



minutes

Te Komiti Rangahau o Unitec | Unitec Research Committee

Date:	2024-05-09
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. It was good to have student representation on the committee today, with Irene Wu joining the meeting as Acting Student Rep.

SECTION 2 – STANDING ITEMS

Item 2.1 Ngā Whakapāha | Attendance, Apologies & Quorate Status

Members Present

1. Hadley Brown (Chair)
2. Tanya White
3. Arun Deo (until 2.20pm)
4. Nora Md Amin
5. Daisy Bentley-Gray
6. Kristie Cameron
7. Helen Gremillion
8. Leon Tan
9. Hamid Sharifzadeh
10. Irene Wu
11. Kahlid Ibrahim (from 1.40pm)

Total members represented: 11 members

Apologies

1. Yusef Patel
2. Lian Wu
3. Kambiz Borna

Total apologies:

3 members

MOTION

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

Moved: Daisy Bentley-Gray

Seconded: Helen Gremillion

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

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

MOTION

That the committee approves the minutes of the 2024-04-11 meeting as a true and accurate record.

Moved: Kristie Cameron

Seconded: Leon Tan

MOTION CARRIED

Item 2.3 Mahia Atū | Matters Arising

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	Complete
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	Complete One of the two reports was presented to the committee today (item 5.1 refers). The other awardee no longer works at Unitec and did not furnish a report

			before they left.
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SECTION 3 – MEA HEI WHAKAAE | ITEMS TO APPROVE

There were no items to approve this month.

SECTION 4 - WHAKAWHITI KÖRERO | ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Section 4.1 IT Policy Changes Impacting on Research

Leon Tan introduced a paper to provide information to the committee on recent changes to Unitec's IT policy that are impacting negatively on research activities in the School of Creative Industries and to ascertain whether these changes are impacting other schools.

Creative Industries are finding that it has become increasingly difficult to instal and utilise non-standard software that's not part of the Unitec mandated suite such as Teams and MS Office. Many staff in Creative Industries rely on a range of non-standard software for both teaching and research purposes, e.g., some staff recently went through the approval process to purchase a piece of projection mapping software for a public event they're doing for Matariki – projecting animations onto the exterior of Te Noho Kotahitanga. Leon co-edits an American journal, so he utilises Dropbox and Signals to communicate with the rest of the journal team. It is time-consuming having to approach IT every time staff want to instal software or software updates. It can happen that software stops working if you miss three or four updates.

In conversation with some of the IT technicians, it seems that there will soon be further tightening of the IT Policy, for example in the form of audits of Unitec devices, with staff being asked to justify every single piece of software that's been installed that's non-standard. This is a concern. The existing IT Policy is clear that IT is there to support teaching and research and collaborative activities around those things. Specifically in Section 1.1 of the Electronic Devices and Systems Policy ("Policy Purpose") it is stated that:

- The policy supports Unitec's strategic plan by...
 - Supporting innovation in teaching and learning.
- The purpose of providing staff and student's access to electronic devices and systems is to...
 - Foster collaboration and communities of practice in teaching, learning and research - internally, nationally and internationally.
 - Enable access to information and resources that staff and students need to complete their work or study.

It is not felt that the current IT service scenario is really keeping to that policy.

Leon asked if others are experiencing similar issues and/or if the committee might consider providing feedback to IT and/or Academic Committee on ideally the need for IT to continue supporting teaching and research and our ability to utilise non-standard software where it's relevant.

The School of Computing has also been experiencing issues. A few meetings were had with IT and the impression was that, with the establishment of Te Pūkenga, Unitec policies needed to be consistent with the policies and procedures of other business divisions. However, now we're devolving back to a regional model, that rationale no longer holds up.

