

# Summary of Sector Responses to the Consultation Paper on New and Emerging Researchers

## Purpose

This document provides a summary of the key points arising from sector responses to the consultation paper on New and Emerging researchers produced by the Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) Sector Reference Group (SRG).

**Note: The SRG and the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) make no claims about the accuracy or appropriateness of any of these sector responses.**

## Introduction

The consultation paper discusses the category of new and emerging researcher (NE). It considers options for addressing concerns raised in previous funding rounds and makes some recommendations. It also invites feedback from stakeholders in the tertiary education sector on these options and recommendations.

It was approved by the PBRF Sector Reference Group at their meeting on 7 November 2008. Sector response to this consultation paper was invited through the TEC web site from 14 November 2008 until 30 January 2009.

A total of 24 responses were received. The respondents are listed in the appendix.

## Organisation of the summary

The summary has been organised into the following five parts:

**A. Table of number of submissions expressing full, partial or no support of options on which further guidance was sought**

**B. Responses to options on which guidance was sought:**

*Assessment of 'NE' researchers according to the agreed criteria but reporting their quality categories without the 'NE' marker (option five)*

*Creation of two new quality categories, 'B(NE)' and 'A(NE)', with carefully defined requirements including PE and CRE (option six)*

*Assessment of 'NE' researchers according to the agreed criteria but reporting their quality categories as 'NE' without a quality category marker (option seven)*

*Shortening the eligibility period for 'NE' status from six to four years (option eight)*

**C. Responses to other options:**

*Retain the status quo for new and emerging researchers (option one)*

*Define conditions for eligibility for N and E status more clearly (option two)*

*Require panels to develop more explicit definitions of what 'equivalent to' the stated assessment criteria means in terms of research outputs, and what would constitute a ranking of '2' for research outputs for new researchers (option three)*

*Provide a higher weighting for those 'NE' researchers awarded a funded quality category (option four)*

**D. Miscellaneous comments**

**E. Appendix**

**PART A.**

Number of submissions expressing full, partial<sup>1</sup> or no support of options on which further guidance was sought

Option	Fully supported	Partially supported	Not supported	No preference expressed
Assessment of 'NE' researchers according to the agreed criteria but reporting their quality categories without the 'NE' marker	3	4	15	2
Creation of two new quality categories, 'B(NE)' and 'A(NE)', with carefully defined requirements including PE and CRE	4	3	16	1
Assessment of 'NE' researchers according to the agreed criteria but reporting their quality categories as 'NE' without a quality category marker	5	5	10	4
Shortening the eligibility period for 'NE' status from six to four years	6	—	15	3

**PARTS B - D**

*The number of times a given reason was made in submissions is indicated in brackets. The most frequently cited reasons are listed first, followed by one-off comments presented in no particular order.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Partial support is deemed to occur where a respondent agrees only in part to a given option. The riders or provisos the respondent places on their endorsement are reproduced in part B.

## **PART B.**

### **Responses to options on which guidance was sought**

#### ***Assessment of 'NE' researchers according to the agreed criteria but reporting their quality categories without the 'NE' marker (option five)***

\*\*\*The number of times a reason was made is indicated in brackets\*\*\*

#### **Disagree:**

- the NE category allows for differentiation between early career researchers and established academic staff who are research inactive **(5)**
- comparisons between rounds would be more difficult if NE were dropped from reported results **(4)**
- a C category for a rising star is far more demoralising than C(NE) **(3)**
- rather than dropping the NE marker, issues of demoralisation could be addressed through better understanding of what NE means and discussion around guidelines **(2)**
- reporting without the NE tag would not be equitable – would upgrade C(NE)s (assessed without PE + CRE) and downgrade Cs (assessed with PE + CRE) **(2)**
- the NE tag should be included in reported results as a reflection of the number of years the academic been employed, not as reflection of their ability/experience **(1)**
- Adams himself recognised that removing the NE marker would not provide enough benefit **(1)**
- the C(NE) category has raised the financial value of some researchers and attempted to address morale and development issues **(1)**
- consideration of NE as a demoralising tag not widespread in this respondent TEO **(1)**
- retain the NE marker to recognise the contribution of NEs **(1)**
- difficult to see the value in withholding post-assessment information **(1)**
- disagree with 'advantage' of anonymity in SRG paper - scores are hardly anonymous to begin with (scores have been requested by some granting bodies, for example) **(1)**
- the PBRF principle of transparency would not be enhanced **(1)**
- unnecessary complexities would be added to the PBRF administration **(1)**, and would achieve little **(1)**
- benefits of reporting the NE marker outweigh the disadvantages **(1)**

