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Te Amorangi Mātauranga Matua

PBRF Sector Reference Group – Consultation paper 11

Reporting the results of the PBRF Quality Evaluation 2026

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PBRF Sector Reference Group – Consultation Paper 11: Reporting the results of the PBRF Quality Evaluation 2026

Purpose

1   This paper sets out the approach developed by the PBRF Sector Reference Group (SRG) for TEC reporting on the results of Quality Evaluation 2026.

2   The SRG considered the following matters in developing this paper:

   › The implications of Cabinet's decision to discontinue the Average Quality Score (AQS)

   › The purpose of reporting on the results of the Quality Evaluation

   › Whether the TEC should stop reporting anything else previously reported, other than the AQS

   › Opportunities for new reporting arising from changes agreed by Cabinet decisions and from changes agreed in principle by the TEC based on the SRG's earlier recommendations

   › Opportunities to add value to reporting in the following four areas:

      o Use of existing PBRF data from the other two fund components (Research Degree Completions and External Research Income)

      o Use of existing TEC data from other funds

      o Use of newly collected data

      o Use of external data.

3   The SRG welcomes comments on the proposed approach.

4   Note: The scope of this paper includes public reporting of Quality Evaluation results and common reporting accessed by participating tertiary education organisations (TEOs). It does not include the reporting of individual Quality Category results to individuals and their employing TEOs.

Background

Cabinet decisions to discontinue the Average Quality Score

5   In July 2021, Cabinet released its decisions on changes to the PBRF. These decisions included instructing the TEC to discontinue reporting the two AQS measures that were

used to report in Quality Evaluation 2018.[1] Cabinet made the decision to remove these AQS measures based on Ministry of Education (MoE) advice, which reflected the findings of the PBRF review held in 2019-2020 and subsequent sector consultation.

6   The TEC will directly action this Cabinet decision. AQS measures will not be produced or included in Quality Evaluation 2026 results.

PBRF Review recommendations

7   One of the ways PBRF Quality Evaluation results have been reported since the Fund was introduced is through the AQS. In 2003 and 2006 there was a single AQS measure and, in 2012, the TEC introduced four different ways of calculating an AQS. This was reduced to two types in the 2018 round: the AQS(S) and the AQS(E). These measures were intended to reflect research intensity as opposed to measuring research quality.

8   The AQS(S) used a multi-year average of FTE totals at each participating TEO relative to the number of funded Quality Categories. This measure provided an indication of the extent to which staff whose EPs have been awarded a funded Quality Category were representative of all teaching and research staff at each TEO.

9   The AQS(E) was calculated by using the number of equivalent full-time students (EFTS) at degree level or higher enrolled in qualifications at NZQF Level 7 and above at each participating TEO relative to the number of funded Quality Categories. This measure indicated the extent to which degree level and above teaching and learning was underpinned by research. Higher numbers indicated a greater intensity of degree-level provision that was informed by research.

10 Based on sector consultation and feedback, the PBRF Review held in 2019-2020 recommended discontinuing the AQS(S) and the AQS(E). The PBRF review panel made the following recommendation, reproduced here in full:

> RECOMMENDATION 33
>
> **The TEC should retain the focus on the increase in the total number of funded Quality Categories when reporting the results of the Quality Evaluation, and discontinue the average quality score metrics.**
>
> The results of the 2018 Quality Evaluation were reported in an accessible way, including the use of web-based data visualisation apps and infographics. Part of the approach to reporting was to place much less emphasis on measures of the relative intensity of research quality, the average quality scores. The changes to the reporting framework appear to have been welcomed by the sector and the panel considered that they were a positive change.
>
> The reporting of average quality scores does, however, appear to be a point of continued tension. The reasons for these concerns reflect both the design of the measures and results of the calculations themselves.

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[1] Ministry of Education, 2021. *Education Report: Final recommendations on the PBRF Review*. Wellington, New Zealand Government, para 64; Cabinet Minute of Decision: Review of the Performance-Based Research Fund: Final Report (CAB-21-MIN-0175).

These metrics imply that a higher score is better given the natural tendency for organisations to use them for ranking purposes. High scores might indicate a concentration of, for example, A Quality Categories at a TEO. That result might be a useful reference point for some stakeholders.

At the same time, given the correlation between career stage and higher quality categories, a very high result might not be compatible with the need for a more balanced profile that ensures the research workforce is continually replenished. A focus on research intensity among staff might also be misleading given the growing diversity of roles among academics, particularly progress in providing specialist career pathways.

The results of the average quality scores measure calculations are not particularly intuitive. The range for the average quality score that aims to measures research intensity among staff (AQS(S)) was between 29.19 and 0.23. The comparable ratio for the score linked to enrolments was between 2.14 and 0.19.

