



# **Tertiary e-Learning Research Fund 2004/2005**

## **Request for Proposal: Information for Applicants**

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## **Tertiary e-Learning Research Fund 2004/2005 – October 2004**

### **1 Introduction**

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The Ministry of Education is administering the second round of the Tertiary e-Learning Research Fund, established to support and encourage rigorous research into tertiary e-learning in the New Zealand context. The Ministry will allocate the fund through a contestable funding process.

#### **1.1 Content of this Request for Proposals (RFP)**

The purpose of this document is to provide potential applicants to the fund with information about the fund itself, its eligibility and assessment criteria, and the process for applying for funding. All funding applications must be made in accordance with the requirements set out in this document.

#### **1.2 Enquiries**

Enquiries about the Tertiary e-Learning Research fund or this RFP may be made to [ellearning.research@minedu.govt.nz](mailto:ellearning.research@minedu.govt.nz). All questions and answers will be available at [www.steo.govt.nz/ELearningNews.aspx](http://www.steo.govt.nz/ELearningNews.aspx). This is to ensure that all potential applicants have access to the same information. Please check the website regularly for updated information on the fund and answers to your, and other applicants', questions.

### **2 About the Tertiary e-Learning Research Fund**

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#### **2.1 Background**

The Tertiary e-Learning Research Fund was established in January 2004 as part of the implementation of the recommendations of the Interim Tertiary e-Learning Framework. e-Learning research is included among the framework's key action areas.

The purpose of the Tertiary e-Learning Research Fund is to advance our knowledge of e-learning in the tertiary sector. The Government will fund rigorous and readily applicable research with a specific New Zealand focus, which will respond to the information needs of tertiary education organisations (TEOs), and be beneficial in assisting them to decide where to place their efforts and resources in relation to e-learning.

It is the Ministry's intention to fund e-learning research which will establish the current context and future impact of e-learning in New Zealand's tertiary education sector. Such research will identify the current situation of tertiary e-learning in New Zealand, such as the significant trends impacting on e-learning in the last three years, and analyse the broader contextual factors which might have an impact on tertiary e-learning in New Zealand. Research into international practices and policies relating to e-learning will also assist us in evaluating and understanding the New Zealand situation.

The projects funded will both satisfy the need for some research on the areas the sector have identified as priorities, and will also provide a framework for a scenario-planning exercise (planned for 2005/2006) for the development of e-learning in the New Zealand tertiary sector. This is an initiative for the future which will be of great benefit to TEOs for assessing both their current and desired situation in respect of e-learning.

A scenario is a mental model that articulates plausible futures by taking into account fundamental business assumptions combined with a deep understanding of the dynamics of present-day reality. In other words, scenario planning is a technique that promotes the interpretation of the present in terms of a well-founded picture of the future. Scenarios do not predict the future, but are used as tools to gain a better understanding of alternative future paths. Scenarios are used to test strategic options against alternative futures that are based on a set of new - but realistic - assumptions.

In rapidly evolving contexts like e-learning it is both difficult and risky to attempt predictions of the future. It would be better to consider a few well-founded alternatives depicting plausible e-learning futures. These alternatives could then be used by the sector to examine the implications for individual TEOs in order to promote informed decision-making.

The first step in a well-founded scenario planning exercise requires a rigorous analysis of the current context. In particular, research is needed on those observable trends and drivers of change that are likely to have a significant impact on the future of e-learning in New Zealand. This call for research focuses on the contextual analysis phase regarding verifiable drivers of change and will not move into the subsequent phase concerning the analysis of uncertainties where the outcome is fundamentally unpredictable.

The desired outcome of the Tertiary e-Learning Research Fund is the provision of research and information which will make a significant contribution to the development of New Zealand's e-learning capabilities. This in turn will contribute to a networked, flexible education system offering accessible, relevant and high quality learning opportunities to all New Zealanders. Thus this fund and the research it supports will help in part to realise the Government's vision of New Zealand as a dynamic, thriving and confident knowledge society.

## **2.2 Funding available**

The fund of approximately **\$300,000** will be allocated on a contestable basis by February 2005. The Ministry of Education seeks to fund **four or five** research projects of the duration of six- to eight-months.

The level of funding sought in any application will be subject to careful scrutiny. Applicants must ensure that project budgets are supported by appropriate cost information and fairly represent the scope and size of the proposed project.