Computing has capstone students and research students who are affected. There are many new technologies in computing that require the installation of software for education and research purposes. It is time consuming to continually have to engage with IT approval processes, particularly as things are so disrupted at Unitec currently. The school did trial some workarounds, e.g., setting up some test computers that will test and run new software. One of the labs has some computers that aren't managed by IT, as they aren't connected to the Unitec network. These initiatives did not prove to be very satisfactory solutions, so the school pushed further and an 'exceptional process' was established. Through that exceptional process, staff can request up to six months or 12 months of access to non-standard software. However, permission is only granted for a limited time and the approval process is laborious and staff found this frustrating. It also seemed that IT were not overly comfortable with granting exemptions, even though it was suggested as a workaround. The exemption process therefore hasn't been used since mid-last year.

The school does have some computers in capstone if students need them, and they also have some laptops which are used specifically for research. If computers aren't connected to the Unitec network, IT appears to be happy with this, and in fact this is an option if you do not need to be connected to the network for reasons such as printing out documents.

The Library hosts referencing management software and is also struggling with an inability to update the software due to the controls effected by IT.

Leon added that once or twice a week there might be an update for an app, and every single time the school has to go through an approval chain that then results in a technician having to literally come to a device and type in a password to enable the update to be made. It seems a bit overboard, notwithstanding the security concerns which are understandable, we are only talking about very basic software.

While the issues discussed weren't seen as being as relevant or pressing by some of the other schools, the committee did sympathise with the difficulties being encountered by the School of Creative Industries and the School of Computing.

It was queried whether the situation could be an example of institutional obstructivism where there's unreasonable guardrails in place, or whether in fact restrictions have been put in place for good reason. If they are in place for good reason, then has IT identified what those reasons are? Has there been use and abuse, e.g., software being installed that has compromised the network? Is there a legitimate concern that we need to be worried about?

Hamid Sharifzadeh responded that IT will have a good reason: security and the need to protect the network and Unitec resources. It is common practice across companies to have good IT security in place. When you have a company device then the software will be managed by their IT team and then you can't just instal anything you want. While it is important to have policies and procedures in place, at the same time, they can create a lot of issues for their people. There needs to be a balance. It is so important to have timely software available, especially for teaching and research endeavours, and if the process for approvals becomes overly protracted it obviously effects the ability for us to function.

Unitec has still got the overhang of Te Pūkenga and its bureaucratic policies and we're now in the process of trying to disentangle from that. This could be a good opportunity for us to advocate to IT and also to Academic Committee for a revisit of this particular policy. It would strengthen our position if we can give some very specific examples of how the policy is affecting academic endeavour, particularly in the teaching and research space. To this end, some good examples have been provided today. Often what happens with central services at Unitec is, if there's a single incident, there sometimes can be a bit of an overreaction with controls. We also have to posit, in any feedback to IT, is the policy change reasonable? What were the causes of its activation?

Leon indicated that he is happy to contribute some time towards a submission to IT and Academic Committee.

Action: Brenda Massey to summarise the committee's discussion and circulate it to the committee, requesting any additional input, particularly in the form of specific examples where IT policy and procedures are hindering teaching and research endeavours. This will inform a submission to IT and Academic Committee, led by Leon Tan.

Section 4.2 **Emerging Researcher Start Up Fund**

The committee received and provided feedback on the application form and guidelines for the Emerging Researcher Start Up Fund as follows:

- The committee sees the new fund as an excellent and timely initiative. It is good to have a mechanism with a fast turnaround between application and decision. The guidelines state that the fund is intended to get staff started on something they are interested in. It is flexible, intended to activate interest in research, so it's pretty open ended which is good.
- It would be good to include with the definition of an emerging researcher that it includes anyone engaged in research activity up to a level of early career researcher. It could be useful to include the definition of an early career researcher, to clarify that this fund is for anyone 'pre' early career in order that there isn't any confusion about when an emerging researcher crosses over into becoming an early career researcher, at which point there are a number of other funding products for which they become eligible for.
- It was suggested that the maximum grant could be increased a little. \$500 doesn't go very far. Maybe \$750 or \$1,000 might be better?
- It was queried what the fund can be used for specifically. Is it possible to include some examples of what will and won't be funded? Is it clear enough that funding can't be used for dissemination? Because we have separate devolved dissemination funding around which there is a layered process of approvals.
- Kristie Cameron commented that an applicant from EAS has been allocated funding and will be using it for equipment.
- Dissemination funding excludes certain activities around the production of research and for some fields, sometimes equipment or software could be what's required as a first step towards having something to actually disseminate.

