

Good day

We approach you about our national fundraising campaign, the aim of which is to provide each postgraduate student in South Africa with their own copy of the Postgraduate Toolkit on CD.

The Renaissance Network, in association with Layla Cassim ERS Consultants CC is excited to initiate this national Postgraduate Capacitation Campaign (PCC) in the transforming field of South African higher education, in the build-up to Youth Day in June 2016.

Dr Layla Cassim, a thirty-two year old social entrepreneur, designed and developed the Postgraduate Toolkit on CD, which was launched in November 2011 in Johannesburg. This is a pioneering initiative to assist postgraduate students across disciplines to complete their degrees. The founding Patron of this initiative from its inception in 2011 is Ms Wendy Luhabe, a leading businesswoman in South Africa and the former Chancellor of the University of Johannesburg. The Toolkit has been endorsed by a number of academics and researchers, whose written testimony of its merit and benefits for postgraduate students features in the Toolkit. The Toolkit is a holistic resource that covers the entire research process, from how to write a research proposal, to how to apply for funding, key concepts in research design and methodology, how to write a thesis, publishing an academic paper, poster and oral presentations on the research project, project management principles in research, the student-supervisor-university-workplace relationship and the role of the supervisor as a mentor.

From its inception, in the past four and a half years, over two thousand students at many universities in South Africa and internationally, especially in the SADC region, have used the Postgraduate Toolkit as a resource to aid them in their studies at all three higher education levels, namely honours, masters and the doctoral levels. Distance students, who are not based on campus and may thus find it difficult to access support services at their universities, have found the Toolkit particularly useful, as have visually impaired students, since the Toolkit is in electronic format and can be accessed with appropriate software. The 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the Toolkit includes voice recordings as well, which further enhances accessibility.

Institutions such as Stellenbosch University and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University have obtained a licence from Layla to make some of the content of the Toolkit available to their postgraduate students on their intranet. Layla has also presented the Toolkit at the National Research Foundation's annual conferences. She also conducts specialist training workshops nationally on key themes from the Toolkit, such as Research Proposal Writing, Research Design and Methodology and Thesis Writing, to academics, researchers and students who are embarking on or busy with postgraduate studies. These workshops are facilitated in-house at various universities, and Layla also conducts public workshops, which anyone is welcome to attend.

The Postgraduate Toolkit was revised by Layla with extensive updates, based on useful feedback she has received from users in the past four years and her own observations of the specific learning needs of students in her workshops, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, which also includes voice-over recordings of Layla delivering PowerPoint presentations on certain key topics, in order to make the Toolkit more interactive, was released in August 2015. It has been very well received by users. This initiative remains a dynamic work-in-progress.

**Layla now has a dream. It is a dream of outreach and accessibility. It is a dream to enable the dreams of others to be fulfilled. It is a dream to enable every postgraduate student to attain a postgraduate degree, with the support of an enabling toolkit.**

She wishes to make her Toolkit available to every single registered postgraduate student in South Africa. Although she has kept the selling price of the Toolkit as low as possible, at R400-00 per Toolkit for three years in a row with an increase to R500-00 early this year, many students are still struggling to afford this fee. This reality has given birth to our Postgraduate Capacitation Campaign (PCC) to enable every postgraduate student in this country to own this tool, as a resource to enhance their studies and achieve their dream of a postgraduate qualification.

South Africa needs to significantly increase its PhD production with urgency. This can only be accelerated through the collective commitment of key stakeholders, both in the public and private sectors. Public and private partnerships have the potential to expedite the increase in PhD production to contribute to meeting our social and economic needs as a maturing democracy.

