

Stakeholder Feedback November 2015

PBRF SRG Consultation Paper #8 - Review of the assessment framework (Part 1: Potential changes to the framework)

The information below is a summary of the Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) Sector Reference Group's (SRG's) eighth consultation paper on the review of the assessment framework. Where the organisation is not identified in the comment, the TEC has not attributed those comments to any organisation. Each line of commentary denotes a separate response from an organisation or individual.

Number	Organisation name
1	Auckland University of Technology
2	Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology
3	Eastern Institute of Technology
4	Individual
5	Individual
6	Lincoln University
7	Massey University
8	Otago Polytechnic
9	Tertiary Education Union Te Hautū Kahurangi o Aotearoa
10	University of Auckland
11	University of Canterbury
12	University of Otago
13	University of Otago - Division of Health Sciences
14	University of Waikato
15	Victoria University of Wellington

EP submission

1. Do you support the proposal to exclude information on cross subject-area boundaries from the 2018 Quality Evaluation Guidelines?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	80.0%	12
No	20.0%	3

Comments

The utility of this is questioned for the Primary Panel without the commentary from the cross-reference panel. The minimal impact on assessments from the 2012 round is noted. The PBRF assessment process covers a broad range of subject areas and research forms and there could be utility if there are specific, well-focussed research.

Yes - given that small percentage who requested cross-referrals and subsequently the very low percentage who then had a change in QC. Also as the consultation paper notes on page3, this would also simplify the process of scoring Eps, which is already time-consuming and complex.

The ability to nominate an appropriate cross referral panel was useful for researchers that had more than one research platform that were of equal value as opposed to primary and secondary platforms. Panel chairs will need detailed guidelines on where it is appropriate to cross refer so researchers are not disadvantaged. We also believe that this will further disadvantage trans-discipline researchers.

Yes. However, the Guidelines then require the Chair to make a decision on all portfolios submitted to their panel regarding cross-referral - a huge workload and responsibility.

We agree that in 2012 cross referral in most cases did not lead to significant differences in scoring

Due to the removal of the ability of TEOs to request cross referrals, we support the proposal to exclude information on cross subject-area boundaries as this may cause unnecessary confusion for researchers.

Waikato supports the proposal to exclude information on cross subject-area boundaries from the 2018 Quality Evaluation Guidelines. With the exception of cross-referral requests to the MKD and Pacific Research panels only Panel Chairs can request cross-referrals in the 2018 round therefore this information is no longer required.

No. Information on cross referrals is still required to inform Panel chairs and the information is useful to the submitter in determining how to determine the main panel. The information could be broader, as it is repetitive.

In general, the answer is yes, but this section was difficult to understand. We are not certain exactly what is being proposed here. We would express a concern over the disestablishment of specialist advisors with regard to music specifically. At Otago, specialist advisors were felt to be particularly useful.

Yes, but only if 2018 subject area descriptions are broad enough to appropriately encompass those research areas likely to cross 2012 subject-area boundaries (see our response to the next question).

Yes, in general we support this proposal. However, since TEO's can request cross-referrals to the Māori Knowledge and Development Panel and the Pacific Research Panel, the SRG should consider providing information on the likely cross subject-area boundaries for those Panels.

2. Are the subject areas covered by each panel appropriate?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	78.6%	11
No	21.4%	3

Comments

The well-established, existing panels were seen as adequate.

We continue to hold concerns about multi and inter-disciplinary research and how these might be addressed. Similarly the breadth of panels calls for the retention of specialist advisors. As one example Property studies/Valuation is placed under 'other' in the Business and Economics Panel - along with, Management, HR, industrial relations, international business and other business.

The descriptions of certain subject areas need to be expanded for clarity, and others need to be reconfigured. There are two changes we recommend in particular:

1. "Foreign Languages and Linguistics" should be changed to "Foreign Languages, Literatures and Linguistics, and Inter-cultural studies".

The addition of "Literatures" brings the subject area in line with "English Language and Literature"; much research in "Foreign Languages" actually pertains to foreign literatures and their cultures, not language per se.

The addition of "Inter-cultural Studies" encompasses interdisciplinary research that spans two or more disciplines, as in Asian Studies, European Studies, Latin American Studies, Comparative Literature, Medieval and Early Modern Studies, and Translation Studies. This specification is necessary if the 2012 Guidelines that gave specific consideration to interdisciplinary research are removed.

The degree of detail within "Foreign Languages, Literatures and Linguistics, and Inter-cultural studies" has a precedent in other current subject areas such as "History, History of Art, Classics, and Curatorial Studies" and "Sociology, Social Policy, Social Work, Criminology and Gender Studies."

