



UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE - SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY FOR AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION

UFS-SASAE DOCTORAL SCHOLARSHIP TERMS OF REFERENCE



UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT
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SASAE
SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY FOR
AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION
Empowering Agriculture For Generations

1. Background and Rationale

Agricultural extension and advisory services are central to agricultural development, farmer learning, innovation, food-system transformation, and the translation of policy and science into practice. Yet the institutional histories, professional networks, and voluntary associations that sustain the extension profession are often poorly documented. As a result, important knowledge about how professional identity is built, how practitioners organise themselves, how branches remain active, and how a national society survives and contributes over time can remain tacit or be lost.

The South African Society for Agricultural Extension (SASAE) has developed over approximately six decades as a voluntary professional society. It has sustained its activities largely through the commitment of its members, provincial or regional branches, conferences, professional exchange, and other member-supported mechanisms. This institutional journey represents an important body of practice-based knowledge. Documenting it can contribute not only to SASAE's own learning and renewal, but also to the wider professionalisation and strengthening of agricultural extension in South Africa and elsewhere on the continent.

As part of the SASAE 60th celebration, the University of Free State (UFS) Research Chair in Communication for Innovation and SASAE launched a joint UFS-SASAE doctoral scholarship. The initiative is part of the Research Chair flagship initiative on Wearing Scientific Goggles, which encourages practitioners and institutions to turn implementation experience into systematic inquiry, credible evidence, and usable knowledge of scientific value. The successful candidate will be located within a supportive organisation and will have access to both academic supervision and the institutional knowledge, networks, and records of SASAE.

2. Purpose of the Terms of Reference

These Terms of Reference define the purpose, thematic scope, eligibility requirements, scholarship provisions, application process, selection arrangements, governance responsibilities, and expected outputs of the joint UFS–SASAE doctoral scholarship.

3. Purpose of the Scholarship

The scholarship is intended to support one suitably qualified agricultural extension practitioner to undertake a PhD that produces a rigorous, useful, and forward-looking account of SASAE as a voluntary professional



society. The study should examine how the Society has evolved, operated, sustained itself, and contributed to the agricultural extension profession, and should generate an empirically grounded framework or set of recommendations for its future strengthening and for possible adaptation by comparable organisations.\

4. Indicative doctoral research focus

Applicants should propose a coherent doctoral study within the following overarching theme:

INDICATIVE THEME: Sustaining a voluntary professional society: the institutional evolution, contribution, branch dynamics and future strengthening of the South African Society for Agricultural Extension (SASAE)

The final research title and design will be refined through the UFS doctoral admissions and proposal development process. The study may address any of the following interconnected areas:

- The historical evolution of SASAE, including key phases, turning points, achievements, challenges, and institutional adaptations;
- The value and contribution of SASAE to its members, the extension profession, employers, policy processes, professional learning, and agricultural development;
- The mandates, roles, operating practices, and relationships of the national structure and provincial or regional branches;
- The organisational, leadership, financial, relational, and voluntary mechanisms through which SASAE has remained active and substantially self-sustaining;
- The motivations, identities, incentives, and forms of professional commitment that encourage members and leaders to contribute their time and expertise;
- The role of conferences, publications, professional exchange, mentorship, networks, and other platforms in sustaining learning and professional identity;
- Patterns of participation and inclusion, including the involvement and progression of early-career practitioners, women, young professionals, and practitioners from diverse institutional and disciplinary backgrounds;
- The Society's institutional memory, archives, practitioner stories, and undocumented knowledge, and mechanisms for preserving and using this knowledge;



- The governance, renewal, and succession arrangements required for future relevance and sustainability; and
- Lessons that may inform other extension societies and voluntary professional organisations in Africa and beyond.

5. Scope Boundaries and Exclusion

The scholarship is deliberately focused on SASAE as a voluntary professional society and institutional system. It is NOT intended to duplicate studies already identified within the broader UFS research programme.

Therefore, the proposed study must NOT

- Focus primarily on national government policy for the professionalisation of agricultural extension.
- Focus on the broader professionalisation registration journey, including engagement with statutory or other professional bodies.

Applicants may discuss policy and professionalisation where these form part of SASAE's institutional history or operating environment; however, these should remain contextual rather than becoming the principal unit of analysis.

The principal unit of inquiry should remain SASAE—its history, structures, branches, members, institutional practices, contributions, sustainability, and future development.

