

Performance Based Research Fund Sector Reference Group Recommendations on Redesign of the PBRF Quality Evaluation 2012

Purpose

This paper gives the recommendation of the PBRF Sector Reference Group arising from consideration of sector responses to consultation papers.

Recommendations of the Sector Reference Group

A. Aims and name of the PBRF

1. That the aims of the PBRF be restated as follows. The PBRF is intended to:
 - assess the quality of research in the tertiary education sector, across the full spectrum of research activity;
 - improve the range and quality of information available on research performance;
 - provide incentives for improving the quality of research;
 - underpin existing strengths in research, and facilitate the growth of new areas of research activity;
 - provide supplementary funding (over and above student component funding) to support degree-level, postgraduate and research training;
 - assist tertiary institutions and the Tertiary Education Commission in decisions regarding the concentration of resources for degree and postgraduate programmes.
2. That in order to more accurately reflect its purpose and avoid further confusion about this (and the extent to which it purchases research), the name of the PBRF be changed to the “Tertiary Research Performance Assessment” (TRPA).

B. Unit of assessment

3. That the unit of assessment for the 2012 PBRF Quality Evaluation remain as the individual.

C. Eligibility

4. That the PBRF Guidelines 2012 contain the clearest possible definitions of the eligibility criteria and in particular, advice about how the FTE status is to be calculated.
5. That the PBRF census collect the names of all PBRF eligible researchers (including Rs and R(NE)s whose EPs are not submitted to the TEC) and their subject area and that this information be checked by panel chairs to ensure that PBRF eligible researchers whose EPs are not submitted to the TEC have been assigned to the correct subject area.

6. That the substantiveness test be revised to read as follows: “Undertake the design of research activity and/or the preparation of research outputs (e.g., as a co-author/co-producer), and thus be likely to be named as an author (or co-author/co-producer) of research outputs”.
7. That the ‘strict supervision’ provisions be extended to researchers by revising the statement of these provisions as follows: “Junior researchers such as research assistants and technical staff who are working under the close guidance of a lead researcher, and who are not engaged in any independent research and do not meet the substantiveness test for teaching, may be designated as PBRF-ineligible”.
8. That the ‘strict supervision’ provisions about teaching be clarified by adding the following three statements: “Eligibility is determined principally by the substantiveness tests for teaching and research”; “Staff members with position titles of lecturer or above, or position titles of research fellow or senior tutor or equivalent, will normally be reported as eligible under the strict supervision provisions”; “Any exception to this needs to be justified in terms of the substantiveness tests for teaching and research”.
9. That an audit of staff eligibility be conducted for the 2012 PBRF Quality Evaluation and that it follow the same specifications as the audit of staff eligibility conducted for the 2006 PBRF Quality Evaluation.

D. Special circumstances

10. That the PBRF Guidelines 2012 will give clear examples of instances of Special Circumstances that are likely and not likely to influence the panels.
11. That the following five special circumstance types may be claimed by researchers:
 - extended leave
 - significant community responsibilities
 - leadership positions involving extended or above the usual time commitment
 - long term disability
 - other circumstances.
12. That part-time employment will be treated as a special circumstance AND researchers in this position will be assigned fractional FTEs.
13. That there be no limit on the number of types of special circumstances that may be claimed by a researcher. There will be room on the EP template for up to three types of special circumstances with provision for researchers to claim further types if needed.
14. That the PBRF Guidelines 2012 state that it will be unusual for special circumstances to influence the final quality category unless there is evidence that the circumstances have been sustained over at least one half (1/2) of the assessment period.
15. That in each case where special circumstances are claimed, the circumstances must be described by the researcher in sufficient detail that a judgement can be made about them. This detail must include dates of all relevant time periods, and a description of how the circumstance in question has negatively impacted on the quantity of the claimant’s research. An appropriately-sized box will be provided in the EP for this purpose.

16. That the PBRF Guidelines 2012 state that most attention will be given to special circumstances for EPs where a researcher is on the cusp of a quality category.
17. That researchers claiming special circumstances may be subject to random auditing, during which appropriate evidence of the claimed special circumstances may be requested, and that the PBRF Guidelines 2012 state that this is the case.
18. That special circumstances will be considered prior to the panels meeting (with special circumstances then being revisited as part of the panel determination of Quality Categories), as in 2006.