In August 2015, the Department of Higher Education in South Africa introduced the Staffing SA Universities Framework (SSAUF), which aims to train a new generation of younger academics, and to address the current shortage of Black academics, specifically Black female academics. The Department outlined its goal of increasing the PhD output in South Africa to 7000 PhDs annually by 2019. The National Research Foundation, meanwhile, supports the National Development Plan's goals of South Africa producing more than 100 doctoral graduates per million by 2030 (the figure is currently 36 per million) and increasing the percentage of academic staff with PhDs from the current 43% to 75%. The 2010 ASSAf report on the state of the PhD in South Africa, however, has revealed systemic problems at universities, which create blockages to increased PhD output. These problems include inadequate support for postgraduate students and insufficient formal training for supervisors.

Against this background, and in order to achieve the abovementioned goals, there needs to be a concerted attempt made to provide postgraduate students at all levels with the support and expertise necessary to complete their degrees, and to assist supervisors in providing optimal supervision to their students. One of the avenues to contribute to the realisation of such developmental goals is value-adding public/private partnerships that are forged to further the overall aim. The Postgraduate Toolkit makes an important contribution in this regard.

## **How may various stakeholders support our Postgrad Capacitation Campaign?**

### **How can you share Layla's dream in achieving her goal?**

Partners from various key stakeholder groupings are invited to enable Layla to achieve her goal of providing every postgrad student with his/her own copy of her Postgraduate Toolkit. This invitation goes out to all higher institutions of learning, their respective Councils, alumni and SRCs, organised labour, suppliers to the higher education institutions, Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), professional associations and bodies, the media, private-sector organisations with Corporate Social Investment funding, government departments at all three tiers, state-owned entities, political parties and their Youth Wings, non-governmental and community-based organisations, external donor agencies and any interested party who wishes to invest in postgraduate development in South Africa.

There are many important benefits to funders to being involved in this Campaign, including the following: funding postgraduate development can provide a pool of future researchers for the organisation; these researchers can be better equipped to undertake specific research projects that are of strategic importance to the organisation; the Toolkit can assist the Human Resources Department of the organisation in providing better support to employees who are studying for a postgraduate degree; and contributing towards realising government's goal of increased PhD output in South Africa. The Toolkit plays a key role in the enhancing the workplace transformation intent of organisations by being a catalyst for the achievement of Employment Equity and Skills Development goals by equipping employees to raise their formal academic profiles and thereby transition more easily into senior management and specialist roles. For higher education institutions, it is a resource to enhance postgraduate supervision, and to enable the acceleration of women and Black academics/researchers, in particular, into full professorship through the attainment of doctoral degrees. Career enrichment to deanship and executive leadership positions is also made possible through the upliftment of the academic profile of high-potential individuals.

### **The Outreach Goal and Investment**

The retail price of the CD is R 500-00, ex vat and delivery via registered postage.

The first phase of this campaign is to reach **20 000 postgraduate students nationally**. This is our goal for the 2016 academic year. Funders have the liberty to invest any amount they wish, and also indicate which higher education institutions benefit from their donation of Toolkits.

Each donation will be handed to the Research Directorate of the chosen institution. Specific public relations expectations of funders will be accommodated, based on practical and feasible considerations. These can be negotiated between each funder and the Campaign's Project Manager.

Relevant terms and conditions will be clarified in detail with funders, upon receipt of each expression of interest received.

The Postgrad Capacitation Campaign (PCC) commences in May 2016, with a formal launch and fund-raising dinner in Johannesburg planned for 14 July 2016. Regional events will take place during the next few months. Kindly visit our website, [www.laylacassim.co.za](http://www.laylacassim.co.za) for the invitation to the dinner, relevant details and updates.

Relevant supporting information is contained in the attached **Postgraduate Capacitation Campaign's Info Pack**, including the content overview of the Postgrad Toolkit, endorsements from academics and other professionals and users, benefits for funders in both the public and private sectors, an order form and the credentials of both The Renaissance Network and Layla Cassim ERS Consultants CC.

We thank you for your attention and look forward to interacting with you on how your organisation can support our Campaign.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Cassim', is written over a light grey rectangular background.

Ms Kudsiya Cassim

Managing Member: The Renaissance Network

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