



minutes

Te Komiti Rangahau o Unitec | Unitec Research Committee

Date:	2024-04-11
Scheduled Start:	1300h
Scheduled End:	1500h
Location:	Microsoft Teams

MEETING OPENED:	1300h
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SECTION 1 – NGĀ KUPU ARATAKI | PRELIMINARIES

Item 1.1 Karakia Tīmatanga | Opening Prayer

Item 1.2 Mihi Whakatau | Welcome from the Chair

The Chair warmly welcomed members of the committee to the meeting.

SECTION 2 – STANDING ITEMS

Item 2.1 Ngā Whakapāha | Attendance, Apologies & Quorate Status

Members Present

1. Marcus Williams (Chair)
2. Helen Gremillion
3. Rokosiga Morrison (proxy for Daisy Bentley-Gray)
4. Kambiz Borna
5. Hamid Sharifzadeh
6. Lian Wu
7. Kristie Cameron
8. Laura Sawyer (proxy for Nora Md Amin)
9. Arun Deo (until 2pm)
10. Khaled Ibrahim
11. Tanya White

Total members represented:	11 members
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Apologies

1. Nora Md Amin

2. Yusef Patel
3. Leon Tan
4. Daisy Bentley-Gray

Total apologies: 4 members

Absent

1. Carly Van Winkel

Total absent: 1 member

MOTION

That the committee accepts the apologies for today's meeting.

Moved: Helen Gremillion

Seconded: Hamid Sharifzadeh

MOTION CARRIED

Quorate Status

A minimum of seven representatives is required; the meeting was quorate.

Hunga Mahi | Staff in Attendance

1. Brenda Massey, Acting Secretary
2. Hadley Brown, Tūāpapa Rangahau

Item 2.2 Pitopito Kōrero o Ngā Hui | Minutes of Previous Meeting

MOTION

That the committee approves the minutes of the 2024-03-14 meeting as a true and accurate record.

Moved: Kristie Cameron

Seconded: Khaled Ibrahim

MOTION CARRIED

Item 2.3 Mahia Atu | Matters Arising

The chair warmly welcomed proxy committee members Laura Sawyer (for Nora Md Amin) and Rokosiga Morrison (for Daisy Bentley-Gray), and Hadley Brown from Tūāpapa Rangahau. Hadley will be chairing committee meetings going forward in order to support Marcus Williams who has reduced his Unitec FTE. Marcus Williams may attend future meetings, or parts of future meetings, if and as required.

Agenda Item(s)	Action	Responsible	Outcome
5.1	Review and update the Conference Seed Funding Guidelines to ensure it is clear that the funding is intended to help host conferences, but that it is expected that the seed funding will be recovered after the conference, if it is successful, and that the point of contact to assist convenors to prepare seed funding applications and business cases is Gregor Steinhorn.	Brenda Massey/ Marcus Williams	Complete

	Ask Research Partner Penny Thomson to table the Conference Seed Funding memo and updated guidelines at the next Research Leaders Hui.	Brenda Massey	Complete
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SECTION 3 – MEA HEI WHAKAAE | ITEMS TO APPROVE

There were no items to approve this month.

SECTION 4 - WHAKAWHITI KŌRERO | ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

There were no items scheduled for discussion.

SECTION 5 - NGĀ TUKUNGA | ITEMS TO RECEIVE

Section 5.1 University and Science Advisory Groups and PBRF Quality Evaluation 2026 Cancellation

A University Advisory Group (UAG) and a Science System Advisory Group (SSAG) have been set up, both chaired by Sir Professor Peter Gluckman. The UAG will provide advice on funding policy settings, including funding mechanisms (e.g., Endeavour and Marsden funding) and the PBRF. As a consequence, the PBRF Quality Evaluation (QE) 2026 will not take place.

A summary of the committee's ruminations, exploratory questions and discussion is as follows:

- The committee expressed concern that the ITP, PTE and wānanga sectors are not represented in the membership of either group.
- The establishment of the two advisory groups and the cancellation of the 2026 PBRF QE puts into question the work undertaken by the PBRF Sector Reference Group (SRG) and the feedback received as part of the public consultation on the 2026 PBRF QE.
- For the moment, PBRF funding will continue to be allocated to TEOs based on 2018 results, which is positive for Unitec. This funding will enable Tūāpapa Rangahau to continue to lobby for a robust research budget to deliver its various research support products.
- The SSAG will proceed in several phases with submissions sought during each phase. It is understood that both Te Pūkenga and Unitec/MIT will make submissions at the appropriate time.
- It would be concerning if the PBRF is discontinued for the ITP sector but not for the university sector. There could perhaps be a risk of this happening if there is no ITP representation on the advisory groups.
- It was posited that if a comprehensive review of science and innovation funding is occurring, that the way that vocational education research is funded would not be considered. If it was to be considered, then the question of "is PBRF the right type of process" would presumably be in the Terms of Reference (ToR). Some believe that the PBRF is not a suitable funding mechanism for vocational education providers, and a funding mechanism that is targeted specifically towards vocational education would be more appropriate.
- It was queried whether, had Te Pūkenga remained intact, it would perhaps have been more difficult for the ITP sector to be excluded from the discussion table.
- The Rangahau Research Forum passionately believes that the best of our research provides huge value for the communities and industries that we work alongside and from the

communities our students are drawn from. Where is that value being addressed in the review?

