



media release

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Otago New Zealand's Top University

The University of Otago has been ranked in first place in the assessment for the Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF), released by the Tertiary Education Commission today.

The PBRF assessment examines the quality of research performance by all eligible academic and research staff in New Zealand universities and other tertiary organisations.

Close behind Otago were Auckland and Canterbury, followed by Victoria, Waikato, Massey, Lincoln, and AUT.

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor David Skegg, said that he is “absolutely delighted with the results. The distinctive characteristics of universities are their research and research-informed teaching. Last year a Government report concluded that Otago is New Zealand’s most research-intensive university. It is very gratifying that a rigorous assessment has now shown that our research is also of the highest quality.”

“This PBRF result will lead to extra funding for the University of Otago, but the reputational effects are far more important. Otago is already famous for its outstanding campus environments and student experience. It has also now been shown to be New Zealand’s leading academic institution.”

In the first PBRF assessment, which was carried out in 2003, Otago was placed fourth. “We always regarded that as an aberrant result,” Professor Skegg said. “I think that the University went into the first exercise with insufficient preparation. The main thing that has changed, however, has been the focus on research excellence and research-informed teaching in all parts of the University. For example, the number of research papers and other outputs produced during 2006 was 50% higher than in 2003. We have also made outstanding academic appointments, and our Leading Thinkers Initiative has been a catalyst for attracting world-class scientists and scholars to this country. This University is ‘on a roll’, and the only thing holding us back is the desperate shortage of research funding in New Zealand.”

Professor Skegg said that, with such an outstanding result overall, it could be invidious to single out individual departments or schools. “Nevertheless, I must mention that the results for our Department of Psychology are stellar. Some would

say that the criteria used in the PBRF for identifying world-class researchers are too rigorous. But the Department of Psychology was found to have no fewer than 12 such academics, a number which is unlikely to be matched by any other department in any discipline in New Zealand. Indeed the number is higher than those in two entire universities!”

While the national results for individual departments are not yet available, the results for subject areas show that Otago has the highest ranked staff in many areas, including Biomedical, Clinical Medicine, Earth Sciences, Economics, Education, English Language and Literature, History, Law, Philosophy, Public Health, and Sport and Exercise Science. The report from the Tertiary Education Commission states that the University of Otago was ranked first or second in more subject areas than any other institution.

Professor Skegg thanked everyone in the University who has contributed to the welcome outcome, and especially Professor Geoff White (Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research). The next PBRF assessment will be in 2012.

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