

# Report of External Evaluation and Review

Medical Research Institute of New  
Zealand

Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 1 September 2015

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*Final Report*

# Purpose of this Report

*The purpose of this external evaluation and review report is to provide a public statement about the Tertiary Education Organisation's (TEO) educational performance and capability in self-assessment. It forms part of the accountability process required by Government to inform investors, the public, students, prospective students, communities, employers, and other interested parties. It is also intended to be used by the TEO itself for quality improvement purposes.*

## Introduction

### 1. TEO in context

Name of TEO:	Medical Research Institute of New Zealand (MRINZ)
Type:	Private training establishment (PTE)
First registered:	30 November 2012
Location:	Level 7, CSB Building, Wellington Hospital, Riddiford St, Newtown, Wellington
Delivery sites:	As above
Courses currently delivered:	Medical Doctorate (Level 10)
Code of Practice signatory:	No
Number of students:	Domestic: three Medical Doctorate students or 'medical research fellows' enrolled at MRINZ.  MRINZ supervises on site one Master's, one Medical Doctorate and six Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) medical research fellows enrolled at New Zealand or overseas universities.
Number of staff:	12 full-time equivalents
Scope of active accreditation:	The PTE offers one approved programme, the Medical Doctorate.
Distinctive characteristics:	MRINZ is a registered charitable trust, operating as an independent medical research institute that investigates New Zealand and international public health issues to improve the prevention and treatment of diseases. The institute at the same time provides specialist training in medical research, with senior staff

'supervising' medical research fellows who are conducting research and wish to also study for a qualification. Supervision in this context includes academic guidance, assessment of progress, support to publish, and joint authorship.

MRINZ employs the fellows, who need to be qualified doctors with clinical experience to gain entry. All the fellows produce clinical research for publication but can enrol in different programmes. The current options are: a Medical Doctorate with either MRINZ or with another institution or a PhD with Victoria University or an overseas university. The Medical Doctorate qualification supports a career in clinical research while a PhD suits someone returning to direct clinical practice.

The key educational achievement is the completion and subsequent publication of original research which contributes to the award of the qualification. The main criteria for the award of the MRINZ Medical Doctorate is the publication of four pieces of original research in an appropriate peer reviewed journal, three of which must be international, and three with the researcher as the first author. A synopsis of the research must also be produced. An internal board of studies oversees the process and an international board of examiners reviews the submission and decides whether to award the qualification.

None of the three current students have been awarded the Medical Doctorate qualification – one is currently writing up the synopsis, while the other two are still in progress. Researchers enrol in the qualification before, during or after completing their research and publications. The qualification gives them academic recognition for the doctoral-level research they have produced. Some of the research fellows do not enrol in a qualification.

Non-profit foundations, pharmaceutical and healthcare companies, the Capital and Coast District Health Board, and New Zealand universities and the Health Research Council fund the research projects of the institute. MRINZ collaborates with a range of local and international partners in conducting research. MRINZ

does not receive government tertiary education funding.

Recent significant changes: In June 2015, MRINZ received Health Research Council funding of \$7 million, which will significantly increase the research activity able to be conducted and therefore the number of fellows under supervision. MRINZ was one of only two funding recipients in this funding category that was not a New Zealand university; the other was a district health board.

Previous quality assurance history: An NZQA-appointed degree monitor visited MRINZ in May 2014 and reviewed the Medical Doctorate programme when just one student was enrolled. The report commended MRINZ for 'its high level of commitment' to the programme, and 'the personal interest shown in the professional development of the student'. The supervision of the sole fellow was seen as 'exemplary'. The overall MRINZ publication record was viewed as 'excellent'.

This is the first NZQA external evaluation and review (EER) of MRINZ.

Other: MRINZ is located within Wellington Regional Hospital and has a respiratory physiology laboratory and clinical research facility, and access to a 14-bed clinical trials unit.

## 2. Scope of external evaluation and review

A lead evaluator determined the scope of the EER after discussion with the director, reviewing NZQA-held documents and data, a self-assessment summary and the MRINZ website. The two focus areas and the key reasons for their selection were:

1. Governance, management and strategy, as this is a mandatory focus area.
2. Medical Doctorate qualification, as the only programme offered by the PTE.

