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Tertiary Education Commission

Performance-Based Research Fund

Report on the overall preparedness of
Tertiary Education Organisations for the
Quality Evaluation

22 March 2012



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Introduction and objectives

The purpose of this report is to provide the tertiary education sector with the results of the recently completed preparedness audits of Tertiary Education Organisations (TEOs) participating in the 2012 Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) Quality Evaluation.

The overall objective of the PBRF audit approach is to provide assurance to the Tertiary Education Commission (the TEC) that TEOs are applying the guidelines in a transparent, fair, and consistent way that adheres to both the letter and spirit of the guidelines. The PBRF audit approach has four distinct phases. This report presents findings from Phase 1: Process Assurance.

As part of Phase 1, KPMG completed preparedness audits of all TEOs participating in the 2012 Quality Evaluation. An additional ten TEOs eligible to participate in the Quality Evaluation advised that they will not participate in the 2012 Quality Evaluation.

Site visits were completed for all eight Universities and four other TEOs. Desktop reviews involving telephone and email discussions were completed for the balance of TEOs. The objective of the preparedness audits was to determine that TEOs had adequate systems and controls to:

- ensure their preparedness for the 2012 Quality Evaluation round,
- determine the eligibility of staff, and
- submit Evidence Portfolios (EPs).

Themes in findings from preparedness audits

Findings relating to the application of the PBRF staff eligibility criteria and research outputs were identified in preparedness audits.

The most common findings related to **staff eligibility** information were:

- not assessing the eligibility of all staff employed at the TEO,
- assessing eligibility based on title rather than the function(s) of the role,

Themes in findings from preparedness audits (cont.)

- incorrectly calculating an employee's full-time equivalent (FTE) status, and
- maintaining inadequate documentation to support the assessment of eligibility, in particular for staff under supervision.

The most common findings related to **research outputs** were:

- the inclusion of research outputs outside the assessment period
- the inclusion of outputs with similar content to those previously submitted, and
- typographical errors in research output titles.

Level of preparedness of TEOs

We assessed the preparedness of the 12 TEOs visited as partial*. At the time of our site visits all TEOs had commenced preparing for the Quality Evaluation.

We did not conclude on the preparedness of TEOs not subject to a site visit. For these TEOs we prepared a report highlighting any exceptions from our testing of staff eligibility and research output information.

**Partial preparedness is appropriate given that the audits were completed 10 to 12 months prior to the census date.*

Common queries from TEOs

During the preparedness audits KPMG also received queries from TEOs on the application and interpretation of the PBRF guidelines. In responding to queries, KPMG consulted with the TEC PBRF project team and PBRF moderators to ensure advice to the sector was consistent.

Common queries included:

- what is a FTE and how is the 0.2 FTE rule applied?
- contractors – what are they and how should they be treated for the PBRF?
- how should TEOs determine if staff are ‘New and Emerging’?
- what documentation do TEOs need to retain to support the assessment of staff eligibility?

Background to the Performance-Based Research Fund

The TEC administers the PBRF. Performance in the PBRF will determine the allocation of approximately \$1.6 billion of funding for the six years starting 2013. The majority (60%) of this funding is allocated through the Quality Evaluation.

KPMG was appointed by the TEC to deliver the PBRF audit programme. The TEOs endorsed the Audit Approach, which was publicly released on 1 June 2011. The Audit Approach outlines the overall objectives of the audit programme, which are to:

- provide assurance to the TEC that TEOs are applying the guidelines in a transparent, fair, and consistent way that adheres to both the letter and spirit of the guidelines.
- determine that TEOs have adequate systems and controls to:
 - ensure their preparedness for the 2012 Quality Evaluation round
 - determine the eligibility of staff
 - submit EPs.
- provide assurance to the TEC that the research output components of the EP and staff eligibility data submitted by TEOs are complete and accurate.

Audit Approach

The PBRF audit approach includes four phases as set out below:

Phase 1: Process Assurance - To provide assurance to the TEC that TEOs have adequate systems and controls in place to ensure their preparedness for the 2012 Quality Evaluation. This report presents findings from this phase.

Phase 2: Data Evaluation - To provide assurance to the TEC and PBRF Peer Review Panels that staff eligibility data submitted by TEOs and the Nominated Research Output (NRO) and Other Research Output (ORO) components of EPs are complete and accurate.

