

**Tertiary Education  
Commission**

Te Amorangi Mātauranga Matua



**Consultation 8  
In-Principle decisions and  
summary of feedback: Panels  
Assessment Criteria**



## Consultation 8 In-Principle decisions and summary of feedback: Panels Assessment Criteria

### Purpose

1. This paper communicates the Tertiary Education Commission's (TEC's) in-principle decisions in relation to changes to the panels assessment criteria as set out in the eighth consultation paper produced by the PBRF Sector Reference Group (SRG).
2. The paper also provides a summary of feedback on the proposals and options set out in the consultation paper in relation to these issues.

### Background

3. Following Cabinet's decisions in 2021, the SRG was convened by the TEC to advise on operational design changes to the PBRF Quality Evaluation 2026. The SRG delivers this function through a process of agreeing options and proposals for identified grouped issues, gathering sector feedback on those options and proposals through a series of consultations, considering consultation responses, and making recommendations to the TEC.
4. The TEC makes in-principle decisions based on the SRG's recommendations. These decisions are made on the understanding that the consultation process is ongoing and that other decisions or external factors may require the recommendations to be reconsidered as part of the process of developing the new guidelines for Quality Evaluation 2026.

### Next steps

5. The SRG will use the in-principle decisions as the basis for developing the draft Guidelines. These Guidelines will be provided to the sector and other stakeholders for consultation before they are finalised and published in September 2023. Notwithstanding paragraph four above, the purpose of the consultation on the draft Guidelines is to ensure that the guidance is consistent, clear and unambiguous, not to re-litigate issues already consulted on.

### Sector consultation process

6. SRG consultation paper 8 provided background information, analysis, and options for changes to a range of issues relating to the panels assessment criteria. These included:
  - › Adjustments to the cross-referral process guidance
  - › Adjustments to the holistic assessment guidance
  - › The introduction of an EP calibration check
  - › EP component weightings
  - › EP component and tie-point descriptors.
7. TEC officials directly contacted key stakeholders at universities, Te Pūkenga, the wānanga and PTEs including DVCs Research, Research and PBRF Managers, and Chief Executives, as well as

contacting the Tertiary Education Union and sector peak bodies to ensure widespread sector awareness of the consultation paper.

## Respondent summary

8. A total of 14 responses were received to SRG Consultation Paper 8: Panels Assessment Criteria.

9. Of these, 11 were made on behalf of institutions or organisations, two were sub-institutional submissions, and one was made by an individual researcher.

10. Organisational submissions were received from:

- › Auckland University of Technology
- › Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington
- › Komiti Pasifika
- › Lincoln University
- › Massey University
- › Te Pūkenga
- › The Tertiary Education Union
- › The University of Canterbury
- › The University of Otago
- › The University of Waikato
- › Waipapa Taumata Rau, the University of Auckland.

11. Sub-organisational submissions were received from:

- › Faculty of Law, University of Canterbury
- › Toi Rauwhārangī College of Creative Arts, Massey University.

## Summary of sector response and In Principle decisions

12. Set out below is an issue-by-issue summary of feedback received, including any key concerns or issues raised, followed by the In Principle decision which has been made in relation to each issue.

13. In reaching these in-principle decisions, the TEC has evaluated the SRG's recommendations against the following criteria to ascertain whether they:

- › Deliver Cabinet's instructions
- › Address the concerns and aspirations identified in the Report of the PBRF Review Panel and the Report of the Moderation 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 inclusiveness
- › Are able to be implemented and audited (legally and practically).

14. In addition, the TEC has evaluated the recommendations to ensure they align with TEC decisions and in-principle decisions to date, including on research definitions and EP design.

### **Adjustments to the cross-referral process guidance**

15. The SRG consulted on a proposal to:

- › Rename the ‘Māori research elements’ and Pacific research elements’ sections in the Guidelines and EP template as ‘Mātauranga Māori Panel cross-referral request’ and ‘Pacific Research Panel cross-referral request’ respectively
- › Refer TEOs and submitting staff to the Mātauranga Māori and Pacific Research Panel-specific Guidelines for guidance on the conditions and criteria that could instigate a request for cross-referral to either panel
- › Create a standalone cross-referral section in the main Guidelines and ensure this mirrors the cross-referral guidance set out in the Assessment Guidelines
- › Clarify the information that Co-Chairs will draw on and the process to be followed in requesting cross-referral
- › Rationalise the language used throughout for the avoidance of confusion.

### **Overall approach: there is universal support for the proposal**

16. Of the 13 responses received on this issue, all supported the proposed adjustment.

17. While Komiti Pasifika supported the proposal they noted that it remained desirable to have Pacific research expertise across all panels, and that it would be important to provide Pacific cultural responsiveness training as part of panels training.

