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In partnership with



Scholars Program

# The University of the Witwatersrand & the University of Edinburgh

## Masters by Research Sustainable African Futures

In partnership with the Mastercard Foundation

Call for Scholarship Applications 2026

Closing date: **2 February 2026**

**Wits-Edinburgh Sustainable African Futures Doctoral Programme**

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***The University of Edinburgh (UoE) and the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) are pleased to invite applications to their collaborative Masters by Research in Sustainable African Futures.***

***Please note that recruitment is for an online Masters programme only, and there is no affiliated funding for an associated Wits-Edinburgh Sustainable African Futures (WESAF) doctoral programme.***

### **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, that include local communities and knowledge. This will ensure that solutions and programs aimed at sustainable development are not dominated by agendas from the Global North. Rather, just transitions in the Global South should respond to local needs and resource availability, such as for agriculture, mineral wealth, green energy, organisational effectiveness, and infrastructure. This requires local 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 emerging researchers and academics in higher educational institutions whilst grappling with the critical issues of sustainable development in their fields of interest. The programme seeks to foster a more interdisciplinary approach to tackling the key threats to sustainable development in Africa and beyond.*

## **About the WESAF Doctoral Programme**

The WESAF Doctoral Programme was established in 2023 and has so far supported a cohort of MScR students and a cohort of PhD candidates. **This call is in relation to a 2<sup>nd</sup> cohort of MScR candidates only.** The WESAF Doctoral Programme aims to provide research training to emerging researchers through an interdisciplinary masters research degree on sustainability on the African continent. WESAF offers a novel blended approach. Whilst primarily an online Masters by research degree, integral to the programme are in-person elements, including an in-person sustainability school, focused on enhancing knowledge in the field of sustainability research. Supervision will be delivered by academics from the University of Edinburgh (UoE).

The program will recruit a cohort of students to complete sustainability-focused masters studies. Through its unique approach and emphasis on advanced research design and methods training, the WESAF Doctoral Programme will produce a powerful cohort of African research specialists committed to addressing Africa's sustainability challenges on its own terms. Students who successfully complete the masters will be well placed to pursue doctoral programmes at UoE, Wits, or other institutions.

## ***Aims, outcomes, and innovations***

Institutions are committed to collaboratively producing the kinds of knowledge that will shape dignified, equitable, and sustainable futures for people across the world. WESAF aims to:

- Equip emerging researchers and academics to grapple with the complex, continental challenges for sustainable development
- Generate inter- and transdisciplinary approaches to sustainability in Africa
- Incubate intersectoral academic and industry aligned African strategies for sustainability with global impact.
- Strengthen regional research capacity networks through networking of partner institutions and partner universities
- Outcomes will include:
  - Graduates will have the ability 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
  - Produce practitioners and academics who can apply their research to solving real-world problems
- Innovations include:
  - The programme will be delivered online with some in-person elements delivered at the University of the Witwatersrand
  - All students will be supervised by Faculty from the University of Edinburgh
  - WESAF Fellows from this cohort will be able to access the wider network of Mastercard Foundation WESAF Fellows

## **MScR by Research in Sustainable African Futures**

The MSc by Research (MScR) in Sustainable African Futures will be delivered predominantly online and administered by the University of Edinburgh. All applications should be made through the University of Edinburgh admission portal (see “How to Apply”, below).

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.

### ***Program 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, which is an extended research project of 18,000 words. This will allow students to explore and develop research ideas that could act as a launch pad into doctoral work. 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 online seminars offered by the University of Edinburgh.

Students in this program will also take part in 2 compulsory Sustainability Schools that will be held in person at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg.

Emerging researchers at partner universities may be expected to undertake several hours of work per week for either the partner institution (see link below), the University of the Witwatersrand, or the University of Edinburgh. This is intended to support emerging researchers in developing an academic and research network and in their professional development.

Online studies are an excellent way to earn a qualification for those who would like to continue working and prefer to study in their local context. Online qualifications through the University of Edinburgh are equivalent to degrees taught on campus.

