

**Performance-Based Research Fund  
Sector Reference Group review:  
Eligibility consultation paper**

## Contents

1. Purpose	3
2. Aims and principles of the PBRF	3
3. Principles of redesign	4
4. Staff eligibility: background	5
4.1 The 2003 PBRF Quality Evaluation	5
4.2 The 2006 PBRF Quality Evaluation	6
4.3 International comparisons	7
5. Discussion of issues and concerns	8
5.1 Interpretation of criteria/perceived 'game-playing' by TEOs	10
5.2 Eligibility of particular staff groups	13
6. Options	17
6.1 Retain current eligibility criteria	17
6.2 Eligibility determined by academic grades	20
6.3 Extend the strengthened substantiveness test to all staff	20
6.4 Allow TEOs greater flexibility in the inclusion/exclusion of staff (minimum and maximum requirements)	21
6.5 Summary of options	22
7. How to submit feedback	24
Bibliography	25

### Disclaimer:

This consultation paper has been prepared independently for the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) by the Sector Reference Group, an external group, as part of the review of the Performance-Based Research Fund. Although the TEC is facilitating this process, the consultation paper represents the independent views and suggestions of the Sector Reference Group, and does not necessarily represent the views of the TEC.

# Performance-Based Research Fund Sector Reference Group review: Eligibility consultation paper

## 1. Purpose

This paper has been prepared as part of the consultation process for the 2012 Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) assessment, it:

- discusses the issues and concerns surrounding eligibility of staff members to participate in the PBRF Quality Evaluation
- considers some options for addressing these concerns
- invites feedback from the tertiary sector and other interested parties on the options discussed in this paper
- invites feedback on any other matters regarding eligibility that should be considered as part of the redesign process.

### Areas of discussion not included in this paper

The Sector Reference Group (SRG) is considering a number of redesign issues for the PBRF 2012 Quality Evaluation and will prepare consultation papers on each. Where an issue overlaps different papers, the discussion of that issue will be confined to only one of the papers. Therefore, the eligibility of new and emerging researchers and staff in professional and applied research disciplines will not be discussed in this consultation paper.

## 2. Aims and principles of the PBRF

In carrying out its role, the SRG for the 2012 PBRF will be guided by the aims and principles of the PBRF. The PBRF is designed to:

- increase the average quality of research
- ensure that research continues to support degree and postgraduate teaching
- ensure that funding is available for postgraduate students and new researchers
- improve the quality of information on research output
- prevent undue concentration of funding that would undermine research support for all degrees or prevent access to the system by new researchers
- underpin the existing sector strengths in tertiary education research.

The PBRF is governed by the following principles:

- *Comprehensiveness*: the PBRF should appropriately measure the quality of the full range of original investigative activity that occurs within the sector, regardless of its type, form, or place of output.

- *Respect for academic traditions*: the PBRF should operate in a manner that is consistent with academic freedom and institutional autonomy.
- *Consistency*: evaluations of quality made through the PBRF should be consistent, across the different subject areas and in the calibration of quality ratings against international standards of excellence.
- *Continuity*: changes to the PBRF process should only be made where they can bring demonstrable improvements that outweigh the cost of implementing them.
- *Differentiation*: the PBRF should allow stakeholders and the government to differentiate between providers and their units on the basis of their relative quality.
- *Credibility*: the methodology, format and processes employed in the PBRF must be credible to those being assessed.
- *Efficiency*: administrative and compliance costs should be kept to the minimum consistent with a robust and credible process.
- *Transparency*: decisions and decision-making processes must be explained openly, except where there is a need to preserve confidentiality and privacy.
- *Complementarity*: the PBRF should be integrated with new and existing policies, such as Charters and Profiles, and quality assurance systems for degrees and degree providers.
- *Cultural inclusiveness*: the PBRF should reflect the bicultural nature of New Zealand and the special role and status of the Treaty of Waitangi, and should appropriately reflect and include the full diversity of New Zealand's population.

### 3. Principles of redesign

PBRF redesign work ahead of the 2012 Quality Evaluation will be based on the following principles and considerations:

- Upholding the aims and principles of the PBRF (outlined above).
- Learning from the first two Quality Evaluations in order to make improvements to the design of the PBRF and the implementation of the 2012 Quality Evaluation.
- Drawing on relevant experience and expertise across the tertiary education sector.
- Exposing proposed changes to rigorous sector and expert scrutiny.
- Achieving as much sector agreement as possible about how the next Quality Evaluation should be conducted.
- Avoiding costly or time-consuming changes unless there are good reasons for believing they will bring significant improvements.

## 4. Staff eligibility: background

### 4.1 The 2003 PBRF Quality Evaluation

#### PBRF Working Group

The PBRF Working Group, established in July 2002 to provide advice on the design and implementation of the PBRF, set deliberately broad eligibility criteria in accordance with the PBRF principle of comprehensiveness. The two key principles for staff eligibility specified by the Working Group were:

- Is the individual an academic staff member? In other words, are they expected to contribute to the learning environment?
- Is the individual expected to make a significant contribution to research activity and/or degree teaching in a tertiary provider?<sup>1</sup>

#### 2003 PBRF Guidelines

The 2003 PBRF Guidelines reiterated the principles for staff eligibility specified by the Working Group and noted criteria such as the minimum 0.2 FTE threshold, the ineligibility of staff based overseas and the substantiveness test whereby staff were deemed to be eligible if they had a major role in teaching and/or research.<sup>2</sup>

#### Review of the 2003 PBRF Quality Evaluation

The report on the 2003 assessment noted that some researchers were PBRF-ineligible because they were based overseas or were contracted to a tertiary education organisation (TEO) but employed by a non-TEO.<sup>3</sup>

The WEB Research report on the 2003 Quality Evaluation noted that some TEOs found the guidelines difficult to interpret, particularly the definitions of research and teaching in the substantiveness test. The report also noted that the eligibility criteria had not been consistently understood and applied across the sector but that there were 'no examples of creative or mischievous interpretations of the eligibility criteria.'<sup>4</sup>

The 2006 SRG established after the 2003 PBRF Quality Evaluation identified participation and eligibility as key redesign issues and a consultation paper was prepared for feedback from the tertiary education sector.

The consultation paper noted the staff participation criteria that was developed to support the evaluation reflected:

- the guiding principle of comprehensiveness
- the government's desire to improve the quality of information on research output
- the need to align the PBRF with the Education Act requirement that degrees be 'taught mainly by people engaged in research'

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Education, Investing in Excellence: The Report of the Performance-Based Research Fund Working Group, December 2002, p.11.

