**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

# FOR WRITTEN REPLY

## QUESTION NO (3236)

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**“   Ms JF Terblanche (DA) to ask the Minister of Science and Technology:**

**(1) Are there measures that are put in place to protect the reputation of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in order to ensure that evidence-based output remains independent and authoritative in all spheres; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details;**

**(2) What additional steps is the HSRC taking to preserve its autonomy?”**

**(3236)**

**REPLY:**

(1) Yes. The HSRC’s approved Strategic Plan and Annual Performance Plan (2015/16, page 26) makes reference to the key risk of “undue donor/funder influence on the research agenda and pressure to secure income” as a key risk affecting its research programme.

The HSRC depends on a combination of government funding (through its Parliamentary Grant) and external income (in the research context, secured through competitive tender processes, contracts and grants). An over-dependence on a source of funding does carry the risk of potential influence by funders in terms of the issues addressed or not addressed through research, and the way in which research findings are presented.

The following measures are listed as mitigating the above-mentioned risk (ibid.):

* “Engagement between the Board and/or executive team and DST, with a view to securing an additional increase in the parliamentary grant – specifically for innovative research;
* Commitment to science prescripts, whereby the HSRC’s work is defined by the rules of science, rather than political allegiance;
* Broadening the funding portfolio through a concerted effort by the executive team, with Business Development’s support towards expanding HSRC sources of funding to EU countries and possibly East Asia.”

(2) The HSRC has very clear mandated objectives as outlined in its founding legislation, the Human Sciences Research Council Act, Act 17 of 2008. These mandated objectives serve as an enabling framework but also as a source of reference when research opportunities and requests are considered.

When opportunities to undertake externally-funded research are considered, the conditions set by potential funders are considered before a decision is made to respond to that opportunity, or not. The HSRC’s legal department also provides a vetting service for research contracts and will help to safeguard the autonomy as well as intellectual property of the HSRC.

Governance structures of the HSRC benefit from the involvement of independent experts. This does not only refer to statutory structures such as the HSRC Board and its subcommittees, but also to committees such as the HSRC Research Ethics Committee and HSRC Press Board whose Chairpersons and several of the expert members are employed outside the HSRC. At the same time, internal members are also experts in their own right, adding value to discussions and review of submitted documents.

The HSRC places great value on the independent review of research outputs. Researchers are strongly encouraged to publish research in internationally recognised, peer reviewed journals. Other outputs, such as policy briefs and book publications, are also externally reviewed before they are published.