



Public Service Association  
Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi

# Briefing to the incoming Minister of Science, Innovation and Technology

December 2023

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Science, Innovation and Technology. This briefing sets out how we'd like to work with you over this term of government, and what we consider to be the most important priorities for the science, innovation and technology portfolio.

## Working well together

The PSA is an important social partner for the Government on matters relating to the science and research sector.

The PSA represents over 92,000 workers across public and community services. This includes people working in Crown Research Institutes, universities, and a range of agencies in the core public service and state sector that are closely linked with the science sector – either undertaking research or using it to inform policy.

Our representative structures include a National Science Committee which is made up of working researchers from across the sector, representing the views and interests of around 2,900 people in the research workforce across the Crown Research Institutes (CRIs) and Callaghan Innovation. These organisations are the interface between government funded science and business; their performance is an essential part of growing New Zealand's economy. The PSA's National Science Committee can link sector leaders with the voice of the research workforce, drawing on their experiences and expertise to inform decisions about the sector.

### At the national level

The PSA's National Science Committee regularly engages with other sector leaders including Science New Zealand and the New Zealand Association of Scientists, and with government to provide a researcher perspective on changes affecting the whole sector.

The National Science Committee, along with PSA leadership, met regularly with previous Research, Science and Innovation Ministers to provide a worker perspective on the Government's work programme. We are keen to continue to meet with you.

### At the institute and workplace level

The PSA engages with CRI management and boards at an individual employer level.

Within research organisations we seek agreed documented frameworks as the basis for the working relationship between the employer and union. This includes putting industrial democracy arrangements in place that make workers' participation in decisions and processes, both directly and through their union, part of business as usual. We know this works and improves both organisational effectiveness and workers' experience of work.

## Our priorities for the science, innovation and technology sector

### Science sector reform

A strong base of science and innovation is crucial to New Zealand's future prosperity and productivity. The Te Ara Paerangi – Future Pathways program has provided a good basis for a shared understanding of the key problems facing the science sector, with substantial input from both industry and the public sector. Some of those issues include:

- an unproductive focus on contestable science funding that creates wasteful spending and reduces efficiency
- a lack of strategic direction to science investment in NZ that limits our ability to reach our full potential for productivity gains and cluster formation
- a research workforce that is prevented from fully focusing on delivering world leading and impactful science because of precarity of research funding that impacts jobs, careers, and research progress.

There is widespread agreement within the sector that reform is needed, and we want to see it progress. We want to work with you and your ministry to ensure that reform under the new Government is informed by workers' perspectives about the barriers to a top-quality research system and the opportunities to improve it.

### Sustainable science funding

While public spending on research in New Zealand has increased significantly since 2016, it remains below OECD averages. Evidence shows that public investment in research has a high return on investment and acts as a catalyst for private investment. We welcomed previous commitments to work towards investment at 2% of GDP, and ask that your new Government also commit to at least this level or higher.

New Zealand must maintain its scientific workforce capabilities to respond in a timely way to changes in strategic direction and to emergencies. New Zealand's responses to earthquakes, extreme weather events, climate change, plant disease incursions and COVID-19 have all been underpinned by our critical science capacity. Maintaining the capability to respond requires investment in the system to recruit and retain skilled workers within the workforce, and this is currently at risk from under-investment in the sector.

This is a long-term challenge, but it will also manifest in immediate ways. The National Science Challenges come to an end in June 2024, and without Government decisions on funding allocation there is a lot of important public research currently taking place that will halt. If National Science Challenge funding was to stop, some institutions would be unable to absorb the level of funding loss without risking the loss of national significant science capability.

## Science infrastructure

Much of the infrastructure in New Zealand's public science and research sector is aging and in need of investment. We want to work with the Government to make sure that investment in infrastructure has good outcomes for the people working with it and the research it produces. To do this we need to ensure there is a worker voice within infrastructure decisions, such as the co-location of facilities in 'Wellington Science City'.

## Growing and supporting local talent

An internationally competitive research, science and innovation system requires a collaborative and whole of system approach to workforce planning and growing capability.

Workers in CRIs are paid poorly compared with people doing similar work in other organisations. Incomes and the job security of most PhD graduates who stay in New Zealand do not improve during the first decade after graduation, meaning many go overseas seeking better prospects. The current system also provides an uneven degree of job security due to the precarity of research funding.

We are eager to work with the Government to shift towards a system that provides integrated career pathways across the system, supports rather than discourages mobility across the science sector, better values diverse skills and experience, and provides stable jobs and opportunities for career advancement.