<sup>2</sup> TEC, PBRF: A Guide for 2003, July 2003, pp.22-34.

<sup>3</sup> TEC, Evaluating Research Excellence: the 2003 assessment, April 2004, p.41.

<sup>4</sup> WEB Research, Phase 1 Evaluation of the implementation of the PBRF and the conduct of the 2003 Quality Evaluation, Wellington, 2004, pp.52-67.

- the desire to minimise administrative, compliance and assessment costs for providers
- the desire to respect institutional autonomy.<sup>5</sup>

With regards to staff eligibility, the following concerns were discussed:

- the 0.2 FTE minimum level of employment did not capture all staff making a significant teaching and/or research contribution
- the exclusion of subcontracted staff
- the exclusion of staff based overseas
- lack of clarity of the substantiveness test and difficulty in the application of this test.<sup>6</sup>

The 2006 SRG recommended clarification of the substantiveness test, retention of the minimum 0.2 FTE requirement, and that staff based overseas and subcontracted staff may be eligible if they met a strengthened substantiveness test.<sup>7</sup>

## 4.2 The 2006 PBRF Quality Evaluation

The recommendations of the 2006 SRG about staff eligibility were incorporated in the 2006 PBRF Guidelines. The key principles were modified to:

- the individual makes a contribution to the learning environment at degree level, and/or
- the individual is expected to make a sufficiently substantive contribution to research activity.<sup>8</sup>

The guidelines also included the following staff participation criteria:

(i) To be PBRF-eligible, staff members must fulfil **all** of the staff-participation criteria set out below:

- They were employed at any time between 15 June 2005 and 14 June 2006

AND

- EITHER They were employed under an agreement of salaried employment with a duration of at least one year OR They were employed under one or more agreement(s) of salaried employment or at least one year on a continuous basis

AND

- They were employed for a minimum of one day a week on average, or 0.2 FTE, over the period of the entire year

AND

- Their employment functions include research and/or degree-level teaching

AND

- Their contribution to research and/or degree-level teaching meets the requirements of the substantiveness test [see ii below]

AND

- If their principal place of research or degree-level teaching is overseas, they

<sup>5</sup> TEC, 2003 Quality Evaluation: Participation and Eligibility Consultation Paper, October 2004, p.2.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, pp.8-13.

<sup>7</sup> TEC, 2006 Quality Evaluation Report of the Sector Reference Group, June 2005, pp.15-16.

<sup>8</sup> TEC, PBRF Guidelines 2006, July 2005, p.29.

must fulfil the staff-participation criteria for overseas-based staff members [strengthened substantiveness test, see iii below]

AND

- If they are sub-contracted to a TEO by a non-TEO, they must fulfil the staff-participation criteria for non-TEO staff members [strengthened substantiveness test, see iii below].<sup>9</sup>

(ii) To meet the requirements of the **substantiveness test**, staff members must:

**EITHER** fulfil a 'major role' in the teaching and assessment of at least one degree-level course or equivalent.

**OR** undertake the design or conduct of research activity and/or the preparation of research outputs (eg as a co-author/co-producer), and thus be likely to be named as an author (or co-author) of research outputs.

A 'major role' means a contribution of at least 25% of one degree-level course and/or 10 hours of class contact with degree-level students and/or supervision (or co-supervision) or one or more research students.

(iii) To meet the requirements of the **strengthened substantiveness test**, staff members must:

**BOTH** fulfil a major role in the teaching and assessment of at least one degree-level course or equivalent

**AND** undertake the design or conduct of research activity and/or the preparation of research outputs (eg as a co-author/co-producer), and thus be likely to be named as an author (or co-author) of research outputs.<sup>10</sup>

### 4.3 International comparisons

The introduction of a research quality evaluation exercise (Excellence in Research Australia (ERA) Initiative) is being considered in Australia and a consultation paper on the proposed assessment was released in June 2008.<sup>11</sup> The ERA consultation paper contains little detail on the eligibility requirements. The best source of comparative information for eligibility requirements is the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in the United Kingdom.

In the RAE, individual institutions are responsible for deciding which eligible staff members will be submitted for assessment. The Guidance on Submissions notes that "managerial decisions on which of their staff to submit are at the discretion of HEIs but they need to be defensible." Institutions must therefore have a code of practice in place for selecting staff members to be included in the assessment, and this code of practice must ensure that the institution complies with relevant equity obligations and responsibilities.<sup>12</sup>

Eligible staff members are defined in following four categories:

- Category A: current staff members with research and/or teaching listed as their primary function in their employment contract.

<sup>9</sup> PBRF Guidelines 2006, p.30.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p.32.

<sup>11</sup> Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) Initiative Consultation Paper, June 2008.

<sup>12</sup> RAE 2008 Guidance on Submissions, June 2005, p.40.

- Category C: current staff members not included in the above definition, but who are active in research that is demonstrably focused in the department in which they are submitted for assessment (vice-chancellors, librarians, staff in university museums, retired staff who are active in research, staff in research council units).
- Category B and D: those who meet the requirements of A or C but who are not employed by the institution on the census date but were employed during the assessment period.

The *Guidance on Submissions* also notes the following points with regards to eligibility:

- Staff must be employed for a minimum FTE of 0.2.
- Staff based overseas where there is 'a clear and current connection with research undertaken by the submitting department' are eligible.
- Research assistants will not normally be eligible unless they are the principal investigator on a significant piece of research work and meet the requirements of Category A.
- Staff who do not have a contract of employment (for example, staff on consultancy contracts) are not eligible.
- Teaching assistants should not be included as research active staff members.

Each institution also returns FTE data on ineligible research-active staff if their research activity is clearly associated with staff members who are eligible for assessment, including:

- research assistants (postgraduate and postdoctoral) whose primary employment function is research only and who are employed to carry out another individual's research programme
- research technicians, scientific officers and experimental officers
- other staff devoted to research (for example, computing staff, but not including secretarial or administrative staff except where their role is wholly supporting research).<sup>13</sup>

## 5. Discussion of issues and concerns

As discussed in the background section, the eligibility criteria were written to conform to the following principles and aims:

- The PBRF principle of comprehensiveness.
- The staff member is expected to make a significant contribution to the research environment and/or degree teaching.
- The Education Act requirement that degrees should be taught mainly by people engaged in research.
- Increasing the average quality of research.
- Ensuring that research continues to support degree and postgraduate teaching.

The eligibility criteria should, therefore, perform two functions:

- the exclusion of staff members who do not have a strong association with degree-level teaching and/or research at the institution

<sup>13</sup> RAE 2008 Guidance on Submissions, pp.15-19.