#### **Partial support:**

- use NE category to report for C + R, but omit for A + B grades (open competition) **(2)**
- retain reporting of C(NE), but report R(NE) as NE **(1)**
- individuals could avoid stigma by not having their personal grade recorded or reported as NE (R or C), but it is important that numbers of NE staff be reported at an institutional level (to show which TEOs are 'developing' new researchers) **(1)**

#### **Agree:**

- not reporting the NE marker would help maintain anonymity **(2)** but the NE researcher must know he/she has been evaluated according to NE criteria **(1)**
- report C and C(NE) together as C (cf. reasons in consultation paper) **(1)** – no opinion expressed on R vs. R(NE)

***Creation of two new quality categories, 'B(NE)' and 'A(NE)', with carefully defined requirements including PE and CRE (option six)***

\*\*\*The number of times a reason was made is indicated in brackets\*\*\*

**Disagree:**

- difficult to make comparisons between A and A(NE)s, B and B(NE)s (especially if different criteria applied), and to compare results between funding rounds **(6)**
- already possible for NE rising stars to achieve A or B through the holistic assessment mechanism / where all researchers are required to complete PE and CRE sections – they should be graded in the normal system **(6)**
- time-consuming exercise, would create too many categories and make the system too complex, without adding value **(5)**
- creating these two new categories could also create the risk of a researcher slipping back a grade in following round **(3)**
- may lead to a perception of diminished prestige of A and B if such 'junior' classes were introduced **(3)**, and would create perception of [A(NE)s and B(NE)s] as being "second class" **(1)**
- benefits (improving morale/incentives for rising stars) are not the primary objective of PBRF, and would also be outweighed by the disadvantages (slippage e.g. from A(NE) to B; huge costs, violating the principles of redesign) **(2)**
- would increase individual competition, detracting from collaborative and long-term sustainable quality research environments **(2)**
- would introduce variations in resourcing and have funding implications not addressed in the [consultation] paper **(2)**
- important to send the right signals about the development of PE and CRE to NEs who will have to compete shortly in general pool **(1)**
- would be difficult to implement credible NE criteria for A and B categories **(1)**
- finer granulation of NE grades decreases anonymity (increases the likelihood of other staff members identifying NE grades) **(1)**
- would be a departure from fundamental principles of assessing research output and quality, to imply focus instead on assessment of individual researchers **(1)**
- may add to demoralisation of C(NE)s **(1)**
- alternative options proposed:
  - award a straight C for NEs with good PE + CRE who can not achieve a B due to insufficient outputs (e.g. professional mid-career appointments). C(NE) would thus be reserved for those with no PE or CRE, i.e. young academic staff, as originally intended **(1)**
  - since individual staff can already obtain granular information on quality category, explore option of exploring qualifying categories (e.g. C-, C, C+ or numerical bands for current scores) to push rising stars up the ladder. This would provide more information

on quality of research and remain comparable with previous assessments (if based on existing scores) **(1)**

**Partial support:**

- support B(NE) category to reward the many researchers who produce B level outputs without sufficient PE and CRE. The category A(NE), however, is not necessary as it is unlikely that any NE researcher could achieve an A level output **(1)**
- merit in considering creating A(NE) and B(NE) categories to create a distinctive path for researchers that recognises excellence, as well as the early stage of their career. This would, however, create further complexity and impact on reporting of future statistics **(1)**
- would boost morale for rising stars, encourage greater effort into EPs and/or achievement of PE. The risk, however, of slipping grade in future rounds (and knock-on effects of demoralisation) would need to be carefully managed **(1)**