After on-site discussion with and the agreement of the director, the second focus area was broadened to include all medical research supervision of doctoral fellows, i.e. Clinical Research Training. The rationale for this change was that the EER team realised that the academic supervision MRINZ provided to the enrolled fellows was essentially the same, irrespective of the doctoral programmes or institution in which they were enrolled. The revised focus area enabled a review of a larger student cohort over a longer period, where some doctoral qualifications have been awarded. The Medical Doctorate programme was still part of this focus area.

### 3. Conduct of external evaluation and review

*All external evaluation and reviews are conducted in accordance with NZQA's published policies and procedures. The methodology used is described fully in the web document *Policy and Guidelines for the Conduct of External Evaluation and Review* available at: <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/registration-and-accreditation/external-evaluation-and-review/policy-and-guidelines-eer/introduction>. The TEO has an opportunity to comment on the accuracy of this report, and any submissions received are fully considered by NZQA before finalising the report.*

The team of two evaluators spent one day at the MRINZ site. The following stakeholders were interviewed on site or by phone:

- The institute director, the chair of the board of trustees and the chair of board of studies
- Two MRINZ Medical Doctorate fellows (one fellow is also a deputy director of MRINZ), one Medical Doctorate, and one PhD fellow enrolled at an overseas university
- Victoria University professor who co-supervises PhD fellows at MRINZ.

The team reviewed a range of documents and data including:

- NZQA degree monitoring report, validation report and other NZQA data
- MRINZ application for NZQA approval of the Medical Doctorate programme
- MRINZ annual research reports for 2013 and 2014
- Health Research Council applications and press releases
- Minutes of board of trustee meetings
- Self-assessment documentation
- MRINZ and other, related websites.

# Summary of Results

## Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Confident** in the educational performance of **Medical Research Institute of New Zealand**.

The key points supporting this judgment are:

- All of the four academically enrolled clinical research fellows have been awarded their doctoral-level qualifications since 2012. All the fellows have published research in international journals as lead and contributing authors. The fellows acquire international-standard clinical research skills. None of the three MRINZ-enrolled Medical Doctorate fellows have yet been assessed. The quality of the individual fellows and overall educational achievement are very strong. However, the merit of these results are not fully clear to the EER team or to the institute.
- The research of the fellows contributes to a clinical research publication record for the institute that has been externally rated as 'outstanding'. The fellows' research helps improve approaches to clinical practice which supports better New Zealand and international health outcomes. On completion of the training, the fellows gain professional positions of greater responsibility.
- Educational activities match the individual needs of the research fellows and other key stakeholders. The fellows learn on the job the full clinical research process, under the supervision of researchers of international standing. There are a range of effective processes in place supporting the fellows to complete their research to a generally high standard. New Zealand and overseas universities benefit from their doctoral candidates being offered high-quality placements to conduct clinical research.
- The purpose of the institute is to produce high-quality research and clinical research training. The culture, systems and structures in place support overall research excellence. The leadership of the founding director is clearly effective and significant. MRINZ also has a strong team which includes the board of trustees, deputy directors, programme leaders, specialists and others. However, the organisation at the level of governance and management lacks a clear and sufficient focus on educational performance. This gap will become increasingly significant if, as expected, the number of enrolled fellows grows.

## Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Medical Research Institute of New Zealand**.

The key points supporting this judgment are:

- MRINZ has a range of review systems which have been consistently effective in supporting the publication of high-quality clinical research. There is a strong culture of reviewing performance. The Health Research Council funding is external confirmation of outstanding performance. However, a key self-assessment gap is that MRINZ does not clearly distinguish the educational performance of the fellows from overall research performance.
- MRINZ established the position of clinical trial managers after identifying that fellows had difficulties meeting research milestones; this support has improved research performance. An IT specialist was similarly appointed to support and enhance research quality.
- There is a range of often quite effective, although informal, mechanisms where fellows receive and can provide feedback. Regular meetings with the programme directors and the director are the key structure in place. Annual performance appraisals are the formal periodic review mechanism, as the fellows are also staff. However, there is no formal feedback loop for fellows to rate and review their educational experience at MRINZ which can be used to support future improvements.
- Governance and management is very effective in supporting research performance, but gives less focus to the specific educational role of MRINZ. As a consequence, there is not a clear and comprehensive understanding of the educational performance of the fellows.

# Findings<sup>1</sup>

## 1.1 How well do learners achieve?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Good**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Good**.