- ensuring that all staff who are making a substantial contribution to teaching and/or research at the institution are included in the assessment.

Concern was expressed after both the 2003 and 2006 assessments that, first, the eligibility criteria and its interpretation and application by TEOs does not adequately perform these functions and, second, that the criteria is too broad. The issues and concerns about the staff eligibility criteria and their application centre on the following three inter-related issues:

- Concerns about differences in interpretation of the criteria and/or perceived 'game-playing' by institutions. These concerns are generally focussed on the allocation of subject areas or mechanisms for making staff PBRF-ineligible, in particular the 0.20 FTE threshold and the staff under supervision provisions.
- All staff engaged in degree/postgraduate level teaching and/or research who meet a substantiveness test are PBRF-eligible (international and subcontracted staff must be engaged in both teaching and research) as long as they meet other conditions such as the more than 0.2 FTE threshold. The issue for discussion here is whether it is appropriate for particular groups of staff to be PBRF-eligible, including:
  - teaching-only staff
  - staff who teach predominantly at sub-degree level
  - research-only staff
  - postdoctoral fellows.
- There is some confusion about how the PBRF Guidelines should be interpreted in relation to some aspects of eligibility, particularly the 0.2 FTE 'on average' threshold and the application of the substantiveness test.

The independent strategic review of the PBRF completed in 2008 by Dr Jonathan Adams includes discussion of the eligibility criteria, and particularly addresses the questions of 'game-playing' by TEOs and eligibility of some staff groups. The report comments that "there is some confusion, and some wilful 'game-playing,' around the definition of staff eligibility."<sup>14</sup>

Adams suggests that the inclusive nature of the eligibility criteria has compromised the ability to make meaningful comparisons between academic units.<sup>15</sup>

The report recommends that the assessment should be narrowed to "a core group of permanent academic staff around whom the research system pivots." This group is defined as the:

"leaders of research teams in science and key thinkers and writers in the humanities. These are the people who apply for and manage research income, who recruit and supervise the postgraduate researchers, who employ the postdoctoral research assistants, who write or oversee the writing of the books, reports and papers and who will guide what happens during the next cycle. They also determine the structure and delivery of all teaching in their academic units."<sup>16</sup>

The solution recommended in the report is based on academic grades in which those with academic grades of Professor, Associate Professor, Senior Lecturer and Lecturer would be included in the assessment and all others excluded.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Adams, *Strategic Review of the Performance-Based Research Fund: The Assessment Process*, 2008, p.59.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p.60.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p.59.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p.61.

This solution relies on uniformity of academic titles (and the job description of each academic title) across the sector, or at least some way of classifying the various academic titles. Salary scales were used by Çınlar and Dowse in their analysis of job titles. Although salary scales may be adequate for this type of analysis, it is an inexact proxy for determining eligibility and may present more problems that it solves and invite 'game-playing' around academic titles.

Adams acknowledges that an academic grade-based solution is difficult, but recommends that the redesign process should consider a solution on this basis.

## 5.1 Interpretation of criteria/perceived 'game-playing' by TEOs

Much of the perceived 'game-playing' centred on "R" category staff, either by removing them completely or changing their reported subject area. The effect of the removal of "R" staff is to increase the average quality score of the subject area/TEO.

Reporting is currently on the basis of average quality score. This has led to some quality scores that do not provide an adequate basis for stakeholders and the government to differentiate between providers and their units on the basis of their relative quality as set by the PBRF principle of differentiation.

Changes to the reporting mechanisms may remove the motivation for 'game-playing' and may reduce the need for removal of loopholes in the eligibility criteria. Reporting will be discussed in a separate consultation paper.

### 5.1.1 Removal of "R" category staff

One of the concerns about eligibility relates to changes in TEO's HR practices and differing interpretations of the eligibility criteria to change the status of previously PBRF-eligible staff members who were given an "R" quality category.

As Table 1 demonstrates, there was a significant drop in number and proportion of "R" category staff between the 2003 and 2006 PBRF Quality Evaluations across many of the TEOs.

**Table 1: Number (headcount) and proportion of "R" rated staff 2003/2006 for selected TEOs**

Tertiary Education Organisation	2003 eligible	2003 R	2003 % R	2006 eligible	2006 R+RNE	2006 % R+RNE
AUT	617	477	77%	410	177	43%
Lincoln University	204	60	29%	224	51	23%
Massey University	1299	581	45%	1163	255	22%
Unitec Institute of Technology	371	289	78%	419	286	68%
The University of Auckland	1521	298	20%	1591	281	18%
University of Canterbury	609	96	16%	654	80	12%
University of Otago	1357	401	30%	1244	172	14%
University of Waikato	567	182	32%	527	91	17%
Victoria University of Wellington	607	130	21%	741	115	16%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7152</b>	<b>2514</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>6973</b>	<b>1508</b>	<b>22%</b>

A disproportionately high number (1528) of staff in the “R” cohort in 2003, particularly younger staff members, were no longer PBRF-eligible in 2006, yet 868 (37 percent) of the 2003 eligible staff (all quality categories) who were not reported as eligible in the 2006 round were still employed by TEOs participating in the PBRF<sup>18</sup>.

TEOs were audited to ensure that eligibility data submitted in the PBRF census was complete and accurate.<sup>19</sup> A sample of 676 eligible and 1329 ineligible staff members was audited. This identified 27 staff from 11 TEOs who had been incorrectly reported as ineligible.<sup>20</sup>

The audit also involved consideration of the 868 staff who had been reported as eligible in the 2003 PBRF census and were still employed by TEOs, but were classified as ineligible for the 2006 census. The audit report stated that these staff members had been correctly classified in the 2006 PBRF census and the change in status was because the staff member:

- was no longer required to do research or degree-level teaching
- had been employed for less than a year
- had an FTE status of less than 0.20
- did not meet the substantiveness test.<sup>21</sup>

A full audit was undertaken of the census data provided by three TEOs to determine if ineligible staff had been correctly classified. This audit report stated that four staff had been incorrectly classified as ineligible by two TEOs, but noted that the eligibility criteria had, overall, been correctly applied and eligibility of some staff members had changed because:

- staff were now in purely management roles
- ‘professional practitioners’ who supported teaching in a professionally-based area were under the supervision of a colleague who was responsible for the design and delivery of the course.<sup>22</sup>

Tutors and academic staff teaching at sub-degree level may have been reported as eligible in the 2003 census and appropriately reclassified as ineligible in the 2006 census due to changes in the way TEOs interpreted the guidelines.

