

SA needs postgraduates

The University of Johannesburg has established a centre to support students at these levels

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SOUTH African universities are facing the challenge of acquiring more postgraduate enrolments.

The country produces too few graduates to satisfy the country's developmental needs of growing the economy and improving its human resource capacity.

Underlining the desperate situation Prof Shireen Motala, head of the University of Johannesburg's Postgraduate Centre, revealed that the country had produced about 1500 doctoral graduates in 2011,

"International demand for South African graduates and the ongoing brain-drain cause further shrinkage of this small body of professionals, adding urgency to the situation," Motala said.

Postgraduate students are essential to a university's research output, a factor that plays a significant part in global university rankings.

"These rankings are dominated by academic establishments in the US and the UK, with only one SA institution, the University of Cape Town, appearing with any regularity among the world's top 200," Motala said.

She said the legacy of exclusion was at the heart of our poor postgraduate record.

"The number of successful undergraduates filtering through our universities provides insufficient throughput to postgraduate levels. The cost of postgraduate study is as much to blame and,



IMPERATIVE: Prof Shireen Motala says postgraduate students are essential to a university's research output. PICTURE: UJACZA

although funding can be accessed, it is limited. A need for postgraduates is a challenge many developing countries are facing.

"A notable exception is Brazil, which offers free education up to doctorate (PhD) level at public universities, funded federally and through the government," she said.

Motala emphasised that postgraduate students need multiple forms of comprehensive support including development of research

competencies and academic writing for publications as well as ongoing mentoring and information sources.

"They need to be pointed in the direction of funders. In South Africa, where postgraduate students tend to be more mature, studying part-time and juggling job and family obligations, time to completion often takes longer than it should, she said.

In their initiatives to upgrade postgraduate studies and increase

enrolment, local universities have opted for different models.

The University Of Johannesburg (UJ) has gone for a cross-disciplinary approach, establishing the Postgraduate Centre (PGC) three years ago under the directorship of Prof Motala. Its mandate is to provide support in the broadest sense – from accommodation to quality scholarship – to 6 000 students in its postgraduate community.

"UJ has committed to being

among the top universities globally."

"Research capacity within the PGC is essential to increase its legitimacy and enable it to interact at the appropriate level with similar structures within South Africa and abroad. This capacity will also enable the PGC to develop research-led qualifications that can be offered to champion specific areas of interdisciplinary research," Motala said.

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