

**Submission by Victoria University of Wellington's Language in the Workplace team
Te Ara Paerangi Future Pathways Green Paper 2021**

As social science researchers there are many parts of the Green paper that speak to the heart of concerns we have with existing priorities and funding mechanisms. **We welcome debate that challenges the status quo and that gives space to areas of high quality and international strength that are currently unreasonably disadvantaged.** Changing the taken-for-granted practices has the potential to stem the 'brain drain' that we currently experience and has the potential to firm up a precarious workforce and rebalance some of the difficulties faced by New Zealand academics that prevent us being the most productive researchers.

We note keenly the discussions around the unhealthy and perverse competition that exists *across* institutions in a small market. **The proposal of base funding to remove this competition** and to encourage collaboration represents positive steps forward. Our concern, however, is that there needs to be a corresponding proposal to encourage the breakdown of competition *within* institutions. In a long-term context of scarcity of opportunity, the internal priorities reflect external priorities. This is normalised and unquestioned. **The priorities which so severely disadvantage us in competition for external funding are currently replicated at an extreme internally.** As scholars in the humanities and social sciences we are always in competition with other sciences. We cannot get to the starting line: our funding pools are smaller following false assumptions about the costs required to undertake research, and there is no time in our workloads for preparing grant applications, nor many sources to which we can apply. Our plight is likely to get worse not better if the hegemonies remain unchecked. While this is an issue for internal discussion and negotiation, it is worth emphasising since it is not confined to Victoria University of Wellington.

It is good to see **acknowledgement of people as central to research**, but this has been woefully under recognised in the past. In our field people are the paramount resource, and issues such as University overheads have made the cost of undertaking research unaffordable within the highly reduced limits assigned to our areas.

We are particularly interested in the desire to see **RSI as a sustainable workforce**. This has simply not been our experience. Attracting, developing and retaining talent is near impossible. New Zealand has an enormous reputation on the world stage in our area and we regularly train not only New Zealand's best, but also those who come from overseas to train with us. All this expertise leaves the country – without Postdoc funding and a stable research base our sought-after doctoral students leave for prestigious jobs at high level institutions, taking their talents with them (Hong Kong, Japan, the United Kingdom, Luxembourg, Australia, Ireland, Denmark, Germany have all benefited from the New Zealand investment represented by our experienced input, scholarly guidance, and extensive mentoring).

Our project offers a case study for how as researchers we have had to survive in spite of existing policies. We are the exemplification of a long running research programme that has existed without safety. As noted, **without guaranteed funding for longitudinal studies**, and for the collection and maintenance of the vital data that we have been able to collect, there have been many lost opportunities and a great deal of lost talent.

Our data is recognised and used by government agencies as being of international significance, but the research funding for this is never part of the priority schemes. Applying for the scarce funding that does exist takes valuable time that comes to the detriment of our wellbeing as academics (both personal and financial) as well as entailing a major loss of research time. This a prime example of

where **investment in infrastructure** would have made an enormous difference to our research capabilities. We are the world leaders who are multidisciplinary and multi-institutional as described in the paper, and yet we are consistently unfunded or underfunded and unrecognised in the current environment where funding priorities, application processes and limits on grant levels preclude us from beginning to compete.

The Language in the Workplace team's funding as exemplification:

We are a long-standing sociolinguistic research project investigating effective communication in New Zealand workplaces. Our research funding trajectory gives a stark illustration of the profound underfunding and detrimental priorities built into current models in terms of (lack of) support for high quality and impactful social research in New Zealand.

Preparation for the Language in the Workplace project began in 1996, and the former Director received external funding from the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology in 1997. On paper it looks like a stretch of stable funding followed until 2001 allowing for the building of solid foundations. In reality, the continuity belies constant uncertainty, multiple funding applications, in-depth monitoring processes, report writing and administration that detracted from achievement, in the process taking up hundreds of hours and being rendered invisible in workloads. Since then, another chunk of funding from Marsden's contestable sources (2006-2008) reignited possibilities, but again came from a small pool and required huge labour investments in application writing for inadequate return. We now find ourselves largely excluded from standard sources because of the funding limits that do not stretch to the salaries and overheads needed to enact research that is collaborative and detailed.

We are very ready to acknowledge that the external funding did establish practices, procedures, methods and pathways that have remained in place for 25 years, creating a pipeline of new and emerging researchers, many now well established. While a handful have found employment in linguistics in New Zealand, and others in cognate disciplines and in administration in the University, as noted above many have been forced to go further afield, taking their skills, training and potential offshore.

Outside the large external grants listed, we have survived hand to mouth. Of the three core members, only two have been employed as academic staff by the University. One retired in 2014, another took on a demanding administrative position from 2016-2020 significantly reducing research capacity. The third has extremely precarious employment which relies on small internal grants, government contracts, payment for workshops, honoraria for academic service (awarded to any of the team members) and has never exceeded more than \$5000 in any calendar year. Thus the only stable funding is the research time allocated within the workload of the current Director and the former Director before retirement, technically 0.4FTE but in practice squeezed around the edges of ever increasing teaching loads. The hours of time that go into securing these tiny sources of funding are simply absorbed into a workload which is already unsustainable.

We are greatly concerned, in particular, that we do not have any financial or resource support to archive our invaluable corpus (which has been labelled as a dataset of international significance by external reviewers of our programme, and which was also the rationale used by the Settlement Unit of the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment for contracting us to advise on the production of empirically-based resource development and ideas that underpin current government policy). Not only has this protection gone unsupported, but we have regularly been asked by university representatives to free up space and remove physical archives. As kaitiaki of taonga we have consistently refused and, with considerable difficulty, found a way to maintain the resources.

Lack of funding should not mean that we are pressured to destroy irreplaceable data donated to us by participants and collected, when funding has existed, using public money.

Despite this extreme lack of funding we enjoy an outstanding international reputation leading the field in terms of theory, method and analysis. The two team members employed as academic staff have both reached the rank of Professor and been awarded A rankings in PBRF rounds. We sit within a programme (currently of just 4 staff) that enjoys a QS ranking in the top 100. Across the team we have published hundreds of articles, 18 books, we present at least 10 times a year, often as invited international plenary speakers, and sit on advisory boards of international research teams who gain funding by being associated with us (ironic when in our own environment we are unsupported). We constantly attract international PhD students of the highest calibre and have guided hundreds of students through our research-based teaching.

This has come at an enormous cost to us personally and restricted the additional potential of our research. It is made worse when overseas scholars come on appropriately-funded research trips to meet us, to be mentored by us, and to become part of the Language in the Workplace world. Instead of finding the high-functioning lab full of productive academics and students that they assume we operate (from a distance), they find a group who have to fight for floor space to house a couple of filing cabinets and a tiny team who are constantly scrambling to support even the most basic business as usual activities.

Despite all of this, as vocational researchers we continue, knowing that we are impacting the lives of the most vulnerable people in the New Zealand workforce and that we are supported by advisors and stakeholders who are also donating their time for the cause.

At best this is embarrassing. In every sense it is exploitation.

Prof Meredith Marra (Director)

Em Prof Janet Holmes FRNZ (Former Director, Associate Director)

Dr Bernadette Vine (Senior Researcher and Corpus Manager)

14 March 2022