Frequently Asked Questions on the Evaluation of the
Contribution to the Training of Highly Qualified Personnel Criterion for Evaluation Group Members

Below you will find a list of frequently asked questions on the evaluation of the Training of Highly Qualified Personnel criterion. The answers to the following questions are based on information found in the Peer Review Manual, section 4.4.3.

Should you require further clarification on any of the listed questions, or have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact your program officer.

1) Q. What type of information should members be looking for in the Highly Qualified Personnel (HQP) training plan? Some researchers present specifics about what each trainee will be doing while others only present their general training philosophy. How should this be evaluated?
   A. A good plan should provide details on the activities or projects in which trainees will be involved and how these relate to achieving the objectives of the proposed research program. Sufficient detail should be provided to demonstrate that the activities are appropriate to the level of trainees (e.g. undergraduate, Masters, PhD, etc.) involved. The plan should describe the skills and knowledge that the trainees will acquire and the expected impact (e.g. on the trainee, the research program and/or research contributions).
   If a “generic” plan without relevant details is submitted, this lack of specificity will be reflected in the overall rating of the HQP merit indicator.
   The HQP merit indicator includes an assessment of both the training record and the training plan. If a poor training plan is submitted, but the training record is good (or vice versa), this will be reflected in the overall rating of the HQP merit indicator.

2) Q. What can be considered as evidence of impact and quality when evaluating the training record?
   A. Evidence that HQP have collaborated in research contributions (conferences, publications, patents, technical reports, etc.), usually as co-authors, is to be considered an indicator of their intellectual involvement and success. Other indicators may also be considered, depending on the level of the HQP.
   The quality of such contributions should also be taken into account, where appropriate. The onus is on the applicant to explain the contribution of trainees to past research contributions. It is important to remember, especially with regard to the training of undergraduate students, that the pursuit of further studies by former HQP, or employment in any sector related to the NSE, can be considered as evidence of the quality of their training.
3) **Q. What is a valid outcome for HQP?**
   A. HQP are expected to move on to careers related to the Natural Sciences and Engineering (NSE), whether in the private or public sectors or in academia. The pursuit of further studies by former HQP, or employment in any sector related to the NSE, that require desired skills obtained through the training can be considered evidence of the quality of their training. Awards recognizing research excellence that are given to the HQP of the applicant may also be taken into consideration.

4) **Q. Some applicants train students in fields outside the Natural Sciences and Engineering (NSE). Can this training be considered as part of the applicant’s past training record?**
   A. The proposed training plan for Discovery Grants must be in the NSE domain. If the HQP’s background is in a field outside the NSE, but it is planned that they will receive training from the applicant in the NSE, it should be considered. If the applicant plans to provide training in fields outside the NSE, it should not be considered. However, past HQP training in other domains (e.g., health, social sciences) may be considered as part of the demonstrated commitment of the applicant to training and the quality of the training environment, particularly when there have been opportunities for training synergy or interdisciplinary training.

5) **Q. Should students trained outside the six-year window who have recently been appointed to a professor position be considered in the evaluation of HQP training?**
   A. Students trained solely outside of the six-year window must not be considered.

6) **Q. How should applicants from an institution without a graduate program or with a new graduate program be evaluated?**
   A. All applicants should be assessed in terms of the quality and impact of their HQP training record and training plan. It is important to remember that contributions to training must not be assessed solely in terms of the number and level of individuals supervised. Members should look at how the training contributes to the advancement of knowledge in the particular field of research and in the NSE. The pursuit of further studies by former HQP, or employment in any sector related to the NSE, can be considered evidence of quality of training. It is also possible for applicants to co-supervise graduate students from other institutions, in which case it is important that the applicant has explained their contribution to co-supervision and its context. In all cases, the onus is on the applicant to describe their particular situation in sufficient detail to allow an assessment to be made.

7) **Q. How do members balance the evaluation of HQP training for researchers with greater amounts of funding (and therefore with the ability to train larger numbers) compared to researchers with less funding?**
   A. All applicants should be assessed in terms of the quality and impact of their HQP training record and training plan. The amount of funding received in the past is not a factor that should be considered in the evaluation. An applicant who has received funding from different sources and who has a larger number of HQP should not automatically receive a higher rating. Members should look at the quality of the training environment and training plan rather than the number of HQP that an applicant has or is
planning to train. Members should assess whether the HQP are well integrated into the proposed plan, and if the proposed work for specific HQP is appropriate for their level. Members should also assess whether the training plan is appropriate for the size of the group proposed. In the case of a large research team, the onus is on the applicant to explain the management of the team (for example, by providing context and evidence of their capacity to supervise a very large group of students).

8) **Q. What weight should be put on the training of PhD students vs. undergraduate students, or post-doctoral students versus laboratory technicians?**
   
   **A.** Members should look at the quality and impact of the contributions to HQP training and refrain from trying to quantify or give different weights *a priori* to different HQP groups. Contributions to high quality training at all levels, including undergraduate and graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, technicians and research associates, are to be considered. It is important to remember, especially with regard to the training of undergraduate students, that the pursuit of further studies by former HQP, or employment in any sector related to the NSE, can be considered evidence of the quality of their training.

9) **Q. Should past HQP training supported by NSERC Discovery Grant funds be weighted more than HQP training supported by other funds? Frequently, in the case of applicants with multiple grants, funding sources for each student are not indicated.**
   
   **A.** When evaluating the training record of an applicant, reviewers should not consider how the students were funded, whether from an NSERC Discovery Grant, a CIHR or SSHRC grant or any other type of funding.

10) **Q. When assessing HQP, is there guidance for evaluating Early Career Researchers? It is hard to compare recently appointed faculty with those who have 20 years of experience.**

   **A.** All applicants are evaluated using the same criteria. The only difference in the assessment of Early Career Researchers (ECRs) vs. Established Researchers (ER) is the role of the training record in determining the final rating. ECRs should not be rated as *Insufficient* solely due to the lack of training record; the review can focus on the plan for future training. To compensate for the fact that ECRs have little to no training record and are expected to have, on average, a lower HQP score than most ERs, ECRs are usually funded to a lower bin level than ERs. At the same time, it is unacceptable for an ER to have no training record, even if they were previously working in industry or the international community.

11) **Q. How should mentorship vs. official supervision be treated?**

   **A.** Mentorship is not considered as supervision, even if the applicant is an ECR. It can, however, be used as context in support of the applicant’s training plan. For example, if an applicant has had mentorship experience, it could indicate a higher feasibility of successful implementation of their training plan.

12) **Q. How can an Early Career Researcher rate more than Moderate in the category for HQP?**

   **A.** It is normal and expected that most ECR applicants will receive a rating of Moderate on the HQP criterion due to a lack of training record. A higher or lower rating can be given if warranted by the
applicant’s training record and plan. If a higher rating is given, the applicant’s training record and plan must be commensurate with that of an ER who receives the same rating.

13) **Q. How should information on the applicant’s general teaching responsibilities and recognition (such as teaching awards) be taken into consideration when evaluating the training of HQP?**
   
   **A.** General teaching responsibilities are not taken into consideration in the evaluation of the HQP training criterion, as this criterion measures research training, not teaching. Teaching awards may be considered under the Excellence of the Researcher criterion, along with other recognitions.

14) **Q. How should involvement in student outreach, workshops, etc. be taken into account?**
   
   **A.** A researcher’s involvement in science outreach activities (e.g., general outreach activities and/or NSERC-funded activities) should also be recognized as a valuable contribution to research and training.