



TERTIARY EDUCATION UNION  
Te Hautū Kahurangi o Aotearoa



# Education Under Pressure

## The 2016 New Zealand Tertiary Education State of the Sector Survey

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## Acknowledgments

Jonathan Oosterman, Charles Sedgwick and Sandra Grey

With thanks to Charles Crothers for statistical analysis work and thanks to AUT Work Research Institute for designing the original survey.

Finally, to all those working in tertiary education, we salute you for your commitment to advancing teaching, learning and research which benefits all New Zealanders, and to those who completed this survey, your voices have been heard loud and clear. As one respondent noted “My stomach is often in knots, but I keep going for the potential and current students’ sake”.

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# Introduction

The dominant direction evident in tertiary education in New Zealand is the pressure to make institutions more 'effective and efficient', competitive, and responsive to both industry and government. The rationale is that we are all subject to the 'global knowledge economy' and that tertiary education is not just a reflection of this world but a key driver of the world we live in.

This has effectively shifted the rationale for tertiary education from being a 'public good' that helps produce a 'critical citizenry', to a commodity that is a 'private good' used for employability and economic growth. The 'public good' role, if extant, is for the benefit of the economy in a global world (Shore et al. 2013).

The changes needed in the tertiary education sector to put into effect this 'New Higher Education' agenda are well known and documented, but research to reveal the effect on those who work and study in the sector is neglected. This study builds on the results of previous work in New Zealand to document the effects (Boyd and Wylie 1994; Hardie-Boys, 1996; Chalmers 1998; and Bentley et al. 2013) and shows how relentless change has damaged both the ideals of tertiary education and those who work in the sector.

In considering what is and isn't working in tertiary education the voice of staff is of central importance. This report presents the results of the most recent survey of staff in the New Zealand tertiary education sector undertaken by the Tertiary Education Union Te Hautū Kahurangi o Aotearoa in June and July 2016. The intention of the survey was to document the experiences of those who work in the sector with a particular focus on the changes over the past decade.

This report builds on a range of previous work undertaken and commissioned by TEU, including: Te Kaupapa Whaioranga: The blueprint for tertiary education (Grey, Sedgwick & Scott, 2013); the 2013 Work Research Institute 'State of the Sector' survey (Bentley, McLeod & Teo, 2014; McLeod & Bentley, 2014); and work undertaken by TEU in relation to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into New Models of Tertiary Education (2016).

The survey responses provided by staff paint a picture of a sector under pressure and large numbers of respondents described the situation as becoming worse in the past 10 years. The overall picture, is one of staff coping as best they can to provide quality education in the face of increasing challenges. This suggests the need for urgent action to remedy this.

# The survey instrument and responses

Survey questions were built on those used in the 2013 state of the sector survey with both closed/scaled and open-ended questions on a range of topics: experiences of autonomy, communication, and decision-making processes; student services and education provision; and, workloads, staff stress, and wellbeing.

The survey provides a picture of staff experience and seeks to understand how staff perceive the sector to have changed over the last 10 years. The largely relative nature of the survey questions (in terms of change over the past 10 years) does not always directly express the current situation in tertiary education in absolute terms, though a small number of questions do take this approach (e.g. the question relating to staff stress levels). While responses are subjective in nature, the overall findings are supported by international research results and other New Zealand data (for example the rise in staff: student ratios).

A total of 1,006 academic and general staff who are TEU members took part in the 2016 State of the Sector survey, answering 23 questions and providing a total of 2,334 written responses to open-ended questions.

Respondents came from 24 of New Zealand's 28 public tertiary education institutions. In all 66.3% of respondents worked in a university, 31.2% in an institute of technology and polytechnic (ITP), and 2.5% in a wānanga. This basically reflects the proportions of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff in each of the major parts of the sector – where 67% are employed in universities,

28.4% in ITPs, and 4.7% in wānanga (Ministry of Education, 2015:12).

72.7% of respondents are academic staff and 27.3% general staff. The largest group of academic respondents were senior lecturers (24.6%) and lecturers (14%), followed by tutors (7.7%) and senior tutors (6.2%).

77.3% of respondents were permanent full-time employees. 71.4% of respondents had spent 10 years or more in the sector internationally. 66.1% of respondents have a Master's degree or PhD.

Respondents were approximately representative of the whole sector in terms of age, gender, and ethnicity. The majority of participants (85%) were in the 40-69 year old age range; there were more female respondents (467) than male (367). Within the 1006 respondents, 73.6% identified as NZ European/Pākehā, 10.9% as Other European, 9.1% as Māori, 1.7% identified with a Pacific Island ethnic group, 1.2% as Chinese, 1.2% as Indian, and 8.9% identified with another ethnicity (percentages total more than 100% due to participants endorsing multiple ethnicities).

Overall, the diversity of respondents reflects the sector overall, and this suggests that the findings reported below are a useful indicator of the likely views of those who work in the sector.

# Survey results

**I no longer enjoy my job and dream of winning lotto so I can quit! Not only are the metrics we are judged on so shallow and narrow, but the workloads are crushing and we have lost autonomy even over our teaching - our expertise. There is managerial micro-management everywhere. It is soul-destroying stuff.**

The clearest experience of life in the tertiary education sector as expressed by the 2016 survey respondents was that over the past decade their ability to influence decision-making, communication between management and staff, the staff: student ratios, workload, stress, and staff well-being had all gotten worse. In several areas - autonomy, evening/weekend work, physical environment, and stress - the experiences of staff were worse than those found three years earlier in the first state of the sector survey (Bentley et al 2014). Not only are conditions continuing to deteriorate for a significant number of those working in the sector, but the negative effects of the current system are spreading further throughout the sector.

Many respondents, like the staff member quoted above, wrote about the loss of autonomy over their own work. Added to this they spoke of an inability to have their voice heard in institutional decision-making and of being subjected to auditing measures that are inappropriate for a quality education, which add to workloads and result in high levels of stress.

Due to the commonality of the issues raised by staff who took part in this survey, we have decided to focus this report on three core themes: lack of voice, unsustainable workloads, stress and alienation. Where relevant we will discuss the governmental causes of these experiences, as described by survey respondents: this includes an orientation to commercial gain as opposed to the broad aims of education expressed in the Education Act 1989; inadequate and misguided funding approaches; and, performance management tools (Education Performance Indicators (EPIs) and the Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF)).

# Lack of voice in the tertiary education sector

Survey questions around decision-making and communication focused on whether or not staff could make decisions about their own work, have input into their institution's policies, as well as gauging their experiences of communicating with management.

Survey responses show that staff in the New Zealand tertiary education sector experience a lack of voice in decision-making. In their written responses, they spoke directly of decreased workplace democracy, describing experiences of empty consultation processes, which either reduced or stopped input into decision-making. They talked of their experience as one of 'top-down management', 'misguided performance measurement', and 'micro-management'.

What the responses reflected was the regulation and auditing techniques of 'New Public Management' (NPM) in the 'New Higher Education' (NHE) environment. New Zealand's higher education environment has been altered markedly by NPM and the nation's version of neo-liberalism which has been the dominant hegemony for the last 30-35 years (Bowl and Tobias, 2012; Saunders, 2010). Codd (2005 in Zepke, 2012: 157) notes 'according to neo-liberalism, higher education is a market where commodities, primarily knowledge, are traded.' However Salmi (2007) rightly notes 'Increased autonomy to act in the marketplace does not mean absence of outside controls.' Like other parts of the world where neo-liberal and NPM techniques have been employed, a raft of regulatory provisions has been put in place in the 'tertiary education market'. 'In general, in the science and technology policy the NPM has meant the increasing use of results as a screening mechanism and the use of targeted external funding with related evaluation practices as a control mechanism.' (Auranen and Nieminen, 2010: 823).