### **3 Eligibility Criteria**

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Eligibility criteria **must** be met before applications can be evaluated against the assessment criteria phase. Applications that do not meet the criteria will **not** progress to the next stage.

#### **3.1 Who is eligible to apply for funding?**

The lead applicant for each application **must** be a **New Zealand tertiary education organisation** (TEO). In the context of this fund, a TEO is a tertiary education provider, (such as a university, polytechnic, wananga, private training establishment), an industry training organisation, or any person or body recognised by the Ministry of Education as a provider of tertiary education-related services.

All applications **must** be authorised by an appropriate representative from the lead organisation (this would typically be the Vice-Chancellor, CEO, or Research Manager of an organisation/ institution).

The following applicants are eligible to apply for funding through the Tertiary e-Learning Research Fund:

- individuals from TEOs (including staff and post-graduate students),
- individual TEOs,
- TEO representative bodies,
- consortia of TEOs, and
- relevant stakeholders, in collaboration with a New Zealand TEO.

#### **3.2 What projects are eligible?**

All applications to the Tertiary e-Learning Research fund **must** align with the identified topics of e-learning research, as outlined in Section 5. In addition, all research undertaken is required to meet the following eligibility requirements:

*1) Appropriate and efficient use of resources*

- All resources must be directed to activities that will most effectively achieve the aims of the funding.
- A detailed budget supporting the funding applied for must be included in the funding application.
- The research should be self-sustaining, and should not require additional “top-ups” from the Ministry or any other funding body. Project funding is “one-off” and will end upon the expiry or termination of the funding agreement. Nor should there be any expectation on the part of the applicant of funding beyond the term of the funding agreement.

*2) Beyond general expectations and not already funded*

- The research proposed must be outside of the usual business of the tertiary system, and must not already receive funding of any kind.

### 3) *Compliance with legal and ethical obligations*

- All research undertaken must comply with the requirements set out in legislation, regulations and treaties to which New Zealand is a signatory.

## **4 Assessment Criteria**

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Eligible applications to the Tertiary e-Learning Research Fund will be evaluated against the following assessment criteria. The Ministry of Education will select for funding those research proposals which are deemed likely to return the most benefit to the tertiary sector and to achieve the objectives of the Tertiary e-Learning Research Fund. [Note that the content of funding proposals must meet the requirements listed in section 8 of this document.]

### **4.1 What are the assessment criteria?**

#### *1. Alignment with the objectives of this research fund.*

The proposed research must

- be in accordance with the priority research areas outlined in section 5 of this document;
- prioritise trends and drivers of change in e-learning in New Zealand that are both verifiable and likely to have a significant impact on the tertiary sector (trends that will not have a significant impact will not be funded);
- be relevant to the New Zealand situation;
- be readily applicable or useful in the future research context; and
- be academically rigorous.

It will be beneficial for proposals to show alignment with the principles of the Interim Tertiary e-Learning Framework, the Tertiary Education Strategy 2002/07, and the e-Learning Advisory Group's 2002 publication *Highways and Pathways*.

#### *2. Applicant's ability to undertake proposals successfully.*

The application must demonstrate the applicant's ability to undertake the project successfully. In particular, the application must show that:

- The applicant has the background, ability and resources to achieve the objectives of the research proposed;
- The applicant will not take on other projects that will jeopardise his/her ability to complete the research; and
- Robust management arrangements and implementation plans are in place.

#### *3. Financial suitability*

The application must show that the research proposed will not place any financial risks on the Government.

## **5 Eligible Areas of Tertiary e-Learning Research**

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The following topics of research are eligible for funding. While different interpretations of these topics will be considered, proposals outside these areas will **not** be considered.

Note: Research projects should take account of relevant international research.

### **5.1 What have other countries done with regard to government policy and accessibility to e-learning?**

What policies have been put in place, what were the outcomes, and what lessons can be learned from their experiences? What government-funded infrastructure is provided to support accessibility to learning in small and remote communities?

### **5.2 Where is New Zealand placed on the world stage in relation to the delivery of borderless and export education through e-learning?**

Undertake a comparative analysis of New Zealand's tertiary e-education situation with international trends, with specific reference to the phenomenon of borderless and export education.

