

# Bridging the **GAP**

**The government-funded New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP) includes a three-year development programme followed by three years of induction for new academics. Here, we meet an nGAP appointee at the University of Johannesburg's Zoology Department.**

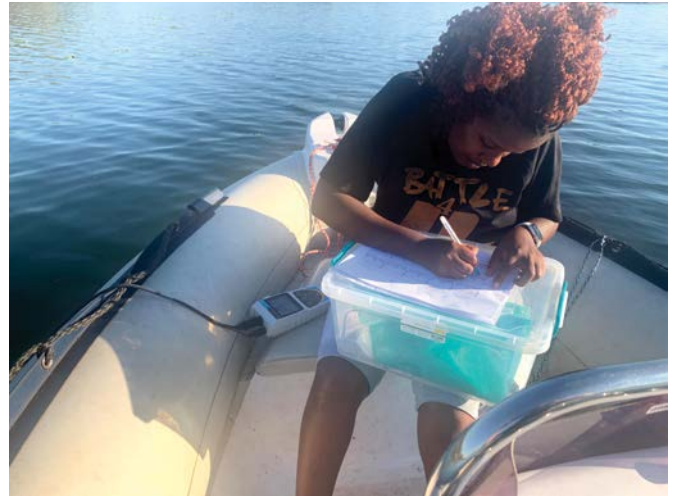
Refilwe Lukhwari is originally from a small town called Tweeling in the Free State Province, where she matriculated. She is married and has a five-year-old son. She obtained her BSc in Biochemistry and Human Physiology, followed by her BSc Honours in Biochemistry at the University of Johannesburg (UJ). After graduation, her work experience during 2010–2012 included being a DST/NRF intern at Mintek, a sales rep at Sandoz, and a medical enablement specialist at Healthbridge. In September 2012 she rejoined UJ as a senior technician at the Department of Zoology, where she also got an opportunity to pursue her MSc in Aquatic Health (part-time), which she completed in September 2018.

## Can you briefly describe your current role?

I was awarded an amazing opportunity to be part of the nGAP in UJ's Department of Zoology in 2019. This role came after I completed my MSc *cum laude* in 2018, while working full-time as a senior technician for all the physiology modules in the same department. This role allows me to complete my PhD while gaining experience as an emerging academic, and I am currently lecturing the Physiology 2A module.

## What is nGAP?

According to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), its prestigious nGAP programme "involves the recruitment of highly capable scholars as new



academics. The recruitment of these academics is based on carefully designed and balanced equity considerations and in light of the disciplinary areas of greatest need in the higher education system. The nGAP is currently the biggest programme within the Staffing South Africa's Universities Framework (SSAUF), a university staff development component under the University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP)."

DHET also has other programmes such as the Nurturing Emerging Scholars Programme (NESP). "Emerging scholars are students in their final year of undergraduate study, or are honours or master's students or graduates, whose academic performance is strong. The NESP recognises the potential of this group of students or graduates and seeks to actively direct some of that potential towards a career in academia, through making structured, attractive prospects and opportunities visible and available to them."

## What advice do you have for emerging researchers and aspiring scientists?

Firstly, always prepare yourself for your future, and rest assured that you are the only person responsible for how it turns out. No one owes you anything. Always be ready for an opportunity when it presents itself, so that you are in a position to grasp it with both hands. You need to work hard in every step, or milestone, of your career. I have seen that no matter where you are, hard work always pays off. Therefore, equip yourself with relevant information for the field you want to pursue, surround yourself with people with like minds, and what matters is how you stand after that fall, not how many falls you have encountered along the way.

- For more information about nGAP and NESP, see: <http://www.ssauf.dhet.gov.za/ngap.html>  
<http://www.ssauf.dhet.gov.za/nesp.html>



*This profile of Refilwe Lukhwari  was originally published on UJ Zoology's Twitter feed, @UjZoology, as part of Women's Month celebrations in August.*

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