

**Tertiary Education
Commission**

Te Amorangi Mātauranga Matua



**Consultation 11
In-principle decisions and
summary of feedback: Reporting
the results of Quality Evaluation
2026**

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Purpose

1. This paper communicates the Tertiary Education Commission's (TEC's) in-principle decisions in relation to Reporting the results of Quality Evaluation 2026 as set out in the eleventh consultation paper produced by the PBRF Sector Reference Group (SRG).
2. The paper also provides a summary of feedback on the proposals and options set out in the consultation paper in relation to these issues.

Background

3. Following Cabinet's decisions in 2021, the SRG was convened by the TEC to advise on operational design changes to the PBRF Quality Evaluation 2026. The SRG delivers this function through a process of agreeing options and proposals for identified grouped issues, gathering sector feedback on those options and proposals through a series of consultations, considering consultation responses, and making recommendations to the TEC.
4. The TEC makes in-principle decisions based on the SRG's recommendations. These decisions are made on the understanding that the consultation process is ongoing and that other decisions or external factors may require the recommendations to be reconsidered as part of the process of developing the new guidelines for Quality Evaluation 2026.

Next steps

5. The SRG will use these in-principle decisions as the basis for developing content in the draft Guidelines. These Guidelines will be provided to the sector and other stakeholders for consultation before they are finalised and published in November 2023. Notwithstanding paragraph four, above, the purpose of the consultation on the draft Guidelines is to ensure that the guidance is consistent, clear and unambiguous, not to re-litigate issues already consulted on.

Sector consultation process

6. In May 2023, the SRG released a consultation paper on Reporting the results of the Quality Evaluation 2026, which included proposals on:
 - › the purpose of reporting
 - › whether the TEC should stop reporting anything previously reported
 - › new reporting arising from changes
 - › opportunities to add value to previous reporting.
7. The SRG consultation paper provided background information, analysis, and options for changes. The public consultation process on ran from 5 May to 16 June 2023. The paper can be accessed on the [TEC website](#).
8. To ensure awareness of the consultation, TEC officials directly contacted key stakeholders at universities, Te Pūkenga, the wānanga and PTEs. This included Deputy Vice-Chancellors –

Research, Komiti Pasifika, Te Kāhui Amokura, Research and PBRF Managers at TEOs, and Chief Executives, as well the Tertiary Education Union (TEU) and sector peak bodies.

Respondent summary

9. A total of 12 responses were received. Of these, ten were from participating TEOs and two were individual submissions:

- › Auckland University of Technology (AUT)
- › Lincoln University (Lincoln)
- › Massey University (Massey)
- › Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington (VUW)
- › Te Pūkenga
- › The Tertiary Education Union (TEU)
- › The University of Canterbury (Canterbury)
- › The University of Otago (Otago)
- › The University of Waikato (Waikato)
- › Waipapa Taumata Rau, the University of Auckland (University of Auckland)

Summary of sector responses and In-Principle decisions

10. A summary of feedback received is set out below, including any key concerns or issues raised, followed by the In-Principle decisions made by TEC.

11. In reaching these in-principle decisions, the TEC has evaluated the SRG's recommendations against the following criteria to ascertain whether they:

- › Deliver Cabinet's instructions
- › Address the concerns and aspirations identified in the *Report of the PBRF Review Panel* and the *Report of the Moderation and Peer Review Panels*
- › Deliver fair and equitable outcomes for all participating TEOs and their staff
- › Uphold the unique nature of research produced in Aotearoa New Zealand and reflect what is distinctive about our national research environment
- › Are consistent with the PBRF Guiding Principles, including the three new Principles of partnership, equity, and inclusiveness
- › Are able to be implemented and audited (legally and practically).

12. In addition, the TEC has evaluated the recommendations to ensure they align with TEC decisions and in-principle decisions to date, including on research definitions and EP design.

Reporting the Results of the Quality Evaluation 2026

Purpose of reporting

13. With regard to the purpose of reporting, the consultation paper proposed to:
- › retain the high-level purpose of reporting stated in 2018 for 2026 with minor amendments:
 - to support accurate understanding of the outcomes of the Quality Evaluation
 - to provide value to the sector
 - to make the results accessible to a wide audience
 - › continue reporting the same information that was provided to the public in the Quality Evaluation 2018 results, aside from the Average Quality Score (AQS) measures, which Cabinet has discontinued.
14. Of the ten responses received, all respondents supported the approach, with some respondents proposing minor wording adjustments. Based on this feedback, the stated purpose of reporting has been revised as shown below.

