

# Improving working lives.

## The State of the Public Tertiary Education Sector Survey

Report snapshot and recommendations



**TEU** | TE HAUTŪ  
KAHURANGI  
TERTIARY EDUCATION UNION

1 May 2019



This report contains a 'Research Snapshot' prepared by independent researchers; and, the changes that TEU's member seek having read and analysed the full research report.

For a full copy of the research please email [teu@teu.ac.nz](mailto:teu@teu.ac.nz)

The Tertiary Education Union Te Hautū Kahurangi o Aotearoa (TEU) is a movement of people working collectively to defend and promote quality public tertiary education that is accessible to all. We work to address a wide range of issues affecting students and staff. We do this because we know staff conditions of work are students' conditions of learning. Together, we have achieved so much. These successes were not just about ensuring everyone has access to tertiary education that is public, local and focused on learning – but about securing pay and conditions that recognise our members' commitment to quality tertiary education, and the time, energy and skill they put into their work.

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## Acknowledgements

We want to thank Drs Gerard Cotterell and Jeannie Rea for peer reviewing the report.

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# **Research snapshot: The State of the Public Tertiary Education Sector Survey**

**Charles Sedgwick &  
Sarah B. Proctor-Thomson**

1 May 2019

Commissioned by the Tertiary Education Union,  
Te Hautū Kahurangi o Aotearoa

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## What we did

The purpose of this research was to gather up-to-date data on the ways in which changing systemic and institutional pressures within the tertiary education sector in Aotearoa were shaping the values, experiences, and relationships of staff, and the teaching and learning conditions of students. Building on two previous TEU surveys (Bentley, McLeod & Teo, 2014; Oosterman, Sedgwick & Grey, 2016), the survey was designed to provide a benchmark for analyses of worker experiences and conditions in the future. Two questionnaires were developed to reflect the different functions and work organisation of academic and general staff. The survey received ethical approval from Auckland University of Technology.

Between April and June 2018 we gathered a sample of almost 2,000 academic and just over 1,000 general staff working in the tertiary education sector. Respondents were drawn from all universities (56.4% of sample), all Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITPs) (39.1% of sample), all wānanga (2.9% of sample), and a smaller group of private training enterprises, Rural Education Activities Programmes and crown research centres (1.5% of sample).

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## What the research tells us: Key findings

### *Staff influence within their institutions*

The degree of influence and autonomy tertiary education staff have over their work is changing. Academics faced increasing pressure to admit and pass students as well as change their delivery mode and assessment. Additionally, implicit or explicit pressure to publish was shared across institutions and inevitably linked to promotion. In sum, autonomy and trust around decision making concerning all issues of teaching and learning is restricted.

Staff reported diminishing influence over decision making. At institution or council level exclusion from decision-making was almost absolute. The closer a decision was to the department or work unit, the more likely input was possible but deterioration over time was noted. Qualitative comments indicated that phrases used in the sector like 'consultation', 'meaningful engagement' or 'committee decision making' were empty signifiers for a number of respondents; Even having a voice did not mean acceptance of one's input. The common perception was that final decisions were usually already made by the leadership before consultation processes began.

### ***Student services and support***

Just over half of all staff in tertiary institutions felt that conditions were supportive of students, but also reported that service provision was getting worse in the areas of mental health, study skills and pastoral care. High workloads of staff interfered with their capacity to adequately support students, especially those who needed more support because they were poorly prepared for tertiary education.

### ***Workloads***

Academics in universities were working longer than those in ITPs and women tended to work longer hours than men in relation to their proportion FTE (Full-time equivalent). General staff worked the hours required in their employment agreements with little variation between male and female staff. Expectations on staff in the areas of administration teaching and research had increased. Expectations to spend more time on teaching preparation and marking had increased for staff across the sector (including those in wānanga, ITPs and universities). Staff in wānanga had higher expectations on them that they would take responsibility for tikanga Māori followed by university and ITPs.