Respondents also spoke of institutional decision-makers failing to understand what work staff do, therefore making damaging decisions, which showed a lack of understanding of, and respect for, teaching and learning. They observed how their loss of voice has reduced/removed consideration of educational concerns from decision-making and replaced them with an unbalanced focus on financial concerns. Respondents made it absolutely clear that, based on their belief and experience, this exclusion from decision-making has a negative impact on teaching, learning, and research.

Respondents said in their experience there was a lack of respect and trust for workers, which severely impacted on staff morale. They painted a negative picture of communication between staff and management, speaking in a number of cases about institutional and personal bullying.

While some respondents did speak of mixed and at times positive experiences with managers, these were almost always situations where a good relationship existed with an immediate manager rather than in the leadership of institutions overall. For many respondents good relationships with management were a matter of good luck, rather than sound institutional design and organisational culture.

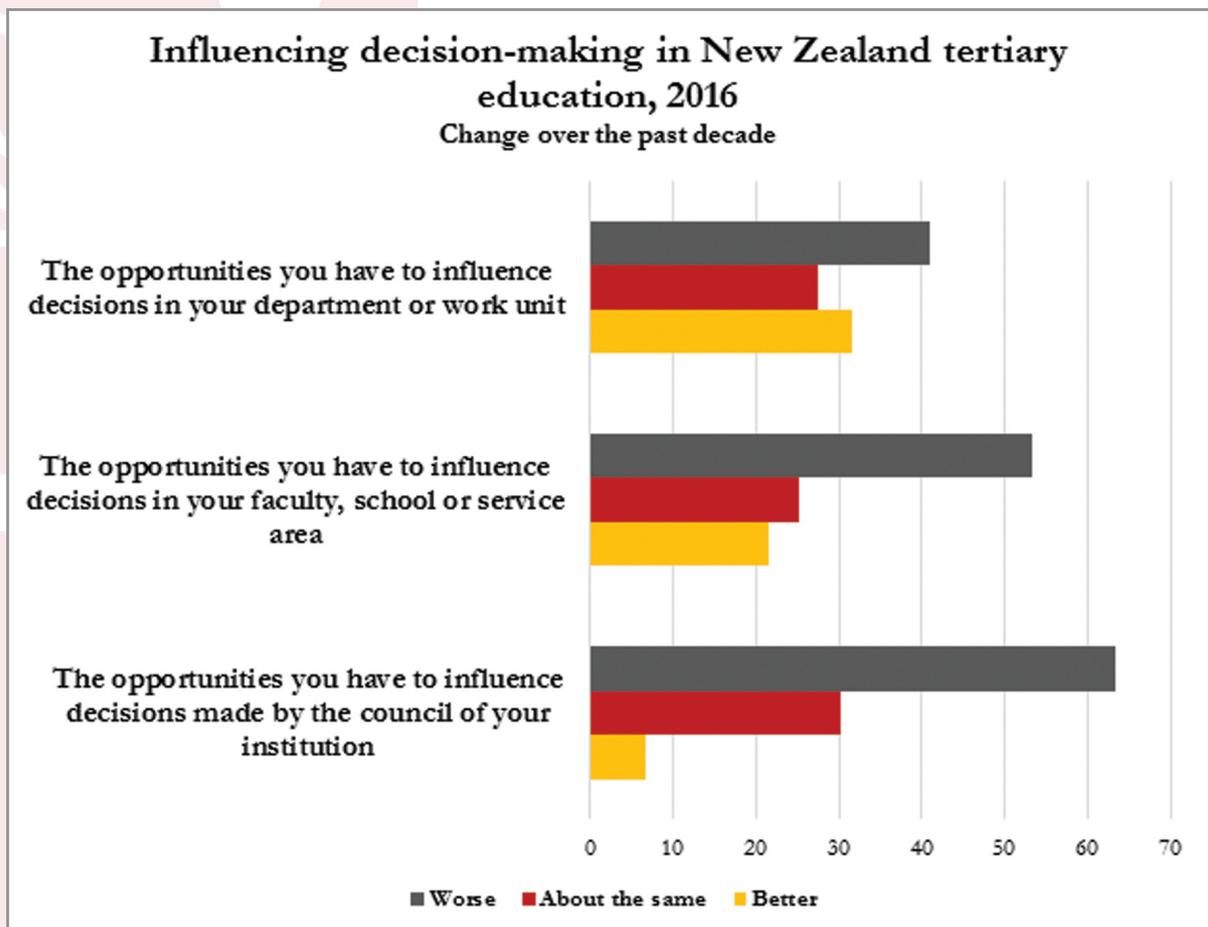
In the next section we turn to examine in more detail the way respondents say they experienced the effect of policy on staff autonomy in making decisions about their own work and more generally in the sector.

# Influencing decision-making

**People who do not care deeply about teaching and research run things, making decisions for financial reasons that undervalue and misunderstand the nature of teaching and research.**

Internationally the accepted convention for decision making in the tertiary education sector is one of collegial governance, and this norm is expressed in New Zealand in the Education Act 1989. In contrast, in 2016 over 50% of survey respondents stated that opportunities to influence decisions in their faculty, school service area, and decisions made by the council of their institution had become worse over the past decade (see Figure 1). In fact, the situation may even be worse than the statistics suggest, given that a number of respondents selected 'About the same', when responding to questions about opportunities to influence decisions. As one respondent put it: 'I have never had any influence on any of these things and that has not changed.'

Figure 1



As noted earlier, while some respondents expressed positive experiences of being able to influence decision-making – in their own programmes, in relation to specific managers, or when they themselves took on more senior roles – this was set against a more ubiquitous set of concerns. Respondents gave a range of examples of how staff voice and expertise was ignored by those in positions of power:

**Decision-making has been centralised and there is very little communication with staff. I have served on a number of reviews and we have been told what we should find before even embarking on the review. Consultations are a joke and morale is at an all-time low.**

**No rep on Council, school advisory committee disbanded, secretive decisions announced as fait accompli, bullying of anyone who questions the research behind management's change programme.**

**Māori and Pacific staff are directly excluded from departmental decision-making despite repeated requests to apply university Treaty of Waitangi and equity and diversity policies.**

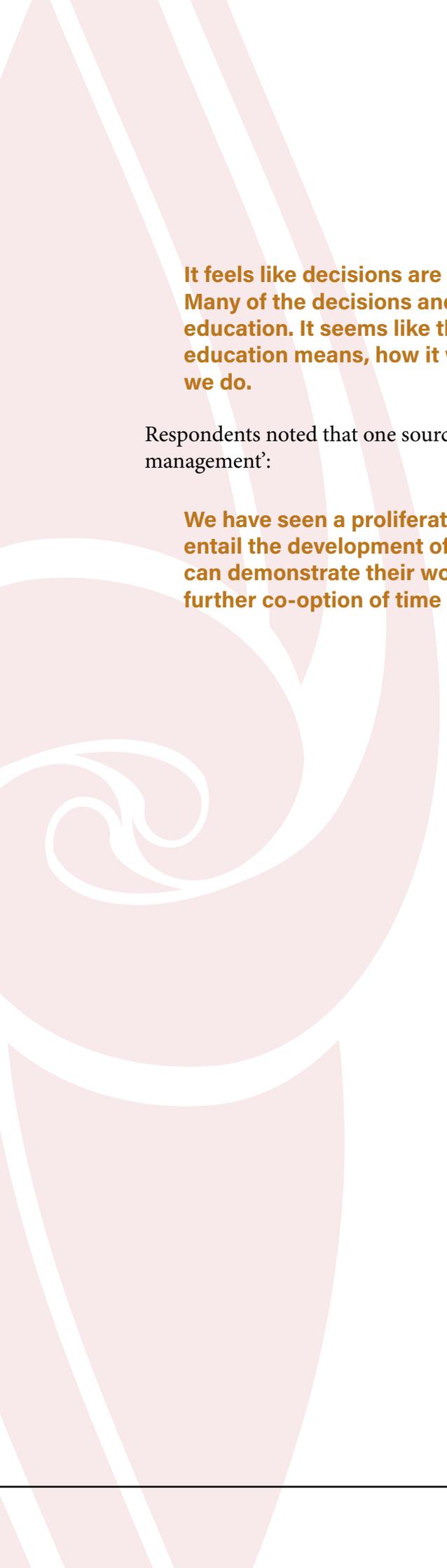
A large number of respondents spoke about a lack of consultation; many others spoke in various ways about consultation as a 'cosmetic' and 'box-ticking exercises', where feedback was ignored:

**'Consulting' has come to have a new meaning - we are asked to attend meetings, we are asked to give opinions and feedback then we are totally ignored.**

**Staff consultation at Faculty level is tokenistic at best. It is mere box-ticking leaving feelings of disempowerment, disrespect, frustration, and finally cynicism.**

Bullying, as noted already, and not being able to speak out, were experiences shared by many respondents, as was fear. Respondents noted that if they voiced opposition they would risk their job. One respondent spoke of a 'frightening' atmosphere which made staff 'reluctant to call attention to ourselves in any way.'

Respondents described how a lack of respect for the work of staff showed not only a lack of respect for (and understanding of) education, but resulted in bad decisions and outcomes in terms of class size and design of facilities.



**It feels like decisions are made then we are told what they are, no questions. Many of the decisions and attitudes are also highly unrealistic [regarding] education. It seems like the people in charge actually do not know what education means, how it works, or what we do.**

Respondents noted that one source of their problems was ‘top down management’ and ‘micro-management’:

**We have seen a proliferation of senior management positions, all of which entail the development of new systems in order that the new appointees can demonstrate their worth to the institutions. Unfortunately this means a further co-option of time and resources from academic programmes.**

# Decreasing autonomy in decision-making in the New Zealand education sector

**There is too much focus on counting things that do not count rather than engaging in learning processes that do count.**

The 2016 survey respondents present an overwhelming perception that autonomy in decision-making has worsened over the past 10 years. There has been pressure to pass students in response to completion rate requirements; direct and indirect pressure to inflate grades and make assessments easier; pressure to lower or remove standards of acceptance into courses, and pressure to take on unsustainable workloads. The experience presented by staff in this survey is at odds with the intent of the Education Act 1989 which describes 'the freedom of the institution and its staff to teach and assess students in the manner they consider best promotes learning'.

Respondents described a number of different pressures which impinge on their autonomy in making decisions about their work.

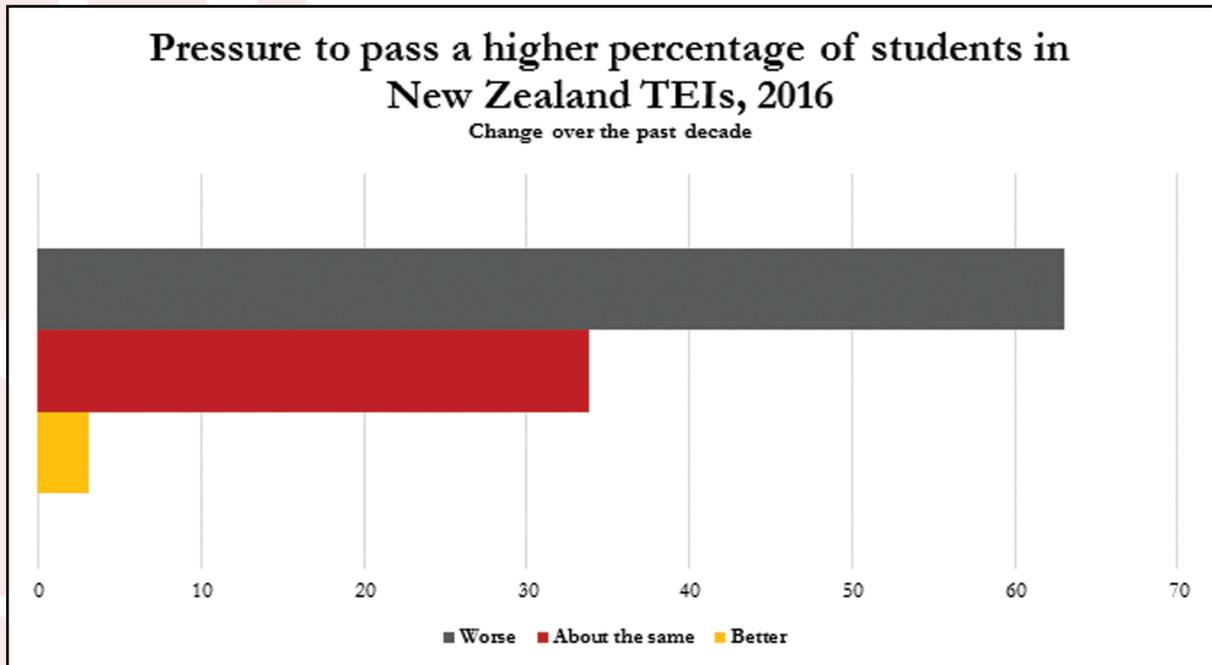
**The effects of managerialism take hold at multiple levels. For example - at paper level, one grapples with a wider distribution of student abilities, which impacts on course ratings (less able students tend to be less satisfied particularly if the course is challenging) therefore there is explicit and implicit pressure to change delivery modes (dumb it down, change assessment, pass students who should not have been**

**admitted in the first place, gamify and so forth). These pressures come from the department, and in turn from Faculty, and in turn from the Centre. All of those entities are keen to keep numbers up and the dollars flowing in. The conversations are increasingly commercial - 'customer satisfaction' and 'return on investment' - rather than social or educational.**

**Focus on completion rates mean that we are under increasing pressure to pass students regardless of whether they have earned a pass or not. Growth in international student numbers only worsens this trend, as many are not up to University study (and the University knows it). Declining funding also means we have to take more students on as we need the EFTS but doing so means we have to let anybody in (and the University refuses to use minimum entry requirements). This sets up a horrible cycle where (1) we need more money so (2) we let more students in many of whom (3) are not up to University study so the University (4) pressures us to pass people while (5) not providing us any support for our increased teaching while also (6) keeping our jobs under continual threat. Nice really. If I didn't actually enjoy teaching so much (or have a mortgage) I and many of my colleagues would have quit a long time ago.**

Scaled survey questions also addressed the various pressures staff are subjected to in relation to how they undertake their own work. Figure 2 shows the pressure to pass a higher percentage of students over the last decade has increased:

Figure 2



The increased pressure to pass students was particularly noted by ITP staff with 71.7% of the ITP respondents stating the situation had worsened over the last decade, and 33% said it was much worse. The respective percentages for university staff were 57.1% and 18%.

