

# The New Zealand Union of Students' Associations

## NZUSA Submission on the Productivity Commission's Investigation into New Models of Tertiary Education.

### 1. What education is for

“The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. But education which stops with efficiency may prove the greatest menace to society.” —Martin Luther King Jr., speech at Morehouse College, 1948

Students want their education to enhance their employability, given the link between having a good job and a happy life, but it is not the sole function. Students primarily choose their education based on the things that they are interested in, they do better accordingly, and having a system that is not purely about cost/benefit and releasing human potential in civics, and as social beings, as well as economic units enhances the nation.

### 2. Developing and representing soft skills

Only about a quarter of employers believe recent graduates are well prepared in critical thinking and analytic reasoning, written and oral communication, complex problem solving, innovation and creativity, and applying knowledge and skills to real-world settings. Yet students often do have these skills (around 60% report that they believe they do). The problem is one of demonstrating these attributes, and the achievement of these attributes.

Many institutions formally have curricula to teach the soft skills that employers have identified as so important; these efforts involve both faculty and professional staff creating clear paths for learning defined skills.

But teaching these skills isn't enough if there is not a common vocabulary for the related outcomes or a common understanding of what they represent.

Student affairs teams have developed a number of ways to describe the experiences of students that align with the skills employers say they want.

Co-curricular transcripts offer one solution, by allowing students to better reflect the skills they bring to the workforce, establishing expectations for their performance. Some badging options can be tied to assessment, which allows students to prove their claims of skill-specific competency. And portfolios allow students to share tangible examples of how and when they believe they have distinguished themselves.

### 3. Access and opportunity

NZUSA is concerned that a number of policy adjustments have led to a denial of opportunity to many New Zealanders from being able to contribute to their own, their community's and their country's future through access to a tertiary education.

Further, we are concerned that these policy changes have been made on an ad hoc basis to deal with perceived flash point issues and have not taken into account the system as a whole or the perverse impact that these changes have on students who are not part of the targeting or the system as a whole.

What is needed is a wide-ranging review of student support policies directed at ensuring that there is no loss of potential through focussing on the particular question of opportunity within the tertiary education sector.

The changes have adversely affected the ability of older students, intending postgraduate students, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds – especially those who need to move to undertake their chosen study, Maori and Pasifika students, and students with disabilities.

### 4. Tertiary teaching quality

Those who have been away from the system for a long time tend to have a perspective that teaching quality within our tertiary institutions is poor. It is certainly the case that tertiary teachers are employed on other bases than their teaching ability: as discipline experts in higher education, as proven by their research capacity, and as experienced industry professionals in further education environments.

However, it is not the case that this means tertiary teaching quality is poor. All institutions have programmes in place of professional development, although these are not necessarily compulsory.

NZUSA has surveyed students about their views on what they want from lecturers and whether there should be a requirement to have specific teaching qualifications. This survey shows students want teachers to have access to an ongoing process of professional development rather than pre-employment qualifications.

Students identified that they want lecturers who know how to use the basics of technology such as powerpoint, and to have knowledge on how to teach in big lecture theatres full of students, and how to get engagement in both small and large settings.

They wanted more support and mentoring for new tertiary teachers from tertiary teachers who are experienced and recognised as having good practice. The Ako Aotearoa Teaching Excellence Academy is an excellent move in this direction.

Far stronger than this support for professional development was a desire from students for tertiary teachers who were enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and approachable.

NZUSA is privileged to be a part of the Ako Aotearoa Tertiary Teaching Excellence Awards Judging Panel. This is an opportunity to see the wonderful things happening in the sector. There

are common themes of academics pushing to make learning relevant, emphasis on assessing what is learnt as opposed to teaching for assessment, inclusion of student voice as legitimate experts in their learning needs and academics are able to change their content and teaching as needs arise.

#### 5. Improving the feedback loops

Although all institutions have mechanisms for getting feedback from students there is no consistent practice and no alignment of connection with the best practices internationally. Too many times they are audit processes rather than connected to quality enhancement. As proof, mostly they are usually summative and the students encouraged to participate see little value in something that will only affect subsequent students.

The focus on student engagement should be on privileging students being empowered to comment, and be listened to, regarding their own learning experiences – and acknowledging that as learners they are experts in their own learning, or could be trained to be so.

