



## POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH FELLOWS - Pros and Cons of different Visa Types October 2021

**Overview:** Postdoctoral Research Fellows (PDRFs) are required to register as postdoctoral researchers at the University of Cape Town (UCT) via the PeopleSoft administration system. A part of the registration requirements for the International fellow is to (1) Pre-register (a visa and immigration clearance process) followed by (2) Registering with the Faculty. Additional information is captured below on page 5 under *important notices and visa matters*

All international researchers who will be a resident in the Republic of South Africa (RSA) for their research are required to have a relevant visa for the duration of stay in the Republic. First time visa applications (study; visitor's visa for research; critical skills) are obtained from the South African Embassy, High Commission or Consulate in your home country. You will need to refer to the application requirements on their website. Your *visa always needs to be valid* and allow you multiple entry into South Africa.

Kindly refer to the Department of Home Affairs website for more information on the [visa application requirements](#). These requirements may vary from country-to-country; therefore, we recommend that you contact the Consular Office at the [South African Mission Abroad](#) in your home country to confirm the requirements.

**Note:** You *CANNOT change from a tourist/visitor's visa* to any other visa type from within South Africa.

In the Republic of South Africa (RSA), the Department of Home Affairs (DoHA) has officially outsourced the handling and processing of visa applications to a company called Visa Facilitation Services (VFS) Global. The Visa Application Centres (VFS) Global are in major cities across the world. It is important to note VFS Global does not have the authority to grant or refuse visas. VFS Global only accepts the visa applications on their behalf of DoHA. The adjudication and decision to ultimately issue a visa is by the DoHA.

There is no one prescribed visa for PDRFs, they can register with a study visa, visitor's visa for research or a critical skills visa.

**NOTE:** If your area of research and qualification is not on the list of critical skills, you will need to apply for a study visa or an endorsed visitor's visa to cover the postdoctoral fellowship.

All applications accepted from the Visa Facilitation Centre will have a minimum processing time of 8 – 10/12 weeks pending the outcome from the DHA. You can track your application online on the VFS Global website to determine the status of your application.

**Note:** Due to the Covid pandemic, processing timelines will vary due to office closures in accordance with Government Covid regulations. Please check by asking at the Embassy/Mission/Consular/VFS offices when submitting the application.

We advise that applications for *new study visas* should be *submitted at least 12 weeks before the intended departure date* for UCT, as it takes time to process these applications. Applications for a new Study visa is issued at Missions in your home country.

**Note:** Due to the Covid pandemic, processing timelines will vary due to office closures in accordance with Government Covid regulations. Please check by asking at the Embassy/Mission/Consular/VFS offices when submitting the application.

The details below are meant to facilitate a comparison between the pros and cons of the different visa types.



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Type of visa & Description	PROs	CONS
<p><b>Study visa - First time application for a study visa</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Department of Home Affairs application form (BI-1738).</li> <li>2. Passport valid for no less than 30 calendar days after expiry of the intended visit.</li> <li>3. Copies of passport and previous visas.</li> <li>4. A non-refundable DHA application fee of R425 for the study visa as well as the VFS processing fee of R1350.</li> <li>5. Medical and radiology reports, not older than six months.</li> <li>6. Unabridged birth certificate.</li> <li>7. An official letter from UCT confirming the postdoctoral fellowship award and the duration of the award</li> <li>8. A police clearance certificate not older than six months old. If you are not in possession of a police clearance certificate, you can apply through VFS at the point of submitting your study visa application. The police clearance processing fee is R185.</li> <li>9. Relevant certificate if married, widowed, divorced or separated.</li> <li>10. A Yellow Fever vaccination certificate, if required by the Act. This will depend on whether you have resided in or travelled through a Yellow Fever endemic area.</li> <li>11. A letter of undertaking from the International Academic Programmes Office of UCT. To receive a letter of undertaking to support the visa (study or visitors visa for research) please complete <i>section A, B and C</i> of the <a href="#">Letter request webform</a></li> <li>13. In the case of bilateral agreement, a foreign state accepts responsibility for the applicant in terms of a written undertaking to pay for the departure of the applicant.</li> <li>14. Proof of medical cover with a <a href="#">South African medical aid provider</a> registered with the South African Council of Medical Schemes. For more information about <a href="#">Health Insurance</a> NB: The medical aid cover must be active from the expected date of arrival until 31 December in a given academic year. Medical cover is renewed annually for the validity period of your study visa.</li> <li>17. Proof of sufficient financial means to cover subsistence and incidental costs, in the form of a bank statement.</li> <li>18. A return plane ticket (if fellowship is less than one year).</li> <li>19. Details regarding arranged accommodation, if any.</li> </ol> <p>Please note that the documents <b>must be originals or certified copies</b>.</p> <p>* A certified copy is a photocopy of the original document with an original certified stamp indicating that the authorised person, e.g. a Commissioner of Oaths or police officer, has seen the original document.</p> <p>Note: An uncertified photocopy of the original or a photocopy of a certified copy is not sufficient.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ open bank account</li> <li>✓ invite family members.</li> <li>✓ work 20-hours per week.</li> <li>✓ Compared to visitor's visa, there is longer duration before renewal i.e., 60-days from expiration.</li> <li>✓ When renewing the study visa, only requires police certificate for South Africa, after being in South Africa for more than one year. No police clearance from other countries of residence required.</li> <li>✓ Post Doc's on a study can apply for change of conditions to Critical Skills within South Africa</li> <li>✓ If married to a South African, will not be required to pay DHA fee for visa renewal, only the VFS fee will be charged.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More stringent requirements than visitor's visa.</li> </ul>



