domains for attendance by all relevant target groups in the sector.	3.3 Number of dedicated seminars and workshops organized by SARIMA in support of the research publication framework.		
<b>Activity 4</b>	<b>Sub-activities</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Sources of evidence</b>
4. Support for ongoing research and analysis of SA scholarly publishing practices	4.1 Provide financial support to maintain, update and expand CREST's SA Knowledgebase for optimal use by the DHET, universities and other role-players (including the development of a web-interface functionality to run queries on SA Knowledgebase)	4.1 Updated database on university research outputs with different levels of user-access to SA Knowledgebase	Timely and comprehensive data and reports on the publication output of SA universities are available to key stakeholders in the system.  Better understanding of key international trends in scientific publishing and its relevance to South Africa.	Web-based version of SAK  SAK reports  Annual report to DHET  Working papers and articles produced by scholars in the community of practice.
	4.2 Provide funding to CREST to expand its capability to produce a set of high-level findings on trends in publication output for the DHET and other agencies on demand	4.2 Annual report to DHET and other role-players produced on trends in publication output.		
	4.3 Provide support to the establishment of a ' <b>community of practice</b> ' of SA scholars to pursue research on topics including scientific publishing, open access, research evaluation, journal business models and bibliometrics. This support should consist of a number of medium-sized grants that are allocated on a competitive basis to support both established but especially emerging black scholars to undertake research in these areas.	4.3 A community of practice established to pursue and institutionalise current scholarship in the field.		



## **SECTION 5**

### **PROJECT OVERVIEW**

#### *4.1 Project Description and Scope*

*Provide a description of the issues/problems/developmental needs that the project seeks to address, the theory of change that underpins the approach that the project will take, the broad scope of the project, and an overview of the interventions contained within it.*

<b>Project description and motivation</b>	<p><i>Provide a description of the issues/problems/developmental needs that the project seeks to address, and the theory of change that underpins the approach that the project will take. The description should also show what evidence and data is being drawn on to inform the need for this project intervention.</i></p> <p>The Department of Higher Education and Training (the Department) has been implementing the <i>Policy and Procedures for the Measurement of Research Output of Public Higher Education Institutions (2003)</i> which was revised and replaced by the <i>Research Outputs Policy (2015)</i>. Through the implementation of this policy, the Department continues to invest in higher education research; encourage research productivity, and elevate the research productive capacity of the higher education system by rewarding quality research outputs at public higher education institutions. The Policy provides for research subsidy funding towards publications produced by academics in public higher education institutions. Under this Policy, all public higher education institutions annually submit to the Department their subsidy funding claims for research outputs in the form of publications.</p> <p>Over the years the research outputs from institutions have been steadily on an upward trajectory. The Department has invested over R18 bn since the 2005/6 financial year when the current policy was first implemented. The actual units have grown from 7320 in 2005 to 21 020 units in 2019. Partly, the growth in research productivity in the higher education system in South Africa is due to this government investment in it.</p> <p>Given this huge investment of public funds and the key role that the <i>Policy on Research Outputs</i> plays in the University sector, it is essential that the quality, integrity, transparency of the implementation of the policy is ensured. It is equally important to continuously monitor the process whereby research outputs (books and conference proceedings) are evaluated by field-specific peer review sub-panels using pre-determined evaluation criteria in line with the Research Outputs Policy.</p> <p>In 2017, the Department commissioned the Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology (CREST) to conduct a study on the Quality of Research in South Africa<sup>1</sup>. CREST identified several questionable and unethical behaviours. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued instances of predatory publishing</li> <li>• Questionable editorial practices that are evidenced by excessive publication by editors and members of editorial boards in “their” journals</li> <li>• Plagiarism in specific fields but without replication of such studies in other fields</li> <li>• Growing evidence of excessive publication by individual academics in a</li> </ul>
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<sup>1</sup> The full report can be found at: [www.dhet.gov.za](http://www.dhet.gov.za) or <https://www0.sun.ac.za/crest/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/quality-of-south-africas-research-publications.pdf>