Institutions should be required to report on the level of student participation in the decision-making of the institution as part of its quality enhancement systems.

This reporting will cover the institution's culture with respect to student engagement, the extent to which students are seen as partners, how well the systems in place respond to student diversity, how the student contribution is valued and shown to be valued, the degree to which the student voice is focussed on enhancement and change, and the existence or otherwise of appropriate resources and support.

Students will be supported locally and through a new National Centre for Student Voice to be active participants in their own learning processes.

Where there is a students' association it will have the function of enhancing and supporting student voice, in partnership with the institution, and be resourced to enable this function through the bulk-grant process.

All institutions must review their formal mechanisms for quality and governance to ensure that structures are based on good practice for enabling student representatives to work in partnership with the institution.

#### 6. The need for a national centre for student voice to build capacity

A National Centre for Student Voice should be developed between the state and the New Zealand Union of Students' Associations with joint governance between the crown, NZUSA and New Zealand's TEIs. This would be modelled on Student Partnership for Quality Scotland, or sparqs ([www.sparqs.ac.uk](http://www.sparqs.ac.uk)).

The Tertiary Education Commission could fund the Centre through Ako Aotearoa – the National Centre for Teaching and Learning Excellence.

The Centre will support students through establishing and delivering a common representative training programme; support institutions to improve systems and cultures for student engagement; support student representatives who work on a national basis; and lead activities on developing a systematic and sector-wide culture of student engagement.

#### 7. New forms of delivery

We are pleased that there has not been a head-long rush into embracing unproven initiatives such as MOOCs and note that there is, as there has always been, considerable investigation into pedagogically sound enhancements in delivery.

We do not believe that New Zealand is anything like out-of-step with international developments in such an area and further note that it is important to bring students along with any such initiatives – and that they are amongst the most conservative in terms of their expectations.

#### 8. Quality control systems

There are problems of quality in our system. We believe that the systems that exist across the university sector are robust, and with the further enhancement of the student voice contribution that we have set out above, that there would be no concerns at all.

This is not true in the sector directly assured by NZQA where quality systems are far more mixed in terms of their application and the assurance/enhancement mechanisms that NZQA is in a position to provide. It is also where a national system of student voice, and enhancing the capacity of learners to reflect and feedback on their own learning would have the greatest impact.

We understand that others have suggested that the unique roles of CUAP and AQA should be done away with, and all brought into an NZQA administered system. We do not agree. Students are well ensconced within the CUAP/AQA processes and they are superior to the alternative.

#### 9. Fixing the secondary/tertiary divide

We believe that the current transition processes between secondary education and tertiary education are broken, despite that there is considerable good practice in silo-ed, under-resourced and widely unknown situations.

The proposal is that the Education and Science Committee inquire into the capacity to support students as they transition from the compulsory school sector and work into tertiary education, and thereby enhance their ability to succeed.

We think there is an urgent need for a review in this area.

This review should

- a. Investigate the current provision (variance and typical) of careers advice at secondary schools in New Zealand.

- b. Investigate the provision of careers advice practitioners' professional development, training and support.
- c. Seek views across the compulsory and tertiary sectors about what level of support would be useful for improving the quality of careers advice.
- d. Seek views on the quality of careers and study advice available to New Zealanders outside of compulsory schooling, particularly: NEETS, unemployed New Zealanders, Maori, Pacifica, older New Zealanders, refugees and other new New Zealanders.
- e. Investigate how schools differently fund careers advice, and what changes could be made to funding regimes nationally and locally to enable an improvement in the quality of careers advice.
- f. Determine how the Government's, and others, online careers tools can be integrated into a coherent whole.
- g. Determine how these online careers tools can be best incorporated into the delivery of careers advice.
- h. To investigate how marketing by providers impacts upon students' choices to study, and where to study, and what links there should be between the government's tools and this marketing.
- i. To invite representatives of providers, including teaching staff, as to curriculum enhancements that could better support student transition, including but not limited to preparation for higher level numeracy and academic literacy.
- j. To investigate how vocational programmes sit within the secondary curriculum and their relationship between serving that function and the concurrent secondary curriculum function of teaching, selecting and ranking of students for university.
- k. To hear views on the place of university entrance as a standard for university.
- l. To investigate if there are differences in the academic preparation, encouragement, and advice given to students from lower-socio-economic backgrounds and those drawn from Maori and Pasifika communities, and the impact that this has on access for those groups.
- m. To investigate the efficacy of existing programmes designed to overcome stratification of achievement within the compulsory sector and the impact that they have on preparation and access to tertiary education.
- n. To understand what perception barriers exist about different types of tertiary education and how can they be overcome?
- o. To investigate how can catch-up and bridging provision be more fully linked into schooling?
- p. To see how fuller integration of tertiary learning and work help to clarify career pathways and options?
- q. To investigate how can careers information be more routinely supplemented with experiential opportunities?
- r. To develop an understanding as to how do students become aware of and prepare for career openings that do not yet exist?

