

Te Ara Paerangi Future Pathways Green Paper 2021/22

Response from the Sociological Association of Aotearoa New Zealand (SAANZ)

Overall:

SAANZ is a non-profit association whose members include academics, social researchers, public and private sector workers, and postgraduate and undergraduate students, working in the disciplinary area of sociology, social policy, and applied social sciences. SAANZ aims to further sociology in Aotearoa New Zealand, to provide a network for NZ sociologists, to further links with other sociological associations, and to address issues of relevance to NZ sociologists. It is a ‘collective member’ of the International Sociological Association (ISA), maintains reciprocal arrangements with its Australian counterpart, TASA, and is a Constituent Organisation of the Royal Society of New Zealand (RSNZ). It has 152 paid members (64 Waged, 4 Unwaged, 58 Postgraduates and 26 Undergraduates) and is one of the key organisations that give voice to social scientific researchers in Aotearoa New Zealand.

SAANZ supports the consultation and review process that is taking place and we appreciate the opportunity to respond and clarify some of the effects of prior government funding regimes and infrastructure on the provision of the kinds of social scientific research that will be fundamental to meeting our compelling challenges as a society.

The tone and broad intentions of the Green Paper are laudable – particularly the desire to move beyond ‘market- and industry-led’ research priority setting – towards a more transformational agenda to meet our major societal challenges. New Zealand’s research system is known to be underfunded compared with those of our OECD peers and this is particularly true of social scientific research. Furthermore, social scientific research in the major MBIE funding competitions is disproportionately awarded as a ‘clip-on’ to other priorities, and there is a significant lack of attention to some of the fundamental social and economic dynamics (e.g. housing affordability, child poverty, income inequality, climate change adaptation, the future of work) that are forming key areas of crisis for contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand.

In such a situation, our research ecosystem cannot be expected to deliver more value and bring in broader foci without further investment. If the proposed revisions to our research system are to achieve the desired transformational change, the Government will need to match funding to aspirations, in particular in relation to social scientific funding around addressing entrenched social and economic inequality, embracing Mātauranga Māori and Te Tiriti-based approaches, and understanding the implications of future transitions for all groups in society.

Consequently, SAANZ strongly supports the Government’s goal of raising national research and development expenditure to 2 per cent of gross domestic product as a minimum action

that should lead rather than follow the tranche of other laudable and desirable reforms that will follow from this consultation process.

1. Ngā Whakaarotau Rangahau: Research Priorities

The current mechanisms for determining research priorities in major government-funded research competitions is outdated and entirely unfit-for-purpose.

In particular, there is an urgent need to move beyond BAU in a research ecosystem that was designed when ‘market-led’, ‘industry-led’ and ‘efficiency through competition’ rationalities were dominating policy thinking. This approach has failed on a number of levels and, as signalled in Figure 2 of the Green Paper (Three Frames in Innovation Policy), there is an urgent need to move from Frame Two (systems designed for maximal sectoral and industry guidance for research priorities) to Frame Three (Transformative Change to Address Grand Challenges).

Figure 2: Three frames in innovation policy

Framing	Key features	Policy rationale	Policy approaches (examples)
Science and technology for growth (since 1950s)	Linear innovation model, driven by R&D (research and development)	Addressing market failures (firms invest insufficiently in R&D because of public good character of innovation)	State financing of R&D; subsidies or tax incentives for business R&D
National and sectoral systems of innovation for improved competitiveness (since 1980s)	Focus on knowledge flows between upstream actors (universities, firms, agencies)	Responding to system failures, e.g. improving linkages between actors, addressing institutional problems (in laws, property rights, regulations)	Promoting science hubs and science-industry collaboration; education and training; cluster policies
Transformative change to address grand challenges (since 2010s)	Nurture radical innovation and new pathways; shape directionality of innovation	Promote system transformation, which incumbent actors are slow or reluctant to do	Missions and goals (SDGs, climate targets), assisting new entrants, creating transformative coalitions, learning, experimentation

Source: European Commission. (2020). Science, Research and Innovation Performance of the EU 2020. page 575.