In principle decision

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that the revised purpose of reporting is:

- › to support accurate understanding of the outcomes of the Quality Evaluation
- › to provide meaningful information that is of value to the sector
- › to make the results accessible to a wide general audience.

Should the TEC stop reporting anything previously reported?

15. With regard to whether the TEC should stop reporting anything previously reported, the consultation paper proposed:
- › aside from the AQS measures, not to stop reporting any of the information that was provided to the public in the Quality Evaluation 2018 results
 - › that the basic data points of TEOs, Panels, Subject Areas, and Quality Category scores, cut by demographic information on gender, ethnicity, employment status and stage remain relevant and useful. That the approach of presenting and analysing trends over time also remains important.
16. All ten respondents supported the proposals to continue reporting as per Quality Evaluation 2018.

In principle decision

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that:

- › aside from the AQS measures, the TEC will continue to report the information that was provided to the public in the Quality Evaluation 2018.

Areas where reporting will be added to reflect changes to the fund

17. With regard to new reporting arising from changes, the consultation paper proposed to:

- › report on how the changes created by Cabinet's decisions on ethnicity weightings and panel weightings have affected:
 - the number of submissions by Māori researchers
 - the number of submissions to the Mātauranga Māori panel
 - the number of submissions by Pacific researchers
 - the number of submissions to the Pacific Research panel;
- › report on how the new definitions of research, excellence, and impact and new Quality Category descriptors have affected diversity and broader recognition of excellence by looking at:
 - how many and what types of Research Activities are submitted in Evidence Portfolios (EPs), both as Supplementary Items in Examples of Research Excellence (EREs) and as Other Examples of Research Excellence (OEREs)
 - how many and what types of Contribution to the Research Environment (CRE) types are included in EPs
 - the number of EPs from Māori researchers
 - the number of EPs and EREs submitted in Te Reo
 - panel selection by Māori researchers
 - the distribution of scoring for Māori researchers
 - the number of EPs by Pacific researchers
 - panel selection by Pacific researchers
 - the distribution of scoring for Pacific researchers.
- › report on the new elements of the design of EPs and the underpinning process introduced by the Achievement Relative to Opportunity framework by reporting:
 - any differences in the number of EREs and Supplementary Items submitted between groups with different or flexible submission requirements. This would include uptake of the option of reduced submission requirements for New and Emerging Researchers and researchers in part-time roles
 - any differences compared to previous rounds in the final score distribution for New and Emerging Researchers, researchers in part-time roles, female researchers, Māori researchers, and Pacific researchers, and researchers who have declared Researcher Circumstances
 - any changes to the number/proportion of researchers meeting the new definition of a New and Emerging Researcher
 - any changes to the number/proportion of researchers declaring Researcher Circumstances compared to the previous Extraordinary Circumstances option
- › report on how changes to the cross-referral process have worked given the changes made not only to this process but to panels – i.e., the new Co-chairing arrangements and changes to panel weightings

- › report on panel composition diversity
 - › report on Co-chairing arrangements in the Moderation team and peer review panels.
18. The SRG also noted that the TEC should ensure due consideration is given to Māori data sovereignty in the conduct of the Quality Evaluation.
19. Of the ten responses received, all respondents supported the proposal, with feedback requesting additional reporting on:
- › cross-referrals
 - › scoring outcomes for EPs submitted with less than three EREs
 - › the real-time moderation process to monitor scoring outcomes and mitigation against unconscious biases
 - › what impact the new ethnicity and new subject weightings have on the overall distribution of 2026 PBRF funds
 - › scoring at national rather than TEO level to ensure privacy
 - › the new ERE structure in general and the Achievement Relative to Opportunity framework
 - › EPs and/or EREs submitted in languages other than English
 - › That reporting concerning ethnicity and applied research is carried out in the form of a narrative analysis rather than an in the form of a data driven deficit narrative.
20. Having considered this feedback carefully, the SRG and TEC consider that these proposed changes are largely addressed through existing or newly proposed reporting when considered in more detail.
21. The SRG did not recommend additional reporting on cross-referrals. The main rationale for this was that the reason for a declined cross-referral will always be the same, i.e., that the Co-Chairs of the panel did not consider it to be suited to the panel.
22. Feedback from VUW proposed adding a field indicating an EP has research in a language other than English, and Te Reo Māori in particular. The previous design of EPs meant there was no easy way to determine how many submissions include non-English language content and what other languages are being used – a completely manual process would have been required to check this.
23. The SRG recommended adopting a new language field in the EP. Given the impact for TEOs of adding a new field to EPs, the TEC has provisionally agreed to this change subject to further consultation. The details have been included in TEO and Assessment Guidelines which will shortly be released for feedback. TEC will consider this feedback and make a final decision in October/November 2023.

