

Marsden Fund Council

Terms of Reference 2025

Background

1. The Marsden Fund Council (the Council) exists to oversee the Marsden Fund on behalf of the Minister of Science, Innovation and Technology (the Minister). These Terms of Reference set out the role of the Marsden Fund Council for the 2026 Funding Round.
2. In October 2025 the Minister announced major reforms to the science system which included the establishment of Research Funding New Zealand (the Board) as the funding decision-maker for most Science Innovation and Technology funds including the Marsden Fund. The 2026 Marsden Fund Round provides for a transition from the Council to the Board.

Minister's Responsibilities

3. The Minister has overall responsibility for the Marsden Fund (the Fund).
4. The Minister issues the Terms of Reference for the Fund and appoints the Council to manage the Fund in such a way as to fulfil the objectives as set out in the Marsden Fund Council Terms of Reference, the Marsden Fund Terms of Reference and the Gazette notice published by the Minister.
5. The Minister may not direct the funding outcome of individual proposals.

Functions

6. The functions of the Council shall be to:
 - a) oversee the assessment of proposals from the Marsden Fund Round and
 - i. determine which full proposals do not meet the eligibility criteria and, therefore, will not be considered by the Board for funding
 - ii. invite Expressions of Interest to proceed to full proposals (based on eligibility and assessment criteria)
 - iii. provide recommendations to the Board to enable its funding decisions
 - b) implement the Terms of Reference for the Fund
 - c) provide advice to the Minister on the performance and achievement of the Fund against its objectives and
 - d) ensure that the relevance and importance of Marsden funded research is monitored and communicated to the New Zealand public.
 - e) oversee the progress of research funded by the Fund by considering the results of monitoring and auditing of contracts undertaken by the Royal Society Te Apārangi (the Society).

Scope of Activities

7. In carrying out its functions the Council shall ensure the following activities are fully addressed, with the support of the secretariat provided by the Society, or other external support as required.

Oversee the Assessment of Proposals for the 2026 Marsden Fund Round

8. The Council will:
 - a) use contestable assessment processes whereby proposals will be treated in a fair, equitable and consistent fashion
 - b) undertake a peer review process of international standard for all proposals
 - c) maintain best practice procedures for conflict of interest and confidentiality procedures and

- d) issue guidance on appropriate indirect costs to be included in successful funding contracts with research organisations.

Use the Principles of Best Practice for the Marsden Fund

- 9. The Council may adopt policies and procedures as it considers necessary to carry out of its functions.
- 10. The policies and procedures adopted and used by the Council must be in accordance with the 2025 Terms of Reference for the Marsden Fund and the Gazette notice as issued by the Minister.

Council Composition, Membership and Relationship with the Society

Membership

- 11. The Council consists of up to nine members, comprising a Chair and eight eminent researchers spanning the range of disciplines. The Council will meet as required, but a minimum of twice a year to discuss recommendations by expert panels on expression of interest and full proposals.
- 12. The Chair and members of the Council shall be appointed by the Minister, with individual members appointed for terms and under such conditions as determined by the Minister. A Deputy Chair may be appointed from within the Council membership by the Council members.

Liability of Members

- 13. Council members will not be personally liable for acts or defaults done or omitted in good faith in the exercise or intended exercise of their functions under these Terms of Reference.

Executive Support for the Marsden Fund Council

- 14. The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (the Ministry) has entered into an agreement with the Society to provide executive support and secretariat services to the Marsden Fund.
- 15. Executive support for the Council shall be provided by the Society, pursuant to this agreement. The output agreement will specify both the range of services to be provided and the price for those services.

Provision of Secretariat Services

- 16. The Council shall be entitled to require services from the Society in accordance with a Memorandum of Understanding between the Society and the Council. The Memorandum of Understanding will outline the roles and responsibilities of the two parties.
- 17. The Council shall communicate directly with a nominated employee of the Society whose function is to manage the executive support for the Council.

Management and Dispersal of Funds

Funding for Allocation

- 18. Funds available for allocation each year shall be formally advised to the Society and the Council by the Minister.

Advice on Marsden Fund Allocations and the role of the Research Funding New Zealand Board

- 19. The Council will:
 - a) decide which applicants from the Expression of Interest stage will be invited to submit a full proposal
 - b) provide recommendations to enable the Board to determine which full proposals will be funded which will include:
 - i. the list of eligible full proposals
 - ii. a shortlist of fundable proposals which appropriately considers the funding available,

- c) provide advice on the determination of the shortlist, including the rationale for the Council's recommendations regarding which proposals are recommended for funding and which are not.

20. The Board will make the decision on which full proposals will be funded.