Further evidence is provided by an analysis undertaken by the TEC of the job titles of the 1528 PBRF 2003 “R” category staff members who were ineligible in 2006 (this includes those no longer employed at a participating TEO). Staff with a job title indicating “other administrative/leadership role” or “other staff role” made up nine percent of the 2003 PBRF “R” category staff, but 42 percent of staff no longer eligible in 2006.<sup>23</sup>

The number of staff in the academic leader and other categories decreased in the 2006 assessment (Figure 1). This suggests that core academic staff members were included in the 2006 census, and the changes in eligibility status were for staff members whose eligibility may have been marginal.

<sup>18</sup> Nuran Çinlar and Jason Dowse, *Human Resource Trends in the Tertiary Academic Workforce*, Wellington, February 2008, pp.32-35.

<sup>19</sup> *Evaluating Research Excellence: The 2006 Assessment*, p.295.

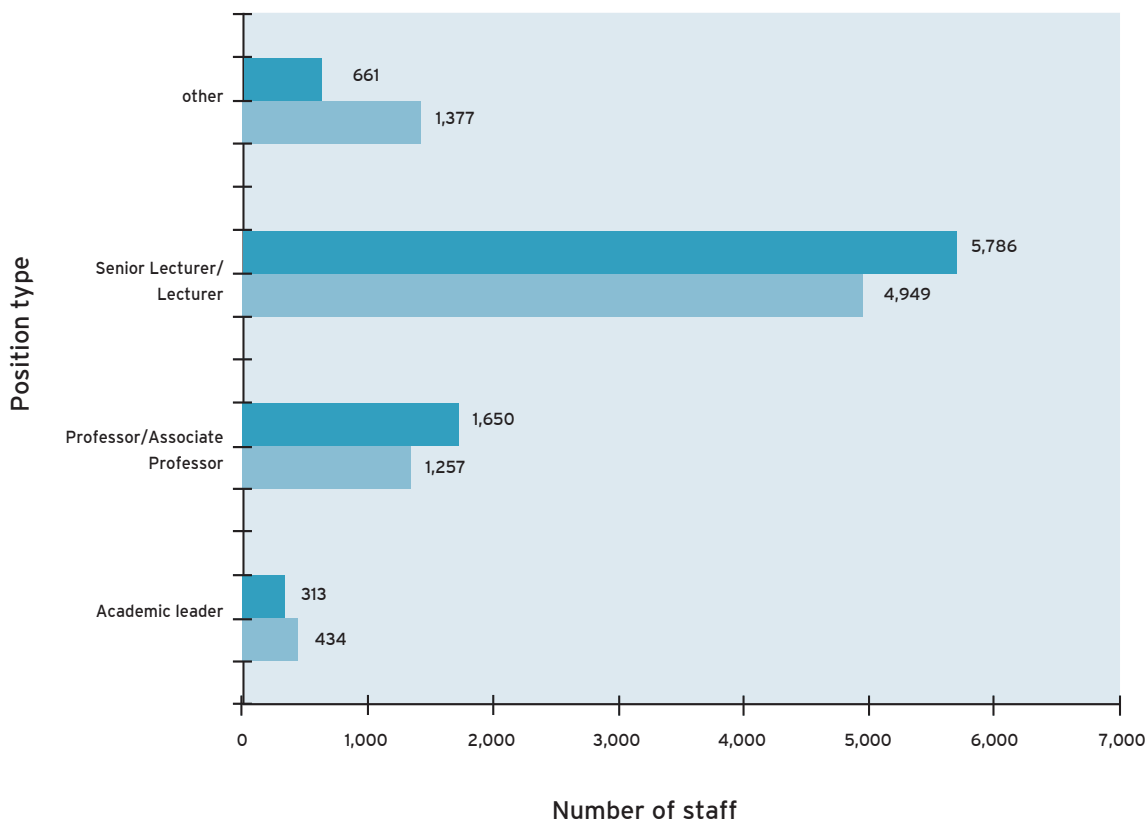
<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p.298.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p.299.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, pp.301-302.

<sup>23</sup> Çinlar and Dowse, p.34.

Figure 1: PBRF-eligible staff by position type<sup>24</sup>



Analysis of the FTE status of PBRF-eligible staff in the 2003 and 2006 assessments shows little change in the number of staff at less than 0.25 FTE.<sup>25</sup> Figures for the university sector show that the number of staff members employed for less than 0.25 FTE increased slightly in the 2006 assessment and the biggest decreases were for staff members employed between 0.25 - 0.74 FTE (Table 2). However, the number of staff in this FTE range is relatively small.

Table 2: FTE status PBRF-eligible staff in the university sector 2003/2006<sup>26</sup>

FTE status	2003	2006	Change - universities	Change - all sectors
<0.25	79	83	5%	14%
0.25 - 0.49	210	156	-26%	-8%
0.50 - 0.74	564	437	-23%	-1%
0.75 - 1.00	5928	6137	4%	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6781</b>	<b>6813</b>	<b>&lt;1%</b>	<b>8%</b>

Nevertheless, there were inconsistencies that may have distorted the results. These inconsistencies were largely a result of TEOs adopting different practices in their interpretation of the guidelines. Uncertainty about the application of the eligibility guidelines may have led to some staff being incorrectly classified in the 2006 census.

<sup>24</sup> 2003 data are taken from PBRF 2006 Quality Evaluation Participation and Eligibility Consultation Paper, p.12. 'Other' includes tutors (286), postdoctoral fellows (183), teaching and research fellows (641) and other (267). 2006 data are taken from Warren Smart, Research par excellence: The factors associated with higher research quality in New Zealand tertiary education organisations, May 2008, p.26. 'Other' includes assistant lecturer (403) and other staff (258).

<sup>25</sup> Çınlar and Dowse, Human Resource Trends, p.78.

<sup>26</sup> Data taken from Çınlar and Dowse, Human Resource Trends, pp.78, 80.

### 5.1.2 Reported subject area

In the 2006 Quality Evaluation, the TEC identified a number of staff members who it considered had been nominated in the incorrect subject area. The TEC worked with TEOs to correct subject areas where an issue had been identified.<sup>27</sup>

Once these issues had been rectified, there were 614 staff members for whom the subject area reported in 2006 was different than that reported in 2003.<sup>28</sup>

Nearly half of these staff members (290) were "R" category staff in the 2003 Quality Evaluation (including a small number who had changed TEO). Çınlar and Dowse note that the "changes generally enhanced the TEO's quality score in the subject out of which staff were transferred, without diminishing the score of the subject into which the staff were transferred."<sup>29</sup>

The subject area in which a staff member has been reported does not appear on the EP evaluated by panels. Where TEOs consider that a staff member will be given an "R" category, they are not required to submit an EP and the reported subject area is not seen by panels. They still have, however, an effect on the subject score.

