



## NRF Evaluation and Rating

# Guidelines and Criteria for Appeals

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Sept 2017

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## 1. Introduction

When a researcher applies for a National Research Foundation (NRF) rating, an Assessment Panel<sup>1</sup> considers a number of reviewers' reports on the quality and impact of an applicant's research and research standing based upon the applicant's research output during the eight (8) years prior to the review, and thereafter assigns a rating to the applicant. The rating reflects the Assessment Panel's conclusion as to which rating category best represents the opinions that reviewers have expressed in their reports on that applicant. Where Assessment Panels cannot reach consensus, or where in their opinion an applicant might fall within the A or P categories, or should no longer fall within the A category, the application and the reviewers' reports are referred to the Executive Evaluation Committee (EEC)<sup>1</sup> for further consideration and final decision.

Although the process contains various checks and balances to ensure that rating decisions are consistent and fair, mistakes may nonetheless occur and a process has been established in terms of which applicants who are dissatisfied with the outcome of a rating decision are able to have the matter **reviewed**. This document sets out the criteria and processes for doing so.

## 2. Appeal

Applicants may appeal against the outcome of an evaluation, with or without the support of the applicant's institution; but all appeals must be submitted via the *relevant authority*<sup>2</sup> at the applicant's institution.

The relevant authority must lodge an appeal on behalf of the applicant in writing **within three (3) months** of the date of the official letter providing the applicant with the evaluation outcome and feedback from the reviewers.

Appeals must be lodged with the NRF's Reviews and Evaluation (RE) unit<sup>1</sup>, which acts as the secretariat for the Appeals Committee.

## 3. Guidelines to Institutions

Although no restrictions are placed on the grounds upon which an applicant may appeal an evaluation decision, the appeal documentation must indicate the extent to which the particular evaluation outcome was seriously incongruent with the institution's assessment of the applicant or the applicant's own assessment and must substantiate why the institutional/applicant's assessment is considered to be more appropriate than that of the Assessment Panel.

Applicants should therefore first consider whether there is a ground for appeal that can be **substantiated**. The grounds, upon which an Assessment Panel's decision could be overruled, set out in clause 6 below, could guide applicants regarding areas upon which to focus. The following questions may further assist:

### 3.1 *Was the result of the evaluation seriously incongruent with the applicant's or institution's assessment?*

The appeal documentation must allege and substantiate the view that a material difference exists between the evaluation outcome and the institutional expectation. A difference of one degree, i.e. adjacent sub-categories (C2 and C3 or B2 and B3), is normally not considered to be sufficiently **material**, but institutions are not precluded from proving otherwise in particular circumstances.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A

<sup>2</sup> An institution's Research Office or staff in the directorate responsible for coordinating research will be able to advise in this regard.

### 3.2 *What are the main reasons for the appeal and will they make a material difference to the outcome?*

Grounds for appeal are normally either **procedural** or **substantive** (relating to the merits of a decision). The reasons must also be sufficiently strong to make a material difference to the outcome. For example, some procedural irregularities might well be material, while others will not affect the outcome.

### 3.3 *How will the reasons for appeal be substantiated?*

Mere criticism of an outcome or allegation as to an irregularity is not sufficient. The documentation must provide a case as to why the original outcome was wrong and why it should be overruled. The reasons must also be sufficiently strong to indicate that a material difference in the outcome will result.

Most importantly, however, the evidence supporting the appeal must have been extant when the rating application was **first submitted**. An appeal should not be pursued if it is based on, for example, research outputs that were not published or in the public domain when the application was submitted; where there has been a change of status of research outputs e.g. a seminal paper in preparation at the time of submission has in the meantime been accepted for publication; or where the applicant received honours or accolades subsequent to the submission of the rating application. Information coming to light subsequent to submission of the application **will not** be taken into account.

Under no circumstances should testimonials, additional referee reports or similar information be included.

