



Nā āheitanga ā-mātauranga,
ko angitū ā-ākonga
Building educational capability
for learner success

University Advisory Group - Submission response to Phase One of consultation

This University Advisory Group (UAG) submission is from Ako Aotearoa, the National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence and responds to questions 7, 8 and 11.

7. What are the most appropriate approaches to ensure excellence in teaching, research, knowledge transfer and community engagement?

- A. Have an open university system where learners can choose and have recognised courses from across the university sector.

We propose the UAG consider the potential gains of adopting an 'open recognition system' for tertiary education courses and qualifications to make it easy to transfer credits and to complete qualifications. This could build on and liberate the current system of recognition of prior learning and cross crediting of courses. With an open and collaborative model learners could choose courses provided by leading educators from different universities and have these recognised in their degree credits. While modelling will need to be done, this approach would strengthen learner agency and outcomes for TES priority learners due to its potential to significantly reduce the costs and to improve the outcomes of degree and post graduate study.

Prioritising high quality teaching and learning outcomes could improve system efficiency. There are significant benefits to those with postgraduate degrees. Graduates have salary advantages and lifelong gains that would become more attainable for underserved groups, particularly Māori, Pacific, Disabled and Neurodiverse Learners with a more open recognition system.

Learners could select courses that are: unique to a specific university and right for their degree programme goals; in the mode of learning that is accessible; and avoids travel and accommodation costs by being able to live in their home in another region. Collaborative technology platforms and learning analytics would support the learning and information flow to learners about what is available and the delivery, achievement and awarding of completed courses and qualifications. Typically, university rules make it difficult to accept credits for multiple courses either within a university or elsewhere. The system of evaluating documentation to award credits is problematic if the education provider is not on the NZQA list of internationally accepted providers. Wherever possible, recognition of prior learning should not have an added financial or time-consuming burden to ākonga by requiring the completion of courses similar to those they have already completed at other institutions. An improved system could improve the course and qualification completion rates of learners from underserved groups.

B. Improve foundation and bridging opportunities

Learners who choose university need to be supported to achieve success. Foundation and bridging courses need to get the basics right. They need to create a sense of belonging through their professionalism, accessibility, manaakitanga, and whakawhanaungatanga. This will provide an essential foundation for the learner to succeed. We support the work of FABENZ and would welcome opportunities to see what more can be achieved.

C. Professional learning and development (PLD) for teachers

Many university teachers struggle to teach well. Most have no formal training in tertiary teaching, and for early career academics, they have little time to learn how to teach. This is unlike primary and secondary school teachers who must undertake comprehensive teacher training courses. The challenge is to build the capability of all teachers in the university system. Professional learning and development approaches must be planned with university staff to ensure excellence in teaching. In the last two years, educators and practitioners from the university sector comprise the bulk of the Ako Aotearoa Māori Cultural Capability workshop attendees indicating that university educators seek ways to upskill their cultural capabilities and to give regard to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Effective teaching standards and developing educators will contribute to high quality teaching. Massey University has actively engaged in the AdvanceHE teaching accreditation programme since 2017 with more than 120 fellowships awarded. Te Herenga Waka - Victoria University of Wellington has Te Arawai Ako Pathway to Fellowships with AdvanceHE. These universities recognise that professional standards are an achievable first step to gain competence in teaching. A wide range of institutions are members and affiliates of the Advance HE Fellowship programme, including technical institutes and design schools. Ako Aotearoa drew on this model to develop the Tapatoru professional teaching practice award for foundation learning as a quality mark that embeds Māori and Pacific cultural values into teaching practices and excellence in supporting priority learner success outcomes.

(Disclosure: Ako Aotearoa Director Helen Lomax and Co-Chair Associate Professor Meegan Hall of the Ako Aotearoa Board are members of the Australasian Advisory Board of Advance HE).

D. Share expertise

There is much good practice in the university sector, but good practice is not consistent. Areas to investigate are professional and welcoming customer service, accessible learning support and advice to all learners, explicit pathways for accessing information and having good campus and online experiences.

Academic staff should be involved in professional development, research, collaborative projects, and open to sharing information and engaging with others in the university sector. Being able to bring other ideas into the teaching space from lived experiences or through invited colleagues (with similar curious and proactive mindsets) supports excellence in teaching and knowledge transfer.

E. Genuine engagement with stakeholders

Professional learning and development approaches must also be planned with stakeholders. Partnering with students' associations like Te Mana Ākonga, NZUSA, NZISA will help to ensure the learner voice is included in educator PLD.

8. How to ensure universities play their role in advancing all segments of New Zealand society without compromising on the goals of excellence?