In their written comments, respondents drew attention to completion rates and the connected pressure to pass students:

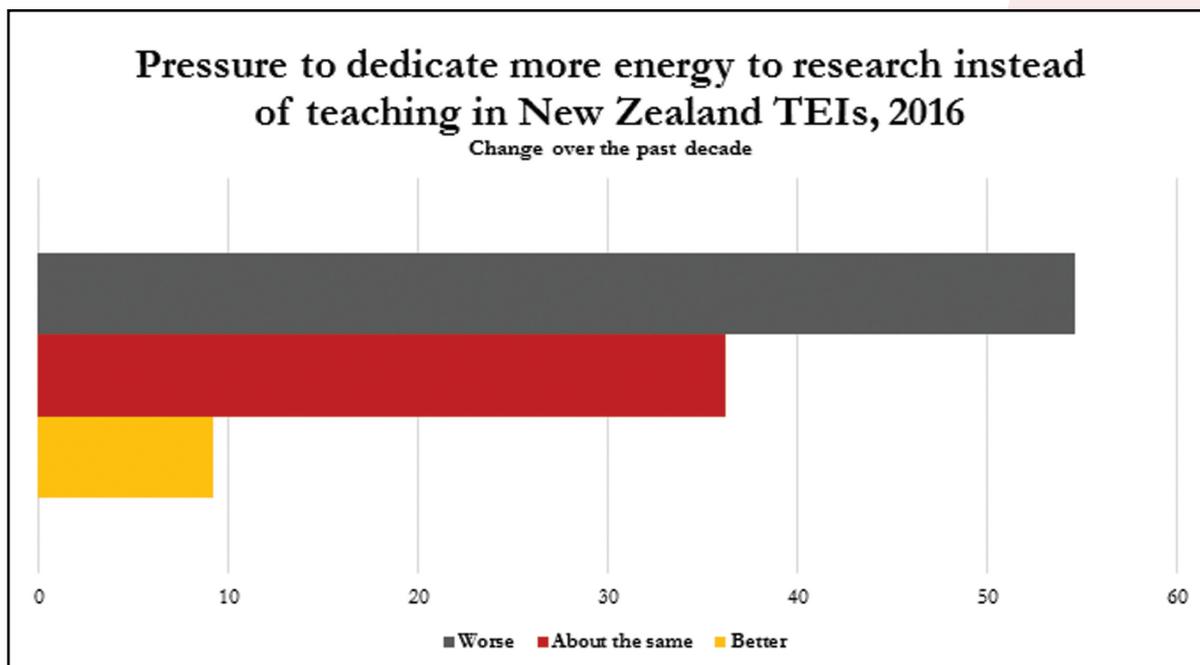
**Ever since funding was linked to retention and success there has been pressure from management to pass more students while at the same time wanting more full-time students. We have been pressured to change assessments, ignore cheating, pass students who are between 45 and 48%. Management re-**

**enrol students who previously have not attended their classes and failed every paper they enrolled in - not just once but for several years.**

**The emphasis on successful completion rates is hurting education standards. Lecturers [are] under intense pressure to pass students by managers; leading to acts of shameful manipulations, low quality assessments and exams.**

A scaled survey question about the pressure to dedicate more energy to research instead of teaching also demonstrates the ongoing attack on staff autonomy.

Figure 3



The pressure was much greater for university staff than those working in the ITP sector. 23.4% of university respondents indicated that the pressure to dedicate more energy to research instead of teaching has got much worse in the last 10 years. The respective results for ITP staff was 9.4%.

A number of respondents also offered written comments about the pressure to dedicate more energy to research due to the demands made by managers with an eye on the Performance Based Research Fund.

**The perception that research outputs are more important than teaching excellence has been very problematic. In a professional area like education, the perception that academic articles are worth more than outputs in teacher-accessible formats has also been problematic, and exacerbated the gaps in the research-practice nexus.**

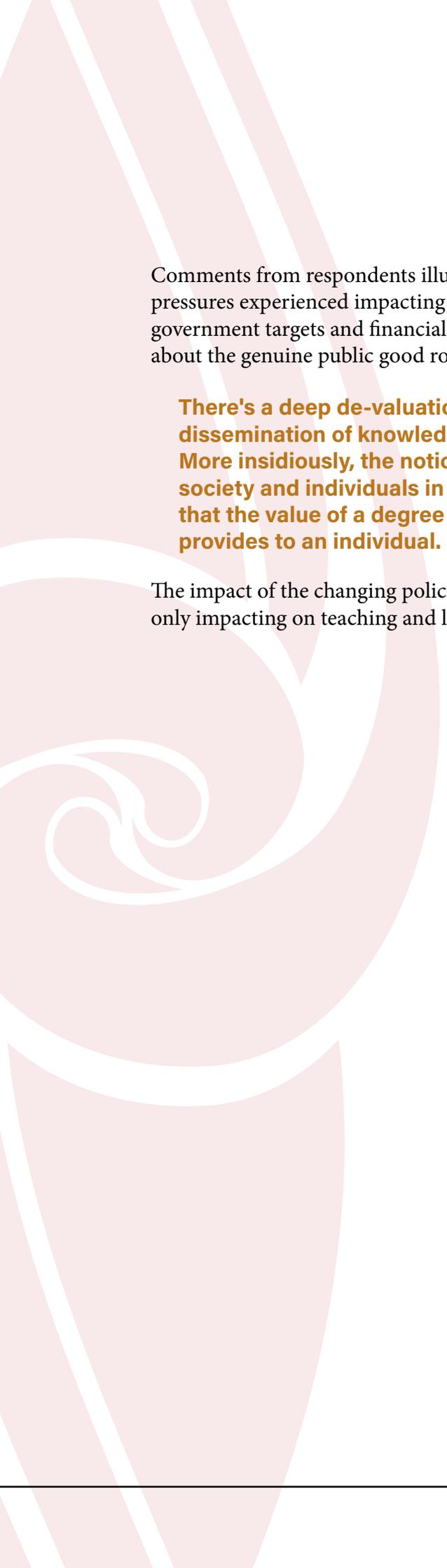
**PBRF and accreditation requires a continual churning of publications, even though most are worthless and any high risk but useful research isn't attempted because of the need to get publications.**

23.4% of University respondents indicated the pressure to dedicate more energy to research had become much worse and 19.8% said it was worse.

**PBRF incentivises a narrow range of research which isn't necessarily appropriate to the NZ context (e.g. pressure not to publish in NZ journals).**

Several respondents also described pressure to adopt an unbalanced focus on online provision:

**Students have been thrown into online learning and flipped and blended teaching models without enough additional support to do this effectively.**



Comments from respondents illustrate how they saw the reduction in autonomy and the pressures experienced impacting on students and the education they receive. As noted before government targets and financial considerations consistently take precedence over concerns about the genuine public good role of tertiary education in New Zealand society:

**There's a deep de-valuation of what universities are about: the creation and dissemination of knowledge. We are in danger of becoming 'degree factories!' More insidiously, the notion that knowledge and education are valuable to society and individuals in and of themselves is being replaced by the sense that the value of a degree is measured in the increased earning capacity it provides to an individual.**

The impact of the changing policy and institutional framework for tertiary education is not only impacting on teaching and learning it is impacting on staff wellbeing.

# Unsustainable workloads for staff in the tertiary education sector

**Expectations on staff in all areas: research, teaching and administration have increased without considering resources or workloads. Change management appears to begin by assuming there is spare capacity in the institution. That is not the case. We are already fully engaged and committed, and highly productive.**

Responses to both open and closed questions show a clear picture of increased workloads in the tertiary education sector over the last decade. Respondents attributed the rising workloads to: lowered or removed entrance standards; the level of support that had to be given to students with lower academic and language skills; having to respond to constant change and (unrecognised) demands of learning new (often technology-related) systems; greater demands for 24/7 online contact with students; increased class sizes; increased administrative and compliance requirements; and, reduced or insufficient funding. Academic staff additionally noted reduced access to administrative support, while support staff described increased workloads due to reduced funding and job losses, as well as, increased demand in certain areas (for example, counselling services). The cumulative effect of the above results in high levels of stress and reduced quality of teaching and learning, despite staff dedication.

The sense of increased workloads is clearly illustrated in Figure 4, which shows that 58% of survey respondents felt that the number of hours they are expected to work has become worse over the past decade. Additionally, 64.2% of survey respondents indicated that the need to work extra hours in the evenings or weekends has become worse (30.4% about the same, 5.6% better). Some respondents made it clear that 'About the same' is actually indicative that conditions had not improved.