Note that it is widely recognised that the usability of **bibliometrics** and **scientometrics** are field dependent and are influenced by the career stage of the researcher, which means that comparative data is normally not considered to be persuasive evidence if used in a motivation.

Note that reviewers are instructed to focus on the applicant's impact and standing based on the output of the **last eight years**. They do not have access to the applicant's previous rating information (the evaluation is *de novo* and independent) and it is quite possible that an applicant's rating remain unchanged, even though the applicant had made progress (e.g. on the continuum of panel specific indicators of Considerable International Recognition) in the rating criteria.

### 3.4 *Are the NRF rating categories<sup>3</sup> & <sup>4</sup> well understood?*

Institutional authorities and applicants should ensure that they understand the rating categories thoroughly before lodging an appeal. Institutions must not only consider whether or not the applicant should fall within a category as defined, but must also consider the nuances that are found in the wording of the various sub-categories. (Note that definitions are continuously refined and institutions must ensure that they base their motivations on the most current definitions of rating categories<sup>6</sup>.)

### 3.5 *Have the NRF panel specific sections of the Key Research Areas and Types of Research Outputs and Considerable International Recognition<sup>4</sup> documents been taken into consideration before lodging an appeal?*

The NRF Key Research Areas and Types of Research Outputs document states the types of research and/or research outputs for the different disciplines dealt with by the Assessment Panels. The meaning of Considerable International Recognition for the different disciplines dealt with by the Assessment Panels is relevant when appeals to be placed in the B-rating category is lodged. Applicants must ensure that the content of their applications conform with the information in these documents relevant to their primary Assessment Panel, as well as their

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix B

<sup>4</sup> These documents are available at: <http://www.nrf.ac.za/rating>

relative importance as specified in these documents. Applicants should heed the NRF's Statement on Predatory Journals and Deceptive Publishers<sup>4</sup> and ensure that their research outputs were listed in the correct output category in their application.

### 3.6 *Did the candidate submit his/her application to the correct primary panel?*

Applicants indicate which (up to three) panels they consider appropriate for the evaluation of their applications. They also have the opportunity to indicate to the panels selected that their work is interdisciplinary (IDR)<sup>5</sup> & <sup>4</sup> in nature. If, however, a panel specified by, or agreed to by, the applicant considered the application that would normally not constitute an irregularity.

### 3.7 *Is it possible that the Assessment Panel might have been correct?*

In any evaluation process, and especially in borderline cases, persons are called upon to exercise judgment after considering the information presented to them. The mandate of Assessment Panels is to determine whether appropriate peer reviewers have assessed an applicant's research and research standing correctly and fairly, and to determine the collective peer opinion of the applicant's research and research standing. Assessment Panels base their judgments on particular criteria and clearly-circumscribed information: they assess the reviewer reports and resort to the application documents and the contextual knowledge of the Specialist Committee members when assessing the reliability of the opinions expressed.

By the very nature of the process, applicants and institutions do not have the same information available to them. While this does not preclude them from having a valid opinion regarding an appropriate rating, applicants and institutions should consider seriously the possibility that peer reviewers could have pointed to issues of concern that were either not apparent before, or which the applicant might not have fully appreciated.

Before submitting an appeal, the applicant and the institution must consider the possibility that peers, in a fair process, might reasonably have reached a conclusion that differs from one's own opinion. That, after all, will be the crux of the Appeal Committee's enquiry.

## 4. **Format of the Letter of Appeal**

- 4.1 The letter of appeal should contain an **introductory section** (executive summary) indicating the applicant's personal details and institutional affiliation, the Assessment Panel that considered the matter, the rating outcome, the purpose of the appeal (i.e. the desired outcome) and a summary of the grounds of the appeal.
- 4.2 Thereafter the document should detail each ground of appeal with appropriate substantiation. The grounds should be categorised as either procedural or substantive. The document should not exceed three pages in length.
- 4.3 The letter of appeal must be signed by the relevant authority of the employing institution.
- 4.4 A letter of appeal will be **returned** to the employing institution without consideration of the merits of the appeal in the following circumstances:
  - 4.4.1 Where it is unsigned
  - 4.4.2 Where it is signed by someone other than an institution's relevant authority
  - 4.4.3 Where the letter refers to scholarly achievements postdating the original submission
  - 4.4.4 Where other reports received from reviewers, e.g. those solicited by the employing institution for promotion purposes, are included
  - 4.4.5 Where the letter does not conform to the requirements listed in clauses 4.1- 4.3.
- 4.5 Letters of appeal that have been returned may be revised and resubmitted within fourteen (14) days of the date upon which they were returned.