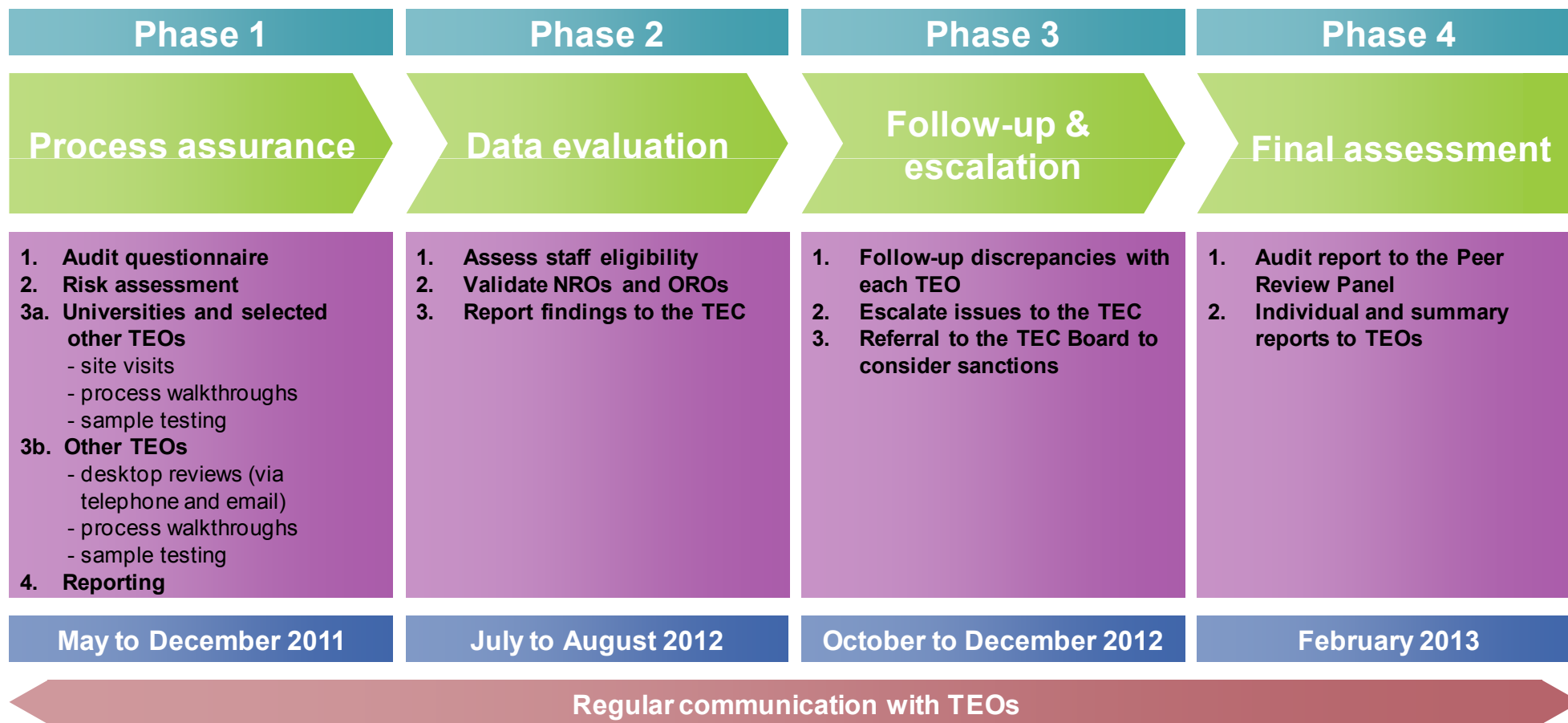
Phase 3: Follow-up - To review findings and discrepancies identified and assess whether these require escalation to the TEC Executive Team or Board.

Phase 4: Final Assessment - To report to the TEC to provide assurance to the PBRF Peer Review Panels on the accuracy and integrity of TEO application of staff eligibility criteria and the validity of the EPs research outputs.

The diagram on the following page sets out the four phases of the audit approach.

Audit Approach (continued)

Diagram 1: Overview of audit approach



Phase 1: Process assurance: Preparedness audit objectives

The objective of the process assurance phase of the PBRF audit approach was to provide assurance to the TEC that TEOs have adequate systems and controls in place to ensure their preparedness for the 2012 Quality Evaluation. This included systems and controls for determining the eligibility of staff and for submitting correct and accurate EPs. Phase 1 included:

- an audit questionnaire sent to all 39 TEOs eligible to participate in the 2012 Quality Evaluation,
- a risk-based assessment of each TEO based on the results of the audit questionnaire,
- site visits to all eight universities and four other TEOs (as listed in section 4.1). Site visits involved meeting with staff to understand PBRF processes and testing of staff eligibility and research output information.
- desktop reviews of 17 other TEOs that had elected to participate in the 2012 Quality Evaluation. Desktop reviews involved discussing PBRF processes over the telephone and testing of staff eligibility and research output information.
- two workshops with the sector to discuss themes from audits and Frequently Asked Questions, and
- a report to all participating TEOs summarising our work and reporting any discrepancies identified in our testing.

