

Selection of Reviewers - Guidelines¹ for Specialist Committees

1. Introduction

The selection of appropriate reviewers constitutes the very essence of the peer-review system that supports the evaluation and rating of individuals. Members of the Specialist Committees and applicants applying for evaluation and rating are thus expected to show **great circumspection** in nominating reviewers.

Applicants are requested to supply names of no more than six active researchers who are best able to assess the scope and impact of their recent research and other relevant scholastic outputs, activities and contributions. Applicants are also requested to indicate their relationship with the reviewer and to give reasons for each nomination in order to provide the Specialist Committee with additional information for the selection of reviewers. Applicants are also given the opportunity to indicate (excluded reviewers) which reviewers should not be approached by the NRF.

The Specialist Committees are requested to nominate six reviewers of whom **three** should be from those **listed** by the **applicant** and another **three** (so called **independent reviewers**) nominated by the Specialist Committee. If Specialist Committees are not able to obtain at least two reviews from appropriate reviewers not nominated by the applicant (if special circumstances exist, e.g. very few people working in the field etc.), they could use more than three reviewers from the applicant's list on condition that they are deemed to be capable of providing an independent review. This must be justified and minuted at the meeting.

Persons who serve on the **Specialist Committees** should have a sound knowledge of the broader context of their fields and be able to readily identify suitable reviewers nationally and internationally. Identified reviewers should be active researchers capable of fair evaluation. There is no substitute for the wisdom of members of the Specialist Committees who are responsible for the selection of reviewers and whose **task** it is to select an **appropriate mix** of **national AND international reviewers** from whose reports the impact of applicants' research in their fields and in broader fields can be gleaned.

2. Nomination of reviewers

2.1 General guidelines

- i. Specialist Committee members should consult closely with one another, especially with the **Convener** of the Specialist Committee, regarding the selection of reviewers.
- ii. Where Specialist Committee members have difficulties or uncertainties regarding reviewers for particular applicants or fields, they should consult other panel m **colleagues** (locally or abroad) and / or members of other Specialist Committees who would be able to make suggestions about suitable reviewers.
- iii. Electronic publication and citation systems such as Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus can also be used to guide reviewer selection.

¹ Guidelines are not considered to be fixed rules. As this is the current norm in practice, any substantive deviations from these guidelines have to be motivated / justified by the panel at the decision making meeting.

2.2 Specific guidelines

- i. Reviewers who are **closely associated**² with the researcher being assessed should ordinarily be avoided (also see Conflict of Interest guidelines). Reviewers from the **same department / school** as the **applicant** should **not** be nominated as reviewers but reviewers from the same institution as the applicant are not prohibited.
- ii. The Specialist Committee should affirm that reviewers nominated by applicants are **appropriate peers**³ and that they are experts in the field of the applicant (either by reputation, citation, publications, etc.). It should be noted that some applicants do, in fact, nominate inappropriate reviewers. Once it has been established that the persons nominated by the applicant are peers, three of those available should be **prioritised**⁴ by the SC to indicate whom the LO in RE should approach first.
- iii. Six additional reviewers should be identified by the SC who are not on the applicant's list, again prioritising three ensuring that they are peers (see footnote 3) and active in the field of research of the applicant.
- iv. An appropriate **mix** of national and international reviewers should be selected for **ALL** rating applicants (even those nominated for the emerging category). The mix should be determined by the discipline and expected outcome of the rating (e.g. for an A nomination there should only be international reviewers while for a potential C candidate working on a problem of local relevance, the mix will look differently).
- v. The **standing** of reviewers should be taken into account; to take two obvious examples,
 - Nobel Prize winners should not be approached for an applicant most likely to be placed in the Y category.
 - International leaders should be approached for applicants currently in the A category (or for applicants where Specialist Committee members feel there is a strong possibility that they may be placed in the A category).
- vi. In some cases an applicant's work may cover **several fields**. Reviewers should be chosen to ensure that the scope and impact of all the work is adequately covered (the publication record and narrative fields in the application often contain valuable information to guide this). The final rating outcome is determined by the field in which the applicant is the strongest. It is, however, important that the key criterion of coherence is not overlooked in the process.
- vii. It may be necessary to consult with other Specialist Committees or to approach more than six reviewers in such cases especially if the fields are very divergent (also see 2.1.ii).
- viii. In cases where an applicant's research straddles more than one Specialist Committee, the evaluation should be handled by the most appropriate Specialist Committee as agreed upon by the applicant and the members of Specialist Committees. Applicants should be give **consent** to a **change** in the **primary panel**. Members of this Specialist Committee will consult with other relevant Specialist Committees if, and when, the need arises (in particular during the process of identification of reviewers).
- ix. Reviewers who are generalists and those who are aware of the 'broader picture' are essential in the evaluation of researchers who do descriptive research because they can place the research into a wider context. It is also preferable to find, in general, a balance between those reviewers who work closely in the field and those who are somewhat removed from the applicant's work.
- x. Care must be taken not to approach the same reviewer too often. Where a particular person is suitable for several applicants he/she could be approached for some of them but could also be

² An exception to this guideline may be made in the case of applicants nominated for the emerging (Y) rating category. Supervisors of these applicants are often in a very good position to assess potential and should therefore not be excluded per definition.

³ A peer is a researcher or a person with a research background who has the requisite knowledge and experience and the ability to exercise objective fair judgment of the applicant and to provide an appropriate assessment of the applicants research and research standing. The emphasis should be on the person's experience and ability to provide an appropriate assessment.

⁴ Although the aim is to obtain six reports (three from reviewers nominated by the applicant and three nominated by members of the SC), the average decline rate of reviewers approached across rating panels are 50%. It is therefore wise to have two reviewers available for every report required.

asked to suggest names of suitable reviewers for the other applicants. *A reviewer should preferably not be approached to do more than three reports in one year.*

- xi. Generally speaking the same reviewer should not be approached more than twice consecutively to review a particular applicant.
- xii. When approaching reviewers in **industry** it is important that the chosen reviewers are **peers** who are **active** in research.
- xiii. Members of Specialist Committees should not be asked to act as reviewers for applicants linked to their panels. Members of the EEC, Appeals Committee and Assessors should normally not be reviewers. The Conflict of Interest rules (Appendix 3) applies to guide decision making in this regard.