

**Tertiary Education  
Commission**

Te Amorangi Mātauranga Matua



**Consultation 2  
In Principle decisions and summary  
of feedback: Towards a more  
holistic understanding of research  
excellence**



## Consultation 2 In Principle decisions and summary of feedback – Towards a more holistic understanding of research excellence

### Purpose

1. This paper communicates the Tertiary Education Commission's (TEC) In Principle decisions in relation to the issues set out in the second consultation paper produced by the PBRF Sector Reference Group (SRG), *Towards a more holistic understanding of research excellence*:
  - › The PBRF Definition of Research
  - › The approach to acknowledging Māori research and Pacific research
  - › The approach to a definition of research excellence
  - › The approach to revising the Quality Category descriptors
2. The paper also provides a summary of feedback on the options set out in the consultation paper in relation to these four issues.

### Background

3. Following Cabinet's decisions in 2021, the PBRF Sector Reference Group (SRG) has been convened by the TEC to advise on operational design changes to the PBRF Quality Evaluation 2025. The SRG delivers this function through a process of agreeing information and options for identified grouped issues, gathering sector feedback on those options through a series of consultations, considering consultation responses, and making recommendations to the TEC.
4. The TEC makes In Principle decisions based on SRG 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 2025.

### 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 June 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.
6. The In Principle decisions reported in this paper, along with the In Principle decision on EP design, will inform the subsequent issues to be considered by the SRG going forward.

### Sector consultation process

7. The SRG consultation paper #2 - *Towards a more holistic understanding of research excellence* provided background information and analysis and set out options in relation to the four issues set out above, which the SRG identified as collectively comprising the approach to defining research for the purposes of Quality Evaluation 2025.

8. Feedback on this consultation paper was invited through an online survey from 10 December 2021 – 14 February 2022.
9. A total of 41 submissions to the public consultation were received. These included submissions from:
  - › Auckland University of Technology
  - › College of Creative Arts, Massey University
  - › Lincoln University
  - › Manukau Institute of Technology
  - › Massey University
  - › New Zealand Association of Scientists
  - › New Zealand Union of Students' Associations
  - › Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga, a Centre of Research Excellence
  - › Otago Polytechnic
  - › Department of Physiology, University of Otago
  - › Te Pūkenga
  - › Tertiary Education Union
  - › University of Auckland
  - › University of Otago
  - › University of Waikato
  - › Victoria University of Wellington
  - › 25 individuals
10. Following the public consultation process, the SRG considered feedback and made initial recommendations on a preferred approach to each of the four issues. This included the recommendation to seek more feedback and input from the Māori and Pacific research communities before making a recommendation on the approach to acknowledging Māori research and Pacific research in the guidance, and a recommendation to test wording with representatives from across the sector as the PBRF Definition of Research, definition of research excellence, and Quality Category descriptors were developed for final recommendation by the SRG.
11. Targeted consultation hui were held across March and April with representatives from the following groups/bodies:
  - › Te Kāhui Amokura, Universities New Zealand
  - › Komiti Pasifika, Universities New Zealand
  - › Faculty of Māori and Indigenous Studies, University of Waikato
  - › Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga
  - › Research Committee, Universities New Zealand
  - › Te Pūkenga
  - › Te Wānanga o Aotearoa
  - › Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi

## Summary of sector response and In Principle decisions

12. The TEC and the SRG would like to thank respondents for their thoughtful and detailed feedback and suggestions.
13. 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.

14. 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).

### **PBRF Definition of Research**

15. The SRG agreed to consult on two options for the PBRF Definition of Research. Option 1 was a detailed definition which expanded in a range of ways on the existing definition, while Option 2 was a very brief and general definition which devolved detailed elaborations to the Panels.