- It is shocking that 95% of PBRF funding is allocated to the university sector. The SSAG's ToR ask, "how can we strengthen and grow commercialisation pathways" and ITPs have strong connections with industry, yet there is no ITP representation on the UAG or SSAG. We could do what we do even better if we had a bigger slice of the PBRF. In addition, the PBRF review was a real opportunity to increase the presence of industry and community partnership in Unitec's PBRF portfolios, which in turn could have increased our performance.
- Arun Deo is part of the PBRF Managers Forum who met regularly throughout the SRG consultation. The cancellation of the PBRF seems to have taken the university sector as much by surprise as it did us. This seems to suggest that the agenda for change isn't being driven by the universities, rather it is a directive of the new government.
- Concern was expressed about the approach the government is taking to science and research in general. Several initiatives have already been cancelled, e.g., some funding schemes, the plan to turn Wellington into a 'science city' and the Te Ara Paerangi – Future Pathways science system reforms. Spending on science and research was supposed to increase in line with other OECD countries.
- It was queried, with the PBRF funding continuing based on our 2018 results, is this good news or not? What was our research performance likely to have been in 2026 compared to 2018? Would we be in a better position or not? Marcus Williams stated that what has been announced will give Unitec a few more years of relatively good revenue, at least compared to the rest of our sector. Unitec has had to contend with a massive and ongoing period of disruption, and we have lost many experienced and highly ranked researchers. However, restructures and redundancies have also hit the university sector and Unitec has had some new academics join bringing externally funded grants with them (a Marsden and two Catalysts for example). If the PBRF had run in 2026, the share of funding allocated through the QE measure to Te Pūkenga would have been fixed at 90% of the proportion allocated through the 2018 QE to ITPs until 2030 unless the level of research quality measured through the 2026 QE had indicated a higher share was warranted. Now with the PBRF being indefinitely postponed we don't know if this will still be the case, however in the meantime at least we do have the knowledge that we will have some guaranteed revenue until a new funding system is organised.
- The committee acknowledged the work of the PBRF Review Panel and the PBRF SRG who undertook such enormous pieces of work. It seems their work and recommendations are quite contrary to what we are speculating is happening here. It would be good to see a statement from the SRG about what is being proposed by the new advisory groups.
- It was questioned whether the status quo requiring staff with a 0.2FTE research time allocation to produce at least two QA outputs per year will remain. The Chair responded that Unitec has a relatively low bar around the production of research outputs which exists in order to ensure compliance around offering degrees. There is a higher bar for those who wish to have a greater chunk of resource. Those basic precepts won't change. In fact, the PBRF isn't referenced in the guidance for Unitec researchers. Instead, words are used such as "a person is performing at a level 'of a national assessment process'".
- It was acknowledged that New Zealand does need to do better in terms of commercialising its science. We invest quite a lot, and the return is not great. In addition, our science research and innovation funding ecology is labyrinthian and overlaps a lot. There is a need for rationalising it. It doesn't change the concerns around the focus or lack thereof on the type of research we valiantly do under very difficult circumstances. We could add a lot more value to society if we were better resourced.
- New Zealand has a huge problem in that there's not enough jobs for our domestic and international PhD graduates. A lot of graduates have to move abroad for work. New

Zealand's environment is not giving everyone who wants to produce research and work in research the space to do so. The government needs to do more in this space if it wants to invest in people.

- The sector is very dependent on government investment in research, as industry isn't generally investing in research in New Zealand. Most businesses in New Zealand are small to medium enterprises that aren't necessarily in a position to invest in R&D. For example, our manufacturing industries are very small compared to some of the bigger economies. How we solve that problem is part of the bigger picture the advisory groups have been tasked with addressing.

The Chair thanked the committee for their ideas and valuable thoughts and reflected that this would be a useful discussion to share with Prof Martin Carroll, DCE Academic.

Action: Brenda Massey to draft a memo summarising the committee's feedback as above for Marcus Williams to send to Martin Carroll.

Section 5.2 **2023 ECR Contestable Funding Final Reports**

The committee received final reports from three of the five recipients of 2023 Early Career Researcher (ECR) Funding.

Dr Mary Yan: the committee commended Mary on her very structured approach to research. Her aims, research design and deliverables are all framed in a way that makes them highly achievable. It is great to see Mary strategically collaborating with organisations that are better resourced than our own, enabling her to do this work. Mary makes modest requests for small amounts of money, but they are for significant projects resulting in publication in quality journals and Mary is building up a valuable portfolio for herself as a non-teaching academic. Mary has helped to carve the non-degree teaching research path and is an exemplarily exemplar of this.

