

# SELECTION FRAMEWORK

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The Centres of Research Excellence (CoRE) Fund was established in 2001. Five Centres were funded in 2002 and a further two Centres were funded in 2003. Each Centre received 6 years funding. The operational funding for the existing Centres for 2006/07 is \$21.4 million (excluding GST). They also received \$31.4 million in Capital (GST not applicable) as part of their establishment. The government has announced that there will be a third funding round for Centres in 2006/07. An additional \$10 million (excluding GST) of operating funds and a further \$20 million for capital purchases is being added to the Fund. The 7 existing Centres will be able to apply for refunding for a further 6 years and applications will also be invited to establish new Centres. Both will be able to apply for up to 6 years of funding, the final 3 years being subject to a mid-term review. Any existing Centres not re-selected will have their current funding scaled down over 3 years.

The CoRE Fund is administered by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC). The Commission have asked the Royal Society of New Zealand (RSNZ) to assist with the selection by running the assessment process for the new funding round and to make recommendations for selection to the TEC.

This document provides further information on the timetable for the round and describes the process and criteria that will be used for assessing applications.

The Government's vision for the Centres of Research Excellence Fund is that it:

- establishes and promotes excellent, collaborative, strategically focused research;
- creates significant knowledge transfer;
- provides opportunities for the creation and diffusion of knowledge that are not available through existing funds; and
- encourages tertiary education institutions to develop relationships and linkages with other research organisations, enterprises and communities that they serve.

This vision is embodied in three objectives for the Centres of Research Excellence Fund, which are that it will support research that:

- is excellent (world-class) quality;
- is focused on New Zealand's future development; and
- leads to significant knowledge transfer activities (including the training of future researchers).

Applicants will find it helpful to refer to the current Tertiary Education Strategy (TES, particularly the section on government goals), the Statement of Tertiary Education Priorities 2005/07 (STEP), and the draft outcomes in the TES discussion document (*Developing the Second Tertiary Education Strategy 2007/12*; relating to improving research connections and linkages).

Applicants should also be aware of the three themes that constitute government priorities: economic transformation, families – young and old, and national identity.

A Centre of Research Excellence must be hosted by a Tertiary Education Institution (TEI).

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## TIMETABLE

September 2006	Ministers receive selection framework: key dates, selection criteria and processes.
12 September	Call for applications.
3 October	Closing date for applicants to submit Expressions of Interest.
1 December	Applications close.
15 December	Applications sent to Referees, Assessment Panels and CoRE Fund Committee.
2 February 2007	Referees' comments returned, assembled and sent to applicants for reply.
16 February	Closing date for applicants' responses to the referees
26 February-7 March	First Stage Assessment Panel meets to evaluate against Excellence and Access to Human Capital Development criteria
9 March	Recommendations to CoRE Fund Committee.
12-13 March	CoRE Fund Committee meets to produce Short List. Inform unsuccessful candidates, giving feedback.
19-27 March	Site visits.
28 March	CoRE Fund Committee meets to assess Relevance and Governance and Management.
6 April	Final recommendation to the TEC.
April/May	TEC Board decision.
May	Report back to Cabinet advising of the recommendations arising from the selection round and seeking the release of funding.
May/June	Announcement of decisions. Decision feedback to participants and public. Feedback to unsuccessful applicants from the Short List.
June/July	Contract negotiation with Centres.

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## **SELECTION PROCESS**

Applicants for CoRE funding will be required to submit two sets of documents; first an expression of interest, then a full proposal. The full proposal will be assessed by specialist panels and referees. Their recommendations will go to the CoRE Fund Committee. That committee will make its recommendations to the TEC.

### **Call for Applications**

The call for applications will be placed on the RSNZ web site and TEI's will be notified in writing. Application packs containing background material and application forms will be available on the website for all prospective applicants. There will be no restriction on the number of applications any host institution can make.

### **Expressions of Interest**

Applicants will be asked to register their interest by providing an abstract of their application by 3 October. This will enable the RSNZ to begin the task of finding referees and panellists in the specialist areas relevant to the applications. To facilitate networking, the titles of the abstracts (and the full abstract if the applicant agrees) will be posted on the RSNZ's web site so that other relevant research groups become aware of an intended application in a particular field.

### **Full Applications**

Full applications will be due on 1st December. They will be in electronic and paper form and must follow the format prescribed in the application pack. Essentially the application will be a Strategic Plan for the proposed Centre. A major component of the Strategic Plan will be the Centre's research plan.

