



Summary of in-principle decisions on the operational design of PBRF Quality Evaluation 2026

This document provides a record of the TEC's in-principle decisions on changes to the operational design of Quality Evaluation 2026.

These in-principle decisions are based on the recommendations of the Sector Reference Group following public consultation in 2021-2023.

These decisions will be confirmed by the TEC Board prior to final publication in November 2023.

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1. PBRF research and research excellence definitions

PBRF Definition of Research

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle the following PBRF Definition of Research:

For the purposes of the PBRF, research is defined as a process of investigation or inquiry leading to new, recovered, or reinterpreted knowledge or understanding which is effectively shared and capable of rigorous assessment by the appropriate experts.

In Aotearoa New Zealand our distinctive research cultures and environments draw on diverse ontological, epistemological, and methodological traditions of critical inquiry, experimentation, and knowledge-creation. This definition of research includes Māori ways of knowing, being, and conducting rangahau such as kaupapa Māori and mātauranga Māori; diverse Pacific ways of knowing, being, and conducting research; and work that embodies new insights of direct relevance to the specific needs of iwi, hapū, marae, communities, government, scholarship and teaching, industry, and commerce, which may be developed through collaborative and practice-led processes involving stakeholders from those constituencies.

Research can be an individual or collective process and may be embodied in the form of artistic works, performances, designs, policies, or processes that lead to novel or substantially improved insights.

For further clarification, research includes:

- › Activity that leads to scholarly books, journal articles, and other nationally and internationally published outputs and presentations that offer new, recovered, or reinterpreted knowledge;
- › Activity that leads to contributions to the intellectual underpinning of different ontologies and epistemologies, subjects, and disciplines (for example, dictionaries, scholarly editions, teaching materials that embody original research, or teaching practices or activities that produce original research);
- › Applications of existing knowledge to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products, designs, policies, granted patents, or creative outputs;
- › Re-centering and revitalisation of knowledge (for example, the study of raranga, whakapapa narratives, waiata composition, navigational knowledge, translation studies, historical or literary archival studies, or ecological research); and
- › The synthesis and analysis of previous research to the extent that the insights generated are new.

It does not include:

- › routine testing and data collection lacking analysis, interpretation and/or evaluation;
- › preparation for teaching that does not embody original research (for example, collation of existing research and research outputs into handbooks or textbooks where this does not embody new insights); or
- › the legal and administrative aspects of intellectual property protection and commercialisation activities.

Approach to articulating Māori research and Pacific research

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that the following statements will sit in the Guidelines alongside the PBRF Definition of Research:

The new definition of research includes explicit reference to Māori ways of knowing, being, and conducting rangahau. Rangahau and knowledge of relevance to Māori communities, such as kaupapa Māori and mātauranga Māori, are essential components of Aotearoa New Zealand's distinctive research cultures. The Māori Knowledge and Development Panel-Specific Guidance has elaborated the ontologies, epistemologies, methodologies, knowledges and understandings which comprise Te Āo Māori. This elaboration applies across all Panels and will be used to determine whether EPs should be cross-referred.

The new definition of research includes explicit reference to diverse Pacific ways of knowing, being, and conducting research. Research and knowledge of relevance to Pacific communities are essential components of Aotearoa New Zealand's distinctive research cultures. The Pacific Research Panel-Specific Guidance has elaborated the topics, ontologies, epistemologies, methodologies, knowledges and understandings which make up Pacific research cultures. This elaboration applies across all Panels and will be used to determine whether EPs should be cross-referred.

Approach to defining research excellence

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle the following revised definition of research excellence will sit in the Guidelines:

For the purposes of the Quality Evaluation, research excellence will be assessed in terms of originality, rigour, reach, and significance, with reference to the quality standards appropriate to the subject area and to the unique nature of Aotearoa New Zealand's research cultures and needs.

Excellence will be assessed across the following areas of activity:

- › The production and creation of knowledge, including ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies unique to Māori and to Pacific communities;
- › The dissemination and application of that knowledge within academic and/or other communities and its impact outside the research environment; and
- › Activity which sustains and develops the research environment, within and across both academic and non-academic domains.

For the purposes of the Quality Evaluation, the impact of research is defined as a positive effect on, change, or benefit to society, culture, the environment, or the economy at any level, outside the research environment.

Impacts on scholarship, research, or the advancement of knowledge within the research environment are not included.

Revising Quality Category descriptors

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that the revised Quality Category descriptors are as follows:

Quality Category A

The panel considers that as a whole the EP contains evidence of activity that is recognised by peers as outstanding, representing the leading-edge in its field (including if appropriate through international publication or dissemination), demonstrates very significant contributions to the research environment, and/or has led to very significant impact.

- › Research outputs are recognised by peers as leading-edge for the field in terms of their originality, rigour, and significance and/or in terms of the reach and significance of their impact.
- › Research-related activities demonstrate very significant outcomes from collaboration, dissemination and/or engagement within or outside academic domains; they may have delivered very significant impacts, with considerable reach, and where relevant have gained the highest level of recognition from peers, which may also include peers within industry, communities, iwi, hapū, marae, the public and third sectors, and/ or professional practice.
- › Research environment contributions demonstrate very significant contributions to the vitality and sustainability of the research culture and environment, which is likely to occur beyond the field of research.

Quality Category B

The panel considers that as a whole the EP contains evidence of activity which is recognised by peers as high-quality within its field (including if appropriate through international recognition), demonstrates significant contributions to the research environment, and/or has led to significant impact.

