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# Governing International Academic Recruitment in South African Universities: Institutional Rationales and Domestic Capacity Development

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## Abstract

*International academic recruitment can fulfil discipline requirements and enhance scholarly networks; yet its developmental significance hinges on the manner in which universities structure and assess the anticipated contributions. This theoretical study explores the ways in which South African universities might align international recruitment strategies with the enhancement of local academic capabilities. It employs a concentrated critical synthesis of research pertaining to internationalisation, faculty recruitment, and curricular advancement, examined in conjunction with national frameworks for internationalisation and academic staffing. The analysis develops an institutional governance framework comprising substantiated recruitment rationales, explicit developmental commitments, enabling conditions, academic contributions, sustained capability, and institutional review. Its principal argument is that recruitment acquires developmental significance through supported relationships and institutional practices rather than the citizenship or international profile of an appointee. Four propositions specify how clarity of purpose, institutional support, reciprocal collaboration, and contextual evaluation may influence the translation of recruitment commitments into sustained capability. The framework distinguishes immediate staffing provision from developmental activity and enduring institutional capacity, while assigning responsibility to universities and academic teams as well as individual appointees. It also separates the assessment of recruitment fairness from the evaluation of subsequent contributions. An illustrative evaluation matrix identifies evidence relevant to mentoring, postgraduate supervision, curriculum development, research collaboration, and continuity of expertise. No original institutional dataset or fieldwork is reported, and the framework remains subject to empirical evaluation. The article contributes an account of international recruitment as a shared institutional commitment whose purposes, implementation and outcomes require distinct forms of scrutiny. The article recommends integrating recruitment planning with academic development, resourcing reciprocal collaboration and reviewing contributions without reducing scholarly value to nationality or numerical performance indicators.*

**Keywords:** *international academic recruitment; university governance; domestic academic capacity development; internationalisation; academic workforce renewal; institutional accountability; South African universities.*

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# 1. Introduction

International academic recruitment places university staffing within networks of scholarly mobility, collaboration, and professional opportunity. It can bring expertise into a department, connect researchers across institutions and support teaching in specialised fields. These possibilities create a governance question extending beyond whether a vacancy is filled: how does a university establish the conditions under which an appointment contributes to its longer-term academic capability? An international appointment may meet an immediate need while leaving the underlying dependence on a small number of specialists unchanged. Conversely, a relatively modest appointment can support wider development when colleagues have opportunities to collaborate and acquire responsibility (Akindele et al., 2024).

The present article examines that relationship in South African universities. It treats international recruitment as a recruitment pathway involving the deliberate search for or appointment of academics across national borders. It does not equate that pathway with non-citizenship. A South African scholar recruited from abroad can participate in international recruitment, while a non-citizen already established in South Africa may apply through a domestic process. Citizenship, recruitment pathway, and the international orientation of academic work therefore describe different matters (Higher Education Leadership and Management [HELM], 2026; Soudien, 2026).

National policy gives this inquiry a substantive foundation. The Policy Framework for Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa identifies quality, intellectual diversity, public benefit, and scholarly development among internationalisation's purposes (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2020). The Staffing South Africa's Universities Framework addresses the development of future academics and existing staff capacity (DHET, 2015). Read together, these documents invite examination of the institutional arrangements connecting international engagement with workforce development. They do not establish that every international appointment must produce the same developmental outcomes.

The article formulates a governance framework to analyse that relationship. It focuses on the conversion of institutional objectives into endorsed academic practices and measurable contributions. The analytical unit is the institutional recruitment commitment, encompassing a declared purpose, the associated responsibilities and resources, and the evidence for evaluating its execution. Individual hires may contribute to this commitment, but departments, programs, and collaborative entities are also pertinent. The framework refrains from evaluating citizenship-based selection disparities or assessing the equity of specific appointments (Darwish et al., 2022).

Related studies develop an appointment-level approach to evaluating citizenship-based recruitment preference. The present article addresses a separate question: how institutional purposes and enabling conditions connect international recruitment with subsequent academic development. Its framework evaluates shared commitments and contributions rather than comparing applicants' selection outcomes (Nzimande et al., 2025).