2. "Music, literary arts and other arts" should be replaced by two subject areas: "Music" and "Fiction, poetry and creative nonfiction".

Literary arts is its own subject area in the same way that "visual arts and crafts" is, and is a completely separate subject area from music.

Veterinary studies and large animal science should/could be part of Biological Sciences.

Is there a need to clarify differences between 'design' in Creative and Performing Arts and 'design' in Engineering, Technology, and Architecture?

Veterinary studies and large animal science should/could be part of Biological Sciences.

Is there a need to clarify differences between 'design' in Creative and Performing Arts and 'design' in Engineering, Technology, and Architecture?

Waikato considers the majority of PBRF subject areas covered by each panel are appropriate however there are areas of concern.

The Management, Human Resources, Industrial Relations and Other Business includes a broad range of management disciplines and is therefore much bigger than the other 3 subjects in the Business and Economics panel. Comparison with the Australian and NZ Standard Research Codes (ANZSRC) shows that Business and Management (1503) is divided into 15 sub-fields. Given the range of specialisms involved, it seems appropriate to consider sub-dividing this subject and ensuring the panel includes adequate expertise to evaluate all of these management research areas.

In addition, there has been some confusion over the assessment of Communication studies as this research fits within Business and Economics, as well as Social Science in the Communications, Journalism and Media Studies.

There is also some slippage between Humanities and Social Sciences, which can mean interdisciplinary research is not always well understood.

Yes, we support the existing subject areas for the 2018 assessment. On the basis that some subject areas have broad coverage with various sub-disciplines (e.g. Design, Psychology), we suggest that the Panel specific guidelines describe, as comprehensively as possible, the sub-disciplines covered within each subject. For example, there has been debate as to whether investigative journalism is included, or accepted, in the 'Communications, Journalism and Media Studies' subject area, providing a comprehensive (as is reasonably possible) would address this frequently occurring concern. The SRG may also wish to consider moving to ANZSRC Fields of Research (just 22 Level one fields or subject areas) in the future given this is how Statistics New Zealand reports on research activity.

Environmental science could be included in a subject area.

Education should have more subject areas.

While we don't think the allocation of subject areas to panels is perfect, we think consistency between rounds is valuable. It is much more important to get the right expertise onto the panel.

Our assessment is that the subject areas covered by each panel are appropriate. As with any drawing of boundaries, there will always be some areas that may be contentious, and of course over time there may be new subject areas that should be considered.

They are fine and further specialisation can be covered by the free field primary field of research. Although guidance could be given to assist researchers to complete the primary field when they had 2 equal fields, or research that is trans-discipline in nature thereby indicating a potential for a cross-referral.

We believe that the subject areas should remain the same as for previous rounds to avoid confusion and to make comparisons possible.

3. Should the SRG review the Guidelines for Special Input Requirements: Māori Research?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	61.5%	8
No	38.5%	5

If so, what are the key issues?

We continue to support the inclusion of a separate focus for Maori research. We believe past descriptors are adequate for current panels

Yes, the Guidelines should be reviewed. The major issue is workload for the MKD Panel, given that a large proportion of the public health, clinical medicine and nursing research has implications for health inequalities and is therefore relevant to Māori, and in consequence should be cross-referred. On the other hand, it is arguable that most NZ academics are well aware of the existing health inequalities and are able to take this into consideration when assessing a portfolio. Requiring the MKD Panel to review this potentially very large number of additional portfolios in addition to those submitted directly to MKD could create an untenable workload for MKD Panellists.

Having been a panellist [edit] and having seen first-hand the very limited effect of cross-referrals, I agree with the general move to remove cross-referrals, and fail to see why referral of portfolios to MKD will produce any different result.

Yes, the Guidelines should be reviewed. The major issue is workload for the MKD Panel, given that a large proportion of the public health, clinical medicine and nursing research has implications for health inequalities and is therefore relevant to Māori, and in consequence should be cross-referred. On the other hand, it is arguable that most NZ academics are well aware of the existing health inequalities and are able to take this into consideration when assessing a portfolio. Requiring the MKD Panel to review this potentially very large number of additional portfolios in addition to those submitted directly to MKD could create an untenable workload for MKD Panellists.

The University of Waikato would support a review of the Guidelines for Special Input Requirements: Māori Research. In particular guidance on when it would be appropriate for a staff member to cross-refer their portfolio to the Māori Knowledge and Development Panel. For example should a portfolio with 1 NRO addressing an issue of importance for Māori be cross referred to the Māori Knowledge and Development Panel?