### **Co-funding**

Applicants will be asked to provide information about current and prospective co-funding arrangements in order to assess the Centre's overall research programme and the Centre's financial viability. Co-funding is encouraged as a Centre's programme will be enhanced and extended by funding from other sources. Ideally such sources of funding will increase over time although Centres are not currently required to become self-sustaining.

### **The Capital Fund**

Applicants will also have the opportunity to apply for capital funding for the purchase of strategic research assets (excluding buildings) relevant to the Centre's proposed research plan. Applicants will need to provide information on their plans for the proposed use of requested items and approximate costs. Shortlisted applicants will be expected to confirm these costs. Recommendations on capital items by the CoRE Fund Committee to the TEC will be based on the contribution of these items to the research objectives, within the funding available. Recommendations may also be used to inform negotiations and contracting decisions after selections are made.

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## **Feedback to Applicants**

All applicants will receive an acknowledgement of the receipt of the abstract and the full application. The RSNZ can provide information and guidance for potential applicants until the closing date for applications. All applicants will receive copies of the referees' comments on their applications before the Assessment Panels meet and there will be an opportunity for applicants to respond to these comments. The Assessment Panels will be asked to prepare feedback on all the applications. This will be augmented by comments from the CoRE Fund Committee and feedback will be provided to the applicants once the final selection has been announced.

## **Recommendations to the TEC**

The CoRE Fund Committee will recommend to the TEC which proposals it considers should be funded, and the level of funding to award. The TEC Board will make the final decisions and report back to Cabinet after the selection round in 2007 to seek agreement for further capital and operating appropriations for the Centres of Research Excellence, including disinvestment decisions if relevant, prior to announcing the outcomes of the selection round to the sector.

# **FURTHER INFORMATION**

## **Assessment Panels**

A number of Assessment Panels will be established to assess the range of applications. These panels will be composed of experts in the research fields of interest so that applications in related fields can be evaluated and ranked. The Panels will take into account the referees' reports and will be considering the applications against the criterion for the Government's objectives of excellence and human capital development.

In view of the small size of the New Zealand research community (and the likelihood of conflicts of interest) and the objective of world class standard, the panels are likely to incorporate a strong international element. In particular the RSNZ will seek to involve expatriate New Zealanders in the process as they are well-placed to comment on development of human capability.

## **CoRE Fund Committee**

The CoRE Fund Committee will act as the overall assessment committee and make the final recommendation on the selection of Centres of Research Excellence to the TEC, based on all the material at their disposal. It will be responsible for assessing the relevance of applications to New Zealand's economic, social or environmental priorities and for assessing the governance and management arrangements.

The chairs of the Assessment Panels will present their recommendations to the CoRE Fund Committee and will be present to answer questions and provide any additional information.

The Committee will draw up a short list and complete the assessment with a visit to the host institutions of finalists to address any remaining issues.

The members of the CoRE Fund Committee will be people of standing and respect in the New Zealand community, and as well as having high level strategic skills, the majority of the

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members will be experienced and respected researchers in their particular field. It is anticipated that there will be up to 9 members of the Committee.

It is important that the CoRE Fund Committee has the background to assess the relevance of each proposal. In the main, these will be people living in New Zealand.

The skills required by the CoRE Fund Committee are set out below.

### **Skill set for selecting the CoRE Fund Committee members**

A widely held attribute within the committee membership will be:

- a demonstrated understanding of research practices, the tertiary research community, the general research community, and the assessment of research excellence.

In addition the membership will collectively have attributes which include:

- demonstrated understanding and commitment to the Government's strategic direction for New Zealand, and demonstrated high-level strategic thinking skills;
- demonstrated understanding of the requirement for tertiary institutions to support New Zealand economic, social or environmental priorities;
- demonstrated experience of best practice for knowledge transfer including the development of human capital and the formation of links with public and private end users;
- demonstrated understanding of the social and cultural dimensions of innovation and an awareness of environmental issues;
- demonstrated experience and reputation in assessing excellence in Māori and Pacific research; and
- demonstrated experience in institution building and assessing governance and management viability.

### **Process for selecting the CoRE Fund Committee members**

The RSNZ will ask for nominations for membership of the Committee and expressions of interest from anyone interested in participating on the Committee. In consultation with the TEC, a Chair will be appointed, after which the RSNZ will work with the Chair to appoint all remaining members of the Committee, with the exception of one member who will be a TEC representative.

### **Referees**

All applications will be sent to referees who are internationally respected in the relevant field. They will be asked to review the proposed research programme with respect to excellence and to comment on the Centre and its research team, the Centre's structure and its intended methodology for research and for knowledge transfer.