### 1.1 Problem Statement

Universities justify international academic recruitment through disciplinary scarcity, research development, curriculum internationalisation, and academic renewal, but these rationales do not explain how the anticipated benefits will be achieved or evaluated. The research problem is the gap between recruitment justifications, institutional support, and evidence of domestic academic capacity development. This gap can lead universities to equate filling vacancies or recording activities with sustained capability, or to hold appointees responsible for outcomes that require collective resources. The article therefore examines international recruitment as a shared institutional commitment, linking its purpose, implementation and contributions to sustained academic capacity while recognising disciplinary differences and fair employment practices.

### 1.2 Research Objectives

The overall objective is to develop a governance framework connecting international academic recruitment with domestic academic capacity development in South African universities:

1. To distinguish the institutional rationales used to justify international recruitment and identify their different implications for evaluation.
2. To explain the institutional conditions and reciprocal relationships through which recruitment commitments can support academic development.
3. To specify evidence for distinguishing immediate staffing provision, developmental activity, and sustained capability.
4. To formulate propositions and review principles for empirical investigation of these relationships.

### 1.3 Research Questions

The research questions examine how South African universities can govern international academic recruitment to ensure that its anticipated contribution to domestic academic capacity development is clearly defined, institutionally supported, and systematically evaluated:

1. What institutional purposes justify international academic recruitment?
2. Which resources, responsibilities, and relationships enable the associated developmental commitments?
3. What evidence distinguishes recruitment activity from sustained academic capability?
4. How can institutional review assess contributions while recognising shared responsibility, scholarly autonomy, and contextual limits?

### 1.4 Rationale and Significance

The article links internationalisation with academic workforce development through the practical responsibilities of institutions. Its scholarly contribution lies in explaining the conditions between recruitment purpose and developmental outcome, rather than presuming a direct relationship. Its practical contribution is a framework through which academic leaders can examine whether institutional commitments are specific, supported and reviewed on appropriate terms. The proposed framework is a conceptual contribution requiring evaluation; the article does not claim to establish a previously unknown national pattern or demonstrate that universities systematically neglect these responsibilities.

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## 2. Literature and Conceptual Foundations

### 2.1 Internationalisation and the Purposes of Recruitment

Knight (2004) conceptualises internationalisation through international, intercultural, and global dimensions of higher education purposes and functions. This helps distinguish internationalisation as an institutional process from the movement of individuals alone. De Wit and Altbach (2021) examine its global development and future direction, drawing attention to the purposes and inequalities accompanying international engagement. For the present framework, these contributions establish the importance of asking what recruitment is intended to accomplish. A recruitment pathway supplies an opportunity for international engagement; its educational or developmental value requires a further account.

Recruitment rationales are therefore treated as claims about a desired contribution. A university seeking expertise for an advanced module makes a different claim from one seeking to establish an emerging research field. A third may wish to broaden students' engagement with comparative professional practices. The distinction is consequential because each purpose implies different institutional support, beneficiaries, and evidence. None is adequately evaluated through a count of internationally recruited staff. The article proposes that purpose should be specific enough to guide implementation without eliminating the openness necessary for scholarly work (Mukwawaya, 2025).

### 2.2 Institutional Rationales and Competing Expectations

Academic recruitment takes place within organisations containing multiple sources of authority and value. Henningsson and Geschwind (2022) analyse recruitment through an institutional logic's perspective, providing a basis for examining the different rationales that actors bring to staffing decisions. This article uses that perspective as a sensitising lens rather than importing findings from another national setting as evidence about South Africa. It asks how disciplinary, managerial, and developmental purposes may interact within an institutional commitment (Mavuso et al., 2026).

For example, an academic unit may prioritise specialised expertise, management may emphasise organisational visibility, and an academic development office may seek opportunities for emerging scholars. Those objectives can reinforce one another, but their coexistence does not guarantee alignment. A role designed around individual research output may leave little time for mentoring. A teaching-intensive appointment may be judged against expectations appropriate to a research appointment. The framework consequently requires institutions to identify and negotiate priorities, including the resources and workload implications of pursuing several purposes together (Chaudhary et al., 2025).

