

## Broadening Participation: SAMRC's Division of Research Capacity Development visit to Rhodes & Nelson Mandela University Postgraduate Funding Fair and CPUT

In line with the SAMRC's commitment to transformation, RCD is committed to broadening participation particularly from underrepresented institutions in our funding programmes. Currently, RCD has only a handful of funded students who are registered at universities in the Eastern Cape Province and universities of technology. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of May 2024, RCD attended the inaugural Mandela-Rhodes Postgraduate Funding Fair hosted by Rhodes University (RU) in collaboration with Nelson Mandela University (NMU), under the theme "Promoting Access and Success in Postgraduate Education Through Funding". The funding fair provided a platform for Honours, Masters & Doctoral students to learn more about available scholarships.

The RCD delegation, consisting of the Divisional manager, Dr Abeda Dawood, and the scholarship coordinator Mr Vincent Fipaza, provided insight into the RCD's diverse funding programmes and research support training to the students. The students had the chance to ask questions, as well as provide feedback on their past experiences with RCD and SAMRC in general. They also engaged in meaningful discussions such as the application process, the documents/requirements needed and the contact details of relevant people for queries.



*Figure 1: RCD programme coordinator, Mr Vincent Fipaza interacting with RU and NMU students.*

The students were encouraged to complete an attendance register with their contacts details, in order, to be included in the RCD database and for the purpose of sharing funding opportunities.

Two students were randomly selected to win prizes from the attendance register.

One of the winners, Ms Boshielo Bontle from NMU, expressed her sincere gratitude for the valuable information shared about the available funding opportunities.

The Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) of Research, Innovation and Strategic Partnerships at RU, Dr Nomakwezi Mzilakazi thanked all funders for honouring the invitation and granting the students an opportunity to interact with them, as their only interaction with students is often through emails.

Dr Mzilakazi aims to have this fair as an annual event that seeks to include postgraduate students of all the four Universities in the Eastern Cape Province in 2025.



*Figure 2: RCD scholarships portfolio visits CPUT. RCD funds 3 post-doctoral fellows under the Extra-mural Postdoctoral Fellowship Programme and 1 Masters student under the Internship Scholarship Programme. Dr Cecil Weale is pictured, (top row, third from the right) funded under the the Extra-mural Postdoctoral Fellowship Programme. Ms Makobo Itsweni (first row, third from the right) is funded under the Internship Scholarship Programme.*

As part of its on-going initiative aimed at informing and encouraging students and staff about research and scholarship funding opportunities. RCD visited CPUT on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2024, a visit that was coordinated by the CPUT Postgraduate Centre Director, Professor Izak van Zyl and Dr Abeda Dawood, RCD Division Manager. along with members of the scholarship portfolio.

Dr Ndlandla and the scholarship team highlighted the comprehensive range of funding programmes designed to support the training of young scientists within the university. They emphasized that these programmes are structured to cater to different kinds of scientists from basic science to clinical research with the primary goal of building and enhancing research capacity, fostering innovation and excellence.

One of the key messages from the session was the strong encouragement for students to apply for future Requests for Applications (RFAs) from the RCD. Dr Ndlandla stressed the importance of staying informed about upcoming opportunities and submitting well prepared applications and supporting documents. "The RCD is committed to supporting our students, but it is crucial that they actively seek out and apply for these opportunities," she noted. The team assured that the RCD is there to guide applicants through the process, offering resources and support to enhance their chances of success.

The session also addressed feedback from CPUT researchers and administrative staff, who voiced the need for more open communication and collaboration to improve the success rate of applications. They suggested that increased transparency from the RCD could help clarify the application process and criteria, enabling more targeted and effective proposals. The RCD team acknowledged these suggestions and committed to implementing measures that facilitate better communication and collaboration. The researchers also highlighted the importance of student exchange funding opportunities (an initiative by the SAMRC vice president) between extramural and intramural SAMRC units to encourage collaboration and for access to laboratory facilities, equipment, or expertise not available at their home institution.

Following the presentations, the floor was opened for an interactive Q&A session. Both staff and students took the opportunity to ask questions about the types of research projects that receive funding and how to streamline the application process. This open dialogue was valuable in clarifying doubts and providing specific examples of successful applications. It also underscored the importance of aligning research proposals with the strategic priorities of the RCD. The discussion also raised important needs at CPUT relating to the funding of part-time students, funding of nursing and medical imaging students, and travel grants to other laboratories or SAMRC units for first year Master's students or within first six months of registration.

Another notable highlight of the event was the invitation extended to Dr. Dawood by Professor Glenda Davison to tour SAMRC/CPUT Cardiometabolic Health Research Extra-mural Unit. This meeting provided a firsthand look at the impactful research being conducted and the tangible benefits of the RCD's funding support, including three postdoctoral fellows and a Master's student in Medical Biotechnology. Reflecting on the visit, Dr. Dawood remarked, "This engagement has been incredibly insightful and productive. I hope that all future engagements can be as fruitful as this one."

The event marked a great step towards enhancing research funding at CPUT. With the commitment of the RCD to provide support, coupled with the proactive involvement of students and staff, the university is well-positioned to achieve greater research excellence. The positive outcomes of this engagement bode well for continued success and innovation in future endeavors. The RCD is looking forward to supporting CPUT at its upcoming CPUT Research Day in November.

**Authors:** Research Capacity Development Division's Team