The overall academic achievement of the clinical research fellows is very strong. The key indicator of academic achievement is the quantity and quality of research the fellows publish as lead authors, contributing to the award of a doctorate-level qualification. All four of the academically enrolled fellows have been awarded a qualification since 2012<sup>2</sup>, with three being PhDs and one a Medical Doctorate from New Zealand or an overseas university. This is a strong achievement rate for doctoral-level qualifications, in which MRINZ has played the major role. None of the three fellows enrolled in the MRINZ Medical Doctorate s have yet been awarded the qualification and no Māori or Pasifika fellows were enrolled during this period.

The Health Research Council funding process assessed MRINZ as having ‘an outstanding track record of achievement in health research’. The degree monitor similarly rated MRINZ’ research publication record as ‘excellent’. Clinical research fellows are involved in all of the MRINZ published research, as either lead or co-authors. The fellows contribute to producing high-quality medical knowledge. They learn a broad range of on-the-job clinical research skills to an international standard.

Research publication is the core business of the organisation, and MRINZ closely tracks and manages all research through to publication. The ongoing successful track record of producing high-quantity and quality research confirms that effective systems are in place. There are regular meetings with the programme directors and/or the director to assess the progress of the fellows. There are weekly or monthly meetings updating all staff on research activity.

However, the quality of the educational achievement of the individual fellows is not clear due to some gaps in the evidence and analysis presented. The number of papers produced and the duration until completion for the individual fellows as lead or contributing authors are not methodically tracked. There was no evidence presented of the relative quality of the research of the individual fellows produced as distinguished from the overall research output of the institute. For instance, the quality rating of the journals in which the individual fellows publish is unclear. Similarly, there is no apparent benchmarking of the research undertaken or the qualification the fellows are awarded. At this time, the board of international

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<sup>1</sup> The findings in this report are derived using a standard process and are based on a targeted sample of the organisation’s activities.

<sup>2</sup> MRINZ registered as a private training establishment in 2012.

examiners has not yet assessed the work of the three fellows enrolled in the sole MRINZ qualification, the Medical Doctorate. This data and analysis would rate educational performance and may reveal patterns or insights of value over time. In conclusion, there is not a clear and comprehensive understanding of the quality of research that is specifically produced by the fellows. Given this information gap, the educational performance is rated as very strong but not clearly exemplary. There is an absence of simple yet systematic review processes to address this matter, and these will be increasingly required with enrolments projected to significantly rise in the future.

## 1.2 What is the value of the outcomes for key stakeholders, including learners?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The key value of MRINZ education is that the clinical research fellows learn how to and do produce and publish high-quality clinical research which addresses significant health concerns and leads to a doctorate-level qualification. The medical and clinical research professions in turn gain practitioners with international-standard clinical research skills. One fellow has subsequently received a university award for the research they produced. Fellows gain employment at MRINZ as researchers and progress to positions as researchers or clinical practitioners with greater responsibility and probably improved income, though this evidence is not systematically collected and analysed.

The high value of MRINZ-produced research outcomes (in which all fellows participate) is demonstrated by the receipt of substantial multi-year Health Research Council funding. The PTE's research record was rated by the Health Research Council as 'outstanding'. MRINZ was one of only two non-university organisations and the only private institution to receive this category of funding. The clinical knowledge produced and disseminated contributes to improved clinical practice to improve health and wellbeing outcomes in New Zealand and internationally. The institute has a high productivity rate, publishing around 50 research papers in 2014. Some senior MRINZ staff also contribute to the development of guidelines for practice in particular fields of clinical management. MRINZ provides New Zealand and overseas universities with high-quality placements by supervising doctoral-level students undertaking clinical research, including clinical trials. Finally, MRINZ met the Health Research Council funding criteria that the organisation overall was contributing 'major economic, social and environmental benefits for New Zealand'.

There is strong evidence that MRINZ is improving the value offered to research partners and the medical research fellows. MRINZ has been successful in significantly increasing its funding from a range of research stakeholders. The

Health Research Council funding is independent confirmation of the increased overall value MRINZ offers.

### 1.3 How well do programmes and activities match the needs of learners and other stakeholders?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

MRINZ doctoral placements match well the needs of the clinical research fellows and other key stakeholders. The fellows are mentored as they manage a comprehensive clinical research process including developing a research proposal, conducting a clinical research project, and then writing up a paper for submission to an international peer reviewed journal. The institute provides the fellows with a range of research opportunities addressing various health conditions and participating in multi-site, randomised controlled research projects across Australia and New Zealand. The fellows have the option of a three-year, full-time, on-site PhD or a Medical Doctorate which requires two years on site and one year of pre- and post-research activity. However, the Medical Doctorate programme may not match the needs of its intended target group of medical practitioners, with few enrolments and limited interest. Two of those enrolled also enrolled in PhDs elsewhere. Evidence was presented that MRINZ is flexible in meeting the needs of individual fellows through one-to-one supervision, access to additional research methodology classes if required, and additional financial resources at times.