### 2.3 Curriculum Internationalisation and Educational Contribution

Leask (2014, 2015) connects curriculum internationalisation with disciplinary learning, and the support academic staff need to develop it. Beelen and Jones (2015) locate internationalisation at home within opportunities for international and intercultural learning available to students beyond mobility programmes. These perspectives direct attention to curriculum design, teaching and learning rather than the passport of the lecturer. Their relevance to recruitment lies in identifying an educational contribution that institutions can specify and support.

Where recruitment is intended to strengthen curriculum internationalisation, relevant evidence might include revised learning outcomes, comparative disciplinary material, collaborative teaching, and assessment of student learning. These are illustrative indicators proposed here, not necessary features of every appointment. Curriculum committees and teaching teams share responsibility for implementation. An appointee cannot independently revise an accredited programme, guarantee student attainment, or create institutional support. The framework therefore examines the interaction between academic expertise, programme processes, and opportunities for student learning (Eftekhari, 2024; de Wit & Leask, 2015).

### 2.4 Academic Mobility and Institutional Participation

Sehoole et al. (2019) examine the experiences of foreign staff at South African higher education institutions. Their work provides contextual grounds for considering mobility alongside institutional experience rather than treating foreign academics as a uniform category. It does not establish that all internationally recruited academics face the same barriers or deliver equivalent benefits. For governance analysis, this supports attention to participation, access to collaboration and differences in institutional setting.

The analytical implication is that an appointment and an opportunity to contribute are distinct. A university can recruit expertise while organisational routines restrict its use. It may also possess expertise among existing colleagues that a narrow recruitment narrative overlooks. Domestic and internationally recruited academics are therefore treated as co-producers of institutional capability. The model does not assume that knowledge moves in one direction from an external expert to a deficient local community. It asks how collaboration recognises and extends the expertise of participants (Nansamba et al., 2024).

### 2.5 Domestic Academic Capacity and Workforce Renewal

The Staffing South Africa's Universities Framework identifies the development of future academics and the enhancement of existing staff capability as linked policy concerns (DHET, 2015). This supplies a policy basis for examining recruitment alongside academic development, without making international recruitment a substitute for dedicated developmental programmes. The present article defines domestic academic capacity as the sustained ability of South African university departments, programmes and scholarly communities to teach, supervise, research, and renew their expertise. This organisational definition includes the contributions of academics of different citizenships. Objectives concerning the development of South African citizens remain separately identifiable where relevant.

Capacity differs from staffing availability and individual productivity. Filling a post increases available labour; completing a joint publication produces an output; enabling colleagues to design and lead subsequent research may indicate a developing capability. These can coexist, but one cannot stand as evidence of all the others. Sustainability concerns the continuity of expertise, practices, and relationships over time. It does not require that an appointee become dispensable or that intellectual collaboration cease once local colleagues assume greater responsibility (Keter et al., 2023).

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### 2.6 South African and Regional Responsibilities

The internationalisation policy framework places institutional strategies within national purposes and recognises South Africa's African responsibilities (DHET, 2020). The governance question is therefore broader than the advantage of a single university. A recruitment initiative may strengthen a receiving department while weakening a partner's supervisory capacity. Alternatively, joint supervision or continuing collaboration may distribute benefits across institutions. The framework does not presume either outcome; it requires the intended beneficiaries and possible costs to be stated.

Domestic development is consequently framed as compatible with reciprocal regional scholarship. Institutions should examine whose capability develops, whose labour supports that development and which relationships remain viable. This guards against treating African academics as resources available for extraction, while also avoiding a claim that every appointment must carry an identical continental obligation. The appropriate scale of review depends on the rationale and arrangements of the recruitment initiative.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Conceptual Research Design

The article uses conceptual synthesis and model development. Jaakkola (2020) distinguishes approaches to conceptual research and emphasises the need to explain how concepts and theoretical resources contribute to the argument. Here, internationalisation scholarship establishes the range of purposes to which recruitment may contribute; an institutional logics perspective illuminates competing expectations; and academic staffing policy supplies a developmental context. These resources inform the construction of relationships between recruitment rationales, enabling conditions and institutional capability. The resulting model is an analytical proposal, not an empirically estimated causal structure.

