

University Advisory Group

Submitter:	Dr Nicole Stanton, Research Manager
Submitting on behalf of Organisation:	Cancer Society of New Zealand National Office

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The Cancer Society is New Zealand's largest non-governmental funder of cancer research, with an investment of over \$50 million into cancer research in the past 10 years. The Cancer Society plays a unique role in the cancer research system in New Zealand, as it provides funding for researchers and research projects that then enables them to be highly competitive when applying for larger contestable government funding, as well as funding important research centres such as the Auckland Cancer Society Research Centre, Cancer Trials New Zealand, and He Taonga Tapu, Cancer Society Tissue Bank.

This submission is written on behalf of the Cancer Society National Office, which administers our national research grants. We will be addressing the below question:

3. What are the barriers (excluding fiscal) that limit the universities from operating efficiently and effectively for the benefit of New Zealand?

The research the Cancer Society funds is reliant on the New Zealand University and Science Systems being strong and effective. This particularly relates to New Zealand's research infrastructure, which includes tenured researchers and research facilities, as our research funds do not generally allow for support for these roles and facilities. Without functional research infrastructure, we would not be able to fund high quality, high impact research conducted here in New Zealand. This is why we are writing this submission to the University Advisory Group.

The Cancer Society primarily holds research contracts with universities, so our perspective of universities is primarily as research organisations.

One of the conditions of the research funding that we provide is that it does not cover university overheads, as we are obliged to ensure our funds are used for the purposes for which our donors intended, not for university administration and infrastructure. Thus, we are reliant on these functions being funded through other means, as noted above. Government contestable funding, such as HRC grants or those from the Marsden fund, includes overheads, so when a person is funded using one of these grants (usually early career researchers), overheads are charged as a value of 120% or more of the person's salary. This severely limits the use of the contestable funding awarded. Often this means

that a person cannot fully fund their salary and research on a single grant. Researchers in this position rely on overhead-free funding such as ours to make up the remainder of their salary to remain employed and sufficiently compensated for their work. This highlights a serious problem, which we alone, as a charity, cannot fix. We understand that overhead charges are currently essential for the effective running of universities, but they completely devalue the government grants that are being awarded, since such a high percentage of them is directed to university overhead costs. The way universities are funded needs to be addressed in such a way that large amounts are not required to be taken from hard won contestable funding.

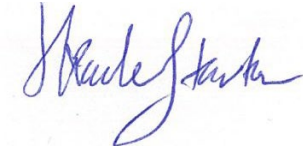
We find that New Zealand universities vary widely in their approach to research, how they employ their staff, and how they support their postgraduate students. One of the key hurdles we have encountered is the complex nature of the University systems for students, particularly the PhD students for whom we provide scholarships. As every university is different, we are unable to advise students as to how best deal with these complexities. We find that University staff also struggle with this complexity, which often means that we need to engage with a range of people across many different teams within a university to solve a problem. From our perspective, this is problematic, and makes it difficult to build relationships with these institutions. If universities could work in a more open and transparent way with each other as well as external entities, that would make our work much easier as we will then know which team corresponds to which function. We do however recognise the unique and important roles universities play in their local and international communities.

We also consider that more collaboration among institutions would be conducive to high impact research, particularly on topics that are unique to New Zealand and therefore unlikely to be studied anywhere else.

The Cancer Society wants to see a thriving university network that supports research that is high value, high impact, and produces good outcomes for all New Zealanders. Our current system needs reform for us to realise that vision. We have highlighted some issues that particularly relate to our interactions with these institutions, and we acknowledge that the problems that need to be addressed go well beyond the scope of our submission.

Thank you for your consideration of this submission. We look forward to seeing meaningful progress on building a strong university system through the advice of the University Advisory Group.

Ngā mihi nui,



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