Estimated staff numbers reported to the TEC

In February 2012, the TEC asked all TEOs to estimate the expected number of eligible and ineligible staff as at 14 June 2012 (the census date for the 2012 Quality Evaluation).

The two graphs on the following pages indicate the number of staff that each TEO expects to be eligible for the 2012 PBRF Quality Evaluation (PBRF ineligible staff). This information is combined with data obtained from the Single Data Return (SDR) which is an annual collection of data from all tertiary institutions. The PBRF ineligible staff values within the graphs are obtained by subtracting the estimated number of PBRF eligible staff from the number of academic (and for universities, research only staff) employed at New Zealand TEOs as reported in the SDR return.

The graphs present the information by TEO type:

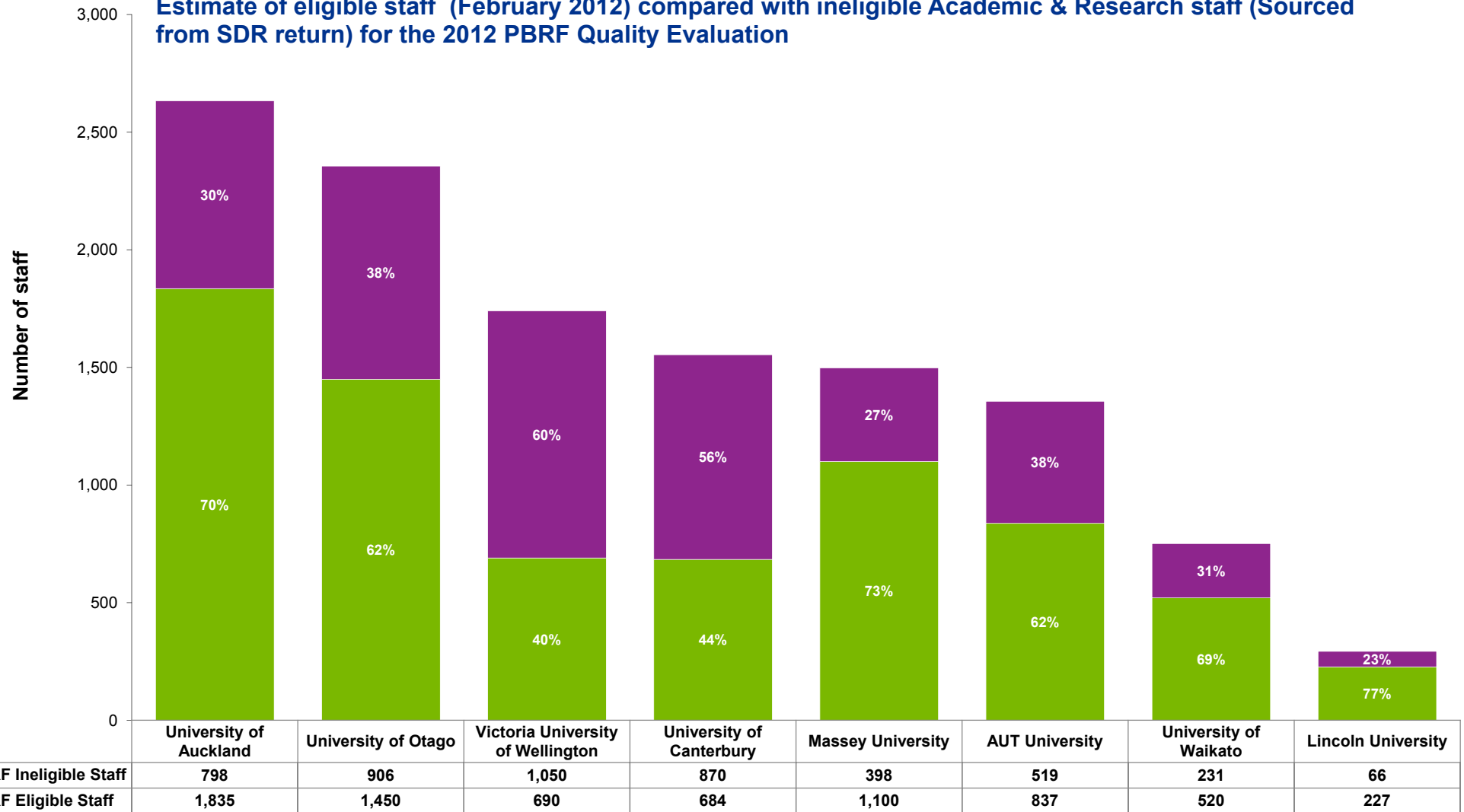
- graph one includes information for the eight universities, and
- graph two includes information for the Institutes of Technology, Polytechnics and Wānanga.