The Guidelines will likely need to be updated to reflect any pertinent changes to the MKD Panel Specific Guidelines, the potential new requirement for providing a justification for the cross-referral request and removing any reference to the now defunct expert advisory groups.

Yes it should be reviewed. The key issues would come from the feedback on the process. Did referral increase the quality scores of EP. If not it suggests that the process may require more guidance to peer review panels and Panel chairs.

We think they are fairly clear as they are, but do not oppose reviewing them

We are generally comfortable with these requirements, although there are two specific areas that may need to be considered for review: "Research involving Māori" the second bullet point - this seems so broad that any researcher could claim that their work will "...contribute to the understanding of issues affecting Māori." This could be written more specifically to identify what is unique about the NROs that this could be claimed. Similarly, in the "Research specifically relevant to Māori" section the second bullet point is very broad and again could be claimed by any researcher.

We are satisfied that the Guidelines for Special Input Requirements: Māori Research are appropriate and do not need reviewing.

No, we believe the Guidelines for Special Input Requirements: Maori Research is still applicable and does not require revision.

4. Should the SRG and the Pacific Research peer review panel develop Guidelines for Special Input Requirements: Pacific Research?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	73.3%	11
No	26.7%	4

Comments

Since the establishment of a Pacific Research peer review panel is modelled on the existing Māori Research panel, by extension there should be Guidelines for the Pacific Research panel that parallel those for the Māori Research panel.

The University of Waikato would support a review of the Guidelines for Special Input Requirements: Pacific Research . In particular guidance on when a staff member may cross- refer their portfolio to the Pacific Research Panel. For example should a portfolio with 1 NRO addressing an issue of Pacific importance be cross referred to the Pacific Research Panel?

Since TEO's can request cross-referrals to the Māori Knowledge and Development Panel and the Pacific Research Panel, the SRG should consider providing information on the likely cross subject-area boundaries for those Panels.

We suggest the SRG and the Pacific Research Panel might wish to begin with a review of the Guidelines for Special Input Requirements: Pacific Research (PBRF Guidelines 2006, pg. 158).

The material that will of most use to staff, and would reduce unnecessary or inappropriate cross-referral requests, is guidance on when a portfolio should be cross-referred (e.g. when two NROs are explicitly Pacific research but the rest of the portfolio is not) and when it probably shouldn't (e.g. when just two OROs are Pacific Research focused). Similarly, how many Research Contributions that are 'Pacific Research focused' would warrant cross-referral to the Pacific Research Panel. Such information would be extremely useful to TEOs in the provision of advice for valid cross-referral requests and help reduce unnecessary cross-referral requests.

Due to the removal of the ability of TEOs to request cross referrals, we support the proposal to exclude information on cross subject-area boundaries as this may cause unnecessary confusion for researchers.

We believe the Guidelines for Special Input Requirements: Maori Research is still applicable and does not require revision.

Guidelines following a similar format to the Māori research special input requirements (with the clarifications we noted in the previous section) would be a useful addition.

Yes, support developing Guidelines for Guidelines for Special Input Requirements: Pacific Research. We suggest the SRG and the Pacific Research Panel might wish to begin with a review of the Guidelines for Special Input Requirements: Pacific Research (PBRF Guidelines 2006, pg. 158).

The material that will of most use to staff, and would reduce unnecessary or inappropriate cross-referral requests, is guidance on when a portfolio should be cross-referred (e.g. when two NROs are explicitly Pacific research but the rest of the portfolio is not) and when it probably shouldn't (e.g. when just two OROs are Pacific Research focused). Similarly, how many Research Contributions that are 'Pacific Research focused' would warrant cross-referral to the Pacific Research Panel. Such information would be extremely useful to TEOs in the provision of advice for valid cross-referral requests and help reduce unnecessary cross-referral requests.

No - for the same reasons as noted above.

Guidelines for Special Input Requirements: Pacific Research should be developed.

Yes separate guidelines will need to be developed - presumably in keeping with those already developed for Maori Research

Yes specific guidance would be useful to ensure the provision is properly applied.

Yes we think this would be valuable

Assignment of EPs

5. Do you agree that Chairs provide specific advice on what part or parts of an EP need to be included in the cross-referral assessment?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	100.0%	14
No	0.0%	0

Comments

We strongly agree with this idea as a way to ensure that panellists are informed about what specific aspects of an EP they are being asked to comment on.

Re paragraph 33 on assignments and organisational conflicts of interest: We note that the rules were clear and the problem was the logistics of implementation. It is difficult to avoid assigning a researcher's EP to one of their TEO colleagues in some subject areas, such as Engineering and Medicine, where almost all researchers are based at only two TEOs.