There was decreased worker control reported in a number of different areas of work. Between 61 and 77% of academic staff across different institutional types said class sizes and staff levels were non-negotiable. These are areas of work that are associated with values academics said were important to them. Women, more so than men said that extra work on the weekends was not negotiable. To a lesser degree, general staff nominated areas of workload and additional hours as non-negotiable, but like their academic counterparts, said that working arrangements were left up to them.

### ***Bullying and discrimination***

A minority of staff reported direct bullying but qualitative comments - from over 10% of respondents - confirmed that a bullying and discriminatory environment is embedded in the tertiary education sector. Over a third of accounts explicitly described bullying perpetrated by management who set the example for others to imitate (other groups of perpetrators including colleagues and students were reported by a much smaller fraction of respondents).

### **Staff outcomes**

A greater level of work/life conflict was experienced by female staff than male. Stress levels had increased over the last three years for over two thirds of all respondents. Academics reported more stress than general staff and those in the 35-45 age bracket more than other age groups. The top contributors to stress for all staff were: anxiety over future employment and unrealistic expectations from management.

The majority of staff in the sector reported that their level of satisfaction had grown worse or much worse over the last three years. As noted in previous surveys (Bentley et al. 2014; Oosterman et al., 2016) the dissatisfaction comes from deteriorating working conditions, in the areas of workload, management and leadership. General staff across the sector were significantly more satisfied in their jobs than academics and more academics indicated that their satisfaction levels were getting worse or much worse. A quarter of academics would recommend an academic career while a fifth would 'not at all' recommend an academic career to others and a further 56% would only tentatively recommend it. Amongst general staff over half would 'not at all' or only 'tentatively' recommend their career to others.

### **Values**

Workers in the tertiary education sector hold enduring educational and professional values that guide them in their work and provide resilience and strength. Effective teaching, engagement with students and quality research in an environment of collegial and supportive relations were some of the values given the highest priority.

Despite their challenging environment, respondents felt reasonably satisfied that they could continue to meet these value objectives under the conditions they had to work in. However, academics and general staff from across the sector were united in their dissatisfaction in regard to the extent to which their institutions provided 'supportive management' and the 'ability to negotiate realistic workload expectations and allocations'.

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## What changes are needed in the sector?

Enduring values and collegial relationships within departments are still acting as the heart that is pumping blood around the sector. But the changes that have been ongoing for over 20 years are beginning to seriously damage this source of life-blood. Survey results in a number of areas – especially those that show how unlikely staff are to recommend their occupation to others – should ring alarm bells for the future. The fundamental orientation of the sector needs to change. We need to turn away from a competitive, marketised model of business, to a recognition of the value of tertiary education to society and its ability to transform the lives of all the people of Aotearoa. This change needs to happen now.

In the voices of people on the ground - those who are delivering high quality services, and leading teaching and learning with students - we need to address the following as a sector:

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The application of the market model in tertiary education combined with a relentless drive to train rather than educate has been a terrible mistake. We seem to have lost sight of why a society needs tertiary education ...we have gone from being a sector that provided leadership in society to one that is a pawn in a poorly conceived socio-economic experiment that allows market forces/money to determine how it operates. Students are definitely not attaining the same level of critical thinking and literacy that they did 20 years ago. We need to change the way we think about education and the measures we use nationally to assess it before there can be any real change within institutions (Academic staff, university).

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### **We need:**

For senior managers to listen to staff and their concerns. To trust that staff do have specialised skills and knowledge that is needed. To stop the excessive growth of middle-management (and increased managerialism) at the expense of staff working directly with students. To have some serious discussions institution-wide about teaching and learning and to make changes that are in-line with relevant peer-reviewed research relating to teaching pedagogy. To understand and respect 'academic freedom' for teaching staff i.e. to retain academic staff ability to write and deliver their own teaching materials, rather than 'deliver' a course that an 'expert' outside the institution has written! (Academic staff, ITP).

A more inclusive work environment and an appreciation that we (or most of us) work within the tertiary environment as we believe in the values of education (General staff, university).

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**And there must be:**

A focus on staff wellbeing with realistic workloads and timeframes in all respects of our work/the changes going on, etc (General staff, university).