## 5.2 Eligibility of particular staff groups

For most academic staff, particularly in TEOs where teaching is predominantly at degree and postgraduate level, eligibility is clear. Any changes to the criteria will not impact on the eligibility of these staff members. Teaching-only, research-only and staff in institutions where there is significant level of sub-degree level teaching are the groups for whom eligibility has been questioned.

### 5.2.1 Teaching-only staff members

The eligibility criteria requires that a number of staff who do not have a major role in research are involved in the assessment. Inclusion of these staff members may not provide a good measure of the excellence in research that is being done in TEOs.

An analysis of the position titles reported in the 2003 PBRF census suggests that teaching-only staff are a very small fraction of PBRF-eligible staff.<sup>30</sup> Information at this level of detail is not available for the 2006 PBRF census and the inclusion of a greater number of staff outside of the university sector may have impacted on the proportion of teaching-only staff.

Most staff members with a position title of lecturer or above should be considered PBRF eligible, but in some cases senior academic titles are honorary or staff are in administrative roles (for example, Deputy Vice-Chancellors) and there is no expectation for the staff member to be research active.

Staff members with position titles outside of these standard academic titles are the primary teaching-only group for whom eligibility is questioned, particularly senior tutors. This is further

<sup>27</sup> Evaluating Research Excellence, p.305.

<sup>28</sup> Çınlar and Dowse, Staffing and Performance Trends in Research Subject Areas, February 2008, p.31.

<sup>29</sup> Çınlar and Dowse, Human Resource Trends, p.40.

<sup>30</sup> Warren Smart, What determines the research performance of staff in New Zealand's tertiary education sector?, November 2005, p.42. Job titles 'Senior teaching fellow', 'Senior tutor', 'Teaching fellow' and 'tutor' comprise 2.2% of the staff included in the analysis.

complicated by varying position titles and definitions across the sector and the review of staff contracts by some TEOs before the 2006 PBRF census to clarify the PBRF-eligibility of some groups of staff.<sup>31</sup>

A number of teaching-only staff, such as limited term tutors, assistant lecturers and teaching assistants will be ineligible through the provisions for staff under strict supervision and/or will not meet the 0.2 FTE threshold.

Table 3 gives the percentage of staff members in each quality category for selected position titles. Teaching-only staff are most likely to be included in the "Assistant Lecturer" title, and the table shows that more than half of the staff included in this title achieved a funded quality category - a higher percentage than staff designated as "Lecturer."

However, allocation of staff members to position title categories is an inexact science and it is unclear which position titles have been included in the categories reported by Çınlar and Dowse, particularly "other staff".

**Table 3: Percentage of staff in 2006 PBRF Quality Categories for selected position title categories<sup>32</sup>**

Category	"R" + "RNE"	"C"+ "CNE"	"B"	"A"
Other staff	55.0%	33.4%	8.5%	3.1%
Assistant Lecturer	48.9%	45.1%	5.3%	0.7%
Lecturer	54.6%	38.5%	6.6%	0.3%
All staff	33.2%	34.3%	25.1%	7.4%

### 5.2.2 Staff members teaching predominantly at sub-degree level

The substantiveness test for degree teaching, see page 4 of this document, is the mechanism for deciding if staff who teach predominantly at sub-degree level should be PBRF-eligible. It defines degree teaching as at least 25 percent of one degree-level course and/or 10 hours of class contact with degree-level students and/or supervision or co-supervision of one or more research students.

The degree-level threshold for eligibility could be considered relatively low for staff members who have a high number of teaching hours each year. The 10 hours a year at degree-level teaching would particularly impact TEOs with a high proportion of sub-degree level teaching.

However, the threshold needs to be low enough so as not to exclude staff members who are part-time or have substantial responsibilities other than teaching within their TEO (and to their community).

The eligibility rules need to mediate between these two factors.

The guidelines also include a list of qualifications that are considered degree-level teaching and the statement "degree-level courses include those at level 4 or above on the NZQA framework that predominantly contribute to degrees or related qualifications."

<sup>31</sup> Çınlar and Dowse, Human Resource Trends, p.xiii.

<sup>32</sup> Data taken from Smart, Research par excellence, p.26. Job titles have been assigned to major categories on the basis of salary tables (Çınlar and Dowse, Human Resource Trends, p.32).

The *New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications* sets out the relationship between the framework and qualifications (Figure 2).<sup>33</sup>

**Figure 2: Qualifications and levels on the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications**

10	Doctorates
9	Masters
8	Postgraduate diplomas and certificates, bachelors with Honours
7	Bachelors degrees, graduate diplomas
6	Diplomas
5	
4	
3	Certificates
2	
1	

Given that levels 1-4 qualifications are certificates and not included in the list of qualifications considered to be degree-level teaching, the eligibility of some staff who teach at sub-degree level may be unclear. Clarification would be provided by changing the guidelines to the following:

“Degree-level courses are those that contribute predominantly to qualifications at level 7 or above on the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications.”

### 5.2.3 Research-only staff (including postdoctoral fellows)

The substantiveness test for research is the mechanism for deciding whether a staff member is PBRF-eligible. A sufficiently substantive contribution to research activity is defined as: to “undertake the design or conduct of research activity and/or preparation of research outputs (eg. as a co-author/co-producer), and thus be likely to be named as an author (or co-author) of research outputs.”

The meaning of ‘conduct of research activity’ may be ambiguous and while many research assistants are doing research, they are not ‘researchers’ *per se* as they are working under the close guidance and supervision of a lead researcher.

The statement that the staff member is likely to be named as co-author may not be a good measure of whether a staff member is research-active as some people are listed as a co-author as a courtesy for the technical roles they provide to researchers.

An analysis of the job titles reported in the 2003 PBRF census suggests that research-only staff make up approximately 10 percent of PBRF-eligible staff.<sup>34</sup> Information at this level of detail is not available for the 2006 PBRF census and the inclusion of a greater number of staff outside of the university sector may have impacted on the proportion of research-only staff.

<sup>33</sup> New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualification, online, available at: <http://www.kiwiquals.govt.nz/about/levels/index.html> (23 June 2008).

<sup>34</sup> Warren Smart, What determines the research performance of staff in New Zealand’s tertiary education sector?, November 2005, p.42. Job titles ‘Senior research fellow’, ‘Research fellow’, ‘Assistant research fellow’, ‘Postdoctoral fellow’ and ‘Research officer’ comprise 10.9% of the staff included in the analysis.