Data for Private Training Establishments (PTEs) is presented in a table. This data was obtained from the February 2012 request for eligible and ineligible staff as SDR data is not available for PTEs.

TEOs without data in the graph or table had not responded to our February 2012 request at the time our report was issued.

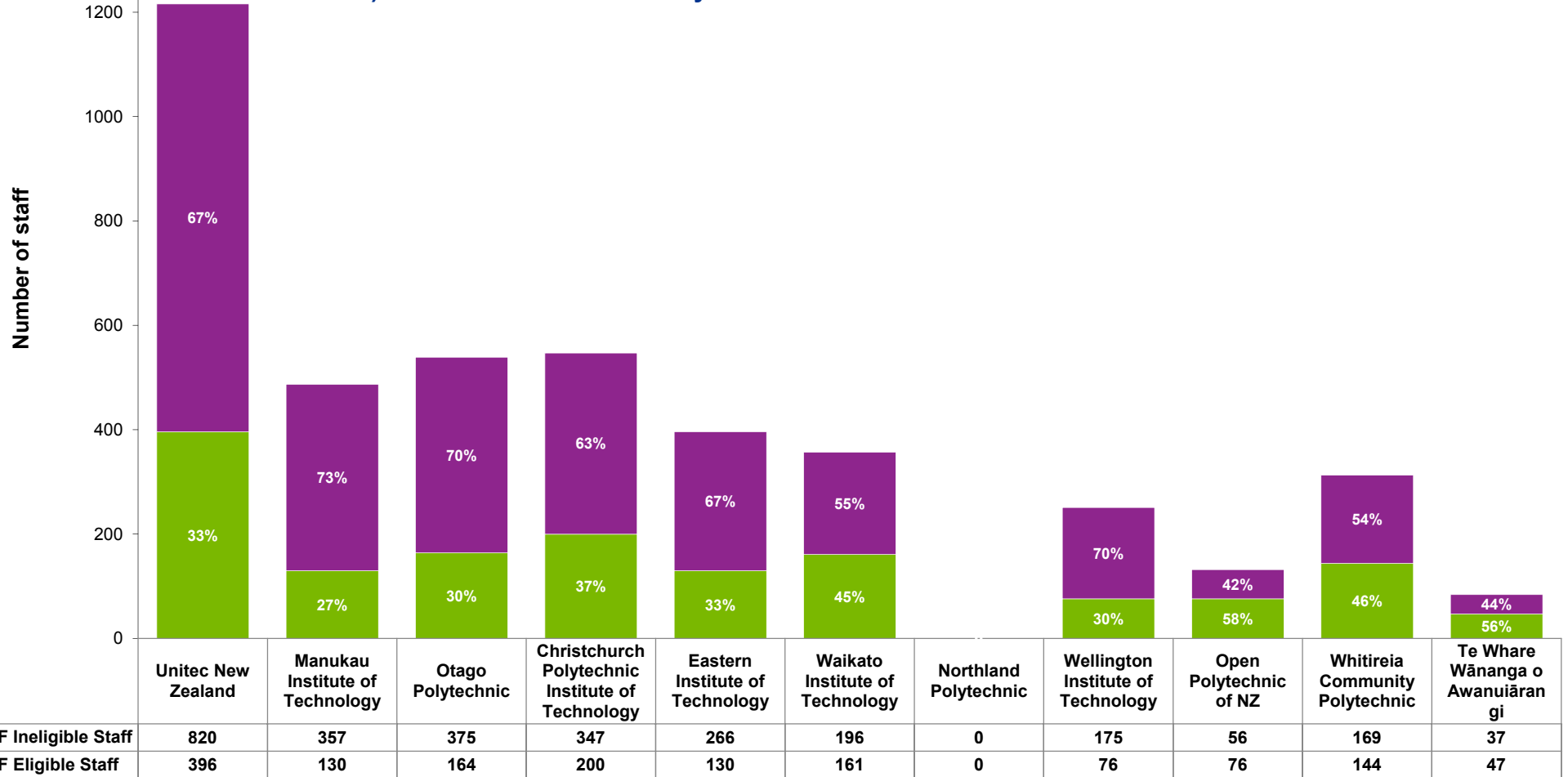
Universities

Estimate of eligible staff (February 2012) compared with ineligible Academic & Research staff (Sourced from SDR return) for the 2012 PBRF Quality Evaluation



