



# New Zealand Search and Rescue Secretariat

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TEC  
NZSAR Council  
NZSAR Consultative Committee

## **NZSAR SECRETARIAT RESPONSE TO THE TERTIARY EDUCATION COMMISSION DISCUSSION PAPER**

### **Background**

The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) recently distributed a discussion paper titled Search and Rescue Tertiary Funding (dated 19 October 2011) and invited feedback on proposed options to change the TEC funding model for search and rescue training.

TEC is dissatisfied with the current arrangements for SAR training due to low qualification completion rates which result in unacceptable performance measurements against TEC's current policy settings. TEC also recognises that the current arrangements do not align well with the needs of the SAR sector.

SAR agencies are dissatisfied with the current arrangements as the present training system does not support SAR agencies to align the training requirements of their personnel with operational needs. The current funding arrangements have the effect of placing the needs and requirements of SAR training organisations ahead of SAR operational agencies with service delivery responsibilities. This is inefficient, costly, causes significant distortions and sponsors internal conflict within the SAR sector.

The large amount of time required to complete training which enables SAR people to attain NZQF qualifications can be an inefficient use of resources and is frequently too time intensive for most SAR people. It is also not well aligned to the training needs of the SAR providing organisations, most of whom decline to participate. Additionally, the attainment of formal NZQF "qualifications" is not generally a good measure of SAR skill and/or utility.

The NZSAR Secretariat is seeking changes to the training funding arrangements that will minimise risks to the delivery of SAR services and support the NZSAR Council goals of enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the SAR sector; achieving a culture of "one SAR body"; promoting continuous improvement and maximising the potential of SAR people.

## **Characteristics of the Search and Rescue Sector**

New Zealand's Search and Rescue sector is comprised of approximately 13,800 people of which over 11,500 are appropriately trained for conducting SAR operations. Volunteers make up 91% of the sector and receive no remuneration for their time. The provision of SAR services is a public good and is provided free of charge irrespective of the cause of the operation.

Few SAR people or agencies are dedicated solely to SAR purposes. SAR typically utilises capacity that is contained within existing organisations and people are "employed" within SAR only for the length of the SAR operation or SAR training activity. It is crucial that SAR people across all organisations are able to train and acquire SAR skills together. This assists operational effectiveness by increasing cross-organisational familiarity and trust.

SAR may be considered to have some characteristics of an "industry" (as defined by the Industry Training Act 1992) however, it does not consider itself as an industry and prefers the term "sector". No funding exists within the SAR sector to replace that made currently available by TEC. It is not likely that any more can be acquired. The SAR sector is responsible for maintaining and sustaining skills within the sector.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to provide constructive feedback from the New Zealand Search and Rescue Secretariat to the Tertiary Education Commission Discussion Paper: Search and Rescue Tertiary Funding Review (dated 19 October 2011).

## **Principles**

The NZSAR Secretariat prepared this feedback document with the following principles in mind:

- The provision of SAR services is a public good, not a commercial operation. Services are delivered at no cost to the users.
- SAR organisations with operational or service delivery responsibilities must be able to exert control over the nature, type and quantity of training for their member personnel.
- The training of all SAR people must remain free of charge to individuals.
- It is vital that SAR people train together where possible, not separately within organisational silos. This will support and enable the NZSAR goal of achieving a culture of "one SAR body" amongst the many organisations who deliver SAR services.

- Training for SAR people needs to provide them with sufficient skills so that the coordinating authorities have confidence that they can perform their designated role(s) effectively and safely. SAR organisations with operational or service delivery responsibilities are responsible for establishing and maintaining this level of confidence.
- SAR training may or may not lead to some form of qualification for individuals.

### **Important Elements**

The NZSAR Secretariat perceives that the following elements are important for any new SAR training funding arrangements that may be established. They should:

- Be fit for the whole of search and rescue sector (Sector as defined by NZSAR).
- Ensure SAR operational agencies are able to control and direct the training of their personnel.
- Ensure SAR training organisations meet the needs of SAR agencies with operational responsibilities.
- Ensure that individual SAR members are not required to pay for their training (irrespective of the employment status of the individual).
- Require SAR operational agencies to present an evidence based, objective case for training need leading to a collective annual SAR training plan.
- Ensure SAR operational agencies own and can develop and share all relevant intellectual property. The free flow of information is important to the NZSAR goal of promoting continuous improvement within the SAR Sector.
- Sustain engagement with government funded tertiary education systems.
- Be efficient in the use of resources.
- Utilise TEC funding and reporting mechanisms.
- Be used for initial or advanced skill acquisition training.
- Ensure SAR training funded by TEC will be standards based where possible.
- Result in nationally recognised skills from the SAR training.

- Result in a recognised NZ qualification for some SAR people who complete significant SAR training.

### **Comment of TEC Funding Sources**

The TEC discussion paper search and rescue tertiary funding review (dated 19 October 2011) proposes four possible options and requests alternate options. The NZSAR Secretariat offers the following comments on each options and outlines its preferred option.