### 3.2 Source Selection and Scope

The synthesis draws on a purposively selected body of scholarship and South African policy documents. The selection approach follows Snyder's (2019) guidance on aligning literature review methods with the research purpose and Jaakkola's (2020) emphasis on explaining the role of selected literature in a conceptual study. The scholarly literature covers higher education internationalisation, curriculum internationalisation, academic mobility, conceptual research design and institutional rationales for academic recruitment. Policy documents are selected for their relevance to internationalisation and academic workforce development in South Africa. Each source has identifiable scholarly or official provenance and informs a concept, clarifies the framework's scope or provides a principle for evaluation. Studies focused primarily on statistical comparisons of individual applicants fall outside the central synthesis because the framework examines institutional rationales for recruitment and the conditions under which international appointments can contribute to domestic academic capacity.

This is a focused narrative synthesis, rather than a systematic review or comprehensive map of the field. It does not claim exhaustive database retrieval, duplicate independent screening, or a formal assessment of all available evidence. Templier and Paré (2015) provide a basis for making a review's purpose and procedures explicit. The limited source base supports conceptual development but cannot establish the prevalence of institutional practices or prove that the proposed relationships hold across universities.

### 3.3 Analytical Procedure

The synthesis proceeds through four analytical operations. First, it separates the meanings of international recruitment, domestic capacity, and institutional accountability. Second, it compares the purposes attached to recruitment and identifies what would need to occur for each purpose to be realised. Third, it distinguishes institutional inputs, collaborative activities, immediate outputs, and sustained capability, locating responsibility at the level where relevant decisions and resources sit. Fourth, it develops propositions and assesses their internal coherence against contrasting hypothetical situations, including a successful appointment without developmental support and a well-supported collaboration without immediate measurable outcomes (Mumba & Qutieshat, 2023).

These operations constitute conceptual reasoning rather than thematic analysis of a fieldwork dataset. The framework is assessed for clarity of constructs, consistency between purposes and indicators, and treatment of alternative explanations. Its illustrative situations are analytical examples and are not reported institutional cases. No interviews, observations, applicant records, or university performance datasets are collected or analysed (Salawu et al., 2023).

### 3.4 Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

The authors approach this study from an interest in public institutional governance and academic development. They recognise that this standpoint shapes their attention to accountability and may privilege formal reporting over other forms of evidence. Reflexivity therefore requires critical consideration of how their assumptions and institutional relationships influence the analysis (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). The framework accordingly recognises scholarly judgement, reciprocal relationships, and unintended effects alongside documented performance. It does not rank universities, assess individual academics, or impose nationality-based obligations. Any future empirical application will require appropriate ethical review, institutional access arrangements, and transparent management of researchers' institutional relationships.

## 4. An Institutional Governance Framework

### 4.1 Scope and Organising Relationship

The framework connects six dimensions: substantiated rationale, developmental commitment, enabling conditions, academic contributions, sustained capability, and institutional review. These are linked evaluative dimensions rather than mandatory sequential stages. Planning and review can reveal reasons to revise a commitment or provide additional support. The model's distinctive claim is that the relationship between recruitment and capacity depends on institutional arrangements that make collaborative contribution possible and its interpretation credible.

Table 1 summarises the proposed dimensions and their different evidence requirements. It is a conceptual evaluation matrix and has not been validated as an instrument. It should not be converted into a single numerical score before empirical work establishes whether its components can be measured coherently.

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Table 1 Proposed governance dimensions and evidence

| Dimension | Evaluative question | Indicative evidence |
|---|---|---|
| Substantiated rationale | What academic need and purpose justify the initiative? | Workforce and academic plans; disciplinary needs; approved rationale. |
| Developmental commitment | What contribution is anticipated, for whom and with whose responsibility? | Role specifications; agreed activities; beneficiaries; workload and responsibility allocations. |
| Enabling conditions | What support makes the commitment feasible? | Time, infrastructure, programme access, induction, and collaboration arrangements; records of support provided. |
| Academic contributions | What substantive work and participation occur? | Teaching portfolios; co-supervision records; joint research; participant accounts of responsibilities and learning. |
| Sustained capability | What capability develops and continues? | Broader supervisory expertise; subsequent project leadership; continuing use of shared practices; contextual baseline. |
| Institutional review | What is established and what response follows? | Review records; alternative explanations; participant responses; adjustments to support and expectations. |