In principle decisions

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that:

- › generalised/anonymised explanations of any cross-referral declines will not be required from panels or reported on by TEC. General information on cross-referrals will be included in each panel's report at the end of Quality Evaluation 2026
- › proposed new data reporting related to Māori and Pacific researchers will be reported at a TEO and national level, with privacy safeguards in place similar to previous rounds
- › a field will be added to the EP to indicate if it contains material that is not in English. This will assist Panels to assign EPs and help establish a baseline from which to track the growth of research in Te Reo Māori and other languages relevant to the Aotearoa New Zealand research environment, including Pacific languages. As noted, this is a provisional decision subject to further consultation.

Opportunities to add value to previous reporting

24. With regard to other opportunities to enhance reporting on the results of Quality Evaluation 2026, the consultation paper proposed not to pursue any of the four main areas identified by TEC officials where there may be opportunities to add value and enhance reporting. The four main areas identified were:

- › linking Quality Evaluation data more strongly to existing PBRF data from the other two fund components (Research Degree Completions and External Research Income)
- › linking Quality Evaluation data to existing TEC data from other funds (e.g., data on related Equivalent Full-Time Student volumes and Educational Performance Indicators)
- › using newly collected data (introducing new fields)
- › using external data (linking Quality Evaluation results to data held by other agencies).

25. Of the ten responses received to this question, six expressed straightforward support for the proposal while others made suggestions for additional reporting:

- › The University of Auckland recommended linking PBRF Quality Evaluation scores to external data (e.g. Scopus data) via artificial intelligence (AI) models as an alternative to the current reporting approach. It also suggested the introduction of reporting on the cost of running the current PBRF by the TEC and participating institutions.
- › The University of Otago suggested the TEC report on the base unit funding rate to enable TEOs to better understand the funding results.
- › Te Pūkenga and one of the individual submissions suggested there is an opportunity to collect information on and report sexual and gender identity.
- › The University of Canterbury, Waikato University, and Massey University provided feedback on the value of involving the sector in the design and supply of data and the need to minimise compliance costs.

26. Having carefully considered this feedback, the SRG and TEC officials recognise the value of making results accessible and downloadable, and the importance of working with TEOs in this area. It was also noted that privacy requirements will continue to place limitations on what can be shared with TEOs. Exploring an AI-based analysis is out of scope at this time.

27. TEC officials note that a base unit funding rate as this does not exist in the formula used for funding calculations. The SRG did not recommend adopting this proposal.

28. Reporting on the costs of running the Quality Evaluation for TEOs would be a large undertaking as agreement on how to calculate costs between TEOs would be needed. Previous attempts to gather information on costs have shown that consistent, reliable data would be difficult to collect. The SRG did not recommend adopting this proposal.

In principle decisions

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that:

- › PBRF data will not be linked to other datasets held by TEC or externally when reporting the results of Quality Evaluation 2026
- › TEOs will not be required to report new information about the costs of participating in the PBRF
- › new information about sexual identity and neurodiversity information will not be collected from submitting staff members.

Other comments related to reporting the results of Quality Evaluation 2026

29. The SRG sought feedback on other opportunities to enhance reporting and received seven responses on the following themes:

- › further clarification was requested regarding Māori Data sovereignty
- › the presentation of new data via the existing Research Demographics app in Ngā Kete should be enhanced
- › comparative reporting across all Quality Evaluation rounds.

30. The SRG did not make any recommendations to the TEC based on the feedback received to this question. The SRG and TEC note that:

- › TEC is taking into account Māori and Pacific data sovereignty as part of the process of looking at the IT system and will provide more information to TEOs as the requirements are established
- › PBRF results will be provided in data visualisations and as downloadable results. The presentation of this data will continue to meet the relevant requirements for protecting individual researcher privacy
- › comparative reporting and analysis between rounds will continue as part of the approach for 2026.