E. New and emerging researchers

19. That the maximum period during which researchers are eligible to claim NE status remain at six (6) years.
20. That researchers eligible to be assessed as NE have their Quality Categories reported as 'A', 'B', 'C(NE)' or 'R(NE)', as applicable, as in 2006.

F. Māori Research

21. That a strategic weighting of 4.0 be introduced for all Research Degree Completions in which the content of the thesis is entirely written in te reo Māori. This does not preclude an abstract being provided in English. The Māori Knowledge and Development (MKD) panel will provide guidance in their panel-specific guidelines as to what it means for a thesis to be "entirely written in te reo Māori".
22. That, in order to not disadvantage EPs submitted to the MKD panel, the weightings of EPs assigned to the MKD panel reflect the cost category of the underlying subject, as determined by the Moderators on advice from the MKD panel.
23. That where practical an appropriate number of Māori panel members be appointed to panels that may be likely to be evaluating significant numbers of EPs from Māori researchers.
24. That individuals recognised nationally for their Māori knowledge be approached to be panelists on the MKD panel and that the selection of MKD panelists not be contingent on self-nomination or on prospective panelists having a PhD. This is consistent with current practice.
25. That one or two international indigenous researchers be appointed to the MKD panel. This is consistent with current practice.
26. That the MKD panel-specific guidelines be reviewed to ensure that any unique aspects of Māori research are acknowledged.
27. That the MKD panel-specific guidelines be revised so that "Māori methodology" is not one of the criteria for submission to the MKD panel.
28. That all EPs where the box is ticked relating to the following request be referred to MKD:
 - Do you wish this EP to be evaluated by the Māori Knowledge and Development panel?

G. Pacific Research

29. That the criteria for “Pacific Research” be revised before the 2012 Quality Evaluation, and that these revised Pacific criteria be clearly communicated to all TEOs prior to the 2012 Quality Evaluation.
30. That in addition to peer review panels there be a Pacific research expert advisory group nominated and named at the same time as the peer review panels.
31. That EPs contain a tick-box allowing researchers to specify that their EP be assessed by the Pacific research expert advisory group via the cross-referral process. The decision on this lies with the TEO and if the box is ticked the cross-referral must take place.
32. That data on ethnicity not be collected via Evidence Portfolios.
33. That the equity weighting of 2.0 for Research Degree Completions by Māori students and the equity weighting of 2.0 for Research Degree Completions by Pasifika students both be retained.

H. Professional and applied research

34. That in addition to peer review panels there be a professional and applied research expert advisory group nominated and named at the same time as the peer review panels.
35. That EPs contain a tick-box allowing researchers to specify that their EP be assessed by the professional and applied research expert advisory group via the cross-referral process. The decision on this lies with the TEO and if the box is ticked the cross-referral must take place.
36. That in addition to the cross-referral opportunity available to researchers as described in the previous recommendation, panel chairs be empowered to seek the advice of the above independent expert advisory groups to comment on research impact for evidence portfolios where the researcher has been appointed to a TEO from professional practice or industry within the assessment period. If this advice is sought by the panel chair then a standard template containing clear questions will be provided to the expert advisory group, to help ensure that the answers will be of assistance to the panel.
37. That all panels be required to re-examine their panel specific guidelines for the preparation of evidence portfolios to ensure that, where appropriate, the distinction between research and professional practice activities is made clear and exemplified. The criteria for assessing research outputs, peer esteem and contribution to the research environment must all be capable of assessing the full range of research.
38. That panel chairs be required to consider whether some panel members should be appointed from outside academia to provide informed comment on the practical impact of applied research.
39. That the following additions be made to the general descriptors and tie-points:
 - Research Outputs - Processes (as in industrial processes, medical procedures, etc.) with an assessment of impact, e.g., company profit, reduction in length of operation time, improved survival, improved social outcomes, environmental impact, etc.;

- Peer Esteem - Ability to attract professional/business/manufacturing engagement, awards and scholarships, invited membership of company boards of directors/advisory boards, invited engagement with industry focused organisations, e.g., NZTE;
- Contribution to Research Environment - factors such as ability to engage profession/business/industry with the academic sector, contribution to profession/business/manufacturing sector, membership of profession/business/manufacturing bodies, etc.