Action: Brenda Massey to provide the committee's feedback to Marcus Williams, Director Research and Enterprise.

Section 4.3

Science System Advisory Group: Submissions Sought for Phase 1

The committee was presented with the questions the Science System Advisory Group (SSAG) is seeking submissions on. Jamie Smiler, National Research Director, Te Pūkenga, is organising a group response to the SSAG's request for submissions.

The University Advisory Group (UAG) is also undertaking a consultation that will consider the role of universities in New Zealand. Jamie is keen to receive feedback from the URC on the UAG's consultation, however the submission questions were released after the agenda for this meeting had been circulated and submissions are due ahead of the committee's next meeting. Tūāpapa Rangahau will circulate the consultation questions to the committee in the coming days and, subject to committee members' availability, will convene a meeting to gather feedback on the submission questions.

The Chair directed the committee to focus specifically on those questions that have an impact on vocational education and training. The questions are broad and would need more time devoted to them than is available today.

A summary of the Unitec Research Committee's ruminations and discussion on the SSAG consultation is as follows:

1. Membership of the SSAG consists mainly of industry leaders and university professors. It is lamentable that the ITP sector is not represented.
2. Unitec has historically received the greatest percentage of PBRF funding that is allocated to the ITP sector, and it would be hoped that this would lend credibility to our thoughts on how research should be resourced and supported.
3. Both the SSAG and UAG are led by Professor Sir Peter Gluckman. While the two groups are operating separately, sharing a chair will allow for connections to be made between the two systems where appropriate, and that is a good thing.
4. The list of questions is quite overwhelming and very broad brush, although it is acknowledged that the sub-questions are prompts to define the scope of the headline questions. All we can do today is keep our conversation very high level around themes. It is hoped that further opportunities will be offered to provide specific and targeted feedback. It will be easier to provide feedback when we have an actual change proposal in front of us.
5. It is acknowledged that Jamie Smiler is a very strong advocate for research, however with Te Pūkenga in the process of being disestablished, will a Te Pūkenga response to the SSAG's consultation hold any weight? Perhaps in addition to contributing to a Te Pūkenga response, Unitec should make its own submission?

Question set 1 – The Science, Innovation and Technology System.

1. *What future should be envisaged for a publicly supported science, innovation and technology system?*
 - That's a huge question. Firstly, what is the definition of science? There needs to be a definition that includes 'sub-categories' of science. Because if you look later under question set 4, the humanities and social sciences are mentioned. Science in the context of this question set seems to really mean research rather than what some might understand science to be. Sometimes terms such as 'science, innovation and technology' can sound exclusive to STEM. Science must be all-inclusive, especially as the social sciences are one of many areas of research that are typically not as well funded as the 'hard sciences'.

2. *What are the opportunities, challenges and barriers that need to be addressed to build a more thriving research, science, innovation, and technology system that delivers positive sustainable growth and prosperity for New Zealand?*

