



NZAS Briefing for Incoming Minister - Research, Science & Innovation

<https://scientists.org.nz/>

02/11/2023

Research, Science and Innovation (RSI) creates the future backbone supporting the economy, society and environment of our nation. Fixing our RSI system has the potential to lift our nation's performance to match peer nations.

The incoming Minister has the opportunity to rebuild the RSI system to create ongoing benefits to New Zealand with two foci built on underpinning recommendations.

First, because great science needs foundations, we must rebuild careers and capability with a focus on addressing the nation's challenges and making RSI attractive to young talent, including Māori.

Second, reforge an outward looking system able to address our big challenges. Rebuild compatibility with international collaborations and funding. Reconnect across industry, universities and all research providers. Retain and improve the ability to address challenges in areas like health and the environment. Reimagine enduring, integrative and international solutions using our collective failures to design RSI to tackle the biggest challenge – climate change – as a guide.

The next Minister can ensure that RSI helps lead the response to climate change as the biggest shift in industry and innovation in many generations.¹

Over the last two years a significant RSI reform programme, Te Ara Paerangi Future Pathways, has obtained valuable input from the research and innovation community. It has reinforced the value of ensuring that research is a stable and attractive career both in general and especially for our future Māori and Pacific leaders. However, NZAS does not have confidence in the programme as it currently stands. It has become captured by existing institutions, including a ministry which lacks the expertise needed in the unique domain of science policy and does not deliver the

¹Diverging from the perceived environment-economy tradeoff will open our eyes to win-win opportunities for climate change solutions.

accountability ministers and the public should expect.² If nothing changes, the potential of our RSI system to deliver will be hamstrung by:

- Continuing to replace leadership with managerialism
- Undermining careers and the factors that attract and retain talent
- Funding structures and institutions misaligned with international norms which enable connectivity and collaboration

Moreover, our nation must have confidence in the ability of the RSI system to address our major challenges. We were lucky to have a few remarkable scientists who rose to the occasion in responding to the pandemic. An integrated response to the challenge of climate change ranks highest among concerns of stakeholders in RSI, yet Te Ara Paerangi has produced no path to RSI reform able to address the scale of this challenge.

The new Minister can rebuild our RSI system to help the nation to grow and prosper by prioritising our most urgent recommendations:

- Invest in careers and connectivity and put an end to self-reinforcing managerialism within competing institutions and the agencies that fund and monitor research.
- Stabilise and reform institutions to maximise the exchange of knowledge, ideas and talent connecting across international linkages, business, te aō Māori, and between government, institutes, universities, think tanks and industry.
- Continue to support and build Māori and Pacific RSI capability that will drive our nation forward with a vision for Te Tiriti in mind.

²Most notably documented by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, but applicable more widely. See <https://pce.parliament.nz/publications/environmental-reporting-research-and-investment/>

-
- Preserve and enhance public engagement with science³ and counter disinformation.
 - Restore accountability to public investment in RSI.
 - Shift accountability for applied RSI priorities to portfolios such as Health, Environment, Conservation, and Primary Industries, which are best positioned to manage ongoing investment in applied science and research in their areas.
 - Design ongoing support for the nationally significant capability currently supported by National Science Challenges.
 - Retain and clarify required levels of support for research and the elements that define our universities⁴ and governance that supports transparency and trust.
 - Question the R&D Tax Incentive as it grows toward \$1b per year: rebalance the incentive with a transparent grants system that knows what has been funded and why.
 - Reconsider missions and prioritisation to achieve accountability and delivery:
 - There is no proof that attempting missions outside government improves delivery or accountability.
 - Our unique RSI system creates huge risk that the control of missions will fuel managerialism.
 - Review and learn lessons from the 10 years of National Science Challenges, preserving what works and connects stakeholders to RSI.
 - Ask why our first major international funding alignment agreement chooses to support Europe's missions rather than our own.
 - Restore a capable ministry focussed on our nation's unique science needs to begin accruing decades of benefits from more stable careers, capability, and international collaboration.
- We look forward to seeing a re-invigorated RSI system emerge at a time when it has never been more needed.

³In particular, reverse the decision to defund the Curious Minds programme and the Participatory Science Platform

⁴See s269(2)(d) in Education and Training Act 2020 and other relevant legislative content