While the results of the AQS(S) show a marked difference between universities and other TEOs, there is no evident correlation between the two scores and the numbers have no intrinsic meaning either locally or internationally.

We were sympathetic to concerns expressed through submissions that the average quality scores are not particularly meaningful, and what value does accrue from them may well be outweighed by their perceived lack of credibility among some stakeholders.

Accordingly, the panel considered that the average quality score metrics should be discontinued.

Ministry of Education consultation on an alternative

11   Following the PBRF Review panel's report, in 2020 MoE asked the sector for feedback on the effectiveness of the AQS measures and for suggestions on a replacement or improvement. MoE found there was widespread support to remove the AQS measures but no consensus on an alternative option.

12   As a result, MoE recommended removing the AQS without a replacement. In doing so they noted criticism of the AQS and that the measure's unreliability was incompatible with the aims of the PBRF.

13   In 2021, MoE's recommendation was accepted by the Minister for Education and Cabinet, and the TEC was directed to stop producing the AQS. MoE's advice noted that the other information produced by TEC in reporting the results was useful, including changes made for the 2018 round, and they saw it as sufficient to fulfil the aims of the PBRF.

14   When the TEC convened the SRG in September, it was agreed to give the question of reporting further consideration as part of the consultation process.

Sector Reference Group process

14   Following consultation on the approach set out in this paper, the SRG will consider sector feedback and make recommendations to the TEC. The TEC will make decisions on reporting on the basis of the SRG's recommendations alongside officials' advice.

15 Any changes to reporting agreed by the TEC based on the SRG's recommendations will be implemented through the Quality Evaluation 2026 process as needed.

16 In developing the approach described in this paper, the SRG has considered whether it will:

› Deliver Cabinet's instructions,

› Address the concerns and aspirations identified in the Report of the PBRF Review Panel and the *Report of the Moderation Panel and Peer Review Panels*,

› Deliver fair and equitable outcomes for all participating TEOs and their staff,

› Uphold the unique nature of research produced in Aotearoa New Zealand and reflect what is distinctive about our national research environment,

› Are consistent with the PBRF Guiding Principles, including the three new Principles of partnership, equity, and inclusivity, and

› Are able to be implemented and audited (legally and practically).

Previous reporting – PBRF Quality Evaluation 2018 results

Reporting meets a key fund objective

17   A primary purpose of producing the results of the Quality Evaluation is to inform PBRF funding calculations. These allocations are reported at the level of annual TEO funding allocations for each component of the PBRF, including the Quality Evaluation.

18   As well as allowing funding to be calculated and allocated, publicly reporting the results of the Quality Evaluation helps ensure the fund meets its objective of providing robust public information to stakeholders about research performance within and across TEOs.

Reporting on Quality Evaluation 2018

19   For the 2018 round, the objectives of the TEC's reporting were:

> › to give meaning to the outcomes of the Quality Evaluation
>
> › to provide value to the sector
>
> › to make the results accessible to a wide audience.

20   The focus of reporting results for the 2018 round included:

> › The AQS(E) and AQS(S) by TEO (both discontinued)
>
> › FTE-weighted Quality Category scores by TEO and by subject area
>
> › Researcher demographics: results by subject area and by demographics (gender, ethnicity, age, and employment status)

Public reporting

21   In terms of public reporting, on the TEC website the results for Quality Evaluation 2018 are provided in the following online formats:

> › [Improving Research Quality: The results of the PBRF 2018 Quality Evaluation](#) – A report that presents the results of the PBRF 2018 Quality Evaluation and provides analysis and comparisons with previous rounds. The report provides an overview of the results, the average quality scores, the funding allocations and the outcomes of the complaints process
>
> › background reports and infographics (see below)
>
> › interactive charts for all Quality Evaluation rounds (see below)
>
> › data visualisations showing research dissemination, researcher collaboration, and author distribution (see below).

22 Alongside the main Improving Research Quality report, there are two public background reports. The equivalent of these two reports will be produced in 2026. These are:

> [Report of the Moderation Panel and Peer-Review Panels](#) (PDF, 1.6 MB) – An overview of the process each panel undertook through the assessment, analysis of the results within a panel context and panel recommendations.

> [TEC Project Report](#) (PDF, 2 MB) – An outline of the process the TEC undertook to implement the PBRF 2018 Quality Evaluation.