- This question appears to be quite focused on economic growth, but what about more holistic outcomes such as wellbeing? Prosperity implies wealth, but we don't know whether that wealth is social wealth or material wealth.
- There are some key words in social science that we don't see here, e.g., inequality and social justice.
- The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a shared blueprint for prosperity for people and the planet. They recognise that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests. The SSAG should consider the SDGs in the context of 'prosperity'.
- The SDGs are important to Pacific peoples, particularly the goals around gender equality, elimination of poverty and ensuring everyone has access to education. They could be part of what we look at in terms of research opportunities and partnering with Pacific countries as well. They could inform what a Pacific research strategy might look like (7.f.).
- Equity is a good term to include in our response, for example when opportunities become available to Pacific researchers, Pacific researchers in ITPs are often excluded, with grants being awarded to Pacific researchers only in universities. The research landscape needs to be equitable for all researchers, and there should be measures to ensure a fair system for all researchers, whether they are Māori, Pacific or others. Everyone should have the same access to funding with no one favoured simply because they work at a university or a CRI.
- One of the opportunities and challenges is to recognise the legitimacy of Indigenous science and knowledge, including Mātauranga Māori (MM). If we decouple hard science from what we call soft science, and even the humanities, we get a much poorer outcome.
- Another opportunity is the applied nature of the research we conduct at Unitec, which is informed by direct community and industry interactions. We often provide solutions in real time that are practical and implementable and economically efficient. Yet at this point in time, we've been left off the advisory group table. We occupy a niche, providing a type of research that is very different from what the universities provide.

3. *What principles should underpin the design of a science, innovation, and technology system for New Zealand, given its demographic composition and distinctive cultural makeup, its geographical position, and its social, environmental and economic futures?*

- A thorough and rigorous piece of work was undertaken in preparation for the upcoming (now cancelled) PBRF round to redefine research. Te Tiriti and Indigenous epistemologies were front and centre in those considerations. A huge amount of work has been summarily put aside in the cancellation of the PBRF. Why does the SSAG not use it to inform their mahi?
- A set of research definitions, QA definitions and guidelines is also being circulated by NZQA. NZQA monitors and approves our programmes, so their guidance should also be considered by the SSAG.

Question set 4 – Contestable Research

- The SSAG should consider prioritising applied research for research investment. Unitec's unique offering, as articulated in our Research Strategy, is research with an applied and practical focus, and our strong relationships with iwi, hapū, community and industry. Support for applied research would be helpful to so many other things that have been discussed above in terms of making innovation more relevant to societies, providing more opportunities, social equity etc. The emphasis on iwi, hapū *and* community is important. If you think of applied research only in terms of industry, then there could easily be a focus limited to meeting economic imperatives as defined by competitive business enterprises. Whereas community interests often speak to priorities that are quite different to neo-liberal discourses that would be operating in business.
- Unitec is unique in its ability to mobilise students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels to be involved in research that connects directly with community participants. This is important for impact, but it also develops students' sense of self belonging and serves to build their skills towards a future career in research at an earlier age than the universities may be able to provide.
- The role of Kaupapa Māori (KM) research and its ability to engage communities and have real time benefits needs to be acknowledged and emphasised. KM research methodologies are grounded in MM. With KM research, as the research is conducted the benefits flow immediately into the community, either at iwi or hapū or whānau levels. Impacts for the community is a big part of KM research. Dr Jenny Lee-Morgan speaks of her pūrākau methodologies as being her koha back to communities.
- "Rationalising" (7.b.) usually means 'reducing' something. Currently, compared to other OECD countries, Aotearoa is investing less into science and research. Further reduction of investment would be a disaster. We are already lagging behind other countries.
- The funding envelope available for research is very small, and some economic commentators have posited that New Zealand's productivity will fall further behind if we don't change our mindset from passive investment into residential housing into things like research and innovation.

7.j. How should the balance of research investment extend across from the humanities, social sciences, health sciences life sciences, physical sciences and earth sciences?