Dr Caralyn Kemp: the committee congratulated Caralyn on getting as far as she has under difficult circumstances and encouraged her to continue. The committee is keen to encourage research with a long-term focus, and commended Caralyn on the ongoing nature of her project.

It was noted that Caralyn was unsure whether she will present/discuss her research with the local board. It is incredibly important that she pursues this, and the committee urges Caralyn to press hard here. Our educational claim in this space is our partnership with community and industry. The most important part of what Caralyn's doing is what she's doing with community/industry, in this case it's local body authorities. If Caralyn needs help in this space, she should reach out to her research partner. The committee acknowledges that external engagement is difficult, but it's so important.

Caralyn and Kristie Cameron both presented at the CANZ conference a couple of weeks ago. Caralyn received a lot of interest from the industry people who were at the conference. It will be important that Caralyn connects with those CANZ networks she made. Their buy-in will add motivation and credibility when it comes time to talk to the local board.

Our ECRs should be encouraged, if circumstances change and different community or industry partners present themselves, to pursue these. If Caralyn isn't receiving buy-in from the local board, but another stakeholder is showing interest, then that should be progressed. Flexible thinking is required! Look at the focus of the groups that have shown an interest, and then present or position your information in a different way for them.

It is exciting to see student involvement in the project (four undergraduate students were involved).

Madhu Sudan: the committee was disappointed that the report was not submitted on the template that was provided. The other two projects haven't been completed yet either, but the final report template provides provocations for researchers to present the reasons behind this. Other prompts in the final report template have also not been responded to as a consequence. Madhu will need to be requested to submit a final report using the appropriate template at a later date.

The committee was unclear as to why the grant was so underspent. Again, provision of this information is prompted in the correct reporting template. The underspend has been lost from research, as budgets do not carry over from one year to the next. The underspend on this project could have supported other projects. It is unclear how the project will be completed without this funding, and as no internal funding has been sought in 2024.

Committee member Hamid Sharifzadeh is involved in Madhu's project and provided some additional context for the committee. Madhu is a very active, hardworking, and ambitious researcher. He is wrangling research collaborators from across the globe (including China and the US), bringing these teams together to progress the project. He is also working across schools, including with the School of Computing. It is a challenging space, particularly as Madhu is also working in Mercy Radiology and as a Senior Lecturer in Medical Imaging, as well as trying to develop an application for Catalyst/HRC funding, which again requires substantial input from international collaborators.

In the context of the ambition that Madhu's taken on (commendable as it is), in the future he might need to be more realistic on what can be achieved within a 12-month period. He should perhaps think about applying for funding of a capacity that could help take some of the workload burden off him, either by removing some teaching responsibility or by employing a higher level of support. Rather than a research assistant, a research associate could help wrangle the international partners and/or assist with some of the higher-level things Madhu's trying to do.

Action: Brenda Massey to draft letters to the three report writers thanking and acknowledging them for their reports and mahi and encapsulating the committee's feedback as above.

Action: Brenda Massey to liaise with the PIs of the other two 2023 ECR funded projects to obtain their final reports.

SECTION 6 - KUPU WHAKAMUTUNGA | CLOSING

Section 6.1 **Ētahi Kaupapa Anō | Any Other Business**

Tanya White said a mihi to Tūāpapa Rangahau for their support of kaupapa Māori and applied research at Unitec to do with the taiao and wāhi tapu at Te Noho Kotahitanga Marae, namely Te Puna, Te Wai Unuroa O Wairaka and the pā harakeke. The late Mel Galbraith discovered that inanga (whitebait) are present from the intersection at Te Auaunga (Oakley Creek) to the top of the puna. We also know that tuna (eel) will leave the puna, swim down Te Auaunga into the Waitemata then spawn somewhere around Tonga. Their mokopuna later, somehow, find their way back to te puna. This is just one example of our applied research and the ways in which we enact tikanga in our methodology and our methods of data collection.

Our work as teachers and researchers has a similar ripple effect. Our students leave Unitec and then deliver value back into the communities that they come from.

Section 6.2 **Komiti Self-Assessment**

An opportunity was given for the committee to reflect on their self-assessment provocations. The committee is reminded that feedback on any aspect of the committee's operation can be emailed to the Chair or the Secretary at any time (in confidence if requested).

Section 6.3 **Karakia Whakamutunga | Closing Karakia**

MEETING CLOSED: 1415 h

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

Agenda Item(s)	Action	Responsible	Outcome
5.1	Draft a memo summarising the committee's feedback on the cancellation of the PBRF 2026 QE and the establishment of the University and Science Advisory Groups for Marcus Williams to send to Martin Carroll.	Brenda Massey / Marcus Williams	
5.2	Draft letters to the three 2023 ECR funding report writers thanking and acknowledging them for their reports and mahi and encapsulating the committee's feedback on them. Liaise with the PIs of the other two 2023 ECR funded projects to obtain their final reports.	Brenda Massey / Marcus Williams Brenda Massey	