Institutes of Technology, Polytechnics and Wānanga

Estimate of eligible staff (February 2012) compared with ineligible Academic & Research staff (Sourced from SDR return) for the 2012 PBRF Quality Evaluation



Private Training Establishments

Estimate of PBRF eligible and ineligible staff as reported to the TEC in February 2012

| Organisation | PBRF Eligible Staff | PBRF Ineligible Staff |
|------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| AIS St Helens | 34 | 73 |
| NZ Tertiary College | 30 | 70 |
| Laidlaw College | 31 | 89 |
| NZ College of Chiropractic | 19 | 42 |
| Whitecliffe College | 28 | 32 |
| Anamata PTE | 15 | 30 |
| Bethlehem Tertiary Institute | 20 | 12 |
| Carey Baptist College | 0 | 0 |
| Good Shepherd College | 7 | 10 |

Themes from preparedness audits

During Phase 1: Process Assurance, KPMG completed preparedness audits of all participating TEOs. Section s3.1 and 3.2 set out themes identified from preparedness audits that relate to staff eligibility or research outputs.

Testing of staff eligibility information

KPMG obtained from each TEO a list of all staff employed and their eligibility status as assessed by the TEO. From this staff list, KPMG selected a sample of staff (based on the number of total staff) and requested employment contracts, job descriptions and other similar documentation to validate each TEOs assessment of eligibility against the PBRF guidelines.

Testing of research outputs

KPMG obtained from each TEO the list of all research outputs or the most recent annual research report. From this list we selected a sample for verification. Testing considered whether outputs existed and whether citations were completely and accurately recorded. Testing involved searching for outputs via the internet and publication databases and obtaining information from the TEO to substantiate outputs when they could not be located publicly.

The most frequent errors identified during the preparedness audits related to the assessment of staff eligibility.

Incorrect assessment of eligibility

Groups of staff not assessed for eligibility: Because either: their roles were not considered relevant to the PBRF or staff lists provided by Human Resources (HR) were incomplete.

Assessing staff based on title rather than the substance of their role: The PBRF guidelines require an assessment of eligibility on the basis of the staff members actual role and function. This is particularly important for roles such as Research Assistant, Tutor, Professional Practice Fellow, Professional Teaching Fellow or Assistant Research Fellow where the substance of the role can vary greatly between TEOs and within Schools or Faculties.

Incorrectly applying the PBRF guidelines: Many TEOs were not familiar with the May 2011 changes to the guidelines to include contractors in the definition of staff. Consequently, these TEOs had not identified and assessed the eligibility of contractors.

Incorrect calculation and recording of FTE

The calculation of a FTE level was an area where we identified errors across several TEOs. Certain HR / Payroll systems record contractors at a default FTE level of between 0 and 0.05 rather than their actual FTE. Other differences related to the interpretation of the guidelines and are discussed further in section 5.0 'Common queries from TEOs'.

Inadequate documentation to support the assessment of eligibility

Many TEOs did not retain adequate documentation to substantiate their assessment of eligibility. This is less important for roles that are clearly ineligible. However, for roles where the job description is generic in nature, or the employee's specific circumstances impact on PBRF eligibility, it is important that documentation be retained to support the TEOs assessment of eligibility. The level of documentation we expect to be retained is discussed further in section 5.0 'Common queries from TEOs'.

Strict Supervision

The PBRF guidelines include a supervised exclusion for eligibility based on staff being 'under strict supervision'. This section excludes staff who would otherwise be eligible for PBRF on the basis that they are working under the close guidance / supervision of another staff member while undertaking research or teaching. This exclusion was created principally to allow TEO's to exclude junior researchers / teaching staff and technical industry staff.

