Massey University Response to ‘Improving the Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Performance-Based Research Fund’

1. In your view, will increasing the proportion of PBRF income allocated based on External Research Income better value user-perspectives of research quality?

Whilst the increase to the weighting of ERI (15% to 20%) and the relative weighting of the category types (government: non-government: international) will place a greater emphasis on the generation of externally generated research income, it does not necessarily place the user-perspectives of research quality to the fore. The model also proposes that that funding indicates good/excellent research outcomes – it might simply reflect certain funding requirements and/or the ability to aggregate a critical mass of researchers to one cause/around one problem. Moreover it adversely affects the level of support for areas of research with naturally low funding profiles (e.g. creative arts). We would therefore urge caution in assuming that funding equates to research quality across all knowledge domains.

There is nothing to indicate that a change to ERI reflects user perspectives; those most likely to gain will be those inside the universities, not end users.

2. Will the proposed change encourage tertiary education organisations to more actively seek out additional research income, and to what extent?

Yes, the new proposed changes will encourage TEOs to seek additional external research funding, however this could have negative implications on a range of core functions undertaken by TEOs. Firstly the administrative requirement to draft and refine funding applications requires additional resourcing in both academic time and administrative functions, thereby potentially decreasing the ability for academic staff to focus on the teaching component of their roles or increasing the overall staff costs. A significant amount of time will be expended seeking and developing additional opportunities, creating and establishing teams to be potentially successful in pursuing these opportunities and drafting and refining applications. Also the risk factors associated with driving organisations towards more complex, opportunistic funding will increase the overhead without increasing benefit.

It should also be noted that the amount involved in the redistribution is minimal (c $300,000 for the whole sector) so the incentive to develop and redirect additional resources may be questionable relative to the benefit received. As the amount of funding available is to remain the same, the new weightings are just likely to introduce a redistribution of the funding benefiting the University of Auckland predominately, with the University of Otago and Lincoln University to a lesser degree. Moreover this model also biases the funding to those disciplines/subjects areas with established funding matrices (e.g. primary industries, medical, engineering, etc.) and does little to support or incentivise research in emerging areas, those with less well developed funding domains (e.g. creative arts, new media, etc.) and the social welfare. Thus, whole sector and economic benefits are difficult to resolve.
3. **What do you see as the potential benefits and risks associated with increasing the proportion of PBRF funding allocated based on External Research Income, and decreasing the proportion of funding allocated through the Quality Evaluation?**

It is noted that the modelling provided only shows the change in funding based on the percentage change from 15% to 20%, not the likely impact of the change in weighting based on category type. The implication of this is deemed to have further significant changes to the distribution of the ERI portion of the PBRF framework. It would be beneficial to model the changes in distribution once these weighting have been applied to understand the full extent of the funding redistribution under this model.

4. **Additional responses to other proposed amendments to the PBRF framework:**

*Research outputs*

Mechanisms to give greater weighting (and/or clarity above relative quality) to outputs that are not refereed journal or conference publication e.g. patents. There seems to be effectively a bias against applied research because the style of output that is likely to result does not always fit the fundamental research value/criteria of high impact journals and high citation rates. Standard journal outputs have a common understanding and agreed value, whereas other outputs are treated inconsistently by different panels and panellists.