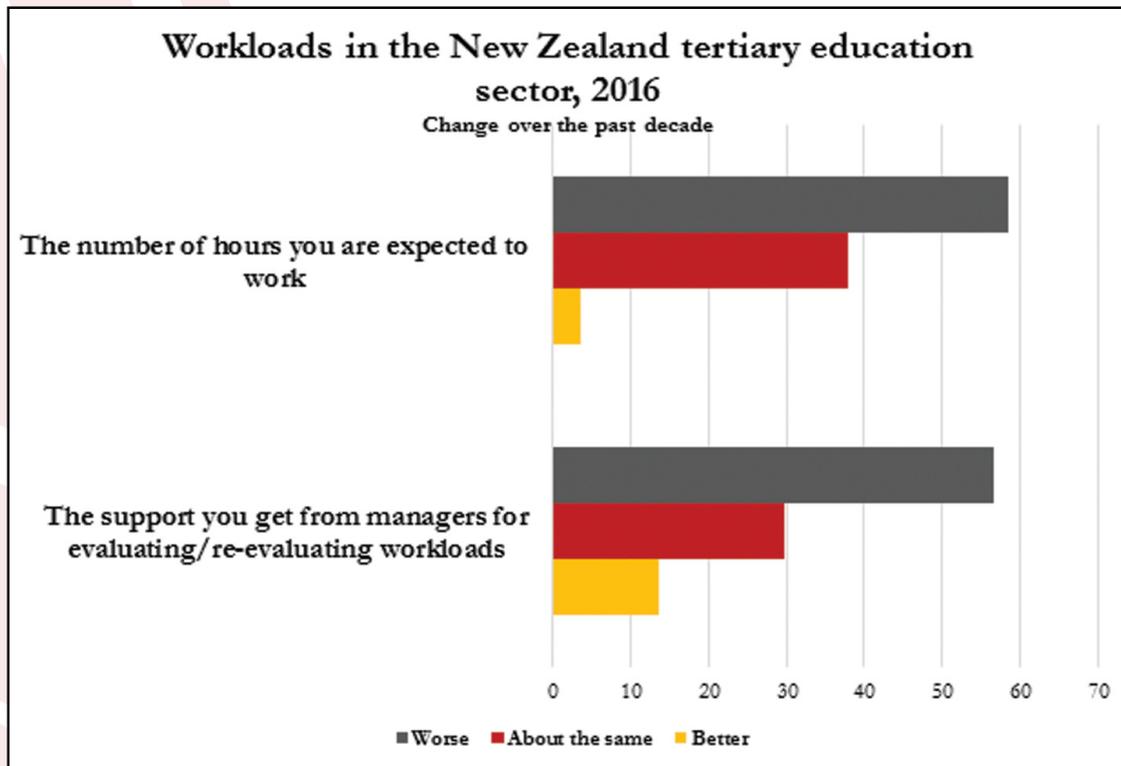
The last respondent's comments about 'compromising the quality of my teaching',

**With the [Tertiary Education Commission] threatening to defund LPPs (low performing papers), there is additional pressure to ensure that we have completion rates above 70%. This is happening at the same time we are being told to stop 'over teaching' in order to produce publications for PBRF.**

**The increasing use of online learning and other IT based teaching methods has also significantly increased workloads. Essentially we are required to use all of this brand new technology but we are not given any extra time to (a) learn how to do it or (b) actually implement the new methodologies they require.**

**I work approximately 60 hours per week and am paid for 37. I could choose to work less but this would mean compromising the quality of my teaching and make research outputs impossible, thereby meaning I would never advance professionally. There is a substantial cost to my personal life and at times my health.**

Figure 4



describes the fact that if you don't have downtime then you don't have the ability to do the interactive, interpersonal work required in the tertiary education sector.

With regard to these pressures, 60.6% of survey respondents stated that numbers of students in each lab, lecture, or tutorial have increased in the last decade. This data is supported by figures on student: staff ratios, which indicate a rise in the ratio of equivalent full-time student units to full-time equivalent staff from 16.2 in 2000 to 18.6 in 2015 (MoE 2015:12). Such ratios clearly impact on staff workload, as well as on students through the necessarily reduced educational and pastoral support staff are able to give to each student:

**Large increases in student numbers, but the same number of staff mean that we are not able to provide as much or as effective help to students who need help.**

Respondents also described the impacts of research expectations:

**There is strong pressure for all staff to work long hours. It is part of the faculty culture and it has a correspondingly negative impact on staff wellbeing. We are all exhausted, we produce more 'outputs' but much of it is 'empty calories' intellectually speaking (we're just too tired to do the hard yards of analysis).**

The impact of the rising teaching and learning demands:

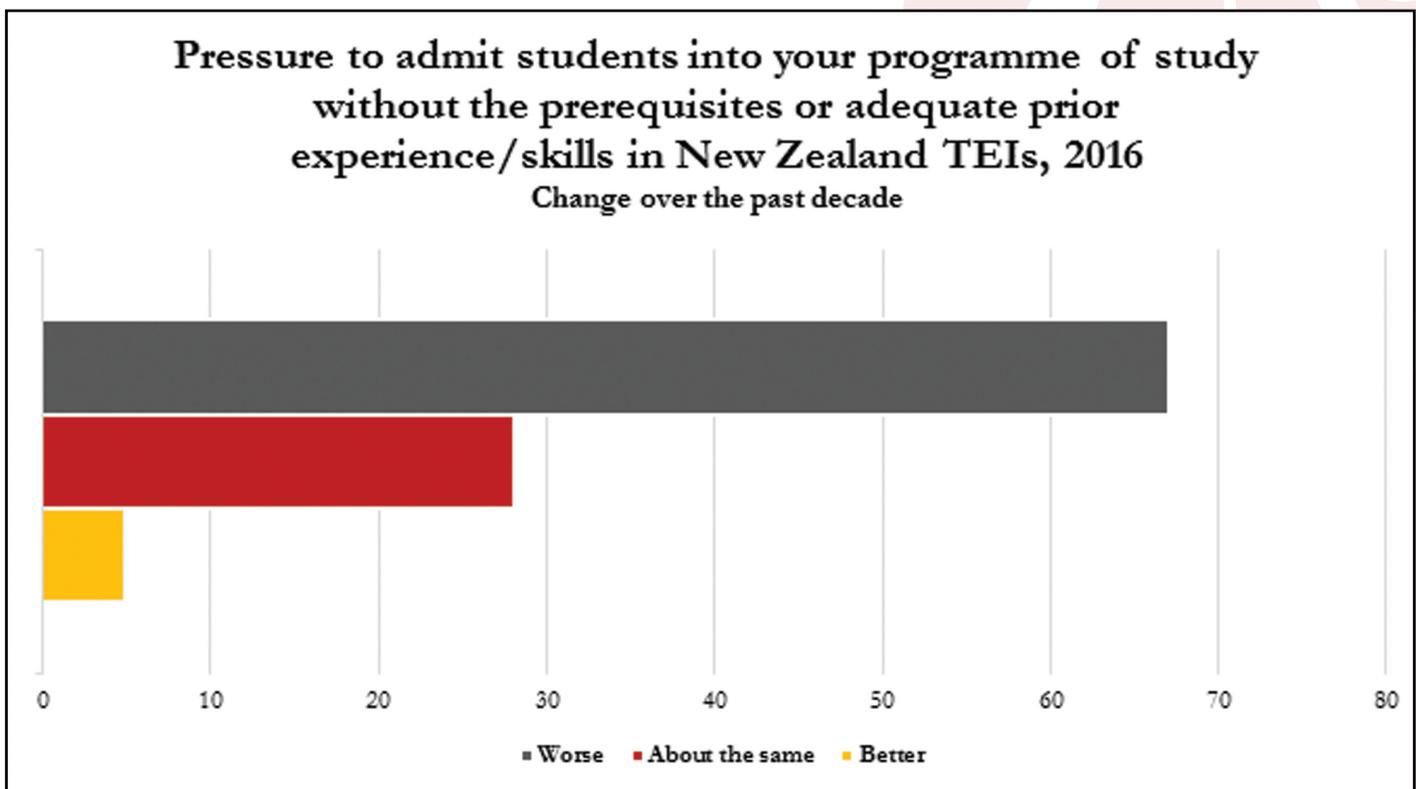
**I have more students, many with greater needs, and less administrative support, to do my job. So I perform more poorly, and my students do as well. This whole doing more with less is total bullshit.**

A respondent who teaches academic development skills to students described how a greater number of students with lower abilities creates a greater workload for staff:

**The increasing number of students enrolling who have not attained a prerequisite literacy standard has put a lot of pressure on services like ours, yet there is no corresponding response from the university to increase our resourcing. We are able to achieve about the same as we always have, yet the demand is immensely greater. We're always exhausted.**

The overall pressure to admit students, can be seen in Figure 5. This pressure is worse for ITP employees.

