

Briefing to the Incoming Minister for Science

He aha te kai ō te rangitira? He Kōrero, he kōrero, he kōrero.

What is the food of the leader? It is knowledge. It is communication.

Congratulations

Congratulations on your re-appointment as Minister for Science. We look forward to continuing to work with you to make a real difference for New Zealanders and especially workers in science organisations.

The PSA and science

The New Zealand Public Service Association: Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi (the PSA) is the principal trade union for working people across the public service, local government, community and state sectors and DHB's. The PSA represents more than 77,000 members and over 2500 members in Crown Research Institutes (CRIs)

The PSA's purpose commits us to seeking to influence the industrial, economic, political and social environment in order to advance the interests of PSA members. Those interests include influencing the way that science is researched and developed and ensuring evidence-based decision making in the sector. The PSA advocates for all PSA members in the science sector and for the fair employment rights for employees across CRIs.

Positive changes in science since 2017.

We would like to firstly acknowledge the positive investment that the 2017 Labour Government has made to enhance the operational effectiveness of science that will have long-term beneficial impact on New Zealand's health, economy, environment and society. Particularly, the additional funding for CRIs through the Covid19 recovery fund and the Strategic Science Investment Fund (SSIF), which allows for strategic investment in research programmes and scientific infrastructure.

In addition, we would like to acknowledge the following reports:

- The Completion of the Te Pae Kaurangi report. The Ministry of Business, innovation and employments (MBIE) report on the future of CRIs.

Briefing to the Incoming Minister for Science

- The development of the Research Science and Innovation (RSI) strategy

Both of these reports recommended positive steps for the guiding the future of science in New Zealand, and we encourage the government to ensure that these reports are progressed and implemented to ensure our RSI and CRI systems are optimised for success. The PSA value the opportunity to engage directly with the minister, and the TPK and RSI would be important current issues to engage on.

Our priorities

1. Upholding scientific integrity in the science and research sector.
2. Better collaboration across CRIs in accordance with the recommendations from the Te Pae Kahurangi report.
3. Stream-lined employment conditions for those working in science
4. Increased funding and resource for science and research.

Our priorities explained

1. Scientific Integrity

Researchers in CRIs have come under increasing pressure from their institutions and under commercial pressures to abandon their important role in speaking out on issues of public concern. This damages the quality of public debate, the regard given to quality research, and the morale of researchers. New Zealand governments have always played a key role in innovation, mainly through our research institutions and we encourage the government to honour the principle of scientific integrity both in spirit and in practice. This means respecting scientists' right to publicly explain and defend their research. It is good, evidence-based decision making that makes for strong public

Briefing to the Incoming Minister for Science

services and a strong country and we think the Crown Research Institutes' Act needs to be amended to include a provision similar to the rights of academics in tertiary institutions to academic freedom.

2. Purposeful Collaboration

The PSA believes there are many benefits of further collaboration between all of the current CRIs and we support the Te Pae Kahurangi reports recommendation for further collaboration. The PSA needs to be considered a key stakeholder, engaging directly with the minister on the implementation of this report.

The PSA recommends a review of duplication, including the management and governance systems that have evolved to support the competitive systems.

The PSA recommends a collaborative approach to capital investment such as national property strategies. Currently, we see many CRIs operating in silos when it comes to capital investment and better co-ordination across organisations would reflect the recommendations of the Te Pae Kahurangi report.

Links to Universities

The relationship between universities and CRIs needs to be examined. As universities have taken a similar corporate trajectory as CRIs, there needs to be examination of the interactions and crossovers of the two with the aim of continuing to link them through collaboration rather than competition. For example, guidelines around use and allocation of funding of cross-appointed staff and students. Linkages between the two would grow NZ capacity and capability as well as to retain domestic and foreign personnel.

3. Employment Conditions

The PSA encourages MBIE and CRIs to ensure employees are valued, not disadvantaged in the changing workplace. This would include ensuring CRIs have common pay, administration systems and conditions of service.

The PSA supports further unification of pay and conditions across CRIs. At present, the rates of pay and conditions for similar jobs can differ significantly from CRI to CRI. Unification of collective agreements would ensure that employees can move within the CRI system without the risk of losing their current pay and conditions. The unification of employment conditions would increase collaboration and the sharing of experience across CRIs, improve consistency and would help streamline cross-CRI collaborations.

A stream-lined approach to employment relations within CRIs would ensure fairness and equity and encourage career development. While CRIs are generally functioning effectively, there are examples of a disconnect between employers and the best interests of employees. The PSA expects consistent engagement across all CRIs when it comes to bargaining and consultation with the PSA and we encourage you as minister to set clear expectations with CRI employers to ensure genuine and consistent worker engagement, including with Unions.

A collaborative, consistent and collective response from CRIs to important issues like gender and ethnic diversity and pay equity would increase the success of government initiatives in this area.

We note that as Minister you issue an annual letter of expectations to the CRIs this could be a useful vehicle to help drive these changes. We would be please to engage with MBIE on the drafting of suitable wording to express this.

Salaries

Briefing to the Incoming Minister for Science

The PSA recommends decreasing the level of inequality between the highest paid workers and the lowest paid workers and a commitment to ensure pay parity between CRI scientists and industry or academic scientists. Pay for all workers should reflect the responsibility and risk associated with the job to ensure that funding is distributed in a way that best enhances work and workers. The work of some CRIs is not geared towards financial returns, but has great societal benefit, and salaries for these staff need to reflect the work they do.

4. Funding

Long term secure funding from MBIE is vital. Fundamental science research needs to be properly supported and resourced and science must be the driving factor in allocated funding. core funding has been static for many years and the absence of any inflation adjustment erodes real funding and creates significant cost pressures.

Establishing a clearer understanding of the funding model, including who funds the overheads and management of the CRIs would be beneficial to the effective and efficient running of these organisations.

Unfortunately, the system of CRIs bidding for work through MBIE creates uncertainty and drives competition across CRIs. As a small country, New Zealand is unable to absorb the enormous cost of bidding, in addition, the likelihood of a bid not being approved is high which can often be a source of significant psychological distress to researchers. Competitive funding also tends to drive short term scientific work at the detriment of public good science.

Therefore, a review of the science funding strategy is important and is the logical next step from Te Pae Kahurangi report. The PSA would like to see MBIE strive to ensure that CRIs are a place that highly skilled scientists would like to work, can develop fulfilling careers and that we are therefore able to continue our world-class science research in New Zealand.



Briefing to the Incoming Minister for Science

CRIs are often called upon to respond to national emergencies because of their scientific expertise and capability. As examples, CRI's have played a key role in responding to the Covid19 crisis and the Kaikoura earthquakes. The importance of CRI scientists has never been more in the public eye and this is an important job, but potential profit has in the past restricted CRI participation in these emergencies. The PSA does not agree with the business approach to these responses and would like to see adequate funding and resources supplied for CRI's to adequately support the country in times of need. This will ensure the best outcome for all New Zealanders and for the science system.