Excellence goals must include and prioritise being an inclusive and diverse university community. While universities can give learners the skills and qualifications needed to thrive in work and life, there are some learners who fail. This is expensive for the universities who miss a pipeline of further study. It is expensive for the learner whose investment in education did not give a return and there are emotional costs of being labelled a failure. These learners are often underserved by the university educators. They are more likely to be Māori and Pacific learners and those with disabilities or with learning support needs. Some of this attrition is due to financial constraints or competing obligations. This can be solved by establishing and sustaining supportive networks, providing scholarships and further funding support or innovation. For example, the reintroduction of the Manaaki Taurua grant for Māori university students will go a long way towards improving Māori learner success.

Racism undermines priority learner success. This is particularly acute for Māori and Pacific learners at this time when Te Tiriti o Waitangi, te reo Māori and other Māori-related initiatives are being challenged, including cultural spaces for Māori and for Pacific learners at universities. A news report last week stated that 19 Asian student union groups in Aotearoa supported keeping special cultural spaces for Māori and Pacific learners. Institutional racism is real and a part of all New Zealand universities¹. This combined with racism that many experience on campus can make for a dismal learning experience and needs to be addressed urgently. Teaching and support staff need to develop strategies to value the learners' culture, language, and identity. This often involves including the learners' family and communities to help them support the learner.

Tertiary teachers want to be successful so that learners achieve their goals and the learning makes a difference in their lives. To achieve this requires more training and support for tertiary teachers. There is also a need for specialists who can connect and engage well with TES priority learners to provide the support they need. While the Tertiary Education Strategy rightly focuses on priority learners, there are also learners whose second language is English, who are from lower socio-economic backgrounds and are older learners who want to retrain. One of the factors that make teaching complex and challenging is meeting the needs of all learners. Some university educators struggle with this complexity and these educators need to meet quality teaching standards and to have development programmes to support the attainment of these standards.

The university sector can learn more about their communities and the barriers and discrimination learners face in higher education, including gender issues, socio-economic challenges and bullying of and by staff and learners. Some beacons are work that has been done on trauma-informed approaches, neurodiversity-affirming approaches and on supporting autistic tertiary learners. There is a need for more interaction, involvement, collaboration with evidence-based and values-based organisations to support learner success. See the [Altogether Autism guide](#). The [Phenomenal Educators](#) framework shines a light on how to support Pacific learners. Ako Aotearoa provides the popular [Dyslexia-Friendly Quality Mark](#). More such Quality Marks are needed to support success for the full diversity of learners.

¹ Theodore, R., Kidman, J., Naepi, S., Kokaua, J., & McAllister, T. (2021). Tackling systemic racism in academic promotion processes. *Mai Journal*, 10(2), 202-206

11. How well are the universities complying with the requirements in the Education and Training Act 2020 with regards to the Treaty/Te Tiriti?

The Act states “achieving equitable outcomes for Māori students.” This is not the case and much more work needs to be done. Professor Margaret Mutu responds directly to the implications of the Act in Ako Aotearoa’s 2021 Tuia Te Ako webinar at this [link](#). Ako Aotearoa has developed resources and professional development on Te Tiriti obligations. Evaluation feedback from the 2023 Tuia Te Ako seminar series highlighted how to enhance the enrolment of more Māori students in tertiary education, as well as strategies to improve Māori learner outcomes. Three are provided as an example below.

1. Cultural integration was repeatedly highlighted as a foundational aspect of creating an inclusive and supportive society for New Zealanders including for Māori and other indigenous students.
 - Embed Te Tiriti principles and honour Māori culture in all aspects of the institution.
 - Increase visibility of Māori knowledge and role models.
 - Provide culturally relevant courses, celebrate achievements, and create welcoming environments.
2. Whānau and community engagement will strengthen relationships with iwi, hapū, and marae, and involve whānau in the education journey, as a consistent theme in supporting Māori students.
 - Establish connections with iwi, hapū, and marae.
 - Foster partnerships with Māori/Cultural leaders and organisations.
 - Involve whānau in the education journey, especially during enrolment.
 - Strengthen relationships with local Kura and hold hui at secondary schools.
3. Relevant learning experiences stress the importance of integrating culturally responsive teaching methods and curriculum designs that authentically reflect Mātauranga Māori to enhance Māori student engagement and their connection with learning.
 - Design courses using Kaupapa Māori methodology.
 - Offer innovative and personalized learning experiences.
 - Make courses interactive, diverse, and aligned with Māori worldviews and Māori aspirations.

Ako Aotearoa would welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission further with the UAG.