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## SELECTION CRITERIA

All applications will be assessed against the degree to which the proposed Centre will meet the three government objectives for Centres of Research Excellence (as in Table 1) and also the strength of its proposed governance and management structure. The structures put in place to govern and manage a Centre will have an important bearing on the Centre's ultimate success and contribution to the overall CoRE Fund objectives.

Measurement will be based on a combination of evidence provided by applicants and the judgement of the referees, Assessment Panels and the CoRE Fund Committee.

A scoring system will be applied to each of the criteria to assist the Assessment Panels and the CoRE Fund Committee in ranking applications for the final shortlist.

A flowchart showing the assessment process scheme is also provided (see back page).

The assessment will be a two step process whereby proposals must demonstrate Excellence and Access or Human Capital Development as a minimal requirement before being assessed for Relevance and Governance & Management.

Proposals will be peer reviewed by international experts against the Excellence and Access or Human Capital Development objectives. Referee reports from this peer review will be provided to the applicants for comment so that there is an opportunity to strengthen their proposals. All the material will then be evaluated by Assessment Panels against the 'Excellence' and 'Access or Human Capital Development' objectives. The top-ranked proposals from this assessment will proceed to the next stage, providing they meet a minimum excellence standard.

To be called a Centre of Research Excellence it is essential that an application attains a threshold level for the criteria related to the "Excellence" objective.

The approximately 15 top ranking applications from the Panels' assessment will then be forwarded to the CoRE Fund Committee for evaluation against the criteria of 'Relevance of the Research to New Zealand's Future Development' and the adequacy of its proposed 'Governance and Management' structure. The making of the case for relevance is the responsibility of the applicant. Proposals will be considered from all fields of research but applicants are encouraged to consider the Ministry of Research, Science and Technology roadmaps for science, futurewatch activities, the current Tertiary Education Strategy, and to be aware of the Government priority themes of economic transformation, families – young and old, and national identity.

Assessment by the CoRE Fund Committee will be in 2 stages. Proposals will be initially ranked and the top 10-12 applicants will either be visited by the Core Fund Committee or be invited to make a presentation. The CoRE Fund Committee will then make its final assessment and ranking of proposals and make its recommendations to the TEC.

A weighting will be applied to criteria related to the 'Excellence' objective so that it contributes 40% of the total score. The other 3 objectives will be equally weighted at 20% each.

Applications from existing CoREs and new CoREs will be considered using the same framework. Existing CoREs will be given the opportunity to demonstrate their successes to date and new applicants will need to draw on other evidence to support their case.

The decision making process will take into consideration the investment already made into existing CoREs, their successes to date, and the research capabilities and networks they

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have developed. At each decision point in the selection process, if an existing CoRE has not scored highly enough to proceed to the next stage and the CoRE Fund Committee considers it is a marginal difference which does not outweigh the potential cost of disinvestment, then the CoRE shall proceed to the next stage. In this event, the CoRE Fund Committee will seek advice from the relevant agencies on the potential costs of disinvestment so that it can be taken into account in their decision making process. This will ensure that the costs involved in disinvesting in that CoRE, including any potential loss of research capability, have been considered and balanced against the potential benefits to be gained from establishing a new CoRE. This is in order to help protect the government's initial investment in the existing CoREs.

The following table sets out the criteria and indicators by which it is proposed to assess applications.

**Table 1:** The four objectives for the CoRE Fund, criteria and measures

<b>GOVERNMENT OBJECTIVE</b>	<b>SELECTION CRITERIA</b>	<b>INDICATORS</b>
<p>EXCELLENCE: World-class excellent research</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellence of the Research Programme</li>   <li>• Excellence of the Research Team</li>   <li>• Degree to which inter-institutional and international collaboration and networking strengthens the research proposals</li> </ul>	<p>The excellence of the research programme will be determined by assessing whether</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the research proposal is well constructed and represents a creative and innovative approach to the subject matter,</li> <li>• it is likely that significant new findings will be produced, and</li> <li>• it will substantially advance knowledge in the field.</li> </ul> <p>The excellence of the research group and the depth and breadth of their knowledge and experience will be assessed by reviewing the previous research productivity of the teams comprising the existing or proposed Centre, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• their publication record,</li> <li>• key presentations,</li> <li>• the structure of the research group for future development (incorporating senior and less experienced researchers, postdoctoral fellows, postgraduate students and appropriate other assistance),</li> <li>• national/international awards to the research leaders for achievements relating to their research,</li> <li>• the ability to attract new researchers to the field, and</li> <li>• the credentials of the Centre's Director, such as academic and professional standing, and their capacity for research leadership.</li> <li>• the extent to which new Centres describe their potential to generate new research capability, and existing Centres plan to maintain and further build their research capability.</li> </ul> <p>The degree to which inter-institutional and international collaboration and networking strengthens the research proposals will be assessed by reviewing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the significance of the additional skills and resources,</li> <li>• the inclusion of new researchers,</li> <li>• the level of exchange of visitors and research personnel, and</li> <li>• the extent of participation in international events.</li> </ul>
<p>ACCESS OR HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contribution to development of experts in wealth creation</li> <li>• Commitment to educating New Zealand's future workforce and contribution to graduate education</li> </ul>	<p>The contribution the Centre will make to educating and training New Zealand's future workforce will be evaluated by the extent to which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the programme encourages the development of research skills,</li> <li>• the Centre has strategies to encourage the inclusion of underrepresented groups,</li> <li>• the research supervision record of the research leaders, and</li> <li>• the programme is linked to the skill needs of the relevant end-user community.</li> </ul>