During the preparedness audits we identified that some TEOs had a significant number of staff who they had identified as 'under strict supervision'. The total number of staff under strict supervision and potentially eligible academic and research only staff taken from the 2011 SDR (see section 2.3) is displayed in the table below. Staff 'under strict supervision' are classified by TEOs in two ways, either:

- a) a specific role has been developed for staff under supervision, for example professional teaching fellow, or
- b) staff retain their normal title e.g. Lecturer or Researcher and are classified in PBRF eligibility documents as 'under strict supervision'.

The number of staff categorised as under 'strict supervision' with roles that did not appear to be junior or technical was substantial enough at several TEOs to warrant further investigation. We have requested that each TEO with a high number of staff classified as under strict-supervision provide detailed documentation to support the nature of the supervision relationship. The information we have requested is provided in section 5.0 'Common queries from TEOs'.

The table on the following page sets out the number and proportion of staff estimated as ineligible to participate on the basis of supervised exclusions. This information was provided by Universities to the TEC in February 2012.

3.1 Themes from preparedness audits – staff eligibility (cont.)

Strict Supervision

Number and proportion of staff estimated as ineligible to participate on the basis of supervised exclusions as reported by each University:

| University | Staff under strict supervision | Estimated Eligible Staff | % strict supervision to eligible staff |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| University of Otago | 470 | 1450 | 32.4% |
| University of Auckland | 355 | 1835 | 19.3% |
| University of Waikato | 47 | 520 | 9.0% |
| AUT University | 42 | 837 | 5.0% |
| University of Canterbury | 26 | 684 | 3.8% |
| Lincoln University | 9 | 227 | 4.0% |
| Victoria University of Wellington | 10 | 690 | 1.4% |
| Massey University | 5 | 1100 | 0.5% |
| Total | 964 | 7343 | 13.1% |

Our testing identified errors in the recording of Research outputs were identified at almost all TEOs. The most common errors identified were typographical errors.

Outputs produced outside of the assessment period

We identified several instances where research outputs were available for inclusion in the PBRF that were outside the assessment period, typically this was because the date of publication was incorrect. The PBRF Guidelines classify these errors as ‘fundamental’ and result in the output being discounted from the assessment process. We recommend all TEOs ensure that processes to verify research outputs are targeted appropriately to identify these errors.

Outputs with similar content

Several outputs we selected in our sample had similar content to other outputs produced and submitted in previous PBRF evaluations. Although this is not prohibited within an Evidence Portfolio, the PBRF guidelines state that staff members should not include outputs that are identical, or virtually identical, in nature and content.

Typographical errors in citations

We identified typographical errors in Research Output (RO) citations for almost all TEOs that we visited. Although these errors do not affect the assessment of an EP, they do not best present the staff member’s outputs.

We assessed the preparedness of all 12 TEOs visited as partial.

This is not unexpected 10 to 12 months from the census date.

Preparedness scale

For TEOs subject to a site visit and detailed review of PBRF processes we prepared a conclusion on their level of preparedness. Our conclusion consolidated the results of the audit questionnaire, meetings held with TEO personnel and testing of staff eligibility and EP information to assess each TEOs preparedness for the PBRF. The preparedness scale used is in three stages, which reflect a pathway of increasing preparedness. For TEOs not subject to a site visit, an overall conclusion was not provided with reporting limited to exceptions.

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Full | PBRF processes fully implemented |
| Partial | PBRF processes partially implemented |
| None | PBRF processes not defined / implemented |

Overall conclusion

We assessed the preparedness of all 12 TEOs visited as partial. At the time of our site visits all TEOs had commenced preparing for the Quality Evaluation.

Different approaches to preparing for the PBRF

- All TEOs had planned for eligible staff to prepare draft EPs for internal assessment between September 2011 and March 2012.
- All TEOs that we visited had allocated resources with defined responsibility for preparing for the Quality Evaluation. Most TEOs have approached the PBRF as a project with several phases i.e. assessing eligibility, preparing EPs, verifying ROs and submitting EPs.
- Other TEOs have embedded PBRF requirements into business-as-usual processes whereby staff eligibility is assessed when staff are recruited and all staff submit ROs for verification as they are completed.

Different approaches to preparing for the PBRF (cont.)

Most TEOs with 50 or more eligible staff have either developed in-house or purchased research management systems, for example, Intuto Research Output Management System (ROMS), Research Information Management System (RIMS) and Symplectic Elements.