#### **Overall approach: Option 1 is preferred by a majority**

16. Option 1 emerged as the clear preference across multiple groups as the table below shows.

**Table 1: PBRF Definition of Research sector preferences**

	<b>Option 1 preferred</b>	<b>Option 2 preferred</b>	<b>Another option preferred</b>
<b>All respondents (41)</b>	58.6% (24)	26.8% (11)	14.6% (6)
<b>Institutional/organisational respondents (16)</b>	62.5% (10)	12.5% (2)	25% (4)
<b>Responses from PBRF-eligible TEOs (8)</b>	75% (6)	0%	25% (2)

17. Responses preferring ‘another option’ in general saw advantages in a simplified definition but were concerned that less traditional research forms, as well as Māori research and Pacific research, would not be sufficiently valued. Concerns were also raised about timing around devolving detailed elaborations to Panel Chairs if Option 2 were followed. Otago University noted that the simplified version alone would not honour Te Tiriti and proposed that the simplified version be supplemented by specific references to Māori and Pacific research. Lincoln University felt the detailed version was too cumbersome, and proposed a modified version of the 2018 definition which included rangahau, Mātauranga Māori and kaupapa Māori, Pacific research, community, action, practice-based and applied research. The specific suggestions made by respondents essentially entail striking a balance between the current wording of Option 1 and Option 2.

18. A number of submissions also indicated that decisions about the application of the high-level definition to panel-specific guidance should not be completely devolved to Panels and that Panels be clearly instructed about how to apply the definition. They noted that it was important

to ensure that the definition of research could be properly recognised at panel level. This point was also raised by respondents who preferred Option 2.

19. In further targeted consultation, wānanga representatives, Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga, Te Pūkenga representatives, Te Kāhui Amokura and Komiti Pasifika all shared a view that the detailed definition approach was preferable. Wānanga representatives and Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga additionally noted that it was important the PBRF Definition of Research included but did not define Māori knowledge or research, as this could be interpreted as the Crown imposing a definition.

### Specific wording suggestions

20. Of the 41 responses, 26 provided detailed wording suggestions. The majority of suggestions for detailed wording changes were made by respondents preferring Option 1. They key points raised are summarised in the table below.

**Table 2: Summary of wording suggestions for Option 1 definition of research**

Issue or suggestion	Raised by
The way in which Māori research/rangahau is described requires review and reconsideration	Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga; Victoria University of Wellington; Te Pūkenga
The wording ' <i>recovery and revitalisation of knowledge previously lost or suppressed (for example, the study of raranga, whakapapa narratives, rongōa, navigational knowledge, translation studies or ecological research)</i> ' could suggest that technical or professional translations in established languages, or insights generated from the repair or recovery of old or poorly-stored databases/ collections would both improperly or unintentionally count as research.	Auckland University of Technology; New Zealand Association of Scientists
The use of 'new' potentially excludes research based on philosophical or theoretical models, or research which draws on previous research	NZUSA
Remove some or all of the specific clarifications following the main definition and/or remove the specific examples for each clarification	Department of Phsysiology, University of Otago; Victoria University of Wellington; Te Pūkenga; University of Otago
The definition should also encompass new or substantially improved processes, alongside material, devices, products etc	Manukau Institute of Technology
The inclusion of teaching materials where they embody new research was considered potentially confusing by Lincoln University, while Manukau Institute of Technology proposed revising to include teaching materials that 'involve undertaking research'	Lincoln University; Manukau Institute of Technology
It is important to acknowledge the centrality of Te Reo to Māori knowledge and research	Faculty of Māori and Indigenous Studies, University of Waikato

## **In principle decision**

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**

21. The SRG consulted on two options for the approach to articulating Māori research and Pacific research. Option 1 was to develop standalone definitions in the 2025 Guidelines. Option 2 was to develop definitions in the Māori Knowledge and Development and Pacific Research Panel-Specific Guidelines, which would then apply across all panels where such definitions were relevant.

#### **Overall approach: Mixed initial response and acknowledgement that Māori and Pacific research communities must have input into and endorse the final approach**

22. The picture is much more mixed in relation to this issue, as the table below shows. Note that only 39 responses were received on this issue.

