

Performance-Based Research Fund Sector Reference Group: Consultation paper # 11 - Review of the assessment framework (Part 2: further changes to the framework); and updates to the 'new and emerging' researcher criteria

Sector feedback and TEC decisions

Purpose

The Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF) Sector Reference Group (SRG) sought feedback from the sector and other stakeholders on the proposed changes to the more detailed aspects of:

- the assessment framework; and
- the criteria for determining and assessing 'new and emerging' researchers.

Feedback was also sought on what other aspects of the Quality Evaluation process need specific consideration and review in order to address concerns about the inclusion and assessment of applied research.

This document provides:

- a summary of the responses received;
- a summary of any concerns raised relating to the options and recommendations; and
- the Tertiary Education Commission's (TEC's) decisions on each aspect of the proposal.

Introduction

The *Review of the assessment framework (Part 2: further changes to the framework); and updates to the 'new and emerging' researcher criteria* consultation paper provided the sector and other key stakeholders with background information on background information on the Quality Evaluation assessment process and changes that were agreed by Cabinet in February 2014 which relate to this process, information on a number of areas that the PBRF SRG sought feedback from stakeholders on as part of the first consultation paper on the assessment framework, proposed further detailed changes to the assessment framework as a result of stakeholder feedback, proposed changes to the eligibility and assessment criteria for 'new and emerging' researchers, and invited feedback on the proposals, what other aspects of the process needed specific consideration and review in order to address concerns about the inclusion and assessment of applied research and any other matters not raised in the paper.

Feedback on this consultation paper was invited through the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) from 30 November 2015 to 9 February 2016. Consultation has now closed.

A total of 17 responses were received. These were from:

- Auckland University of Technology
- CPIT Aoraki
- Eastern Institute of Technology
- Massey University
- Otago Polytechnic
- Tertiary Education Union Te Hautū Kahurangi o Aotearoa
- Unitec Institute of Technology
- University of Auckland

- University of Canterbury
- University of Otago
- University of Otago - Division of Health Sciences
- University of Waikato
- Victoria University of Wellington
- 3 individuals

Callaghan Innovation also provided feedback. Feedback has been anonymised.

Process information

The SRG has considered the feedback from the sector and other stakeholders relating to each of the matters identified in the consultation paper and have indicated their preferred option, which has been recommended to the TEC.

Now that the consultation process has been completed, all changes have been incorporated and recommended to the TEC for approval.

Organisation of summary

Each of the responses has been analysed. Feedback is summarised according to the following three sections:

- Proposals for further change to the 2018 Quality Evaluation assessment process
- Assessing applied research in the 2018 Quality Evaluation
- Criteria for determining and assessing 'new and emerging' researchers
- Any other matters

A. Proposals for further change to the 2018 Quality Evaluation assessment process

Māori Research and cross-referral advice

The SRG proposed changes to the Guidelines for Special Input Requirements: Māori Research, in order to align it to known changes in the 2018 Quality Evaluation cross-referral assessment process.

A review of the responses has been undertaken and summarised below.

Do you support the proposed changes to the Guidelines for Special Input Requirements: Maori Research?	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	87.5%	14
No	0.0%	0
Partially	12.5%	2

The changes were strongly supported. The initial cohort of the Māori Knowledge and Development (MKD) panel has also reviewed the feedback. The MKD panel has finalised the text that has been included in the draft *Guidelines for tertiary education organisations participating in the 2018 Quality Evaluation*.

The SRG would also like to clarify that:

- The Pacific Research panel is also providing similar advice to support the cross-referral process.

- The new Maori Research and Pacific Research elements in the Evidence Portfolio (EP) can only reference five research output or research contribution items that are submitted in that EP.
- There is no provision in the assessment process for a panel to request a specialist advisor, however, the panels will have the opportunity to bring additional panel members into the process once EPs have been submitted. If there is an identified need for, for example, specific mātauranga Māori expertise, this can be addressed this way.

Definition of 'world class'

The SRG proposed changes to the definition of 'world class' in order to address concerns that national, regional, or Māori research may be disadvantaged as it may not receive international exposure.

A review of the responses has been undertaken and summarised below.

Do you support the proposed changes to the definition of 'world-class'?	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	76.5%	13
No	0.0%	0
Partially	23.5%	4

The changes were generally supported and the SRG has incorporated feedback into finalised definition included in the draft *Guidelines for the 2018 Quality Evaluation assessment process*.

Research Contribution scoring descriptors

The SRG developed proposed Research Contribution (RC) component descriptor and tie-point descriptors based on the earlier feedback received and the Cabinet requirement to draw upon the work of the Professional and Applied Expert Advisory Group.

A review of the responses has been undertaken and summarised below.

Do you support the proposed descriptors for the Research Contribution component?	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	56.3%	9
No	0.0%	0
Partially	43.8%	7

The changes are generally supported and the SRG has incorporated feedback into finalised definition included in the draft *Guidelines for the 2018 Quality Evaluation assessment process*.