### **5.3 What might the e-learning architectures of the future be? What might they look like? What are the key systems in tertiary institutions that in the future need to be integrated or whose information should be integrated?**

### **5.4 Part 1: Who will be New Zealand's tertiary e-learners?**

Analyse e-learner profiles and trends over last three years. What is the impact of likely changes in demography in New Zealand in the future? [You might include the following personal data for e-learners: ethnicity, age, gender, EFT and employment status, geographical location, etc]

### **Part 2: What are the growth rates of the different categories of e-learning delivery in New Zealand tertiary education organisations?**

Survey and compare the growth rates in different categories of e-learning delivery. What might be the implications of these growth rates? [You might consider using the SDR Course Register File 3.13 Internet field categories: no access, web-supported, web-enhanced, web-based.]

## 6 Assessment process and key dates

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### 6.1 Timeframe

Timeframe / Key dates	Task
Week of 18 October 2004	RFP issued
12pm (midday), Monday 6 December 2004	Applications submitted
December 2004	Applications checked against eligibility criteria by a team of Ministry of Education staff
January 2005	Evaluation panel review eligible applications and make recommendations for funding
February 2005	Funding decisions communicated to all applicants
End February – End March 2005	Tertiary e-Learning Research agreements negotiated and signed

The Ministry of Education may change the above timeframe if that is required. The Ministry will notify applicants of any significant changes to the above timeframe.

### 6.2 Consideration of Applications

a) *Applications must meet the requirements outlined*

Applications must contain the information required in this document. Compliance with these requirements will form part of the assessment of applications by the Ministry of Education.

b) *Assessment*

See section 6.3 for an outline of the assessment process which the Ministry of Education will follow. Note that only eligible applications will be evaluated against the assessment criteria.

c) *No guarantee of funding*

The Ministry of Education does not guarantee that all or any applicants will receive funding from the Tertiary e-Learning Research Fund 2004/2005.

### 6.3 Process for making funding decisions

The Ministry of Education will undertake a three-stage process to screen and assess applications:

*i) Screening for Eligibility*

All applications will be screened against the eligibility criteria to eliminate non-eligible applications or projects. A team from the Ministry of Education will undertake the initial screening, but will seek external confirmation of the eligibility of applications as required.

*ii) Evaluation against Assessment Criteria*

An Evaluation Panel will assess all eligible applications against the assessment criteria. The panel is comprised of four experts from the tertiary education sector and one representative from a relevant government agency.

On the basis of the successful meeting of the assessment criteria and the individual merit and ranking of the proposals, the Evaluation Panel will make funding recommendations to the Ministry of Education.

*iii) Funding Decisions*

Senior officials from the Ministry of Education will make the final decisions about funding on the recommendations of the Evaluation Panel.

#### **6.4 Decisions on Applications**

The Ministry of Education will inform in writing all applicants of its decision on the applications for funding by the end of February 2005.

The Ministry may contact applicants for further information about their application or to discuss the application prior to deciding on funding allocations, commencing negotiations, or issuing a funding agreement.

#### **6.5 Negotiations and Agreements**

Once the funding decisions have been communicated, contract negotiations will commence with the successful applicants. The anticipated completion date of this process is the end of March 2005.

The Ministry of Education may negotiate with any applicant on all or part of their application, or on any matter relating to their project or its application after the deadline for receiving applications has closed. A decision to allocate funding to any application may be conditional; for example, it may be subject to receiving further information or assurances, or to agreement upon certain revisions to the proposed project. Such conditions will be discussed with the applicants concerned prior to negotiations towards a written funding agreement.

Applicants should note that negotiations are not binding and no contractual obligations arise until both parties have signed a written funding agreement in the Ministry of Education's standard form. The funding agreement will state the roles and responsibilities of each party and the terms of the agreement based on the Ministry's requirements and subsequent negotiations.

## **7 Payment Profile**

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Funding for successful applications will be paid in instalments throughout the term of the agreement for the project. The frequency and amount of instalments will be agreed between the Ministry of Education and the successful applicant. Please include an indicative payment profile for your project.

You may specify a sum to be paid on signing the funding agreement as a start-up or establishment payment. This sum must be clearly identified in your budget and will cover initial, one-off project costs (e.g. recruitment) as may be appropriate.

With the exception of establishment payments, the following constraints will apply to payment profiles:

- Funding will be paid in instalments in arrears;
- Instalments will be paid no more frequently than monthly;
- Instalments will be linked to project milestones;
- Instalments may be for different amounts.

