



Performance-Based Research Fund

Sector Reference Group for the Quality Evaluation 2025

Terms of Reference

Background

The Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) is a key government initiative under the Tertiary Education Strategy (TES). It involves funding tertiary education organisations (TEOs) based on their research performance as determined by three components:

- › Quality Evaluation;
- › Research Degree Completions (RDC); and
- › External Research Income (ERI).

The periodic Quality Evaluation measures research quality through the assessment of Evidence Portfolios (EPs), which are submitted by TEOs for their PBRF-eligible staff. The next Quality Evaluation will be held in 2025, having been delayed by a year due to the impact of COVID-19.

In the Quality Evaluation, subject-specific peer review panels independently assess EPs and assign individual quality categories. The results are then publicly reported.

The results of the Quality Evaluation, together with the results of the RDC and ERI measures, provide the basis for annual funding to participating TEOs that submit EPs that are awarded a funded quality category.

The Ministry of Education convened an independent review panel in 2019 and consulted on its recommendations for changes to the PBRF in 2020. Cabinet agreed a package of changes in May 2021.

Cabinet's decisions and instructions, along with feedback from participants in the Quality Evaluation 2018 (including Panels, Chairs, and the TEC project team), form the basis for the work of the PBRF Sector Reference Group (SRG) for the Quality Evaluation 2025

PBRF Objectives and Principles

The primary objectives of the PBRF are to:

- › Increase the quality of basic and applied research at New Zealand's degree granting tertiary education organisations;
- › Support world-leading research-led teaching and learning at degree and postgraduate levels;
- › Assist New Zealand's tertiary education organisations to maintain and lift their competitive rankings relative to their international peers; and
- › Provide robust public information to stakeholders about research performance within and across tertiary education organisations;
- › Support a robust and inclusive system for developing and sustaining research excellence in Aotearoa New Zealand.¹

In doing so PBRF will also:

- › Support the development of postgraduate student researchers and new and emerging researchers
- › Support research activities that provide economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits to New Zealand, including the advancement of Mātauranga Māori; and
- › Support technology and knowledge transfer to New Zealand businesses, iwi and communities.

The PBRF is governed by the following set of principles:

- › **Partnership:** the PBRF should reflect the bicultural nature of Aotearoa New Zealand and the special role and status of the Treaty of Waitangi | Te Tiriti o Waitangi;²
- › **Equity:** different approaches and resources are needed to ensure that the measurement of research excellence leads to equitable outcomes; and
- › **Inclusiveness:** the PBRF should encourage and recognise the full diversity of epistemologies, knowledges, and methodologies to reflect Aotearoa New Zealand's people.
- › **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;

¹ This new objective was added as a part of the Ministry of Education's review of the PBRF and agreed by Cabinet in May 2021.

² This and the following two new principles were added as a part of the Ministry of Education's review of the PBRF and agreed by Cabinet in May 2021.

- › **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;

Role of the PBRF Sector Reference Group

The SRG will provide advice and recommendations to the TEC on the operational design of the Quality Evaluation 2025. The scope of the group's work is defined by:

- › Cabinet decisions about the Quality Evaluation, which include the new funding weightings for Māori and Pacific researchers and for the Māori Knowledge and Development and Pacific Research panels. These decisions are not in scope for the SRG to reconsider, but will shape its work.
- › Cabinet directions to the TEC to ensure that the SRG considers specific areas. These include broadening the PBRF definitions of research and research excellence, making changes to the Evidence Portfolio design, simplifying the New and Emerging researcher qualifying criteria, and replacing the Extraordinary Circumstances category with a new 'merit relative to opportunity' concept.
- › Issues identified through feedback from participants in the Quality Evaluation 2018.

The SRG may identify additional operational issues which it considers necessary to address. Any additional issues will be considered by the SRG subject to TEC agreement.

The SRG will carry out its work by:

- › meeting regularly, both face-to-face and via video- or tele-conference;
- › reviewing any papers prepared as part of the SRG process and undertaking further analysis as required;
- › identifying options for resolving issues, and communicating these options in the form of discussion papers for sector feedback; and
- › reviewing sector feedback and agreeing recommendations for consideration by the TEC.

SRG statement of expectations

The TEC is committed to fulfilling our obligations under the Education and Training Act 2020, the Tertiary Education Strategy, and our own Statement of Performance Expectations to: honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi in its entirety; ensure we actively support the protection of Te Tiriti taonga including Te Reo Māori and Mātauranga Māori; and also support a strong wānanga system in all our operations. The SRG will be guided in its working practices and in performing its role by the following statement of expectations which expresses these obligations, as well as by the PBRF objectives and principles.