- › Research outputs are recognised by peers as high quality for the field in terms of their originality, rigour, and significance and/or in terms of the reach and significance of their impact.
- › Research-related activities demonstrate significant outcomes from collaboration, dissemination and/or engagement either within or outside academic domains; they may have delivered significant impacts with reach, and where relevant have gained recognition from peers which may also include peers within industry, communities, iwi, hapū, marae, the public and third sectors, and/or professional practice.
- › Research environment contributions demonstrate significant contributions to the vitality and sustainability of the research culture and environment.

Quality Category C

The panel considers that as a whole the EP contains evidence of activity which is recognised by peers as having met quality-assurance standards within its field (including if appropriate through international recognition), demonstrates some contributions to the research environment and/or has led to some impact.

- › Research outputs are recognised by peers as meeting the quality standards of the field in terms of their originality, rigour, and significance, and/or demonstrate impact which is limited in terms of reach or significance.
- › Research-related activities demonstrate some outcomes from collaboration, dissemination and/or engagement either within or outside academic domains; they may have delivered moderate impacts and where relevant may have gained some recognition by peers, which may also include peers within industry, communities, iwi, hapū, marae, the public and third sectors, and/or professional practice.

- › Research environment contributions demonstrate some contributions to the vitality and sustainability of the research culture and environment.

Quality Category C(NE)

The panel considers that as a whole the EP contains evidence of activity which is recognised by peers as having met quality-assurance standards within its field (including if appropriate through international recognition), and/or has led to some impact. The EP may contain evidence of contributions to the research environment.

- › Research outputs are recognised by peers as meeting the quality standards of the field in terms of their originality, rigour, and significance, and/or demonstrate impact which is limited in terms of reach or significance.
- › Research-related activities demonstrate some outcomes from collaboration, dissemination and/or engagement either within or outside academic domains; they may have delivered moderate impacts and where relevant may have gained some recognition by peers, which may also include peers within industry, communities, iwi, hapū, marae, the public and third sectors, and/or professional practice.
- › Research environment contributions, if present, demonstrate some contributions to the vitality and sustainability of the research culture and environment.

This Quality Category can be awarded to the EPs of new and emerging researchers only.

Quality Category R

An EP will be assigned an R when the evidence included does not demonstrate the quality standard required for a C Quality Category or higher.

Quality Category R(NE)

An EP will be assigned an R(NE) when the evidence included does not demonstrate the quality standard required for a Quality Category C(NE) or higher.

This Quality Category can be awarded to the EPs of new and emerging researchers only.

2. Redesigning Evidence Portfolios

What comprises an Example of Research Excellence?

Based on the recommendation of the SRG, the TEC has decided in principle that:

An Example of Research Excellence (ERE) must include:

- › a single core research output
- › a brief contextualizing narrative.

In addition, an ERE may include up to three supplementary items which:

- › may be either research activities OR additional research outputs, and
- › must relate to the core research output.

The Guidelines will clarify that:

- › EREs are assessed according to the same assessment criteria regardless of the number of supplementary items they contain, if any; and
- › Research activities demonstrating impact must have occurred within the assessment period to be eligible, but the underpinning research output does not have to be published within the assessment period (as in Quality Evaluation 2018). Impacts which were first claimed in a previous Quality Evaluation are not eligible for submission in Quality Evaluation 2026.

Approach to the minimum number of EREs in an EP

Based on the recommendation of the SRG, the TEC has decided in principle that an EP must contain three EREs, unless one of the following exceptions applies:

- › New and Emerging Researcher
- › Extraordinary Circumstances (noting that the SRG is currently consulting on a change of name)
- › Part-time employment.

What comprises an Other Example of Research Excellence?

Based on the recommendation of the SRG, the TEC has decided in principle that both research outputs and research activities will be eligible as OEREs.

How many OEREs should an EP include

Based on the recommendation of the SRG, the TEC has decided in principle that an EP can list up to eight OEREs, alongside a narrative which staff may use to contextualise each OERE listed.

Renaming the Research Contribution component

Based on the recommendation of the SRG, the TEC has decided in principle that the Research Contributions component will be renamed Contributions to the Research Environment.

Reducing and revising the eligible Research Contribution types

Based on the recommendation of the SRG, the TEC has decided in principle that items submitted within the Contributions to the Research Environment component must belong to one of the following six types:

- › Contribution to Research Discipline, Culture, and Environment (previously Contribution to Research Discipline and Environment)
- › Facilitating, Networking and Collaboration
- › Researcher Development, Capability-Building, and Mentoring (previously Researcher Development)
- › Reviewing, Refereeing, Judging, Evaluating and Examining
- › Student Development and Support (previously Student Factors)
- › Peer esteem and research recognition not included in ERE section.

For clarity, the following types which were previously eligible as Research Contributions will be eligible as research activities within the ERE and OERE sections:

- › Invitations to Present Research or Similar
- › Outreach and Engagement
- › Recognition of Research Outputs
- › Research Funding and Support
- › Research Prizes, Fellowships, Awards and Appointments
- › Uptake and Impact.

Following the recommendation of the SRG, the TEC has further decided in principle that the type descriptors will be reviewed and revised ahead of consultation on the draft Guidelines to better reflect Māori and Pacific research modes, to clarify the distinctions between types, and to ensure that peer esteem factors have a clear place within the EP.

What should the Research Contribution component comprise?

Based on the recommendation of the SRG, the TEC has decided in principle that the Contributions to the Research environment component must contain a minimum of one and a maximum of ten items. Each item must be categorised within one of the six eligible types, and must comprise a brief description containing sufficient detail to enable audit.

3. Panel membership criteria and working methods

Panel chairing arrangements

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed that:

Each panel will be led by two Co-Chairs, with the role of Deputy Panel Chair to be disestablished.

