Te Ara Paerangi – Future Pathways Green Paper Submission

Thank-you for the opportunity to participate in this conversation about the future of New Zealand's research system. I look forward to next steps and possible solutions being presented for further discussion.

Research Priorities

Has MBIE considered adopting the United Nations Sustainable Developments Goals (SDGs) as a starting point or scope for national research priorities? [THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development (un.org)](un.org) This could provide necessary vision and international alignment to "create a coherent whole". Informed by the SDGs, focus could be on NZ context and upholding Te Tiriti.

The research ecosystem seems bogged down in here and now. It would be good to see more holistic, long-term, and intergenerational considerations as starting point and allow the sector (providers and users of research) to inform focus based on need, aspirations, and capability. It goes without saying that there needs to be a mix of investment types to ensure capability and capacity is maintained but also to allow for new capability to naturally evolve and avoid stifling free-thinking and blue skies research.

Funding

Base grant funding model

The treadmill of funding application cycles to secure research funding, provide employment certainty for staff and one's own salary makes a research career less than attractive. The idea of establishing a base grant is worth investigating and whether international examples are adaptable for the NZ context. One concern is that it is just another way to slice, dice, and compete for the current available funding and not offer anything new beyond an industry in of itself. In the next steps of this system review it would be good to be able to scrutinise a couple of examples.

Transactional stakeholder relationships

There is a pervading transactional view of relationships with research end-users and/or stakeholders, who are only considered in a tokenistic way when writing an application requiring stakeholder involvement, or when pushing out research results. Noting this is not the case across the board. Some researchers excel in this space recognising that stakeholders are critical partners for research to be relevant, for implementation and ultimately impact. There is a significant time investment to be weighed up when building and managing relationships along with other job obligations and responsibilities.

There is also a lack of stakeholder understanding of how researcher and research organisations work and even what research entails. An old-fashioned view in some industries is that researchers have plenty of time on their hands and are waiting to be called up to do research for free because researchers are already paid employees. Even views on how intellectual property may be handled are outdated.

Recent mission-led funding initiatives have required stakeholder involvement but it has been a blunt instrument to ensure collaboration with not enough time for genuine engagement. Some of these mechanisms are strongly influenced by either political cycle or timing around budget appropriation. There is a requirement for co-design but researchers and stakeholders are forced into a rigid timeline of milestone achievement and tick box reporting. The opportunity for dialogue, and building mutual understanding and trust are lost. This compromises relationships from the start and leads to long-term resentment. *Future initiatives need to consult the sector for an appropriate timeframe and resourcing to build relationships in advance of applications and resulting project/programme milestones.*

Institutions and Research Workforce

In order to "encourage greater dynamism and fluidity across different types of organisation" and address diversity and inclusion matters there needs to be a radical shift in thinking and incentives in the research system about what is a credible career path, recognition, and acceptance of alternative pathways.

In other sectors we see movement of people between different jobs, roles, and organisations. It appears that similar mobility is not as easy to achieve for researchers. In my own experience you are viewed with suspicion for wanting to move between different types of public and private sector organisations. You are asked why you want to leave an organisation rather than the point of difference you bring to an organisation.

A fellowship scheme that allowed and incentivised movement between organisations might help change the mobility culture, build stronger more informed connections, and it could also be geared to enable knowledge exchange. This needs to be more than an internship and not disadvantage a researcher in meeting career progression criteria.

A more flexible or holistic assessment of experience, excellence and potential is overdue for researchers who take parental leave or have significant family and community responsibilities. This and the previous point about recruitment may be considered institutional matters but the ecosystem incentivises and rewards a traditional pathway (and CV) where you qualify and progress, in a full-time capacity, to achieve a senior position and without time out for life duties. This coupled with unconscious bias means women, Māori, Pacific peoples, and differently abled people stand little chance to achieve equity unless addressed.

A good starting point would be an overhaul of the CV required for funding applications and awards followed up with a change in assessment guidelines for CVs/track record and

appropriate selection and training of assessors. Individual institutions also need to address internal professional development and review (and promotion) processes but a signal from the sector would speed this up.

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