- › We respect and uphold Māori-Crown partnership and the obligations which flow from Te Tiriti. This means in particular we acknowledge that Mātauranga Māori and Te Reo are protected taonga, and that Māori and Mātauranga Māori experts in the group have a specific voice in matters relating to Māori researchers, kaupapa Māori, and Mātauranga Māori.
- › We respect and value the diversity of professional and academic expertise, backgrounds, culture, and lived experience within the group, as well as the diversity of organizations which participate in the PBRF. We will acknowledge when as a group or as individuals we do not have the expertise to make informed decisions and should defer to those who do. This means that we will call in outside advice when we identify that we need to.
- › We listen to and value all perspectives and views, including minority ones, and seek to reach decisions that realise the aspirations of the whole sector through consensus wherever possible.
- › We are drawn from a wide range of participating TEOs and types of TEO to work together for the whole of the sector.

Operational design principles

Operational design work ahead of the Quality Evaluation 2025 will be based on a number of principles and considerations:

- › upholding the objectives and principles of the PBRF and statement of expectations;
- › learning from the previous Quality Evaluations in order to make improvements to the design of the PBRF and the implementation of the Quality Evaluation 2025;
- › 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; and
- › avoiding costly or time-consuming changes unless there are good reasons for believing they will bring significant improvements.

Process for the SRG

The SRG's process in considering the design of the PBRF before the implementation of the Quality Evaluation 2025 will be as follows:

- › the SRG decides on topics for issues/consultation papers at its first meeting (including seeking feedback on any additional issues for consideration);
- › at subsequent meetings, preparation of issues papers by the TEC Secretariat for the SRG that give background information, specify the issues, and outline potential options for resolution;
- › consideration of issues papers by the SRG (in terms of the quality of the analysis, accuracy, clarity, coverage of the relevant issues and options, and recommended approach);
- › preparation of consultation papers by the TEC Secretariat and the SRG for the sector providing background information, clarification of issues, analysis, and recommended approach;
- › consultation with the sector, and the receipt and incorporation of feedback as required;
- › the SRG makes recommendations to the TEC;
- › the SRG receives feedback from TEC on the recommendations;
- › TEC makes and publishes "in principle" decisions; and
- › if agreed by TEC, the SRG recommendations are integrated into the PBRF guidelines.

At the conclusion of the PBRF redesign phase, in June 2023, a new set of guidelines for the operation of the Quality Evaluation 2025 will be issued, containing the integrated redesigned process.

Input from the TEC's audit and legal stakeholders will also be sought regarding proposed changes and the drafted guidelines.

SRG Membership

SRG members are expected to:

- › commit to the full period during which the group will operate;
- › contribute to discussion on the basis of their expertise and experience;
- › contribute to the development of advice through peer review and, by agreement, produce working papers within their field of expertise;

- › maintain confidentiality where required – for example, when discussing options for consultation;
- › canvass proposals widely within their network of contacts in the sector once papers have been published for feedback;
- › adhere to these Terms of Reference; and
- › work collaboratively with other SRG members to make recommendations to the TEC.

Membership of the SRG is as follows:

Name	Affiliated organisation
Professor Wiremu Doherty (Co-chair)	Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi
Professor Wendy Lerner (Co-chair)	Victoria University of Wellington Te Herenga Waka
Dr Clive Aspin	Victoria University of Wellington Te Herenga Waka
Dr Maria Baker	Te Rau Ora
Associate Professor Vaughan Bidois	Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi
Professor Craig Bunt (Te Ātiawa)	University of Otago
Dr Christine Cheyne	Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology (Te Pūkenga)
Dr Donna Hendry	University of Otago
Professor Robert Jahnke (Ngāi Taharora, Te Whānau a Iritekura, Te Whānau a Rakairoa o Ngāti Porou)	Massey University
Professor Bryony James	Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato University of Waikato
Professor Jenny Lee-Morgan (Waikato – Ngāti Mahuta, Te Ahiwaru)	Unitec (Te Pūkenga)
Professor Kathryn McPherson	Auckland University of Technology
Dr Sereana Naepi	University of Auckland
Professor Steven Ratuva	University of Canterbury
Professor Karen Scott	University of Canterbury
Associate Professor Yvonne Te Ruki Rangī o Tangaroa Underhill-Sem	University of Auckland
Associate Professor Melinda Webber (Ngāti Whakaue, Ngāpuhi, Ngati Kahu)	University of Auckland
Dr Beatrice Turner (Secretariat)	TEC

Conducting the business of the SRG

Meetings of the SRG

The Co-chairs of the SRG, supported by the TEC Secretariat, are responsible for establishing a regular meeting schedule and calling meetings at appropriate intervals throughout the life of the SRG. The TEC may request the SRG to meet outside of the scheduled meetings if their contribution to a piece of work is necessary and time-bound.