At least one Co-Chair must have expertise in Māori knowledge. In this context, 'Māori knowledge' should be understood broadly, but indicates a level of expertise distinct from the general requirement that all panellists demonstrate awareness and understanding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the significance of Māori-Crown partnership. The Co-Moderator Māori will play a central role in assessing the relevant expertise of nominees for the role of Co-Chair Māori in each peer review panel.

The following criteria will be applied when considering suitable candidates for the role of a Panel Co-Chair. Co-Chairs will:

- › be recognised experts in one of the subject areas within the relevant Panel (essential)
- › demonstrate awareness and understanding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the significance of Māori-Crown partnership (essential)
- › demonstrate an appreciation of the diverse range of ontologies, epistemologies, knowledges, and research in Aotearoa New Zealand (essential)
- › have expertise in Māori knowledge (at least one Co-Chair)
- › have previous experience as a PBRF panel member or equivalent including international research assessment exercises (at least one Co-Chair)
- › be familiar with quality evaluation processes
- › be from a different subject area and/or TEO to the previous Panel Chair (where applicable/feasible)
- › be able to commit the necessary time (essential).

It is also expected that Panel Co-Chairs will meet the criteria for Panel Members where those differ from the Co-Chair criteria.

Panels composition criteria

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed that:

Panel Co-Chairs will be required, except where candidates meeting the criteria cannot be found, to appoint panels which reflect the diversity of Aotearoa New Zealand and the PBRF principles of equality and inclusivity, and which specifically include representation of:

- › Māori researchers
- › Pacific researchers
- › The full range of participating TEO types and where appropriate non-TEO research organisations
- › The full range of career stages including, where candidates meet the criteria, early career researchers
- › International researchers
- › New panellists
- › Practice-based, community-based, or applied research as appropriate
- › Interdisciplinary research.

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.

The TEC notes that the panel selection guidance and instructions to Panel Co-Chairs will continue to require coverage across the subject areas included in each Panel. The TEC additionally notes that, as in Quality Evaluation 2018, specific language requirements and individual subject area capacity are best addressed by Co-Chairs once TEOs have provided EP submission intentions.

Medicine and Public Health Panel

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed:

- › To split the Medicine and Public Health panel into two new panels:
 - a. The Medicine panel, covering the Biomedical and Clinical Medicine subject areas.
 - b. The Public Health panel, covering the Public Health subject area.
- › That splitting the Medicine and Public Health panel provides an opportunity to review subject area coverage for both new panels, and that in particular there is an opportunity to consider the Public Health subject area coverage. The TEC will make the feedback available to the Co-Chairs of the two new panels, to support the initial panel member appointments and the development of the Panel-Specific Guidelines.

Panel workloads

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed to:

- › Retain the existing overall ratio of 35 Evidence Portfolios per panellist in determining panel sizes.
- › Share feedback from 2018 panel members with Panel Co-Chairs to support the panel appointment process.

Renaming the Māori Knowledge and Development panel

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed that:

- › The Māori Knowledge and Development Panel will be provisionally renamed the Mātauranga Māori panel.
- › Once appointed, the Co-Chairs and initial panel members will be invited to revisit and confirm the name of the panel when they develop the Panel-Specific Guidance.

Note. The Co-Chairs of the Mātauranga Māori panel were appointed in May 2023. They have confirmed their support for the proposed new name.

4. Individual circumstances

Achievement Relative to Opportunity

Based on the recommendations of the SRG the TEC has agreed in principle that:

- › The proposed Achievement Relative to Opportunity framework will be adopted.
- › The 'Extraordinary Circumstances' provision will be renamed as 'Researcher Circumstances'.

Note that the Achievement Relative to Opportunity framework will include the eligible professional and personal circumstances which have impacted on individual researchers' capacity to carry out research and research-related activity during the assessment period. These are defined as:

- › Meeting the New and Emerging Researcher eligibility criteria
- › Meeting the part-time employment definition (as defined for the purposes of determining EP submission requirements)
- › Experiencing one or more eligible Researcher Circumstances.

New and Emerging Researchers – eligibility criteria

Based on the recommendations of the SRG the TEC has agreed in principle that the following eligibility criteria and additional guidance for determining New and Emerging Researchers will be adopted:

- › Definition of a New and Emerging Researcher

New and Emerging Researchers are defined as members of staff who meet the PBRF staff eligibility criteria at the census date and who first became independent researchers on or after the start of the assessment period on 1 January 2018.

For the purposes of the PBRF Quality Evaluation, an individual is deemed to have become an independent researcher from the date at which they first held a contract of employment of 0.2 FTE or more at any organisation (whether in New Zealand or elsewhere) in which their role included the expectation to carry out one or more of the research activities described in the 'substantiveness test for research'.

- › The revised substantiveness test for research, for the purposes of determining both PBRF eligibility and New and Emerging status, is as follows:

Staff members are required to undertake one or more of the following: the design of research activity; the preparation of research outputs (for example, as a co-author or co-producer) that is likely to result in being named as an author (or co-author or co-producer) on one or more research outputs; the academic supervision of graduate research students in a primary, joint, or co-supervisor role.

- › TEOs should refer to the following clarifications in applying the definition of a New and Emerging Researcher and the substantiveness test for research:

- Staff members who are employed to carry out supervised or non-independent research activity (for example research assistants or postdoctoral research fellows who do not design their own research activity), and students who carry out supervised or non-independent research activity (including research degrees), are not considered to meet the definition of an independent researcher for the purposes of the Quality Evaluation, regardless of whether they carry out activities that would otherwise appear to meet the substantiveness test for research. (**Note:** following sector feedback on the draft TEO Guidelines, this wording has

been amended to remove the reference to postdoctoral research fellows. Please refer to page 26, below.)

