23 April 2014

Roger Smyth, Group Manager
Tertiary Education Group
Ministry of Education
45-47 Pipitea Street
Thorndon, Wellington

Dear Roger,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Minister’s proposal to increase the proportion of Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) funding allocated based on external research income.

The Open Polytechnic Research Committee considered the proposal at a recent meeting. Please find below the Open Polytechnic’s responses to the questions posed in your letter of 2 April 2014:

1. In your view, will increasing the proportion of PBRF income allocated based on External Research Income better value user-perspectives of research quality?
   No, as it will favour specific forms of research for which large amounts of external funding are available. The proposal may further disadvantage areas already underserved by research activity.

2. Will the proposed change encourage tertiary education organisations to more actively seek out additional research income, and to what extent?
   The change will certainly encourage TEIs to compete for external research income, though it will further benefit larger TEIs. There is an opportunity cost to applying for external grants, which further discourages TEIs with fewer resources from participating.

3. What do you see as the potential benefits and risk 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?
   The proposal promotes a utilitarian approach to research activity.

   Potential benefits are that PBRF funding would be seen to partner with funding bodies, with projects meeting the criteria of those bodies. This would give the perception of more robust research taking place. The proposed shift is also compatible with previous messages around aligning research with technology transfer.

   Potential risks include the potential for conflict of interest, whereby researchers may be required to take a less objective view of outcomes in order to satisfy the expectations of funders; not all fields for research have funding opportunities available to them, further
Reducing incentive for research in those areas; encouraging researchers to spend more time on preparing research proposals, rather than engaging with research; discouraging institutions from supporting new and emerging researchers, in favour of those more likely to win external grants; reinforcing the current discrepancy between the potential income of larger and smaller TEIs from the PBRF, with the net loss of research capability across the sector.

If you need anything further, please don’t hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Seelig (Dr)
Chief Executive