

Performance-Based Research Fund Sector Reference Group: Summary of responses to consultation paper #1 – Approach to the design of the 2018 Quality Evaluation

Purpose

This provides a summary of the key points arising from sector responses to the first consultation paper produced by the Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF) Sector Reference Group (SRG) on the approach to the design of the 2018 Quality Evaluation.

Introduction

Consultation paper #1 provided the sector and other key stakeholders with background information, identified potential changes to the operation of the Quality Evaluation process, proposed a redesign of the structure of the Quality Evaluation guidelines, proposed a suite of papers and an indicative timetable for consultation on the papers, and invited feedback on other matters to be considered as part of the design process.

Feedback on this consultation paper was invited through the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) from 28 August to 2 October 2014.

A total of ten responses were received. These were from:

- AUT University
- Bethlehem Tertiary Institute
- Business New Zealand
- Massey University
- Unitec Institute of Technology
- University of Auckland
- University of Canterbury
- University of Otago
- University of Waikato
- Universities New Zealand Māori Committee

Organisation of summary

Each of the ten responses has been analysed and feedback is summarised according to the following sections:

- a. Potential changes requiring sector consultation (recommendations table).
- b. Proposed structure of the PBRF Quality Evaluation guidelines.
- c. Proposed consultation papers and sub-topics/content.
- d. Indicative consultation timetable.
- e. Other matters.

Feedback has been anonymised.

A. Potential changes requiring sector consultation (recommendations table).

The greatest amount of feedback was received in relation to recommendations 5-20, in the area of developing Evidence Portfolios (EPs). Only three of the 14 recommendations received no comments (review of PE/CRE exceptions, submitted quality sound and visual files, and removing the Accepted Manuscripts provision).

Feedback indicated that there is strong support across the sector for greater clarity in guidance and better auditing of TEOs to determine when a research output is first 'publicly available'. The SRG will include a specific review of the policy that underpins the meaning of the assessment period as part of the Research Output paper.

The area that raised the most concerns was the inclusion of impact as an assessable item. Cabinet decisions on changes to the PBRF have excluded the inclusion of impact as a stand-alone measure. However, impact has always been allowed as an optional measure of the quality of research in EPs. As such, the SRG's focus will be on:

- a. providing advice to the sector regarding what information and evidence should be included in an EP if a researcher **chooses** to submit an entry in the Research Contribution component on research impact; and
- b. ensuring that the guidelines for peer review panels support appropriate assessment of these entries.

With the remaining recommendations, there were no significant issues raised but there were a variety of questions and some more minor concerns, which the SRG intends to respond to within the consultation papers as they are developed:

B. Proposed structure of the PBRF Quality Evaluation guidelines

Feedback supported the proposal to restructure the 2018 Quality Evaluation guidelines, including the proposed split into four documents. A number of suggestions were also made including recommendations to develop the panel-specific guidelines and release these along with the final guidelines by June 2016. The TEC will need to consider this particular recommendation, as the development of panel-specific guidelines requires the establishment of the peer review panels and they are not normally established this early in the process.

C. Proposed consultation papers and sub-topics/content

A number of suggestions have been made regarding the content of the proposed paper. The SRG expects to incorporate suggestions in the consultation papers where appropriate.

More general comments on the development of the guidelines included signalling significant changes as early as possible, ensuring all guidelines are publicly available, developing a question and answer portal to ensure any points of clarification are available to all, making no changes to the guidelines once published, and involving the TEC auditors at the outset.

The SRG intends that all significant changes will be signalled as early as possible and the TEC has engaged its PBRF auditors to support the SRG in the development of consultation papers and the guidelines. The TEC also confirms that all guidelines will be publicly available and supports the development of a question and answer portal to increase the transparency of the PBRF process.

D. Indicative consultation timetable

The SRG has reviewed and revised the ordering and timing of the proposed consultation papers incorporating the feedback from the sector. The timetable will be published on the TEC's website and updated as dates become finalised.

The revised consultation timetable is set out below:

Title	Indicative timeframe for 6 week consultation process
Review of staff eligibility criteria	31 October – 12 December 2014
Developing Evidence Portfolios – operational guidance for the Research Contribution component	Late November 2014 – late February 2015

Title	Indicative timeframe for 6 week consultation process
Feasibility of a Pacific Research peer review panel	Late January – early March 2015
Developing Evidence Portfolios – operational guidance for the Research Output component	Early March – late April 2015
Review of the general Special Circumstances provisions and the Canterbury Earthquake Special Circumstances provisions	Late April – early June 2015
Review of the assessment framework – weighting and scoring, peer review panel subject areas, multi-disciplinary research, definitions, and advice	Early June – late July 2015
Professional, applied and commercial research	TBA
Review of the TEO audit process	TBA
Review of the panel selection and operation process	TBA

E. Other matters

The SRG has noted two areas raised by multiple organisations:

- Developing the Evidence Portfolio schema (technical document) along with the guidelines; and
- Aligning the work being led by the Ministry of Education on staff data collection with the work of the SRG.

The TEC has already determined that a technical systems sub-group will be formed and has started making arrangements for this group. The technical documentation will be developed and consulted on once the decisions on changes to the format of EPs and census requirements are determined.

The SRG and the TEC are working with the Ministry of Education with the intention of aligning information relating to staff data collection. As the scope and timeframes for both groups develops, further communications are expected.

Other consultation papers have been suggested and the SRG can confirm that additional papers will include:

- Review of the process for establishing peer review panels including options for determining panellist eligibility; discipline and institutional coverage; personnel/roles involved throughout the decision-making process from the first identification of potential panellists to final appointment; avoidance of major conflicts of interest for panellists and management of minor incidences; and ways of making this process transparent
- Review of the TEO audit process including sanctions on TEOs.

A Creative and Performing Arts paper was also proposed. However, the SRG believes the content suggested for this paper is best placed within the panel-specific guidelines for the Creative and Performing Arts peer review panel.

There was also feedback on professional and applied research, specifically any impact on academic engagement with research users and on incentives to conduct research that meets business, industry and community needs. There was also feedback regarding Māori research within the PBRF. The SRG and the TEC intend to ensure that these two areas are addressed within each of the consultation papers as required, and the development of the guidelines, and will seek to engage relevant stakeholders in the process.