- Membership on supervisory teams in non-primary, non-joint, or non-co-supervisory roles is not considered to meet the academic supervision criterion in the substantiveness test for research.
- Job titles are not relevant to determining whether a staff member meets the definition of an independent researcher.
- The independent production of research outputs where that is not a role requirement is not relevant to determining whether a staff member meets the definition of an independent researcher.
- Where a staff member was self-employed prior to commencing a PBRF-eligible role in a TEO, the substantiveness test for research should still be applied; i.e. was the staff member required to carry out research as a function of that self-employed role. Where the application of the substantiveness test for research does not produce a clear outcome, the staff member will not be considered to have met the definition of an independent researcher in that self-employed role.

Extraordinary Circumstances – eligible types and revised wording

Based on the recommendations of the SRG the TEC has agreed in principle that the following types of Researcher Circumstances, as described below, will be eligible:

- › **Long-term illness or disability** that has affected the quantity of research outputs produced and/or activities undertaken during the assessment period. This could include physical or mental disability, ill-health or injury, developmental conditions, or other disabilities, health conditions, or diseases that may be progressive or have fluctuating or recurring effects.
- › **Extended personal leave** that has affected the quantity of research outputs produced and/or activities undertaken during the assessment period. This could include leave due to shorter-term physical or mental ill health or injury, parental leave relating to fertility, pregnancy, maternity, paternity, adoption, or childcare. Sabbatical leave is not considered in this circumstance.
- › **Significant family or community responsibilities** that have affected the quantity of research outputs produced and/or activities undertaken during the assessment period. This includes responsibility for dependants, including caring for elderly or ill, injured or disabled family group or community members, or responsibilities to specific communities, such as iwi or Pacific communities.
- › **Career breaks or interruptions in employment** that have affected the quantity of research outputs produced and/or activities undertaken during the assessment period. This includes periods where the staff member was not employed in a PBRF-eligible role, or any other role in New Zealand or overseas in New Zealand or overseas, which met the substantiveness test for research, as well as periods of unemployment. Extended personal leave or leave without pay is not included in this circumstance.
- › **Force majeure:** a significant unforeseen natural or human-made event that has affected the quantity of research outputs produced and/or activities undertaken during the assessment

period. These may include, but are not limited to, events such as earthquakes, including the ongoing impacts of the Canterbury earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, fire or other severe weather events, volcanic activity, pandemics, armed conflict, or terrorist attacks. The impacts on research must have occurred within the assessment period and meet the six-month summative threshold. The events can have occurred during or prior to the assessment period in New Zealand or anywhere in the world.

Note that the inclusion of pandemics within the *Force majeure* type is not prejudicial to any decision taken on how COVID-19 impacts will be recognised.

Note that across all eligible types, the circumstance/s must have impacted on the staff member's ability to carry out research activity for a minimum of six months in total during the assessment period (this does not need to be a single period of time). This duration is in line with the New Zealand Disability Strategy.

Researcher Circumstances – declarations process

Based on the recommendations of the SRG the TEC has agreed in principle that the process for inviting and validating Researcher Circumstances declarations will be as follows:

- › TEOs develop a process for inviting voluntary staff declarations of researcher circumstances and for ensuring the total duration of the impacts declared meets the minimum time period of six months total across the assessment period. Declarations will be used by the TEO to determine the submission requirements for the EP, and the type of Researcher Circumstance will be noted in the EP for panellists' information. Information in the declarations is not submitted as part of the EP and panellists will not make any assessment of declared Researcher Circumstances.
- › Staff make voluntary declarations to TEOs. Declarations comprise the category of circumstance (for example: Long-term illness or disability) and the total duration of time the circumstance impacted on their ability to carry out research activity during the assessment period (for example: 2 years' total period of impact). Declarations do not have to include any description of the circumstance/s or impact statements. Declarations do not ordinarily include any personal information or records where the staff member has previously disclosed the circumstance to their employing TEO. Where the staff member has not previously disclosed the circumstance, they will need to provide sufficient information to enable the TEO to validate the category of circumstance and the duration of impact.
- › While declarations must be voluntary, it is the responsibility of TEOs to ensure researcher circumstances declarations are valid and have led to the declared duration of impact. For the avoidance of doubt, where a staff member has not previously provided, and chooses not to provide information sufficient to validate a declaration, the TEO should not validate the declaration.

Note that the processes for inviting and validating declarations established by TEOs are audited during the Process Assurance phase. In developing the audit methodology with the auditors, the TEC will consider how to ensure that TEO processes comply with the PBRF Quality Evaluation 2026 Guidelines and all relevant legislation including the Employment Relations Act 2000, the Privacy Act 2020, and the Human Rights Act 1993.

The TEC will also consider whether any sample-based auditing of TEOs' calculations to determine EP submission requirements based on Achievement Relative to Opportunity is necessary. Any proposed

changes to the audit methodology will be consulted on to ensure they will provide robust assurance in the process.

Researcher circumstances – Canterbury Earthquakes

Based on the recommendations of the SRG the TEC has agreed in principle that, for Quality Evaluation 2026, the five Canterbury Earthquakes impact types recognised in the Quality Evaluation 2018 Guidelines will be combined into a single Researcher Circumstances type recognising the ongoing impacts of the Canterbury Earthquakes, and included within the new *Force majeure* extraordinary circumstance type (see recommended wording of *Force majeure*).

Part-time employment definition

Based on the recommendations of the SRG the TEC has agreed in principle that the following definition and guidance will be used by TEOs to determine which of their PBRF-eligible staff qualify as part-time for the purposes of determining EP submission requirements:

› Part-time researcher definition

For the purposes of determining EP submission requirements a PBRF-eligible staff member is considered to be employed part-time if they:

Held a relevant contract or contracts for employment during the assessment period that:

- At any one time totalled less than 1.0 FTE; and
- in total comprised a maximum of 0.8 FTE across the duration of the staff member's employment during the assessment period.