1. Status quo. This option is not favoured by the NZSAR Secretariat as significant distortions have been created within the sector in order to access and retain the training funding. The SAR operational agencies are not sufficiently empowered to control the nature and content of SAR training and the training can be misaligned to operational need. It is believed to be inefficient and costly with too many overheads. Course, programme and qualification requirements have been onerous on individuals and can lead to excessive and/or unnecessary training.
2. Exemption to funding rules. This option is a possibility but is not favoured by the NZSAR Secretariat. Exemptions would resolve some difficulties with the status quo option (above) but the inefficiencies and lack of influence by SAR operational agencies would remain.
3. Reconfigured Adult and Community Education (ACE) funding. This option may be a possibility but a number of changes and SAR specific settings would be required for it to work effectively. Specifically:
  - a. Issues around the possible duplication of Crown funding may need to be clarified for those Crown funded SAR agencies (ie Police). SAR training is frequently a joint effort with services being provided in kind.
  - b. Some SAR people are not adults.
  - c. No fees can be set for SAR participants. The vast majority are already volunteering their time to do a public good. It would be perverse to also charge them to be trained so that they may volunteer.
  - d. The funding for SAR training needs to be assured. ACE is currently a contestable fund so some sort of “ring fence” within the fund for SAR would be required.
  - e. Other setting changes will also be required.

4. Alternate Funding Streams. This option is not favoured by the NZSAR Secretariat. Such funding streams do not exist and they may be impossible to establish and retain over the long term. Additionally, the education specific administrative frameworks and responsibilities currently residing within TEC would need to be duplicated at significant cost.
5. Other Options. The TEC discussion paper requested alternate options. Three are outlined below:
  - a. Utilising the Industry Training Fund (ITF). This option may be a possibility but a number of changes and SAR specific settings would be required:
    - i. While SAR may have some characteristics of an “industry” (as defined by the Industry Training Act 1992), a number of differences exist:
      - The “work” SAR performs is a public good, not for commercial gain.
      - The SAR sector generates no income.
      - Most of the time SAR is a latent capacity existing in a range of separate adjacent organisations and activates only in time of need.
      - The vast majority of its “employees” are unpaid volunteers.
      - There is minimal requirement for “trade qualifications” but a strong requirement for the acquisition of skill sets.
      - The SAR sector has no capacity to subsidise “industry training”
    - ii. The SAR sector would not be able to meet 30% of its training costs. It would be able to provide some costs “in kind” (such as the provision of venues etc)
    - iii. SAR training should be standards based where possible but not entirely so.
    - iv. Eligibility arrangement for SAR trainees would need to be defined.
    - v. SAR training should be focussed on attaining skills, not qualifications.
    - vi. Other setting changes would also be required.
  - b. TEC bulk funds NZSAR for the purchase of SAR training. This option may be a possibility and is partially favoured by the NZSAR Secretariat. Concerns exist about the ongoing sustainability of any such arrangements. Some inefficiencies

may also be created by the requirement for the NZSAR Secretariat to meet education specific administrative costs frameworks and responsibilities. At inception, a high degree of clarity would need to be established about what was and was not to be purchased with any such funding. Accountability arrangements may also be onerous and complicated.

- c. SAR Training Fund. A separate TEC fund specifically for the purpose of training SAR personnel is the option **most preferred** by NZSAR. Such a fund should be simple and aligned to principles and elements important to NZSAR. A diagram of how such arrangements might work is attached and a description of responsibilities is contained in the next section. The NZSAR Secretariat is unsure if regulatory or statute changes would be required to implement this option. It may be possible to establish such a fund within an existing funding arrangement such as ACE or the ITF.

### **Proposed Responsibilities – SAR Training Fund**

- SAR operational agencies:
  - Determining, describing and documenting the structure, content, moderation, assessment, credits and qualifications of SAR courses and ensuring it all aligns with the NZSAR Core Curriculum. Unit standards are unlikely to be required for all levels of training.
  - Ownership of all training intellectual property so that good quality training for SAR services, a public good, may be provided at minimal cost and continually developed and improved.
  - Establishing an evidence based training need by SAR agencies in advance.
  - Producing a collective annual SAR training plan, coordinated by NZSAR based upon the sector need and including specifics of the training requirement, numbers, locations, dates and support that may be able to be provided (ie venue).
  - Will have a direct relationship with TEC via the provision of the annual SAR training plan
  - Will provide their members to the training providers in accordance with the annual SAR training plan so that they may receive the agreed training.
  - Monitoring and reporting on training delivered to their personnel.

- Managing the training record(s) of their personnel.
- Provides advice to the ITO on SAR training matters and the accreditation of training providers.
- Assisting and facilitating training as required and agreed.
- TEC:
  - Interacting with SAR operational agencies to confirm the annual SAR training plan.
  - Making funding available to the ITO to fulfil the annual SAR training plan.
  - Monitoring and reporting on the SAR training spend.
- ITO:
  - Assisting the SAR Operational agencies to describe and document the structure, content, moderation, assessment, credits and qualifications of SAR courses and ensuring it all aligns with the NZSAR Core Curriculum.
  - Fulfilling the annual SAR training plan by arranging, organising and paying for all TEC funded SAR training.
  - Accounting to TEC for the use of funding.
  - Accounting to the SAR sector for the quality and content of the training.
  - Identifying and approving training providers in consultation with the SAR operational agencies.
  - Managing and reporting about any credits and/or qualifications that may arise due to SAR training.
- Training providers
  - Provide SAR training as arranged by the ITO in accordance with the annual SAR training plan.
  - Assisting SAR agencies and the ITO on request to develop and document SAR training.

## **Summary**

The review of Search and Rescue Tertiary Funding by TEC is a timely and welcome development as the NZSAR Secretariat believes the current funding

model for SAR training is increasingly unfit for purpose. This review is perceived as an opportunity to establish a new training system which will support the delivery of SAR services for the medium to long term.

Ideally, the resultant changes will serve to minimise risks to the delivery of SAR services and support the NZSAR Council goals of enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the SAR sector; achieving a culture of “one SAR body”; promoting continuous improvement and maximising the potential of SAR people.

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Attachment: Diagram of Funding Search and Rescue Skill Acquisition Training

