



# Mid-term Review of the Centres of Research Excellence (CoREs)

## Guidelines for the conduct of Review Panel meetings

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## General information for Review Panel members

This document contains information about expectations for the conduct of individual members of the Review Panel. **These guidelines MUST be read in conjunction with the Terms of Reference for the Centres of Research Excellence (CoREs) mid-term review.** These guidelines are intended to facilitate the smooth operation of the Review Panel meetings. They are retained as a permanent record, as required by the Auditor-General, and are publicly available.

### 2017 Mid-term review of CoREs

The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) is responsible for administering the Centres of Research Excellence (CoREs). Currently, there are 10 CoREs all of which are funded until 2020. Some of the CoREs have been in existence since 2002/2003. Others have been funded in recent years.

All the 10 CoREs that are currently funded are to have a mid-term review. The TEC will undertake part of the review summarising each CoRE's progress against activities specified in their strategic/research plans. The Royal Society of New Zealand (the Society) has been contracted by the TEC to undertake the other part of the review by convening a panel of experts to act as a review committee to provide findings and reflective commentary to the TEC on both the progress the CoRE has made to date and on their future strategic direction.

There are three phases to the panel process:

- Firstly, panellists will receive a set of documents relating to each CoRE to read and evaluate which will include a self-assessment submission from the CoRE prepared to specifications set out by the Society and a report from the TEC on their assessment of the CoRE's progress.
- Secondly, the Panel will meet a representative(s) of each CoRE and be able to question them about the progress and future plans of the CoRE.
- Thirdly, the Panel will discuss and agree on the findings and reflective commentary to be included in a report to TEC on each CoRE.

### Process and timetable

Date	Activity
3 February 2017	Open call for nominations for members of the CoRE Fund Review Panel
10 February 2017	Appointment of Review Panel Chair is expected to be announced
17 February 2017	Request for review submission documents sent to CoREs
10 March 2017	Appointment of Review Panel members announced
1 May 2017	Submission documents from CoREs received
8 May 2017	Report on progress of CoREs received from TEC
18-19 May 2017	Review Panel meets to prepare for meetings with CoREs
22-26 May 2017	Review Panel meets with each CoRE
26-31 May 2017	Reports from Review Panel to TEC prepared

**Table 1.** Timetable for CoRE Fund Mid-term Review

## Role of the CoREs mid-term review Panel

The CoREs mid-term review Panel (the Panel) will act as an **assessment committee** and develop findings and commentary for the TEC on both the progress each CoRE has made and on their future strategic direction based on all the material at their disposal.

The panel will consist of a Chair and up to four other members and will include:

- Two highly regarded and experienced internationally renowned researchers;
- An experienced researcher with strong knowledge and understanding of best practice and implementation of the priorities of the Tertiary Education strategy; and
- An experienced researcher with strong knowledge of Mātauranga Māori and the Māori research context.

The Chair of the Panel will be responsible for the effective conduct of the assessment process and will ensure that the conclusions reached are defensible, by:

- ensuring that the assessment criteria are adhered to;
- ensuring that Panel members consider only the information that has been provided to them through the assessment process;
- identifying and taking appropriate action over conflicts of interest; and
- ensuring that information provided for feedback to the TEC is appropriate.

The Panel will have access to all information provided by the TEC and the CoREs. This will include the report from TEC on the assessment of the progress made by each CoRE and the written submission (self-review) provided by each CoRE.

## Scope of Review and Assessment Criteria

The panel will assess each CoRE and comment on whether that CoRE is performing in accordance with the Mission Statement, and will plausibly deliver against its outcomes. The review will address the following key questions:

Is the Panel satisfied that:

- the information provided by the research advisory groups shows that each CoRE continues to meet standards of research excellence?
- each CoRE continues to operate in a collaborative partnership?
- each CoRE continues to deliver benefits to New Zealand?
- each CoRE continues to engage with end-users and stakeholders?
- each CoRE is contributing to tertiary education outcomes?
- the CoRE demonstrates authority at a national and international level?

The Panel will develop a professional opinion as to whether:

- there is evidence of strong governance and management for each CoRE
- the activities completed by the CoRE to-date contributed to delivering against its outcomes
- there is confidence that the CoRE will plausibly deliver against its outcome statements

The review will exclude comparisons of the CoREs researchers and institutions, the New Zealand research system, or the Government's research policy. As such, the Panel will not make recommendations to:

- change the terms of the current contract;
- review or change the CoREs policy framework;
- change the quantum of CoREs funding received by individual CoREs;
- reselect or de-select CoREs; or
- review whether CoREs are collectively fulfilling the policy intent.

## Review Process

Panel members will receive a package of documents including:

- A report from the TEC summarising each CoRE's progress against its strategic/research plans for 2015/16 to 2017;
- A written submission from each CoRE describing their Centre's operation and which is effectively a self-assessment of its contribution to the Mission Statement for Centres of Research Excellence;
- An assessment by each CoRE's research advisory group of the Centre's research activities, including a commentary on its research excellence.