› Note that:

- Only contracts for roles that qualify the staff member for PBRF eligibility or non-TEO roles that meet the substantiveness test for research are relevant in calculating a staff member's FTE for this purpose. As in Quality Evaluation 2018, in order to be considered PBRF eligible, a staff member's role must be a minimum of 0.2 FTE.
- As in Quality Evaluation 2018, 1.0 FTE is defined as 37.5 hours a week. This applies for the purposes of all FTE calculations.
- Applying the definition of 'part time' for the purposes of determining EP submission requirements is separate from the process of calculating FTE for the purposes of determining PBRF staff eligibility and funding allocations.
- All relevant roles must be included in calculating FTE across the assessment period, including where the staff member changed employer.
- In calculating FTE across the assessment period, periods where the staff member was not employed in any PBRF-eligible role, or any other role which met the substantiveness test for research, should be excluded. Such periods can be claimed under the Career breaks Researcher Circumstance type.

The SRG noted the sector's concerns that applying this definition is a new administrative step but noted that alternative approaches either do not fully address the existing equity issues or may create new inequities. TEC officials will continue to engage with TEOs to ensure that there is clear guidance and consistent understanding of this new definition and process, supported by and reflected in the Guidelines.

EP submission requirements – New and Emerging Researchers

Based on the recommendations of the SRG the TEC has agreed in principle that the following EP submission requirements will apply:

- › A staff member who first became eligible as a New and Emerging Researcher from 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2021 inclusive submits an EP that contains a **minimum of two EREs** (each containing a research output, narrative, and up to three supplementary items), up to eight OEREs, and up to 10 CREs. The staff member may choose to submit **three EREs**.
- › A staff member who first became eligible as a New and Emerging Researcher from 1 January 2022 – 31 December 2025 submits an EP that contains a **minimum of one ERE** (containing a research output, narrative, and up to three supplementary items), up to eight OEREs, and up to 10 CREs. The staff member may choose to submit up to **three EREs**.
- › EPs submitted by New and Emerging Researchers continue to be eligible for the C(NE) and R(NE) Quality Categories as well as A and B Quality Categories.

Note that so long as an EP meets the minimum submission requirements, the number of items in the EP, including EREs, will not be considered in and of itself as part of its assessment and does not affect the Quality Categories that can be awarded. Assessors and panels will assess all EPs that have met the submission requirements according to the same criteria, regardless of the number of EREs or the number of supplementary items within each ERE.

EP submission requirements – part-time staff

Based on the recommendations of the SRG the TEC has agreed in principle that the following EP submission requirements will apply:

- › A staff member who is employed 0.5 – 0.8 FTE in total across the duration of their employment during the assessment period submits an EP containing a **minimum of two EREs** (each containing a research output, narrative, and up to three supplementary items), up to eight OEREs, and a minimum of one and up to 10 CREs. The staff member may choose to submit **three EREs**.
- › A staff member who is employed 0.2 – 0.49 FTE in total across the duration of their employment during the assessment period submits an EP containing a **minimum of one ERE** (containing a research output, narrative, and up to three supplementary items), up to eight OEREs, and a minimum of one and up to 10 CREs. The staff member may choose to submit up to **three EREs**.

Note that so long as an EP meets the minimum submission requirements, the number of items in the EP, including EREs, will not be considered in and of itself as part of its assessment and does not affect the Quality Categories that can be awarded. Assessors and panels will assess all EPs that have met the submission requirements according to the same criteria, regardless of the number of EREs or the number of supplementary items within each ERE.

EP submission requirements – Researcher Circumstances

Based on the recommendations of the SRG the TEC has agreed in principle that the following EP submission requirements will apply for PBRF-eligible staff who have declared, and had validated, eligible Researcher Circumstances:

- › Where there has been an impact on the staff member's ability to carry out research activity for between six months and four years in total during the assessment period, a staff member submits an EP containing **two EREs** (each containing a research output, narrative, and up to three supplementary items), up to eight OEREs, and a minimum of one and up to 10 CREs.

- › Where there has been an impact on the staff member's ability to carry out research activity for more than four years in total during the assessment period, a staff member submits an EP containing **one ERE** (containing a research output, narrative, and up to three supplementary items), up to eight OERs, and a minimum of one and up to 10 CREs.
- › So long as an EP meets the submission requirements, the number of items in the EP will not be considered as part of its assessment. Assessors and Panels will assess all EPs that have met the agreed submission requirements according to the same criteria, regardless of the number of EREs or the number of supplementary items within each ERE.

Note that declaring Researcher Circumstances is a matter of individual choice for each submitting staff member.

Staff ethnicity data collection and reporting processes

Based on the recommendations of the SRG the TEC has agreed in principle that to ensure staff ethnicity data is collected and reported in a fair and transparent manner, the following will be adopted:

- › A statement in the Guidelines setting out the TEC's expectations that staff ethnicity declarations remain voluntary;
- › The audit process will include scrutiny of TEO staff data collection, recording, and processing processes (note that staff data will not be audited);
- › The chief executive officer of the submitting TEO will be required to sign a declaration that staff data has been collected and reported in line with the Privacy Act 2020; and
- › Statistics New Zealand Level 3 coding will continue to be used for collecting and reporting Pacific ethnicity.

