

Research in the ITP sector – what we are all up to

Notes from the ITPNZ Research Forum of June 25th 2009

Degree-granting ITPs are clear that research is a **core part of their business** and that the research undertaken by the ITP sector is fundamentally different from the university sector. ITPs focus on **applied research**, including evidence-based professional practice, that is useful to industries and professions they serve. The majority of ITPs gain **funding for research** from the **PBRF** and/or external research funding sources. Increasingly ITPs are seeking to increase the amount of money gained through **external research grants**. Gaining sufficient funding to support the research activity of ITPs is a significant issue limiting their ability to expand the activities they currently engage in.

The development of a strong **Research Culture** across the institution is the focus of most if not all of the ITPs. The strategies and tactics being used to support this include:

1. Implementing a **Research Strategy**

The majority of ITPs have a research strategy to guide the development and investment required to support to inculcation of a robust research culture. The ITP's Research Strategies cover priority areas for research, enhancing research degree completions (where these are part of the ITP's portfolio) and gaining funding for research through the PBRF and external funds.

2. Widening the research focus to include **innovation and technology development and transfer** activities

Many of the ITPs have broadened their focus on research to include innovation and technology development activities that enable them to link with local and regional industries. Some have linked their activities to established "incubators" and/or established "industry in residence" programmes.

Another approach used by some ITPs has been to establish a consultancy track in their academic staff career structure. This track recognises that consultancy activities can also be research particularly where the consultant retains the right to publish their papers based on their own Intellectual Property developed as the result of the processes they use.

The establishment of Innovating NZ will provide a mechanism for industry to link easily to ITP expertise and for ITPs to collaborate and share their knowledge and experience in working with industry.

3. Establishing a **Research Office** to support research activity

This can comprise Advisory Staff and Administration Support and may be supported by appropriate Advisory Committees. The number of Support Staff in the Research office of an institution may range from 0.1 FTE to 4.5 FTE depending on the research focus of the institution.

Some institutions operate a Research Committee with a focus on providing Strategic Research Advice to the management and/or a Committee to approve research proposals and applications for research funds.

4. Providing **support and incentives** for staff to be research active

A wide range of initiatives are used to support and incentivise research. These include:

- Providing time release from teaching, through PBRF scholarships, to produce publications
- Promoting winners and supporting key research projects
- Professorial appointments to train and support emerging researchers
- Providing a centralised pool of seed funding to support research
- Standardising teaching hours for staff teaching on degrees
- Managing staff time and workload to produce research outputs
- Research awards/aimed at rewarding outputs
- Income from PBRF reinvested into research

5. Setting institutional **targets and expectations** for research

While rewarding and incentivising staff to produce research outputs, it is also recognised that setting research targets and expectations for staff is important. Institutions have achieved this using their own research weightings system and/or using the PBRF ratings generated through either mock or “real” PBRF rounds.

6. **Training and development** for staff

All ITPs recognise the importance of providing training and mentoring of new and emerging researchers. Initiatives used include:

- Providing support for PHD and Masters students to complete their degrees
- Providing training for academic writing through writers retreats/forums and journal clubs
- Training staff in research methodologies with some institutions having their courses on-line

7. Maintaining accurate and centralised **Research Records**

All ITPs engaged in research recognise the need for a centralised Research Repository. Sharing research publications is also seen as a mechanism to mentor staff. Gathering the accurate records and physical evidence to support the bibliographic record is recognised as being difficult in some cases. One institution reported providing every academic staff member with a box at the beginning of the year to place their publications and other forms of evidence in so that they could be collected for the central repository.

8. Increasing **funding** available to support research

All ITPs recognise that accessing the funding to support research is difficult. With the decoupling of research funding from teaching t, the only sources of funding available are the PBRF and external research funds. All ITPs are aiming to increase the funding available to them either by improving their performance in the next PBRF round in 2012 and/or by increasing the amount of revenue available from external contracts. It is recognised that servicing external research contracts can create pressures on teaching staff to balance their teaching with their external commitments.

9. **Benchmarking** performance across ITPs

Some ITPs are beginning to use the information available from the Tribal Benchmarking exercise to benchmark their research performance across the ITP sector.

Commitment to the PBRF is another key area of focus for the ITPs who are part of the ITP Research Forum. All members express a commitment to either remain in the PBRF or enter at the next round in 2012. It is recognised that the current construction and operation of the PBRF does not adequately reward applied research and professional practice. This has been a major focus of the current review of the Fund's operation and it is hoped that once the revised PBRF assessment process adopted for 2012 will provide better recognition for these forms of research. Concern has also been expressed about apparent moves to shut ITPs out of the PBRF. These must be resisted as much as possible.

Over the next three years, the priorities for ITPs are to:

- Raise the proportion of PBRF rateable staff within their institution
- Investigate and implement collaborative approaches to working with universities and other ITPs especially in situations where degrees are being taught collaboratively across institutions or where an ITP is teaching a university's degree under their accreditation.
- Focus on areas of strength/winners e.g. arts and creative industries where the ITPs have a good record of achievement in the past PBRF rounds
- Run mock PBRF rounds to ensure staff are well prepared for the 2012 round

Emerging and Current Issues for The Research Forum

The Forum recognises that working together to raise the profile of ITP research will support the positioning of ITPs as applied research institutions and situate the ITP sector to perform well in the 2012 PBRF round. Key issues that affect all ITPs engaged in research are:

- Raising visibility of research outputs from the ITP sector and managing the perceptions of ITP research – parity of esteem for ITP research with that undertaken by universities/CRI
- Convincing TEC that research is core business for ITPs who deliver degrees
- Influencing political decisions in relation to research and highlighting their impact on institutions
- Balancing the management of external research contracts against teaching commitments
- Increasing the number of PBRF rateable staff entering PBRF

- The viability of degrees in many ITPs when student numbers may be small and research income limited
- Managing the costs of research and gaining a return on investment in it
- Linking research to the needs of the economy and region
- Establishing ITP benchmarks for research
- Supporting research in an environment of collaborative delivery models – How do we effectively collaborate
- Nurturing our “stars” and retaining our staff to ensure we have a critical mass to support teaching and research
- Managing the lack of institutional support for research – software/research repository

The Forum sees the following activities as opportunities to work together:

- Having a collective strategy on PBRF
- Developing an ITP-wide Publication strategy
- Sharing information/training opportunities
- Sharing research skills/courses
- Establishing a common/linked research repository
- Investigating ways to link research to evaluation and SAEER
- Setting uniform expectations for research across the whole sector
- Writing up and publishing research – making sure research counts/journal publication

Immediate priorities are:

1. Establishing the Forum as an entity supporting a robust research culture across the ITP sector. To do this we will meet twice a year and communicate through a Research Forum established on Wikieducator. The next meeting of the Forum will be held in Wellington in October, hosted by WelTec. Amanda Torr will chair the meeting with Simon Peel of Unitec supporting. The first 2010 meeting will be held at Unitec in March 2010. Wintec will co-chair this meeting.
2. Sharing training opportunities. Both Bay of Plenty and Waikato Polytechnic are running Writing Retreats in the second half of 2009 and have spaces for other staff. Otago Polytechnic have a research methods course on-line that people can use. It is available on their Wikieducator site.
3. Raising the profile of ITP research by sharing and promoting “good news” stories and the value of ITP research.
4. Working together to raise the capability of institutions in relation to the PBRF round in 2012. WelTec, EIT, Wintec and NMIT have expressed an immediate interest in this activity.