I. Panel Specific Guidelines

40. That the TEC sponsor a forum for PBRF stakeholders and interested parties at which attendees are asked for advice on developing panel specific guidelines.
41. That the training for panel members and chairs include specific discussion of seeking wider evidence of peer esteem and evaluating research impact.
42. That the Panel Specific Guidelines contain recommendations on what should and should not be included in the commentary about NROs.
43. That the Panel Specific Guidelines for each panel indicate whether EPs submitted to that panel could include journal “impact factors” in the commentary on each NRO, and where they are permitted, panel members receive training in the use and limitations of journal “impact factors”.

J. Process of Evaluating Evidence Portfolios

44. That the procedure for TEOs submitting EPs to the TEC be as follows:
 - TEOs determine “New and Emerging” researchers;
 - TEOs determine those EPs that are clearly R or R(NE);
 - TEOs submit to the TEC all EPs except those determined by the TEO as clearly R or R(NE).
45. That, except for the differences specified in these recommendations, the design of EPs remain unchanged from the design used in the 2006 Quality Evaluation.
46. That every EP contain the same number of characters available as in 2006 (1024 characters) for commentary about the NROs, and the same number of characters (1024 characters) for outlining their contribution to the research.
47. That the maximum number of ROs in an EP remain at 30.
48. That the PBRF census *not* collect the researcher’s Date of Highest Degree Enrollment or the Degree Classification and that the Date of Highest Degree Completion require the year only and not the day and month.
49. That the panel selection process remain the same for the 2012 Quality Evaluation as it was for the 2006 Quality Evaluation.
50. That when reviewing panel composition, the panel selection group should consider the coverage, where appropriate, of professional and applied research.
51. That there be no new additional peer review panels.
52. That the assessment timetable for the 2012 Quality Evaluation be as specified in the below table:

Event:	Date:
PBRF Census date	Thursday - 14 June 2012
EPs submitted by TEOs to the TEC	Friday - 20 July 2012
EPs and supporting documents sent to panel Members	Monday 27 August 2012
Recommended deadline for requests for additional specialist advice, cross referrals and requests for NROs	Friday 21 September 2012
Final date for additional specialist advice to be returned to TEC	Thursday 18 October 2012
Pre-meeting assessment of EPs ends and preliminary scores provided to the TEC by panel members	Friday 2 November 2012
Panels meet to assess EPs and assign Final Quality Categories (three days per meeting)	From Monday 26 November 2012 to Friday - 7 December 2012

53. That there be no change to the Quality Categories.
54. That the two panel members assigned to evaluate an EP provide the TEC with their preparatory scores only if they do not reach agreement on preliminary component scores.
55. That there be no change to the holistic phase of the evaluation procedure. The purpose of the holistic phase remains as a consistency check looking around the break points. Where there are changes to the Quality Category during the holistic phase, then the researcher's component scores will be revised to reflect the change to the researcher's Quality Category as a result of the holistic phase.
56. That information on the researcher's 2006 (or carried-over 2003) Quality Category, where available, also be made available during the holistic phase. This will be done solely to ensure that where there are major discrepancies that the 2012 Quality Category is fully justified.
57. That there be no change to the cross-referral process other than the following: that cross-referral panels must provide the rationale for their grades as well as their scores to the original panel.
58. That the PBRF Guidelines 2012 clarify that while the researcher (through their TEO) may request a cross-referral to a panel other than the panel the EP is originally referred to, the final decision on cross-referral remains with the chair of the original panel - other than cross-referral to one of the two expert advisory groups.
59. That where possible, more experienced panel chairs run their panels in the earliest time slots and where possible, other panel chairs attend these earlier meetings of other panels to optimize consistency.