5. Panels Assessment Criteria

Adjustments to the cross-referral process guidance

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that:

Guidance on cross-referral to the Mātauranga Māori and Pacific Research Panels

- › The 'Māori Research elements' and 'Pacific Research elements' sections in the EP template will be renamed the 'Mātauranga Māori Panel cross-referral request' and 'Pacific Research Panel cross-referral request' sections respectively, to clarify that these sections should only be completed if the staff member/TEO wishes to request cross-referral to either/both panels. This guidance will also be reflected in the main Guidelines.
- › The Mātauranga Māori and Pacific Research Panel-Specific Guidelines will each contain a specific cross-referral section, which will set out the circumstances in which each panel will consider a cross-referral request that is initiated by a TEO/submitting staff member.
- › The main Guidelines will refer TEOs and submitting staff to the Panel-Specific Guidelines to determine whether a request for cross-referral should be made to the Mātauranga Māori or Pacific Research Panels. This will ensure there is no risk of non-alignment between the main Guidelines and the Panel-Specific Guidelines, and clarify for TEOs and submitting staff that the Panel-Specific Guidelines are the overriding guidance for determining whether a cross-referral should occur.

Guidance on cross-referral to other panels

- › The main Guidelines will have a standalone 'Cross-referral' section, which for the avoidance of doubt will repeat the conditions under which Panel Co-Chairs may request cross-referral as set out in the Assessment Guidelines.
- › The cross-referral section will clarify that Panel Co-Chairs will draw on information provided in the Field of Research section, as well as the ERE and OERE subjects.
- › The Assessment and main Guidelines will both clarify that Panel Co-Chairs who request cross-referral must specify the parts of the EP that require cross-referral.

The language used to refer to the cross-referral process will be standardised across both Guidelines so that, for example, the use of 'request' versus 'initiate' or 'initiate a request' is rationalised.

Adjustments to the holistic assessment guidance

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that:

- › In both the main and Assessment Guidelines, 'detailed holistic assessment' (a process which is carried out only for EPs which meet the criteria below) will be renamed as 'detailed reassessment'. This change will distinguish the process from 'holistic assessment', which describes the routine holistic consideration of all EPs carried out as part of the panel assessment stage.
- › The Assessment Guidelines will clarify the expectation that detailed reassessment is an exceptional process and will not be necessary for the majority of EPs.
- › Only EPs that meet one or more of the following criteria will be referred for detailed reassessment:
 - The Panel identifies that the EP has specific quality issues that are uncommon relative to subject-area norms such as unusual research outputs, activities, or the presence or absence of CRE item types.

- In relation to the CRE component only, the Panel identifies that the EP has specific quantity issues that are uncommon relative to subject-area norms such as an unusually low or high number of CRE items or particular types relative to career-stage.
- The Panel identifies specific scoring concerns which may include significant differences in scoring either by the panel-pair or cross-referral assessors, unusual scoring combinations like a low RO score but a high RC score, or where a panellist believes the raw component scores may not accurately represent the overall quality of the EP.
- Additionally, Panel Co-Chairs will have the discretionary ability to refer EPs for detailed reassessment in exceptional circumstances where EPs do not meet any of the criteria but the Panel Co-Chairs consider that there are strong reasons for detailed reassessment.

EP calibration check

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that:

- › As part of their oversight of the panel-pair assessment phase, the Moderation Team will receive regularly updated initial scoring data. The Moderation Team will review initial scoring data for any significant variation between scores given to EPs with fewer than three EREs and scores given to EPs with three EREs. Any concerns will be flagged with Panel Co-Chairs.
- › Ahead of the panel meetings, panels will receive average component scores and analysis comparing EPs with three EREs against the different groups of EPs that have fewer than three EREs.
- › During the panel meeting, where meaningful variation is observed (likely to vary across panels) the panel will carry out specific calibration of the various groups against each other, as part of the calibration process, to ensure that ERE quantity has not informed scoring. While Panel Co-Chairs will determine how the EP calibration process occurs within the panel, and what degree of score variation will be considered ‘meaningful’ in the context of that panel, the TEC will ensure that the EP calibration process does take place across all panels and that the same standard of scrutiny occurs.

EP component weightings

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that:

- › the Examples of Research Excellence component will be weighted at 70 percent and the Contributions to the Research Environment component will be weighted at 30 percent.

EP component and tie-point descriptors

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that:

- › The component descriptors will be renamed to reflect the new Examples of Research Excellence and Contributions to the Research Environment component names
- › The tie-point descriptors will continue to align to the two, four, and six tie-points
- › TEC officials will make further detailed adjustments, as appropriate, to the component and tie-point descriptor wording to reflect specific sector feedback and the in-principle decisions to date. Revised component and tie-point wording will be reflected in the draft Guidelines published for sector consultation in June 2023.
- › TEC officials will ensure the component and tie-point descriptors are clear that any supplementary items listed in an ERE will be taken into consideration in assessing the EP. However, in line with the principle that the Quality Evaluation assesses research quality, not quantity, the number, presence, or absence of any supplementary items will not in and of itself be a factor in assessment.

6. Technical matters and EP design

Platform of Research – Contextual Summary

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that:

- › The proposed approach to the Platform of Research is adopted. This section remains part of the EP but no longer needs to set out information about the staff member's employment or other circumstances during the assessment period. The Platform of Research should focus on introducing staff member's research focus and platform, as well as any relevant aspects of their research environment.
- › The Guidelines for TEOs and for panellists will clarify that this component is not scored but will be used by panellists to inform their assessment of the two scored components, and by panels to inform their holistic consideration of the EP.
- › The character count of the Platform of Research is reduced from 2,500 characters to 1,500 characters, rather than to 1,000 characters as originally proposed.
- › The drafting of the Guidelines will address the more detailed feedback provided by the sector to ensure the purpose of this section is clear and distinct in the EP design.

