

Performance-Based Research Fund Sector Reference Group

Terms of Reference

Background

The Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) is a key government initiative under the Tertiary Education Strategy (TES). It involves funding tertiary education organisations (TEOs) based on their research performance as determined by three components:

- Quality Evaluation;
- Research Degree Completions (RDC); and
- External Research Income (ERI).

The periodic Quality Evaluations measure research quality through the assessment of Evidence Portfolios (EPs) submitted by TEOs for their PBRF-eligible staff. Subject-specific peer review panels independently assess EPs and assign individual quality categories. The aggregated results are then publicly reported.

The results of the periodic Quality Evaluation, together with the results of the RDC and ERI measures, provide the basis for funding allocations to participating TEOs.

The Ministry of Education reviewed the PBRF and recommended a number of changes to its operation. Cabinet agreed these recommendations in February 2014, including confirmation that the next Quality Evaluation will be held in 2018.

Role

The PBRF Sector Reference Group (SRG) will provide advice and recommendations to the TEC on what further changes, beyond those agreed by Cabinet, should be made to the design of the PBRF (specifically the Quality Evaluation component) before the implementation of the 2018 Quality Evaluation.

This will involve:

- meeting regularly (via teleconference where necessary);
- reviewing any papers prepared as part of the TEC's PBRF redesign work, and undertaking further analysis as required;
- identifying options for resolving issues, and communicating these options in the form of discussion papers for sector feedback; and
- reviewing sector feedback and agreeing recommendations for TEC consideration.

Objectives and Principles of the PBRF

In carrying out its role, the SRG will be guided by the objectives and principles of the PBRF.

The primary objectives of the PBRF are to:¹

- Increase the quality of basic and applied research at New Zealand's degree granting tertiary education organisations;
- Support world-leading research-led teaching and learning at degree and postgraduate levels;
- Assist New Zealand's tertiary education organisations to maintain and lift their competitive rankings relative to their international peers; and
- Provide robust public information to stakeholders about research performance within and across tertiary education organisations;

In doing so PBRF will also:

- Support the development of postgraduate student researchers and new and emerging researchers
- Support research activities that provide economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits to New Zealand, including the advancement of mātauranga Māori; and
- Support technology and knowledge transfer to New Zealand businesses, iwi and communities.

The PBRF is governed by the following set of principles:²

- **Comprehensiveness:** the PBRF should appropriately measure the quality of the full range of original investigative activity that occurs within the sector, regardless of its type, form, or place of output;
- **Respect for academic traditions:** the PBRF should operate in a manner that is consistent with academic freedom and institutional autonomy;
- **Consistency:** evaluations of quality made through the PBRF should be consistent across the different subject areas and in the calibration of quality ratings against international standards of excellence;
- **Continuity:** changes to the PBRF process should only be made where they can bring demonstrable improvements that outweigh the cost of implementing them;
- **Differentiation:** the PBRF should allow stakeholders and the government to differentiate between providers and their units on the basis of their relative quality;

¹ The objectives were revised as a part of the Ministry of Education's review of the PBRF and agreed by Cabinet in February 2014.

² These principles were first enunciated by the Working Group on the PBRF. See *Investing in Excellence*, pp.8-9.

- **Credibility:** the methodology, format and processes employed in the PBRF must be credible to those being assessed;
- **Efficiency:** administrative and compliance costs should be kept to the minimum consistent with a robust and credible process;
- **Transparency:** decisions and decision-making processes must be explained openly, except where there is a need to preserve confidentiality and privacy;
- **Complementarity:** the PBRF should be integrated with new and existing policies, such as charters and profiles, and quality assurance systems for degrees and degree providers; and
- **Cultural inclusiveness:** the PBRF should reflect the bicultural nature of New Zealand and the special role and status of the Treaty of Waitangi, and should appropriately reflect and include the full diversity of New Zealand's population.

Redesign Process

The process the SRG follows in considering the design of the PBRF before the implementation of the 2018 Quality Evaluation will be as follows:

- the SRG decides on topics for issues/consultation papers (including seeking feedback on any additional issues for consideration);
- preparation of issues papers by the TEC for the SRG that give background information, specify the issues, and outline potential options for resolution;
- consideration of issues papers by the SRG (in terms of the quality of the analysis, accuracy, clarity, coverage of the relevant issues and options, and recommended approach);
- preparation of consultation papers by the TEC and the SRG for the sector providing background information, clarification of issues, analysis, and recommended approach;
- consultation with the sector, and the receipt and incorporation of feedback as required;
- the SRG makes recommendations to the TEC;
- the SRG receives feedback from TEC on the recommendations; and
- if agreed by TEC, the SRG recommendations are integrated into the PBRF guidelines.

