



The University of the Witwatersrand & the University of Edinburgh

In Partnership with the Mastercard Foundation

**Wits-Edinburgh Sustainable African Futures
(WESAF) Doctoral Programme**

Call for Scholarship Applications 2023

Closing date: 15 May 2023



Wits-Edinburgh Doctoral Programme in Sustainable African Futures (WESAF)

The University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and the University of Edinburgh (UoE) are pleased to invite applications to their collaborative Doctoral Training Programme in Sustainable African Futures (WESAF).

Context

Globally we face two interrelated challenges: achieving a just and inclusive society secure in dignified employment with affordable access to meaningful education and high-quality healthcare whilst simultaneously ensuring planetary health through environmental sustainability. In Africa these twin imperatives are complicated in distinct ways. The continent's very young and growing population provides significant opportunities for economic growth, but these must be pursued within the environmental frameworks signalled in the global community's commitment to sustainable development. Any conceptualisation of sustainability must therefore grapple with the inequities and complexities embedded in the geopolitical, social and environmental realities of our modern world. WESAF's understanding of sustainability is thus anchored in a theoretical framework that recognises that sustainable development must be socially just while respecting environmental limits.

Further to enable a sustainable future in Africa, it is essential to explore and promote an African-driven sustainability agenda as part of collaborative decision-making processes, which include local communities and knowledge. This will ensure that solutions and programmes aimed at sustainable development are not dominated by the agenda of the Global North. Rather just transitions in the Global South should respond to local needs and resource availability, such as for agriculture, green energy, and infrastructure. This requires indigenous understandings and management of a range of complex, interconnected challenges in the development of suitable solutions that are sensitive to both the vulnerabilities of the countries of the Global South, and their long histories of resilience in the face of protracted adversity.

WESAF aims to advance research capacity amongst African academics and higher educational institutions whilst grappling with the critical issues of sustainable development in their fields of interest. This will enhance a more interdisciplinary approach to tackling the key threats to sustainable development in Africa and beyond.

About the programme

The WESAF doctoral programme aims to provide research training to equip students (primarily academics already holding tenured positions) to complete interdisciplinary doctoral research on areas related to sustainability on the African continent. The blended programme is designed to enable students to complete primarily online masters followed by a primarily online doctorate. The Masters by Research and PhD programmes will combine in-person elements including sustainability schools (in person schools focussed on enhancing knowledge in the field of sustainability research) in South Africa and contact sessions in Edinburgh alongside workplace-based internships. Supervision will be jointly delivered online by academics from both UoE and Wits.

The programme will recruit an initial cohort of 50 students from faculties from partner [African higher education institutions](#) to complete sustainability focused doctoral studies. Following an initial online Masters by Research, to front-load the development of critical research skills and delivered full time, at least 30 of these students will continue to complete PhDs either full-time or part-time. Through its cohort approach and emphasis on advanced research design and methods training, the programme will produce a powerful cohort of African research specialists committed to addressing Africa's sustainability challenges on its own terms.

Impacts

The Universities of the Witwatersrand and Edinburgh share a long-standing and productive partnership. Bound by common values, the Institutions are committed to collaboratively producing the kinds of knowledge that will shape dignified, equitable and sustainable futures for people across the world. Under this overarching vision, WESAF aims to:

- Equip universities to grapple with complex, continental challenges for sustainable development
- Generate inter- and transdisciplinary approaches to sustainability in Africa
- Incubate intersectoral, industry aligned African strategies for sustainability with global impact
- Strengthen regional research capacity networks through networking of partner institutions and partner universities

Outcomes

- Graduates will have qualified to drive advanced sustainability research in their countries of origin
- Researchers from historically marginalized and underrepresented groups will be integrated into the African research community

- Organizational, financial and human resource capacity of partner institutions will be strengthened

Innovations

- The programme will be mainly delivered online (with some in-person sustainability school elements delivered at the University of Witwatersrand and meetings in Edinburgh) to ensure the best possible access to quality supervision for all applicants
- It will provide advanced front-loaded methodological training in a context where virtually all doctoral degrees are focused on producing research outputs only
- It will include an appropriately scoped workplace internship aimed at harmonizing the developmental agendas of the world of work, government, higher education, society and the environment

The programme will be launched in September 2023.

While all the scholars are expected to complete the Masters by Research in one year, it is anticipated that some scholars will undertake the PhDs flexibly, some full time and others part time while continuing in their substantive roles at their universities. The PhD could be undertaken in various forms, including by publication.

