



Association for Women in the Sciences: Submission to PBRF Review 2013

Submitted on behalf of AWIS by:

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This submission addresses Question 13 of the Consultation Document¹:

What are the benefits and risks for tertiary education organisations and teaching and research staff of removing the special circumstances provisions from the Quality Evaluation?

The Association for Women in the Sciences opposes the proposal to remove the provision for special circumstances. We believe that removing the provision for special circumstances will tend to disadvantage women, who are more likely to have taken extended periods of leave or to be working part-time due to family commitments.

It is AWIS' fear that should the special circumstances be removed, not only may women who have reduced research time allowance receive a lower PBRF grade, but institutions may make decisions based on the potential for staff to receive a low PBRF score due to parenthood or other family circumstances. Women may ultimately find it more difficult to take extended leave or work part-time in these circumstances or be less likely to be employed at all if it is perceived that there is a risk that they will lower a department's overall score.

Even though the special circumstances provision results in a change in quality category for only a small number of researchers, the quality category received makes a big difference to those individual researchers. If the PBRF Quality Evaluation is to be credible as a tool for ensuring that excellent research is encouraged and rewarded then it has to be seen to treat everyone fairly.

There are currently a number of different reasons special circumstances could be invoked - to explain why a researcher has fewer than four nominated research outputs, as stated on p66 of the *Performance-Based Research Fund Quality Evaluation Guidelines 2012*²; when the total number of outputs is less than the allowed maximum, as implied by the *Rationale for Change* on p20 of the *Consultation Document*³; or by anyone who has some special circumstance, irrespective of whether their output has been reduced. We recommend that the purpose of the special circumstances provision should therefore be clarified in this review.

We also recommend that how the special circumstances provision is applied should be clarified. For example, does working half-time imply that two nominated research outputs would be acceptable? The procedure adopted in the Research Excellence Framework⁴ (REF) in the United Kingdom could serve as a model in this respect.

There are no obvious benefits to tertiary education organisations in removing the special circumstances provision. The risks are that excellent researchers could be disadvantaged and potentially lost.

About AWIS www.awis.org.nz

The Association for Women in the Sciences, founded in 1985, has 100+ members throughout the New Zealand science system. The Association aims to encourage women to use and develop their scientific abilities and achieve their full potential through networking and providing visibility and support for girls and women with an interest in science.

¹ Review of the Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) Consultation Document
(<http://www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/TertiaryEducation/PolicyAndStrategy/~media/MinEdu/Files/EducationSectors/TertiaryEducation/PBRF/PBRFConsultationDocument.pdf>) p27

² Performance-Based Research Fund Quality Evaluation Guidelines May 2013
(<http://www.tec.govt.nz/Documents/Publications/PBRF-Quality-Evaluation-Guidelines-2012.pdf>) p66

³ Review of the Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) Consultation Document
(<http://www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/TertiaryEducation/PolicyAndStrategy/~media/MinEdu/Files/EducationSectors/TertiaryEducation/PBRF/PBRFConsultationDocument.pdf>) p20

⁴ REF2014: Panel Criteria and Working Methods
http://www.ref.ac.uk/media/ref/content/pub/panelcriteriaandworkingmethods/01_12.pdf pp9-10