- A specific response to this question is quite important, considering Unitec's unique perspective. The question is a little bit leading. It seems to be asking 'are all of these disciplines equally important or are some more important than others'?
- What is the intention behind this question? It is hoped that it is not because budgets are going to be cut and invested in places that are not going to be fair to all researchers.
- If New Zealand wants to improve research quality in general, we need to be encouraging and facilitating interdisciplinary research. Many researchers are currently working in silos. We are already in a geographical silo, as we're far away from other parts of the world. In Europe, lots of countries are working together. The interdisciplinary approach is very important. The SSAG could look at models like the Scandinavian countries. New Zealand is a remote with a small population. Scandinavian countries are similarly challenged, but they are collaborating, especially in areas around technology. This is enabling them to attract top talent from around the world.

Action: Hadley Brown/Brenda Massey to circulate the consultation questions to the committee in the coming days and, subject to committee members' availability, convene a meeting to gather feedback on the submission questions.

Action: Hadley Brown/Brenda Massey to collate and disseminate the URC's feedback on the SSAG consultation to Jamie Smiler, National Research Director, Te Pūkenga before COB tomorrow.

SECTION 5 - NGĀ TUKUNGA | ITEMS TO RECEIVE

Section 5.1 **2023 ECR Contestable Funding Final Report**

The committee received a final report from Dr Sarah Wells, a recipient of 2023 Early Career Researcher (ECR) Funding.

The committee commented that the report was very comprehensive. It is clear that work is still in progress, but this was well explained and revised milestone dates had been clearly articulated. It was noted from the final financial reconciliation that there was a slight overspend, however the committee was pleased to see that the overspend had the prior approval of Tūāpapa Rangahau.

Some of the milestones have been pushed into 2026, and the committee queried whether this was acceptable. Brenda Massey advised that, particularly for projects that involve seasonal fieldwork that can be delayed by permitting, weather and pandemics, projects do not have to be completed in the year for which funding was allocated. However, allocated funds don't roll over from the year they were granted into the next or subsequent years. Tūāpapa Rangahau is very clear about this to applicants. In this case Sarah was strategic in terms of making sure she spent the grant during the period it was available, in some cases buying materials in advance when she won't be using them until later.

Action: Brenda Massey to draft a letter thanking and acknowledging Sarah for her report and encapsulating the committee's feedback as above.

SECTION 6 - KUPU WHAKAMUTUNGA | CLOSING

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

N/A

Section 6.2 **Komiti Self-Assessment**

An opportunity was given for the committee to reflect on their self-assessment provocations. The committee was 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).

The committee congratulated Hadley on having successfully chaired his first meeting. It was an enjoyable and lively meeting. Hadley responded that he enjoyed the kōrero, and acknowledged that he has big shoes to fill. While the committee misses Marcus, it is good to know that he is still very

much the Director of Research and Enterprise. He has had to pull away from some of his duties due to his reduced FTE, and the chairing of this meeting is one of those duties.

Hadley thanked the Committee Secretary for her support, and the committee for the collegiality that was shown today.

Section 6.3 **Karakia Whakamutunga | Closing Karakia**

MEETING CLOSED: 1430 h

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

Agenda Item(s)	Action	Responsible	Outcome
4.1	Summarise the committee's discussion on the difficulties Unitec's IT policies and procedures are posing to teaching and research endeavours. Circulate the discussion document to the committee, requesting any additional input, particularly in the form of specific examples. Use the committee's feedback to inform a submission to IT and Academic Committee.	Brenda Massey / All Leon Tan	
4.2	Provide the committee's feedback on the new Emerging Researcher Start Up Fund to Marcus Williams.	Brenda Massey	
4.3	Circulate the UAG consultation questions to the committee in the coming days and, subject to committee members' availability, convene a meeting to gather feedback on the submission questions. Collate and disseminate the URC's feedback on the SSAG consultation to Jamie Smiler, National Research Director, Te Pūkenga, before COB Fri, 10 May.	Hadley Brown / Brenda Massey Brenda Massey / Hadley Brown	
5.1	Draft a letter for Marcus Williams to send to Dr Sarah Wells thanking her for her ECR final report and encapsulating the committee's feedback on it.	Brenda Massey	