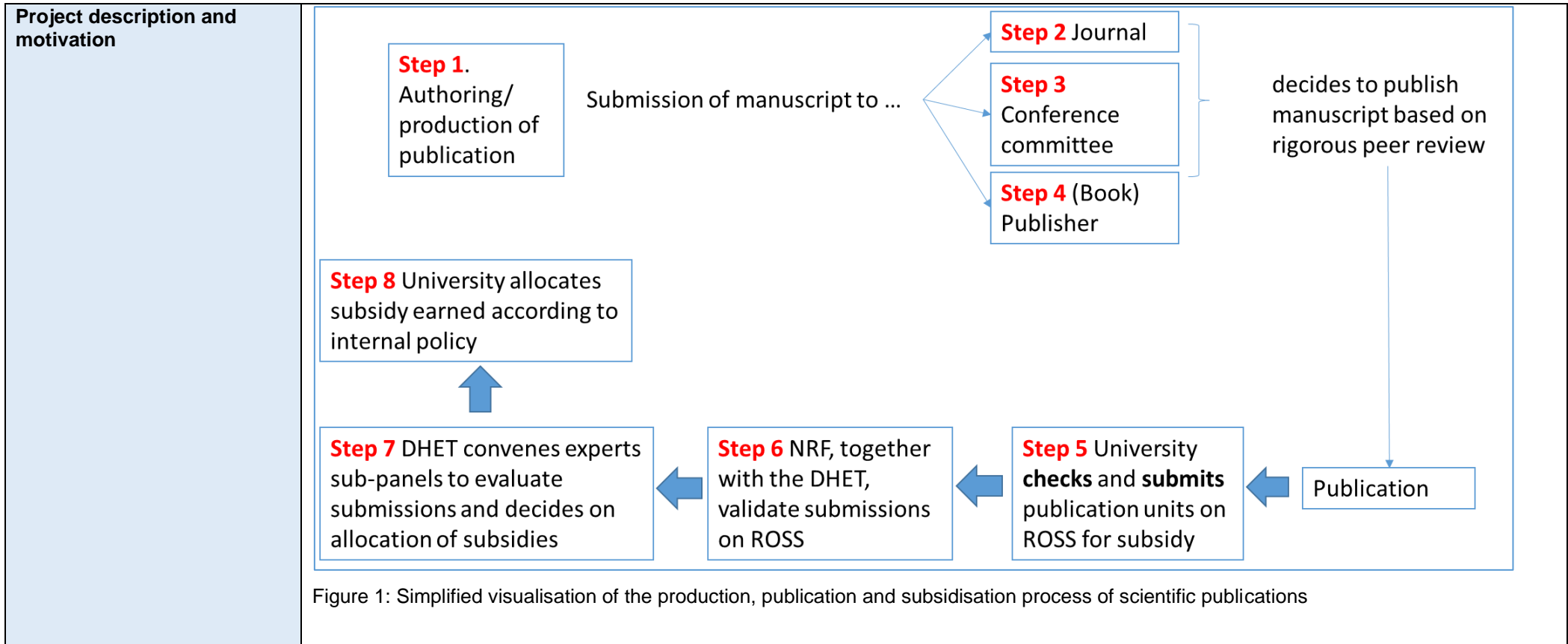
particular journal or issue of a journal

- Growing evidence of gaming of the submissions of conference proceedings by certain universities and authors

In its various policy documents on research publications, the DHET has always emphasized the inextricable link between research quality and research integrity. If quality in scientific research is understood to refer to the intrinsic merit, worth or value of a research output, then integrity refers to the decision-making that takes place during the production of such output and specifically the values and standards that inform the decision-making. In this respect the DHET adheres to the basic principles of the Singapore Statement on Research Integrity (2010) and is also co-signatory to the Statement on Ethical Research and Scholarly Publishing Practices (2019)

<https://www.nrf.ac.za/sites/default/files/documents/STATEMENT%20ON%20ETHICAL.pdf>