*Source: Authors' conceptual synthesis. Indicators are illustrative and require contextual adaptation and empirical evaluation.*

### 4.2 Substantiating the Recruitment Rationale

Academic recruitment is a strategic institutional activity shaped by different academic and organisational priorities (Henningsson & Geschwind, 2022). Building on this perspective, the framework proposes that a recruitment rationale should identify the academic purpose and the level at which the appointment is expected to contribute. A specialist teaching rationale should specify the curriculum responsibility and constraints being addressed, while a research-development rationale should identify the field, collaborative opportunity or capability sought. Institutions should also explain how international recruitment complements alternatives such as existing staff development, visiting collaboration or programme partnerships.

Academic recruitment involves different institutional purposes and considerations that require explicit examination (Henningsson & Geschwind, 2022). The framework therefore defines substantiation as the fit between an identified need and the proposed recruitment response, without assuming that international academics possess superior expertise. Subsequent developmental achievements should not retrospectively replace the rationale used to approve a post. Opportunities emerging after appointment should instead be documented as revised or additional contributions, with their resource implications acknowledged. This distinguishes the initial institutional commitment from subsequent adaptation.

### 4.3 Making Developmental Commitments Explicit

Where development forms part of the recruitment purpose, institutions should identify intended beneficiaries, activities, and responsibilities. Effective mentoring requires clear expectations, reciprocal participation, and institutional support (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2019). The framework therefore proposes that co-supervision commitments specify the programme, the emerging supervisor's role and the support required for increasing responsibility. Mentoring expectations should have a manageable scope, allow participants to shape the relationship and reflect academic rank, role, and workload.

Developmental commitments involve institutions as well as individuals, consistent with the shared responsibilities identified by NASEM (2019). The framework assigns enabling responsibilities to relevant institutional actors, including workload allocation by departmental leadership, curriculum approval through programme structures and funding support through research offices. It treats a commitment as credible when these actors participate in its design and the necessary support is identified. These expectations should follow the academic purpose of the role rather than an appointee's international status.

### 4.4 Providing Enabling Conditions

Enabling conditions include time, infrastructure, access to programmes, administrative support, and opportunities for collaboration. Research on expatriate academics demonstrates the relevance of job demands, resources and cross-cultural adjustment to research productivity (Maharjan et al., 2022). The framework therefore proposes assessing support against the stated recruitment purpose, recognising that laboratory research and comparative teaching require different inputs. Financial provision should be considered alongside access, recognition, responsibility, and workloads that permit sustained engagement.

The framework further proposes reviewing whether promised support is provided before interpreting non-achievement. Where resources are unavailable, the problem may concern institutional implementation rather than individual willingness or capability. However, resource provision alone does not demonstrate meaningful collaboration or developmental contribution. Enabling conditions and academic contributions therefore require separate evidence to identify whether corrective action concerns resources, programme design, relationships, or expectations.

### 4.5 Examining Academic Contributions

Contributions comprise the scholarly and educational work undertaken towards the developmental commitment, including joint module development, collaborative grant preparation,

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mentoring, co-supervision, and shared research leadership. Research contributions should be documented through specific responsibilities rather than inferred from co-authorship alone, consistent with the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (National Information Standards Organization [NISO], 2022). Participation records, portfolios, programme documentation, and participant accounts can provide complementary evidence. The framework nevertheless distinguishes evidence of activity from evidence of learning or sustained capability.

Evaluation should also consider opportunities for participants to exercise judgement and responsibility. The Council on Higher Education (CHE, 2022) identifies co-supervision involving less experienced and established supervisors as a developmental practice. Building on this approach, the framework proposes examining how emerging academics undertake agreed supervisory responsibilities or contribute to research design, analysis, and project leadership. These are illustrative developmental pathways requiring negotiation and appropriate institutional approval, rather than universal progression requirements (Niewiesk & Garrity-Rokous, 2021).

### 4.6 Assessing Sustained Capability

Sustained capability concerns what a department or scholarly community can continue to do because of supported collaboration. Evidence may include broader supervisory expertise, teaching materials used by a team, functioning research practices, or the ability to lead subsequent initiatives. The relevant comparison is with a documented starting position and the contribution anticipated. A simple before-and-after difference cannot isolate the appointment's effect from funding changes, other recruitment, or wider academic development (Sarong, 2024).