23 TEC produced infographics to summarise each subsector's participation in the PBRF 2018 Quality Evaluation:

> [Institutes of technology and polytechnic sector infographic](#) (PDF, 98 KB)

> [Private training establishment sector infographic](#) (PDF, 98 KB)

> [University sector infographic](#) (PDF, 104 KB)

> [Wānanga sector infographic](#) (PDF, 98 KB)

24 We also developed an infographic that shows TEO participation across the four Quality Evaluation rounds (2003, 2006, 2012 and 2018):

> [Quality Evaluation participation across four rounds](#) (PDF, 137 KB)

25 All of the above forms of reporting are published on our website and found here: https://www.tec.govt.nz/funding/funding-and-performance/funding/fund-finder/performance-based-research-fund/previous-quality-evaluation-rounds/pbrf-2018-quality-evaluation/pbrf-2018-quality-evaluation-results/

Reporting for participating TEOs

26 In addition to this public reporting, two online applications accessible to participating TEOs are available through the TEC's Ngā Kete information portal. These apps allow participating TEOs to access results for all four Quality Evaluation rounds by funded Quality Category, panel, subject area and nominated academic unit, as well as sector-wide demographics by subject area.

27 These login-required apps also drive publicly available interactive pages on the TEC website:

> FTE-weighted Quality Category scores by TEO and by subject area: https://www.tec.govt.nz/funding/funding-and-performance/funding/fund-finder/performance-based-research-fund/previous-quality-evaluation-rounds/pbrf-2018-quality-evaluation/pbrf-2018-quality-evaluation-results/quality-evaluation-results-by-teo-and-subject/

› Researcher demographics: https://www.tec.govt.nz/funding/funding-and-performance/funding/fund-finder/performance-based-research-fund/previous-quality-evaluation-rounds/pbrf-2018-quality-evaluation/pbrf-2018-quality-evaluation-results/researcher-demographics/

28 None of this reporting involves the disclosure of information about any individuals, as privacy is a paramount consideration. Rigorous data privacy checks are in place to ensure that none of our reporting would reveal, or allow someone to infer, the Quality Category awarded to any individual.

Reporting for participating individuals

29 While out of scope for the rest of this paper, individuals' Quality Categories are provided in confidence to their employing TEO at the end of the Quality Evaluation exercise. As part of the process, individuals can indicate whether they also wish to receive this Quality Category. They can also request their own individual scores directly from the TEC at any time.

Reporting on Quality Evaluation 2026

Purpose of reporting

31 The SRG proposes that the high-level purpose of reporting stated in 2018 remains accurate, and can be retained for 2026 with a minor amendment:

› to support accurate understanding of the outcomes of the Quality Evaluation

› to provide value to the sector

› to make the results accessible to a wide audience.

32 The SRG welcomes feedback on any areas where there is a rationale to change the purpose of reporting.

Should stop reporting anything previously reported?

33 Aside from the AQS measures, the SRG does not propose to stop reporting any of the information that was provided to the public in the Quality Evaluation 2018 results.

34 The basic data points of TEOs, Panels, Subject Areas, and Quality Category scores, cut by demographic information on gender, ethnicity, employment status and stage remain relevant and useful. The approach of presenting and analysing trends over time also remains important.

35 The SRG welcomes feedback on any areas where there is a rationale to stop any of the reporting produced in 2018.

New reporting arising from changes

36 This section considers the impact on reporting of Cabinet's decisions and the subsequent SRG recommendations which have been approved in principle by the TEC. In considering this question, the SRG identified several changes that will affect what the TEC will need to report.

37 Overall, reporting on these changes is of a very similar type to previous reporting on the conduct of the Quality Evaluation found in the main report and *Report of the Moderation Panel and the Peer-Review Panel*. As such, these proposals for changes to reporting are minor.

38 In most cases, the TEC would already be reporting on these things as a matter of course using the data submitted by TEOs. While they will provide important information, they do not have any significant implications in terms of compliance costs for TEC or for TEOs. For this reason, the SRG has not taken the approach of developing different options when seeking sector feedback.

39 New areas for reporting, or which have taken on additional importance, arising from changes include:

› **Cabinet's decisions on ethnicity weightings and panel weightings**. Having considered these changes, the SRG proposes that TEC reports on how they have affected:

   o the number of submissions by Māori researchers

   o the number of submissions to the Mātauranga Māori panel

   o the number of submissions by Pacific researchers

   o the number of submissions to the Pacific Research panel.

› **New definitions of research, excellence, and impact and new Quality Category descriptors**. Having considered these changes, the SRG proposes that TEC reports on how they have affected diversity and broader recognition of excellence by looking at:

   o how many and what types of Research Activities are submitted in Evidence Portfolios (EPs), both as Supplementary Items in Examples of Research Excellence (EREs) and as Other Examples of Research Excellence (OEREs)

   o how many and what types of Contribution to the Research Environment (CRE) types are included in EPs

   o the number of EPs from Māori researchers

   o the number of EPs and EREs submitted in Te Reo

   o panel selection by Māori researchers

   o the distribution of scoring for Māori researchers

   o the number of EPs by Pacific researchers

   o panel selection by Pacific researchers

   o the distribution of scoring for Pacific researchers.