## 10. Articulation and matriculation

Another aspect of the system which fails students and the other investors in tertiary education is the wastage that comes from poor arrangements between institutions – despite the unified Qualifications Framework.

We believe that there would be considerable advantage in requiring articulation agreements between (particularly regional) polytechnics and universities. This is the situation in Scotland, and would mean that students could begin their studies without having to leave home, saving considerable resources. They would also likely arrive at university – if this was the right path for them – better prepared for success.

There also need to be better arrangements between universities for movement between them, especially as most students are not enrolled in specialist qualifications. 120 points in a commerce degree should equal 120 points in any other.

No institution should be able to accept matriculated students unless they have these articulation agreements in place.

## 11. Promoting tertiary study vs advertising

In the university sector, around \$40 million is spent on advertising which really amounts to no more than shifting students between various capped programmes. Further, given that most universities serve their local geographical areas the cost/benefit of this spend is at best dubious. Given that the pastoral support and programmes to enhance the student experience are all experiencing a squeeze on their own capacity this spend seems even more fraught.

We believe that institutions should contribute to a national fund to promote tertiary educational opportunities, that students should have access to advice that would objectively direct them to the best institution for their learning goals, and that there is no place for branding and other promotional activities to domestic students.

## 12. Life-long learning

NZUSA believes that education is necessary life-long process. With a rapidly changing employment market students will need to reskill and retrain so they are able to make meaningful contributions towards society. There are many late-in-life learners, or those needing up retrain after redundancies or change in life circumstance. These people need to be able to access tertiary education but have limited access due to Studylink restrictions. Without the opportunity to access tertiary education throughout their life they will have restricted access to quality employment and their opportunity to contribute meaningfully to society will be restricted. Tertiary education needs to work at its processes of recognising prior learning (be it work based or academic) and allow this to staircase into meaningful study.

### 13. Affordability

Although student loans reduce the up-front barriers to tertiary study it is not true that they do not present a barrier. We know that groups which are unfamiliar with the benefits of study because of familial under-educational achievement are debt-adverse, so too are those seeking to return to study later in life. Our Income and Expenditure Survey (2014) of 5000 students across the sector also showed that around 2/3rds of students say that they will not do further study because of the impact of debt – a finding that is consistent with other jurisdictions where the costs and loans are similar to here.

In fact, we believe that the main reason that increasing fees combined with student loans has not seen a reduction in tertiary education enrolments is because of the extremely poor financial literacy that school leavers have.

It is a considerable concern that while most students are able to go to a local institution that is of good quality, by the time they come to do post-graduate study they are denied allowances at exactly the time when they would want to devote themselves moreso to their study (and work less) and potentially have to move to a new location.

Finally, we estimate that tertiary institutions are currently spending around \$20 million in reducing first year fees. These go almost exclusively to those from socio-economically advantaged communities. Again, if we were to think about NZ Inc and the goals thereof there would be a better way of spending these funds to enhance affordability – such as First in Family Scholarships coupled with better links between tertiary institutions and secondary schools to identify talent who would otherwise be put off from tertiary study.

### 14. The overall shape of the sector

There are a number of fantastic things happening in the tertiary sector. However, we are concerned that the monitoring and top-down management approaches is stifling the creativity and innovation of those working at the coalface. The competitive funding model does nothing but create silos, between Institutions and even at a departmental level within an individual Institution as departments fight for EFTS and funding. This silo mentality hinders collaboration and the opportunity to work cross discipline for the good of students.