**Agree:**

- disadvantages (added complexity) outweighed by benefits: rewarding good performance **(2)**; focusing efforts of NE researchers on outputs (not on PE + CRE at early stage); motivating high calibre NEs that TEOs want to retain, rather than lose to higher paid positions overseas (their research should generate extra income) **(1)**
- would provide more detailed reporting to NE researchers **(1)**

***Assessment of 'NE' researchers according to the agreed criteria but reporting their quality categories as 'NE' without a quality category marker (option seven)***

\*\*\*The number of times a reason was made is indicated in brackets\*\*\*

**Disagree:**

- unnecessary change – the introduction of the NE system has been successful, its effect has been more positive than negative, and the demoralising effect of knowing one's grade is over-emphasised in the [Adams] report **(3)**
- would add unnecessary complexities to the PBRF administration **(2)**, and would not add greater transparency **(3)**
- would blur any comparisons between 2006 and 2012, and reduce the usefulness of reported results **(2)**
- reporting all NEs in one bundle would discriminate against researchers who could achieve a C(NE) category, leading to their demoralisation **(2)**
- would be more disappointing for individuals not to know whether they had obtained an R or C grade **(1)**, and they would be unable to assess their performance relative to that of others on a national basis **(1)**
- would have funding implications not addressed in the [consultation] paper **(1)**

**Partial support:**

- support reporting R(NE) as NE to acknowledge that research is underway without having yet acquired a grade, BUT do not support reporting C(NE) as NE – mixes apples & oranges (Cs with Rs) **(3)**
- support reporting of C(NE) as NE to reduce the stigma for rising stars – NE category would be clearly distinguished from C category, and thereby simplify reporting and funding processes **(2)** but do NOT support reporting of R(NE) as NE, as this would not distinguish NEs who met criteria for a funded category from those who did not (demoralising the former), and would fail to comply with principles of transparency and equity **(2)**

**Agree:**

- “best option of those provided” - gives researchers recognition and protection of their NE status without, for example, the stigma of C grade **(1)**
- “much better approach” than the previous two options (five and six) **(1)**
- support reporting of NEs without a quality category marker, as long as quality categories awarded remain R(NE), C(NE), B and A **(1)**
- would be essentially creating a fourth quality category, as suggested by Adams. [A variation of] this fourth category could be assigned to ANY researcher, NE or established, and would solve the problem of an NE being assigned a C for work that is actually less than a C whilst also recognising and funding work of researchers who meet the requirements for degree teachers **(1)**

## ***Shortening the eligibility period for 'NE' status from six to four years (option eight)***

\*\*\*The number of times a reason was made is indicated in brackets\*\*\*

### **Disagree:**

- Six years is a good compromise: training post-PhD can be 3 to 4 years before an established position is taken (cf. USA where tenure periods are 6 to 7 years) – 4 years would mean a C(NE) could translate to a C but have little opportunity to build PE and CRE **(5)**
- four years is as arbitrary as six **(2)**
- exclude from the count of eligible PBRF those NEs who become eligible for first time in the second half of a census period (in the six months after close of publication period) because this can result in default R(NE)s **(1)**
- keep NE status to six year period from 1 Jan (first year) to 31 Dec (sixth year), so NE researcher eligible on 17 Dec 06, for example, would lose NE status in 2012 **(1)**
- keep status quo – matching eligibility period to the NE status would be easier to administer **(1)**
- achieve the same result by asking all researchers to complete PE and CRE sections with the incentive of a B or A **(1)**
- retain 6 years – many doctoral candidates are part-time and take longer than 6 years to complete **(1)**
- would have negative effects for part-timers, joint clinical/academic appointees and mid-career appointments (e.g. doctors systematically employed as senior lecturers with no academic background), who need time to establish research portfolios **(1)**
- staff with high teaching loads (e.g. in ITPs) may be greatly disadvantaged **(1)**
- would be inconsistent with other similar status measures, including Marsden criteria for Fast Start applications **(1)**
- alternative proposals:
  - apply six years pro rata – a researcher who has only worked part-time since his/her PhD should be given a longer period of time to be NE **(2)**
  - set a maximum of eight years post-PhD (regardless of pro-rata status) to cover disadvantaged groups, e.g. young researchers on parental leave early in careers **(1)**
  - if a fourth category were created (see point in option seven), shortening the NE eligibility period would be unnecessary **(1)**