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Visa type & Description	PROs	CONS
<p><b>Visitor’s visa endorsed for research (more than 3 months up to 3 years)</b>  <b>SECTION 11.1 (b) iii Research</b>            The application requirements are subject to change; therefore, you should make enquiries with your nearest South African mission, consulate abroad or any Home Affairs office to see whether or not you are required to apply for a visa.</p> <p><i>Visas are not issued</i> at any South African port of entry.            If you arrive at a port of entry without a relevant visa, the immigration officials are obliged to instruct you to <i>return to your home country</i>.</p> <p>Foreigners with long term status (<i>work permits/permanent residence</i>) in the neighbouring countries who transit South Africa to return to their employment or residence are not subject to the transit visa, provided they are in possession of proof of their status.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Easier to obtain than study visa</li> <li>✓ May invite family members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No work allowed</li> <li>- Difficulty in opening bank account</li> <li>- Family members may not work in South Africa unless they are on a visa which permits it.</li> <li>- Cannot renew this visa type in South Africa, visa holder must return home to renew their visa from their home country.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Critical Skills visa - <i>Critical Skills is about a SKILL and NOT a title</i></b>  <b>SECTION 19(4) OF THE ACT</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Duly completed online form. Handwritten forms will not be accepted by Home Affairs.</li> <li>2. Passport valid for no less than 30 calendar days after expiry of the intended visit.</li> <li>3. A medical report not older than 6 months</li> <li>4. A radiological report not older than 6 months</li> <li>5. Marriage certificate or in the case of a foreign spousal relationship, proof of official recognition thereof issued by the authorities of the foreign country of the applicant (where applicable).</li> <li>6. The affidavit of spousal relationship to a South African citizen or resident if applicable</li> <li>7. Proof of a union recognised in terms of the recognition of customary marriages act, 1998 (act no. 120 of 1998), where applicable.</li> <li>8. Divorce decree, where applicable.</li> <li>9. Death certificate, in respect of late spouse, where applicable.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The <a href="#">Department of Home Affairs Endorsement</a> for <b>Part-time</b> study only. No need to apply for a condition to study.</li> <li>✓ All advantages of study visa plus unlimited work hour as study is part-time only.</li> </ul> <p>NB: Full time research/study ONLY permissible on a study or visitors visa endorsed for research NOT on a Critical Skills visa/permit.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If your area of research and qualification is not on the list of critical skills, you will need to apply for a study visa or an endorsed visitor’s visa to cover the postdoctoral fellowship.</li> <li>- ONLY PART TIME study allowed</li> <li>- Requires an official job offer.</li> </ul>