...a review of workloads and time to do pastoral care, marking and other activities outside of lecturing, support (time and financial) to do research that can inform teaching, realistic workload, a move towards quality of education and student support being the main goal of education (rather than it being purely a money making venture) (Academic staff, ITP).

Better communication and rather than a top down approach to everything, why can those in senior positions not come and talk to people on the ground ... (General staff, university).

The involvement of active teaching and research staff in decision making needs to be restored. There is virtually no "bottom up" input into decisions. We have become a business where all significant decisions are made by the "Senior Management Team" with almost no reference to staff who are actually interact with the students or do any research (Academic staff, university).



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## Commentaries and commendations

 I commend the TEU on committing to this recurring survey, which is providing the only such trend data on the attitudes and opinions of staff working in tertiary education on their working conditions and the impact upon students teaching and learning conditions.

It is a depressing picture with staff overwhelmingly critical of the ongoing diminution of their working conditions and the directions in tertiary education across the different types of institutions and amongst academic and general staff.

However, I note, as we have found in surveys conducted by the NTEU, that staff, unless pushed to the limit, still want to work in tertiary education and gain satisfaction from their work. I wonder though - are we heading towards a tipping point?

**Jeannie Rea, Victoria University (Australia), Immediate Past President National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU)**

 Sadly the results seen in the State of the Public Tertiary Education Sector are not a surprise. We are hearing students say they are finding it harder to get the help and support they need – this report shows why. And we are hearing from both staff and students that they are feeling the pressure of what has been a drive for greater ‘efficiency’ in our polytechnics, universities, and wānanga.

For students this drive for ‘efficiency’ means that we are losing a lot of the student experience on campus. When students enrol they want to get through it as quickly as possible, often forgetting about the power of learning and discovery that they should associate with tertiary education.

The pressure on both staff and students is causing real damage as this report shows. And the research complements what our own report “Kei te pai? Report on Student Mental Health” says.

It’s time for a critical rethink about what tertiary education is for. With the Tertiary Education Strategy being updated is a time for us to do that. And we need all staff and students to get involved with the process of shaping that government strategy. Our voice – staff and students – needs to be heard.

**James Ranstead, NZ Union of Students Associations**

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 The TEU is to be congratulated for continuing to provide regular surveys detailing the impact of changes in the tertiary sector on staff in these institutions. In this vein this latest report is a timely if somewhat depressing reading of the views of staff who report diminishing levels of influence over decision making at the institution or council level where real power lies and declining levels of job satisfaction.

Findings such as these bode ill for continued recruitment into the area. However, staff in the survey still report strong attachment to the values of providing effective teaching, engaging with students and undertaking quality research – the critical elements needed in the tertiary sector.

The findings in the report also indicate that those employed in the sector have very clear idea about what is need to provide a positive environment in the tertiary sector. One can only hope that under the new administration that these findings will be taken into account before further changes are introduced and the people who have been at the coal face of several decades of extensive change are consulted in a meaningful way.

**Gerard Cotterell, Research Services Manager for the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Law, University of Auckland**

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 This survey and this report details the ways in which our current, market based tertiary education system undermines and obstructs the expression of professional values in the sector. Most of all it reveals that human relationships are at the heart of tertiary education. It shows us how we can support those relationships and the values they embody and importantly exposes changes that are mandatory if the full transformational potential of tertiary education is to be realised.

Conditions of work for staff are conditions of learning for students – and equally, they are the conditions of production for research and innovation.

This is a report from the frontlines. It is, therefore, an invaluable resource for all those concerned with the future of our sector - staff and student advocates at all levels, policy makers, officials and politicians, industry and professional bodies, employers, parents, whanau and iwi. We in Te Hautū Kahurangi the Tertiary Education Union of Aoteroa New Zealand are very proud to present this research. We hope that it receives the study and attention it assuredly deserves.