There are two main arguments put forward against the inclusion of research-only staff:

- some of these staff members, such as postdoctoral fellows, are more likely to get a low quality category thereby effectively penalising the institution where they are employed by lowering the final average quality score for the subject, nominated academic unit and TEO. Research-intensive academic units and disciplines that rely heavily on collaborative research involving postdoctoral fellows are conversely penalised for employing these staff members
- the intention of the PBRF is to ensure that research continues to inform teaching at degree and postgraduate level and research-only staff do not contribute to teaching.

For example, at the The Royal Society of New Zealand PBRF Forum on 21 May 2004 Professor Paul Callaghan argued:

"I can see no reason to include in the PBRF people who have research-only contracts... Where did the money come from? The money was taken from our graduate teaching...it's about the research/teaching nexus.... And so those who are not teaching cannot contribute in terms of this and they shouldn't be included. There's *no* justification for including post-doctoral fellows."<sup>35</sup>

Postdoctoral fellows and other research assistants are specifically discussed in the Adams report. Adams acknowledges that there are differing views in the sector about whether postdoctoral fellows should be PBRF eligible, but concludes that inclusion of these junior researchers is "reputationally significant and financially trivial" because of the impact these staff members have on the average quality score. Inclusion of junior researchers, claims Adams, can result in distortions in the ranking of research units based on average quality scores.<sup>36</sup>

Adams notes that postdoctoral fellows in the sciences "rarely have an independent research portfolio."<sup>37</sup> However, there are widely varying practices and expectations of postdoctoral fellows across the sector. Some postdoctoral fellows engage in independent research, some are co-supervisors of postgraduate research students and some contribute to degree-level teaching. Postdoctoral fellows can and do contribute to the research and learning environments of their TEO and discipline.

Many postdoctoral fellows and assistant research fellows are considered to be new and emerging researchers and provisions for the assessment of these staff members means that they may achieve a funded quality category solely on the basis of their publications.

A significant number of other research-only staff, (particularly at more senior levels) are supervisors or co-supervisors of postgraduate research students and/or undertake some teaching at degree or postgraduate level. They also contribute to the learning environment by fostering a research culture at the institution and mentoring and developing new and emerging researchers.

The aims of the PBRF include improving the quality of information on research output in New Zealand. Exclusion of postdoctoral fellows and other research-only staff may provide a distorted picture of the nature and excellence of research in the TEO, subject area and across New Zealand, and compromise the ability to accurately measure the research output of researchers in the New Zealand tertiary sector.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Callaghan, Transcript of Plenary Sessions at the RSNZ PBRF Forum, 21 May 2004, online, available at: [http://www.rsnz.org/advisory/social\\_science/media/pbrf2004-plenary.php](http://www.rsnz.org/advisory/social_science/media/pbrf2004-plenary.php) (23 June 2008). Professor Callaghan was Chair of the Moderation Panel in the 2003 assessment.

<sup>36</sup> Adams, p.60.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p.60.

## 6. Options

A number of options for the eligibility criteria for the 2012 assessment are discussed below. These options are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

### 6.1 Retain current eligibility criteria

There are strong arguments for retaining the current eligibility criteria. Most TEOs understand the current criteria, any incongruous interpretation of the criteria/‘game-playing’ is largely for staff members whose eligibility is marginal and any changes may not result in significant benefits. Most of the opportunity for ‘game-playing’ is now known and has been exhausted. Any further ‘game-playing’ will be a ‘correction’ to align the practices of TEOs. Continuity in the eligibility criteria would retain the ability to make meaningful comparisons between assessments.

However, perceptions of ‘game-playing’, particularly in the 2006 assessment, may compromise the credibility of the quality evaluation process and the current eligibility and reporting mechanisms have resulted in some quality scores that could be considered misleading about the quality of research in particular subject areas/nominated academic units/TEOs, particularly when comparisons are made with these subject areas in other TEOs. These concerns need to be addressed to maintain the confidence in the PBRF. As the Adams report notes, “it is likely to be beneficial for equity of assessment and outcome and for quality of information if a clearer [staff eligibility] definition can be developed.”<sup>38</sup>

These concerns, however, can be addressed without changing the essential elements of the eligibility criteria, either through a more rigorous audit, a sector-led audit and/or clarification of the guidelines.

#### 6.1.1 Current eligibility criteria and a more rigorous audit

The current eligibility criteria would be retained, but a larger sample of staff would be audited, particularly ineligible staff and the subject area in which staff members are reported. The audit would need to be completed before the subject panels meet to assign quality categories.

This would provide greater confidence in the validity of information reported by TEOs and address concerns regarding staff under supervision and reported subject area.

However, there are a number of disadvantages to this option:

- much of the ‘game-playing’ was legal (for example, changes to staff contracts) and would not be corrected through an audit
- higher costs and compliance for TEOs and a more rigorous audit may not be well received by TEOs
- it may compromise trust between the TEC and TEOs
- it may not result in increased confidence by TEOs
- the current audit processes identified a number of discrepancies and corrected them. The numbers of staff members in question are small and the benefits of auditing a larger sample may not be significant.

<sup>38</sup> Adams, p.59.

### 6.1.2 Current eligibility criteria and a sector-led audit

The current eligibility criteria would be retained, but an audit group comprised of sector representatives would review the information in the PBRF census to ensure that the eligibility criteria and strict supervision provisions were correctly applied and that the nominated subject was appropriate. TEOs would need to provide explanations for staff who were designated as under strict supervision and for any changes in eligibility status or subject area between assessments.

The audit would need to be completed before the subject panels meet to assign quality categories.

This option addresses some of the disadvantages noted in 6.1.1 and has some additional advantages:

- staff in the sector are more likely to have the knowledge to adequately assess eligibility
- any groups of staff for whom eligibility was marginal could be discussed and then uniform eligibility applied across the sector
- it would ensure transparency.

However, as with option 6.1.1, the benefits may not be significant. This option also:

- places the onus for determining eligibility on the sector (this is not necessarily a disadvantage)
- may place additional costs on the sector.

### 6.1.3 Current eligibility criteria with clarification to the guidelines

The Guidelines and procedures would be modified to clarify areas where there has been confusion or inconsistency of application. In some cases, this may lead to minor changes in the eligibility criteria.