MRINZ educational activities also match well the needs of the clinical research stakeholders. New Zealand and mainly United Kingdom universities are provided with international-standard clinical research placements for their doctoral candidates. MRINZ matches the need of the Health Research Council for both high-quality clinical research and for emerging health researchers to be supported. The needs of MRINZ as a research institute, regularly publishing high-quality clinical research, are well matched through the significant contribution junior research fellows make to this strategic activity. The pharmaceutical biotechnology companies' and other research partners' needs are similarly met by the research of the fellows.

Changes have been implemented to improve the output of research, which also better matches the educational needs of the fellows. MRINZ identified that researchers required additional project management support to reach their key research milestones. Two clinical trials manager positions were created which have provided more effective assistance to the research fellows. Similarly, a new specialist IT position provides fellows with information technology expertise to enhance the quality of their research. The additional Health Research Council funding confirms that MRINZ is matching well the council's health research priorities needs, and will provide increased resourcing and educational opportunities for future

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fellows to better match needs. Clearer reporting will be required to determine how well educational needs are being matched during this growth period.

#### 1.4 How effective is the teaching?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Good**.

MRINZ has taken an approach to supervision that is highly effective in mentoring clinical fellows to become medical researchers of an international standard. The director leads a team of programme directors who have clinical research expertise in various fields and success in publishing outstanding health research and gaining funding of peer reviewed contracts. This team provides supervision to the emerging researcher to learn 'on the job' and achieve their academic objectives. The NZQA degree monitor commended MRINZ for providing supervision to the first enrolled Medical Doctorate fellow that was seen as 'exemplary'. One key outcome of this robust supervision is that all the recently enrolled fellows have been awarded their qualification. The current fellows interviewed described having access to a pool of knowledgeable mentors who assist them, including the clinical trial and IT managers, and that there is a 'steep learning curve' and programme directors are 'aware of the fine balance' between 'providing guidance' and fellows needing to 'learn through trial and error'.

There is a range of usually effective, yet often indirect, processes which review the effectiveness of the supervision provided. Programme directors, the clinical trial manager and the director peer review all research progress and output through to publication. External experts peer review the research papers when submitted for publication. This culture of constant review provides feedback both on the quality of research and feedback to MRINZ on the quality and effectiveness of the guidance and supervision offered to the research fellows. The programme directors are also formally appraised each year for their overall performance, although it is not known to what extent their specific supervision performance is reviewed.

There is no formal assessment of the quality and effectiveness of the individual supervision provided. Additionally, there is no formal mechanism where fellows provide feedback on the supervision they receive. It appears that self-assessment takes place organically and informally as part of everyday research-focused activities. The small number of research fellows and the hands-on oversight of the current director are key factors in the excellence of the academic supervision despite the lack of a feedback loop.

## 1.5 How well are learners guided and supported?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The support and guidance provided to the fellows is highly effective, enabling them to stay engaged and complete their three-year research projects. Support and guidance is individualised to the needs of the medical research fellow. The 100 per cent completion rate is explained by a number of interrelated factors. The organisation as a whole, the director, programme directors and clinical trial managers share a strong professional stake in ensuring a successful outcome for the research projects of the fellows. The programme directors are co-authors of the publications. The reputation and funding of MRINZ is clearly linked to the production and quality of the research. With this key purpose, this small organisation has evolved a close-knit collegial environment. The fellows have one-to-one relationships with their on-site programme director, who they see most days and with whom they have regular meetings. Similarly, clinical trial managers and the director meet with fellows to assist with their projects. The MRINZ team is responsive to the needs of the fellows. The three fellows interviewed by the evaluators said that MRINZ team members will, on occasion, cover for absent research fellows. The fellows saw an open culture at MRINZ where ongoing verbal feedback was encouraged. Overall, MRINZ was viewed as a supportive workplace to complete research. The high rate of research publications and all enrolled fellows being awarded a qualification supports this positive viewpoint.