**Table 3: Approach to Māori research and Pacific research sector preferences**

	Option 1 preferred	Option 2 preferred	Another option preferred
<b>All responses (39)</b>	38.5% (15)	35.9% (14)	25.6% (10)
<b>Institutional/organisational respondents (16)</b>	37.5% (6)	18.6% (3)	43.8% (7)
<b>Responses from PBRF-eligible TEOs (8)</b>	37.5% (3)	12.5% (1)	50% (4)

23. A common thread across all responses, regardless of the option preferred, was that any approaches or definitions must have the support of, and be co-developed with, Māori and Pacific research communities.
24. Responses supporting ‘another option’ generally tended to prefer an approach that combined the two, with some degree of high-level definition of Māori research and Pacific research included in the Guidelines, combined with more detailed definitions and guidance about applicability across panels from the Māori Knowledge and Development and Pacific Research panels and/or Panel Chairs. Responses from the University of Auckland, Victoria University of Wellington, Te Pūkenga, Otago Polytechnic, and NZUSA all supported an approach of this sort, while Lincoln University considered that the definitions should be included in the PBRF Definition of Research rather than as standalone definitions, and expanded on as necessary in the Panel-Specific Guidelines.
25. A number of submissions, including those of Te Pūkenga, AUT, and an individual submission, also noted the importance of the relevant Panel Chairs in this context, indicating that their early appointment ahead of the other Panel Chairs should be a priority.
26. Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga submitted that Māori research should not be defined by the Crown in any sense, and that rather the Māori Knowledge and Development panel members should have the expertise necessary. They also noted that Māori panel members should be appointed to all panels to ensure Māori research submitted to other panels is fairly assessed. Victoria University

of Wellington expressed support for Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga’s submission and noted they also had concerns about the Crown defining Māori research.

27. In consultation hui following the review of written submissions, representatives from the wānanga, Te Kāhui Amokura, Komiti Pasifika, Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga and Te Pūkenga all endorsed Option 1 as an approach, noting that statements in the Guidelines would unambiguously indicate that Māori research and Pacific research was acknowledged and valued in the Quality Evaluation. However, the groups all agreed that the statements should not define Māori research or Pacific research, and that the relevant Panels were the appropriate sources of expertise for developing definitions. The text of the two statements reflects detailed feedback provided during the hui.

**In Principle decision**

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**

28. The SRG consulted on two options for the approach to defining research excellence. Option 1 was to develop a standalone definition which would sit in the 2025 Guidelines, while Option 2 was to have no standalone definition, as in 2018, with the definition instead continuing to sit in the PBRF Funding Determination.

**Overall approach: Total respondents preferred Option 2, but eligible TEOs preferred Option 1**

29. Option 2 emerged as the clear favourite when the responses are considered as a whole, but this preference disappeared when considering only institutional responses, and was reversed among PBRF-eligible TEOs. Note that there were 40 responses to this issue.

**Table 4: PBRF Definition of Research sector preferences**

	Option 1 preferred	Option 2 preferred	Another option preferred

<b>All responses (40)</b>	35% (14)	57.5% (23)	7.5% (3)
<b>Institutional/organisational respondents (15)</b>	46.7% (7)	53.3% (8)	0%
<b>Responses from PBRF-eligible TEOs (8)</b>	62.5% (5)	37.5% (3)	0%