### **Agree:**

- fairer – easier for a researcher who completed a PhD six years previously to achieve a C(NE) than for a researcher who has only just completed or been appointed **(3)**
- would provide better incentives for NEs (and their TEOs) to progress into other categories and to work on PE and CRE – it should be possible for researcher awarded PhD at start of assessment period to build EP over four years, then be assessed under standard (non-NE) criteria **(2)**

- shortening would help remove the large spread in quality categories between NEs at each end of the NE status period **(1)**
- shortening would help combat demoralisation of NEs at end of NE status period who would prefer to be considered established academics **(1)**
- would enable NEs to be involved earlier, and allow them to develop their potential and/or contribute to the PBRF process **(1)**

**No preference expressed:**

- may slightly increase or decrease advantages to NEs – aggregated gains to efficiencies (in shortening the period) would be negligible **(1)**
- a longer or shorter timeframe is likely to be immaterial in comparison to the more fundamental changes that need to be made regarding practice-based research **(1)**

**PART C. Responses to other options**

*(N.B. Feedback on these options was not formally solicited in the consultation paper)*

\*\*\*The number of times a reason was made is indicated in brackets\*\*\*

**Option one:**

***Retain the status quo for new and emerging researchers***

3/3 responses support this option

<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• strongly agree but recommend the TEC define existing eligibility more tightly <b>(1)</b></li><li>• agree and stress the need for better understanding of existing categories <b>(1)</b></li><li>• there is little reason to change the current guidelines, although reducing NE status period could have some advantages <b>(1)</b></li></ul>	

**Option two:**

**Define conditions for eligibility for N and E status more clearly**

8/9 responses support this option

<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• endorse the need for clear, panel-specific guidelines <b>(1)</b> that include carefully defined requirements for PE and CRE sections <b>(1)</b></li><li>• ensure staff and PGs have ready access to guidelines <b>(1)</b></li><li>• make criteria more favourable for TEOs to employ professionals entering an academic career <b>(1)</b></li><li>• examples of doctoral equivalencies (especially for professional doctorates and other types of qualifications) would be good for panels and institutions, along with revised guidelines <b>(1)</b></li><li>• anomalies around eligibility need to be ironed out and agreed – previously, some eligible researchers were not included, whilst others who didn't fit criteria were. Process for application as NE should reflect this <b>(1)</b></li><li>• support provision of space on EP in which NE designation entered to ensure a “no surprises” process <b>(1)</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• current guidelines are clear - confusion over NE status may be due to reliance on preconceived ideas regarding NEs and lack of familiarity with details of guidelines <b>(1)</b></li></ul>

**Option three:**

**Require panels to develop more explicit definitions of what ‘equivalent to’ the stated assessment criteria means in terms of research outputs, and what would constitute a ranking of 2 for research outputs for new researchers**

11/11 responses support this option, with 2 expressing reservations

<b>Agree</b>	<b>Reservations</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• endorse clarification of definitions in terms of doctorate and two peer reviewed outputs <b>(4)</b></li><li>• panels need more flexibility to create own guidelines <b>(3)</b> and to provide examples <b>(1)</b></li><li>• need for flexibility to allow for one stellar paper (rather than two lower impact ones) to suffice for assessment as NE <b>(2)</b></li><li>• NE category often includes mid- to end-career professionals entering academia who do not fit common model of NE (no core doctoral equivalent), but have potential to score highly in PE and CRE - review rigid weightings given to these? <b>(2)</b></li><li>• reinforce notion that PEs and CREs be completed in all EPs <b>(1)</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• do not support any lessening of requirements – could create problems for entry and have negative flow-on effects on status/desirability of some qualifications <b>(1)</b></li><li>• overall, do not agree to Masters theses counting as doctoral output but acknowledge it may be appropriate in some disciplines (e.g. Humanities and Law) <b>(1)</b></li></ul>