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<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Legal separation order, where applicable.</li> <li>11. Police clearance certificate issued by the police or security authority in each country where the relevant applicant resided for 12 months or longer after attaining the age of 18 years, in respect of criminal records or the character of that applicant, which certificate shall not be older than six months at the time of its submission: (provided that the certificate shall not be required from a foreign country in the case of renewal or extension of a visa within the republic)</li> <li>12. A yellow fever vaccination certificate if that person travelled or intends travelling from or transiting through a yellow fever endemic area: (provided that the certificate shall not be required where that person travelled or intends travelling in direct transit through such area)</li> <li>13. A written undertaking by the employer accepting responsibility for the costs related to the deportation of the applicant and his or her dependent family members, should it become necessary (all renewals must be accompanied by an offer of employment or employer contact. no renewal without employment contract except for the occupations listed under the category of life and earth sciences and academics and researchers)</li> <li>14. A written undertaking by the employer to ensure that the passport of his or her employee is valid at all times for the duration of his or her employment (where there is no employer: a written undertaking by the applicant to ensure that the passport of the applicant shall be valid at all times for the duration of his or her temporary visa)</li> <li>15. For the occupations listed under the Critical Skills category of: i) life and earth sciences; and ii) academics and researchers, you are required to provide proof of suitable financial means, if you do not have an employment contract. You will also be required to continue to prove your financial means every year subsequent to receiving your critical skills visa with no work contract.</li> <li>16. Proof that the applicant falls within the critical skills category by specifically indicating the occupation/critical skill for which the application is being made as it appears on the critical skills list.</li> <li>17. Proof of evaluation of the foreign qualification by SAQA and translated by a sworn translator into one of the official languages of the republic.</li> <li>18. If required by law, proof of application for a certificate of registration with the professional body, council or board recognised by SAQA in terms of section 13(1)(i) of the national qualification’s framework act;</li> <li>19. A confirmation, in writing, from the professional body, council or board recognised by SAQA in terms of section 13(1)(0 of the National Qualifications Framework Act, or any relevant government department confirming the skills</li> </ol>	<p>The visa/permit can be issued for a period not exceeding 5 years</p> <p>✓ Suitable for SA graduates who are at Masters’ and PhD level of study that forms a part of the Critical Skills list</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Where there is no offer of employment, the critical skills visa shall be issued for a period not exceeding 12 months.</li> <li>- Work Permit is only valid provided that the holder of the visa has a job offer in South Africa</li> <li>- If the work position continues, applicant can renew the critical skills visa within South Africa. If there is no job offer, and they visa lapses, need to re-apply from home country.</li> </ul>
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or qualifications of the applicant and appropriate post qualification experience, (if not attached, VFS official to check directive 22 of 2014)		
20. Proof of payment of the applicable fee		

### IMPORTANT NOTICES AND VISA MATTERS

- PDRFs require an official letter from the academic host at UCT confirming continuance of research at UCT, the terms of the fellowship, the amount of the fellowship award and the duration for which an extension is required.
- PDRFs moving to South Africa with their children will be required to purchase medical aid cover for their children, regardless of the type of visa held by the PDRF.
- PDRFs married to South Africans and on spousal visas are allowed to register as postdoctoral fellows.
- Critical Skills Application requirements: 5 years' proven Skills and experience in field on the Critical Skills lists; to be registered with Professional body SAQA or Government department in field of classification. Proof of foreign qualification.
- Critical Skills Certificate registrations must be renewed annually-if not maintained it will lapse technically and therefore no longer valid.
- A spouse and dependent children of a holder of a critical skills work visa shall be issued with an appropriate visa valid for a period not exceeding the period of validity of the applicant's critical skills work visa.
- PDRFs who completed their doctoral studies in South Africa, who are applying for critical skills visas are advised to apply for South African permanent residence in parallel with their critical skills visa, if they desire permanent residence.

**\*\* Applicants must have a work offer, in order to apply for Permanent Residence\*\***

If both applications are made in parallel, the applicant receives a concession from having to submit supporting documents for their South African permanent residence application.

**Pre-registration** verifies compliance with immigration and visa regulations. It is a requirement for all international students regardless of whether they travel to South Africa or not.

Pre-registration is the administrative process for:

1. Verifying that an international student has the required immigration visa and study permit required for registration at UCT, and that the student has medical aid cover from a South African medical aid scheme for the full duration of their study visa; and
2. Confirming that all initial fee payments i.e., the postdoctoral fellowship award letter

Both checks require the lifting of blocks to academic registration on students' records. Both pre-registration blocks are administered by the International Office. Once you have been pre-registered, the "blocks" on your profile is lifted allowing you to register with your faculty. New Postdoctoral fellows - contact the Faculty administrator for assistance.

[Pre-registration guidelines](#) – for your information

Click on the link to review [Cost of first time and visa applications](#) in South Africa. Please check the Embassy/Consular/ VFS offices website in your country for the information.

**\*\* Kindly note, the processing timelines may differ due to the impact of the pandemic on operations at the Department of Home Affairs as well as Consular Office Missions Abroad.**