Research management systems enable the collation of research outputs and the development and submission of EPs within a database. At the time of our audits, most research management systems had not been updated to support the TECs revised EP schema document however plans had been developed to achieve this.

| Tertiary Education Organisation (TEO) | Scope of audit |
|---|----------------|
| Universities | |
| University of Otago | Site-visit |
| University of Canterbury | Site-visit |
| University of Auckland | Site-visit |
| AUT University | Site-visit |
| Massey University | Site-visit |
| Victoria University of Wellington | Site-visit |
| University of Waikato | Site-visit |
| Lincoln University | Site-visit |
| Institutes of Technology, Polytechnics and Wānanga | |
| Unitec New Zealand | Site-visit |
| Manukau Institute of Technology | Desktop review |
| Otago Polytechnic | Desktop review |
| Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology | Desktop review |
| Eastern Institute of Technology | Site-visit |
| Waikato Institute of Technology | Desktop review |
| Wairariki Institute of Technology | Desktop review |
| Northland Polytechnic | Desktop review |
| Wellington Institute of Technology | Site-visit |
| Open Polytechnic of NZ | Desktop review |
| Whitireia Community Polytechnic | Desktop review |
| Te Wānanga o Awanuiārangi | Site-visit |

| Tertiary Education Organisation (TEO) | Scope of audit |
|--|----------------|
| Private Training Establishments | |
| AIS St Helens | Desktop review |
| NZ Tertiary College | Desktop review |
| Laidlaw College | Desktop review |
| NZ College of Chiropractic | Desktop review |
| Whitecliffe College | Desktop review |
| Anamata PTE | Desktop review |
| Bethlehem Tertiary Institute | Desktop review |
| Carey Baptist College | Desktop review |
| Good Shepherd College | Desktop review |

Listed on the following pages are common queries raised by TEOs during the preparedness audits. In responding to queries the audit team consulted with the TEC PBRF project team and PBRF moderators to ensure advice to the sector was consistent.

What is a FTE and how is the 0.2 FTE rule applied?

A FTE is based on the standard FTE for the organisation. Typically, this should be between 36 and 40 hours per week. In response to queries from the sector two clarifications were made to the PBRF Guidelines in respect to FTE in November 2011.

- 1) The 0.2 FTE rule should apply to the total employment over the year, even if it is made up of employment from two or more contracts.
- 2) The 0.2 FTE rule is calculated as an average over the year. For example:

If there are two contracts of 0.15 FTE each, and both are for at least a year, then they should be taken together and treated as 0.30 FTE.

If a staff member's FTE status changes throughout the year i.e. they worked in a PBRF eligible role for six months at 0.7 FTE and six months at 0.1 FTE then these should be averaged and treated as 0.4 FTE in the census.

Contractors – what are they and how should they be treated for the PBRF?

The PBRF Guidelines were updated in July 2011 to expand the definition of staff to include contractors (i.e. staff on a contract for service). Some TEOs were unaware of this change and other TEOs have found it difficult to identify all staff on a contract for service. For the PBRF we suggest that TEOs finding it challenging to identify contractors follow one of the two approaches below for assessing eligibility:

- 1) obtaining information from Finance on contractors employed, or
- 2) identifying with Faculties or Schools contractors employed to undertake degree-level teaching or research.

How to determine if staff are 'New and Emerging'?

To assess whether staff are 'New and Emerging' each TEO must first assess whether the staff member is eligible and then apply the test set out in the guidelines as to whether this is the staff member's first PBRF eligible appointment. Consideration of the staff members Doctoral completion or Research Outputs (as described in Section E of the PBRF Guidelines) should only occur once a TEO has determined that a staff member is 'New and Emerging'. We expect TEOs to review an employee's Curriculum Vitae and other similar documentation to assess whether an employee's previous work history could include PBRF eligible roles.

What documentation do TEOs need to retain to support the assessment of staff eligibility?

The Performance-Based Research Fund Quality Evaluation Guidelines 2012 (Version November 2011, pg 38) state that to be PBRF eligible a staff member's employment or service contract functions [must] include research and / or degree-level teaching.

On page 29, the PBRF Guidelines define employment functions as the:

'tasks, goals and accountabilities that a staff member is required to undertake during the 12 month (or longer) position reported at the PBRF Census date. These may be contained in a job description, role profile, performance agreement, contract for services, or agreement of annual goals and accountabilities'.

Questions related to the level of documentation required from TEOs can be separated into three themes:

- 1) what documentation to use and retain for assessing eligibility when job descriptions are generic?
- 2) what documentation to retain when a staff member's eligibility is unclear (for instance, staff where the substantiveness, overseas-based staff or non-TEO staff tests have been applied)?
- 3) what documentation to retain when determining a staff member to be under 'strict supervision'?

