

Systems and people

Te Pūnaha Matatini submission to the Science System Advisory Group

Associate Professor Priscilla Wehi and Professor Markus Luczak-Roesch
Co-Directors, Te Pūnaha Matatini

We appreciate the opportunity to provide input into the work of the Science System Advisory Group (SSAG) on the review of the Research, Science and Innovation System (RSIS) in Aotearoa New Zealand. We provide this input in our capacity as co-directors of Te Pūnaha Matatini – Aotearoa New Zealand’s Centre of Research Excellence for Complex Systems.

Because there has already been significant consultation in recent years about the RSIS (especially in the context of Te Ara Paerangi, to which we provided a comprehensive and evidence-backed [submission](#)), we want to keep this submission to the SSAG concise and focused on two recommendations:

1. Take a systems approach to the evaluation and re-design of the RSIS.
2. Put the people within the RSIS at the centre of attention.

Take a systems approach to the evaluation and re-design of the RSIS

Adopting a systems approach to reforming the RSIS should involve a comprehensive and integrated method that considers all components and their interactions within the research ecosystem and of the research ecosystem with the wider society. This approach should **ensure that the reform is holistically forward-thinking and give consideration to the need to restore the credibility of research and science in an increasingly polarised society.**

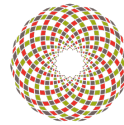
A critical step in a systems approach should be the **identification of levers of change** within the current RSIS that are expected to be effective for a transition into a desired future state. However, our appeal is for any transition to happen with great care by first **evaluating implications and impact of change to avoid creating, perpetuating or amplifying inequities in the RSIS.** This should be backed by robust, high-quality evidence.

Put the people within the RSIS at the centre of attention

As a Centre of Research Excellence (CoRE) we have a **particular perspective on the lived reality of people within the RSIS** that other organisations may not experience as directly as we do. We are attached to a host institution (the University of Auckland), but we are not

A Centre of Research Excellence hosted by the University of Auckland





a legal entity. We don't employ researchers, but we build researcher networks and support some of the research activities of the people within our networks through research funding.

We have experienced – specifically over the last five years – a diversification of our principal investigators' professional circumstances. It is much **more common now that some of Aotearoa New Zealand's best researchers are not permanently employed by 'traditional' organisations** with a mandate to undertake research (e.g., universities or Crown Research Institutes (CRIs)). Instead, we much more frequently see mixed employment (part-time with a traditional organisation and part-time with a private organisation) as well as scholars who have no link to traditional research organisations (i.e., they work as independent scholars or are employed by a private research organisation). However, **involving people from outside of traditional organisations in CoRE-funded research is not straightforward due to structural, procedural and financial misalignments** (e.g., independent scholars and scholars in private organisations aren't usually covered by a base salary to attend CoRE events and, therefore, need to be compensated on a per day basis or invest their time in events for free).

Furthermore, because these scholars have (partially) left the traditional academic research system, they are no longer incentivised to publish their research in academic outlets. This is in direct conflict with the expectations from many research funders (including the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) that funds CoREs) that evaluate research success and impact (proposed and achieved) through the proxy of publications in peer-reviewed academic outlets.

We want to emphasise that we think **the diversity of researchers' employment circumstances should be considered a feature (and not a flaw) of a modern RSIS** that is committed to what is often referred to as the "third mission" (specifically in central Europe). The "third mission" refers to the **interweaving of universities and research organisations with society, municipalities, and the economy**. We hope the SSAG will make recommendations that allow for larger flexibility in how research funding can be used to foster this mission and **enable wider participation by people in research activities independent from their individual organisational affiliation**. Associated with this, we would also like to see effort put into communicating the value of research to societal groups and organisations.

We therefore reiterate that we would like to see careful assessment of the current research system based on robust work from a structural perspective, including current researcher 'homes' and employment destinations for both domestic and international students, and an assessment of the necessary requirements to create and maintain a stable, flourishing workforce.