



higher education & training

Department:
Higher Education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Directorate: University Research Support and Policy Development

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Policy on the Evaluation of Creative Outputs and Innovations Produced by South African Public Higher Education Institutions, 2017

To Deputy Vice-Chancellors Research, Directors of Research and Research Office Administrators

These amendments have been included to align the Creative Research Outputs subsidy and are intended to assist the Creative Disciplines in gaining recognition and enhancing research.

Purpose

This communique formally notifies all public higher education institutions of mandatory amendments to the requirements for the applicant annotation when submitting Creative Research Outputs on the Research Outputs Submission System (ROSS). The revised requirements take effect immediately, starting with the next submission cycle in **May 2026**, and apply to all new submissions. These amendments are intended to strengthen the evidentiary basis of submissions, improve consistency in the peer-review and evaluation process to ensure clearer articulation of research contribution.

Background

During the last evaluation cycle, the Department identified consistent errors in articulating research intent within the Creative Research Outputs. In particular, submissions frequently demonstrated strong creative execution but insufficiently defined research questions, methodologies, and knowledge contribution. These gaps have limited peer reviewers' ability to assess submissions against the policy (2017) and the Implementation Guideline (2021). The revised annotation structure addresses these deficiencies by introducing clearer requirements.

Amendments to the annotation structure

All submissions must include an annotation and be uploaded on ROSS. The annotation should cover the following:

- a) *Locate the research within the discipline and* clearly state the research problem or question guiding the work. This must be stated as a research inquiry rather than a descriptive account.

- b) Provide a methodological account of the creative process, demonstrating how the work constitutes a systematic investigation. This must include technical iterations, processes, and practices that substantiate the research approach.
- c) Articulate the contribution to knowledge, specifying whether the work advances theory, practice, methodology, or interdisciplinary understanding. The statement must be evidence-based and not purely descriptive.

The annotation will serve as a review guide, providing a coherent intellectual framework for peer reviewers to assess the submission.

Below is a guide on how to draft the annotation:

- 1) Introduction and outline description*
- 2) Research statement*
- 3) Research approach and development process*
- 4) Knowledge contribution within the creative field*
- 5) Academic recognition*
- 6) Any additional information supporting the submission*

The use of keywords in the applicant annotation and the language of the output submitted

To support peer reviewer matching and system-based categorisation within ROSS, applicants must select a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 10 keywords that accurately reflect the research domain, methodology, and the work's contribution.

Applicants must further specify the language of the Creative Research Output, where applicable, to support appropriate reviewer allocation, particularly in literary arts, music, film and television, theatre, performance and dance.

The amended Excel spreadsheet reflects the changes.

Compliance and verification

Institutions are responsible for ensuring that all submissions comply with the specified requirements before final submission on ROSS. Internal verification processes must be implemented to confirm that annotations meet the minimum standards.

Implementation

The amendments take effect from the upcoming submission cycle. Institutions are required to:

- Align internal submission guidelines with the revised annotation requirements
- Provide targeted capacity-building support for applicants
- Ensure administrative oversight of compliance before submission

The updated ROSS template accompanies this communicate. The Department and the NRF will provide technical guidance to support the implementation of this process.

Monitoring and review

The Department will assess the impact of these amendments during the next evaluation cycle, with particular attention to improvements in clarity of submissions. Feedback from panels and institutions will inform further refinements.

The Department will conduct an administrative compliance check. Submissions that do not meet the requirements will not be processed for peer review until the respective institutions address the deficiencies.

For queries regarding the implementation of the Policy, please contact Dr Idah Makukule at: Makukule.I@dhet.gov.za

Yours sincerely,

Prof T. Lewin

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