#### **0.2 FTE**

The PBRF guidelines include advice about how the FTE status is calculated: 'The full-time-equivalent (FTE) status for part-time staff is the percentage (to two decimal places) of full-time employment, ie. actual salary paid divided by the salary that would be paid if the position were full time.' Attention should be drawn to this statement in the Guidelines for 2012, ie. the staff members was 'employed for a minimum of one day a week on average, or 0.2 FTE, over the period of the entire year (see p.31 for clarification on the calculation of FTE status)'.

#### **Subject area**

The designated subject area would be included on EPs so panels can assess if it is correct. This would allow for 'game-playing' around subject areas to be identified for staff who submitted an EP. However, many R staff do not submit an EP (although this could be checked as part of the audit process or a list of all PBRF-eligible staff who contribute to each subject area could be made available to the appropriate subject panels). It also places the responsibility on panels to verify subject areas.

**Research: revise the research substantiveness test:**

The Guidelines include the following substantive test for research:

Undertake the design or conduct of research activity and/or the preparation of research outputs (eg. as a co-author/co-producer), and thus be likely to be named as an author (or co-author of research outputs).

Three options for refining this test are:

Undertake the design of research activity and/or the preparation of research outputs (eg. as a co-author/co-producer), and thus be likely to be named as an author (or co-author) of research outputs.

Design or lead research activity and/or the preparation of research outputs (eg. as a co-author/co-producer), and thus be likely to be named as an author (or co-author of research outputs).

Undertake the design or conduct of research activity and/or the preparation of research outputs.

Any of these revisions would reduce the likelihood of junior researchers and technical staff being designated eligible, and may lead to some marginal staff in funded quality categories being ineligible, particularly new and emerging researchers.

**Research: extend the 'strict supervision' provisions to researchers**

The strict supervision provisions would be revised to enable TEOs to designate researchers as ineligible on the basis that they are conducting research under the close guidance and supervision of a lead researcher. This would also reduce the likelihood of junior researchers and technical staff being designated as eligible, but the phrasing of this statement would need to be carefully considered so as to avoid researchers inappropriately being designated as under supervision. For example:

“Junior researchers (such as postdoctoral fellows) and technical staff who are working under the close guidance of a lead researcher, are not engaged in any independent research and do not meet the substantiveness test for teaching may be designated as PBRF-ineligible.”

**Teaching: clarify the supervised exclusions provisions**

The strict supervision provisions about teaching would be clarified through adding the following statements:

Staff members with position titles of lecturer/research fellow or above may not be reported as ineligible under the supervision provisions.

Senior tutors will not normally be able to be reported as ineligible under the supervision provisions unless a case is made by their TEO.

This would make it much more difficult for the strict supervision provisions to be used inappropriately. However, some staff are given honorary titles and are not expected to be involved in research activity. This may also lead to 'game-playing' around academic titles.

### **Teaching: change the minimum level on the NQF**

The statement about degree level courses would be changed so that a higher Level on the NZQA Qualifications framework is required (ie. level 7 or above). This would clarify the eligibility of staff teaching predominantly at degree level.

“Degree-level courses are those that contribute predominantly to qualifications at level 7 or above on the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications.”

## **6.2 Eligibility determined by academic grades**

This is the solution recommended Dr Jonathan Adams. Adams suggests that staff members in the main academic grades (Professor to Lecturer) should be eligible and all others should not. This could be modified to allow discretion to TEOs to designate some postdoctoral fellows and senior tutors as eligible. This solution may provide a better basis for comparison between research groups, particularly between different disciplines.

The major difficulty with this option is the opportunity for ‘game-playing’ and the technical issues of auditing the information reported by TEOs. There are also many staff who have academic titles other than these ‘main academic grades’, and there is no uniformity in the job descriptions of academic titles across the sector (and there can be differences within individual TEOs).

## **6.3 Extend the strengthened substantiveness test to all staff**

Only staff who have a major role in degree-level teaching AND research would be considered to be PBRF-eligible. These ‘core staff’ would:

- do or lead research, and
- be responsible for setting the teaching material so the teaching-research nexus would be maintained.

The staff members could enhance their assessment through employment of postdoctoral fellows/ research assistants (this could be included in the contribution to the research environment component of the Evidence Portfolio). This option would resolve some of the ambiguity about staff eligibility and allow TEOs to report a significant number of staff members in “R” and “RNE” quality categories as ineligible and thereby improve their average quality scores.

However, there are a number of disadvantages to this option:

- some research-only staff with high quality categories could be ineligible, reducing average quality scores
- it could compromise the PBRF principle of comprehensiveness and the PBRF aim to increase the quality of research
- TEOs would need to reassess all of their staff for PBRF-eligibility and changes to staff contracts may be required
- it may lead to different types of ‘game-playing’

- it may impact negatively on ineligible staff. Some research funding in institutions is contingent on PBRF eligibility. This option could make this funding unavailable for some staff members and impact negatively on capacity building. (TEOs may review these policies in light of any changes to eligibility but, given the strategic objectives of some TEOs, preferential funding for PBRF-eligible staff may be retained to some level)
- it does not align with the Education Act requirement that degrees should be taught mainly by people engaged in research
- it is most likely to result in the removal of R category staff which would have disproportionate impact on women, Māori and Pacific staff (all are over-represented in this quality category)
- it could compromise ability to make comparisons between PBRF assessments and ability to measure whether there has been an increase in research quality.

#### **6.4 Allow TEOs greater flexibility in the inclusion/exclusion of staff (minimum and maximum requirements)**

Two sets of criteria would be required:

- The minimum level below which staff members could not be included. This would essentially be the current substantiveness test and would prevent staff members who do not have a strong association with the institution from being included.
- A maximum level above which staff members must be included. For example,
  - Staff members for whom degree-level teaching is 10 hours or more and is 25 percent or more of their total teaching must be included
  - senior tutors may be excluded at the discretion of the TEO
  - staff members who lead or design research and who are likely to be named as lead author on a research output must be included
  - staff members who meet the substantiveness test for research with an academic title of lecturer or research fellow or above must be included, but postdoctoral fellows, research assistants and assistant research fellows may be excluded at the discretion of the TEO.

This would allow staff who have minimal teaching at degree level (that is, courses that primarily contribute to qualifications that are at levels 7 or above on the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications) to be excluded without compromising the eligibility of staff who have relatively few total teaching hours. It would also mean that junior researchers could be excluded without compromising the eligibility of new and emerging staff such as postdoctoral fellows who have the potential to be awarded a funded quality category.

The option risks 'game-playing' around academic titles and could compromise comprehensiveness and consistency principles. It may also compromise the validity of comparisons if different TEOs engage in different eligibility strategies. However, there is some evidence of this under the current eligibility criteria (see Çinlar and Dowse, *Human Resource Trends*). Comparisons between PBRF assessments and measurement of an increase in research quality would also be difficult.