Waikato supports the SRG's proposal that Chairs provide advice on what specific parts of an EP need to be included in a cross-referral assessment. Waikato also recommends that input from panel members also be included.

The proposal to require staff to justify or explain the need for a cross-referral would assist Chairs in providing such advice. Since a cross-referral is seeking particular advice only one or more specific components of a portfolio, we believe it would be useful to standardise across all Panels how feedback might be requested, received and then applied.

Yes it will save time and provide a context for assessing the quality and impact of the work and should provide better quality review. Poor understanding of the context may have been one reason why the cross referrals made little difference to the scores.

Yes, we support the proposal for Chairs to provide specific advice on what part or parts of an EP need attention in cross-referral but only if the cross referral includes the whole EP and parts of an EP are not cross-referred in isolation.

Yes we agree that it is appropriate for the Chair to do this

Yes - this seems like a sensible clarification to assist cross-referral panel Chairs and will positively contribute to workload management for panels.

One of the areas we would like more guidance on is education related research. We have seen some discrepancies in the way EPs were cross referred by panels in this area. Should research that focuses on a specific discipline (e.g teaching and learning related to fine arts studio practice) be seen by the Creative Arts panel or the Education panel or both?

We agree with the suggestion.

Yes, support this proposal. The proposal to require staff to justify or explain the need for a cross-referral would assist Chairs in providing such advice. Since a cross-referral is seeking particular advice only one or more specific components of a portfolio, we believe it would be useful to standardise across all Panels how feedback might be requested, received and then applied.

Individual assessment

6. Do you support:

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Option 1: Require cross-referral assessors provide a commentary which would include confirmation of the aspects of the EP were assessed and provide a rationale for the component scores provided; and require the panel pair to include the cross-referral assessor in the discussion to determine the Preliminary component scores in cases where the scores are significantly different (i.e. more than two points difference).	53.3%	8

Option 2: Require cross-referral assessors provide a commentary which would include confirmation of the aspects of the EP were assessed and provide a rationale for the component scores provided; and require the panel pair to include the cross-referral assessor in the discussion to determine the Preliminary component scores in all cases.	46.7%	7
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Comments

One aspect that is unclear is that if the cross-referral assessor is directed to assess only one or two research outputs in the Research Outputs section, how are they able to give a reliable or accurate score for the entire section? We suggest the SRG review what might be the best mechanism for feedback from the cross-referral assessor to the primary panel, if directed to a limited set of items. The proposal to include the cross-referral assessor in the discussion of the component score appears to be a significant improvement over past practice and should help address this issue. We support the involvement of the cross-referral assessor when the scores are significantly different but particularly when the scores would change the quality category.

We are supportive of option 1, mainly for reasons of managing the workload of panels and trying to keep the EP process as straightforward as possible for panels.

We support Option 1 as this is the best and most efficient use of time, while also offering a safeguard to ensure appropriate scoring.

It should be required in all cases, as the quality or impact may not be understood by the panel pair. This is especially important in understanding the value of applied research.

Waikato supports Option 2.

Waikato seeks clarification on what the component scores provided by the cross-referral assessor would actually cover

e.g. would the score be for just the item(s) they were asked to assess, OR

e.g. if it was an NRO would their component score be for all the portfolio's research outputs, i.e. they would be assessing a component score for research not covered by their subject area.

We support the proposal that cross-referral assessors are included in all discussions as it is deemed important that any person who is involved in the assessment process be party to the discussion to generate the preliminary component scores. The proposals to include only cases where significant differences occur is not appropriate as even one point can alter the assessment of the portfolio.

7. Do you support special circumstances being assessed at the Holistic scoring stage only?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	93.3%	14
No	6.7%	1

Comments

We agree with this proposal with the proviso that panels are instructed to take special circumstances seriously and not dismiss them out of hand as they seem to have done in previous assessments.

Yes, they should (all) be assessed at the holistic stage when all members of the panel are together. This is seen as a more reasoned approach, and providing greater surety of careful consideration (reduced targets noted)

Yes, we support the consideration of special circumstances only at the holistic assessment stage.

Waikato supports the SRG's proposal to assess special circumstances at the Holistic scoring stage only.

Yes the Holistic scoring state better and will provide more a comprehensive approach. Special circumstances relate to quantity and the platform of research which may be more fairly assessed once the entire panel is well-calibrated.

Yes; this is sensible, since this is itself a holistic assessment of the effect of the special circumstances on the final score.