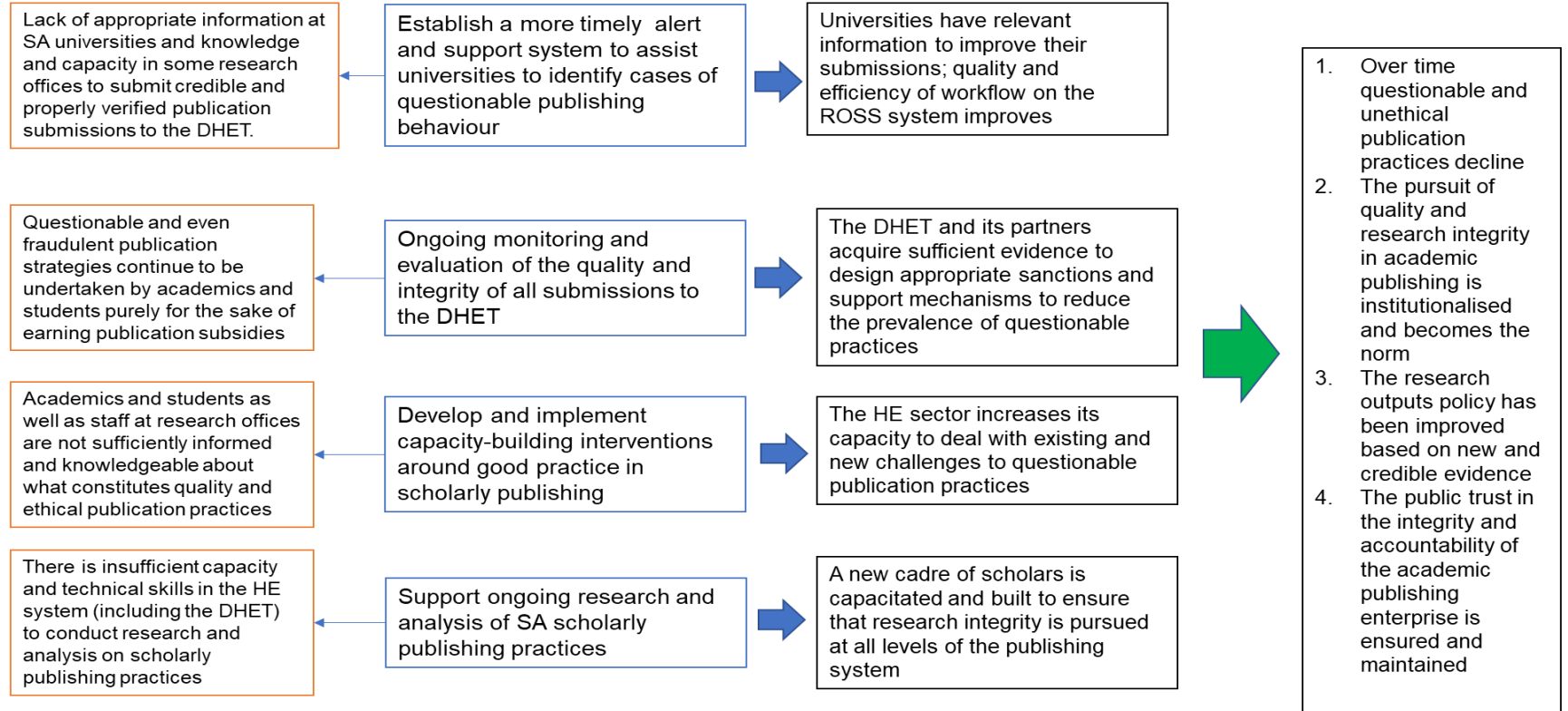
Against this background, the DHET seeks to develop a Research Publications Quality Framework (PQF) to be applied to scholarly publishing in the Higher Education Sector in South Africa. The Framework will capture (see Figure below) the critical decisions across the entire process from the production and publication of scholarly documents to the submission of publications and awarding of subsidy to the contributing universities.



<b>Project description and motivation</b>	<p>The implementation of the PQF is the main responsibility of the DHET working in close co-operation with all the main role players (universities, publishers, journal editors, etc.) in the system. To support the implementation of the PQF by the DHET, a collaborative programme is hereby proposed with Stellenbosch University as the lead university in partnership with the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.</p> <p>The proposed programme will provide the necessary technical and research support and input to the DHET to ensure that the implementation of the PQF achieves its desired outcomes and impact in the most effective and cost-efficient way. The diagram below visually presents the theory of change of the programme by making explicit how the four main activities of the programme will address the current shortcomings and challenges in the scholarly publishing system and how these activities (interventions) will produce the desired positive outcomes and impact. Overall, the impact will also translate to policy improvements that are meant to sustain the quality and integrity of research publications outputs from South African universities.</p>
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**Project description and motivation**

**PROBLEMS** ← are addressed by **INTERVENTION ACTIVITIES** which produce **OUTCOMES** that translate over time to **IMPACT**



1. Over time questionable and unethical publication practices decline
2. The pursuit of quality and research integrity in academic publishing is institutionalised and becomes the norm
3. The research outputs policy has been improved based on new and credible evidence
4. The public trust in the integrity and accountability of the academic publishing enterprise is ensured and maintained