Improvements in support and guidance have taken place as part of general changes made to improve MRINZ' research performance. As previously noted, clinical trial manager positions were established to provide additional professional and personal support. There is mostly informal feedback on how effective the support and guidance is, through one-to-one meetings with the supervisor or director. The strong educational outcomes indicate that support and guidance is generally effective.

## 1.6 How effective are governance and management in supporting educational achievement?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Good**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Good**.

MRINZ has a clear purpose: to investigate important public health problems to improve the prevention and treatment of diseases. It also provides specialist training in medical research, with research and education activity closely interwoven in the identity of MRINZ. Governance and management has been highly effective in supporting outstanding overall research performance. The focus on the education

role is less clear in some areas. However, overall governance and management has been effective in supporting strong educational achievement.

There is a range of sound governance and management processes in place. The current director has been instrumental in founding and creating a high-performing research organisation. MRINZ has been successful in attracting and retaining high-quality research staff. Relationships have been developed with reputable local and international research and education partners. The facilities and resourcing support the high-quality research and training. The board monitors activities and risk management. The small size of the organisation and a flat management structure enables the director, with the support of the deputy directors, programme leaders and other support roles to maintain a high standard of performance. Substantial funding has recently been secured, recognising the outstanding research performance of MRINZ.

However, the board and management give limited attention to the individual educational achievement of the fellows and the effectiveness of their processes in supporting that achievement. For instance, the two recent chairman's and directors' annual reports made no direct reference to the educational role or the quality of the performance of the institute in this area.

Feedback and review processes supporting strong research performance are clearly part of the everyday culture of the institute. Educational review processes, mostly implicit within these broader processes, have been generally effective. Recent changes present both new opportunities and potential risks for MRINZ: increased funding will significantly upscale both the research and educational activity taking place; and the pioneering director is looking to retirement.

Review processes lack a sufficiently clear educational focus. For instance, the MRINZ self-assessment questionnaire centred on the overall organisation's activities and not on how well governance and management supports educational performance, learning and teaching. There is an absence of periodic and more systematic review processes, including: rating the educational achievement and experience of the MRINZ fellows; a review of the board's performance in supporting educational outcomes; assessing the impact on educational performance of the recently established roles of clinical trial and IT managers; and at some point a review of the Medical Doctorate programme.

## Focus Areas

*This section reports significant findings in each focus area, not already covered in Part 1.*

### 2.1 Focus area: Governance, management and strategy

The rating in this focus area for educational performance is **Good**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this focus area is **Good**.

### 2.2 Focus area: Clinical Research Training

The rating in this focus area for educational performance is **Good**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this focus area is **Good**.

# Recommendations

NZQA recommends that Medical Research Institute of New Zealand:

- Develop a clearer focus on the educational role of the organisation to support the academic achievement and related outcomes for the medical research fellows.
- Design and implement more systematic review processes to suit an education provider with low student numbers and programmes of generally three years' duration.

# Appendix

## Regulatory basis for external evaluation and review

*External evaluation and review is conducted according to the External Evaluation and Review (EER) Rules 2013, which are made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.*

*Self-assessment and participation in external evaluation and review are requirements for maintaining accreditation to provide an approved programme for all TEOs other than universities. The requirements are set through the NZQF Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules 2013, which are also made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.*

*In addition, the Private Training Establishment Registration Rules 2013 require registered private training establishments to undertake self-assessment and participate in external evaluation and review, in accordance with the External Evaluation and Review Rules (EER) 2013, as a condition of maintaining registration. The Private Training Establishment Registration Rules 2013 are also made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.*

*NZQA is responsible for ensuring non-university TEOs continue to comply with the rules after the initial granting of approval and accreditation of programmes and/or registration. The New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NZVCC) has statutory responsibility for compliance by universities.*

*This report reflects the findings and conclusions of the external evaluation and review process, conducted according to the External Evaluation and Review (EER) Rules 2013.*

*The report identifies strengths and areas for improvement in terms of the organisation's educational performance and capability in self-assessment.*

*External evaluation and review reports are one contributing piece of information in determining future funding decisions where the organisation is a funded TEO subject to an investment plan agreed with the Tertiary Education Commission.*

*External evaluation and review reports are public information and are available from the NZQA website ([www.nzqa.govt.nz](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz)).*

*The External Evaluation and Review (EER) Rules 2013 are available at <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/About-us/Our-role/Rules/EER-Rules.pdf>, while information about the conduct and methodology for external evaluation and review can be found at <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/external-evaluation-and-review/policy-and-guidelines-eer/introduction/>.*

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