The SRG would like to clarify that:

- Feedback from the first consultation paper on the assessment framework indicated:

- A strong preference for the new RC component tie-point descriptors to reflect the tie-point descriptors for the previous Peer Esteem and Contribution to the Research Environment components.
- Higher scores should only be awarded for Research Contribution 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.
- Some responses have requested that a more prescriptive approach be taken to the RC component in regard to both the RC types and the descriptors. This includes further categorisation of the RC types into esteem, contribution or impact to assist TEOs, their staff and panels to distinguish between the different categories. The SRG does not support this proposal as the Quality Evaluation assessment is a holistic, judgement-based process. The panels need to assess a wide range of research and research activities. Introducing a more prescriptive approach to the assessment process will potentially disadvantaging those who undertake quality research activities that falls outside of this approach. In addition to this:
 - Some of the new RC types include activities that could be esteem or contribution depending on the activity. The SRG believes that it is important for staff members to identify their best activities and then categorise them in accordance with the high level types.
 - Panels will assess the content of each RC item and base their decision on the description and quality of that item. It is the responsibility of the staff member to ensure that their description clearly identified the esteem, contribution or impact of their activity rather than rely on the title of a research type to convey this information.
- The inclusion of research impact is new for the 2018 Quality Evaluation. The SRG and the TEC have taken a broad approach to impact as feedback from stakeholders throughout the wider consultation process has presented cases for impact that are both inside and outside of academia. The approach taken by the SRG and the TEC is to enable and encourage those who have evidence of research impact to include this in their EPs, however as we are over four years into the six year assessment period for this Quality Evaluation, we do not believe that research impact should be a mandatory element or expect it to be included in every EP.
- The impacts of research must have occurred in the assessment period, but do not need to relate to research undertaken in the assessment period or submitted within the EP.
- The activities in the tie-point descriptors are examples designed to give panels a sense of the range and level of activity that could be expected. They are examples only and are not restricted to these activities.

Holistic assessment

The SRG proposed significant changes to the guidance on the holistic assessment process.

A review of the responses has been undertaken and summarised below.

Do you support the proposed guidance on the holistic assessment stage of the assessment process?	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	47.1%	8
No	11.8%	2

Partially	41.2%	7
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While the responses to the changes were mixed, the main issue was in regard to the assessment of part-time employment.

The SRG and the TEC have reviewed the feedback and revised the guidance on the holistic assessment process and what information should be included in the Platform of Research – Contextual Summary as this will support the holistic assessment. These updates have been included in the draft *Guidelines for the 2018 Quality Evaluation assessment process* and draft *Guidelines for tertiary education organisations participating in the 2018 Quality Evaluation*.

It has also be determined that the FTE recorded for the staff member will be shown on the EP. This has not been available to panellists in previous Quality Evaluation rounds.

B. Assessing applied research in the 2018 Quality Evaluation

The SRG sought feedback on what other aspects of the Quality Evaluation process need specific consideration and review in order to address concerns about the inclusion and assessment of applied research.

The SRG would like to clarify that the Quality Evaluation assessment process:

- specifically states that the absence of quality assurance for an output will not automatically be taken to imply low quality, and
- research outputs will be considered on their merit. This means no one specific type will be weighted higher than another.

The guidelines state that the review processes employed by users of commissioned or funded research including commercial clients and public bodies are considered to be formal quality assurance processes. Applied researchers should not be disadvantaged due to the type of research output they produce or the quality assurance process or lack of quality assurance. It is important that all researchers explain the quality and significance of their work and not assume that a panel will be able to infer this from proxy measures.

Some responses have suggests significant policy changes that cannot be addressed by the SRG or the TEC. These will be provided to the Ministry of Education as the policy holder.

The SRG was also asked to define applied research; however the SRG does not believe that this is necessary. The PBRF Definition of Research incorporates the key elements of applied research, by specifically stating that research “...includes work of direct relevance to the specific needs of iwi, communities, government, industry and commerce.”, stating that research may include “...the use of existing knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially improved, materials, devices, products, communications or processes...” and allowing for dissemination through a wide range of forms “...including, but not limited to, publication, manufacture, construction, public presentation or presentation of confidential reports.” It is important to the TEC and the SRG that applied research is increasingly understood as a part of the PBRF not something that is outside of it.

Other responses have noted the importance of panel composition. The TEC has released information on panel composition as it relates to applied research in the panel nomination documentation. Panel Chairs understand that assessors on some panels will need to be credible to applied researchers when the panels are completed in 2018.

It is important that panels where applied research is more common address applied research specifically in their panel-specific guidelines. The feedback from this consultation paper has

been provided to panel Chairs as part of the information for consideration when developing panel-specific guidelines.

The TEC has included some further advice in the main guidelines to ensure that it is clear that the eligibility date for patents is the granting date. Additional examples have been included in the section on non-traditional outputs that show how families of patents should be treated in accordance with the agreed principles.

C. Criteria for determining and assessing 'new and emerging' researchers

The SRG proposed changes to the eligibility criteria and guidance to determine if a staff member is 'new and emerging' as well as the evidence requirements, in order to align them to the agreed principle.

A review of the responses has been undertaken and summarised below.

Do you support the proposed eligibility criteria and guidance, and evidence requirements for 'new and emerging' researcher?	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	40.0%	6
No	26.7%	4
Partially	33.3%	5

The responses to the changes were mixed with a number of concerns raised about potential complexity and auditability, and eligibility of people from outside academia.

Some concern was also raised about reducing the number of outputs required for a new and emerging researcher from a thesis plus two other outputs or equivalent. As the minimum number of outputs in an Evidence Portfolio (EP) is one, the requirement for three outputs is inconsistent and potentially disadvantages new and emerging researchers.

The SRG has incorporated this feedback to ensure that the eligibility criteria are simple, and clarified the guidance and evidence requirements.

These updates have been included in the draft *Guidelines for tertiary education organisations participating in the 2018 Quality Evaluation*.

D. Any other matters

No additional matters of significance were raised that are not addressed in this paper and the draft guidelines.