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<sup>5</sup> The NRF subscribes to the Global Research Council's Statement of Principles on Interdisciplinarity (see <http://www.nrf.ac.za/rating> )

## 5. Documents to be considered by the Appeals Committee

- 5.1 The Appeals Committee considers the following documents during the appeal process:
- 5.1.1 The letter of appeal
  - 5.1.2 The outcome letter with feedback
  - 5.1.3 The researcher's original rating application
  - 5.1.4 Reports by the reviewers
  - 5.1.5 Meeting records, as well as the decisions taken by the relevant Assessment Panel and, where appropriate, the EEC
  - 5.1.6 Relevant policy documents and/or decisions
- 5.2 The Appeals Committee may consider any other documentation that could assist in clarifying issues and/or reaching an appropriate decision.

## 6. Grounds for Overruling a Decision

- 6.1 The Appeals Committee shall not consider an application afresh, without reference to the previous decision of the Assessing Panel and/or the EEC regarding the applicant's rating.
- 6.2 A decision of the Appeals Committee may result in a rating remaining the same or being adjusted either upwards or downwards.
- 6.3 The Appeals Committee may not overrule and substitute a decision of the body that made the previous rating decision unless it is firmly convinced that, based upon the information that was before that body at the time that it made its decision, the previous decision was wrong in one or more material respect(s).
- 6.4 The Appeals Committee will consider the following when assessing whether or not an appeal should succeed:

### 6.5.1 *Substantive issues relating to the merit of the appeal*

Was the decision of the previous body:

- (a) Congruent with the information before it?
- (b) Congruent with the reasons that it provided for reaching that decision?<sup>6</sup>
- (c) Reached because irrelevant considerations were taken into account or because relevant considerations were not considered?
- (d) So unreasonable that no reasonable person could have reached a similar decision based on the information that was presented to it?

### 6.5.2 *Procedural issues*

- (a) Did the previous body follow the prescribed procedures in reaching its decision?
- (b) Was the decision of the previous body tainted with bias, or can reasonably be suspected that some members involved in the decision were biased?
- (c) Was the decision taken by an inappropriate or incorrect panel; i.e. one that was not listed in the applicant's application or not accepted by the applicant when a panel not so listed was selected?
- (d) Was the panel decision based on a sufficient number of useful reviewers' reports<sup>6</sup>?
- (e) Did the balance of reports by independent (nominated by the members of the Specialist Committee) reviewers and reviewers nominated by the applicant possibly disadvantage the outcome of the rating<sup>6</sup>?

### 6.5.3 *Materiality*

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix C

Is any identified irregularity sufficiently substantial to constitute a material deviation from a required norm to warrant the overruling of the previous decision?

## **7. Closure**

- 7.1 The NRF's Reviews and Evaluation unit shall convey the decision of the Appeals Committee to the relevant authority at the applicant's employing institution as well as to the EEC and the relevant Assessment Panel members.
- 7.2 The decision of the Appeals Committee shall constitute the final determination of an applicant's rating and no further appeals will be permitted.
- 7.3 There shall be no further correspondence regarding the merits of the Appeals Committee decision, the reasons therefor, or the procedures that it followed.