Yes, support this proposal. We believe it would provide a more transparent and consistent assessment process. The SRG might also wish to consider considering only those portfolios with special circumstances when the scores are close to the threshold of the next quality category, or whichever has been the score margin (e.g. plus or minus 60 points) when quality categories have been changed historically under the special circumstances provision.

We believe it would provide a more transparent and consistent assessment process. The SRG might also wish to consider considering only those portfolios with special circumstances when the scores are close to the threshold of the next quality category, or whichever has been the score margin (e.g. plus or minus 60 points) when quality categories have been changed historically under the special circumstances provision.

8. Do you support increasing the minimum percentage of NROs expected to be examined by panel members during the individual assessment stage from 25% to 50%?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	80.0%	12
No	20.0%	3

Comments

Increasing the number of NROs assessed will improve the accuracy of the assessment.

Although Waikato does not support the SRG's proposal to increase the minimum percentage of NROs examined from 25% to 50%, Waikato does concede it could make the exercise more meaningful.

However the status quo allows for panels to review more than the minimum 25% of NROs. This is appropriate as reviewers can read more NROs than this whenever this appears to be required to determine the RO score. As this level of NRO reviews has been satisfactory for three PBRF rounds, it seems inefficient to increase the % for the fourth PBRF round. The extra workload would be significant for all panel members. Making the workload more onerous for panel members may reduce the calibre of the panel membership in future, as top scholars would not have time to do this key role.

Note, EPs will be smaller in 2018 because of the change to the new combined PE/CRE component and the smaller number of these items (only 15); this change aims to improve the effectiveness/efficiency of the EP preparation and review process.

Increasing the % of NROs to be examined seems to go against this aim by increasing time to complete the review processes.

We are concerned that this change could lead to quite dramatic increases in workload for some panel members, as some individual NROs could be very long.

It is the quantity of Other Research Outputs which has been reduced and these are not examined. If the purpose is to reduce work for the panel it would be expected that the bulk of work was in the assessment of the Nominated Research Outputs, not the ORO.

Yes we support this. Our understanding is that this is normally the practice for many panels anyway. It might add some work, but leads to a more robust result.

Yes, support this proposal, particularly since some 2012 panels seemed to already have taken this approach.

We agree with 50% being a minimum for NROs being examined.

Yes, agreed 50% should be the minimum number of NROs examined by panel members

We support the proposal to increase the requirement to 50%.

Yes, we support this as a reasonable expectation, particularly when 80.42% of NROs were examined by panel members in the 2012 QE (PBRF Evaluating Research Excellence - 2012 Assessment Final Report Table 3.5).

Scoring system including scoring new and emerging researchers

9. Are the evidence requirements for the "C(NE)" Quality Category sufficiently clear or is additional guidance is required?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes, the requirements are clear	40.0%	6
No, the requirements are not clear and additional guidance is required.	60.0%	9

If additional guidance is required, what are the key issues relating to this aspect of the scoring system?

Panels should list which degrees will be considered equivalent to a Doctoral degree for specific disciplines e.g. a Master of Audiology in speech and language therapy.

Yes the Research Output component requirements are very clear but what are the expectations for the Research Contribution component?

Additional guidance would be useful. What are the entry-level qualifications required? What is acceptable as a professional qualification? Will RC evidence be considered and included in scoring in portfolios where it is available?

Additional guidance would be useful. What are the entry-level qualifications required? What is acceptable as a professional qualification? Will RC evidence be considered and included in scoring in portfolios where it is available?

Waikato considers the existing evidence requirements for the C(NE) Quality Category could be improved by including a sentence that specifically indicates no 'Research Contribution' is required.

Extra guidance is necessary on expectations for both the Research Outputs and the Research Contributions for a C(NE) grade.

There appear to be major differences in publication levels and expectations for a first academic appointment across the panels and subjects. How well does the existing standard of a PhD thesis (or equivalent) and 2 quality assured publications sit with the various panels? Is this an appropriate 'general' standard for satisfactory research performance?

Also, how is the start time of employment factored into the expectations for the ROs for a C(NE) grade? For example, someone with a first academic appointment early in the 6 year review period is likely to have had more opportunities to publish than someone starting this role towards the end of the review period. As there is no longer a 'Part-time employment' special circumstances category how will this be accommodated

The minimum evidence requirements is not sufficiently explicit.

We understand the Public Health subject area for example accepted a Master' degree as the customary qualification, it would have been very useful for TEOs to have understood Panel's standards in this matter prior to submission of portfolios. We suggest that a New and Emerging researcher section is included in the panel-specific guidelines and this includes the minimum standards expected for the subject areas covered by the Panel. We believe it is important for the ongoing development of new researchers into the tertiary sector that they have clear and unambiguous minimum standards to meet for the PBRF, particularly when they are recent appointments near the end of the PBRF assessment time frame (e.g. appointed in 2016).