**Option four:**

**Provide a higher weighting for those 'NE' researchers awarded a funded quality category**

6/8 responses support this option

<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• would provide further incentives to both researchers and institutions <b>(3)</b></li><li>• issue of disincentivised institutions and low morale in researchers must be addressed through ongoing education that NE <i>is</i> the appropriate beginning point for an academic career <b>(1)</b></li><li>• NE should carry its own funding, greater than that of a C to reflect value of such staff to the TEO employer <b>(1)</b></li><li>• changes to funding weighting would have no impact on retrospective and prospective comparison of data <b>(1)</b></li><li>• under the current system, departments with large numbers of post-doc fellows are disadvantaged in overall quality category, despite ability to attract post-docs <b>(1)</b></li><li>• changing the way NE grades are incorporated into calculations of overall quality categories may help better measure research quality <b>(1)</b></li><li>• appropriate direction to encourage accurate reporting of NEs and to support TEOs who commit to appointing new staff <b>(1)</b></li><li>• would address concerns about workforce structure <b>(1)</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• do not support this option, unless additional funds are allocated - if funding pool remains the same and is simply allocated differently, it would only be recycling the same funding <b>(1)</b></li><li>• would need to increase weightings for an ordinary C, thus devaluing A and B <b>(1)</b></li></ul>

## PART D. Miscellaneous comments

- strong support of purpose for which NE category established. Important to make changes for 2012 around principles of comprehensiveness, consistency and transparency BUT issues around junior staff support, career structure and morale are primarily the responsibility of the TEO employer, not PBRF **(2)**
- disquiet amongst [non-NE] academics is not necessarily reported but widespread, more so than amongst oft-cited 'demoralised' NEs. Many staff have been disappointed with their grades and are disgruntled by current the PBRF mode. Post-grading feedback (re method of attributing grades) would be useful
- revise PE criteria to include PhD supervision as PE for emerging researchers – would be consistent with PBRF principles of respect for academic traditions and credibility
- need for stronger mentoring system for NEs, provision for selected students to be put into tenure track positions, and more funded post-docs – more incentives (paid positions) for NEs to remain in NZ
- main flaw in current process and options proposed, including allocation of more money to TEOs for C(NE)s or NEs, is that they do NOT provide correct incentives for TEOs to support NEs
- NEs need support (time, money, assistance) to get from C to B so PBRF needs to: fund TEOs on conversion rates (e.g. move staff from C(NE) to C, B to A); mandate PBRF money allocated to NE staff to conduct publishable research
- funding gap between top and bottom should not be extreme
- focus on the morale of rising stars is tedious – tournament-style incentive systems do not foster cooperation and are not robust to changes, therefore not appropriate for rewarding research
- to focus on morale is to focus on the psyche of a few people, shift away from focus on whole research environment
- suggest holding meetings to explain PBRF to NEs and to hear their feedback
- all NE portfolios should go to TEC for assessment
- post-2012, the PBRF, as fundamentally flawed, should be replaced with an alternative model – minimal changes should be implemented as a result of current review so as not to undermine data obtained so far
- long-term adverse effects of PBRF is to stunt growth of research workforce if TEOs focus on As and Bs
- PBRF is a flawed system – it is not geared for uncompetitive staff; has issues to address on teaching/research split and gender-bias

## **PART E. Appendix**

A total of 24 responses were received and will be given equal weight by the PBRF Sector Reference Group.

Responses made on behalf of these institutions, organisations or associations:

- New Zealand Nurses Organisation
- Tertiary Education Union
- Vice-Chancellor's Office of the University of Auckland
- Victoria University of Wellington Postgraduate Association

Responses made by individuals and/or groups of staff from the following tertiary education organisations:

- Auckland University of Technology
- Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology
- Eastern Institute of Technology
- Lincoln University
- Massey University (2 separate submissions)
- NorthTec
- Open Polytechnic of New Zealand
- Otago Polytechnic
- Unitec Institute of Technology
- University of Auckland
- University of Canterbury
- University of Otago (5 separate submissions)
- University of Waikato
- Victoria University of Wellington
- Waikato Institute of Technology