## ADMINISTRATIVE AND DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURES FOR RATING

## 1. ASSESSMENT PANEL

## 1.1. Composition

- 1.1.1 A Chairperson
- 1.1.2 Members of the Specialist Committee (including a convener who plays a facilitating and coordinating role)
- 1.1.3 An Assessor
- 1.1.4 In attendance:
  - (a) Director: NRF Reviews and Evaluation (RE)
  - (b) Secretariat: Staff from NRF RE

## 1.2. Specialist Committees

## 1.2.1 Composition

Normally **three to eight rated** and respected members of the South African research community in each of the following fields of research:

- i. Anthropology, Development Studies, Geography, Sociology and Social Work (ADGSS (two subpanels))
- ii. Basic and Applied Microbiology (BAM)
- iii. Biochemistry, Molecular and Cell Biology (BIOC)
- iv. Chemistry
- v. Communication, Media Studies and Library and Information Sciences (CMLI)
- vi. Earth Sciences
- vii. Economics, Management, Administration and Accounting (EMAA)
- viii. Education
- ix. Engineering (two sub-panels)
- x. Health Sciences (Public Health / Clinical Health and Basic Health Sciences)
- xi. Historical Studies
- xii. Information Technology
- xiii. Law
- xiv. Literary Studies, Languages and Linguistics (LLL)
- xv. Mathematical Sciences
- xvi. Performing and Creative Arts, and Design (PCAD)
- xvii. Physics
- xviii. Plant Sciences
- xix. Political Sciences and Philosophy (PSP)
- xx. Psychology
- xxi. Religious Studies and Theology (RST)
- xxii. Veterinary and Animal Production Studies (previously A&V 2)
- xxiii. Zoological Studies (previously A&V 1)

## 1.2.2 Terms of reference specific to members of the Specialist Committee (SC)

- i. To read and screen the applications for evaluation and rating for appropriateness of the primary panel, premature submissions, and to select an appropriate mix of reviewers.
- ii. To ensure (in collaboration with the staff in RE) that a sufficient number of reports of acceptable quality with a balance in the number of reports submitted by reviewers nominated by the applicant and those nominated by the SC is available at the panel meeting.
- iii. To identify constructive feedback from the reports by reviewers that justify the rating outcome and provide developmental advice from the reviewers that could be conveyed to applicants to improve their research and future rating applications.

## 1.3 Convener of the SC

Conveners are nominated by the SC prior to the current one from the ranks of the currently serving members. Appointment is done the Executive Director: RE (ED: RE).

### **1.3.1 Terms of reference specific to the convener role:**

*[In addition to him/her being a member of a SC, see 1.2.2 above]*

- i. To assist the Director: RE to identify replacement panel members for those rotating off at the end of their cycle;
- ii. To coordinate the screening of rating applications for their panel to ensure that applications have not been submitted prematurely and have been submitted to the most appropriate primary panel.
- iii. To assess and validate the declared interests from members of their SC which could pose a potential conflict.
- iv. To assist the Director: RE to identify an external feedback writer if this is not to be done by the members of the SC themselves.
- v. To assign applications to the members of the SC according to their fields of specialisation and/or the workload.
- vi. To screen the motivation and appropriateness of the reviewers nominated and prioritised by the members of their SC (“ratify”) for each applicant in their panel.
- vii. To ensure that an adequate number of reports of acceptable quality with a balance between reviewers nominated by the applicant and those nominated by the SC is available at the panel meeting
- viii. To facilitate consensus amongst the members of their SC at the panel meeting and at virtual (e-mail) meetings for cases not finalised at the panel meeting.
- ix. To ensure that quality-controlled feedback for each applicant’s outcome letter is submitted timeously to the assigned RE staff member.
- x. To represent the interests of their SC at NRF meetings; and
- xi. To coordinate all activities of their SC.

### **1.4 Assessor**

Assessors have to ensure that the same standards are maintained across the different fields of research. They are selected from the ranks of highly respected researchers who have served on SCs (normally as conveners) in the past, who are therefore familiar with the process and who have earned a reputation during their tenure on these SC for their wisdom and objective judgements. Assessors must also ensure that the assessment process is fair and independent and that the same criteria are applied consistently by all the SC’s.

