

Performance-Based Research Fund Sector Reference Group: Consultation paper #4 – Establishing a Pacific research peer review panel

Sector feedback and TEC decisions

Purpose

The Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF) Sector Reference Group (SRG) undertook an investigation into the operational feasibility of establishing a peer review panel for Pacific research before the 2018 Quality Evaluation. The SRG consulted the sector and other stakeholders on this proposal.

This document provides:

- a summary of the responses received;
- details on any concerns raised relating to the proposals; and
- the Tertiary Education Commission's (TEC's) decisions on each aspect of the proposal.

Introduction

Consultation paper #4 – Establishing a Pacific research peer review panel provided the sector and other key stakeholders with background information on the inclusion and assessment of Pacific research in the context of the Quality Evaluation process, the proposal for the establishment of a Pacific research peer review panel, the objective and principles for this panel along with the potential issues and mitigation actions, and invited feedback on the proposal and any other matters not raised in the paper.

Feedback on this consultation paper was invited through the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) from 26 February to 9 April 2015. Consultation has now closed.

A total of 17 responses were received. These were from:

- Auckland University of Technology
- Christchurch Polytechnic Institute Of Technology
- Massey University
- Tertiary Education Union Te Hautū Kahurangi o Aotearoa
- Unitec Institute of Technology
- University of Auckland
- University of Auckland, Pacific Women's Health Research Unit, Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology
- University of Canterbury
- University of Otago
- University of Waikato
- Victoria University of Wellington
- 6 individual staff members

The Ministry of Education also provided feedback. Feedback has been anonymised.

Process information

The SRG has considered the feedback from the sector and other stakeholders relating to each of the matters identified in the consultation paper. The SRG has indicated its preferred option, which has been recommended to the TEC. In regard to the proposal to establish a Pacific research peer review panel, the TEC has made decisions on these recommendations

and advised the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment as required under the decision by Cabinet.

Next steps

As there has been unanimous support for the proposal the TEC will now take the appropriate steps to implement the decisions. Feedback received from the sector and other stakeholders will feed into this process. The SRG will also use the decisions as the basis of the draft guidelines for the 2018 Quality Evaluation. These guidelines will be provided to the sector and other stakeholders for consultation before they are finalised in June 2016. The purpose of the consultation on the draft guidelines is to ensure that the guidance is clear and unambiguous, not to re-consult on matters already consulted upon and agreed.

Organisation of summary

Each of the 17 responses has been analysed. Feedback is summarised according to the following sections:

- A. Do you support the establishment of a Pacific research peer review panel?
- B. Do you recommend any changes to the draft objectives and underlying principles of the proposed panel?
- C. Are there any additional issues that have not been addressed? What mitigations can you suggest to address these and any other issues?
- D. Please describe and detail any areas or issues relating to establishing a Pacific Research Peer Review Panel that require our attention but have not already been included in the consultation paper.

A. Do you support the establishment of a Pacific research peer review panel?

The SRG proposed that a Pacific research per review panel be established for the 2018 Quality Evaluation.

A review of the responses has been undertaken and summarised below.

	Response %	Response #
Yes	100%	17
No	-	-
Possibly	-	-

There was unanimous support for the inclusion of this as a new peer review panel. Some concerns were raised, although these were similar to those that were indicated in the paper, specifically the potential for undue burden on Pacific researchers and conflicts of interest.

Questions were asked as to whether the SRG considered keeping the Pacific Research Expert Advisory Group (EAG) from the 2012 Quality Evaluation, focusing more on ensuring strong Pacific representation on the existing panels, or including Pacific research in with the Maori Knowledge and Development panel.

Cabinet formally disestablished the Pacific Research EAG. This precludes the option of the SRG reforming this group for the 2018 Quality Evaluation. The SRG agrees that there needs to be a focus on strong Pacific representation on the existing panels, and has specifically included this in the proposal regarding establishing peer review panels. The Pacific Expert Group which provided advice to the SRG noted that this needs to be part of the long-term goal however both groups agreed that this needs to sit alongside the Pacific

research peer review panel, not replace it. The SRG did not consider including Pacific research into the Māori Knowledge and Development panel, as it was not seen as appropriate.