60. That there be no changes to the moderation process other than considering that Moderators be given extra training.
61. That when the Chief Moderator is appointed for the 2012 Quality Evaluation, the complaints process be reconsidered and further consultation sought and if necessary the complaints process be redesigned.
62. That in the PBRF Guidelines 2012 the general list of legitimate Research Output types include: "Literary translations, where these contain significant editorial work in the nature of research," and that the relevant Panel Specific Guidelines also include this addition.
63. That the PBRF Guidelines 2012 contain in a prominent position the following SRG Recommended Protocols under which individual PBRF data is provided to TEOs:

1. The TEO will establish processes and protocols for maintaining confidentiality of individual Quality Categories for all staff, and processes and protocols to keep this information secure.
2. All staff participating in PBRF Quality Evaluations will be informed by their employing TEO of:
 - a. the processes and procedures by which PBRF data, including individual Quality Categories, will be communicated and to whom;
 - b. those people and positions within the TEO who will have access to an individual's Quality Category;
 - c. the uses to which individual Quality Categories (and Component Scores) may be put and the uses to which they may not be put; and
 - d. these Conditions.
3. The TEO will advise individual participating staff of their personal Quality Category (and any other data relating to the assignment of the Quality Category relevant to them that is provided to the TEO by the TEC), unless the staff member requests otherwise.
4. The TEO will restrict access to individual Quality Categories to the minimum number of staff necessary to achieve the following purposes:
 - a. validation of the accuracy of the Quality Categories, along with FTE and subject cost categories for individual staff;
 - b. internal management and allocation of financial resources (consistent with the purposes of the PBRF);
 - c. to identify strengths of Departments/Schools; and/or
 - d. as an externally-validated benchmark to help ensure appropriate internal calibration of assessments of research.

Advice must be given by TEOs to staff members, prior to their participation in the Quality Evaluation, that the TEO may use individual Quality Categories for these purposes. TEOs should ensure that no identification of individual Quality Categories can be made outside this small number of staff.

5. The TEO will, in conjunction with staff and TEU representatives, establish codes of practice and complaint procedures that govern the behaviour of staff members participating in the PBRF Quality Evaluation. The TEO's code of practice relating to staff participation in the PBRF Quality Evaluation will indicate that:
 - a. maintenance of the confidentiality of individual Quality Categories and Component Scores, if known, is a priority for the TEO;
 - b. staff members will not be required to divulge their Quality Categories;
 - c. each staff member has an opportunity to discuss her/his Quality Category and Component Scores with her/his manager if the staff member desires;
 - d. in the event that a staff member advises a manager of her/his Quality Category, or Quality Category and Component Scores, that manager will not use that information other than for purposes authorised by the individual staff member concerned and within the restrictions specified in these Protocols.
6. The TEO will not use individual Quality Categories, or information leading to the revelation of individual Quality Categories, for purposes other than those consistent with these Conditions and advised to staff members prior to participating in Quality Evaluations. In particular:

- a. the TEO will not use individual Quality Categories as a basis for salary determinations;
 - b. the TEO will not request individual Quality Categories for recruitment purposes, and, if the TEO makes recruitment decisions informed by individuals' Quality Categories, then the TEO will consider the Quality Categories in the context of other evidence of research performance and will take account of the TEO's overall staff profile (particularly since the offered Quality Category can not be verified by the TEO); and
 - c. the TEO will not use individual Quality Categories for performance appraisals or for disciplinary action against staff.
7. The TEO will not divulge individuals' Quality Categories to any third party without the prior authorisation of the individuals concerned. In particular, the TEO will ensure that individual Quality Categories of staff, either employed by the TEO concerned or by another TEO, are not revealed through marketing or advertising activity initiated by the TEO.

K. Managing Nominated Research Outputs

64. That, if (and only if) the final versions of Nominated Research Outputs (NROs) are not available, researchers be able to submit Accepted Manuscripts (NISO standard RP-8-2008) as NROs. 'Accepted Manuscript' is to be understood as the author's final manuscript as accepted for publication at the completion of the peer review process. The date of publication of the final version must be within the period of eligibility.
65. That the resourcing provided by the TEC to acquire and support the Peer Review Panel secretariats be proportionally greater in 2012 than it was in 2006.
66. That panel members primarily obtain access to NROs by means of a TEC-managed secure web space of links to repositories (such as university libraries) where the NROs are held. This includes a local, temporary TEC database to hold any NROs that are sent digitally.
67. That timeframes for the 2012 Quality Evaluation are developed so that all NROs that are in a suitable format to be placed in the repositories described above, can be placed in these repositories in sufficient time for panel members to be able to appropriately access them.
68. That adequate provisions be made so that all NROs that are not in a suitable format to be placed in the repositories described above, are able to be appropriately accessed by panel members in some form.
69. That the Support Process and Systems Working Group, a sub-group of the PBRF Sector Reference Group, develop detailed plans and proposals, as specified in the Support Process and Systems Working Group Terms of Reference, to allow the implementation of the above five SRG recommendations.
70. That the TEC encourage TEOs to make NROs digitally available whenever appropriate.