2. Te Tiriti, Mātauranga Māori me Ngā Wawatao Te Māori: Te Tiriti, Mātauranga Māori and Māori Aspirations

The revisioning and aspiration to bring Te Tiriti and Mātauranga Māori more centrally into the research ecosystem in Aotearoa New Zealand is an exciting element of the agenda set out in the Green Paper. SAANZ endorses these aspirations in the strongest possible terms.

SAANZ also notes that sometimes aspirations in these areas are hard to implement in the face of entrenched groups and institutions that have benefitted from prior research priorities and systems which marginalised both Māori and Pacific research priorities and capabilities. SAANZ stands as one organisation that is wholly committed to these kinds of transformation and would look forward to working with government to enact these kinds of changes.

3. Te Tuku Pūtea: Funding

The research funding system in New Zealand has been strongly slanted towards specific disciplinary areas (particularly STEM) and/or instrumental research to serve the immediate needs of industry and sectoral groups. This has created an imbalance in funding that is not addressing key areas of social change and crisis in Aotearoa New Zealand, and has resulted in a lack of capacity in the social sciences to make a sustained contribution to the kinds of trans-disciplinary research that is needed to deliver transformational research.

The historical origins of this imbalance came about in the 1990s. In the initial restructuring of the research system in 1992, there was a clear venue for fundamental research to take place through the Social Research and Development (SR&D) CRI, which administered what had previously been the Social Science Research Fund. These were both eliminated in 1995 and no specific social scientific funding competition was retained. This has resulted in a failure to build the kinds of datasets and longitudinal research insights that were urgently needed in the context of a rapidly widening set of inequalities and in preparation to face future crises in Aotearoa New Zealand.

SAANZ recommends that funding competitions be restructured:

- Significantly increase the level of funding to the Marsden Fund.
- Re-institute the Social Science Research Fund.
- Or, alternatively, create funding competitions around 'blue skies' and 'applied social science' under the aegis of a new national funding agency.

4. Ngā Hinonga: Institutions

The dis-establishment of the Social Research and Development CRI in 1995 created a major weakness in the research ecosystem in New Zealand and placed us out of step with most comparable OECD countries. This has resulted in the loss of significant research capacity, and an over-burdening of either: 1) Government Dept/Ministry contracts and consultancies on research into areas of specific policy interest, and 2) University, Polytech and Wānanga funding through Vote Education to resource individual researchers to try to undertake the kinds of longitudinal and broad social and economic evaluation that has been urgently needed to address some of our most compelling social and economic concerns.

There is a need to resource and rebuild 'middle ground' capabilities in the social sciences, which might be achieved through the re-establishment (and proper resourcing) of the Social Research and Development CRI, or the creation of strong social science capabilities within a suite of new organisations seeking to deliver transformational research challenges.

5. Te Hunga Mahi Rangahau: Research Workforce

SAANZ considers this to be an area of very high priority. Research workforce development in the social sciences has been strongly oriented towards bringing through cohorts of postgraduate students who then don't have suitable opportunities and pathways to enter professional work.

SAANZ strongly advocates for:

- A return to the general Post-Doctoral Fellowship scheme which was cancelled a decade ago. This was a vital area of capability development for the social sciences.
- Removal of overheads from Post-Doctoral positions in research applications to make Post-Docs relatively more financially viable than PhD and Masters Scholarships in funded research. The current situation is resulting in a significant imbalance of funded postgraduate students versus Post-Docs.
- Addressing the value of social scientific SAC funding per student EFT to increase the resourcing of University, Polytech and Wānanga training of social science students, which would allow for greater resourcing for secondments and internships as a fundamental aspect of student learning in social science subjects.

6. Te Hangahanga Rangahau: Research Infrastructure

SAANZ broadly supports the recommendations of Universities New Zealand on the desirability that large capital infrastructure is funded by government, perhaps via competitive rounds, and is accessible to all relevant researchers.

SAANZ would specifically recommend that national research priorities must include e-infrastructure requirements, as appropriate, including datasets, archives and other forms of digital research infrastructure that are vital to the future research contribution of the Social Sciences.

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