The Panel will meet representatives from each CoRE in a series of meetings in late May 2017 during which they will be able to ask questions about the CoRE's operations and plans. Prior to the first of those meetings the Panel will confer, either in a face-to-face meeting or by videoconference to develop a potential list of questions to be asked of each CoRE.

At the conclusion of each meeting with CoRE representatives, the panel will discuss the information received and reach a conclusion on each of the questions above to be included in the final report to the TEC.

## Role of the Royal Society of New Zealand staff

It is not the role of the Society staff to make the assessment of the progress of each CoRE. Rather, their role is one of facilitation and "guardianship" of the panel process, ensuring that the process is credible and defensible. To achieve this, staff will:

- organise all logistical aspects of the process;
- assist the Chair of the Review Panel in determining realistic timetables for meetings;
- record any conflicts of interest and actions taken;
- record decisions and draft a report on each CoRE for the Panel to consider;
- liaise/communicate with the TEC;
- prepare the final report once consensus has been reached by the Panel; and
- forward the final report to the TEC.

## Confidentiality

The Society takes the issue of confidentiality very seriously.

- Panel members must ensure the safe keeping of all material received (e.g. the submissions from the CoREs, reports from TEC and panel summaries).
- At the conclusion of the assessment process members must return the documentation to Society staff and destroy any documentation remaining elsewhere.
- Outside the meetings of the Panel there must be no correspondence or discussion by Panel members of the contents of the information received with third parties or the CoREs being reviewed, except by the Chair of the Panel or the Society's designated CoRE secretariat.
- The intellectual property of the ideas and hypotheses described in any of the material submitted by the CoREs must be treated in strict confidence.

## Privacy

The Society has obligations under the [Privacy Act](#) to keep confidential certain information provided by individuals. During the course of the reviews, Panel members may have access to personal information about individuals associated with a CoRE. Where this occurs, the principles of the Privacy Act must be adhered to, in particular the following:

- **Principle 5:** Agencies must ensure that there are reasonable safeguards in place to prevent loss, misuse or disclosure of personal information (*keep private information safe*).
- **Principle 9:** An agency that holds personal information must not keep that information for longer than is necessary for the purposes for which the information may be lawfully used (*return/destroy all private information at the conclusion of the process*).

- **Principle 10:** Agencies must use personal information for the same purpose for which they collected that information (*only use private information for the purposes of the review*).
- **Principle 11:** Agencies can only disclose personal information in limited circumstances (*do not reveal private information to parties outside those directly involved in the review process*).

### Conflicts of interest

A rigorous approach must be taken in order to maintain the credibility of the mid-term review process and to ensure that CoREs are subjected to fair and reasonable appraisal. During Panel member selection the Society will try, as far as possible, to minimise the potential for conflicts of interest relating to any Panel member. However, where further potential or actual conflicts of interest are identified the following rules will apply.

- If a Panel member has an interest in a CoRE, such as collaborating with a CoRE researcher or their group, or being a close relative, then that member, at the discretion of the Panel Chair, shall leave the room and not contribute to the discussion on that CoRE's progress;
- If the Panel Chair has a conflict of interest on a matter then the duties of chairing the relevant part of the meeting shall be passed to a nominated alternative.
- All the above conflicts of interest must be declared in writing to the Society.
- The Panel Chair will ensure that minutes are recorded of all conflicts of interest and actions taken.

### Review Panel meetings

1. The first on 18 or 19 May, probably by videoconference, is to familiarise the Panel members with the Terms of Reference and processes involved in assessing the CoREs and to set the agenda and questions for the meetings with each of the CoREs the following week.
2. The 22-26 May meetings will be held in Wellington with representatives from each of the CoREs. The first role of the discussions is to provide the CoRE an opportunity to present key points in support of their self-assessment. A second role is to enable the Panel to verify and test the robustness of the submitted material. Thirdly, the discussions will offer the Panel an opportunity to seek out additional information to help them form a view on the quality of the leadership and management of the CoRE. Lastly, the discussions will assist the Panel in forming a view on the CoREs overall performance and its likelihood to deliver on its intended outcomes. At the conclusion of each meeting with a CoRE, the panel will discuss their individual views and reach a consensus on each of the key questions for inclusion in the report to TEC.

The following week (29-31 May), the panel will receive drafts of the reports to TEC prepared by the Royal Society secretariat to review and comment on. If necessary, a videoconference will be held to discuss important matters so that the reports can be finalised.

### Decision making in the Panel meetings

The Panel will work on the basis of **consensus**-based decisions rather than voting. Where a decision is required the Chair will, after reasonable deliberation and when s/he judges that there is a consensus amongst the Panel members, state that: s/he believes that agreement has been reached; and what the agreement is.

If any member of the Panel considers that a consensus has not been reached they may say so and discussion will continue, including on whether there is a consensus. There may also be discussion on exactly what the agreement entails.

This means that each Panel member fully supports the outcome of the Panel's deliberations but cannot be assumed to have supported every element of every decision. Therefore, they do not need to state dissenting views on particular items that they did not fully agree with.