Figure 5



33.3% of ITP respondents say that the pressure to admit students into their programme of study without the prerequisites or adequate prior experience/skills has become much worse and 20.5% say it has become worse. For university respondents it was 15.1% and 23.9%.

Respondents also acknowledged that workload increase was also a product of imposed government performance measures; in particular PBRF:

**PBRF has become an absurd time-suck, with half-way progress reports, constant updating of research entries and profiles, and so forth. It's not giving NZ a good return on investment, not with respect to academic staff time.**

**PBRF and TEC have imposed more bureaucracy on processes, with the result that there is less time to do research or to devise ways to teach innovatively.**

**The impacts of both the rising workload pressures and lack of voice in the tertiary education sector lead to heightened stress and alienation in the sector.**

# Stress and alienation in the New Zealand tertiary education environment

**Everyone is stressed... You cannot teach or learn in such a harsh, stressful environment. This is such a short sighted approach.**

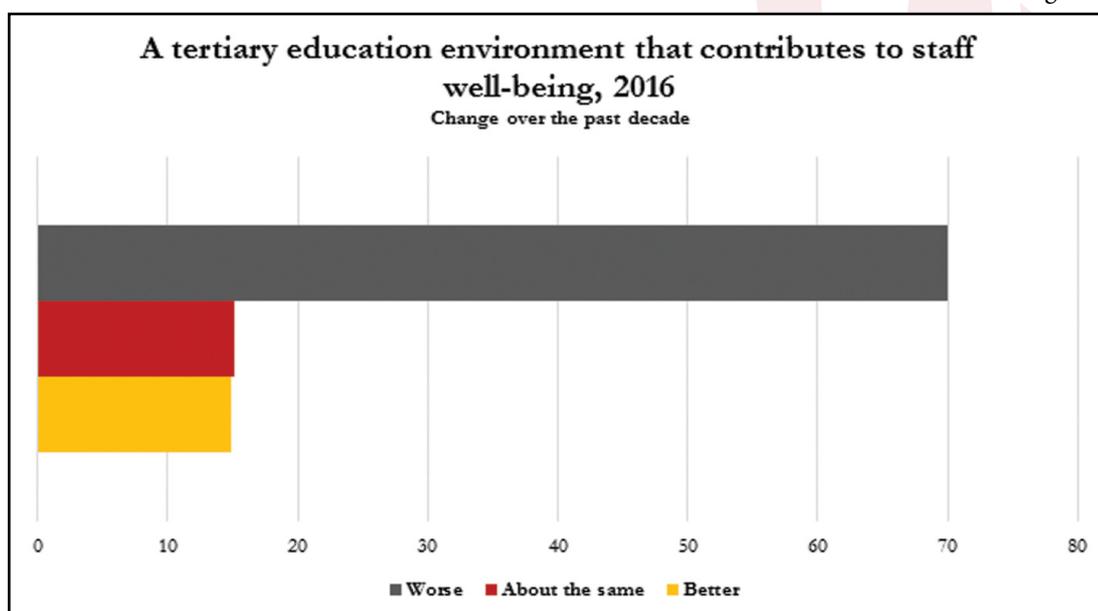
Stress, alienation, low morale, experiences of bullying, exhaustion, and fear of losing one's job have been a persistent thread in previous discussions. Survey respondents described how unsustainable workloads and lack of voice led to their experience of stress and alienation as well as inadequate support for students. They have described the sense of frustration they have with management that don't know what staff do, and decision-making constantly framed by financial rather than educational concerns. Disrespect and lack of trust add to flawed consultation processes which sometimes leaves only the commitment of staff to their own educational ideals as a motivation:

**I love teaching and researching, and I don't mind the administrative contribution. I have wonderful students in my classes and for research supervision. I have great colleagues. All these balance against the horrible university management. I also wonder how long I can keep working 60 hours per week.**

**My stomach is often in knots but I keep going for the potential and current students' sake.**

Staff wellbeing and stress levels are clearly important for staff themselves, but they also impact on students – the conditions of work for tertiary education staff are the conditions of learning for tertiary education students. Increased workload and expectations leads to the provision of lower quality education to students, with the important point being, as stated by respondents, that this need not be the case, and that this is the result of current managerial practice, which has been incentivised by the government.

Figure 6



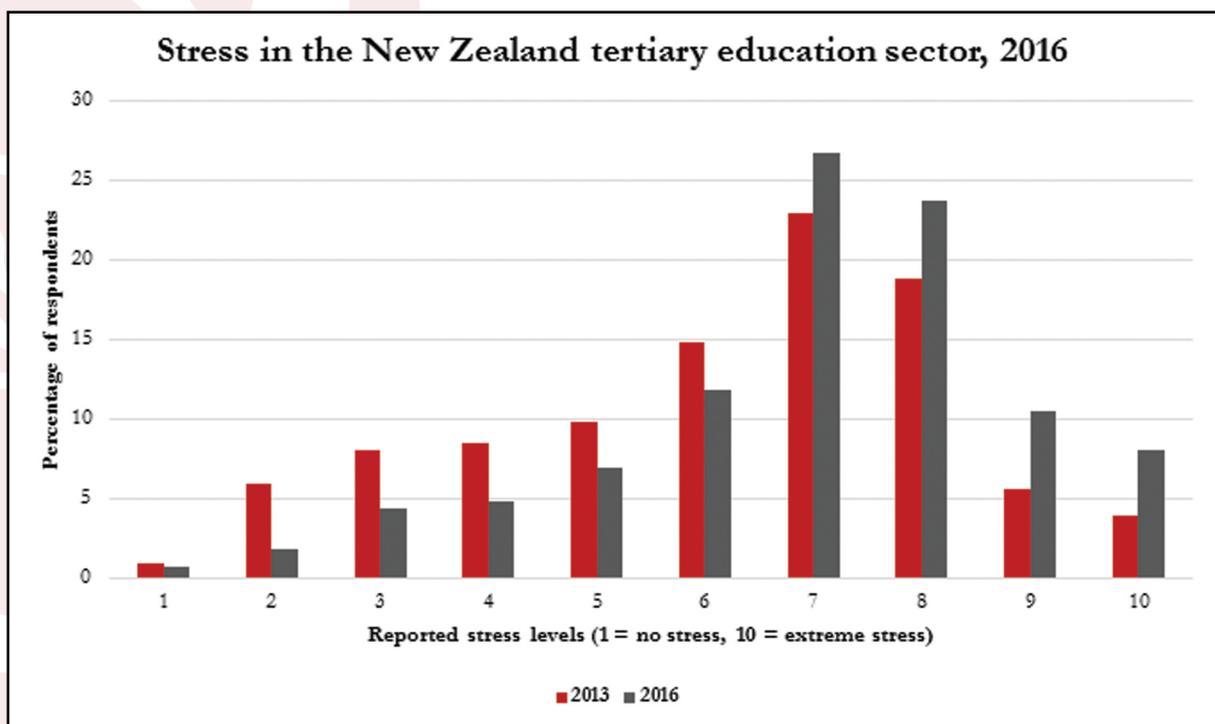
Perceptions of the impact of the working environment on staff well-being is clearly depicted, in Figure 6.