## **8 How to Submit a Funding Application / Research Proposal**

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### **8.1 Due date and address for applications**

Funding applications for the Tertiary e-Learning Research fund must be received by the Ministry of Education no later than:

**12pm (noon), Monday 6 December 2004**

Please use the application template provided and insert the subject header:  
**Tertiary e-Learning Research Fund Application**

Email your application to

**[elarning.research@minedu.govt.nz](mailto:elarning.research@minedu.govt.nz)**

Please note that the Ministry of Education works in a PC environment using Windows XP Professional, with Microsoft Office 2003 desktop applications including Word, Excel and Access. All documents should be able to be read by this system.

The Ministry of Education will acknowledge receipt of your application by return e-mail.

## 8.2 Information required

All applicants must use the template provided for the Tertiary e-Learning Research Fund funding applications.

The template can be

- downloaded from [www.steo.govt.nz/eLearningProjects.aspx](http://www.steo.govt.nz/eLearningProjects.aspx) ;
- downloaded via the eLearn portal at [www.elearn.govt.nz](http://www.elearn.govt.nz); or
- requested by e-mailing [elearning.research@minedu.govt.nz](mailto:elearning.research@minedu.govt.nz).

Ensure that you provide information under each heading provided in the template. Applications should not exceed **5,000 words** including appendices.

### All applications must include the following:

#### 1) *Cover sheet*

The cover sheet of the application should include the following information:

- Research option
- Title of project – full and abbreviated
- Applicant's/ Applicants' name(s)
- Lead tertiary education organisation's contact details
- Primary contact person's name and contact details\*\*
- Amount of funding applied for
- Authorisation of application by organisation: name, designation, and signature. This person would typically be the Vice-Chancellor, CEO or Research Manager of an organisation. Please note: to be eligible, all applicants **must** have the documented support of their organisations
- Indication of collaboration in project
- Indication of willingness to collaborate with other TEOs on this project.

\*\* The contact person must be someone who has the authority to negotiate a funding agreement on behalf of the applicant(s) in the event that the application is successful.

#### 2) *Executive summary*

Provide a concise summary of the research project for which you are applying for funding.

#### 3) *Demonstration of alignment with criteria*

Applications must demonstrate how the proposed project meets the eligibility and assessment criteria (as outlined in sections 3 and 4).

#### 4) *Proposal Requirements / Project Plan*

Proposals should include the following:

- Project goals, objectives / outcomes / deliverables (including the background to and rationale for the project, clearly defined objectives and articulated benefits for the tertiary sector);
- A brief demonstration of the appropriateness of your research methodology and how it will achieve the expected outcomes.
- A proposed timetable, including starting and finishing dates, and dates for interim milestones and milestone completion;
- Key project tasks (i.e. outline what you are going to do to achieve the project's outcomes/ deliverables);
- Brief background information on the key personnel to be involved, including qualifications and experience relevant to their role in the project.

If you are undertaking a joint project, you must:

- describe the nature of your relationship;
  - include details of the collaboration;
  - state whether that relationship is governed by a written agreement and provide a copy of that document;
  - specify which party will have responsibility for what aspects of the project.
- A detailed budget itemising costs (e.g. salaries/wages, materials, data processing, travel, accommodation, other project costs, overhead charges and other expenses). Note: capital items will not be funded. [Please use the template provided for your budget];
  - Indicative payment profile [please use the template provided];
  - Analysis of project risks and how you would mitigate against them; and
  - Declaration of any possible conflict of interest from the research team/ institution in relation to the project.

## **9 Terms and conditions of this Request for Proposals (RFP)**

### **9.1 Non-complying applications**

The Ministry of Education reserves the right to decline late applications, partially completed applications or applications that do not conform to the requirements to apply for funding as laid out in this document, entirely at its discretion. Non-eligible applications will not be considered.

### **9.2 Assessment of applications**

The Ministry of Education may seek external comment on applications, as described in section 6.3 above.

The Ministry may consider any relevant information from or about any potential applicant or application as part of the assessment process.

### **9.3 The Ministry of Education's rights regarding this RFP**

The Ministry of Education reserves the right not to fund any or all applications.

The Ministry reserves the right at any time:

- To request additional information about any application from the applicant(s) or any interested or affected stakeholder(s);
- To undertake background checks on the financial viability of successful applicants prior to contract negotiation;
- To seek further applications from any applicant or potential applicant;
- To negotiate with any applicant or other person on any matter relating to an application or the fund, after the date for funding applications has closed;
- To cancel this request for proposals; and
- To re-issue the RFP.

