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	Established researchers with a sustained recent record of productivity in the field who are recognised by their peers as having: • produced a body of quality work, the core of which has coherence and attests to ongoing engagement with the field • demonstrated the ability to conceptualise problems and apply research methods to investigating them.	C1	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: Some reviewers as already enjoying considerable international recognition; OR 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; OR 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.*
		C2	With the exception of no more than a single reviewer raising some minor concerns, all other 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.

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For applications submitted 28 Feb 2022

** Up to 36 years of age is the norm

***40 years (or younger) as at 28 Feb 2022 (closing date)

Guide to terminology:

Overwhelming 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: 2016

Explanatory note: For 2022 applications the call closed on 28 Feb 2022 but only took outputs into account that was published in the period: 1 Jan 2014 to 31 Dec 2021(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 2022 applications it is calculated as follows:

Year 0: 2016 (any date between 1 Jan – 31 Dec of 2016)
Year 1: 2017
Year 2: 2018
Year 3: 2019
Year 4: 2020
Year 5: 2021 (any date between 1 Jan – 31 Dec 2021 (end of the period under review)

If the applicant has obtained his/her degree on 31 Jan 2016 he/she will benefit by almost 11 months but if he/she obtained it in Dec 2016 they will literally have just over five years.