Accordingly, the framework favours a bounded contribution account over an unsupported attribution claim. Reviewers should ask whether the anticipated activities occur, whether the proposed developmental mechanism is plausible, and what alternative influences may explain the change. Continuity should also be understood relationally. An ongoing international partnership can form part of domestic capability; sustainability does not require independence from every external collaborator. What matters is whether participation and expertise become more robust and less vulnerable to avoidable institutional dependence.

### 4.7 Reviewing and Revising Institutional Commitments

Institutional review brings the dimensions together without merging their conclusions. It may find a well-founded rationale with inadequate support, meaningful collaboration with outcomes still emerging, or considerable output without evidence of broader developmental benefit. Such conclusions imply different responses. The appropriate action may be to resource the commitment, revise its scope, improve participation, or acknowledge that an immediate staffing objective has been met without establishing a wider capacity effect (Franco & Franco, 2022).

Review should occur through relevant academic and management structures, with governance oversight concerned with aggregate commitments and institutional learning. Council oversight need not involve reassessing confidential individual performance or directing scholarly content. Participants should be able to contextualise evidence and record disagreement. Reporting should state what is established, what remains uncertain and which institutional decisions follow, allowing the next planning cycle to incorporate the lessons (Angela et al., 2026; Council on Higher Education, 2021).

## 5. Conceptual Propositions

### 5.1 Proposition 1: Purpose Clarity Supports Assessability

The framework proposes that international recruitment commitments with specific academic purposes and identified beneficiaries are more assessable than commitments expressed through generic internationalisation aspirations. This proposition draws on evaluability assessment literature, which emphasises shared programme understanding and the plausibility and practicality of evaluation (Lam & Skinner, 2021). Clear purposes help reviewers connect intended contributions with relevant evidence. However, assessability does not guarantee better scholarship, and greater planning complexity does not necessarily improve evaluation usefulness (Chapman & Dahler-Larsen, 2024). Commitments should therefore provide sufficient clarity for assessment while permitting justified adaptation.

An empirical test could compare reviewers' ability to connect initial purposes with subsequent evidence across recruitment initiatives. Such a comparison should consider differences in documentation, disciplinary context and the time elapsed since appointment. Broad commitments may also generate valuable contributions unforeseen at recruitment. The framework therefore distinguishes assessment against initial commitments from recognition of emergent value and does not classify unplanned contributions as failures.

### 5.2 Proposition 2: Support Conditions the Translation of Commitments into Practice

The framework proposes that the developmental contribution of international recruitment is more likely to be realised when institutional support matches the agreed academic purpose. Research on expatriate academics identifies job demands, resources, and cross-cultural adjustment as relevant to understanding research productivity (Maharjan et al., 2022). The proposed mechanism is the opportunity to undertake the intended work: collaboration requires access, time, and institutional authorisation alongside individual expertise. Support is therefore an enabling condition, rather than a sufficient explanation of developmental success.

Empirical investigation should examine the timing, accessibility, and adequacy of support rather than its presence in a budget alone. It should also consider alternative explanations, including changing programme demand, competing workloads, and the departure of collaborators. Where promised support is unavailable, attributing non-achievement to individual shortcomings requires caution. Where adequate support is available but intended activities do not occur, further inquiry should examine relationships, implementation, and the continuing relevance of the commitment.

### 5.3 Proposition 3: Reciprocal Participation Supports Capability Development

The framework proposes that collaborative arrangements distributing substantive responsibility and recognising participants' expertise are more likely to support sustained capability than arrangements limited to nominal participation. This proposition draws on research that conceptualises capacity development as mutual learning rather than a one-way transfer of expertise (Axelby et al., 2022). The proposed mechanism is learning through

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meaningful scholarly work and opportunities to exercise judgement. Reciprocity enables internationally recruited academics to learn from institutional and local expertise while colleagues engage with additional knowledge and networks.