The Co-chairs will call on the TEC Secretariat to assist with the setting of and preparation for meetings (including communicating an agreed agenda). The Co-chairs should ensure adequate notice is given for each meeting to ensure members are able to attend.

It is expected that all members of the SRG will attend scheduled meetings. If a member of the SRG is unable to attend a meeting, then there is to be no proxy for that member at the meeting. It is the member's responsibility to brief another member(s) of the group on any work they might have been undertaking on behalf of the SRG. They must also inform the Co-chairs and Secretariat which member will be presenting their work or update on their behalf.

The SRG will, wherever possible, reach decisions through consensus, seeking to reflect the expertise, perspectives, and experience of all members. The Co-chairs will retain the ability to make final decisions about the content of consultation papers and the SRG's recommendations to the TEC jointly.

The Terms of Reference will be published publicly on the TEC website following their approval at the first meeting of the SRG.

Minutes

So as to ensure free and frank discussion, the minutes will consist of a record of decisions and action points. Detailed minutes of discussions at SRG meetings will not be kept.

The Co-chairs are responsible for ensuring the minutes are taken for each meeting by the TEC Secretariat and then approving those minutes. Minutes will be checked for accuracy and cleared with the Secretariat before being circulated to members of the SRG.

Reimbursement of Costs

The TEC will reimburse (on presentation of appropriate receipts) travel costs associated with attendance at SRG meetings.

In the event that specific activities require additional work from any members of the SRG, the TEC will agree a contract with the member concerned to cover payment for the agreed services.

Confidentiality

Members of the SRG will be receiving papers covering issues, background information, and suggested changes to the design of the PBRF. These papers may at times include potentially contentious issues and analysis as the SRG must have all relevant data for them to effectively consider and communicate issues freely and frankly.

It is essential that the papers provided to the SRG, and any subsequent SRG discussions, remain confidential to the group, at least until such time as revised papers are circulated for wider sector consultation.

All members of the SRG will be required to sign a Confidentiality Agreement.

Approval

The SRG approved these terms of reference on 24 September 2021.

Appendix: Background of the PBRF

In 2002, Cabinet agreed to the recommendation from the Tertiary Education Advisory Commission (TEAC) to establish a performance-based research fund for tertiary education organisations (TEOs).

The design details were developed by a PBRF Working Group, supported by the Ministry of Education and the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), working in consultation with the sector.

The recommendations and rationale were published as a report, Investing in Excellence. Cabinet accepted this report, and its recommendations still form the basis for most of the design and implementation of the PBRF.

It was agreed that the fund would be allocated through three separate measures:

- › the Quality Evaluation;
- › Research Degree Completions (RDC); and
- › External Research Income (ERI).

The Quality Evaluation is an assessment of research quality. The unit of assessment used is individual academic staff at participating TEOs. TEOs are required to apply a set of eligibility criteria to their staff in order to determine which individuals are eligible to participate.

Evidence Portfolios (EPs) consisting of research outputs and other examples of research-related activity for each eligible academic are compiled by their employing TEO. These EPs are then submitted to the TEC along with a census of staff employed by the TEO on a specific date.

This information is audited by the TEC to ensure that it is correct and robust. EPs are assessed by subject-specific peer review panels and awarded a quality category. These quality categories form the basis of quality-related research capability funding for TEOs for a six-year period. This funding is distinct from PBRF funding determined on the basis of the RDC and EPI measures, which is calculated on an annual basis.

The first PBRF Quality Evaluation was conducted during 2003. The next was conducted in 2006; however, this was a partial round and those academics that participated in 2003 were not required to participate. The 2012 and 2018 Quality Evaluations were full rounds with all eligible academics participating.

The Ministry of Education completed a review of the PBRF at the conclusion of the 2012 Quality Evaluation. Cabinet agreed a number of recommendations for change which were developed and operationalised by the SRG and TEC project staff prior to the 2018 Quality Evaluation.

Following the 2018 Quality Evaluation, the Ministry of Education set up an independent review panel to consider whether further changes to the three PBRF measures were required. The panel, chaired by Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith, submitted its final report and recommendations in 2020. Cabinet took these recommendations into consideration in making final decisions on the 2025 PBRF.