6. Expected Scholarly and Practice Outputs

The successful candidate will be expected to produce outputs that meet UFS academic requirements and to return useful knowledge to SASAE and the wider profession. Expected outputs include:

- An approved doctoral research proposal and ethics application;
- A completed PhD thesis that meets UFS requirements;
- Peer-reviewed scholarly publications in accordance with the agreed doctoral publication plan;
- A concise institutional history or synthesis suitable for SASAE members and partners;
- A practical institutional sustainability and renewal framework or roadmap for SASAE;
- Presentations or learning dialogues with SASAE structures and relevant professional audiences;
- A responsibly curated inventory of relevant archival and oral-history materials, subject to consent, ownership, and data-governance requirements; and



- Accessible practitioner-centered products such as briefs, stories, podcasts, case studies, or conference contributions, as agreed with the supervisory team and SASAE.

7. Scholarship Provisions

Subject to final written confirmation, applicable UFS rules, and the availability of funds, the scholarship is expected to cover approved UFS doctoral tuition and compulsory registration-related costs, writeshop support, research travel, fieldwork, data collection, editing, and publication charges for the funded period. The precise value, duration, renewal conditions, and allowable costs will be stated in the scholarship award letter.

IMPORTANT: Unless expressly included in the award letter, the scholarship should not be assumed to cover a living stipend, salary replacement, equipment, or other incidental costs. Applicants should disclose any additional funding needs and existing support.

Continuation of funding will normally depend on satisfactory annual progress, continued registration, compliance with the agreed research plan, participation in required doctoral activities, fulfilment of reporting requirements, and observance of UFS academic and financial rules.

8. Eligibility Requirements

Applicants must meet all the following minimum requirements:

- Meet, or be able to meet, the UFS admission requirements for doctoral study in the relevant academic field;
- Hold an appropriate master's degree or equivalent qualification recognised for doctoral admission;
- Be a practising agricultural extension or advisory services professional, or have a clearly demonstrated professional role closely connected to the field;
- Be a member of SASAE and demonstrate a substantive interest in the extension profession and institutional learning;
- Be able to access and engage appropriately with SASAE members, branches, leaders, partners, and relevant records;
- Have the time, employer support where applicable, and personal commitment required to complete a PhD;



- Be willing to participate actively in the UFS doctoral cohort and agree to scholarly-development activities; and
- Declare any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest.

Early- and mid-career extension practitioners are particularly encouraged to apply because the scholarship seeks to strengthen continuity, future leadership, and sustained knowledge production within the profession. Career stage will, however, be considered together with academic readiness, professional commitment, research potential, and the quality of the proposed study; it will not replace the requirement for merit and doctoral readiness.

9. Application Requirements

Applicants should submit a complete application through the channel specified in the call. The application package should include:

Component	Requirement
Motivation letter	A concise explanation of the applicant's interest, professional commitment, fit with the scholarship and intended contribution to SASAE and the extension profession.
Concept note	Approximately 3–5 pages outlining the proposed title, background, problem, purpose, indicative questions or objectives, conceptual orientation, methodology, expected contribution and feasibility.
Curriculum vitae	Including qualifications, extension experience, professional affiliations, research exposure, publications and relevant leadership or voluntary service.
Academic records	Certified qualifications and transcripts required for preliminary eligibility assessment and UFS admission.
Professional support	A letter from the employer or relevant authority confirming awareness of the application and, where applicable, reasonable support for doctoral participation.
References	Contact details or letters from two referees able to comment on the applicant's academic potential, professional conduct and commitment.
Declarations	A statement covering other funding, conflicts of interest, previous doctoral registration and the originality of the concept note.



10. Nomination, Screening, and Selection Process

To combine broad access with a manageable and credible review process, selection will take place through a staged procedure involving SASAE branches, a joint review mechanism, and UFS doctoral admission processes.

10.1. Call and Branch Mobilisation

SASAE will circulate the approved call through its structures and invite eligible practitioners to submit applications in the prescribed format.

- Submission: All candidates submit their 3-page proposals directly through the UFS systems
- Application launch date: 15 October 2026
- Application closing date: 15 November 2026

10.2. Branch-Level Screening

Each branch may review eligible applications and nominate up to two candidates, using the approved criteria and conflict-of-interest safeguards.

- Distribution: The UFS team routes the collected applications to the respective SASAE branches.
- Evaluation: Branches verify membership and evaluate the candidates using a standardized, supplied rubric.
- Shortlisting: Each branch submits their Top 2 candidates back to the central team by 2 December 2026
- Branch screening date: 16 November to 2 December 2026

10.3. Joint Technical Review

A joint UFS–SASAE review committee will assess nominated applications for eligibility, quality, fit, feasibility, and potential contribution.

- Joint Review: A small technical committee comprising UFS and SASAE representatives reviews the top 12 submissions.
- Selection: The final winning PhD proposal is selected before the holiday break.