**The MScR program can only be undertaken on a full-time basis and will run from September 2026 to August 2027.**

<b>September 2026</b>	In-person Sustainability School at Wits University (approx. 5 days)	Pre-orientation to the Postgraduate Program
<b>September - December 2026</b>	Teaching term 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data Collection (core course)*</li> <li>• Two online micro-methods courses – no credit</li> </ul>
<b>January – March 2027</b>	Teaching term 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research Design (core course)*</li> <li>• Dynamics of African Development (core course)*</li> </ul>
<b>April/May [TBD] 2027</b>	In person sustainability school at Wits (approx.9 days long)	Social and academic activities with opportunities for networking
<b>April – August 2027</b>	Teaching term 3	Dissertation design & writing under an academic supervisor

Table 1. MScR Program in Sustainable African Futures

\*Please note that the timing of these courses may be subject to change.

### **Funding**

The program is delivered in partnership with the [Mastercard Foundation](#).

Costs covered during the 12 months of the MSc by Research program 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.
- Workload relief for faculty / work experience stipend for early career researchers
- Laptops and connectivity stipend where appropriate
- Reading material will be accessible online through the University of Edinburgh 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 **10<sup>th</sup> December 2025 and 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2026**. UoE and Wits will recruit applications from a pool of early career researchers and staff in 14 African partner institutions. These partner institutions are:

1. Ain Shams University
2. University of Dar es Salaam

3. University of Ghana
4. University of Ibadan
5. University of Malawi
6. University of Mauritius
7. University of Rwanda
8. University of the Witwatersrand
9. University of Free State
10. Eduardo Mondlane University
11. Makerere University, Uganda
12. Universite Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar
13. University of Namibia
14. Moi University

### ***Eligibility***

The target group for scholarships are early career researchers and University staff members who meet the requirements to pursue a social sciences masters 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 Masters programme at the University of Edinburgh (A UK 2:1 Honours degree, or its international equivalent).
- Ideally demonstrate a level of English language competency that will enable the candidate to succeed in their studies, regardless of their nationality or country of residence. Support may be offered to offer holders who are slightly below the required IELTS band to help them reach the necessary admissions requirement, but all applicants will need a foundation in English to be eligible.
- *Be either:*
  - a) recent graduates from the 14 partner universities with strong interests in pursuing a career in academia and/or research, OR
  - b) demonstrably involved in research projects of one of the 14 partner universities OR
  - c) a staff member at one of the 14 partner universities (including lecturers, early career researchers, professional service staff in arts and humanities, etc).have generally completed their last university degree not more than 3.5 years ago at the time of application
- Applicants must be 35 or under the year the programme commences. Therefore, for the 2026/27 academic year, we accept applications from those born on or after 1 January 1991. Anyone born in 1990 and prior is not eligible.
- Be a resident and citizen or hold refugee status in an African country (including North Africa).

***Women, applicants from refugee and displaced backgrounds, candidates with disabilities, and candidates who have not completed a Masters degree are especially encouraged to apply.***

## **How to Apply**

To apply for this program please click [here](#).

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)
- Your final official university degree certificate and final official transcript.

***Please note that preparation of this application requires applicants to source 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.***

Students completing the three core courses and the dissertation will exit with a MSc Research in Sustainable African Futures. A Masters by Research is an ideal qualification for individuals interested in pursuing a doctoral programme or seeking professional development, especially if research is an integral part of one's daily work.

***There is no affiliated funding for an associated WESAF doctoral programme.***

The MSc by Research will be conferred by the University of Edinburgh at graduations in November/December 2027 virtually or in-person in Edinburgh. The grant will not cover travel to graduate in person at the University of Edinburgh.

## **Online programme information session**

A recording of an information session for interested applicants is available [here](#).

## **Contact and Queries**

Please ensure you have read all the guidance provided to you via this website and the application form. If you are still unable to find an answer to your query, please contact the team at [mcfsp@ed.ac.uk](mailto:mcfsp@ed.ac.uk). For questions relating to the wider WESAF program please contact the Wits team at [wesaf@wits.ac.za](mailto:wesaf@wits.ac.za).