› The SRG also notes that the TEC should ensure due consideration is given to Māori data sovereignty in the conduct of the Quality Evaluation.

› **Achievement Relative to Opportunity framework**. This framework introduces new ideas into the design of EPs and the underpinning process. Having considered these changes, the SRG proposes that TEC reports on:

   o Any differences in the number of EREs and Supplementary Items submitted between groups with different or flexible submission requirements. This would include uptake of the option of reduced

submission requirements for New and Emerging Researchers and researchers in part-time roles.

- o Any differences compared to previous rounds in the final score distribution for New and Emerging Researchers, researchers in part-time roles, female researchers, Māori researchers, and Pacific researchers, and researchers who have declared Researcher Circumstances.

- o Any changes to the number/proportion of researchers meeting the new definition of a New and Emerging Researcher.

- o Any changes to the number/proportion of researchers declaring Researcher Circumstances compared to the previous Extraordinary Circumstances option.

> **The cross referral process.** Having considered these changes, the SRG proposes that TEC reports on how they have worked given the changes made not only to this process but to panels – i.e., the new co-chairing arrangements and changes to panel weightings.

> **Panel composition diversity.** The SRG notes the TEC's earlier in-principle decisions on panels include that: 'The TEC will report on panel make-up against the groups listed above, as well as on panel gender and ethnic diversity, when panels are announced.'

> **Co-chairing arrangements in the Moderation team and peer review panels**. A significant change to the Quality Evaluation is the introduction of Co-Moderators and Panel Co-Chairs. The SRG notes that reporting on the Quality Evaluation will provide an opportunity to reflect on how this worked.

40 Overall, reporting on these areas will be a matter of data-supported narrative in the main report and *Report of the Moderation Panel and the Peer-Review Panel*. Analysis of EP submissions and the results will play a key role. As such, while reporting on these matters is important, the SRG's view is that they do not involve any specific changes or new costs for TEC or TEOs in terms of reporting.

41 As noted above, given that these matters are within the scope of previous approaches to reporting, the SRG has opted to share the above with the sector for general comment only, rather than asking for feedback on these matters as a series of Yes/No options. However, the SRG welcomes any feedback on this approach and on what else might be considered.

Opportunities to add value to previous reporting

42 Except for concerns about the AQS, and reporting on the changes noted in the previous section, previous feedback reflects that the 2018 presentation of the results was generally fit-for-purpose.

43   The SRG has considered a number of other opportunities where the TEC could potentially add to the value of the data by either presenting it differently and/or linking it to other datasets.

44   When considering options for extending or enhancing reporting, the SRG saw it as important to consider the PBRF principles. Any proposed changes to reporting need to be weighed against the importance of Consistency and Continuity, as well as Efficiency, as changes can drive administrative and compliance costs that outweigh the intended benefits of the change.

45   TEC officials provided advice on four main areas where there may be opportunities to add value to reporting:

   › Linking Quality Evaluation data more strongly to existing PBRF data from the other two fund components (RDCs and ERI)

   › Linking Quality Evaluation data to existing TEC data from other funds (e.g., data on related EFTS volumes and Educational Performance Indicators)

   › using newly collected data (introducing new fields)

   › using external data (linking Quality Evaluation results to data held by other agencies).

46   The considered view of the SRG is that none of these areas would provide enough benefit to justify the technical complexity and potential compliance they would introduce. They may do significant harm by providing misleading perspectives on the PBRF and on sector performance. Similar issues to those that were highlighted with regard to the AQS also apply to these potential metrics, which raise questions about meaningfulness and attribution. A further consideration was the need to keep the reporting focused on the Quality Evaluation itself.

47   On that basis, the SRG does not recommend pursuing any of these opportunity areas as the basis for new types of reporting on the results of the Quality Evaluation 2026.

48   The SRG welcomes feedback on this view and on any other opportunities to enhance reporting.

Next steps and consultation feedback

17   The SRG seeks the sector's feedback on the proposed approach outlined in this paper.

   › Do you have any comments on the proposed statement on the purpose of reporting the results of Quality Evaluation 2026?

   › Do you have any comments on the proposed areas where reporting will be added to reflect changes to the fund?

   › Do you have any comments on other opportunities to enhance reporting on the results of Quality Evaluation 2026?

> › Do you have any other comments related to reporting the results of Quality Evaluation 2026?

18 Feedback can be provided through the online survey available here: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/7TZ35CK

19 The feedback period will run from 5 May to 16 June 2023. The SRG will consider sector feedback and make its recommendations to the TEC in July 2023.

20 The TEC will make decisions confirming its approach to reporting based on the SRG's recommendations and officials' advice. These decisions will be communicated to the sector when final Guidelines are released.