A large number of respondents spoke about stress being at an unsustainably high level.

Respondents were asked to rate their stress levels from one to ten, with one being no stress and ten being extreme stress – a question which research

suggests correlates well with more detailed measures. The average stress value given by respondents in the survey was 7. This has increased from 6.1 in the 2013 survey. This is even more disturbing when compared with the results from two representative New Zealand national population surveys (Bentley, McLeod & Teo, 2014, p. 31) with mean values of 5 and 5.5.

Figure 7



These statistics are reflected in the comments from survey respondents:

**There is a substantial cost to my personal life and at times my health.**

**Staff have never felt lower, students becoming increasingly dissatisfied. The management are killing the very things that will make us money in the future - it doesn't even make sense according to their own corporate logic.**

**Stress is exacerbated by increases in workload, lack of administrative support, destruction of institutional histories, frequent administrative changes and a disrespect for staff as people... We all suffer when the institutions with which we are associated behave in inhuman ways.**

**I have never seen so many colleagues pressured to teach such huge workloads and maintain research projects at the same time. Coping levels are at an all-time low. Totally unmanageable.**

The issues with management, which persistently appeared in every section of this report and here extends to personal behaviour against staff, must be noted again.

**There's this attitude from the upper management that 'if your staff aren't screaming, then you're not working them hard enough' (something I've heard them say)... It used to be that they were there to enable us to do our jobs - now we have to constantly fight the system in order to get the most basic aspects achieved on a daily basis.**

**I believe that I work in an unsafe environment where bullying and intimidation by Faculty Management is rife. This makes for an extremely stressful workplace.**

**People [are] asked to do submissions and then their submissions are read out at [a] university wide meeting and mocked by management as ridiculously stupid, this really happened, which obviously discouraged many people from even making a submission for the next issue, lest they be publicly mocked and humiliated.**

Stresses caused by various aspects of the built environment drew multiple responses with particular concerns expressed around hot-desking and open-plan offices:

**Open and shared office space makes confidential conversations difficult and little confidential space is provided... Hot desking is widespread and this creates anxiety, conflict and frustration (having to readjust your work space everyday and not have an environment conducive to creativity).**

# Understanding the NZ tertiary education system

**There is an impermeable layer of management which has developed in the last decade which is generally focused on meeting governmental (e.g. TEC) requirements at the expense of quality teaching and research.**

The responses to the 2016 State of the Sector survey highlights both staff experiences of work in the sector, as well as identifying the causes of these experiences. Government orientation towards commercial gain and away from the broad aims of education has manifested in continual underfunding of the sector and misguided funding via performance management tools (EPIs, PBRF). Notably the staff's perspective of the effects does not end with their own experiences or their own selfish ends but sees the tertiary education institution and those in it as part of a wider community that continues to be damaged by the structures and processes in the system.

**Current funding in tertiary education is really impacting negatively upon staff and students. Staff are unnecessarily overworked with pressure to teach, publish and support students.**

**Student support services are chronically underfunded and understaffed... The gradual erosion of funding at all levels for salaries, for facilities, and for students is beginning to bite, and these problems will accelerate as years of diminished resourcing takes a compound toll.**

**Very long wait times to see a counsellor - currently six weeks - which is hugely problematic when 46% of our students have poor wellbeing.**

**I walked a suicidal student over to student services as I was worried about her. Our choice was to come back tomorrow or go to another campus. I didn't feel this was satisfactory.**

**I lament the loss of a specific service to support Māori students in their study and the running down of learning support services, in particular the one-to-one consultations that allowed students who were at a loss to make a human connection.**

These results come from an institutional response - centralisation of decision-making and micro-management and it is the experience of this which dominates the responses discussed. Together, these have led to staff experiences of lack of voice in decision-making, unsustainable workloads, and stress and alienation. Despite staff efforts, these have impacted negatively on the quality of teaching and learning offered in our tertiary education sector, thereby undermining the broad societal goals that education contributes to.

These comments are also consistent with previous analysis by TEU (see, for example, Grey, Sedgwick & Scott, 2013; Grey & Scott, 2016) and sadly are reflected in similar surveys of the sector since 1994, plus smaller discussions of the same issues in 1996 and 2000 each of which noted the development and effects of many of these issues. The sadness and disillusionment is compounded by the absence of any acknowledgement of

these surveys in the recent Productivity Commission discussion of 'New Models of Tertiary Education' 2016-17.

We return to a point made in the beginning that nearly 28 years of reform in the tertiary education sector which as respondents accurately noted has been constant and remorseless, has largely progressed without any evaluation of the effect on those who continue to work in the tertiary education sector in New Zealand, which they invariably do in spite of all the changes.

Many of the changes, we know hinge on 'New Public Management' approaches to tertiary education and there is also a large body of academic work critiquing these approaches. While engaging with this body of work is beyond the scope of this report, it is worth noting that such approaches to tertiary education have never been conclusively shown to increase efficiency and lower costs, as intended (Broucker & De Wit, 2015). The negative consequences are, on the other hand, blatantly clear, as are the effects on many who work in the sector and this demands the need for both acknowledgement of the issues and urgent action to remedy these issues.

We close this report with a brief description of the alternative vision for the sector provided by respondents, and provide two flowcharts that are consistent with the analysis of survey respondents – one that addresses the current system, and another that depicts an alternative vision for the New Zealand tertiary education sector. We refer also to the TEU's publication *Te Kaupapa Whaioranga*, which outlines the TEU's vision for the tertiary education sector.

In their analysis of the 2013 State of the Sector survey, the New Zealand Work Research Institute offers some solutions to the problems described by survey respondents:

[S]ector organisations would benefit from initiatives designed to increase staff involvement, develop leadership talent and management capability, reduce the burden of administrative and non-core workload, and foster healthy, well-organised work and a culture of respect and dignity. (Bentley, McLeod & Teo, 2014: 40)

Respondents in the 2016 survey offered similar suggestions:

**Better communication. Listening more to lower paid and contract staff. Employing more full time staff. Recognising teaching and service.**

**More respect and recognition for great teachers. This needs to be recognised through the way unis are funded.**

**Restructure this idiotic competition [between tertiary education institutions].**

**Devolving decision-making responsibilities 'down' the line - especially around budgets/ expenditure. Developing more of a 'trust' model of management - flattening management structure. Promoting real communication - in person, informal, 'open-door' - minimising 'edicts-by-email'!**

In previous TEU research, tertiary education sector staff also described alternatives to current performance management tools:

Focus group participants... described how they maintain the quality of teaching and learning through peer-reviewing, collegial debate, and team moderation of student assessment. This is not about blind faith, rather processes in which staff have the autonomy to maintain the integrity of their profession. (Grey & Scott 2016: 19)