The WESAF Doctoral Programme comprises of two components (see figure 1):

- **Part 1:** MSc by Research in Sustainable African Futures (delivered online by University of Edinburgh)
- **Part 2:** PhD (delivered jointly by University of Witwatersrand and University of Edinburgh)



PART 1: MScR by Research in Sustainable African Futures

The first component of this innovative collaborative postgraduate programme of studies, consists of an MSc by Research (MScR) in Sustainable African Futures delivered online and administered by the University of Edinburgh. All applications should be made through the University of Edinburgh admission [portal](#).

This degree is designed to build the capacity of and prepare students looking to undertake doctoral-level research with an interest in sustainability in Africa. The MScR programme will provide the necessary skills to undertake advanced research through a structured programme of research training. Students will have the opportunity to undertake additional specialist research training (through courses and sustainability schools) alongside an independent research project.

Programme Structure

The MScR includes three compulsory courses that cover core research training skills around Data Collection and Research Design and a compulsory course to introduce students to the complex realities of sustainable development in African contexts with the course “Dynamics of African Development” (see table 1).

An integral part of the degree is a dissertation, an extended research project of 18,000 words that will allow students to explore and develop research ideas that can act as a launch pad into doctoral work – through, for example, an extended research proposal, a systematic or scoping review or an exploratory, pilot research study engaging with sustainability in Africa. The programme approaches sustainability in very broad terms and so welcomes students interested in developing *innovative, cutting-edge, multi, inter and transdisciplinary* research projects. The programme also offers the opportunity to develop students’ own interests through workshops, short courses and seminars offered online by the University of Edinburgh (non-credited courses). Students in this programme will also take part in two compulsory sustainability schools that will be held in person at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg.

The MScR programme can only be undertaken on a full-time basis and will run between September 2023 and end in August 2024.

September, 2023	In person sustainability school at Wits University (5 days)	Pre-orientation to the Postgraduate Programme
September - December 2023	Teaching term 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dynamics of African Development (core course) • Data Collection (core course)
January – March 2024	Teaching term 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Design (core course) • two online micro-methods courses – no credit
April - May 2024	In person sustainability school at Wits (10 days)	Sustainable African Futures (theory and practice)
April – August 2024	Teaching term 3	Dissertation design & writing under an academic supervisor from UoE

Table 1. MScR Programme in Sustainable African Futures

Funding

The WESAF programme is in partnership with the [Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program](#)

Costs covered during the 12 months of the MSc by Research programme are:

- MSc by Research fees
- Participation in two sustainability schools (in person) in Johannesburg. Covered costs include visa applications for South Africa entry, vaccinations as necessary, accommodation and subsistence while in Johannesburg, return flights and internal travel.
- Laptops and connectivity where appropriate
- Reading material will be accessible through the University of Edinburgh online library and other resources will be made available by course lecturers (no cost will be attached to courses or dissertation).

Application Process for the MSc by Research

Applications will open between 14 April and 15 May 2023. UoE and Wits will recruit applications from a carefully selected pool of staff in African partner institutions. The full list of partner African Institutions can be found here: <https://www.wits.ac.za/wesaf/partners/>

Eligibility

The target group for scholarships is emerging researchers and academics who meet the requirements to pursue a master's degree at the University of Edinburgh.

To apply for this programme, applicants must:

- have successfully completed a university degree that will qualify for entry into a Master's programme at the University of Edinburgh (A UK 2:1 honours degree, or its international equivalent).
- demonstrate a level of [English language competency](#) that will enable one to succeed in the studies, regardless of nationality or country of residence.
- have generally completed their last university degree not more than three and a half years ago and/or have demonstrable experience in academia/research at the time of application.
- be nationals or permanent residents of an African country
- be a) a staff member at one of the partner universities, OR b) a candidate being considered for teaching or research staff recruitment by the partner universities.

Female applicants, applicants from refugee and displaced backgrounds, and candidates from other less privileged regions or groups are especially encouraged to apply.

In addition to the online application form, candidates will need to upload the following mandatory documents:

- Curriculum vitae, including a list of publications (if applicable)
- A final official university degree certificate and final official transcript.
- Letter of support from the university where the candidate is based
- If applicable, information on the UNHCR registration as a refugee

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE PREPARATION OF THIS APPLICATION REQUIRES SOURCING VARIOUS OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS, WHICH MAY TAKE SOME TIME. IT IS THE APPLICANT'S RESPONSIBILITY TO SOURCE THESE EARLY SO THAT THEY CAN RECEIVE THE DOCUMENTS FROM THE RESPECTIVE AUTHORITIES IN TIME.