The types of things that come up are :

- in public health a Master in Public Health is often the entry requirement for a medic, many of whom do not do PhDs. We are not clear if an MPH is adequate to count as an NRO and this should be clarified.
- The guidelines could state "a N&E staff member without a PhD will require three quality assured research outputs to gain a C(NE) score" or something equally clear.

Additional Guidance is required to avoid submission of new and emerging researchers who are not going to get a quality score. This will be especially important as NE has a higher weighting in the next round and so there may be more submissions in this area.

Clarity on the evidence required where a staff member has a Masters degree in disciplines where it is expected e.g. Creative Industries and disciplines where it is not e.g. Nursing.

At least 2 NRO should be examined for NE researchers as there is a lower requirement for Contribution to Research.

We are unclear why in section 49 there is a requirement for a staff member "...to provide evidence of more than the minimum number of research outputs i.e. two." If a masters or professional qualification is deemed sufficient for a particular discipline or profession, then why would there be an expectation that the staff member has to 'prove' themselves with additional outputs?

They are fairly clear. People often ask if quality assured conference papers 'count' for the C(NE) grade so perhaps this could be clarified

They are sufficiently clear and no additional guidance is required.

No, we believe the current evidence requirements are sufficient to describe the requirements for NEC classification.

Component scoring and tie-point descriptors

10. Are any changes required to either the Research Output component descriptor or the tie-point descriptors?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	40.0%	6
No	60.0%	9

If so, what change is required and why?

Waikato recommends single descriptors be developed for each tie point to allow better consistency among panels and panel members when scoring evidence portfolios

Waikato considers further clarification is needed for the RO descriptor 5/4. Revision is needed to show that these RO are significant at an international level. This could be achieved by editing the following sentence:

"The EP typically includes research outputs that are presented in reputable channels considered as being at least at a middle level of excellence"

So that it reads for example:

"The EP typically includes research outputs that are presented in international channels considered as being reputable and reflecting a high level of excellence"

This change will help with the evaluation as the 'international' significance is a more readily understandable criterion for staff and reviewers.

The current descriptors for the Research Output component have changed little since the first PBRF assessment and are reasonably well understood. However, given the opportunity for review, it has been suggested that the assessment process may be more precise if there were descriptors for each of the scores available rather than the just five descriptors covering the seven point range. Why, for example, do the scores of zero and one each receive their own descriptors? A more precise measurement 'tool' would result in more accurate, consistent and transparent scoring.

It is also worth noting that the 'tie-point' descriptors do not necessary 'tie' to a particular quality category. A 2012 score of 3, 6, 7 would achieve a B, a 2012 score of 6, 4, 4 (all tie-points) results in a B. From this perspective the use of the term 'tie points' is confusing.

The panel guidelines should provide more information relevant to the discipline.

Although a wider panel is sought this time and more overseas panellists are being recruited they are likely to be academic which would reduce the opportunity for applied researchers' work to be valued. The panel guidelines should provide specific information and examples.

We support the use of the Professional and Applied EAG's work on detailed criteria for assessing excellence in applied research. Issues such as the types of journals which are highly regarded in Professional and Applied research areas would be particularly important to consider.

The general descriptors are fine but we need examples of how these work for each panel. The current panel specific guidelines vary enormously from very helpful to not helpful at all, the same level of detail needs to be provided for both.

We strongly believe that no change should be made to the RO descriptor or tie-point descriptors. Changes made here will essentially change the definition of an A or B and hence make any comparisons between assessments null and void. The existing tie-points are understood by the sector.

No, we do not believe there should be any changes made to descriptor or the tie-point descriptors for the research output component as any changes to the terminology may impact assessment and may influence previous round comparisons.

Yes The panel guidelines should provide more information relevant to the discipline. Although a wider panel is sought this time and more overseas panellists are being recruited they are likely to be academic which would reduce the opportunity for applied researchers' work to be valued. The panel guidelines should provide specific information and examples.

We believe the tie-point descriptors are very clear and should remain as in previous rounds.

11. What are the key considerations for the draft Research Contributions component descriptor and tie-point descriptors?

How merging of PE and CRE items into Research Contributions will impact on the descriptors and tie-point descriptors.

Guidance will be required to ensure an activity should only be mentioned once. Past panel members report frustration at the same information being used again and again in individual research contribution statements.