30. For those who preferred Option 1, the main reason given was that a high-level definition was felt to be the clearest and most equitable approach (Te Pūkenga, Otago Polytechnic, University of Waikato, Lincoln University) and that it was important to ensure there was a definition that could be consistently applied across the Panel-Specific Guidelines and across disciplines (Lincoln, Manukau Institute of Technology). Lincoln also noted that a standalone definition was important to ensure that standards of excellence for Māori, Pacific, community, practice-based and action research were understood and consistently applied across panels.
31. Victoria University of Wellington noted that a standalone definition of research excellence was important to inform the assessment standards that fall from it, including the Quality Category descriptors and the tie-point descriptors.
32. A number of responses (University of Auckland, MIT, Lincoln, individual responses) also noted that if the definition of research was broadened to include impact, engagement, and collaboration, then the research definition was an important way of signalling what excellence looks like for these less well-understood forms of research activity and output.
33. Among the organisational responses supportive of Option 2, Massey University and Auckland University of Technology felt that the definition of research excellence could be sufficiently articulated across the Definition of Research and the Quality Category descriptors. The New Zealand Association of Scientists noted that research excellence was difficult to define objectively, and that many of the common indicators were either open to gaming or disproportionately privileged established disciplines. The majority of individual responses supported Option 2, and did not comment on why, but one individual echoed the New Zealand Association of Scientists' comments about measures such as citations and infometrics.

### **Specific wording suggestions**

34. There were few specific suggestions, but overall the feedback was that a broadened definition of research requires a complementary definition of research excellence, and that it was critical to consider appropriate indicators of excellence for less traditional research disciplines and methodologies. The University of Otago, while not supporting Option 1, noted that if a standalone definition were pursued, it would be important to ensure that any external income indicators did not discriminate against New and Emerging Researchers or disciplines such as the Humanities where external income generation is less of a focus.
35. In consultation hui following the review of written submissions, there was strong support for Option 1. Māori and Pacific stakeholder representatives felt that a definition in the Guidelines should mirror the inclusion of Māori research and Pacific research in the PBRF Definition of Research, and thus emphasise the relevance and value of Māori research and Pacific research.

36. Universities New Zealand’s Research Committee also noted that the sector would welcome more guidance on how research impact was understood within the Quality Evaluation, and that the definition of research excellence could clarify this.

### **In Principle decision**

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**

37. The SRG consulted on a single option, which was to revise the Quality Category descriptors to:
- › reflect the PBRF Definition of Research;
  - › ensure they describe overall EP quality with emphasis on rigour, originality, significance, disciplinary reach, benefits to communities and stakeholders, and peer esteem; and
  - › reflect indicators of prestige and value within Te Ao Māori.

### **Respondents support revising the Quality Category descriptors**

38. There was a high level of support for this option. Of the 39 respondents who answered this question, 33 were supportive, three were not, and three preferred ‘another option’. All of the eight submissions by participating TEOs were supportive, as were 15 of the 16 institutional/organisational responses.
39. NZUSA indicated support for ‘another option’. In comments they clarified that they were supportive of the Quality Category descriptors being revised, but wanted the descriptors better aligned against Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the PBRF principles.

## Specific issues to be addressed

40. Respondents gave a range of suggestions for issues to be considered when revising the descriptors. Several responses noted that international reach or impact should not be used as a straightforward indicator for excellence (University of Waikato, Te Pūkenga, TEU), or that the association of 'international, 'national, and 'local' with A, B and C Quality Categories was not appropriate (University of Auckland). Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga noted this was particularly disadvantageous for Māori research which frequently by design is aimed at a national or local audience. Victoria University of Wellington and Massey University noted that it was particularly important that international activity was not used as a measure of excellence in light of COVID-19 restrictions.
41. Lincoln University and the Department of Physiology at the University of Otago noted their view that the numerical range of scores that lead to a B Quality Category was too broad. Lincoln queried whether the Quality Category model should be reviewed, while the Department of Physiology suggested that the B category could be subdivided.
42. In consultation hui, representative from Māori and Pacific research communities gave clear feedback that the existing descriptors had disadvantaged their researchers both through the alignment of excellence with geographical reach, and through the focus on publication as the core measure of excellence.
43. Research Committee noted that the explicit inclusion of impact within the Definition of Research was a significant change. While this was broadly welcomed as allowing a broader understanding of research, the Committee cautioned against descriptors that required both research production and impact, noting that an either/or approach would better recognise researchers whose work had a strong focus on impact whilst also acknowledge those in disciplines that tend to focus more on publications.

### In principle decision

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.