### **9.4 Confidentiality of Information**

Applicants must maintain as strictly confidential, except as required by law or as the Ministry of Education may permit, all information that might come into their possession in relation to the initiative, this RFP and any negotiation that may arise from it.

The Ministry will share the information in applications (on a confidential basis) with the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) and other relevant government bodies and external experts for the purposes of assessing it against the eligibility and assessment criteria.

Details of successful applications (including the topic of the research, the lead applicant and the funding awarded) will be made publicly available through the eLearn portal ([www.elearn.govt.nz](http://www.elearn.govt.nz)) once the Ministry of Education has communicated its funding decisions to applicants.

Otherwise, the Ministry of Education will not disclose any of the information in any application to any third party, except where required to do so in response to requests under the Official Information Act 1982 or by Court order. The Ministry will consult applicants about releasing or withholding significant details under the Official Information Act.

Applicants are required not to make any public statements in relation to this RFP, the allocation process, or any negotiation, without the Ministry of Education's prior written consent.

### **9.5 No intention to create legal relations**

This RFP may result in negotiations for a funding agreement, but of itself is not an offer that applicants accept by submitting an application. Every application received is an offer upon which the Ministry of Education may negotiate with a view to acceptance once a written contract is executed. Successful applicants should note that negotiations are not binding until execution of a written funding agreement. No process contract is established by this RFP and any application.

### **9.6 Information**

All information provided by the Ministry of Education in relation to this RFP is believed to be the best information available at that time. The Ministry cannot and does not make any representation or warranties as to the accuracy or completeness of such information.

Applicants warrant that all information and statements made in their application(s) are correct. Applicants should make (and will be deemed to have made) their own independent investigation of all relevant and material matters.

### **9.7 Changes to this RFP**

The scope and requirements of this RFP information document reflect the Ministry of Education's current requirements for applications for research funding. If the Ministry needs to vary those requirements, it will:

- email all individuals and organisations, to whom the Ministry issued the RFP, details of the new requirements,
- post the changes on-line at [www.steo.govt.nz/eLearningProjects.aspx](http://www.steo.govt.nz/eLearningProjects.aspx), and
- extend the due date accordingly, if those details were provided less than ten working days before applications are due.

### **9.8 Cost of preparing your application**

Applicants are responsible for paying all costs incurred by them in the preparation of their applications and the negotiations of any funding agreement.

The Ministry of Education has no obligation to pay applicants any money for any research applicants propose or undertake until a formal funding agreement is signed by both parties, and only then as agreed and expressly recorded in writing in that funding agreement.

### **9.9 Tertiary e-Learning Research Funding Agreement**

Successful applicants will be required to sign a standard Ministry of Education funding agreement. It can be viewed on the eLearn website ([www.elearn.govt.nz](http://www.elearn.govt.nz)).

The funding agreement will be for a maximum term of ten months and include provisions that provide for the following:

- Funding agreements will require applicants to undertake the project in accordance with the project plan described in the funding application. Any proposal to alter the project plan once an agreement has been reached will be treated as a formal contract variation that must be agreed in writing with the Ministry of Education.
- Applicants may not use the funds for any purpose other than for the project. Applicants must agree to use the funds paid to them by the Ministry of Education in such a way that best ensures the achievement of outcomes of the project and funding agreement.
- Applicants may not apply for other funding for the project without the Ministry's prior written agreement.
- Successful applicants may not assign an agreement to any other person or organisation.
- Successful applicants will be required to supply at least two progress reports on projects funded. Progress reports will include:
  - a description of progress made;
  - achievement of project milestones;
  - notification of failure to achieve or risks to achieving milestones, including the causes and strategies to remedy and/or mitigate;
  - issues arising in the delivery of the project; and
  - a summary of expenditure.
- Successful applicants may publish their research independently, but in relation to any publications of the work, or part thereof, they must acknowledge the financial assistance given by the Ministry. The Ministry will have the right to publish and use in whole or in part results of the research subject to the author being consulted prior to publication and to appropriate acknowledgement being given to the source.
- Successful applicants must agree to participate in any evaluation that the Ministry of Education or its agents may wish to undertake of the Tertiary e-Learning Research Fund as the Ministry may reasonably require.