18. Te Pūkenga and the University of Canterbury noted there could be value in TEOs or submitting staff being able to initiate cross-referral to all panels. The TEU suggested that the TEOs or submitting staff should be able to indicate in the EP via a tick-box and statement where particular outputs should be cross-referred, and to which panel.

#### **In principle decisions**

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

##### **1. 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 cross-referral should occur.

## **2. 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***

19. The SRG consulted on a proposal to:

- › Clarify the distinction between 'holistic assessment' and 'detailed holistic assessment'
- › Clarify the expectation that detailed holistic assessment is an exceptional process
- › Introduce revised criteria for detailed holistic assessment:
  1. The panel identifies that the EP has specific quality issues that are uncommon relative to subject-area norms
  2. 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
  3. The panel identifies specific scoring concerns such as significant differences between panel-pairs or between ERE and CRE component scores.
  4. Panel Co-Chairs will additionally have the discretion to refer EPs for detailed holistic assessment where they believe there are other strong reasons for reassessment.

**There is broad support for the proposal, with suggestions for further wording clarifications**

20. Of the 13 responses received to this question, ten supported the new proposal.

21. Lincoln University did not support the proposal, and the University of Otago and Victoria University of Wellington proposed alternative approaches. All three institutions indicated agreement with the rationale behind the proposed changes that the distinction between 'holistic' and 'detailed holistic' assessment was confusing.

22. The University of Otago proposed that the terminology be amended to make it clear the two were different processes, and also requested that the criteria for detailed holistic assessment be

expanded to include EPs that scored within 70 points of a Quality Category boundary, while recognising this would create additional workload for panels.

23. University of Wellington proposed that the holistic assessment process be removed as a standalone assessment phase and replaced by the detailed holistic assessment process only.

24. Lincoln University noted that it was unclear why both processes were required.

25. Auckland University of Technology, while supportive of the proposal, noted that the use of 'holistic' in both processes was potentially confusing and suggested the terms 'holistic assessment' for the panel process that applies to all EPs and 'detailed reassessment' for those EPs that meet the criteria.

26. The University of Auckland also supported the proposal in general but queried the inclusion of criterion 2 (in relation to the CRE component only, the panel identifies specific quantity issues that are uncommon relative to subject area norms), given the overall principle, reinforced through the new ERE submission requirements, that quantity in and of itself will not be a factor in assessment.

#### **In principle decision**

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:
  1. 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.
  2. 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.
  3. 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.
  4. 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**

27. The SRG consulted on a proposal to introduce a scoring calibration check at the panel assessment phase, to ensure fair and consistent scoring across EPs regardless of the number of EREs required. Panels will receive average component scores for the Achievement Relative to Opportunity groups and for EPs containing three EREs. Where meaningful variation (to be determined for each panel) is observed between groups, the panel will carry out specific calibration of the various groups against each other, to ensure ERE quantity has not informed scoring.

#### **There is broad support for the proposal, with some queries and concerns**

28. Of the 13 responses received to this question, ten expressed straightforward support for the proposal or did not provide any direct comment.

29. Lincoln University did not support the proposal. Lincoln suggested that EPs submitted by New and Emerging Researchers, part-time staff, or staff who had experienced eligible Researcher Circumstances should be assessed together in 'blocks', separately from EPs containing three EREs, to ensure comparison of 'like with like' and to avoid unconscious bias in scoring.

30. Massey University noted that views on the proposal were mixed across the institution. While acknowledging the need to ensure equitable scoring across EPs regardless of ERE numbers, there were concerns at how panels would address any meaningful variations that were observed between EPs with three EREs and EPs with reduced submission requirements, and more detail was sought.

31. Victoria University of Wellington expressed support in principle for the calibration check, but suggested that it was an activity better carried out by the Moderation Team as part of the moderation process, so that any issues could be resolved during panel-pair assessment, thus avoiding the need for EPs to be reassessed during panel meetings.

#### **In principle decisions**

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

32. The SRG consulted on three options for the EP component weightings:

- a. The ERE component has a 70 percent weighting and the CRE component has a 30 percent weighting
- b. The ERE component has a 60 percent weighting and the CRE component has a 40 percent weighting
- c. The component weightings are adjusted so that the ERE component has a 80 percent weighting and the CRE component has a 20 percent weighting

### **There is broad support for the 70/30 weighting, with some appetite for the other options**

33. Of the 13 responses received to this question, ten supported the 70/30 weighting.

34. In general, responses supporting this option felt that it represented the best balance between acknowledging the greater maximum number of items in the ERE component and the more tightly focussed CRE component, and recognising the spirit of Cabinet’s instructions to reward a broader range of research excellence. Lincoln University, Massey University, and Victoria University of Wellington also noted that given the extent of other changes to the EP design, retaining the same component weightings as in Quality Evaluation 2018 would provide certainty to submitting staff.