At the conclusion of the PBRF redesign phase in June 2016, a new set of guidelines for the operation of the 2018 Quality Evaluation will be issued, containing the integrated redesigned process.

Input from the TEC's audit and legal stakeholders will also be sought regarding proposed changes and the drafted guidelines.

Principles of Redesign

The PBRF redesign work ahead of the 2018 Quality Evaluation will be based on a number of principles and considerations:

- upholding the objectives and principles of the PBRF (outlined above);
- learning from the previous three Quality Evaluations in order to make improvements to the design of the PBRF and the implementation of the 2018 Quality Evaluation;
- drawing on relevant experience and expertise across the tertiary education sector;
- exposing proposed changes to rigorous sector and expert scrutiny;
- achieving as much sector agreement as possible about how the next Quality Evaluation should be conducted; and
- avoiding costly or time-consuming changes unless there are good reasons for believing they will bring significant improvements.

SRG Membership

An important principle guiding the work of the SRG is that, while its members are drawn from a wide range of participating TEOs, their role is not to act as representatives for their respective organisations.

SRG members are expected to:

- contribute to discussion on the basis of their expertise and experience;
- contribute to the development of advice through peer review and, by agreement, produce working papers within their field of expertise;
- maintain confidentiality where required;
- canvass proposals widely within their network of contacts in the sector; and
- work with other SRG members to make recommendations regarding redesign issues to the TEC.

Membership of the SRG is as follows:

Name	Affiliated organisation
Emeritus Professor Ian Town (Chair)	Independent
Professor Richard Blaikie	University of Otago
Dr Maxine Bryant	University of Canterbury
Professor Donald Cleland	Massey University
Professor Philippa Howden-Chapman	University of Otago
Mr Jonathan Hughes	Universities New Zealand

Name	Affiliated organisation
Professor Kate Kearins	Auckland University of Technology
Professor Robyn Longhurst	University of Waikato
Dr Shireen Maged	Te Wānanga o Aotearoa
Professor Janet McLean	University of Auckland
Professor Kay Morris Matthews	Eastern Institute of Technology
Professor Richard Newcomb	Plant and Food Research and the University of Auckland
Professor Tony Parker	Massey University
Dr Steven Ratuva	University of Auckland
Associate Professor Jacinta Ruru	University of Otago
Professor David Simmons	Lincoln University
Amber Flynn (Secretariat)	TEC

Conducting the business of the PBRF SRG

Meetings of the PBRF SRG

The Chair of the SRG, supported by the TEC Secretariat, is responsible for establishing a regular meeting schedule and calling meetings at appropriate intervals throughout the life of the SRG. The TEC may request the SRG to meet outside of the scheduled meetings if their contribution to a piece of work is necessary and time-bound.

The Chair will call on the TEC Secretariat to assist with the setting of and preparation for meetings (including communicating an agreed agenda). The Chair should ensure adequate notice is given for each meeting to ensure members are able to attend.

It is expected that all members of the SRG will attend scheduled meetings. If a member of the SRG is unable to attend a meeting, then there is to be no proxy for that member at the meeting. It is the member's responsibility to brief another member(s) of the group on any work they might have been undertaking on behalf of the SRG. They must also inform the Chair and Secretariat which member will be presenting their work or update on their behalf.

At each meeting, a copy of the Terms of Reference will be available for use of the members of the SRG.

Minutes

So as to ensure free and frank discussion, detailed minutes will not be kept of discussions at SRG meetings. However, the minutes will consist of a record of decisions and action points.

The Chair is responsible for ensuring the minutes are taken for each meeting, by the TEC Secretariat and then approving those minutes. Minutes will be checked for accuracy and cleared with the Secretariat before being circulated to members of the SRG.

Reimbursement of Costs

The TEC will either book, or reimburse (on presentation of appropriate receipts) travel costs associated with attendance at SRG meetings.

In the event that specific activities require additional work from any members of the SRG, the TEC will agree a contract with the member concerned to cover payment for the agreed services.

Confidentiality

Members of the SRG will be receiving papers covering issues, background information, and suggested changes to the design of the PBRF. These papers may at times include potentially contentious issues and analysis as the SRG must have all relevant data for them to effectively consider and communicate issues freely and frankly.

It is essential that the papers provided to the SRG, and any subsequent SRG discussions, remain confidential to the group, at least until such time as revised papers are circulated for wider sector consultation.

All members of the SRG will be required to sign a Confidentiality Agreement.

Approval

The SRG approved these terms of reference on 24 July 2014.