To apply for this programme please click here: <https://mcfspedinburgh.smapply.io/prog/wits-edinburgh2324/>

Exit points

Students completing the three core courses and the dissertation will exit with a MSc Research in Sustainable African Futures. Masters by Research are ideal entry points for applicants interested in pursuing a doctoral programme or to enhance and progress a professional career, especially if the research is an integral part of one’s daily work. The MSc by Research will be conferred by the University of Edinburgh at graduations in November/December 2024 virtually or in-person in Edinburgh. The grant will not cover travel to graduate in person at University of Edinburgh.

Transition between part 1 and part 2 of the Doctoral Training Programme

Students who will successfully complete the MSc by Research programme will be invited to apply to the PhD programme in Sustainable African Futures that will start in January 2024. Thirty candidates will be awarded scholarships for this PhD programme on a competitive basis. Applicants will be supported by the designated programme team at Wits University throughout the application process. Applications will open in September 2024 and close in October 2024. Successful candidates will be enrolled in the PhD programme in January 2025.

PART 2: PhD in Sustainable African Futures

The Doctoral Programme in African Sustainable Futures is an innovative doctoral programme that can be taken on a full-time (3 years) or part-time (up to 6 years) basis. It will be delivered primarily online under co-supervision by leaders in their fields at UoE and Wits. Students will meet with their supervisors for an advanced training session in person in Edinburgh in December 2026. Each student will also be expected to undertake a partially subsidized research placement with a workplace partner selected by the programme team during the course of the PhD.

Programme Structure (assuming full-time- 3 years)*

January, 2025 – December 2025 (Year 1)	Orientation & Regular online co-supervision	Students will be expected to lead and/or participate in regular online seminars across the lifespan of the programme
January 2026- December 2026 (Year 2)	Students meet with their supervisors in Edinburgh for 2 weeks & Regular online co-supervision	
January – December, 2027 (Year 3)	Regular online co-supervision	
July 2028	Graduation	

Table 2. PhD Programme in Sustainable African Futures – Full time

Programme Structure (assuming part-time – up to 6 years maximum)

January, 2025 – December 2025 (Year 1)	Orientation & Regular online co-supervision	<i>Students will be expected to lead and/or participate in regular online seminars across the lifespan of the programme</i>
January 2022- December 2026 (Year 2)	Students meet with their supervisors in Edinburgh for 2 weeks & Regular online co-supervision	
January – December, 2026 (Year 3)	Partially funded internship with selected industry partner & Regular online co-supervision	
January – December 2027 (Year 4)	Regular online co-supervision (PT)	
January, 2028 – December, 2029 (Year 5)	Regular online co-supervision (PT)	
January, 2030 – December, 2030 (Year 6)	Regular online co-supervision (PT)	
July 2031	Graduation	

Table 3. PhD Programme in Sustainable African Futures – Part-time

Funding

The programme is in partnership with the [Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program](#)

Costs covered during the PhD programme are:

- Tuition fees
- Participation in two sustainability schools (in person) (one in Edinburgh (2025) one in Johannesburg (2027)), including visa applications for South Africa entry, vaccinations as required, accommodation and subsistence while in Johannesburg, return flights and internal travel.
- Research placements of between 1 and 6 months will be arranged for students at some point in the second or in the third year of the PhD. A stipend to cover costs for the placement with external industry (or appropriate workplace) partner.

Scholarships are granted for 3 years for full time study and six years for part time study for the PhD.

Annual reporting on progress will be mandatory.

Application Process for the PhD Programme

Applications for the programme will open in September 2024 and close in December 2024

Eligibility

Only candidates that have completed the MScR in Sustainable African Futures are eligible to apply for the PhD programme. Candidates invited to apply for this programme will submit an online application form. In addition to the online application form, applicants must upload the following mandatory documents:

- A time plan that demonstrates that the doctoral thesis dissertation will be completed in good time
- A recommendation letter from the Masters supervisor at the University of Edinburgh
- A 2-5 page concept paper for the proposed PhD project.

This application will only be valid if all the required documents are timeously submitted via the Wits portal. The portal will close at 24:00 GMT on the last application day. Applications submitted via other channels will not be accepted. Incomplete applications cannot be considered.

Online WESAF Information session with partner institutions

An online information session with all partner institutions will be held on:

Date: Thursday, 13 April 2023

Time: 16:00 to 17:00 SAST / 15:00 - 16:00 UK

Register Here: shorturl.at/tyGT5

The recording of this session is available at <https://www.wits.ac.za/wesaf/>

Contact and Queries

Please ensure you have read all the guidance provided to you [via the website](#) and the [application form](#). If you are still unable to find an answer to your query, please contact the MCF team at WESAF.UoE@ed.ac.uk for all admissions-related questions. For questions relating to the wider WESAF programme please contact the Wits team at wesaf.dp@wits.ac.za.