### **1.5 Chairperson**

The Chairperson is a senior researcher of repute (either present or past) who is thoroughly familiar with the NRF rating system. Their role is to facilitate decision making and they often act as a second Assessor.

### **1.6 Quorum**

- i. Chairperson and
- ii. Assessor and
- iii. At least 50% plus one (1) of the members of the SC.

### **1.7 Appointment**

- i. Chairpersons are appointed for a period of three (3) years (with the option of extending the appointment) by the NRF CEO.
- ii. Assessors are appointed for a period of three (3) years (with the option of extending the appointment) by the NRF Deputy CEO.
- iii. Conveners are appointed annually by the relevant NRF Executive Director (ED) responsible for evaluation and rating of individuals in the NRF.
- iv. Members of the SCs are appointed for a period of four (4) years by the responsible NRF ED after one or more of the following steps:
  - (a) Consultation by the Director RE with the convener and/or members of the current SC
  - (b) Consultation with any suitable person in the South African research community
  - (c) A call for nominations



## **1.8 Terms of Reference of Assessment Panels**

- i. To receive documentation from the NRF in respect of the evaluation and rating of individual researchers.
- ii. To assess the usability of the reports and to interpret the ratings proposed by the reviewers in these reports.
- iii. To decide on an appropriate rating for applicants based on these reports from reviewers.
- iv. To debate issues if there is no consensus on a particular rating outcome and to try to reach consensus.
- v. To refer properly motivated cases where consensus cannot be reached to the Executive Evaluation Committee (EEC).
- vi. To refer cases to the RE ED / EEC where a principle decision is required (e.g. alleged unethical conduct).
- vii. To forward nominations for the A and P categories to the EEC together with the Assessment Panel's recommendations.
- viii. To refer all applications of researchers who previously fell in the A category, who are deemed to no longer fall into this category, to the EEC.
- ix. To recommend improvements to the evaluation and rating system; and
- x. To alert the NRF Executive to the needs and priorities of particular disciplines.

## **2. EXECUTIVE EVALUATION COMMITTEE (EEC)**

### **2.1 Composition**

- 2.1.1 NRF Deputy CEO, Research and Innovation Support and Advancement (RISA)
- 2.1.2 Chairpersons of Assessment Panels
- 2.1.3 Two (2) conveners of the SCs (one representing the Natural Sciences and Engineering (NSET) panels and one representing the Social Sciences, Humanities and Law (SSH&L) panels) appointed annually by the NRF Deputy CEO (RISA)
- 2.1.4 NRF Executive Director with responsibility for evaluation and rating
- 2.1.5 Additional NRF Executive Director appointed annually by the NRF Deputy CEO on a rotational basis
- 2.1.6 In attendance:
  - (a) Director: NRF Reviews and Evaluation (RE)
  - (b) Secretariat: Staff from RE

### **2.2 Chairperson**

NRF Deputy CEO (RISA)

### **2.3 Quorum**

The quorum shall be a majority of all committee members (50% + 1) of whom at least three (3) shall be external members (i.e. not NRF staff) and at least two shall be NRF staff members.

### **2.4 Terms of reference**

- i. To consider cases where consensus could not be reached at the meetings of the Assessment Panels.
- ii. To take decisions about applicants nominated for the A and P categories (except when they are the outcome of an appeal).
- iii. To validate decisions on all applicants who were previously in the A category and who are nominated for placement in another category by the Assessment Panels.
- iv. To take decisions on all applications referred by the Assessment Panels where a principle decision is required.
- v. To identify issues for discussion/clarification at the annual EEC/Assessors/Conveners policy workshop.
- vi. To refer substantive amendments to rating policies to the NRF Executive for a decision.
- vii. To make recommendations on any aspect of the evaluation and rating system to the NRF Executive.
- viii. To commission investigations about the evaluation and rating process where necessary.