35. Komiti Pasifika and the Tertiary Education Union preferred a shift to a 60/40 weighting. Komiti Pasifika noted this option allowed greater room to recognise impact, incentivised growing the research ecosystem, and would particularly benefit New and Emerging and Pacific researchers by uplifting the research-related activity these groups tended to do more of. The Komiti was strongly opposed to the 80/20 weighting, arguing this would further entrench disadvantages for New and Emerging, Māori, Pacific, and female researchers, as well as those working in non-traditional fields.

36. Auckland University of Technology preferred a 70/30 split on balance, but supported the intent behind the 60/40 option and would be happy to see such a change in the future. However, they felt that it was too far along in the current assessment period to introduce this change for Quality Evaluation 2026.

37. The University of Auckland preferred a shift to an 80/20 weighting, on the grounds that this reflected the greater maximum number of items in the ERE component, and resulted in a closer relationship between the ERE component score and the eventual Quality Category.

38. Te Pūkenga supported a 70/30 split on balance but noted that an 80/20 split would be their second preference on the grounds that the available evidence of research quality was more robust for outputs than for the evidence available to support CRE items.

#### **In principle decision**

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**

39. The SRG consulted on a proposal that included:

- › retaining the seven-point scoring scale
- › renaming the Research Output component descriptor as the Examples of Research Excellence component
- › renaming the Research Contributions component descriptor as the Contributions to the Research Environment component
- › revising the ERE and CRE component and tie-point descriptors to reflect the new PBRF Definition of Research, definition of research excellence and impact, and Quality Category descriptors.

### **There is strong support for the proposal with some queries for clarification**

40. Of the 14 responses received to this question, 12 supported the proposal in general.

41. The proposal was not supported by an individual researcher who felt that the Quality Evaluation in general did not serve architecture academics well, and that the proposed revised descriptors (and the Guidelines as a whole) should better reflect the unique nature of the discipline.

42. Lincoln University did not support the proposal on the grounds that the role of supplementary items within an ERE remained unclear, with the proposed wording appearing to imply that supplementary items would not be considered as part of assessment. VUW also made this observation. Lincoln University also felt that the tie-point descriptors were more subjective than previously, and noted that it would be useful to have descriptors for each score on the seven-point scale rather than just for the tie-points.

43. The University of Waikato, while supporting the proposal, also noted it was unclear whether or not supplementary items would be taken into consideration in assessment, and recommended that the EP calibration check also include scoring of EPs containing EREs with and without supplementary items.

44. Auckland University of Technology also supported the proposal, but noted that the use of 'research outputs and/or activities' throughout the ERE component and tie-point descriptors implied that the required standard could be met on the basis of either research activities alone, or research outputs alone. AUT suggested that submitting staff should be explicitly encouraged to include both outputs and activities, and that failure to do so could be used as one way of differentiating between scores.

45. Massey University supported the proposal but anticipated challenges for TEOs in advising staff on how to balance components of their EPs to ensure best outcomes, in light of changes to the EP design.

46. Victoria University of Wellington expressed concern that the component descriptors did not reflect a broadened PBRF Definition of Research because the outputs and activities referred to were ones that were eligible in Quality Evaluation 2018.

47. Victoria University of Wellington also suggested that the way in which the tie-points were used should be reconsidered. In particular, they noted that the revised descriptors appeared to raise

the bar such that it was no longer clear how a component could exceed, for example, a score of six. VUW noted they supported communicating high aspirations for the research community, and suggested that rather than re-word the descriptors, they could be attached to the odd-numbered scores (i.e. three, five, and seven). This would mean that rather than judging whether a component met or exceeded the tie-point, panel members would judge whether it met or fell short of the tie-point.

48. A number of specific wording suggestions were made by respondents supporting the proposal:

- › Te Pūkenga suggested that qualifiers ‘adequate’, ‘excellent’, and ‘outstanding’ be applied to the two, four, and six tie-point descriptors respectively
- › Massey University felt that the four tie-point descriptor was ambiguous
- › The University of Otago supported the move away from using geographical terms to signify excellence, but expressed concern this could imply that global reach was not valuable in and of itself. The University of Otago suggested that the ERE component six tie-point descriptor be amended to refer to ‘the best of its kind in the relevant global context’, in order to give the researcher choice in terms of the relevant context for their work, whilst ensuring that ‘global’ is not being problematically equated with excellence
- › The University of Auckland and Victoria University of Wellington submitted detailed suggested wording changes. Broadly speaking, comments from both universities are concerned with ensuring alignment between the revised Quality Category descriptors and the component descriptors, and with consistency across and between tie-point descriptors.

#### **In principle decision**

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.