Decision

Establish a new peer review panel for the 2018 Quality Evaluation that focuses on Pacific research.

B. Do you recommend any changes to the draft objectives and underlying principles of the proposed panel?

The SRG put forward the panel objectives and principles, developed by the Pacific Expert Group and based on the work of the Pacific Research Expert Advisory Group for the 2012 Quality Evaluation. Feedback was sought on any changes to these.

A review of the responses has been undertaken and summarised below.

	Response %	Response #
Yes	47%	8
No	53%	9

A number of responses suggested wording changes to the objective and principles. The Pacific Expert Group and SRG have reviewed this feedback. The SRG and the TEC have agreed that it is most appropriate for the Pacific research peer review panel to consider the feedback and determine the most appropriate changes to make. The panel will then be able to finalise the draft objectives and underlying principles with support from the SRG and this can be included in the draft Guidelines and/or the draft panel-specific guidelines.

Decision

The final objectives and principles for the Pacific research peer review panel will be determined by the panel itself with support from the SRG and included in the draft Guidelines and/or the draft panel-specific guidelines upon confirmation by TEC.

C. Are there any additional issues that have not been addressed? What mitigations can you suggest to address these and any other issues?

The SRG identified a number of issues and mitigations relating to the establishment of an additional panel.

Feedback from the sector confirmed that these were likely issues and supported the mitigation actions proposed. There were also a number of useful points put forward to assist with addressing some of the concerns raised.

There also appeared to be some confusion in regard to the role of the panel. The SRG reiterates that the Pacific research peer review panel will function in the same way as any of the other subject/disciplinary panels in regard to the assessment process. This means that:

- The Pacific panel will be responsible for the assessment and assignment of a Quality Category for each of the Evidence Portfolios (EPs) that are submitted to it as the Primary panel.
- Any staff member that believes that the majority of the research within their EP best aligns with the subject can choose to submit to the panel (this is an existing rule).

- The Pacific panel, like the other subject/disciplinary panels, will follow the rules of the assessment process set out in the main guidelines. The panel will also develop a set of panel-specific guidelines to support those choosing to submit this panel.

The one significant difference with the Pacific panel will be in regard to the cross-referral process. Both Chairs of other panels and staff members can request a cross-referral to the Pacific panel, if some but not all of their research aligns with the subject. In this scenario, the Pacific panel would not be responsible for the assignment of a Quality Category.

Concerns have been raised regarding Pacific research, which is often qualitative and narrative in nature, not being appropriately assessed because of this. In this regard, it is important to remember that all subject/disciplinary panels are 'peer review panels' so the type of research that is being assessed is also the same type of research that is being conducted by panel members.

There was also a question as to why the SRG did not consult on the decision to apply the underlying subject weighting to EPs submitted to the Pacific research peer review panel. The SRG noted in the consultation paper that there is no current classification prescription for Pacific studies therefore applying the underlying subject weighting to EPs would be a reasonable approach to take in this regard. In addition, it ensures that the funding calculation applied to the Quality Evaluation results appropriately reflects the subject matter of each EP. This means neither TEOs nor Pacific researchers are disadvantaged in the funding calculation.

D. Please describe and detail any areas or issues relating to establishing a Pacific Research Peer Review Panel that require our attention but have not already been included in the consultation paper.

Some concern was noted in relation to the formation of the panel, specifically ensuring the appointment of overseas panellists and a mix of subject/discipline specialists. These comments will be provided to the Moderators and the Chair of the panel to ensure that an appropriate panel is selected. The other concern noted was in regard to the use of publications and journal rankings in the Pacific research context. As noted above, the panel will consist of 'peers' who understand the context of Pacific research however this is an area that can be addressed within the panel-specific guidelines.