<p><b>Project description and motivation</b></p>	<p>In the remainder of this document the main activities of the proposed collaborative programme are described in more detail:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 The establishment of a more timely <u>alert and support system</u> to assist universities (and their research offices) to identify cases of questionable publishing behaviour before submitting for publication subsidies.</li> <li>2 Ongoing <u>monitoring and evaluation of the quality and integrity</u> of all submissions to the DHET through rigorous and regular monitoring of all SA journals, the development and monitoring of a list of accredited book publishers and the monitoring of a list of accredited conference proceedings.</li> <li>3 The development and implementation of educational and <u>capacity-building interventions</u> around good practice in scholarly publishing</li> <li>4 Support for <u>ongoing research and analysis of SA scholarly publishing practices</u> in order to maintain the requisite levels of vigilance and ensure that the public investment in the subsidy systems meets the highest standards of research quality and integrity.</li> </ol>
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## SECTION 6

### 6.1 ACTIVITY PLAN

List and describe each activity in the project and target dates for completion over the period of implementation:

NR	MAIN ACTIVITY	SUB-ACTIVITY	ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION	TIME FRMAE
1.	<b>The establishment of a more timely alert and support system to assist universities to identify cases of questionable publishing behaviour before submitting for publication subsidies</b>			
	1.1		Develop and establish an open access website that provides a comprehensive portal of information and documents in areas such as lists of predatory journals, questionable publishers, integrated accredited journal lists, FAQs about ethical publishing, etc. (CREST)	Ongoing to March 2026
	1.2		Establish routines to improve the efficiency of the publication and creative outputs submissions process and procedures including the capturing of information by institutions to the capturing of evaluation process by the Department (NRF)	Ongoing to March 2026
	1.3		Establish routines to ensure more efficiency of the research outputs evaluation process by the evaluation panels including the peer review process in book and conference proceedings publications as well as creative outputs (NRF)	Ongoing to March 2026
2.	<b>Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the quality and integrity of all submissions to the DHET through rigorous and regular monitoring of all SA journals, the development and monitoring of a list of accredited book publishers and the monitoring of a list of accredited conference proceedings</b>			
	2.1		Implementing and monitoring of a Journal Quality Monitoring Framework (JQMF) of all accredited SA journals annually, at least for the duration of the project, whilst setting up permanent systems (CREST, ASSAf and DHET)	Ongoing to March 2026
	2.2		Evaluation of new journal applications and appeals for listing in the DHET list of Approved Journals.	Ongoing to March 2026
	2.3		Implementing a revised annual journal cluster review process conducted by ASSAf panels (ASSAf)	Ongoing to March 2026
	2.4		Development and ongoing monitoring of a list of accredited publishers (CREST and DHET)	Ongoing to March 2026



	2.5	Development and ongoing monitoring of a list of accredited conference proceeding titles. (CREST and DHET)	Ongoing to March 2026
	2.6	Monitoring of the quality assurance policies, systems and procedures of the individual universities (CREST and DHET)	Ongoing to March 2026
	2.7	Production of an annual M&E report combining the results of activities 1 – 5 (CREST and ASSAf)	Ongoing to March 2026
	2.8	Study of international best practices to inform processes and decisions on quality academic publications, and for benchmarking.	Ongoing to March 2026
3.	<b>The development and implementation of educational and capacity-building interventions around good practice in scholarly publishing.</b>		
	3.1	Provision of funding support to staff at University research offices (and related institutions) to enrol for academic courses in the fields of research management and related fields (research integrity, bibliometrics, research evaluation).	Ongoing to March 2026
	3.2	Provision of funding for junior and middle-level research managers to attend short courses and conferences and training in areas such as publication ethics, predatory publishing, bibliometrics, etc.	Ongoing to March 2026
	3.3	Provision of funding to develop new seminars and workshops (in conjunction with universities) in these domains for attendance by all relevant target groups in the sector.	Ongoing to March 2026
4.	<b>Support for ongoing research and analysis of SA scholarly publishing practices</b>		
	4.1	Provide financial support to maintain, update and expand CREST's SA Knowledgebase for optimal use by the DHET, universities and other role-players (including the development of a web-interface functionality to run queries on SA Knowledgebase)	Ongoing to March 2026
	4.2	Provide funding to CREST to expand its capability to produce a set of high-level findings on trends in publication output for the DHET and other agencies on demand	Ongoing to March 2026
	4.3	Provide support to the establishment of a ' <b>community of practice</b> ' of SA scholars to pursue research on topics including scientific publishing, open access, research evaluation, journal business models and bibliometrics. This support should consist of a number of medium-sized grants that are allocated on a competitive basis to support both established but especially emerging black scholars to undertake research in these areas.	Ongoing to March 2026