Reciprocity does not require identical roles, equal expertise in every task or a predetermined transfer of leadership. It requires credible opportunities for participants to contribute, learn and assume appropriate responsibility. Empirical investigation should compare participants' accounts of responsibility with work products and subsequent opportunities to exercise the capabilities developed. It should also examine whether collaboration creates disproportionate burdens, excludes eligible colleagues, or concentrates opportunities within a small group.

### 5.4 Proposition 4: Contextual Review Improves the Interpretation of Contribution

The framework proposes that evaluation distinguishing staffing provision, developmental activity and sustained capability supports more defensible interpretations than evaluation based on undifferentiated output counts. This approach aligns with responsible research assessment principles that recognise diverse contributions and prioritise qualitative judgement supported by appropriate quantitative evidence (Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment [CoARA], 2022). The proposed mechanism is avoiding the substitution of evidence of one achievement for another. A completed module demonstrates an educational contribution, while increased supervisory responsibility may indicate developing capability; both are valuable but require different evidence and attention to disciplinary context and time.

This proposition concerns interpretive quality rather than an automatic improvement in academic performance. Empirical investigation should examine whether contextual review produces clearer, more consistent explanations and proportionate decisions, while considering reporting burdens, participant understanding, and differences in institutional documentation capacity. Contextualisation should clarify the responsibilities, constraints, and evidence relevant to an outcome. It should permit scrutiny of adverse findings rather than provide an unrestricted justification for non-achievement (Al Husaini & Shukor, 2022).

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1 Recruitment as a Shared Institutional Commitment

The framework reframes developmental value as a relationship among purpose, institutional support, and collaborative practice. Its analytical contribution is the separation of dimensions often compressed into the claim that recruitment benefits a university. An appointment can address immediate teaching needs, generate strong individual scholarship, and contribute little to wider workforce renewal; another may facilitate collaborative learning whose effects emerge slowly. These are hypothetical configurations that show why value requires specification rather than a single summary judgement.

The institutional logics perspective helps explain why actors may assess the same commitment differently (Henningsson & Geschwind, 2022). The framework extends that insight into questions of responsibility and evidence. A disagreement between a research-output rationale and a mentoring expectation should be addressed through planning and workload decisions, rather than left for an appointee to resolve informally. The contribution is thus an institutional account of how recruitment purposes become actionable, not a claim that recruitment must serve one dominant objective.

### 6.2 Connecting International Engagement with Domestic Development

Domestic capacity development can advance through sustained international participation. A department may strengthen its supervisory capability while remaining actively involved in an international research group, with collaboration continuing as local leadership grows. This understanding aligns with capacity development as a long-term process of reciprocal exchange and mutual learning (Axelby et al., 2022). The framework therefore examines whether international engagement expands meaningful participation, distributes responsibility, and recognises expertise within the institution. Development is assessed through the capabilities sustained through these relationships.

Responsibility for development extends across incoming academics, existing staff, academic leaders, and institutional systems. Induction, access, workload allocation, and collaborative opportunities require coordinated institutional support. The framework consequently examines how support shapes the implementation of agreed commitments without assuming that citizenship determines developmental contribution. It also distinguishes institutional capacity development from development targeted at particular groups: where a programme prioritises historically excluded groups or South African citizens, its objectives, intended beneficiaries and assessment criteria should be stated explicitly.

### 6.3 Separating Fair Appointment from Subsequent Contribution

Subsequent academic contribution cannot, by itself, establish whether an appointment process treated applicants fairly. A productive academic may have been selected through a flawed process, while a defensible appointment may encounter conditions that limit later contributions. Procedural fairness requires examination of recruitment criteria, assessment practices, and decision-making, including their relevance, consistency, and transparency (Lucy et al., 2023). Contribution assessment requires evidence of academic work and the conditions supporting it. The framework therefore proposes that developmental expectations be stated consistently for comparable roles, without becoming retrospective justifications for selection decisions or additional burdens attached automatically to nationality.

The framework examines institutional purposes, commitments, and implementation; it does not determine whether applicants experienced citizenship-based preference. Where contribution review raises concerns about recruitment procedures, those concerns should be referred to the appropriate recruitment review process and examined using evidence from the appointment itself. Maintaining this distinction supports procedural accountability while allowing academic contributions to be assessed fairly in their institutional context.