Request and supply of physical ERE Outputs

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that:

- › The proposed approach to ERE Output request and supply processes is adopted and the expected default is that ERE Outputs are submitted as electronic versions, either via direct link or by uploading to the TEC file-store.
- › In circumstances where a submitting staff member believes that a digital version of a born-physical ERE Output will not enable full and fair assessment, or a digital version cannot otherwise be created, the physical output can be supplied.
- › The EP will not include a new field requiring a rationale for physical submission, as had been proposed.
- › The proposed approach to requests is adopted and that Panellists will submit requests for physical ERE Output within 15 working days of EP allocation.
- › The proposed approach to supply is adopted and that TEOs will supply physical ERE Outputs within 15 working days of receipt of a request from a panellist.
- › Discipline-specific advice will be provided in the Panel Specific Guidelines where needed to clarify what sorts of physical submissions a panel expects to consider.

EP structure

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that:

- › The EP's narrative field character-length counts will be as follows:
 - as above, the Platform of Research – Contextual Narrative increases from 1,000 to 1,500
 - the ERE contextual narrative remains at 1,500 characters
 - proposed Research Activity narratives of 1,500 characters in the Supplementary Items and OERE sections are removed. Any narrative related to these items should be included in the ERE contextual narrative or OERE contextual narrative
 - the Contribution to the Research Environment (CRE) narrative for each item is reduced from 1,500 to 1,000 characters.

- › The order of items in an ERE will place the Contextual Narrative first, rather than the ERE Output
- › Language regarding ‘Core Research Output’ and ‘Main Research Object’ has been reviewed as the difference in meaning between these two terms is unclear and both terms shift the focus back to older approach of an NRO. The new term “ERE Output” is adopted.
- › The completion of the Individual Contribution field is compulsory for ERE Outputs that have more than one author. This does not mean that collaborative work cannot be submitted, or that an individual within a group must always be identified as a lead author.
- › A Dataset can be included as an ERE Output if it meets PBRF definition of research.
- › Consideration will be given to ensuring that the main Guidelines and Panel Specific Guidelines have updated definitions of Creative output types and Software output types.

Research outputs and activities, CRE types

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that:

- › The proposed new Products and Processes research output type will be added. The Guidelines will clarify that some outputs may be classifiable under more than one of the types and clarify audit expectations regarding these.
- › Detailed sector feedback on a variety of other issues – including for example the definitions of Creative Arts output types and Collaboration – will be clarified in drafting the Panel Specific Guidelines and the main Guidelines, with input where appropriate from Panels.
- › The Panel Specific Guidelines and the main Guidelines allow for some flexibility around potential overlaps between Collaboration and Peer Esteem items. This will be reflected in the EP schema.
- › The proposed ‘Other’ CRE type is removed.
- › “Research Funding and Support” will remain an eligible type of Research Activity.

7. Recognising the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Recognising COVID-19 impacts under Researcher Circumstances – Force Majeure

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that:

- › The design of the Quality Evaluation will recognise the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic during the assessment period via the new Force Majeure provision within Researcher Circumstances.
- › The purpose of reduced submission requirements under the Achievement Relative to Opportunity framework will be clarified in the draft Guidelines.
- › The Guidelines will clarify how the optional nature of Supplementary Items will work in the assessment process.

8. Reporting the results of Quality Evaluation 2026

Purpose of reporting

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that the revised purpose of reporting is:

- › to support accurate understanding of the outcomes of the Quality Evaluation
- › to provide meaningful information that is of value to the sector
- › to make the results accessible to a wide general audience.

Continuing to report information previously reported

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that:

- › aside from the AQS measures, the TEC will continue to report the information that was provided to the public in the Quality Evaluation 2018.

Areas where reporting will be added to reflect changes

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that:

- › generalised/anonymised explanations of any cross-referral declines will not be required from panels or reported on by TEC. General information on cross-referrals will be included in each panel's report at the end of Quality Evaluation 2026
- › proposed new data reporting related to Māori and Pacific researchers will be reported at a TEO and national level, with privacy safeguards in place similar to previous rounds
- › a field will be added to the EP to indicate if it contains material that is not in English. This will assist Panels to assign EPs and help establish a baseline from which to track the growth of research in Te Reo Māori and other languages relevant to the Aotearoa New Zealand research environment, including Pacific languages. As noted, this is a provisional decision subject to further consultation.

Opportunities to add value to previous reporting

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that:

- › PBRF data will not be linked to other datasets held by TEC or externally when reporting the results of Quality Evaluation 2026
- › TEOs will not be required to report new information about the costs of participating in the PBRF
- › new information about sexual identity and neurodiversity information will not be collected from submitting staff members.

9. TEO and Assessment Guidelines (decisions to be confirmed)

Use of ANZSRC codes to populate 'Field of Research' field

Based on the recommendation of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that the existing 'Field of Research' free text field in the EP will be retained, and that the proposal to use ANZSRC codes will not be adopted.

EP Language Field

Based on the recommendation of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that a Language Field will be added to the EP, and that a list of languages will be used to populate the field.

Officials note that:

- › TEC officials will provide a list in the final TEO Guidelines. The list will comprise the official languages of Aotearoa New Zealand along with the top ten most commonly-spoken languages (Statistics NZ), nine Pacific languages, and all languages which were included in EPs submitted in 2018.
- › As in 2018, the indicative EP submission process will occur approximately 6-12 months ahead of the submission date, and will enable TEOs to indicate the languages in which they anticipate submitting EREs. This information will be used by Panel Co-Chairs to support their final panel appointments.

Update to Software research output type description

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle to the following description of the Software research output type:

- › Originally researched, created, and published or otherwise publicly disseminated software (computer programs and their associated documentation, consisting of a set of instructions written by a programmer) or a curated database of significant research data. These artifacts shall be refined products offered commercially or online or distributed as open source through a recognised publisher or distributor.
- › Includes:

System software

- › operating systems
- › programming languages
- › control systems.