GOVERNMENT OBJECTIVE	SELECTION CRITERIA	INDICATORS
<p>RELEVANCE Contribution to New Zealand's future development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Impact</li>   <li>● Pathways to innovation through collaboration with public or private sectors</li>   <li>● Transfer of knowledge to end-user, communities and other researchers</li> </ul>	<p>The potential to enhance New Zealand's future development will be assessed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● the potential to make a significant impact on the themes that constitute government priorities: economic transformation, families – young and old, and national identity as well as the goals expressed in the Tertiary Education Strategy and the Statement of Tertiary Education Priorities: relevance to economic, social and environmental policies, strengthening Māori development and meeting the development aspirations of Pasifika,</li> <li>● the extent to which addressing these goals is a focus of the Centre, and</li> <li>● the extent to which the proposed Centre duplicates or expands existing capabilities within New Zealand's research system.</li> <li>● the extent to which new Centres describe their potential to generate, and existing Centres plan to maintain their value through capability and network development.</li> </ul> <p>The extent to which the Centre demonstrated pathways to innovation through collaborative links to others will be assessed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● the understanding shown of the research needs of New Zealand communities and industries and plans for effective translation of research and knowledge into application for new and existing commercial success, and/or social or environmental benefits,</li> <li>● involvement of relevant sector in determining the Centre's research programme, and</li> <li>● the demonstration of innovative value from the new or expanded activity in service or policy development, or in enhancing productivity, developing new products and helping New Zealand firms compete in high-value products and services.</li> </ul> <p>The transfer of knowledge to others will be assessed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● the relationship to other groups in the particular field of research, and</li> <li>● the involvement of end-users and the wider community in the planning, implementation and uptake of the research programme,</li> <li>● the plans for promoting the Centre's activities to the wider community, including where appropriate, for commercial gain,</li> <li>● the strength of institutional connections with stakeholders in industry, community, and iwi, and</li> <li>● the impact on Māori and Pasifika from the research.</li> </ul>

GOVERNMENT OBJECTIVE	SELECTION CRITERIA	INDICATORS
GOVERNANCE & MANAGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Management structure and business plan</li> </ul>	<p>The strength of the governance, management and operational arrangements will be evaluated by considering the Centre's Charter or Business Plan and proposed performance measures to determine:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the clarity of the principles of operation and the extent to which the governance and management structures will ensure these are met,</li> <li>the credentials of the Centre's Director such as capacity for strategic leadership, management skills and successful experience</li> <li>a robust Centre establishment plan</li> <li>the adequacy of the proposed reporting arrangements</li> <li>the ability for the Centre to meet its primary purpose,</li> <li>the ability to fulfil Treaty of Waitangi obligations,</li> <li>host institution support, such as Centre establishment, funding or other financial policies, provision of space and other resources, and</li> <li>the financial viability of the proposed Centre</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agreements among participating organisations</li> </ul>	<p>The strength of the partnership required between participating research organisations will be evaluated by considering any Memoranda of Understanding or other agreements that those organisations have put in place, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>types of partnerships,</li> <li>agreements for personnel sharing,</li> <li>agreements for cost sharing, and</li> <li>agreements for intellectual property sharing.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilities</li> </ul>	<p>The appropriateness of the Centre's facilities will be assessed by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the ability for the centre to develop a separate identity from its host,</li> <li>the standard of the accommodation,</li> <li>the extent to which the equipment and other research tools are considered state of the art, and the standard and ease of access to support services, including financial systems provided by the host.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Centre development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The prospects for the Centre to develop into a viable entity in the long term will be evaluated by the proposal showing a clear and probable path for its future development.</li> </ul>

**Selection Process – Flow Chart**