10.4. Shortlisting

The committee will identify a shortlist, anticipated to comprise up to five candidates, subject to the quality and number of applications received.

10.5. Concept Defence and Interview

Shortlisted candidates will present and defend their concept notes before the joint panel and respond to questions about doctoral readiness, professional commitment, access, and feasibility.

10.6. Recommendation and Due Diligence

The panel will rank candidates, record its reasons, and recommend a preferred candidate and, where appropriate, a reserve candidate.

- Announcement: The winner is officially notified by the 15th of January 2027

10.7. UFS Admission and Award

The scholarship recommendation does not constitute doctoral admission. The preferred candidate must complete and satisfy all UFS application, admission, registration, ethics, and administrative requirements before the award is activated.

- Onboarding: The selected candidate receives dedicated support from the team to successfully navigate the UFS university application and registration process ahead of the April registration.

11. Selection Criteria and Weighting

Criterion	Weight	Assessment focus
Academic readiness and research potential	20%	Evidence of doctoral-level capability, analytical strength, writing ability and readiness to undertake sustained independent research.
Professional relevance and commitment	15%	Depth and relevance of extension experience; commitment to the profession; likelihood of using the doctorate for continued contribution rather than credential acquisition alone.



Quality of the concept note	25%	Clarity, coherence, originality, methodological promise, feasibility and potential scholarly contribution.
Alignment with the scholarship scope	20%	Clear focus on SASAE as a voluntary professional society; attention to institutional history, branches, sustainability, contribution and renewal; avoidance of excluded duplication.
Access, relationships and feasibility	10%	Realistic ability to engage branches, members, leaders, archives and partners while maintaining ethical independence.
Potential for institutional and wider impact	10%	Capacity to produce useful outputs for SASAE and lessons relevant to the extension profession in South Africa and Africa.
Total	100%	

The panel may establish a minimum overall threshold and minimum scores for critical criteria before assessment begins. The scoring guide, declarations, and panel record should be retained for transparency and auditability.

12. Governance and Responsibilities

12.1. University of the Free State

- Provide the confirmed scholarship funding in accordance with the award conditions;
- Manage doctoral application, admission, registration, and academic processes;
- Appoint or approve suitably qualified supervisors and provide academic quality assurance;
- Include the candidate in the relevant doctoral cohort and research-development activities;
- Guide proposal development, ethical clearance, progress monitoring, and scholarly outputs; and
- Participate in the joint selection and governance arrangements.



12.2. SASAE

- Circulate and promote the call through its structures and branches;
- Coordinate or oversee fair branch-level nomination and screening;
- Nominate suitable representatives for the joint review and advisory processes;
- Facilitate appropriate access to members, former leaders, branches, records, and institutional networks, subject to permissions and ethics;
- Support institutional learning dialogues and uptake of relevant findings; and
- Protect the integrity of the process by managing conflicts of interest and avoiding undue influence over findings.

12.3. Successful Candidate

- Complete all UFS admission, registration, ethics, and progress requirements;
- Develop and implement a rigorous, feasible, and ethically sound doctoral study;
- Maintain scholarly independence while engaging respectfully with SASAE and its stakeholders;
- Participate in supervision, cohort activities, seminars, and agreed professional-learning platforms;
- Submit required progress and financial reports;
- Produce the agreed academic and practitioner-centred outputs; and
- Acknowledge the scholarship partnership in outputs in accordance with the agreed wording.

12.4. Supervisory and Advisory Arrangements

UFS will appoint the formal supervisory team in accordance with university policy. Where suitably qualified and approved, SASAE-affiliated academics or professionals may contribute as co-supervisors, advisers, resource persons, or members of a reference group. Advisory participation does not displace the authority of the UFS supervisory and academic-governance structures.

13. Research Integrity, Independence, and Knowledge Governance

- The research must comply with UFS research ethics requirements, applicable legislation, and institutional policies.
- Participation by SASAE members and stakeholders must be voluntary and based on appropriate informed-consent processes.



- The candidate must distinguish institutional participation and support from control over analysis or conclusions.
- Sensitive, confidential, and personal information must be managed in accordance with an approved data management plan.
- Ownership, access, archiving, and future use of interviews, historical records, images, and other materials must be agreed in advance and reflected in consent and permission arrangements.
- Authorship and acknowledgment must follow accepted scholarly standards and reflect actual intellectual contribution. Access, position, or funding alone does not confer authorship.
- SASAE should be given an opportunity to comment on factual accuracy and institutional sensitivities in practitioner-facing outputs, without compromising academic independence or the right to report substantiated findings.

