



RESEARCH OFFICE

DIRECTORATE: POSTGRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCHER DEVELOPMENT

Dr Thierry M Luescher

Director: Postgraduate Studies and Researcher Development

Upper Campus - Otto Beit Building

Office for Postgraduate Studies

Rondebosch 7700

Cape Town – South Africa

Cellphone/WhatsApp: +27 (0) 83

3505959

Email: thierry.luescher@uct.ac.za

Postdoctoral Fellowship (2026): International Comparative Higher Education Research

Purpose

The rapid massification of higher education in Africa, the expansion and increasing differentiation of African universities, and the development and consolidation of African research universities such as the University of Cape Town (UCT) prompts increased scientific research into the changing nature of postgraduate education and training, professional and researcher development, and academic career pathways.

The Research Office fellowship provides a unique opportunity for an emerging higher education researcher to participate in international comparative studies into postgraduate studies and researcher development in African and international contexts. The fellow will participate in all stages of the research project; from proposal refinement, fundraising and ethics review to the collection and analysis of empirical data on policies, strategies, structures, services, practices and data that shape postgraduate, postdoctoral and emerging researcher training in African research universities and other internationally leading research universities. The study develops conceptual models, builds empirical knowledge and systems, and will propose policy options (at various levels) that are intended to strengthen African universities postgraduate, research and professional development support; evidence-based decision-making in the sector; research excellence and innovation, and the transformation and sustainability of UCT's postgraduate training and research function in particular; and it will thereby contribute to the development of African research universities and UCT's status as Africa's leading research university.

Call for Applications

The Directorate: Postgraduate Studies and Researcher Development (D:PGRD) in the Research Office is UCT's centre of competence for the cross-disciplinary academic and professional development of postgraduate students, emerging researchers, mid-career research professionals and established research leaders. The Directorate is headed by Dr Thierry M. Luescher, an NRF-rated researcher with expertise in international comparative higher education research and student affairs, and adjunct professor of critical studies in higher education transformation. The Directorate includes the Office for Postgraduate Studies (OPGS) and its transdisciplinarity-focused Knowledge Coop; the Emerging Researcher Programme (ERP) and the Research Leadership Programme (RLP); the Accelerated Transformation of the Academic Programme (ATAP) and Carnegie Developing Emerging Academic Leaders (DEAL) projects (and other externally-funded projects); as well as the Postgraduate Funding Office (PGFO) and the Postdoctoral Office. The Directorate is a founding member of the University's emerging Data Analytics for the Research Enterprise (DARE) hub.

As part of its mandate to support excellent, transformative and sustainable postgraduate studies and researcher development, the D:PGRD conducts international comparative and institutional higher education research into teaching and learning, professional and researcher development, the student



experience and student affairs, at postgraduate level and beyond; higher education policy and practices; and critical studies in higher education transformation. Located within the UCT Research Office, it collaborates closely with the Research Enterprise Directorate and DARE, as well as the Directorate for Research Integrity and the eResearch Centre. Beyond the Research Office, the Directorate seeks to work closely with the Institute for Humanities in Africa (HUMA), the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED), the Neville Alexander School of Education, and with key academic leaders in all faculties and their programmes, the deputy deans for postgraduate studies and research, UCT's research units and research chairs, as well as the other units within the postgraduate studies and research ecosystem of UCT and beyond.

We now invite suitably qualified candidates to apply for a postdoctoral research fellowship in the D:PGRD to participate in an international comparative research project that will describe and analyse the relevant policies, strategies, structures, services, practices and data system of postgraduate, postdoctoral and emerging researcher training and development in an international group of research universities – creating an opportunity to participate in world-leading research on changes in university teaching and learning at postgraduate level, professional and researcher training, and related data systems, and build new capacity in critical higher education research with strong professional and academic career advantages. The fellow will work closely with Dr Thierry M Luescher as the principal investigator and his colleagues in the D:PGRD; with Christina Pather and Albert Baloyi of DARE and Prof Mattia Vaccari at the eResearch Centre; and with academics and peers in one of the Directorate's partner research units/departments (as appropriate for the fellow's disciplinary background and interests).