### **3. APPEALS COMMITTEE**

#### **3.1 Composition**

- 3.1.1 A Chairperson
- 3.1.2 One or more members who have considerable experience with the NRF evaluation and rating process (e.g. previous NRF Assessor/member of the EEC)
- 3.1.3 One or more additional members who are or who have been researchers/scholars of stature
- 3.1.4 The NRF CEO
- 3.1.5 In attendance:
  - (a) Director: NRF RE
  - (b) Secretariat: Staff from RE

#### **3.2 Chairperson**

The Chairperson is a senior researcher of repute who is thoroughly familiar with the NRF rating system.

#### **3.3 Quorum**

The quorum shall be a majority of all committee members (50% + 1).

#### **3.4 Appointment**

- 3.4.1 The Chairperson is appointed by the NRF CEO for a period of three years with the possibility of extension of the appointment for a further period of three years.
- 3.4.2 Other members are appointed by the NRF CEO in consultation with the Chairperson of the Appeals Committee. A member may not be a current member of an Assessment Panel or the EEC.

#### **3.5 Terms of Reference**

- i. To consider appeals lodged against evaluation and rating decisions.
- ii. To ensure that the correct and complete process has been followed by the members of the Assessment Panel/EEC in deciding on a rating outcome.
- iii. To ensure that fairness and objectivity have prevailed in the interpretation of reviewers' reports.
- iv. To ensure that NRF ratings are interpreted correctly.
- v. May refer matters back to the SC for additional input;
- vi. To make a final and binding pronouncement on the outcome of the rating decision that is being appealed; and
- vii. To provide advice to the EEC on issues that might require policy or process interventions to improve application of the rating system.

### **4 TEAM in NRF RE (responsible for the evaluation and rating of individuals)**

#### **4.1 Terms of Reference**

- i. To screen applications for completeness and eligibility and to acknowledge receipt thereof.
- ii. To interact with the Designated Authorities at employing institutions on issues referred back by the Convener of the SC, e.g. withdrawals, changes in primary panels etc.
- iii. To approach reviewers nominated by the members of the SC for each applicant in the priority order approved by the convener.
- iv. To assist reviewers with any difficulties, questions or information required to complete the review.
- v. To monitor the status of reviewer responses and to keep the convener updated with this information.
- vi. To screen reports submitted for completeness and thank reviewers.
- vii. To make all logistical arrangements for meetings of committees/workshops (dates, venues, transport etc.).
- viii. To act as secretariat for Assessment Panels, the Executive Evaluation Committee and the Appeals Committee.
- ix. To inform employing institutions and applicants of rating outcomes.

- x. To maintain and develop the IT systems and tools used by the members of SC's.
- xi. To develop new operational procedures and processes and/or to refine existing ones.
- xii. To advise the NRF Executive on all operational matters pertaining to the evaluation and rating system and to make recommendations on issues that need attention.

### Definition of NRF Rating Categories

The definitions of the rating categories are given below. Descriptions of sub-categories in the A, B C and Y categories have also been indicated. The definition of research at the end of the table should be consulted to clarify the interpretation of research as indicated in the various categories.

It must be borne in mind that the peer evaluation process is intricate and not mechanistic. Ultimately the judgement of the members of the Assessment Committees and their wisdom which has some intangible components must be relied upon. Hence interpretation of words such as 'broad field', 'narrow area', 'considerable', etc. form an important part of the Assessment Committees' task in their role of assessment of reviewers' reports.