### 6.4 Accountability without Reducing Scholarly Value to Indicators

Indicators support accountability when they answer clearly defined questions and their limitations are recognised. DORA's guidance emphasises that quantitative indicators require transparent, contextual, and fair interpretation (Declaration on Research Assessment [DORA], 2024). Within this framework, mentoring

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records establish participation but do not independently demonstrate development, while joint publications indicate shared outputs without necessarily revealing the distribution of intellectual responsibility or recognition. The evaluation matrix therefore combines indicative records with interpretive questions and explicit limitations, allowing evidence to reflect the purpose and context of each commitment.

Review should also distinguish outcomes still emerging from commitments not implemented, and insufficient evidence from an established absence of benefit. These distinctions are proposed safeguards for interpreting developmental contributions. Participants should have opportunities to clarify evidence and contest interpretations, while institutions remain responsible for addressing demonstrable implementation problems. Reporting should identify what the evidence supports, what remains uncertain and what action follows, with the effort required proportionate to the scale and importance of the commitment.

### 6.5 Disciplinary Variation and Unequal Institutional Resources

The framework requires adaptation to disciplinary practices and institutional conditions. Supervisory development in a laboratory group may depend on equipment and collective research, while curriculum development elsewhere may require programme approval and sustained teaching collaboration. These examples illustrate why institutions should specify the developmental process, necessary support, and expected time horizon before selecting evidence. This approach accords with DORA's (2024) emphasis on contextual interpretation and the limitations of quantitative indicators.

Institutional resources may also affect how clearly contributions are documented. Axelby et al. (2022) demonstrate how administrative requirements can privilege familiar institutional arrangements and disadvantage less-resourced partners. Extending this insight, the framework proposes that comparative review examine documentation capacity alongside evidence of contribution. Limited records should be recognised as an evidentiary constraint, without automatically implying limited capability or benefit. Application should therefore establish a manageable minimum record of purposes, support, activities, and review decisions, supplemented by contextual evidence where available (Mojapelo, 2020).

## 7. Limitations and Future Research

This article develops a conceptual framework from selected scholarship and policy documents; it neither establishes national practice nor validates an evaluation instrument. Its contribution depends on transparent and justified conceptual foundations (Jaakkola, 2020), although source selection may omit relevant perspectives on mentoring, organisational learning, and academic development. The propositions identify plausible relationships without establishing their strength, causal direction, or general applicability. Development may also extend beyond evaluation cycles, and some scholarly contributions remain difficult to document (Jensen, 2022).

Future research should examine whether academic participants and institutional leaders recognise and distinguish the proposed dimensions. Comparative qualitative cases across disciplines and resource settings could analyse authorised documents, workload arrangements, participant accounts, and academic activities, including initiatives experiencing difficulties. Longitudinal studies could investigate sustained capability while considering funding changes, other appointments, and programme developments. Comparisons with domestic recruitment and other staff-development initiatives could clarify whether the mechanisms are distinctive to international recruitment. Research should also examine workload burdens, unequal collaborative opportunities, and benefits across African partner institutions, allowing findings to refine, challenge or reject the propositions.

## 8. Conclusion

academic recruitment enhances national academic capacity building via institutional frameworks that align its objectives with endorsed research endeavours. Its contribution cannot be inferred from an appointee's citizenship, the completion of recruitment or output counts alone. The framework distinguishes recruitment rationale, developmental commitment, enabling conditions, academic contributions, sustained capability, and institutional review. It assigns responsibility to institutions, collaborative teams, and appointees, while distinguishing immediate staffing needs from longer-term developmental outcomes. Empirical research is required to assess the proposed relationships and determine how supported recruitment commitments contribute to sustained academic capability.

## 9. Recommendations

Universities should clearly define the academic purpose of international recruitment and specify developmental expectations where these form part of that purpose. Academic leaders should align expectations with workload, resources, and meaningful opportunities for collaboration. Evaluation should distinguish activities from sustained capability, use discipline-appropriate evidence, and allow sufficient time for development. Governance bodies should review institutional implementation and outcomes without treating nationality counts as measures of academic value or using subsequent performance to justify earlier selection decisions. Future research should examine how recruitment commitments are supported, what contributions emerge and which capabilities develop over time.

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