L. Weightings

71. That no change be made to the funding ratio for Quality Evaluation (QE), Research Degree Completions (RDC) and External Research Income (ERI) from the current ratio of 60/25/15.
72. That no change be made to the weightings of the three components of the Evidence Portfolio.
73. That no change be made to the weightings for the Quality Categories.
74. That no change be made to the weightings of Subject Cost Categories.

M. Reporting of Results

75. That all individual participating staff members are advised of their Quality Category, final Component Scores and all scores leading to their Component Scores once these are confirmed, unless the individual indicates they do not want to receive this information. When these scores are provided, they will be accompanied by a short commentary explaining the various stages of assessment.
76. That Evidence Portfolios contain a tick-box allowing staff members to indicate whether or not they want to receive their Quality Categories and Component Scores.
77. That no information from Evidence Portfolios be made publicly available.
78. That the threshold for the public reporting of results to be increased to 7 FTE and above.
79. That the status quo be kept with respect to the funding formula and the measurement of the Average Quality Score.
80. That tables which report overall results for TEOs, panels, and Subject Areas (Tables A1, A2, and A3 in the 2006 Report) should be amended to include only information for each of the A, B, C, C(NE), R, and R(NE) Quality Categories, expressed as both numbers and percentages of FTE staff, in addition to the Average Quality Score (FTE-based), the number and percentages of FTE staff totaled over A and B Quality Categories, and the overall total number of staff as well as total FTE staff.
81. That a high profile be given to the additional indicators mentioned in the recommendation above.
82. That an additional table be presented near the beginning of the report that relates AQS to size of Nominated Academic Unit.
83. That all numerical scores be reported to one decimal place.
84. That merged TEOs be reported as one entity.
85. That there be no reporting at Field of Research level.
86. That the TEC promote a forum to discuss options for PBRF post-2012. This forum should be held in the second half of 2010 so that an indication of the likely direction PBRF may take post-2012 is available to the sector before the next quality evaluation.

Conclusion

87. That in all respects, other than the alterations specified in these recommendations (and without it being a partial round) the 2012 PBRF Quality Evaluation will operate using the same procedures as the 2006 PBRF Quality Evaluation.

The response of the Tertiary Education Commission to the recommendations of the PBRF Sector Reference Group

The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) accepts in principle all of the PBRF Sector Reference Group (SRG) recommendations. Acceptance 'in principle' means that a recommendation is accepted subject to any clarifications of wording as deemed necessary.

One of the SRG recommendations was not accepted in full. This is recommendation # 86:

That the TEC promote a forum to discuss options for PBRF post-2012. This forum should be held in the second half of 2010 so that an indication of the likely direction PBRF may take post-2012 is available to the sector before the next quality evaluation.

The TEC agrees that such a forum should be held but not necessarily be in 2010. The forum could be held in 2011 and the TEC would like to discuss this with other agencies.

The TEC would also like to clarify recommendation # 75. It states:

That all individual participating staff members are advised of their Quality Category, final Component Scores and all scores leading to their Component Scores once these are confirmed, unless the individual indicates they do not want to receive this information. When these scores are provided, they will be accompanied by a short commentary explaining the various stages of assessment.

Such advice will occur upon the TEC receiving a request from an individual participating staff member, once the Quality Evaluation 2012 is complete.

Recommendations # 1 and # 2 have a different status from the other SRG recommendations as changing the name and the aims of the PBRF are not matters that the sector was consulted on during the consultation process that resulted in the rest of the SRG recommendations. Given this, the TEC has decided not to take the significant steps of altering the name and the aims of the PBRF.