Cat	Definition	Sub-category	Description	
A	Researchers who are unequivocally recognised by their peers as leading international scholars in their field for the high quality and impact of their recent research outputs.	A1	A researcher in this group is recognised by all reviewers as a leading scholar in his/her field internationally for the high quality and wide impact (i.e. beyond a narrow field of specialisation) of his/her recent research outputs.	
		A2	A researcher in this group is recognised by the overriding majority of reviewers as a leading scholar in his/her field internationally for the high quality and impact (either wide or confined) of his/her recent research outputs.	
B	Researchers who enjoy considerable international recognition by their peers for the high quality and impact of their recent research outputs.	B1	All reviewers are firmly convinced that the applicant enjoys considerable international recognition for the high quality and impact of his/her recent research outputs, with some of them indicating that he/she is a leading international scholar in the field.	
		B2	All or the overriding majority of reviewers are firmly convinced that the applicant enjoys considerable international recognition for the high quality and impact of his/her recent research outputs.	
		B3	Most of the reviewers are convinced that the applicant enjoys considerable international recognition for the high quality and impact of his/her recent research outputs.	
C	<p>Established researchers with a sustained recent record of productivity in the field who are recognised by their peers as having:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• produced a body of quality work, the core of which has coherence and attests to ongoing engagement with the field</li> <li>• demonstrated the ability to conceptualise problems and apply research methods to investigating them.</li> </ul>	C1	<p>All of the reviewers are firmly convinced that the applicant is an established researcher as described and who, on the basis of the high quality and impact of his/her recent research is regarded by:</p> <p>Some reviewers as already enjoying considerable international recognition;</p> <p>OR</p> <p>The overriding majority of reviewers as being a scholar who has attained a sound/solid international standing in their field, but not yet considerable international recognition;</p> <p>OR</p> <p>The overriding majority of reviewers as being a scholar whose work focuses mainly on local and/or regional issues and who as a scholar at a nationally leading level has substantially advanced knowledge and understanding in the field by contributing to new thinking, a new direction and/or a new paradigm.*</p>	
			C2	All of the reviewers are firmly convinced that the applicant is an established researcher as described. The applicant may, but need not, enjoy some international recognition for the quality and impact of his/her recent research outputs.
			C3	Most of the reviewers concur that the applicant is an established researcher (as described).

\*This definition is restricted to those researchers whose area of research prevents (or precludes) them from meeting the requirements of either definition 1 or definition 2.

Cat	Definition	Sub-category	Description
P	Young researchers (normally younger than 35 years of age**), who have held the doctorate or equivalent qualification for less than five years# at the time of application and who, on the basis of exceptional potential demonstrated in their published doctoral work and/or their research outputs in their early post-doctoral careers are considered likely to become future international leaders in their field.		Researchers in this group are recognised by all or the overriding majority of reviewers as having demonstrated the potential of becoming future international leaders in their field on the basis of exceptional research performance and output from their doctoral and/or early post-doctoral research careers.
Y	Young researchers (40 years** or younger), who have held the doctorate or equivalent qualification for less than five years# at the time of application, and who are recognised as having the potential to establish themselves as researchers within a five-year period after evaluation, based on their performance and productivity of quality research outputs during their doctoral studies and/or early post-doctoral careers.	Y1	A young researcher (within 5 years from PhD) who is recognised by all reviewers as having the potential (demonstrated by research products) to establish him/herself as a researcher with some of them indicating that he/she has the potential to become a future leader in his/her field. OR A young researcher (within 5 years from PhD) who is recognised by all or the overriding majority of reviewers as having the potential to establish him/herself as a researcher of considerable international standing on the basis of the quality and impact of his/her recent research outputs.
		Y2	A researcher in this group is recognised by all or the overriding majority of reviewers as having the potential to establish him/herself as a researcher (demonstrated by recent research products).

### Definition of research

For purposes of the NRF, research is original investigation undertaken to gain knowledge and/or enhance understanding.

*Research specifically includes:*

- the creation and development of the intellectual infrastructure of subjects and disciplines (e.g. through dictionaries, scholarly editions, catalogues and contributions to major research databases);
- the invention or generation of ideas, images, performances and artefacts where these manifestly embody new or substantially developed insights;
- building on existing knowledge to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products, policies or processes.

*It specifically excludes:*

- routine testing and analysis of materials, components, instruments and processes, as distinct from the development of new analytical techniques.
- the development of teaching materials and teaching practices that do not embody substantial original enquiry.