Academic Criteria and Requirements

Applicants must be under examination or have graduated with a doctoral degree in a relevant discipline, including higher education studies, education, political science, sociology, organizational studies or a related field/discipline, with a doctoral dissertation focusing on higher education. Applicants should:

- Have excellent analytical and research skills, including the use of qualitative and quantitative social research methods.
- Have a strong emerging academic track record (e.g., scholarly and non-scholarly publications, conference presentations, involvement in research projects, teaching, tutoring and training).
- Be competent in a professional work set-up, a team player who is able to work independently.
- Have excellent computer literacy, including training and application in advanced software use in social research (one or more of the following: SPSS, R, Python, Nvivo, Atlas.ti, AI tools); some knowledge of UCT systems application like PeopleSoft, SAP or Amathuba are an advantage.
- Show intellectual curiosity and problem-solving ability; be eager to learn new research methods and flexible in response to changing research directions.
- Interest in postgraduate studies, researcher development, as well as matters concerning the student experience and staff experience of higher education in Africa.
- Interest in participating in conducting postgraduate training workshops; mentorship, supervision and teaching; and social outreach and community engagement.
- Be able to present complex issues clearly to academic and non-academic audiences and interested in participating in scholarly publishing.
- Demonstrate effective academic communication in English, publishing skills, and the willingness and ability to contribute to grant proposals and scholarly dissemination. Knowledge of other African languages is an advantage (e.g., Afrikaans, Arabic, French, seSotho, Kiswahili, isiXhosa or isiZulu).



- Commit to participate in national and international research-related travel and participation in institutional, national and international higher education fora and conferences.
- Have good interpersonal skills, a collegial working style, and the ability to work in a highly diverse work environment.

Award Conditions

Candidates must be available to start as soon as possible, preferably at the beginning of 2026, and must be able to reside in/relocate to Cape Town and attend meetings and work on-site (Upper Campus) at least three days per week. Fellowships are open to South African and international candidates with a valid study permit.

Successful candidates must register for the position at UCT and comply with the University's approved policies, procedures, and practices for postdoctoral research fellows (see: <https://uct.ac.za/research-support-hub/postdoctoral-research-fellows-hub>).

Postdoctoral research fellowships are only available to individuals who have achieved their doctoral degree within the past five years and have not previously held comprehensive professional or permanent academic positions.

Fellows are expected to use the period exclusively for conducting the agreed research, writing from their prior research (e.g., doctoral study) and publishing, limited postgraduate training and teaching/supervision duties (as agreed) and academic travel (e.g., conference travel, field research). They are also required to attend and participate in all relevant research-related activities within the Directorate, the Research Office, as well as an assigned academic department or research institute within UCT.

The successful candidate will enter into a Memorandum of Agreement (MoU) with the Principal Investigator in the Research Office, Directorate: Postgraduate Studies and Researcher Development, and is expected to produce scholarly output or publish papers and other work assignments as specified in their MoU.

Progress reports are required twice a year.

Value and Tenure

This is a one-year fellowship, with the possibility of extension based on excellent performance and availability of funding. The value is **R350,000 per annum** (no relocation costs are available).

Holders may apply for additional funding for field research, research visits or conference participation, as well as for publication-related funding (e.g., APCs, OA contributions).

The fellowship carries no additional benefits or allowances and is compliant with SARS regulations.

Application Requirements

To apply, email a **single PDF** containing the following documents to **Dr Thierry M Luescher (Email: thierry.luescher@uct.ac.za; cc: amanda.bessick@uct.ac.za)**:

- A motivation letter detailing how you are suited for the position, with evidence of research to date.
- A comprehensive CV including a full list of publications/research outputs.



- Contact details of three referees (one must be your PhD or previous post-doc supervisor).
- Copies of all academic transcripts and diplomas.

Selection Process

Eligible and complete applications will be considered by a selection committee constituted from the Research Office and its partner units.

Closing date: Applications are open until the position is filled. Selection starts after 31 December 2025.

Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted and may be required to undergo a competency test.

The RO and D:PGRD reserve the right not to make any appointments or to change the award conditions.

The University of Cape Town reserves the right to disqualify ineligible or incomplete applications. Preference may be given to citizens and permanent residents of South Africa and citizens of any other African country. Fellowships are open to international applicants from any country with a valid study permit.