Application software

- › data analysis and visualisation
- › simulation
- › machine learning and artificial intelligence systems
- › collaborative systems
- › domain specific applications

- › curated databases.
- › Excludes:
 - › databases of references or material for supporting research programmes of individual researchers.

Achievement Relative to Opportunity background/rationale

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle to retain the ARO framework background chapter.

New and Emerging Researcher criteria: clarification around prior Quality Evaluation eligibility

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that the following clarification will be added to the guidance on applying the New and Emerging Researcher criteria:

- › Staff members who have submitted EPs in previous Quality Evaluations cannot be considered New and Emerging for Quality Evaluation 2026.

New and Emerging Researcher criteria: status of postdoctoral fellows

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that:

- › the NER criteria guidance will clarify that job descriptions and employment expectations should be used to determine staff members' research independence, rather than job titles; and
- › reference to postdoctoral fellows is removed from the examples of staff who carry out supervised or non-independent research.

The relevant guidance will now read:

Staff members who are employed to:

- carry out supervised or non-independent research activity (for example research assistants or other staff members who do not design their own research activity), and
- students who carry out supervised or non-independent research activity (including research degrees)

are not considered to meet the definition of an independent researcher for the purposes of the Quality Evaluation, regardless of whether they carry out activities that would otherwise appear to meet the substantiveness test for research.

Note: this replaces the previous text at the bottom of page 12, above.

Part-time staff members: verifying average FTE across the assessment period

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that TEOs will not be required to verify the declared average FTE category of staff submitting as part-time if they choose to submit three EREs. It will remain essential that these staff declare and TEOs' report their part-time status and average FTE category (either up to 0.49 FTE or 0.5 – 0.8 FTE).

Note that:

- › All part-time staff have the option to submit fewer than three EREs. This is an individual choice

- › Where part-time staff choose to submit three EREs, TEOs will still be required to report their part-time status and average FTE category in the Staff Data File
- › TEOs will still be accountable for the information provided by staff claiming part-time status where any discrepancy is found between a staff member's declared average FTE category and other information submitted through the staff data file or held by the TEO
- › TEC will provide a tool to assist TEOs and their staff in calculating their FTE in accordance with the guidelines.

Platform of Research – Contextual Summary character limit

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that the Platform of Research – Contextual Summary character limit will remain 1,500.

Examples of Research Excellence terminology

Based on the recommendations of the SRG, the TEC has agreed in principle that the ERE Output term will be retained.

Appendix: SRG consultation papers, summaries of consultation, and in-principle decisions

No.	Consultation paper	Consultation period	Consultation status	Decision status
1	Approach to the design of the 2025 Quality Evaluation (PDF 1.3 MB)	6 October–5 November 2021	CLOSED	Decisions reached: Summary of consultation feedback and SRG decisions (PDF 880 KB)
2	Towards a more holistic understanding of research excellence: PBRF research and research excellence definitions (PDF 1.1 MB)	10 December 2021–14 February 2022	CLOSED	Decisions reached: TEC In Principle decisions and summary of feedback on research definitions (PDF 475 KB)
3	Redesigning Evidence Portfolios (EPs) (PDF 1.1 MB)	4 March–18 April 2022	CLOSED	Decisions reached: TEC In Principle decisions and summary of feedback on EP design (PDF 485 KB)
4	Roles and person specifications for the Moderation Team (PDF 423 KB)	31 March–27 April 2022	CLOSED	Decisions reached
5	Individual researcher circumstances and Staff Identification (PDF 1.2 MB)	6 May–2 June 2022	CLOSED	Decision reached – see below
6	Panels: membership criteria and working methods (PDF 1.2 MB)	1 July–29 July 2022	CLOSED	Decisions reached (PDF 476 KB)
7	Individual Circumstances 2 (PDF 2.1 MB) Individual Circumstances Appendix 2 (A3 version) (PDF 127 KB)	12 August–22 September 2022	CLOSED	Decisions reached: TEC In-Principle decisions and summary of feedback on Individual Circumstances (PDF 528 KB)
8	Panels: assessment criteria (PDF 1.2 MB) Proposed component descriptors (DOCX 197 KB)	30 September–11 November 2022	CLOSED	Decision reached: TEC In-Principle decisions and summary of feedback on panel assessment criteria (PDF 429 KB)
9	Technical matters/detailed EP structure and submission requirements (PDF 1.4 MB) Detailed EP structure and submission requirements (DOCX 491 KB)	19 December 2022–24 February 2023	CLOSED	Decision reached: TEC In-Principle Decisions and Summary of Feedback on Technical Matters, and recognising the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (PDF 442 KB)
10	Recognising the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (PDF 463 KB)	24 March–5 May 2023	CLOSED	Decision reached: TEC In-Principle Decisions and Summary of Feedback on Technical Matters, and

				recognising the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (PDF 442 KB)
11	Reporting the results of the Quality Evaluation 2026 (PDF 493 KB)	5 May 2023– 16 June 2023	CLOSED	Decision reached: TEC In-Principle Decisions and Summary of Feedback on Reporting the results of Quality Evaluation 2026 (PDF 381 KB)
12	Draft PBRF Guidelines for TEOs participating in Quality Evaluation 2026 (PDF 1.9 MB) Overview of changes to the TEO Guidelines (PDF 478 KB) Draft Guidelines for the Quality Evaluation 2026 assessment process (PDF 1.2 MB) Overview of changes to the Assessment Guidelines (PDF 459 KB)	11 August–22 September 2023	CLOSED	Decision reached: [add link]