



TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR A SOLICITED WRC PROJECT

KEY STRATEGIC AREA	KSA 9 (Business Development and Innovation)
THRUST	3 (Business Development)
PROGRAMME	2 (Capacity building and training programmes)
TITLE	Developing and piloting a model that shifts water graduates from bridging programmes and academia into employment

Background and Rationale

Youth unemployment sits at a staggering 34% for South African graduates. In January 2021, the Water Research Commission (WRC) together with the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) and partners began the piloting of a work exposure and bridging programme – the Water Graduate Employment Programme (Water GEP) under the Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES).

Investing in employment transitioning unemployed graduates is important in building on past education investments and creating economic buffers that support New and Just Transitions for a post-COVID future. The National System of Innovation (NSI) framework and Water and Industrialisation Master Plans, aimed at economic recovery, raise these key factors and the need for inclusive socio-economic development. The vulnerability of unemployed graduates in the South African labour market cannot go unaddressed and should be viewed as a key initiative within South Africa's Economic Recovery Plan.

The Water GEP is currently testing a mentorship and work exposure model that provides training and placements of graduates across the country. In its first phase it provided approximately 400 graduates with work exposure and mentoring opportunities, with many rising to the challenge to improve their employability. Yet, the shift into direct employment still needs to be made.

Majority of SA's public institutions are facing capacity challenges with decreased pipeline of young water graduates and professionals entering the workplace. These employment opportunities are not easily accessible. Insights from Water GEP I highlighted that factors such as employer networking, graduate career development portfolios and professional accreditation are just a few factors that prevent the shift from academia and bridging programmes like internships into full time employment. Graduates are also not technologically savvy to enter the world of work where virtual and remote working is becoming the norm in certain contexts due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic. No study has been done to date on the impacts this will have on graduate employment and entrance into the workplace. Nor have there been any recommendations for academic curriculum shifts to support technical capability application and specialisation in a shifting post-COVID economy.

This initiative will form part of the broader Water Graduate Employment Programme (Water GEP) Phase 2 which falls under the Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES) and will run for 9-12 months between November 2021 and September 2021. The Water GEP provides for graduate stipends and training (budgets). The overarching objective of the programme is to catalyse job creation in three inter-linked areas (work exposure placements, business incubation, and shifting graduates into employment) that

supports sustainable economic development. This TOR specifically refers to Leg 3 that shifts graduates into employment. Water GEP Phase 1 has created a number of pathways for recently graduated youth including access to host institutions and potential employers. Current monitoring and evaluation suggests that 20-25% of supported graduates were performing within the expectations of the host organisations and have shown contributions in their place of work.

Objectives

General

This terms of reference aims to: *develop and pilot a model that shifts 100 top performing Water GEP phase 1 graduates into employment whilst building new knowledge on the transition of a post-COVID youth workforce for water security.*

Specific:

- Develop a water graduate employment model to shift graduates from bridging programmes and academia into employment for 100 Water GEP 1 graduates (combination of virtual and in-person where applicable).
- Pilot the model by transitioning 100 Water GEP I graduates into employment to test its applicability within the South African water and linked sector contexts;
- Undertake action research (monthly – inception to completion) to develop insights into the transition water graduates into employment and of a post-COVID youth workforce for water security.
- Develop in collaboration with WRC a policy brief for national discussion
- Project Manage, lead and collaborate with broader project teams (placement and incubator sub-projects) to support and input into aligning, reporting, monitoring and evaluation.

Deliverables:

1. Inception report and plan that includes the:
 - a. Overarching project management plan for the programme development and models (all 3 legs)
 - b. water graduate employment model, design and roll-out (methodology, employer matching, stipend-salary short-term match, materials, career development coaching, professional accreditation, employer networking, partnerships, scheduling, budgeting, etc with engagement with the broader Water GEP project teams/legs);
2. Pilot, test and report on the overall Water GEP II programme, employment model induction, water sector orientation, employer negotiations and contracting, employment basics phase of the model with 100 graduates which includes virtual and possible in-field career coaching and employer/professionalisation engagement;
3. Pilot, test and report on the overall Water GEP II programme, employment coaching, employment readiness, employment transition learnings building on the basics phase (includes virtual and in-field engagements, panels, contracting and feedback mechanisms)
4. Research report that outlines new knowledge and insights into shifting water graduates into employment, trends in local and global post-COVID youth workforce with recommendations for future research, graduate support, policy and practice.

Lighthouse:

- Green Economy

- Sustainable Water Behaviours

Knowledge Tree

- Human Capital Development
- Sustainable solutions

Time Frame: 11 months (graduate support from 15 November 2021 until May 2022, research and reporting outputs May 2022 until September 2022).

Total Funds Available: R 1650 000.00 (incl vat)

Project Management, Reporting and Administration capped at: R300 000.00
Research, Training and Implementation: R 1 350 000.00