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Dr Marianne Engelbrecht, RDA Programme Manager

**Invest in yourself so that others can invest in you: Introducing the Researcher Development Academy**

Pursuing research excellence is no small undertaking and requires the right support and an enabling environment. At Unisa, we strive towards conducting impactful research that benefits not only the institution but contributes to the broader socio-economic African context. Achievement of this lofty goal will depend on growing new generations of research capability and is therefore closely linked to researcher support and transformation. The emergence of the 4IR and changing technologies continue to change and shape the ODEL higher education environment. Reskilling and upskilling have never been more important for researchers hoping to thrive in this new and volatile environment.

Within this context, Unisa initiated a two-year Researcher Development Academy (RDA) Project to address the development needs of our researchers and implement strategies to enable new research engagement opportunities that will contribute to the overall improvement of research support structures and assist in transforming traditional models of research support. The RDA Project was launched on 1 August 2022 by the appointment of the programme manager, Dr Marianne Engelbrecht, to centralize, coordinate and facilitate researcher development and capacity-building programmes throughout the university using an inclusive and collaborative approach.

Researcher development is concerned with the advancement of researchers to optimal levels within their careers through the development of crucial competencies. The enhancement of this knowledge, skills and attributes of researchers are of benefit to the individual’s personal and career development, but also directly linked to the research performance of the university and the broader society relating to the generation of knowledge and innovation. The Unisa RDA will support the advancement of scholarship by providing professional training and development to researchers. It intends to not only promote current research endeavours but also invest in researchers themselves by creating a research-support eco-environment in which especially emerging and developing researchers can acquire new skills and knowledge.

Through the envisaged Researcher Development Framework, the RDA will provide professional training and development opportunities at all stages of the researcher’s career level, from developing researchers to ultimately becoming a research leader. Participation in the academy involves a myriad of activities such as career advice and career mapping, subscribing to individualised activities and training opportunities, conducting self-reviews, and tracking progress, as well as becoming part of a mentorship initiative.

As the year comes to a busy end, it is time to reflect on our personal and career development and achievements and plan for the year ahead. It may be that you are in a better position about your research career today compared to last year, or that your personal development was on the back burner because of demanding activities at work and competing priorities. In contemplating our goals for the year ahead, researchers will be able to make use of deliberate and tailor-made research development initiatives, facilitated by the RDA\* to achieve career goals that have been set.

**“Your future is created by what you do today” .**

\*The RDA will launch in 2023 - For more information on the RDA: engelm1@unisa.ac.za