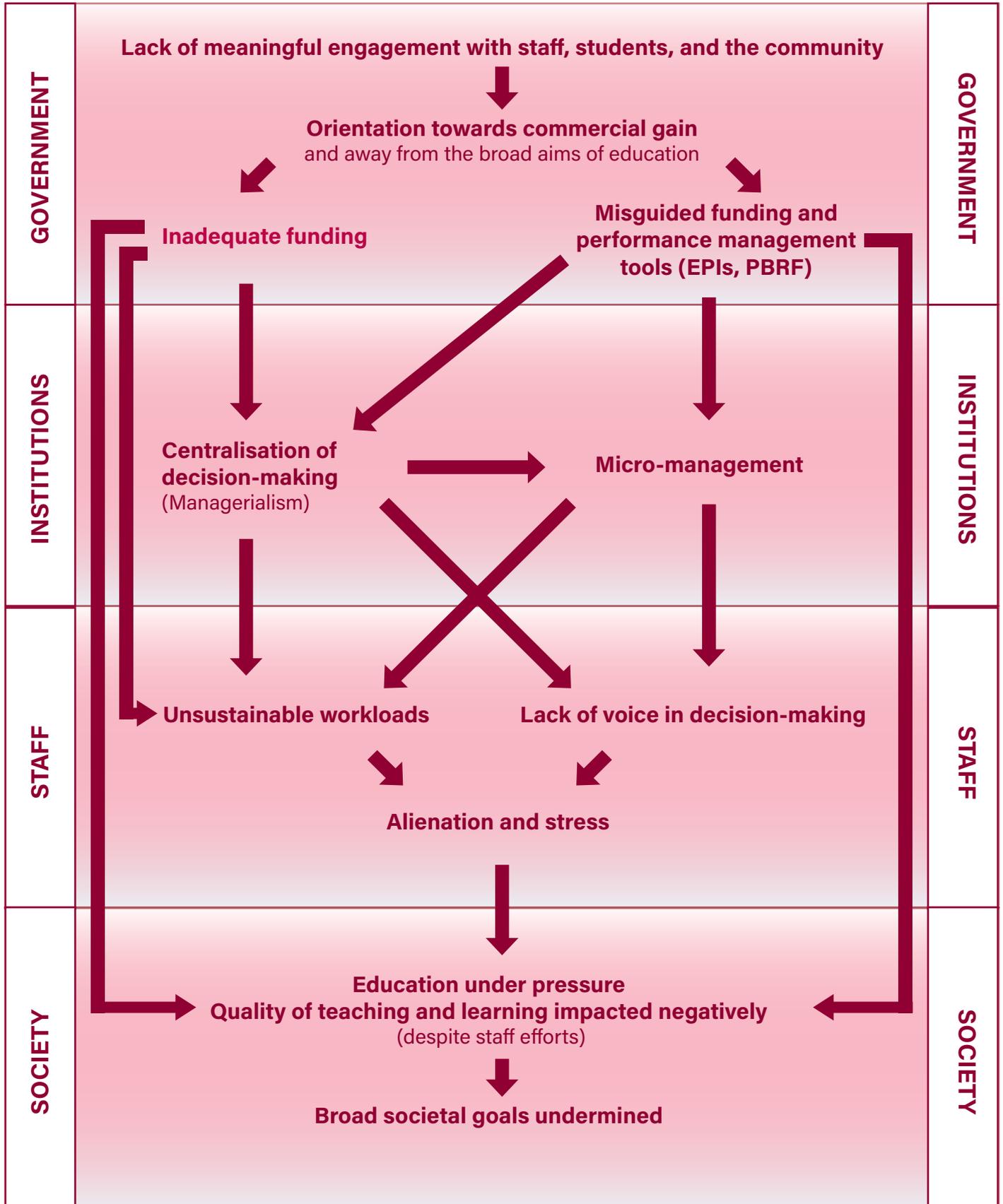
A healthy tertiary education community will be more innovative, creative, and productive, and this would be a real possibility if different decisions were made by both government and institutional managers. In line with comments from survey respondents, TEU's vision for the sector is based around an orientation towards the enrichment of society via the broad aims of education recognised in the Education Act 1989. This requires active engagement by government with staff, students, and communities, adequate funding, and appropriate performance assurance measures based in responsible autonomy for institutions. It requires staff to have respected voices as part of collegial governance, and sustainable workloads

that allow a healthy engagement in work. This will allow the New Zealand tertiary education sector to provide true quality teaching and learning, thereby creating real value for society as a whole.



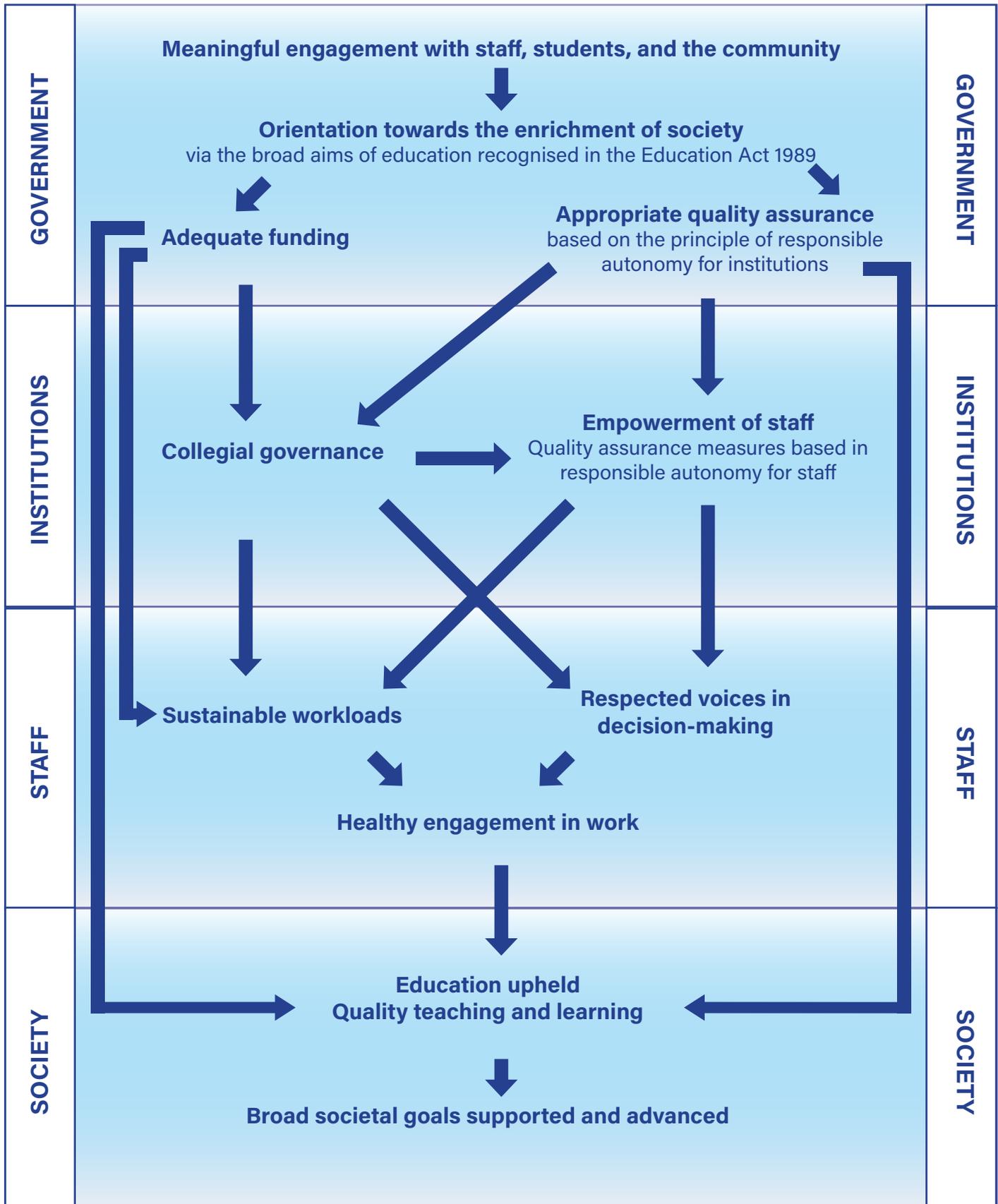
# Tertiary education: The state of the sector

Diagram 1



# A new vision for the sector

Diagram 2



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# Notes





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