Strong guidance through the tie-point descriptors should be given that high scores are to be awarded for Research Contribution ONLY when the researcher's range of contributions includes both high peer esteem and high contribution to the research environment, not just one or the other. Without this stipulation, some researchers will be disincentivised to contribute to the research environment, particularly senior researchers with high peer esteem whose contributions to the research environment are often among the most important.

As raised in our submission to SRG Consultation Paper 3, the Contribution to the Research Environment component was included in the PBRF assessment for the purpose of alleviating concerns that the PBRF would incentivise self-regarding activity by individuals, such as seeking only to boost their own research profile without consideration of colleagues or students. The PE component was introduced as a non-Research Output indication of research quality; for example, without it, it could be difficult to assess the quality of the work of someone who is co-author of a large number of multi-author research outputs.

Therefore the scoring system for Research Contribution needs to ensure that, to achieve a high score, an EP exhibits achievement in BOTH peer esteem and contribution to the research environment. A middling score could require evidence of reasonable peer esteem and reasonable contribution to the research environment OR evidence of significant achievement in one aspect but little to no achievement in the other.

The PE and CRE descriptors are very detailed and Waikato considers these need to be re-edited to reflect the single combined Research Contributions (RC) components.

Waikato recommends single descriptors be developed for each tie point to allow better consistency amongst panels and panel members when scoring this evidence portfolio component.

We offer the following as a suggestion on how the initial descriptors could be first drafted:

The first draft should begin with a merge of the previous Peer Esteem and Contribution to Research descriptors. Also merged into the descriptors should be the descriptors from the PBRF 2012 Professional and Applied Expert Advisory Group scoring guide, although these will have to be significantly condensed. For the impact component guidance from the UK REF descriptors for impact should be included to provide some direction. These three factors should provide a well-tested draft for the new descriptors.

Need strong input from industry and applied researchers, as most panel members are traditionally Academics. Although a wider panel is sought this time and more overseas panellists are being recruited they are likely to be academic which would reduce the opportunity for applied researchers' work to be valued. The panel guidelines should provide specific information and examples.

The use of terminology and expectations from the previous PE and CRE descriptors should be a key reference document to ensure as much consistency and applicability from previous rounds.

The descriptors should provide clear guidance to assessors, while also recognising that the professional knowledge and expertise of individual's and panels must also be acknowledged.

They need to be transparent as well as fair.

They should contain some notion of the magnitude and ongoing contribution of the various items that are listed in an EP.

Other comments

We do not believe there should be any changes made to descriptor or the tie-point descriptors for the research output component as any changes to the terminology may impact assessment and may influence previous round comparisons

We don't think any changes [to the Research Output Component descriptor or the tie-points descriptors] are required although they could be clearer on applied/professional work so as not to disadvantage work of this nature

Panel assessment

12. Do you support the proposal to develop additional guidance on the holistic assessment stage of the assessment process, including the specific consideration of special circumstances as identified previously?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	100.0%	14
No	0.0%	0

Comments

Yes, more guidelines around the holistic assessment process is required especially for Panel Chairs. We note a need to keep the earthquake moderator for this round. A formal session for the Panel Chairs and Moderators on the on-going effects of the earthquake is recommended.

It is unclear whether this would be useful or not; we recommend that the SRG seeks advice directly from 2012 panel chairs on this point.

We support the development of additional guidance for the overall holistic assessment stage. We also support the assessment of special circumstances at the holistic assessment stage rather than has been done in the past.

Yes, strongly support additional guidance in the application of the holistic assessment.

Except in the case of the application of special circumstances, it's unclear why a portfolio that has been scored in just three sections, with each section scored in a broadly holistic manner - i.e. as a whole and not as the sum of the component parts - then may yet have another holistic assessment, unrelated to the application of special circumstances, applied. This suggests that although the component scores might be 'correct' and 'moderated', the scoring still does not reflect the preferred result of the panel. Consequently the scores should be questioned. It is possible a more precise scoring system as suggested earlier may address this issue.

The SRG and TEC have access to the approximately 50 or so cases where the holistic assessment raised or lowered the scored quality category. It is only with an understanding of why the quality category was raised or lowered, could valid comment be passed on what guidance is required. Nonetheless, more guidance and therefore transparency over what justifies a 'holistic' score would be useful for both managers and staff.

Yes - probably particularly important to assist with Special Circumstances considerations.

We agree that additional advice on holistic assessment would be useful and that this advice should be published in the guidelines document.

Yes, we support the proposal to develop additional guidance for the holistic assessment stage.

Waikato supports the SRG proposal to develop additional guidance on the holistic assessment stage of the assessment process.

Other comments

We note a need to keep the earthquake moderator for this round. A formal session for the Panel Chairs and Moderators on the on-going effects of the earthquake is recommended.