[Last update: 29 July 2014]

#### For applications submitted 28 February 2017

- \*\* Up to 36 years of age is the norm
- \*\*\* 40 years (or younger) as at 28 Feb 2017 (closing date)

#### Guide to terminology:

- Overriding majority: ≥ 80% of the reports
- Most: = 50% plus one of the reports
- Some: ≥ 2 ( one (1) plus one (1))

#### #Year in which PhD had been obtained by which applicants can apply for a Y/P rating: 2011

Explanatory note: For 2017 applications the call closed on 28 Feb 2017 but only took outputs into account that was published in the period: 1 Jan 2009 to 31 Dec 2016 (eight full years). The date that a researcher "obtains" (in the broadest sense – anything from notification that it will be awarded to walking over the podium) his/her degree could be anytime in the year (i.e. 1 Jan -31 Dec). For 2017 applications it is calculated as follows:

- Year 0: 2011 (any date between 1 Jan – 31 Dec of 2011)
- Year 1: 2012
- Year 2: 2013
- Year 3: 2014
- Year 4: 2015
- Year 5: 2016 (any date between 1 Jan – 31 Dec 2016 (end of the period under review))

If the applicant has obtained his/her degree on 31 Jan 2011 he/she will benefit by almost 11 months but if he/she obtained it in Dec 2011 they will literally have just over five years.

## Feedback Policy Guidelines for Rating Applications

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All applicants who have requested feedback should receive feedback. The length and nature of the feedback may, however, differ as the needs of the applicant and information available from the reports are not the same and needs to be taken into account by the members of the Specialist Committee who provide the feedback. The **feedback** process should ensure that applicants receive adequate information on how their rating outcome was decided. The following **types** of feedback should be provided:

1. A **reviewer profile**<sup>7\*</sup> comprising of the following:
  - i. Number of reviewers approached.
  - ii. Number of reports received.
  - iii. Number of reports used.
  - iv. Number of reports from reviewers based in South Africa.
  - v. Number of reports from reviewers based outside of South Africa.
  - vi. Number of reports from reviewers nominated by the applicant.
  - vii. Number of reports from reviewers selected by Specialist Committee.

***\*Although the aim is to procure six reviewer reports, four reports of acceptable quality expressing a consistent opinion is the NRF benchmark.***

2. A narrative **justification** referring to the comments of the reviewers to **explain** the **reasons** for the rating outcome decision, as well as provide **developmental guidance** on how to improve the applicant's future research or interesting comments on their current research, crafted by the assigned feedback writer. The **convener** of the Specialist Committee is accountable for **quality control** of the **content** of the feedback. This feedback should:
  - i. Be aligned to and consistent with the rating awarded.
  - ii. Relate to the rating category descriptions and definitions but should not just cite ("copy and paste") phrases from them. It is important that this qualitative feedback section support and enhance the reviewer profile information.
  - iii. Comprise of clear sentences that focus on explaining the reasons why a specific rating was awarded.
  - iv. Use the developmental recommendations section to strengthen the narrative justification section.
3. It is **important** to keep the following in mind:
  - i. The most important feedback from the evaluation process is the **rating itself**. It represents the overall opinion of reviewers regarding the standing of the applicant as a researcher, based on the **quality and impact of research outputs** over the last eight years.
  - ii. **Developmental** feedback is selected because of its potential value to researchers in their future work, but the comments provided might be something applicants wish to **disregard** completely.

While the NRF may engage in discussion about aspects of the evaluation and rating process it will not enter into any discussion (apart from official appeals) on the contents of feedback supplied as it emanates from the collective views of a number of reviewers.

Last updated July 2017

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<sup>7</sup> See "Selection of reviewers – Guidelines to Specialist Committees" for an outline of how reviewers are selected and "Assessment of reviewer's reports" for an outline of how the usability of reports is determined (available at <http://www.nrf.ac.za/rating>)

ILLUSTRATION OF PROCESS OF APPEAL AGAINST RATING OUTCOMES