**Michael Gilchrist, National President, NZ Tertiary Education Union**





# **Improving working lives.**

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## **Commitments needed to improve the working lives of tertiary education staff**

### **Tertiary Education Union**

The research findings in The State of the Public Tertiary Education Sector are a call to action. Staff conditions of work are students' conditions of learning. We seek the support of government, institutional leaders, and the collective efforts of staff in the sector to turn around over two decades of decline in the working lives of tertiary education staff.



Our journey together to improve staff and student well-being is guided by the four whainga of Te Koeke Tiriti:

#### **Tū kotahi, tū kaha**

We are strong and unified; we are committed to actions which will leave no-one behind; we create spaces where all people can fully participate, are fairly represented, and that foster good relationships between people.

#### **Awahi atu, awahi mai**

We take actions that seek to improve the lives of the most vulnerable; we give and receive, acknowledging that reciprocity is fundamental to strong and equitable relationships; and we work to advance approaches that ensure quality public tertiary education for all.

#### **Ngā piki, ngā heke**

We endure through good times and bad; we work to minimise our impact on the environment; and we foster ahikā – the interrelationship of people and the land, including supporting tūrangawaewae – a place where each has the right to stand and belong.

#### **Tātou, tātou e**

We reach our goals through our collective strength and shared sense of purpose, which are supported through participatory democratic decision-making processes and structures.

***The government must:***

- Reform the funding model of the tertiary education sector (See Reforming Tertiary Education Funding).
- Legislate that tertiary education institutional councils be comprised one third government appointment reflecting Te Tiriti o Waitangi commitments; one third community and industry; one third staff and students.
- That the Ministry of Education and TEC report annually to parliament on the use of casual, fixed-term, and contractors in tertiary education institutions; and on staff: student ratios across the tertiary education sector.
- Require that all institutional strategic plans include staff and student well-being charters, evaluations, and operational plans on improving well-being.
- Ensure academic freedom is included in all legislation and policy for the tertiary education sector.
- Remove all performance based funding and work with the sector to find means of accountability that focus on social, human, economic, and environmental wellbeing.
- Require tertiary institutions to become exemplary state sector employers including by adopting the Living Wage and Gender Pay Principles.

***Institutional leaders must:***

- Ensure all collective agreements include salary scales for all staff.
- Ensure that any restructuring is carried out publicly and encourages full staff, union, student, and community participation. All change in our sector has consequences for students' conditions of learning.
- Ensure there is pay transparency both in terms of gender and ethnicity, reporting on gender and ethnicity pay gaps in annual reports.
- Formally commit to the Gender Pay Principles
- Provide professional development for senior staff to ensure good working relationships at all levels and to enact and Te Tiriti o Waitangi commitments.
- Provide training for council members and all staff on academic freedom and on the enactment of Te Tiriti o Waitangi commitments.
- Have workload audits carried out in all parts of institutions every three years.
- Include academic freedom and professional autonomy in all strategic planning and all institutional policies.

**TEU members must:**

- Agree to a staged campaign to address well-being on campuses with the first step being meetings with all vice chancellors, chief executives, and councils to discuss this report.
- Attend and engage at council, faculty, departmental, and division meetings on a regular basis.
- Ask at every meeting they attend: “How will this action by our institution improve teaching, learning, and research?”; and “How will this action by our institution advance the well-being of staff, students, and communities?”
- Participate in an annual ‘Go home on time day’ to highlight persistent and worsening workloads in the tertiary education sector.
- Attend a workshop on insecure work to fully understand the negative impacts of precarious work on workers, families, and communities; and to plan collective actions that can be taken to improve working conditions for all.
- Participate in collective negotiation actions aimed at getting stronger clauses into agreements on casual and fixed term appointments.

Tertiary education is a public good that contributes to social, economic, environmental, and human well-being. If the tertiary education sector is to address the needs of students, communities, employers, and all New Zealanders then each of the requirements above must be met.

A woman with glasses and a blue patterned top is smiling and holding a white sign. The sign has the text "People B4 PROFIT!" written in red marker. She is also holding an orange flag with a white number "2" on it. The background shows a grassy area with other people, suggesting an outdoor event or protest.

People  
B4  
PROFIT!

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