Exemplars used by the Panels should include those which are applied and have good evidence of impact through the Research Outputs and Contribution to Research.

Quality Categories

13. Do you believe that the Quality Category descriptions, specifically the term "world-class" and the distinction the definitions make between international and national contribution and recognition, could be improved for the 2018 Quality Evaluation?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	71.4%	10
No	28.6%	4

Comments

There is a difference between publishing something that is truly international in some sense, and publishing something in a national level journal that is from a nation other than New Zealand. This would be difficult to tease out, but it seems to disadvantage Kiwis who might not have the contacts in other nations that scholars who come to New Zealand from those nations have.

While we recognise that the term 'world-class' is not always appropriate, the current Quality Category descriptions are well understood.

No new suggestions. We thought the present descriptor of 'world class' as adequate within the overall framework.

Yes, they could be improved. Guidance is required to ensure people understand that "world-class" can include research on New Zealand subjects (currently there is confusion on this point). It should be made clear that the adjective does not refer to research focus and location, but instead refers to research reach and influence.

Waikato supports the SRG's proposal to improve the definitions between international and national contribution as some research is at a borderline and nationally recognised work is international by definition in some respects.

In the RO assessment sheet the term 'world-class' is helpfully defined as "best of its kind". This makes it easy to envisage the RO is "best in the world". Similarly, for RC and the A grade.

It will be helpful to introduce a more consistent use of the terms 'internationally significant' and "international excellence". These can be contrasted with having "national significance".

Yes, some of the terminology could be improved.

At present the maximum component score is for research of a "standard" that is 'world-class'. This then lends itself to generating the equivalent of graduated 'lower standards' through a geographic reference i.e. regional, local etc.

The current scoring table includes terms such as 'minimal' for a score of 1, 'developing research' for 2-3, 'middle level of excellence' for a score of 4-5 and 'world-class' in relation to a score of 6-7. One suggestion is to align more closely with standardised terms such as 'very high quality' (relative to the best in the world), 'high quality', through to 'moderate quality' and then 'low quality' (i.e. score of one) and 'very low quality' (i.e. score of zero) or high medium low. It's unclear if this would resolve the issue but should provide a more consistent standards level.

A Maori researcher will make most of their contributions in New Zealand. It should be possible for a Maori researcher with limited international impact to attain an A status.

The description should ensure that really highly valued national or regional research is not undervalued because it hasn't had high international exposure.

We would support the inclusion of reference to the 'authority' the researcher has in the space if national or international. Whilst some can evidence an impact internationally it is the ability to demonstrate authority at that level which secures the assessment score.

Rather than the term 'world class' which can lead institutions to the conclusion that this means 'publishing in international journals only', a better term would be something like 'high quality'

The main issue that I have with the term "world class" is that many individuals in NZ do not recognize that work is world class because it actually needs a specialist to evaluate it. This is a problem for researchers in niche areas that are often overlooked by main-stream evaluators. Often a National recognition comes only as a result of a previous international recognition that PBRF panel members do not appreciate.

We think they are fine as is.

Please describe and detail any areas or issues relating to the review of the assessment framework that require our attention but have not already been included in the consultation paper, or will be addressed in the second consultation paper on this topic.

The RC categories as described previously do not appear in an order/sequence that has a clear logic or rationale. Why is the 'Other RC' listed as No 4 in the list of categories. Some further work appears to be needed on these combined categories. The Research Contribution Description is currently listed alphabetically. There may be merit, in some instances, of allowing it to be ordered in terms of 'importance'.

There has been some concern that the primary focus of the review work has been on the efficiency of the assessment rather than the quality of the assessment. We note that much of the discussion regarding the review focuses on reducing the time and effort of the panel reviewers, without much consideration of improving the quality or effectiveness of the assessment itself. This has been raised here to alert the SRG to this concern and trust it will be considered in their deliberations and final recommendations on what we recognise is a difficult and unenviable task.

Need more information on how the impact of applied research will be described and valued as most panellists are likely to be academics.

There needs to be more guidance on how to treat trans-disciplinary research.

In the PBRF scoring guide table (page 8), a score of 600 earns an A no matter how it is obtained, and a score of 400 earns a B no matter how it is obtained. But, for a score of C, one needs to meet two criteria: a score of 2 has to be obtained under the RO Score, and a total score of 200 or more has to be obtained. I don't have a particular objection to this, but it doesn't seem consistent. For example, if you have a 1 under RO and a 7 under RC (admittedly unlikely), then your total score is 280, but you still receive an R. This means that the RC score isn't really 30% of the total.