## 6.5 Summary of options

No changes to eligibility criteria		
Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
Retention of current criteria (section 6.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- understood by sector</li> <li>- basis for comparisons between assessments</li> <li>- small number of staff for whom eligibility is in question</li> <li>- little further potential for 'game-playing'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- credibility of PBRF may be compromised</li> <li>- possibly misleading results under current criteria</li> </ul>
More rigorous audit (section 6.1.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- more confidence in accuracy of information</li> <li>- particular areas of concern could be addressed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- legal 'game-playing' will not be corrected</li> <li>- costs and compliance</li> <li>- may compromise trust</li> <li>- may not result in better outcomes or increased confidence</li> <li>- benefits may not be significant as small number of staff in question</li> </ul>
Sector-led audit (section 6.1.2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- more confidence in accuracy of information</li> <li>- particular areas of concern could be addressed</li> <li>- sector are more likely to have knowledge to assess eligibility</li> <li>- eligibility of marginal staff could be negotiated and uniformly categorised</li> <li>- would be transparent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- places onus on sector (not necessarily a disadvantage)</li> <li>- benefits may not be significant as small number of staff in question</li> <li>- cost to sector</li> </ul>
Clarification to guidelines (section 6.1.3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- more uniform understanding and application</li> <li>- clarification of eligibility of particular groups of staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- could lead to 'game-playing' around academic titles</li> <li>- eligibility of some groups of staff may still be inappropriate and/or unclear</li> </ul>
Academic grades (Adams solution - section 6.2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- some marginal staff are ineligible</li> <li>- may provide a better basis for comparison</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- may lead to 'game-playing'</li> <li>- significant audit requirements</li> <li>- lack of uniformity in job titles and job descriptions</li> </ul>

<p>Extend strengthened substantiveness test (section 6.3)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- would resolve ambiguity</li> <li>- TEOs would not have to report a large number of "R" category staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- some research-only staff with high quality categories could be ineligible</li> <li>- against principle of comprehensiveness and aim to increase research quality</li> <li>- TEOs would need to reassess eligibility</li> <li>- may lead to different types of 'game-playing'</li> <li>- may impact negatively on ineligible staff</li> <li>- does not align with Education Act</li> <li>- may have disproportionate impact on women, Māori and Pacific staff</li> <li>- reduces ability to make comparisons between assessments</li> </ul>
<p>Allow TEOs greater flexibility in the inclusion/exclusion of staff (minimum and maximum requirements) (section 6.4)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- allows some marginal staff to be excluded without also excluding some staff members for whom eligibility is appropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- may lead to 'game-playing,' especially around academic titles</li> <li>- against principle of comprehensiveness and consistency</li> <li>- different strategies by TEOs could compromise comparisons</li> <li>- reduces ability to make comparisons between assessments</li> </ul>

## 7. How to submit feedback

This paper has been considered by the SRG and approved for consultation purposes.

The SRG has no fixed view at this point, but considers this an important area in the redesign process for the 2012 PBRF Quality Evaluation. The SRG welcomes feedback from the stakeholders in the tertiary education sector in relation to this PBRF Eligibility consultation paper.

Feedback is sought in relation to:

- the general issues and concerns raised in this paper
- the options and recommendations identified in this paper
- any additional recommendations that stakeholders would like the SRG to consider with relation to the eligibility criteria.

In particular, the SRG would like feedback on the following questions:

- Is the current eligibility criteria well understood by staff members and TEOs (section 4.2)?
- Would the changes to the guidelines suggested in section 6.1.3 provide greater clarity about the eligibility criteria?
- Would a sector-led audit/a more rigorous audit provide greater confidence in the quality evaluation (sections 6.1.1 and 6.1.2)?
- Should the eligibility criteria be changed to make specific groups of staff PBRF-ineligible (teaching-only staff, research-only staff, postdoctoral fellows and staff who teach predominantly at sub-degree level (section 5.2)?
- Which of the options discussed in this paper would be the best means of determining eligibility (sections 6.1 (status quo), 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4)?

The eligibility of new and emerging researchers and staff in professional and applied research disciplines will be discussed in separate papers for consultation with the sector. Feedback on these issues should not be submitted in response to this consultation paper.

All feedback relating to this consultation paper on the PBRF special circumstance provisions should be emailed to: [PBRF.2012Redesign@tec.govt.nz](mailto:PBRF.2012Redesign@tec.govt.nz) or can be

posted to: Dr Damien Cole, Tertiary Education Commission, P O Box 27048, Wellington, to be received no later than 5pm, Friday, 23 January 2009.

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## Performance-Based Research Fund

Feedback template  
for

Eligibility consultation paper

Feedback from:	
Contact details:	

## 1. Purpose

The purpose of this template is to provide a mechanism for collecting feedback on the matters raised as part of the PBRF Assessment Framework Consultation paper.

The objective is to obtain feedback in such a way that will speed the collation and review of feedback pertaining to specific areas of interest.

Respondents are encouraged to use this template to provide feedback, but should not feel limited in any way from providing comments in addition to those requested in the template.

### Timeframe for feedback

1. Completed templates and any other comments should be emailed to PBRF.2012Redesign@tec.govt.nz or can be posted to Dr Damien Cole, Tertiary Education Commission, P O Box 27048, Wellington 6141.
2. Feedback would be appreciated as soon as possible, no later than 5pm, Friday, 23 January 2009.

Transcript of Plenary Sessions at the RSNZ PBRF Forum, 21 May 2004, online, available at: [http://www.rsnz.org/advisory/social\\_science/media/pbrf2004-plenary.php](http://www.rsnz.org/advisory/social_science/media/pbrf2004-plenary.php) (23 June 2008).

WEB Research, *Phase 1 Evaluation of the implementation of the PBRF and the conduct of the 2003 Quality Evaluation*, Wellington, 2004.

## 2. Questions

Is the current eligibility criteria well understood by staff members and TEOs (section 4.2)?

Would the changes to the guidelines suggested in section 6.1.3 provide greater clarity about the eligibility criteria?

Would a sector-led audit/a more rigorous audit provide greater confidence in the quality evaluation (sections 6.1.1 and 6.1.2)?

Should the eligibility criteria be changed to make specific groups of staff PBRF-ineligible (teaching-only staff, research-only staff, postdoctoral fellows and staff who teach predominantly at sub-degree level (section 5.2)?

When should special circumstances be considered (section 5.4)?

Which of the options discussed in this paper would be the best means of determining eligibility (sections 6.1 (status quo), 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4)?