



SFARS Position Paper -

FUNDING MECHANISMS

October 2009

This position paper reflects on the current funding situation of SFARS and seeks to identify funding mechanisms/sources to provide equitable access to UCT funds based on the contributions made by Soft-Funded Academic and Research Staff (SFARS)

Background

The University of Cape Town has a large number of ‘soft-funded’ academic/research staff, i.e. staff whose salaries are not funded either by UCT GOB funds nor another body such as one of the government departments. It is this difference that is key to defining SFARS, i.e. they are staff that are soft-funded, non-GOB, contract researchers/ academics whose primary function is to conduct research, but who also teach, supervise post-graduate students and participate in UCT leadership and management processes. Although GOB staff are also engaged in research, the majority of funding for their remuneration comes from government subsidies based on student numbers.

The precarious financial position of SFARS – who make key contributions to UCT’s research profile, output, research-led teaching and social responsiveness – is disquieting. This needs to be urgently addressed if UCT is to continue to retain and attract researchers so as to be a world class research-led University. UCT has acknowledged that its research strategy needs to include funding mechanisms to provide greater financial support for SFARS through mechanisms that will return to research units a greater proportion of the monies that they generate. This position paper aims to outline some of the funding mechanisms that should be explored in order to support SFARS. These mechanisms are, we believe, equitable and sustainable. Importantly, they do not make a direct claim on the general operating budget of the University.

‘Quantifying’ SFAR’s contributions to research

Three of the several quantifiable ways in which these staff members contribute to the activities of their Departments, Faculties and the as a whole University include:

- Raising salaries for administrative staff, junior researchers and other SFARS;
- Disseminating research findings in the form of peer-reviewed journal articles, books and book chapters that generate revenue for the University in the form of the ‘publication subsidy’ paid by the Department of Education (DoE); and
- Teaching undergraduate and postgraduate courses, convening courses and programmes, and supervising honours, masters and PhD student (these issues are dealt with in the SFARS position paper on compensating teaching contributions).

Below we examine how two of these quantifiable contributions could be utilised to provide equitable mechanisms for providing financial support to SFARS.

Possible funding mechanisms for financial support for SFARS

1. Funding sources provided by UCT for SFARS only

With the money generated by SFARS, funding sources can be created to alleviate the problem of raising salaries (and time spent raising funds to pay salaries). This could be achieved in several ways:

- Create a fund that provides a monetary incentive to SFARS who have submitted proposals that were unsuccessful
- Provide top-up funding for all proposals that do not obtain full funding, not just MRC proposals
- Create a point system that gives SFARS ‘credit’ for their achievements that can be ‘cashed in’ for salary contribution
- Create a funding mechanism for extended research leave for SFARS.

The intention is not to provide money over and above SFARS salaries but to remove the risks and stress related to fund-raising while researching, teaching and proposal writing.

2. Return of a greater proportion of the publication subsidy

Some universities in South Africa return a substantial proportion of the publication subsidy to individual researchers within research units. To our knowledge only the law faculty at UCT has moved in this direction by effectively returning 50% of the publication subsidy to research units that produce subsidy-earning publications.

We propose, first, that the income of UCT’s publication subsidy, as well as the distribution thereof, is made public. Promoting faculty-wide discussion forums on this would be a first step to transparency and openness.

Secondly it is proposed that UCT develops a new policy for the distribution of this subsidy so that a greater proportion is specifically earmarked to be returned to University research units in order to cover part of SFARS salaries. Having a uniform policy in this regard would accord with UCT’s mission to be research-led, to pursue internationalization, and to become ‘Afropolitan’, viz. by attracting young, able previously disadvantaged researchers into its fold. This could have a ripple effect in terms of increasing the number of accredited publications produced by UCT and hence the overall subsidy for the University. Such a mechanism would have the added benefit of incentivise SFARS to turn a greater proportion of their research outputs into subsidy-earning articles, or chapters, or books. We believe that the system used by the law faculty provides a very good example and if implemented across the University it would contribute considerably to the funding of SFARS.

Other non-monetary contributions

SFARS make a substantial contribution to the University and this should be acknowledged and recognised. For example

- The dissemination of research findings in the form of peer-reviewed journal articles, books and book chapters, policy briefs and reports *raise the profile of UCT* in the local, national and international scientific and broader community
- Their involvement in *research greatly enhances their teaching contributions* and provides *students with opportunities to become involved in research*, giving meaning to UCT being a research-led University.
- Their participation in Departmental, Faculty and University committees, contribute to *leadership and management* within the University; and
- They make substantial and key contributors to social responsiveness activities (e.g. policy development).

The following are the **main recommendations** for UCT to consider in its strategies and budgeting for providing funding mechanisms for SFARS:

- Establish mechanisms and support processes at UCT for securing research funds by non-GOB staff/research units
- Establish a mechanism whereby a significant proportion of the publication subsidy is returned to research units and establish other funding opportunities for non-GOB funded researchers
- Establish a mechanism for returning a proportion of teaching subsidy and fee incomes in relation to SFARS teaching and programme/course convening inputs.