What documentation to use and retain for assessing eligibility when job descriptions are generic?

Many smaller institutions, in particular, polytechnics have generic job descriptions that are not specific on teaching and research expectations. In the absence of specific job descriptions, we recommend polytechnics use workload plans, research plans or annual performance agreements as a means of assessing eligibility because these indicate:

- a) the courses a staff member teaches (and whether these are degree-level), and
- b) any research expectations i.e. the number of outputs to be produced, or the proportion of the staff members role to be allocated to research.

What documentation do TEOs need to retain to support the assessment of staff eligibility? (cont.)

What documentation to retain when a staff member's eligibility is unclear?

When a staff members eligibility is not clear we expect TEOs to retain documentation to support their assessment of eligibility or ineligibility. We suggest this could take the form of a file note or similar that sets out the TEOs assessment of eligibility against the specific staff eligibility criteria supported by evidence.

Example:

- [staff member A] was employed on 1 February 2010 by [TEO name] for 0.3 FTE as a permanent Lecturer.
- their employment functions include degree-level teaching on the [Degree-level course name] in Semester A each year.
- they are responsible for the delivery of 80% of the course and also the design of the course and the course's assessment.
- [staff member A] is based in Australia for seven months per year and employed by [Australian University] for research.
- this staff member is deemed to have a principal place of teaching and research overseas. This staff member does not meet the Overseas-Based Staff as they have not been employed for the five years between 15 June 2007 and 14 June 2012. Their first date of appointment in New Zealand was 1 February 2010.

This staff member is deemed to be PBRF ineligible.

What documentation do TEOs need to retain to support the assessment of staff eligibility? (cont.)

What documentation to retain when determining a staff member to be under 'strict supervision'?

As discussed in section 4.0 – Themes from the preparedness audits, several TEOs had a high number of staff categorised as under 'strict supervision' with roles that did not appear to be junior or technical. For these TEOs, we have requested they provide further information to support the assessment of eligibility and the staff members status as under 'strict supervision'.

We have set out below the information requested from these TEOs as we consider these same points to be beneficial to other TEOs who have staff under 'strict supervision'. We suggest all TEOs use the questions below as a basis for documenting that a staff member is under 'strict supervision'.

Teaching under 'strict supervision' – information to assist documenting eligibility

- the staff member's highest academic qualification,
- the name of the course(s) that they teach,
- the percentage of the course that they deliver,
- the name of the person who undertakes the design of the course,
- the name of the person who undertakes the assessment of the course,
- any evidence to support that that the course material and assessment material was developed by the person(s) identified above,
- the name of the person who is 'supervising' the staff member and how many other staff they supervise, and
- the nature of the supervision relationship.

Research under 'strict supervision' – information to assist documenting eligibility

- the staff member's highest academic qualification,
- the lead researcher that they are supervised by and working with,
- the research has this staff member been involved in over the last five years,
- whether this staff member is the author or co-author of any research, and
- is this staff member currently undertaking any independent research.

The audit approach for 2012 will be similar to the approach adopted for the preparedness audits however samples selected for testing will be larger at each TEO.

The audit approach for 2012

In late July 2012, after the final close-off date for resubmission of census and EP information, KPMG will begin Phase 2: Data evaluation of staff eligibility and research output information. This testing within this phase will be similar in nature to the testing undertaken in Phase 1: Process assurance but with larger sample sizes. Phase 2 will include detailed testing of:

- staff eligibility information to ensure correct and consistent application of the staff eligibility criteria, and
- research outputs to ensure outputs exist and citations are correctly and accurately recorded.

Phase 3: Follow-up – In this phase any discrepancies identified in Phase 2 will first be discussed with the TEO, and if not able to be resolved, escalated to the TEC. Any sanctions will be referred to the TEC Board for consideration.

Phase 4: Final Assessment – In this phase a report will be prepared to the TEC to provide assurance to the PBRF Peer Review Panels on the accuracy and integrity of the application of staff eligibility criteria and the validity of the research outputs claimed in EPs.



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Disclaimer

The information provided in this report is based on our interpretation and application of the Performance-Based Research Fund Quality Evaluation Guidelines 2012. We have consulted with and sought agreement from the Tertiary Education Commission for the advice provided in this report. The information provided is not intended to replace or serve as substitute for the Performance-Based Research Fund Quality Evaluation Guidelines 2012 and there can be no guarantee that the information will continue to be accurate in the future.

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